Reflection Document

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Relationship between Research and Design.

The research focuses on disparities in London, these disparities are initially mapped by dichotomising territories of affluence and deprivation. The extent of a territory is marked by the presence of multiple membranes. These membranes have varying permeabilities with asymmetric dependencies. The accessibility to a specific territory such as the Hurlingham Social Club in Fulham depends on various factors such as ableness to afford the joining fee, network, and proximity. Such dependency is largely asymmetric for certain demographics. As a result, existing disparities worsen the gap between affluent and deprived. Disparities have been analysed on the scale of 1 km^2 sites, as well as for so-called *machines*. These machines are case-studies, such as clusters of buildings, or grounds that act as highly independent and specialised machines, or cities-within-cities. These machines typically highly impermeable material and immaterial membranes.

Disparities have been found to be particularly present on six planes: sound, reflection, social, exchange, recreation, and accessibility. Together the disparities on the planes form the assemblage of disparity. The asymmetry depends on the degree of affluence and deprivation of the analysed territory or machine. The plane of accessibility includes the asymmetric membranes drivability, visibility, cyclability, and walkability in Figure 1.
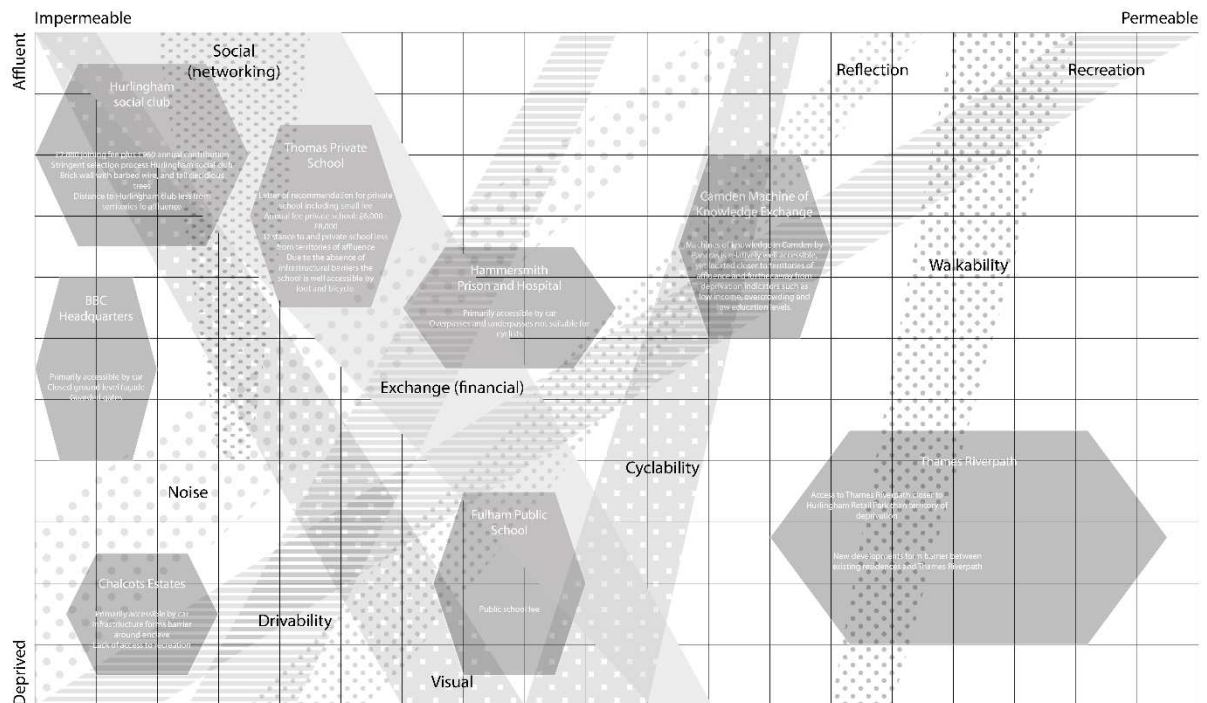

Figure 1 - Membrane asymmetry

The membranes can be material and/or immaterial. Architectural membranes too, can have material and/or immaterial objectives and effects. To a largely extent they determine the accessibility to the membrane's territory – which may or may not perpetuate existing disparities.

The intent of the design is to address the existing dichotomy and polarity between territories of affluence and deprivation, to challenge asymmetric membranes that perpetuate deep-rooted disparities. The middleground acts as its own agent, its own territory, that provides continuous impulses challenging existing disparities. The middleground itself, ironically, also consists of a sequence of asymmetric membranes. These membranes, however, intend to address and potentially disrupt the disparities found on the six planes as indicated in Figure 2.
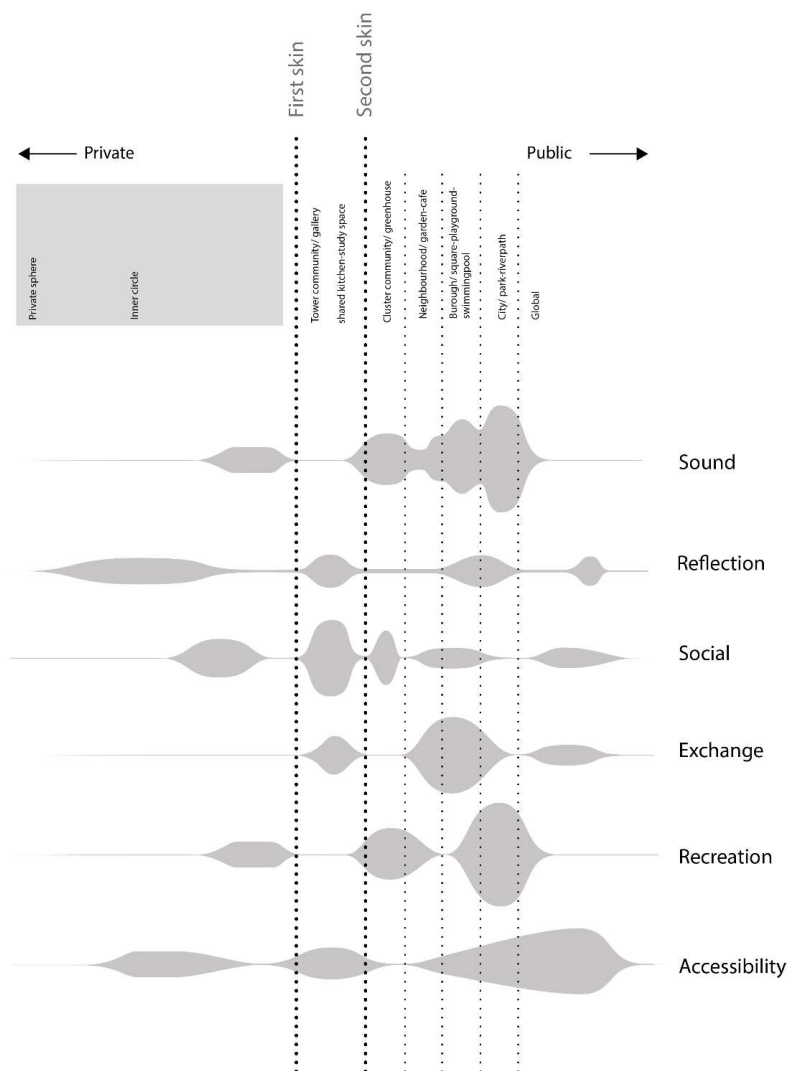

Figure 2 – Middleground design intent

In the middleground concept, in between the membranes we find spaces with permeabilities that vary depending on their plane. Typical housing development is mainly accessible by car with extensive underground or gated parking, the middleground is less asymmetrically accessible. It is accessible by car, by water bus, or shared fleet – challenging the mono-accessibility of existing enclaves such as the car-centric Hurlingham Square gated community. Similarly, where harbour front developments often form barriers between the Thames River Path and the nearby neighbourhoods, the middleground, however, rejects this

barrier and respects both existing neighbourhoods, lines of sight and roads –to promote inclusivity and initiate trans-membrane relations.

By creating a continuous sequence of membranes with dependant-variable permeabilities the middleground becomes porous to various stakeholders. Yet, the porosity depends on the stakeholder: community dwellers have can permeate more membranes than visitors. However, due the membrane multiplicity there is no hard division between private-public – countering and criticising the formation of exclusive enclaves, such as the Hurlingham Social Club.

Feedback on Research and Design

Feedback from mentors included a need for a more structured and substantiated approach translating the research to the design. Consequently, I added an additional layer of interpretation to the analysis of the TADs, which led to the definition of the six planes on which disparities present themselves, as well as the definition of membrane asymmetry. The membrane analysis has informed the design approach as to create sequence of semi-permeable spaces and membranes that counter territory dichotomisation.

Moreover, I was asked to investigate current housing system more in depth. Therefore, I investigated several housing case-studies in proximity to the Fulham site. As a result, I gained more understanding of historic housing developments as well as typical requirements for new-built projects. For example, the Hurlingham Retail Park development in Fulham was able to avoid developing the typically required social housing by investing in public goods, in this case the Thames River Path. Ironically, the 'public investment' in the Thames River Path primarily benefits the affluent who can afford to live in proximity to the Thames Riverpath. Those who would typically benefit from social housing schemes, benefit much less from this public investment. Moreover, the social housing that was created to replace existing affordable housing does not have access to the new-built elevated courtyard.

Relationship between Master Track Architecture, Crossovers, and Graduation Project

// the relationship between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS).

The graduation project focusses on disparities in the built environment. These inequalities are embedded in a complex web of systems; they are characteristics of the modern heterogenous city – the studio's overarching topic. Addressing disparities from an architectural perspective requires a multi-disciplinary approach since the asymmetries transcend singular disciplines. They are entangled in a variety of conditions. The track MSc Architecture focusses on developing skills ranging from social to technical skills to address issues in an integral way, going beyond conventions in traditional disciplines.

Research Method

The research method includes the analysis of asymmetries/ disparities on various scales, from borough scale to the scale of the machine/ and the street. Since one of the premises is that disparities transverse multiple scales, they must also be examined on various scales. The research method studying asymmetries considers data from surveys, which includes deprivation and affluence indicators, as well as the influence that systems, and *machines*, and streets have on persisting disparities in London.

The definition and development of the territories of affluence and deprivation (TADs) may help generate discussion on previously invisible or hidden disparities, possibly exposing relevant conditions. Defining on what planes asymmetries manifest themselves with what idiosyncratic membranes provides a better

understanding of disparities in London. The role of architectural membranes is investigated through photographs and sketches.

The research by design approach includes investigating what role architectural membranes can play in creating a middleground in various milieus of disparity. How can these membranes mediate between various actors, and delineate a sequence of spaces in which the gradient of exclusivity and inclusivity varies? If, hypothetically, the public realm is the ultimately inclusive and the private sphere is ultimately exclusive, how can architectural membranes mediate in between public and private, as a sequence of spaces? In this sequence what membranes delineate the spaces? How are membranes variable dependant to allow permeability on one of the six planes?

The research method gave more insight in the disparities and the relevant idiosyncrasies. Analysing street levels, in combination with the investigation of case studies gave more insight into disparities on a scale that the survey data could not provide. The approach however was rather deterministic with respects to the binary character of the territories of affluence and deprivation. Shifting the focus to investigation membranes more in depth resulted in a more layered understanding of the disparities and allows for a more nuanced understanding of territory interrelations.

Wider Framework and Transferability

// Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.

Disparities, including socio-economic inequalities, are by no means a new phenomenon. These inequalities however are still pressing concerns to the inclusivity and well-being of cities' inhabitants. Territories of affluence continue to territorialise parts of the city. As a result, the city becomes more and more fragmented and exclusive, and inequalities continue to persist.

The middleground aims to challenge the trends of perpetual inequalities, fragmentation, and exclusivity. Designing the middleground as a multiplicity of membranes creates a sequence of spaces that mediate in varying degrees between public and private. This proof-of-concept intends to show how the middleground approach can promote inclusivity on the various planes considering the multiplicity and complexity of disparities. Since other megacities struggle with similar issues as London, they too may benefit from the middle-ground approach.

Ethical issues and dilemmas

// Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii, if applicable) elaborating the design and (iii) potential applications of the results in practice.

(i)   Research

My personal fascination with inequalities partially stems from the current Dutch political climate, in which we witness increasing wealth inequality. Although income and wealth inequality are as much pressing issues in London as they are in The Netherlands. It can be an ethical challenge to understand the context of disparities in London without being biased by my own upbringing and background. This brings me to another potential aspect of bias, as a white, educated adult from a middle-class family, it can be challenging to understand the intricacies of inequalities and disparities that especially minorities experience.

Yet, by an in-depth analysis of the Grenfell-tower, which houses relatively many minorities, including going through personal statements I gained a better understanding of the intricacy of entangled issues many

minorities face. Discussing disparities and asymmetries that I have not experienced myself must be addressed with sensitivity and recurring reflection. Nevertheless, the risk remains of having overseen relevant (cor)relations and misinterpreted data.

One of the premises of the research includes the assumption that typologies of deprivation tend to overlap with territories of deprivation. However, to what extent is this premise based on a bias. What is the risk that the premise becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; if I intend to confirm the premise by looking for typologies of deprivation within territories of deprivation, am I then overlooking typologies of deprivation in territories of affluence? The research would potentially be less biased if the method included a more systematic definition and analysis of typologies of deprivation.

(ii)   Design

The project intends to address persistent disparities by remediating the space between public and private, avoiding hard transitions between public-private, and affluent-deprived.

One of the ethical dilemma's faced in the design process is to what extent to allow actors to participate in the design process. User participation may be considered vital to a democratic design process, yet, to what extent will users consider future proof adaptations, and inclusivity of future inhabitants, and other actors. If this design were to become reality, inclusion of various actors in the design process would be recommended. Although this is partially beyond the scope of my graduation project, I will continue to stay aware of stakeholder participation by approaching and analysing the proposals from the perspective of multiple actors.

Another ethical dilemma includes to what extent future residents and other users of the project should be able to appropriate the architecture to meet their needs and accommodate new demands? The degree of potential appropriation in the design proposal is increased through modular and adaptive design, through design iterations the desirable degree of appropriation can be investigated. I believe that it is vital to not carve all design decisions in stone, this requires careful consideration, design, mediation, and compromise.

Particularly relevant to the graduation topic is, whether it is unethical to take advantage of the asymmetry in the housing market by designing expensive penthouse-like housing units to finance spaces such as shared outdoor spaces, kitchens, and gardens? Perhaps it seems ironic to capitalise on existing inequalities within the context of this research. However, if this approach makes the project financially more feasible and the smaller units more affordable, it's a trade off I am willing to make at this point.

(iii)   Potential applications in practice

The middleground includes a variety of housing units which should reflect the demands from society, not a mix that generates the largest profit. Most of the housing units in the residential towers will be smaller units, some of which should be affordable for lower income households. This can be achieved through various schemes including Social Rent, London Living Rent, Affordable Rent, Rent to Buy, and Shared ownership.

However, the mix of dwelling typologies may be influenced by financers. Here, too, it remains an ethical debate to what extent the project will remain of mix that reflects the demographics of London, and that the development does not succumb to market forces and is adopted to create greater profits. Smaller units, especially when north-facing, may be more suitable for affordable housing units. The design steers towards a minimum of 35% affordable housing, of which minimum 30% social rent, so the project qualifies for the Fast Track Route (FTR).

The mix of units in part affects the demographics and diversity within the project. Yet, it remains uncertain to what extent the mix adequately reflects the intended diversity and inclusivity. Is it ethical to force a certain diversity for example through instilling a minority quota? In London, racial minorities are more likely to live in poor quality housing, should they then be prioritised over non-ethnic minorities? Although relevant, this dilemma is beyond the scope of this research and design.

The project site is owned by The Comer Homes Group (Prophet, 2012). Together with the Hammersmith and Fulham Council they form the Fulham Riverside West Partnership, and has previously submitted plans for the development of the site, which have been rejected by the government in favour of the Thames Tideway Tunnel (Prophet, 2012). Their previous proposal includes 15-18% affordable housing as described in the council's planning report. Although this initial fraction has not yet been approved due to lack of substantiated documents, it does show the design intent from the consortium. The Comer Homes Group is known for developing gated luxury communities, which contrasts the design ambitions and begs the question whether the site and stakeholders are suitable for the project proposal. This dilemma requires an adequate business plan and strategy to convince the Comer Group of the proposal's viability.

Outlook

The project started with a fascination with inequalities and disparities and led to an initial binary dichotomisation of 'polar' territories. It has, however, progressed into a more biunivocal design project that focusses on relations rather than dichotomies, which does more justice to complexities and interdependencies of inequalities than the initial dichotomisation.

The final part of the project will focus on the development of membrane sequences; how can they enable both mediating space with varying degrees of inclusivity and exclusivity, as well as varying degrees of appropriation.

Bibliography

Prophet, S. (2012, July 5). *Fulham SW6*. Retrieved from Owners of Fulham Super Sewer Site Submit Plans for 474 New Homes: https://www.fulhamsw6.com/#!pages/shared:common:supersewer020