

CLASH OF CLASS

research into London's social and spatial dissociations

&

the design of Grenfell Tower memorial

(mourning & reattachment)

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Research essay

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Abstract

On June 14 in 2017, 72 people lost their lives and hundreds of families were left homeless as the Grenfell tower block caught fire in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea within the inner-city of London. The tragedy has shaken the society, highlighting the conflict between privileged and unprivileged within the city's society, as most of the victims were ethnic minorities living below the poverty line. The research aims to analyze and unfold the underlying issues relating to the fire, looking at the social as well as spatial condition of the Grenfell Tower's surrounding area. The research draws upon Charles Booth's poverty maps from over a century ago as well as current Deprivation maps and Space Syntax theories, intending to understand the geometry of poverty in the city. Through the specific case of the Tower fire, the relationship between social and spatial tension will be addressed. Eventually, this paper also suggests an architectural intervention, in the form of a memorial on the authentic site of the fire. The design solution could hopefully bring justice to the people affected by the fire and point the society towards hope again.

Keywords: London, social division, wealth gap, spatial dissociations, Grenfell Tower fire, social trauma, memorial architecture

Index

Introduction

1. Background

Charles Booth Poverty maps

Deprivation maps

Space Syntax

2. Problem Statement

Research Questions

3. Research Methods

4. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Social Conditions

Spatial Translation

5. Grenfell Tower Fire

Discourse Analysis

Site Analysis

6. Design Task

Grenfell Tower Memorial

Architecture of Trauma

Design Intervention

Conclusion

Bibliography

Introduction

The rich city with poor people

1. Rowland Atkinson, *Alpha City: How London Was Captured by the Super-Rich* (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 1-9.

2. Youssef Cassis, *Capitals of Capital: The Rise and Fall of International Financial Centres 1780–2009* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 279-284.

3. "Tackling poverty and inequality," Trust for London, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/key-facts-london-poverty-and-inequality/>.

4. "Poverty in London 2018/19," London Datastore, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://data.london.gov.uk/blog/poverty-in-london-2018-19/>.

5. Michael Pacione, "Urban restructuring and the reproduction of inequality in Britain's cities: an overview," in *Britain's Cities: Geographies of Division in Urban Britain*, ed. M. Pacione (London: Routledge, 1997), 7-60.

6. Adam Lusher, "Grenfell Tower residents complained two years ago of 'cheap materials and corner cutting' in block's refurbishment," *Independent*, June 16, 2017.

In recent decades, London has fallen into the hands of the 'super-rich'.¹ The city has the largest number of wealthy people per head of population and London has even been described as the 'financial centre of the world'.² However, the consequences of this transformation are evident. As London's prosperity is increasing in some areas, poverty is deepening in others. And the wealth gap within the city's society is only widening.

The city's increasing wealth is in constant friction with pockets of poverty that can be found throughout the city. While 50% of the capital's wealth is owned by the top 10%, the bottom 50% own only 5%.³ This leaves 28 percent of the city's society living below the poverty line - wages 60 percent below the national median (£517 per week).⁴

London is therefore characterized by extreme variations in living standards between different groups and neighborhoods. Divisions exist between rich and poor, privileged and deprived, skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed, healthy and ill, old and young, male and female, resident and immigrant, included and excluded and inner city and outer city.⁵ These many dimensions of the problem and inequalities with it are part of the everyday lives of many Londoners.

June 14th in 2017 proved how severe the situation truly is, as the fire at Grenfell Tower speeded up the ongoing discussion concerning inequalities in London. The case remains at the heart of the debate - being an extreme example of the problem. That night, 72 people lost their lives, and hundreds of families were left homeless when the tower caught fire within the borders of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea - a borough generally known to be one of London's wealthiest. A budget cut of 5000 pounds during the tower's renovation in 2016 led to a cheaper, non-fire-resistant façade cladding.⁶ The victims have been believed to die for that price! The division within the inhabitants of that city had now gone to the lengths where people were losing their lives.

The infamously divided London creates an opportunity to examine the different societal classes and their zones of socio-spatial conflict. In his book, *The New Urban Crisis*, Richard Florida - an American economist - reminds us that the problem of inequality and poverty is fundamentally an urban one. And that urban segregation, in the long run, threatens economic growth.⁷

This research then aims to explore what makes certain areas in London more prone to poverty. It will investigate the role of space and architecture in signifying and designing these divisions and grounds for many different classes being able to co-exist.

7. Richard Florida, *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class-and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 90.

The research firstly outlines a brief history of poverty and social cartography in London, subsequently describing the arising research questions, and the methods used. The social condition of an area will be studied as well as how the social issues translate to the physical environment. The research ends with the case of the Grenfell Tower fire, also diving into architecture of trauma. Following the case study, a design intervention will be introduced in order to provide possible solutions to the ongoing conflicts.

1.

Background - Mapping the Social Shape of the City

Charles Booth Poverty maps

8. "Charles Booth's London: Poverty maps and police notebooks," London School of Economics & Political Science, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/learn-more/what-were-the-poverty-maps>.

9. Quoted in Pfautz, *On the City*, 120.

10. Laura Vaughan, *Mapping Society: The Spatial Dimensions of Social Cartography* (London: UCL Press, 2018), 77.

Throughout the expansion and transformation of London, the city's social context has been tightly linked to urban configurations. Pioneers of social cartography have shown some evidence of spatial segregation giving rise to social segregation in their research. The work of Charles Booth's, an inquiry resulting in the seventeen-volumes *of Life and Labor of the People in London* published in 1903, revealed the true nature of poverty in London and became one of the most influential maps at the time.⁸

Booth was an English sociologist who, in the turn of the 20th century, was diving into the societal problems and poverty in London. After being involved in the control of Census data to help targeting resources, he started questioning the quality of the data gained. The Social Democratic Federation in 1885 found that up to 25% of the population of London were living in extreme poverty. To Booth this sounded like an overstatement. He then decided to undertake his own inquiry, unexpectedly ending up classifying the poverty rate at 35% instead.

Booth was the first to really map the social shape of the city (Figure 1), putting it on display for everyone to see. Street by street, Booth coloured London according to the general condition of the inhabitants, identifying seven different classes in society. His maps provided the spatial and social context of poverty by uncovering the arrangement of one in relation to the other.

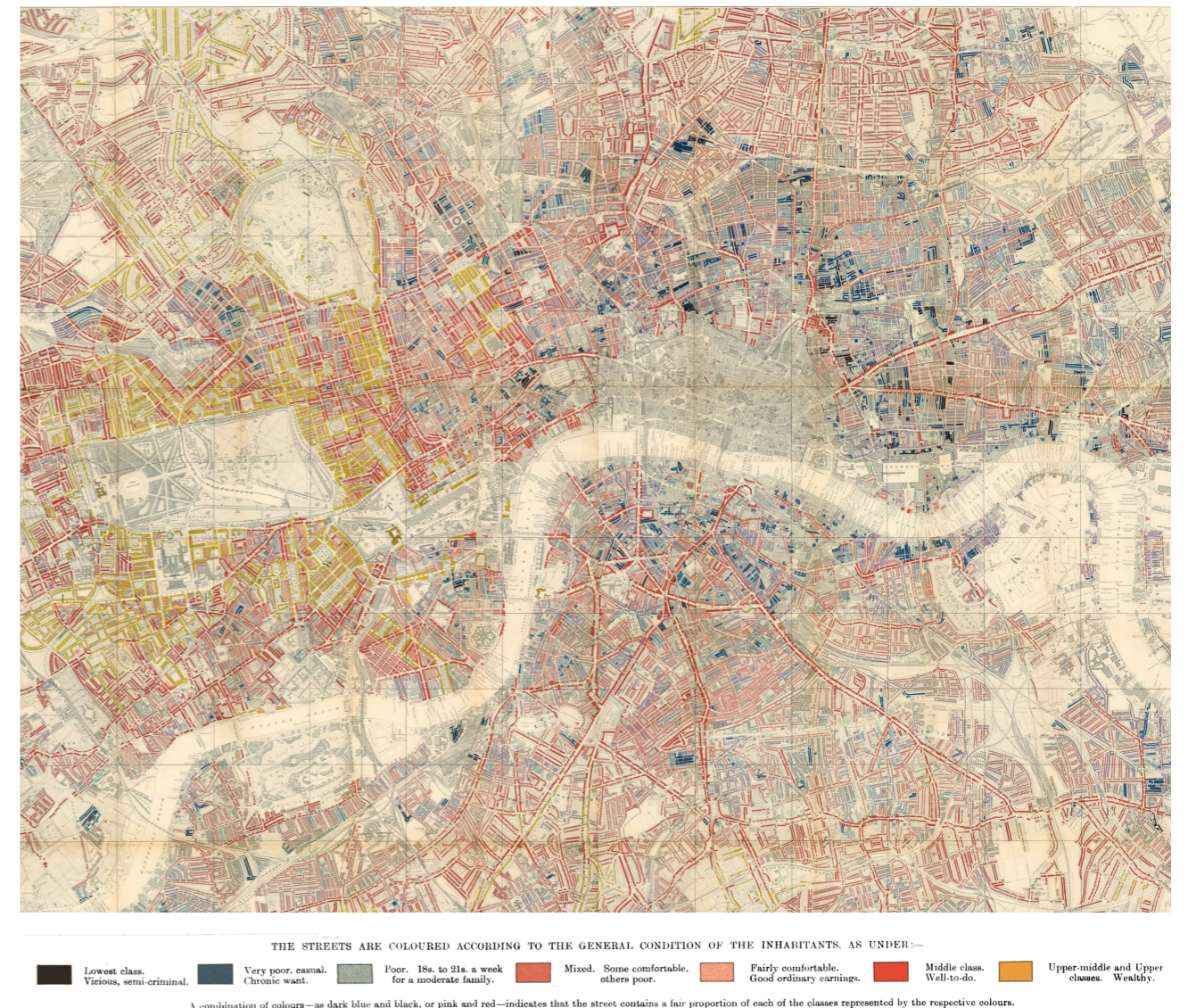
It was common that poverty streets – marked black or dark blue – were situated right adjacent to prosperous red or yellow streets, the inhabitants of which used to be unaware of the extreme poverty existing right behind the corner. A variety of classes were located in the same area, having an impact on the social conditions. The pockets of irregularity in the urban grid often created introspective places, claimed by the criminal classes. There was never an intension nor an explicit plan to organize the nineteenth-century city in this way. The pattern had rather emerged as part of the process of continuity and change which brought about the spatial logic of the city at the time.

Booth already recognized that the problem of poverty had become a spatial problem. Physical thresholds – such as railways – had the effect of isolating areas, blocking inhabitants from the life of the city. His notes during the research (1889–1903) drew observations such as:

*"...the "poverty areas" tended to be literally walled off from the rest of the city by barrier-like boundaries that isolated their inhabitants, minimizing their normal participation in the life of the city about them..."*⁹

*"Large-scale obstacles in the urban fabric have been proven to have a harmful effect on the ability of people to move around and improve their social and economic conditions."*¹⁰

Fig 1. Charles Booth's Descriptive Map of London Poverty, 1889.



11. Laura Vaughan,
*Mapping Society: The
Spatial Dimensions of
Social Cartography*
(London: UCL Press,
2018), 81.

Charles Booth's work of gathering data around poverty, deepens the processes of social research as well as extends the attention given to it. The government also starts developing interventions to improve the situation faced by many.

Booth's recommendations to the Royal Commission on Housing (1901) were precautions such as a better transport system (allowing it to expand to the suburbs), widening of roads and opening up spaces. Overcrowded households and houses, generally not fit to live in, would be closed as a part of slum clearance (Figure 2). The aim was also to get rid of the overly complex geometry of the street layout.¹¹



Fig 2. Children sitting under a washing line in a slum area of London, Shoreditch, 1889.

Deprivation maps

12. Laura Vaughan et al., "Space and Exclusion: Does urban morphology play a part in social deprivation?," *Area* 37, no. 4 (December 2005): 1-9.

Following the ground-breaking ideas of Booth's Poverty maps, today the Index of Multiple Deprivation is more commonly used (since the turn of the 21st century) (Figure 3). Whereas Booth's maps were the results of his own observations, the Deprivation maps are data driven (Consumer Data Research Centre). An influential study by Noble and his colleagues (2000) developed the Index for the UK government. The increase of GIS (Geographic Information System) in Census studies and the availability of Census data in GIS-friendly formats meant that increasingly more studies are using census information as the basis for their measurement of deprivation.¹²

Rather than dividing the society by class like Booth did, the Deprivation map measures poverty based on access to necessities in society, the parameters being: income, employment, education, health, safety, housing & services, and quality of the environment.

Today, there is still a correlation between poverty and spatial segregation. Though, the widening trend of gentrification means that the relationship is not as strong today as it used to be in the past. Gentrification has the power to displace low-income classes and prevent them from moving into previously affordable neighborhoods. When comparing Booth's London from over a century ago to the current situation, it seems that society used to be generally more mixed. According to the original Poverty maps, the almost criminal back alleys might have been just a corner away from wealthy buildings along the main roads. The contemporary Deprivation Indexes imply that there are now clearer designated areas for each class within the city.

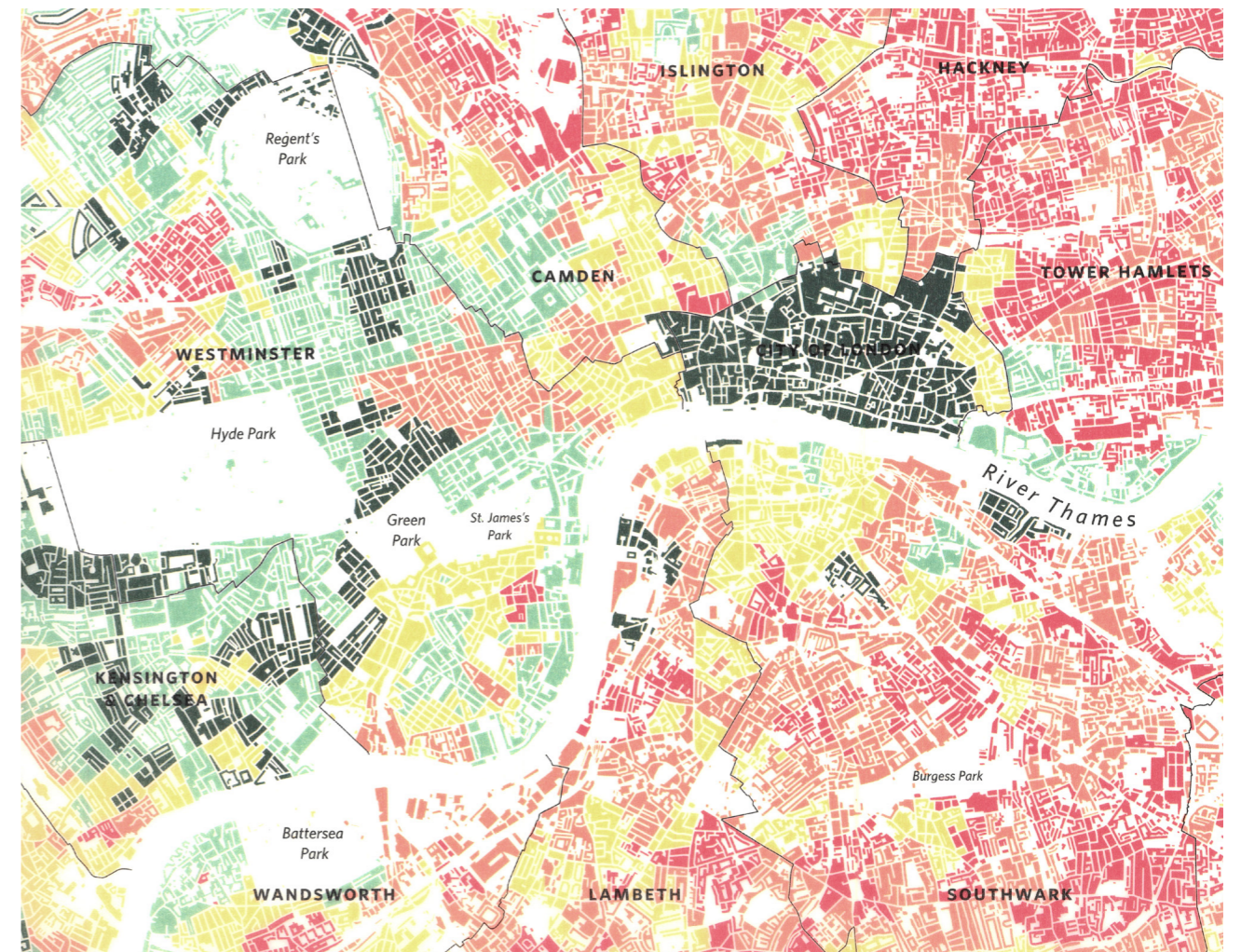


Fig 3. Deprivation map

Space Syntax

13. Laura Vaughan,
*Mapping Society: The
Spatial Dimensions of
Social Cartography*
(London: UCL Press,
2018), 83.

14. Laura Vaughan et al.,
"Space and Exclusion:
Does urban morphology
play a part in social
deprivation?," *Area* 37, no.
4 (December 2005): 6.

Various methods have been employed in spatial inequality, deprivation, and poverty measurement studies to enable the understanding of the spatial process involved in the creation and stagnation of poverty areas.

What Booth's poverty maps tell us about the relationship between the lack of access and spatial as well as economic poverty has been discussed to some extent. For instance, the UCL Space Syntax Laboratory (founded in 1970s in London) recently started overlaying their theory with the original Poverty maps (Figure 4). Their algorithms analyzing spatial design in relation to social outcomes drew some connections between Booth's definition of poverty and the accessibility of the areas. *"The analysis found that interruptions to the grid structure significantly influenced the spatial configuration of a poverty area, giving rise to conditions of both spatial and social segregation."*¹³

The main roads, depicted red and yellow, are well connected and they surround the lower integration and lower-class streets. The streets with high integration value often contain the socially and economically lively activities of the city.¹⁴ They are functionally as well as spatially the so called 'foreground network'. Another pattern that emerged from the analysis is that the high-class streets are significantly longer with nearly straight connections and route continuity, whilst the lower-class streets are significantly shorter than average. Poverty classes tend to live in the 'background networks' of the area.



Fig 4. Detail of Descriptive Map of London Poverty, 1889, showing the East End district of London, overlaid with space syntax analysis of spatial accessibility for each street to all other streets within 800m.

2.

Problem Statement

15. Rowland Atkinson, *Alpha City: How London Was Captured by the Super-Rich* (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 1-9.

16. Scott Orford et al., "Life and death of the people of London: a historical GIS of Charles Booth's inquiry," *Health & Place* 8, no.1 (April, 2002): 34.

London has undergone many drastic changes during the past century, yet the patterns of poverty seem to have stuck to a certain extent. Generally, the urban poor are now being pushed to the outskirts of the city. As Rowland Atkinson – an academic and the author of the book *Alpha city* – describes it:

*"The consequence of London's transformation is the brutal expulsion of the unprivileged. Severe cuts and demolitions are adding to the catalogue of social injustices."*¹⁵

Previous research suggests though, that despite the many attempts to improve housing quality and to eliminate the deep poverty clusters over the past 100 years, these interventions have "failed to substantially alter the geography of poverty." In a study, conducted by Scot Orford et al., Booth's measurement of social class was matched to the measurement of social class in the 1991 Census, as well as to all causes of death in a survey done between the years 1991 and 1995. The paper concludes that:

*"The spatial patterns of poverty in inner London are extremely robust and a century of change has failed to disrupt it"*¹⁶

Urban form is a significant factor influencing the spatial distribution of poverty and the problem is that the geometry of poverty at the end of the 19th century seems to be very similar to that at the end of the 20th century. Even though, the poverty rate of 35% of Booth's London has dropped to 28% in the London of today, the problem remains. Currently, London's prosperity is increasing in some areas, but poverty is deepening in others.

There are thus zones, in the inner-city of London, where 'rich' and 'poor' remain living adjacent to one another. This research aims to shed light on these kind of conflict zones and their socio-spatial discontinuities. The conflict zone can be understood as the confrontation of two incompatible spaces.

Research Question

How are social conflicts manifested in London, in terms of spatial dissociations, within areas where pockets of poverty and the upper-class collide?

Sub-questions

1. *What is the social condition of inhabitants living in these areas?*

2. *How do the social issues translate into the physical environment?*

3. *What are the intervention strategies?*

3.

Research Methods

The research questions will be approached and answered through an example of a collision zone. Rather than trying to understand the general condition in London, the issues of conflict will be approached from the perspective of a location that stands out within the inner-city of London. The study into this particular area then examines the social as well as physical conditions, providing a more thorough understanding of the conflict zone.

Analyzing demographic data will be used as one of the techniques to address the social shape of the chosen borough. Information about the general condition of the inhabitants will thereby be addressed, and the opposing extremes will be identified.

Studying the spatial qualities of the same area will be based on a typomorphological analysis. Dissecting the different kinds of spatial discontinuities will help presenting the role of space in possibly heightening the social division.

In addition, the research considers the case of the Grenfell Tower fire, and its position within the bigger picture. A discourse analysis will be carried out. Navigating through recent media and debates concerning poverty and segregation relating to the fire will provide more in-depth insights about the opposed actors in the area.

Through a critical assessment, the findings will be measured against a theoretical framework – existing research linking spatial issues to social outcomes. By looking at space and spatial practices we can understand the characteristics of poverty, where space becomes the common denominator but also the carrier of these divisions.

4.

the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

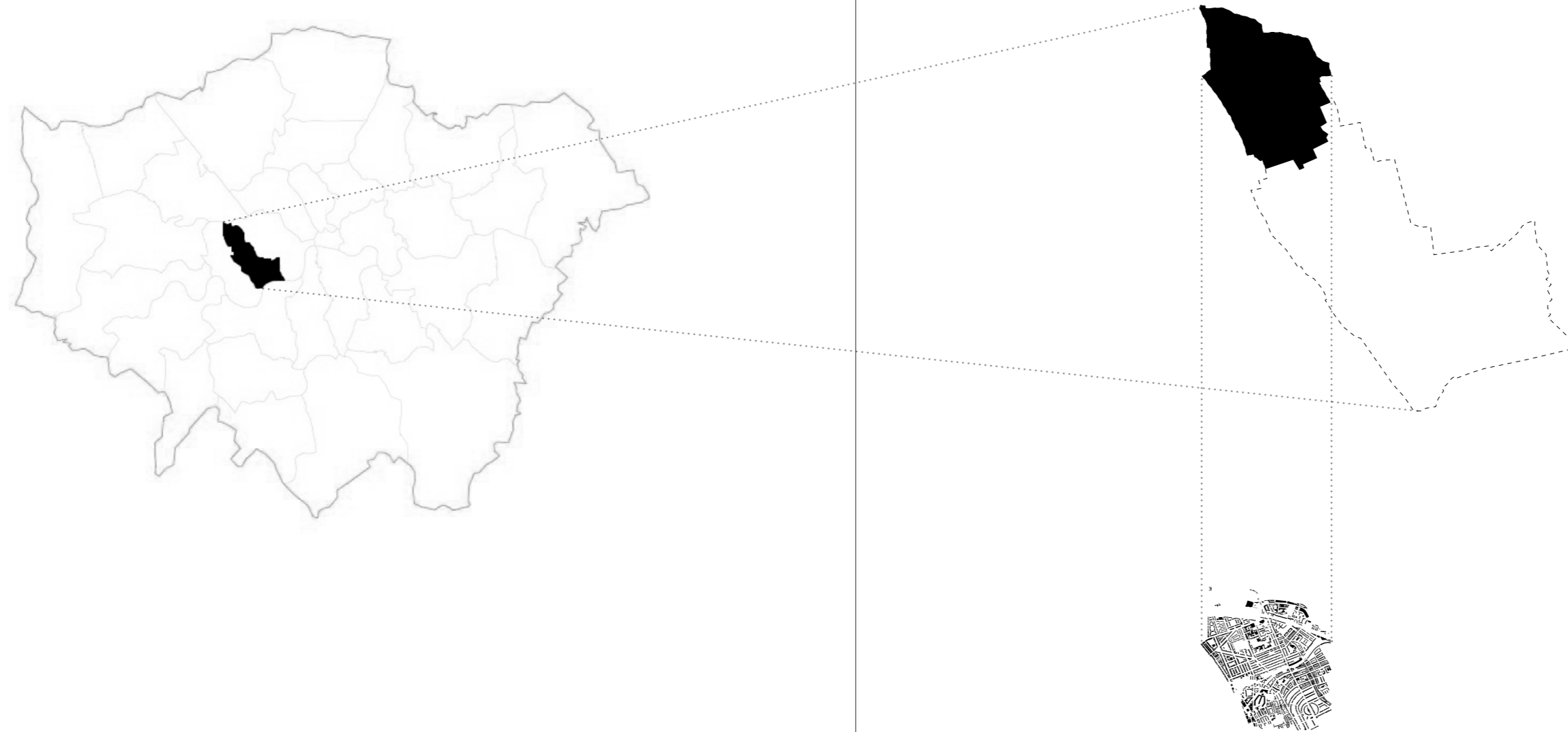


Fig 5. Focus area indicated :
The Royal Borough of
Kensington and Chelsea /
Northern part of the borough

17. London Datastore, *Earnings by Place of Residence, Borough*, (2019), NOMIS, <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/earnings-place-residence-borough>.

18. Laura Vaughan, *Mapping Society: The Spatial Dimensions of Social Cartography* (London: UCL Press, 2018), 85.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea attracts attention as having the highest resident-based salaries in London.¹⁶ Being one of London's wealthiest boroughs, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, withholds some of the city's most expensive streets such as the Kensington Palace Gardens or, in other words, Billionaire's Boulevard. Despite the borough's overall wealth, there are also rather poor neighborhoods within its borders. The affluent areas surrounding the Hyde park have a shadow side. Just a kilometre away, where the colourful houses of Notting Hill (Figure 6) meet the neighbourhoods of Holland park, Ladbroke Grove and North Kensington (Figure 7), the lower classes of society start to gradually appear. There appears to be a zone where poverty meets prosperity, where the opposing extremes live in a close proximity.

The deprived neighbourhoods in the Northern part of the borough have already had their status since Booth first revealed their nature (Figure 8). The area then underwent bombing during the Second World War. In 1960s, municipal housing was part of the slum clearances (initiated by Booth).¹⁸ A decade later, large parts of North Kensington were remodeled to create the Westway highway. Despite the major changes, parts of the area remain deeply deprived to date. What these areas are deprived of will be elaborated in the following chapters.



Fig 6. Street of Notting Hill

Fig 7. Residential towers near the Westway highway

— imagined division



Social Condition

19. "Poverty in London 2018/19," London Datastore, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://data.london.gov.uk/blog/poverty-in-london-2018-19/>.

20. Fordham Research, "Strategic Housing Market Assessment Report" (London: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2019), 34. <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/wamdocs/SHMA%20Report.pdf>.

21. London Datastore, Census, (2011), ONS, <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/?q=census%202011>.

22. James Cheshire and Oliver Uberti, *LONDON: The Information Capital: 100 maps and graphics that will change how you view the city* (London: Penguin, 2014), 86-87.

23. London Datastore, *Earnings by Place of Work, Borough*, (2019), NOMIS, <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/earnings-place-work-borough>.

24. Laura Vaughan et al., "Space and Exclusion: Does urban morphology play a part in social deprivation?," *Area* 37, no. 4 (December 2005): 1-9.

In London, 28 percent of the population live under the poverty line.¹⁹ Within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the average earnings abundantly exceed that line. But when that average is broken down per ward, shocking fluctuation can be found (Figure 9). The Median annual gross income per household is £15,391 in the Northern parts of the borough, whereas, in Campden and in its adjacent wards, it reaches up to £82,256 (Figure 10).²⁰

The financial differences within the borough translate to variations in population density, education level, unemployment rate and so forth.²¹ The fluctuations become inevitably visible in the lives of the inhabitants.

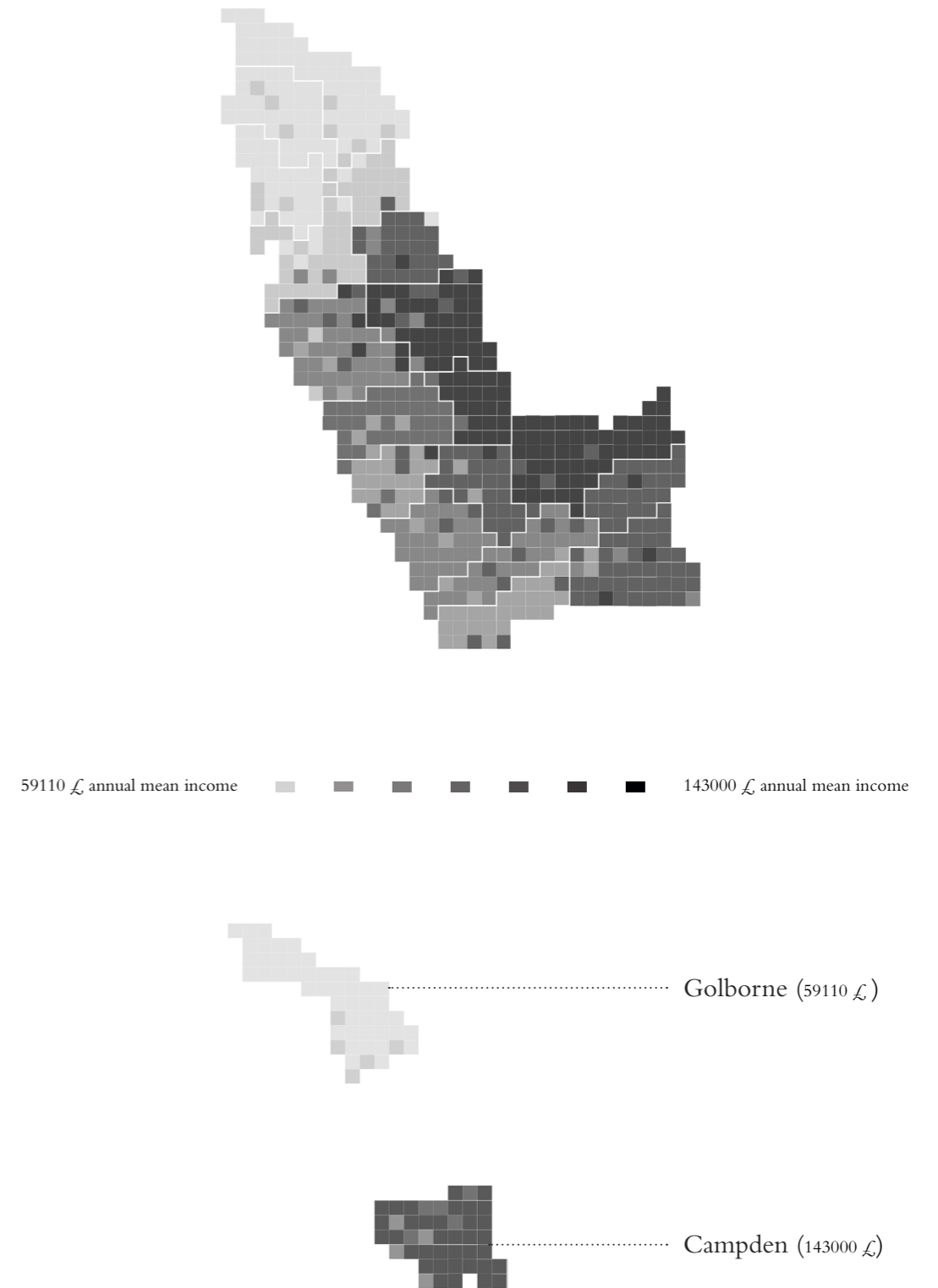
Living in the affluent areas, people often work in the financial sector as managers and directors²² (Figure 11). The highest (workplace based) earnings in London are generated in Tower Hamlets, in the financial district of Canary Wharf.²³ It's common for people from the wards of Campden, Brompton, Queen's Gate, Hans Town etc. to commute all the way there daily (Figure 12). More than half of the work force of Kensington and Chelsea stay working within the borough or commute to the neighbouring areas though.²¹

The poorer part of the population is more likely to be technical and service workers. In Golborne - in the poorest ward of Kensington and Chelsea, the population increases daily by only 8,4% due to commuter flows, whereas, the increase in Campden is +37,4% - implying that there are less opportunities for work in Golborne.²¹

One of the main findings of research done in 2005 "Space and exclusion: does urban morphology play a part in social deprivation?"²⁴ by Laura Vaughan, was the relationship between social deprivation and distance of residence from sources of employment.

Fig 9. Annual mean income per ward

Fig 10. Annual mean income : Golborne & Campden



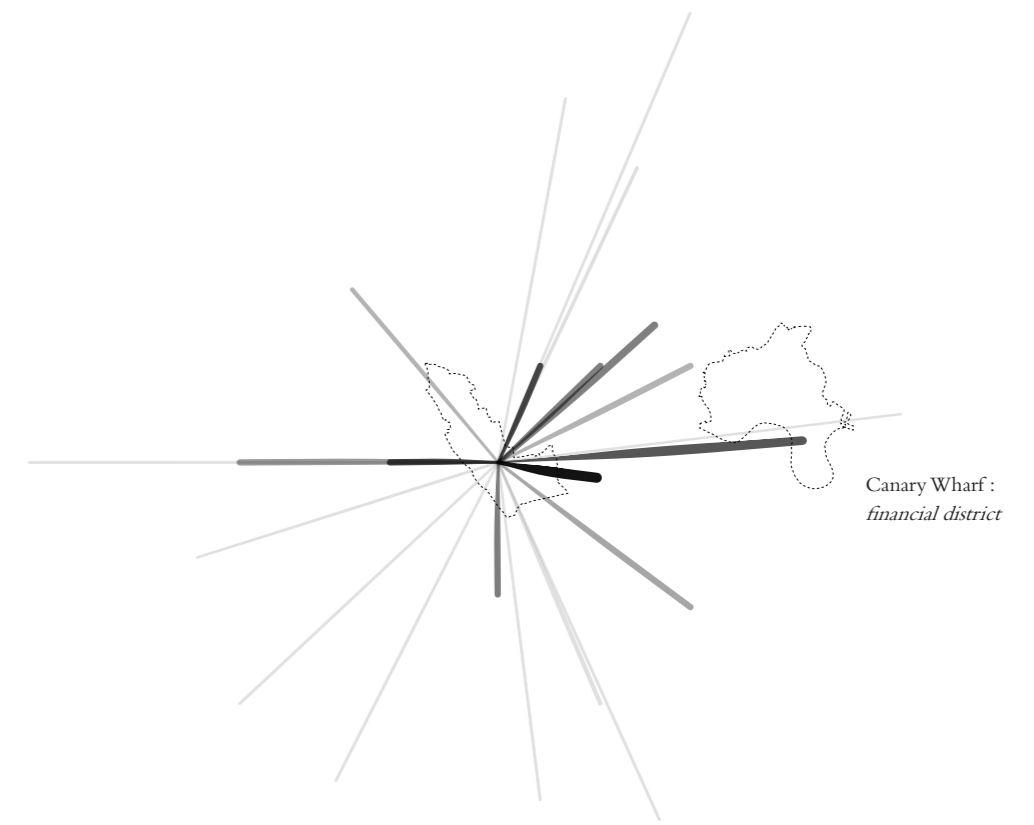
25. London Datastore, Census, (2011), ONS, <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/?q=census%202011>.

The more personal aspects of the lives of the inhabitants also tell us something about the financial differences within the borough. The overall life satisfaction scores went significantly down the more North the ward was located, according to the Census data.²⁵ Inhabitants were somewhat more likely to have diagnosed with long-term illnesses in the Northern wards of Golborne, St. Charles and Notting Dale. Moreover, overcrowding of the households was almost four times more intense in these poorer neighbourhoods.

Fig 11. Occupations per ward

- managers and directors
- mid-level employees
- technical and service workers

Fig 12. Commuter flows from Kensington & Chelsea outwards



Spatial Translation - from Wealth Gap to Space Gap

26. "Hildrey Studio,"
Space Gap, accessed
November 11, 2020,
[https://hildreystudio.com/
Space-Gap](https://hildreystudio.com/Space-Gap).

"The pavilion housed a series of events exploring the disparity of space allocation across the UK. A take on the 'wealth gap', the Space Gap is best understood as a gap in the distribution of space between one group and another within the city. The design of the pavilion was an open forum space set beneath a three dimensional 'volume diagram' that made visible the shocking split in size and scale between the largest homes available and the smallest spaces that people are forced to live in. As both an overlay and conflation of the various housing spaces, it highlighted the unequal distribution of space across the country. The project connected those who shape housing and policy with those who live with their effects, allowing both to learn from each other and better imagine how to move forward towards an inclusive built environment."

26

The Space Gap (Figure 13) pavilion was a part of London Design Festival in 2018. The installation is a good example of a project that managed to make London's divisions and inequalities tangible. It embodies how the wealth gap explicitly translates to the living environment. The following explores the 'space gap' of the conflict zone in Northern Kensington and Chelsea.



Fig 13. Space Gap - London
Design Festival 2018

27. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter, *Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a postcivil society* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 13-31.

It can be said that everything that there is in space is produced either by co-operation or through conflict.²⁷ Thus, the social condition can be confirmed by urban space. Walls or other urban/architectural thresholds are often being put in places of high tension and conflict. The physical environment clearly reveals many basic aspects of social space. In the conflict zone of Kensington and Chelsea though, there only appears to be an 'imagined division'.

Spatially, it is hard to define a border between the different classes of society in the Northern part of Kensington and Chelsea. Yet, urban features that already Booth was criticizing can be recognized being part of the segregation of certain deprived areas in Kensington and Chelsea. Spatial dissociations, such as an overly complex geometry of the street layout or the isolating capability of rails and highways are adding to the social problems in certain locations (Figure 14).

Fig 14. Spatial analysis North Kensington

- — borough border
- area with an overly complex street layout
- isolating infrastructure
- analysis area on next page

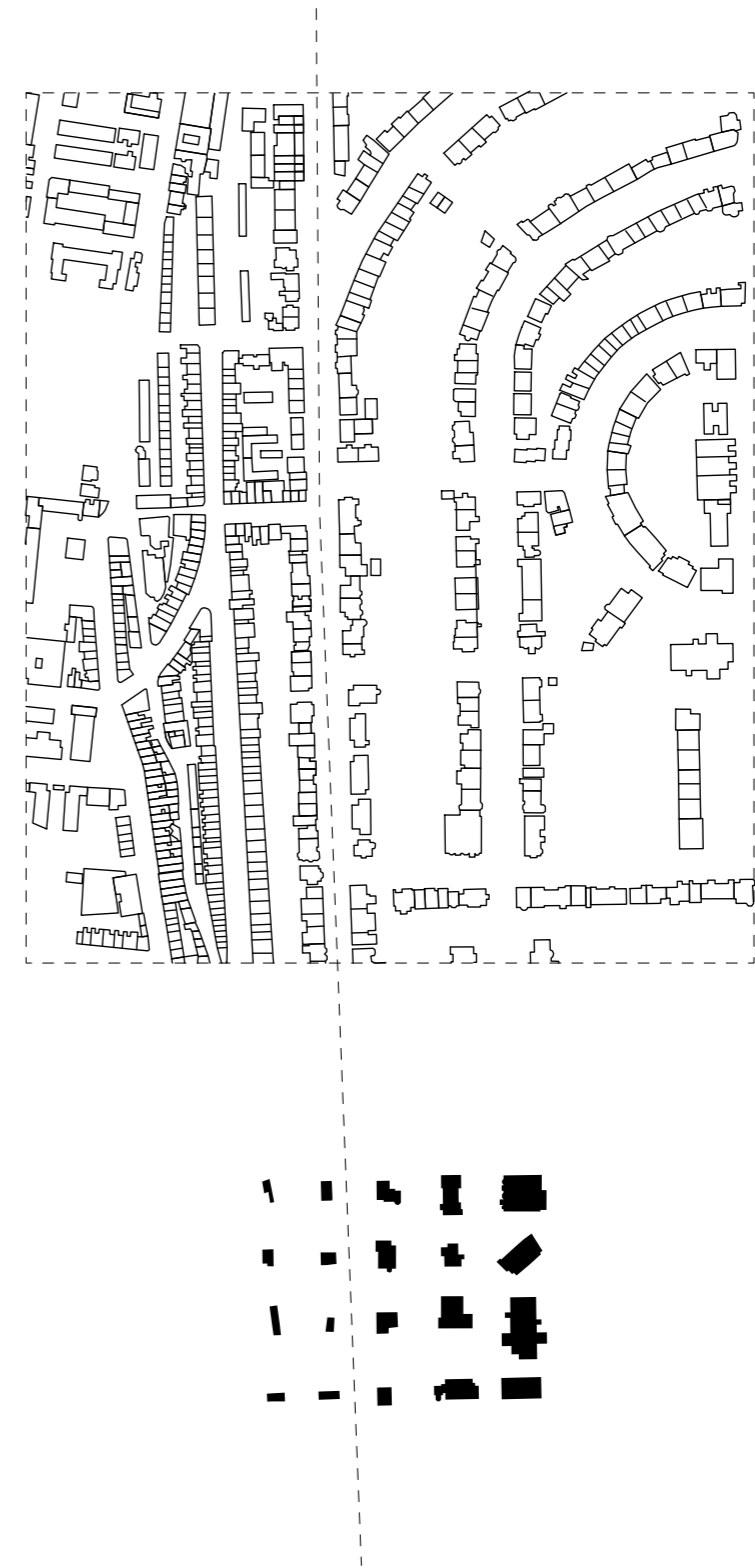


Analyzing the morphology of the conflict area, where the poor streets are just at the backsides of the prosperous ones, the uneven plot sizes convey the financial differences. As visible in Figure 15, along the main road of Notting Hill - Ladbroke Grove - the households are visibly larger. The back streets seem to be squeezed in and are often overcrowded. In this area, just one street might be the separation between the highest and lowest social class (Figure 17).

Moreover, according to the analysis gathering spatial boundaries in the area, (Figure 16) one of the most deprived areas in North Kensington can be explained by the enclosing railways, isolating the area from the rest. The poorest areas are often near by non-crossable infrastructure. On the contrary, buildings along the major roads that are easily crossable, gain importance.



Fig 15. Plot sizes analysis



I
One of the most deprived areas in the North Kensington is being closed off and separated from the rest by the railways.

II
The most deprived areas related to non-crossable infrastructure.

III
At six points along the wall of the railway, there is a passage connecting the areas.

IV
Buildings right next to major roads (easily crossable roads, not highways) gain importance.

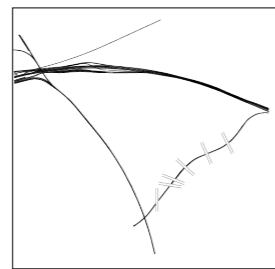
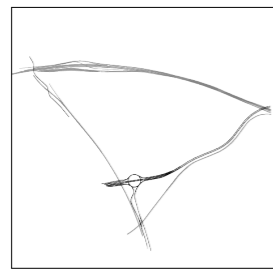
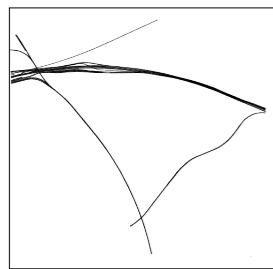
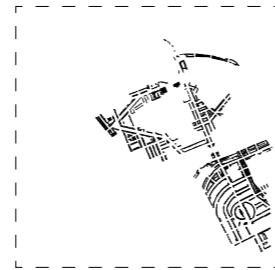
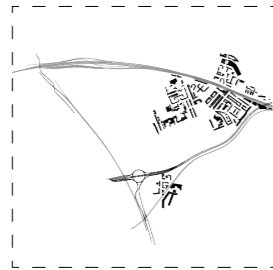


Fig 16. Spatial thresholds analysis (left)

Fig 17. Street as division (right)



28. Asher Wayne, *Rings Around London: Orbital motorways and the battle for homes before roads* (London: Capital History, 2018), 157.

The Westway highway completed in 1970 (Figure 18), has been criticized for the lack of care over the environment²⁸, and rightly so. The highway – running West to East – is completely blocking the North-South connection of the area, isolating North Kensington. Many views and accesses are fenced off or blocked (Figure 19). Lowered air quality and noise pollution are some of the damaging factors for the residents living nearby.

Homeless have found a shelter underneath the highway, visible in figure 21, and some of the ‘awkward’ or inconvenient leftover spaces generated by the highway have been claimed by mobile home-dwellers, having no better place to go (Figure 20).

Despite the space underneath and neighbouring the Westway highway being of poor quality, life has found its way to exist in there. As visible in figures 22 and 23, for example sports facilities and stables have been placed below the roundabout.



Fig 18. Westway highway

Fig 19. Fences and blocked views around the highway

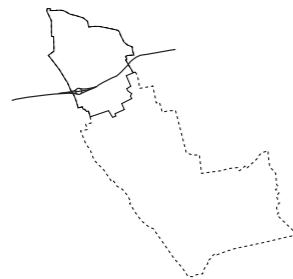




Fig 20. Mobile-dwellers claiming in-between spaces created by the highway



Fig 21. Underneath the Westway





Fig 22. Tennis court underneath the highway

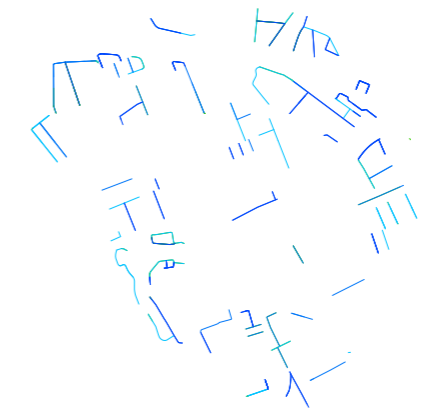
Fig 23. Horse stable underneath the highway



The Space Syntax theory, discussed in Chapter 1, was also applied to the focus area. In figure 24, the most deprived areas of Kensington and Chelsea, according to the Deprivation maps are aligned with the least connected streets based on the Space Syntax.³¹ It becomes clear from the analysis that the two correlate. The pockets of profound poverty are created by the street layout to a certain extent.

Fig 24.Space Syntax & Deprivation combined - analysis

■ most deprived buildings



most connected streets



least connected streets

5.

Grenfell Tower Fire

The privileged can buy their safety

29. "Grenfell Tower Inquiry," Phase 1 report, accessed Feb 16, 2021, <https://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/phase-1-report>.

30. Anna Minton, *Big capital: Who is London for?* (London: Penguin, 2017), 1-14.

31. Lynsey Hanley, "Look at Grenfell Tower and see the terrible price of Britain's inequality," *The Guardian*, June 16, 2017.

Located in the very deprived part of Kensington and Chelsea, within the ward of Notting Dale, a fire broke out on 14 June 2017 (Figure 25). Started in a fridge on the 4th floor of the 24-storey residential tower block, the Grenfell Tower, the fire ended up taking 72 lives. Hundreds of families also lost their home abruptly.

The tragedy has lifted the borough of Kensington and Chelsea to the spotlight and brought it in the middle of the discourse. The fire emphasized the discrimination of the lower income classes living in high-rise residential towers.

The debate goes about the victims being ethnic minorities, living below the poverty line. People were now losing their lives as the political agendas of the borough council and other organizations in lead continued neglecting the deprived areas and the concerns of the inhabitants. The residents of Grenfell had filed complains concerning the safety of their home prior to the accident.

In 2016, the tower was renovated – commenced by KCTMO (Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organization). Designed by Studio E architects, and led by contractor Rydon, the aim was to improve the tower's heating and energy efficiency, as well as external appearance. Due to a budget cut of 2 £ per square meter, a cheaper cladding – aluminum composite panel – was chosen. Both the cladding with a polyethylene core and the PIR insulation plates failed fire safety tests conducted after the fire.²⁹

Anna Minton, in her book *the Big Capital*, describes the general problem of the city. According to her, housing in London has become a financial asset rather than a basic right.³⁰

And Lynsey Hanley in her article "Look at Grenfell Tower and see the terrible price of Britain's inequality" for the *Guardian* stated: "*The privileged can buy their safety – high-rise dwellers and the poor are condemned to second-class status.*"³¹ Inequalities, in the case of the Grenfell Tower fire, indeed translated to compromised safety of the inhabitants.

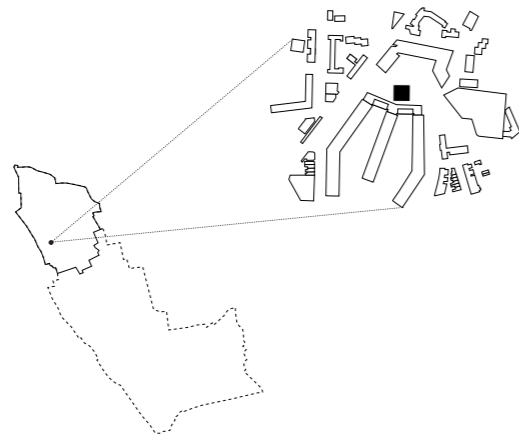


Fig 25. Grenfell Tower on fire



Discourse Analysis

32. Tom Batchelor, "Kensington Council leader Nicholas Paget-Brown resigns after fatal Grenfell tower fire," *Independent*, June 30, 2017.

33. "Grenfell Tower Inquiry," Phase 1 report, accessed Feb 16, 2021, <https://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/phase-1-report>.

34. "Kensington and Chelsea," TMO, accessed Feb 16, 2021, <http://www.kctmo.org.uk/>.

Many stakeholders were taking part in the renovation of the Grenfell tower. The people affected by the fire demand answers and want someone to take responsibility. As seen in the scheme in Figure 26, the borough council was the only part-taker admitting to its wrongdoing. On 30 June 2017, Nicholas Paget-Brown - the former leader of the council - announced his resignation.³² The council had failed to adequately respond to the fire. The rest of the associates have only been bouncing around the responsibility, blaming each other for the events of that night. The first part of a Public Inquiry was published on 30 October 2019, addressing the events on the night of the fire.³³ The second part of the Inquiry is still ongoing, investigating the wider picture.

Since 1994, KCTMO has been managing the whole housing sector of Kensington and Chelsea. Following the Grenfell Tower Fire in 2017 though, the council terminated its contract with them, and since January 2018, the housing has been directly managed by the council again.³⁴

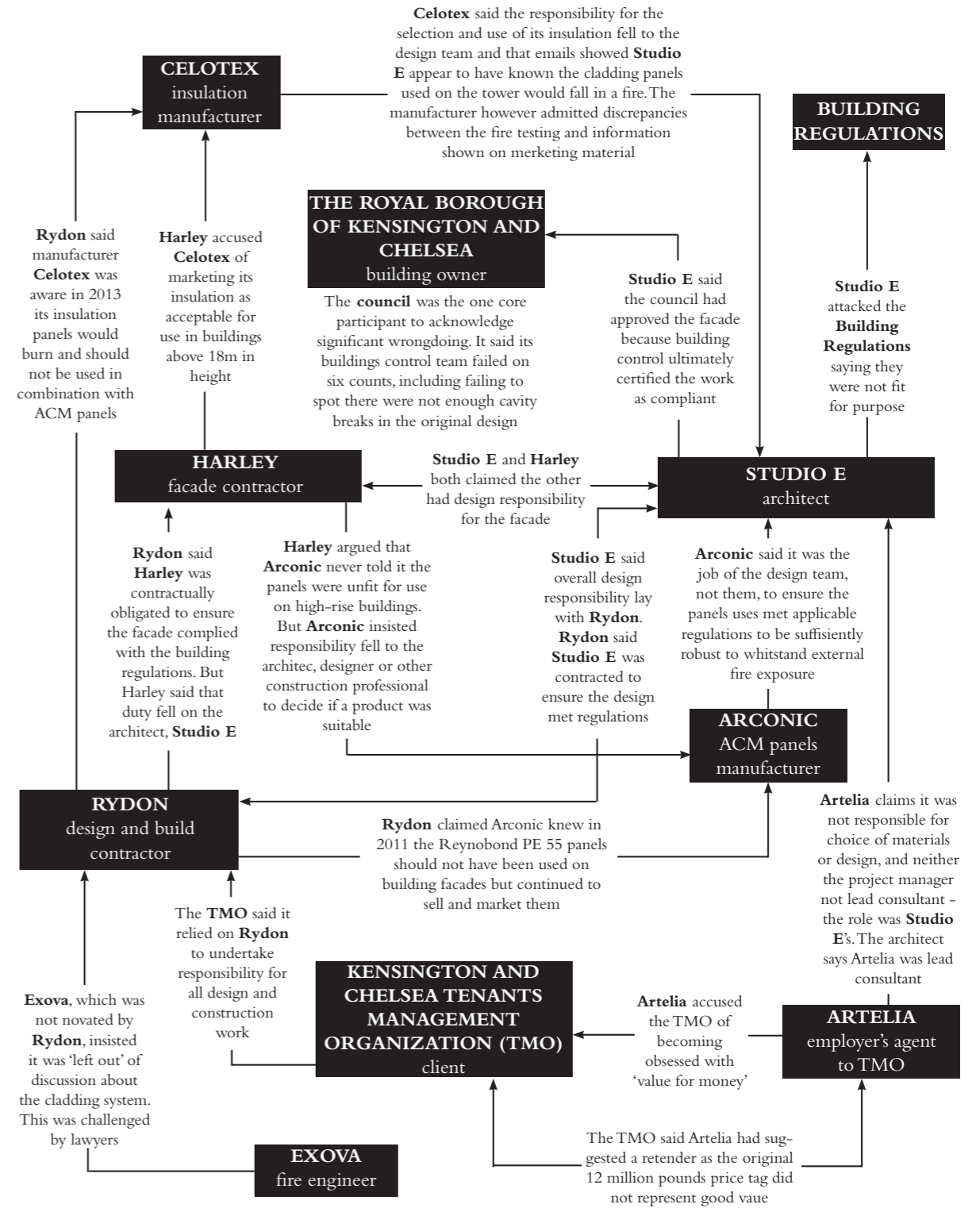


Fig 26. Who's blaming who?

Site Analysis

The Grenfell Tower was completed in 1974 as a part of the Lancaster West Estate (directly South of Grenfell). The tower block's top twenty storeys consisted of 120 flats, with six per floor. On each level there were two flats with one bedroom and four flats with two bedrooms each – with a total of 200 bedrooms. The first four stories were non-residential until during the refurbishment in 2016, two of them were converted to residential use, bringing the total count of flats to 127 and bedrooms to 227 (six of the new flats had four bedrooms each and one flat had three bedrooms).

Grenfell is one of the five high-rise tower blocks in North Kensington, in an otherwise low-rise residential neighbourhood. Due to its height, the tower is visible from afar, otherwise the area is quite hidden from the main roads. The Grenfell Tower is adjacent to the Kensington Leisure Centre (East) and to the Kensington Academy (North). Blocking the West entrance to the site, there is a eight meter high railway running from South-West to the North-East. The only way to access the site with a car is along the Grenfell Road, parallel to the East facade of the Lancaster West Estate.

The area has been completely fenced-off subsequent to the fire (Figure 28). It has been treated almost like a crime scene, denying access for almost four years now. Along the fence, the community has set up a memorial wall with writings and flowers.

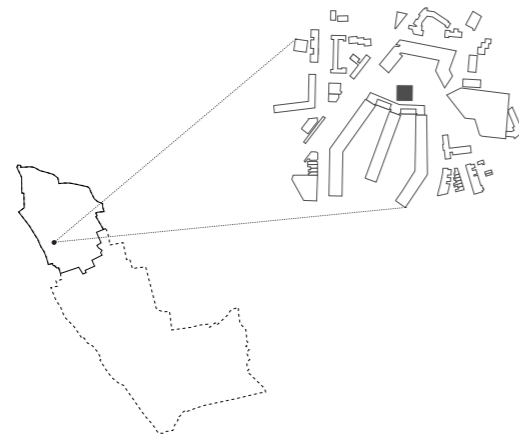
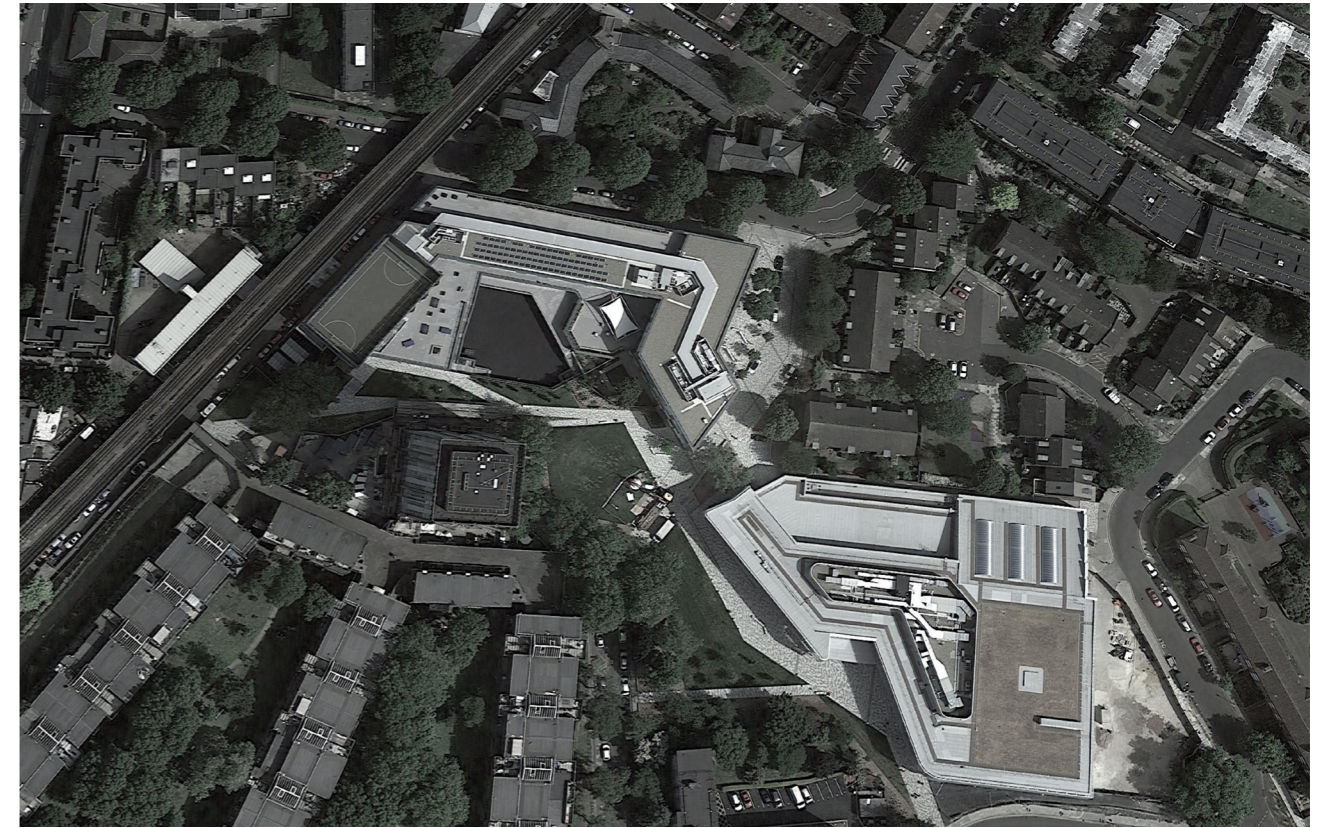
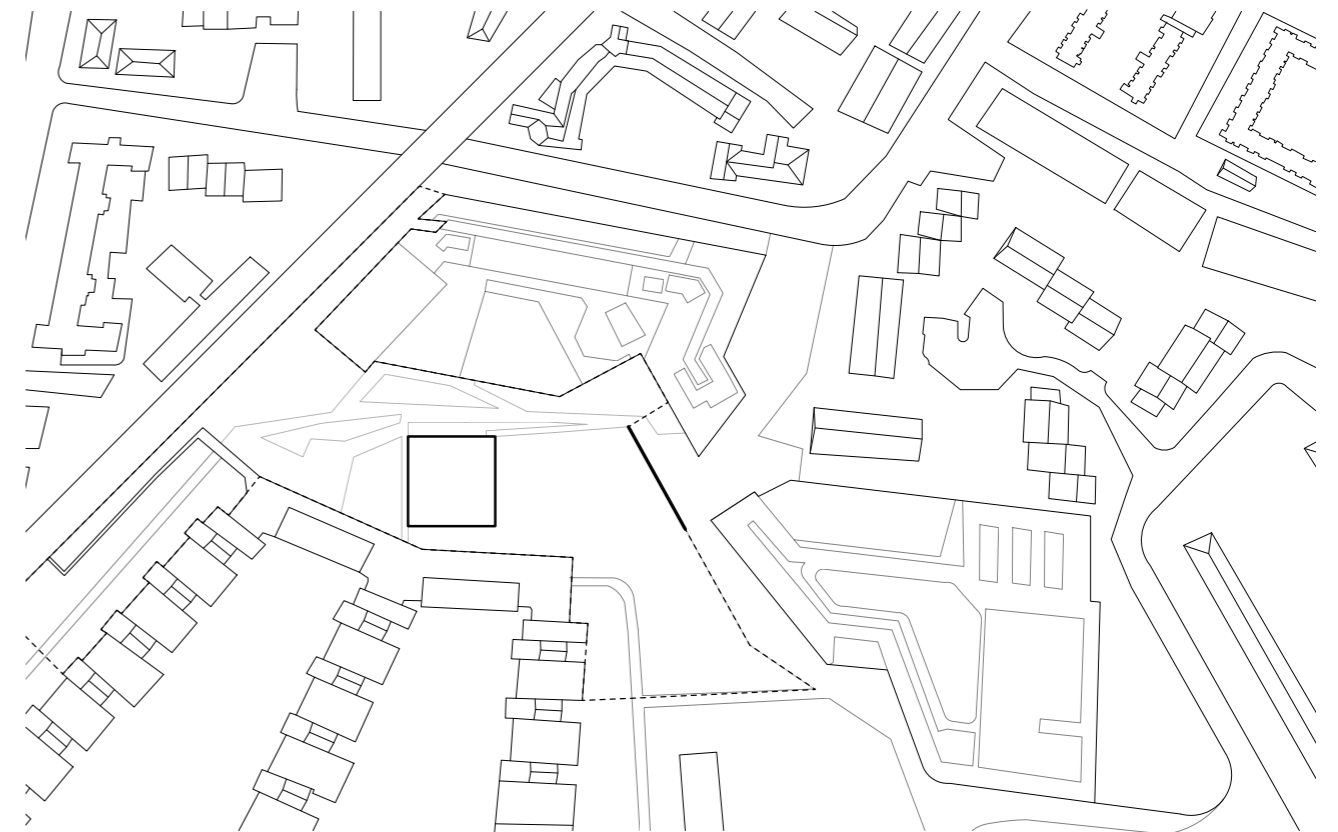


Fig 27. Grenfell site prior to the fire

Fig 28. Grenfell site 2021/ remaining elements



6.

Design Task

Grenfell Tower Memorial

35. Grenfell United, “Remember Grenfell: A special memorial for the 3rd Year Anniversary,” Grenfell United, June 16, 2020, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-khO6D-IC0E&t=3472s&ab_channel=GrenfellUnited.

36. Nadia Khomami, “Grenfell Tower site to be turned into memorial,” *The Guardian*, March 1, 2018.

The Grenfell Tower fire depicts political as well as social symbolism of London’s division and inequalities. The event itself is monumental, being one of the most extreme illustrations of the issue of poverty in London’s more recent history. Within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the accident becomes even more highlighted, in an area where the extremes in society (‘rich’ and ‘poor’) live in a close proximity. In the case of the fire, the conflict becomes clear.

Social trauma cannot be repaired. But commemorating the events that took place as well as exposing the causes of it can bring awareness of the bigger picture still on-going in London.

Still today, the ghost of Grenfell is drawn on the skyline of the city. According to the interviews of the victims, the community does not want the haunting reminder to be there anymore.³⁵ The ruins of the Grenfell Tower are designated to be demolished in the coming year of 2022. And the community has requested a memorial to be built on the site.³⁶

Architecture of Trauma

37. Yuong, 2000, op. cit., p. 223

38. Sabina Tanovic, "Memory in Architecture: contemporary memorial projects and their predecessors" (PhD diss., Delft University of Technology, 2015), 3.

We need marks in history – something to bring us back to that moment.

We as humans have a great need to memorialize. We place a stone on the grave and lay flowers on it. The materiality of the body is of importance in our mourning process – else our minds construct the loss again and again through absence.

Memorials as an architectural type are used as means to materialize intangible emotions – creating collective memories. Memories that expand in time and space can be passed on to the following generation. Memorials are able to create the much needed space for the psychological process of mourning.

Throughout history, there have been different attempts to commemorate on given location, to translate an event into an architectural concept and its materialization. Yet, the influence of the memorial space on the visitors cannot be choreographed. One cannot choreograph emotion.

Perhaps, for that exact reason, it's common for contemporary memorials to be abstract in nature. They are trying to be 'presenting the unrepresentable' after all. This is particularly evident in the Holocaust Memorial 'field of otherness' designed by Peter Eisenman in Berlin (Figure 29). Victor presence and victim absence can be felt as the memorial brings about 'shame' on the Holocaust remembrance.

"Because the murdered Jews can respond to this gesture (Germany will remember expressed in creating the memorial) only with a massive silence, the burden of response now falls on living Germans who in their memorial visits will be asked to recall the mass murder of a people once perpetrated in their name, the absolute void this destruction has left behind, and their own responsibility for memory itself."³⁷

Memorials can often be categorized into either monuments or memorial museums, or into hybrids. The events of 9/11 in New York, for instance, were commemorated with an informative museum together with a memorial plaza (Figure 30). Some fought for the reconstruction of the towers but eventually the newly-created void was left as a signifier, recognizing the loss of the survivors.³⁸

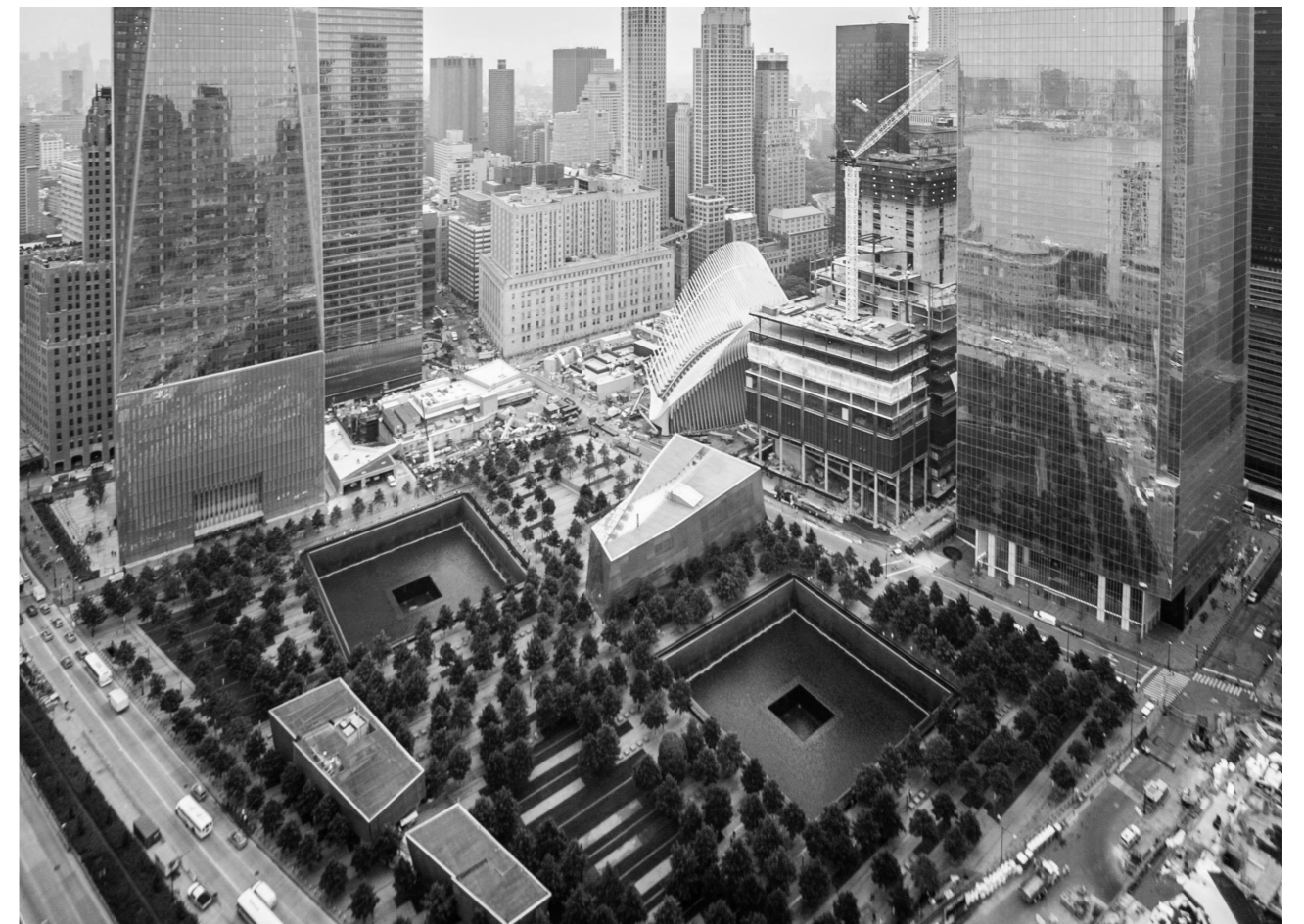


Fig 29. Holocaust Memorial, Berlin

Fig 30. 9/11 Memorial, New York

Design Intervention

mourning & reattachment

39. Peter Homans, *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End* (Virginia, University of Virginia Press, 2000), 3.

40. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter, *Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a postcivil society* (New York, Routledge, 2008), 83.

41. Flavien Menu, *New commons for Europe* (London: Spector Books, 2018), 81.

In psychology, Peter Homans describes the trajectory of loss as follows: *attachment - loss - grieving - mourning - reattachment*.³⁹ The design intervention honouring the lost lives and commemorating the Grenfell Tower fire on the authentic site, focusses on the two last components of Homans' description: *mourning* as a memorial and *reattachment* as forward-looking new functions. The latter is meant to exceed the limitations of a memorial. Whereas the memorial remains fixed, the other part of the design is meant to be evolving. The aim is not to freeze the site and freeze the debate by only creating a 'silent' memorial but to keep the conversation going.

From the analysis, it became clear that there was no understanding nor communication between certain actors involved with Grenfell. *Reattachment* connects the institution that shapes housing - the council - and the ones living with their decision - the community.

*"Layering of public spaces in the same location brings counter-publics in contact and confrontation with each other."*⁴⁰

*"We shouldn't avoid conflict in our experiences of participation. We step forward when getting into conflicts. People start to get to know each other. The enemy changes its face - it is no longer about neighbours or strangers but it can be much more constructive."*⁴¹

The design intervention aims to create inclusion within the divided city. It goes as far as creating a shelter for the homeless, the very fragile part of society. Furthermore the design proposal deals with the next predominant issue relating to the fire. The same flammable materials used in Grenfell Tower are still on the facades of various buildings around London. These panels will be slowly taken down and brought to site. An expansion through time will be visible as this problematic issue is being solved and the panels are adding up on the new walls in an artistic manner.

The new walls, as a part of the architectural design intervention, can be seen as a continuation of the existing memorial wall that is now placed on the edge of the site (Figure 32).

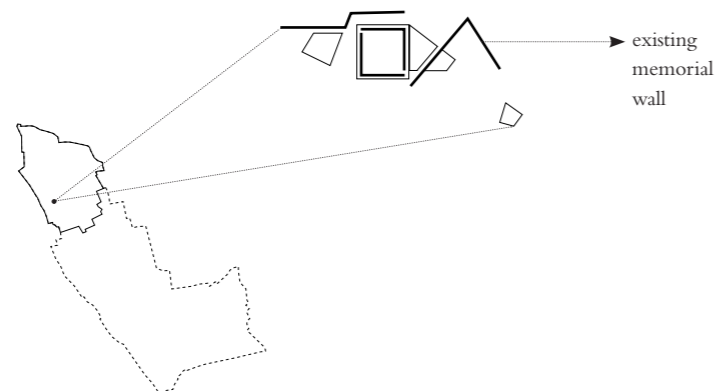
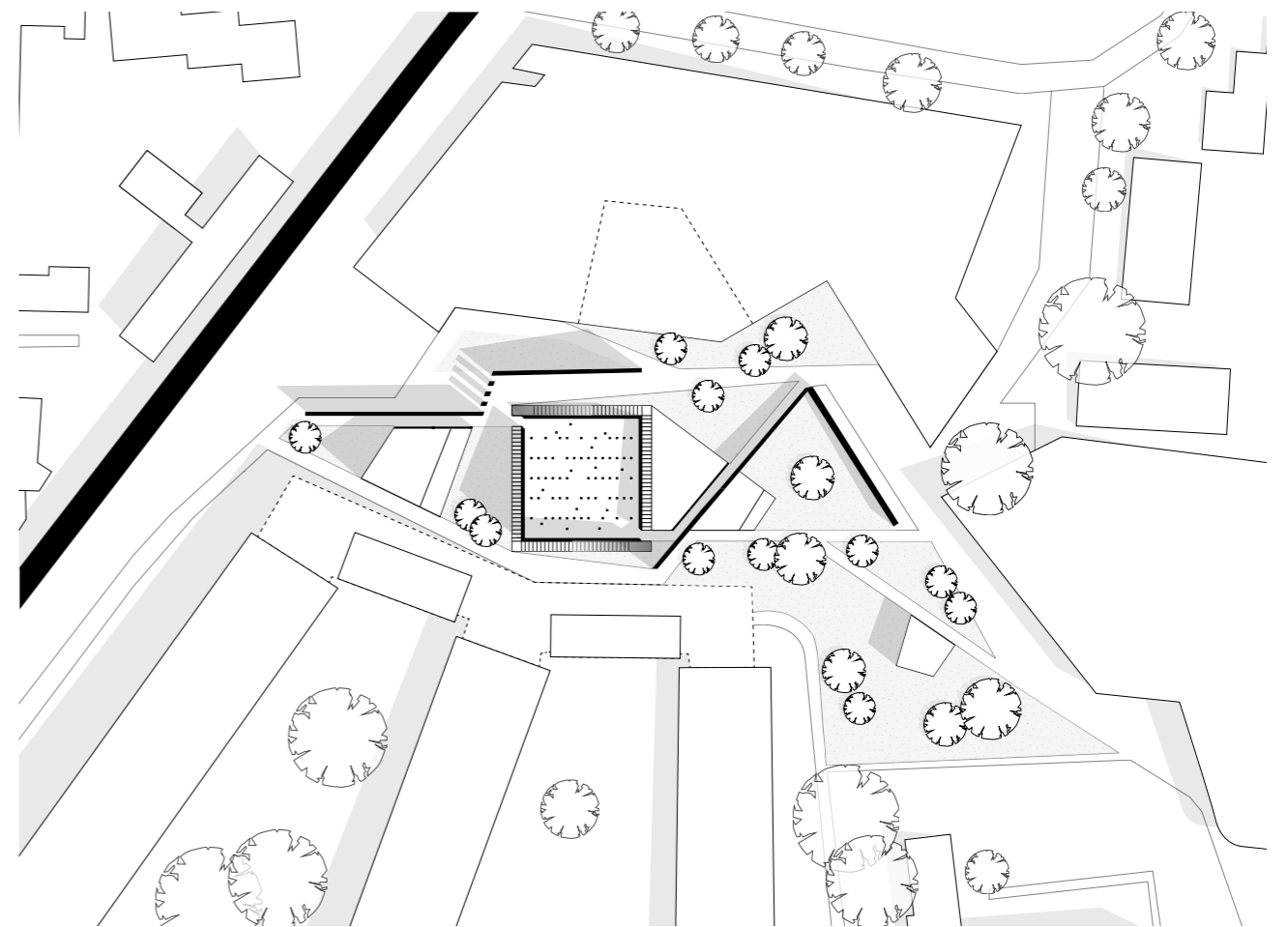


Fig 31. Grenfell memorial wall

Fig 32. Masterplan



Conclusion

The social as well as spatial dissociations between different social classes were investigated in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London. The overlooked areas in North Kensington are isolated from the wealthy neighboring districts, creating tension between the two.

Research shows that in this area, where the average earnings abundantly exceed the poverty line, the median annual gross income per household can nevertheless fluctuate with tens of thousands of pounds between the different social classes. The rich are able to afford houses or apartments that are designed bigger, more sophisticated and for fewer occupants. In contrast, housing for poor people is simpler, using a standard design for a number, maybe a complete row of dwellings to save in cost. They are made smaller but for more people and they are built in areas where land costs less, even inside roundabouts. This trend then culminates in what happened in the Grenfell Tower, where, in order to save cost, flammable cladding was used and 72 people died for that price.

Thereby, architecture has made visible the growing economic disparity between the rich and poor in London. And the geography of poverty in the city has persisted over time. Isolating spatial attributes such as uncrossable infrastructure, overly complex street layout and over crowding are affecting the social condition of these areas. They are creating a threshold, leaving locations like the Grenfell Tower and its surroundings to the 'background network'.

A spatial intervention on the plot of the Grenfell Tower, being relatively small in size, will not solve all the morphological issues of the most deprived areas within the borough. Rather it intends to address and shed light on the most dominant conflicts. Architecture will be used as a creator of order in the most devastated environment. The site will be turned into a space for remembering as well as to a space for moving on. The design intervention – a memorial dedicated to the 72 lost lives and their families – helps the community to come to peace with the events in the past. As importantly, the design will guide Londoners towards a better, more understanding and involving future.

Memorial architecture is symbolic and therefore open for interpretation. Multilayered views exist on the particular memory and the night of the fire remains deeply embedded in the political and social context of the city.

Architecture can support memory work, but what is the impact of the design once the memorial is installed in real time and space, will never be completely known since emotion cannot be choreographed. Nevertheless, the design approach takes cues from psychology, philosophy, political and social history of the city and binds it together with meaning in architecture.

Reflection

The Graduation studio 'Architectural Design Crossovers' started with my interest in the divided city, London. I was curious how the financial extremes co-exist within the capital and how the differences in living standards translate to social and spatial tension. The main curiosity during the whole process stayed more or less the same. However, sometimes the direction of the investigation led to a dead end and I had to rephrase the main questions quite often.

The topic of conflict kept leading me back to the Grenfell Tower fire, since it was a monumental tragedy arising from the issues of the area. There have been some attempts, on a social and political level, to bring justice to the victims and to help the society move forward but nothing has been done on an architectural level yet. I was therefore drawn to the design task of the memorial.

The approach I chose towards the P2 presentation lacked some character. The feedback encouraged me to take a stronger stand, and to address the bigger on-going conflict more. After a further thought, I decided that the design should be twofold. It should commemorate as well as point to hope. Both aspects would be equally as important. I also analyzed architecture of trauma more in detail, and concluded that only few memorials deal with the on-going condition. Often what is being commemorated is already in the past and the memorial becomes informative rather than solution providing.

The issue of poverty surrounding Grenfell is still present to date. Realizing that changed the nature of the intervention. If the project was only a memorial, the site would be somewhat 'stuck' with the tragedy. The addition of new functions, for example, the community center would keep the site evolving. In 10 years of time, this part of the project could even be something else, whereas the memorial remains fixed in time and space. The two faces of the project would make the tension within the neighbourhood tangible and even felt.

The role of an architect becomes significant, as the designer of the ground for many different lifestyles and opinions being able to co-exist. In projects like this, an architectural intervention could steer the conversation and development to the right direction, finding the right way of exposing and accumulating the issues. An architectural translation of the events that took place and the materialization of the emotion on the authentic site could provide the much needed space for mourning.

During the graduation project I have struggled to find the right way to go about the ethical issues relating to Grenfell and memorials in general. The topic is highly sensitive and the project quite unusual. I began to question my role in it. I wondered how to relate to the victims and their loved ones since I have no personal connection to the events of the fire. I tried to reach out to the Grenfell community with no response. Also, there was no opportunity to visit the area in order to observe closely and talk to people. The method used and thereby the understanding of the level of suffering and the opinions of the survivors was then limited to interviews found online.

"We are not asking for money. We are not asking for sympathy. We are demanding change." - Grenfell United

Another struggle during the process was to link the research to the design decisions. The process has not been linear and at the beginning of the research, I did not know what I was working towards. It seemed like I had to go back and adjust the research once I knew my project better, in order to create a coherent story. To me, the inequalities and segregation in the city can translate to a memorial, giving visibility to the conflict and the proper attention to the people who suffered and/or still suffer the most from these very issues.

The research was a means to understand the various underlying obstacles relating to the fire and to increase the relevance of them. It dives into the debate, aims to uncover the social condition - rather than financial differences (already known) - and it contributes to the scientific dialog by explaining the role of spatial dissociations adding to the social problems in locations like the Grenfell Tower.

The graduation project, concerning social and spatial issues of poverty areas in London, relates to the studio of Architectural Design Crossovers, the 'Heterogeneous City', since it's talking about this exact diverse and fragmented character of London. The master track of the built environment becomes clear as the intervention is approached from a spatial point of view. Even though the focus is on an architectural level, the project touches upon other scales and dimensions of the built environment: the urban condition, the execution of the building and the technology embedded within.

The project is multidisciplinary. The direct landscape is designed to soften the rather strict geometry of the architecture. The technical aspects concerning, for example, fire safety are adding to the architectural ideas and affecting the handling of details. The intervention incorporates the management side by bringing together the ones who decide with the ones directly affected by the choices - hopefully creating understanding between the actors. Eventually, the wider social message behind the project would mean that no one's live or well-being cannot be compromised in the planning and construction of housing for them.

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