Northumbria Research Link

Ungating Community:
Opening the enclosures of financialised housing

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Ungating Community:
Opening the enclosures of financialised housing

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Abstract

An ideology of globalisation and neoliberal progress has led governments across the world to enable and encourage investors and property developers in constructing real estate projects that appeal to a mobile, global elite. This thesis examines four topologies of financialised housing and the ways in which they construct borders and form exclusions within their cities, arguing that each one is a variation of the gated community. The gates – both real and affective - consist of spatial, social and political infrastructures that work together to produce homogenised spaces of exclusion. Firstly, the luxury investor-focused property that we see in abundance in major cities across the globe. Secondly, private student housing that caters to a community of short-term international students looking for maximum convenience. Thirdly, the 'co-living' complex that rebrands the precarity of contemporary labour and the insecurity of a private rental market in crisis, capitalising on these characteristics towards selling a lifestyle of flexibility and the illusion of togetherness. And finally, the 'expat' compounds in China that aim to attract international professionals through the construction of convenience and familiarity: a smooth transition from one context to another. Interrogating these four housing topologies – which have to date not been examined in relation to each other - I will argue for their *ungating*: the constructive interruption and dismantling of their borders, barriers, exclusions and divisions via strategies of collectivisation, intervention and the radical imagination, as demonstrated by four case-study projects I will outline as examples of ungating. This is important work that must be done towards transforming the exclusionary mechanisms of financialised housing and establishing communities and spaces that are inclusive of difference. My research is presented in three parts: this written thesis, my project *ASSET ARREST*, and two films titled *Gated Community*. Each part works in dialogue with the others, using artistic, performative, action research and theoretical methods. Overlapping at points, the research is conducted and performed from positions that move between the embedded and the distanced. My aim in positioning these three parts alongside each other is to construct a multi-dimensional and fragmented image and exploration of financialised housing that generates and presents knowledge in different ways: an approach that is vital towards developing a theory

and practice of ungating.

Contents

Acknowledgements

A Guide to *Ungating Community*: A Thesis in Three Parts

This thesis is presented in three parts, each exploring the gated nature of urban spaces and communities created by various financialised housing topologies. Each component works in dialogue with the others, using artistic, performative, action research, and theoretical methods. Overlapping at points and diverging at others, the research has been conducted and performed from positions that move between the embedded and the analytical. I approached the subject of financialised housing, community, art and the radical imagination as tools for creating new spaces, from different angles, thus generating new forms of knowledge and experience. Through my varied methodologies, I performed as artist, researcher, inhabitant, and various characters, both real and imagined. This introductory guide elaborates on each component of my thesis and the relationships between them, expanding upon my methodological approach and my position as an artist and researcher.

Firstly, my project *ASSET ARREST* – published as a podcast series - approached the spaces of financialised housing through a process of performing as a potential buyer or renter and functions as an example of what I call 'ungating'. *ASSET ARREST* situates theory and research *within* the actual spaces that I interrogated throughout the written work, allowing me to experience them through their marketing, branding, and physicality *as well as* the social, political, and economic effects that can be determined from a greater distance. My written thesis drew upon this process, alongside theoretical research, in order to include the experiential and intimate knowledge gained through *ASSET ARREST*.

For each episode of *ASSET ARREST*, I invited a guest to attend a viewing of a different residential property with me. Guests have included a wide array of artists, architects, estate agents, activists, academics, and individuals who live in a certain area and have an interest in a property development that is affecting them. In recording a conversation with my guest before and after each viewing, I constructed and published an 'image' of the exclusive, private space that is communicated through language rather than the glamorous and idealised photography and CGI renderings that typically depict these spaces as we navigate the city. The majority of

my guests were people I had not previously met before. This required a particular kind of performance: one in which we enacted a kind of intimacy, performing as a couple, family members, friends, or colleagues. The experience of the viewing became a performance between myself and my guest, and the unknowing estate agent who performed their sales pitch. I have viewed purpose-built student housing, luxury new developments, multi-million-pound mansions, serviced apartments, and gated communities for expats; each form of housing requiring me to play a different role. I view this aspect of my thesis as being situated within histories of performance art, and the *intervention* as performance.

Another part of *ASSET ARREST* was the 'tours' that I ran where members of the public could sign up to attend a viewing of a property of their choice with me. I made the process of entering these spaces less intimidating for my guests who in turn could experience the hidden reality of these 'luxury' spaces that populate the city. I use the term 'luxury' in a broad sense – much as the developers do – to identify these spaces as being financially out of reach for myself and the people I am leading on tours. These homes-as-products require *ungating* in the sense that they are exclusive private spaces that extract from that which lies around them, as my written work elaborates on. In entering these spaces, and taking others with me, we performed an act of extraction that flowed in the opposite direction: we gained something back from the developers and investors, however momentarily. I handled all communications with the developer or agent and lead the conversation during the viewing. Again, I view this as an act of ungating. With planners, developers and investors often utilising culture as a tool towards increasing property values, *ASSET ARREST* enabled me – an artist - to claim something back from *them*; to use their spaces towards different ends. I intend *ASSET ARREST* to be an ongoing project, a long-term commitment that will enable me to map out and interrogate the exclusionary spaces of financialised housing in whichever cities I pass through for work or leisure.

Part Two of my thesis is two films – G*ated Community Episodes One and Two* – that responded to domestic environments I have lived in. Each film approached the spaces they are set in through a performance of characters that enacted and embodied various cliches, struggling with their relationship to the spaces they inhabit. Episode One – *The Lockdown* – was made during 2020 when we were

confined to our houses due to the Covid-19 crisis. The community explored in this film was the only one I had access to at that point, largely contained within virtual space and the algorithmic architecture of social media platforms and news outlets. Here, the community was addressed through performing as three semi-fictionalised versions of myself, each based on reactions and responses to the crisis that was unfolding and circulating online: the 'self-care' of baking and skincare, the depression eased by self-medicating, the feeling that this was a world-changing moment, and that capitalism was going to fall. Other characters came in and out of the picture: gig workers summoned by apps; a filter bubble and an algorithm, shaping the communities I felt part of. This episode drew upon tropes found in sitcoms; a response to the 'set' that the home had become, and the reactions of an 'audience' accessed through a screen (this is reinforced in the film through the implementation of canned laughter).

Episode Two – *Likeminded People* – was filmed during a month I spent living in a large 'co-living' complex, 'The Collective', in London's Canary Wharf, on a self-initiated residency. In this film, the community was shaped through the branding, promotional materials and architecture of the housing. The notion of the 'set' came into play again, reflecting the narrow form of subjectivity that the building allows its residents. [The Collective's branding and design is examined in the third part of this thesis, which focuses on The Collective as a co-living case study.] This episode included characters that are not all played by myself and drew upon the cinematic tropes used in films about cults. In the film, The Collective was found not to be what the main character – played by me - expected, but rather a cult of 'digital nomads' running a 'geographical pyramid scheme'. The central character struggled to understand whether these are indeed 'likeminded people' and felt concerned about whether she understood who she herself is, and how the space might shape her if she stayed and connected with the people inhabiting it.

These films present an alternative mode of performance to that utilised in *ASSET ARREST* but they equally respond to residential spaces I positioned myself in relation to, whether through a temporary intervention via the 'viewing' process or a longer process of inhabiting a space as a home. They allowed for an expanded exploration of the forms of subjectivity such spaces can dictate, and the problems present within the desire to be amongst 'likeminded people': a common selling point

for the topologies of financialised housing discussed in this thesis and a major factor within their practices of gating. Both ASSET ARREST and G*ated Community Episodes One and Two* can be seen as forms of both durational performance and invisible theatre, belonging on the one hand to a history of immersive art and on the other to under-cover journalism; all the works can also be seen to be forms of action research. To a certain extent, the works are designed to both mock and take very seriously these forms, methods and investigative protocols.

Part Three of my thesis takes the form of a written analysis, which examined four case studies of different housing topologies in different cities and considered how we might work to *ungate* these gated communities. The text uses academic methods. Each case study was considered in relation to what forms the real and affective gates that enclose them and what social, spatial, and economic effects these gates produce. Through reviewing relevant literature and the promotional materials marketed by each development, as well as drawing upon conversations with estate agents and people living in the developments and their localities, I formulated an argument for *ungating* that requires making these gates visible. In the introduction, I outlined my concept of gating versus ungating, alongside the economic and political context that has shaped financialised housing as it is understood today, laying out the terms, definitions, and parameters for my investigation. Each of the four chapters of Part Three considers the various gating mechanisms that are at work and, following this, I discuss an example of a project that enacts forms of ungating that have been useful in transforming, interrupting, and entering these exclusive enclosures; opening up new and fragmented spaces of difference.

My contribution to knowledge is not just the knowledge about these specific spaces and forms of housing that I have gained and distributed but also the multifaceted nature of my interrogation. Each part of the thesis works alongside the other to present different research outputs. I have developed these as outcomes that can stand alone as creative works rather than be reliant on each other for interpretative or experiential functions. I present them alongside each other as distinct bodies of work that offer different ways of engaging with the issues of financialised housing, community, and the practice of ungating. The multi-dimensional image of the 'gated community' that my thesis as a whole generates is in turn a tool that can be drawn

upon in developing a practice of ungating. I view this approach as vital to a theory and practice of ungating, due to the nonlinear and often abstracted nature of the gates in question (as elaborated in Part Three).

As discussed above, the financialised housing models I explore through my thesis are targeted toward a particular audience at a particular stage in their life. For example, 'co-living' (Chapter 2) is marketed toward those who are young, mobile, and looking for a particular kind of life*style* that is only loosely rooted to *place*. We might consider the 'character' they imagine themselves to be as embodying the form of the 'digital nomad'. In contrast, Beijing Riviera (Chapter 4) is a gated community designed to house international professionals who have relocated – usually temporarily – to Beijing for work. The episodic nature of the housing on offer in each chapter is embodied by the three parts of my thesis. *ASSET ARREST* presents glimpses into exclusive spaces in the form of podcast episodes. The 'Gated Community' films follow the episodic nature of a TV series. And, the written work is presented as a series of chapters that examine different housing topologies, constructing windows into each.

The results of my examination present a journey through financialised housing that sits in contrast to the flat and idealised images that these residential spaces use to represent themselves. Working against the 'perfect' image that is distributed to infect the potential buyer or renter's imagination is a form of breaking the façade and interrupting the boundary or the *gates*. Whilst each part of my thesis employs different tactics and methods, they work together to share a comprehensive examination of the issues I have outlined. As with the multi-faceted projects discussed in each chapter of my written work, my own PhD project has taken on different guises in order to enter and examine the spaces in question. I view this multi-directional approach as holding great potential towards the practice of *ungating* that I am proposing as a mode of practice.

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Portfolio of Practice

For official ASSET ARREST website with all podcasts and related materials please visit: https://www.assetarrest.com/

All episodes can also be found on Google Podcasts / Spotify / SoundCloud and most other podcast platforms.

ASSET ARREST at ZK/U: Centre for Art and Urbanistics, Berlin, 2019:

In May and June 2019, I undertook a residency at ZK/U: Centre for Art and Urbanistics in Berlin, as part of a collaboration between the NewBridge Project in Newcastle, and Durham Universities' *Politics of Urban Social Innovation Project* (PUrSI). This enabled me to conduct research into financialised housing in Berlin and develop a series of podcast episodes set around viewings of properties within the city. As pictured above, I was also able to present my archive of brochures and promotional materials, as well as audio recordings, to an audience during the OpenHaus events.

ASSET ARREST as part of Prospect Us at Shieldfield Art Works (SAW), Newcastle, 2021:

ASSET ARREST installation, 2021.

A new ASSET ARREST episode and video was produced for the *Prospect Us* exhibition at Shieldfield Art Works. The exhibition explored the social, emotional and political impact of commodification of land, rapid urban development and studentification in Newcastle. The new episode featured viewings of a number of purpose-built student accommodation blocks in Shieldfield, and interviews with several students who were living in them. A video accompanied the audio and depicted a 'walk through' of student accommodation blocks in Shieldfield, using the videos hosted on the provider's websites.

The video can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t531McC_TMc

Still from video, 2021.
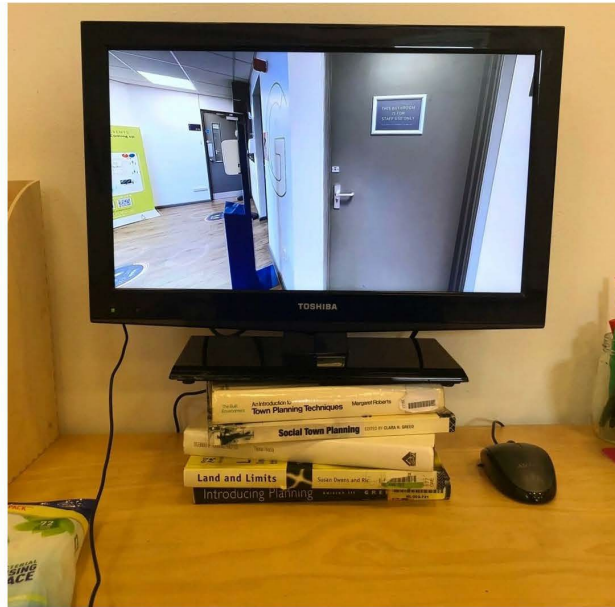
Details of ASSET ARREST
installation, SAW, 2021.

ASSET ARREST tours for the AntiUniversity Festival, 2021:

Text from the open call:

"Fed up with seeing the area you live in swallowed up by luxury property developments masquerading as homes? Always wanted to step inside the properties that are sold as "investment opportunities"? Fancy a fresh perspective on the city, or just an escape from your own life for an hour? ASSET ARREST has over 5 years' experience of viewing unaffordable and devastating properties with no intention of buying them. ASSET ARREST feels entitled to view multi-million properties and see the city from within these exclusive spaces. ASSET ARREST morphs into many characters in order to do this effectively.

ASSET ARREST would love to invite you on a personal tour of the luxury property of your choosing and will act as an estate-agent-agent, freeing you from the anxiety, fear and discomfort you might otherwise feel in entering these spaces. Contact us today and our experienced estate-agent-agent will make the process as easy, fun and free of hassle as possible!

Viewings available 6th - 10th September, at the property of your choice. Alternatively, ASSET ARREST can select a property for you."

As well as participation in this festival, I regularly released open calls, enabling people to sign up to attend viewings with me, of properties of their choice.

View Gated Community Episode One:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsvIqA6VaG8

View Gated Community Episode Two:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvw70xC8PCs

Trailer for Episode One: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZteI5CJI8Tc

Trailer for Episode Two: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrXBeHxjyA0

Gated Community Epsiode Two at Out_Sight, Seoul, 2021-2022:

Episode Two of Gated Community iwas exhibitied as part of a group exhibiton - I don't wanna be horny anymore I wanna be happy - at Out_ Sight gallery in Seoul, Korea. A selection of installation views:

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on 17 September 2019.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 54,079 words.

Name: Laura Yuile

Signature:

Date: 13/01/2022

Introduction: Towards a Theory of Ungating.

'Islanders across the world experience a strong sense of belonging, something which also holds true for islanders located in cities'. (Ballymore, 2015).

A stage in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is lined with replica red phone boxes as several men dressed as the Queen's Guards stand tall and look around, replica rifles pointed upwards, a banner reading 'Forget Calm and Have Fun' covers a wall. Crowds in business attire gather around to have their photos taken ('Keep Calm and Capture the Moment!'), mingling with wine glasses in hand and chatting eagerly to sales representatives about homes on another continent that do not yet exist. A choir sings in front of a projection of London and people can be seen signing documents. Ballet dancers enter, moving gracefully in front of a CGI video that depicts a cluster of high-rise buildings emerging from an incoming swarm of pixels. A large rotating logo reads 'LDN E14'. This bizarre scene is that of the 2015 Malaysian launch of London City Island (LCI) (Jiggee, 2015), a property development by Irish developer Ballymore[1] in partnership with Malaysian developer Eco World,[2] in London's Borough of Newham.[3] Property fairs, launches and tours in Asia are common strategies through which developers sell off significant proportions of new developments in London: Ballymore appear as experts in this field. They describe LCI as a 'mini-Manhattan' and a 'cultural cosmopolitan hub', citing the cityscapes of Tokyo and Chicago as inspiration, reinforcing its connection to the global (Ballymore, 2015). The event was designed to conjure a space of potential in the minds of those eager to *buy into* London, to own a slice of this global city for the

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[1] Ballymore were founded in Ireland in 1982 and operate predominantly in London and Dublin. Other significant projects include the Guinness Quarter in Dublin and Embassy Gardens in London. For more information see: https://www.ballymoregroup.com/

[2] Eco World is a real estate developer based in Malaysia, but their core business involves property development outside of Malaysia. They have 18 ongoing and upcoming projects in the UK. For more information see: https://ecoworldinternational.com/

[3] Construction on London City Island was started in 2014 and was completed in 2021. Many properties were sold off-plan, and people were able to move into completed buildings as they were ready, upon the completion of each phase.

purpose of accruing profits.

London City Island is neither an island nor particularly near the City of London (or even the centre of London): it is a collection of new homes and commercial units on a peninsula (once known to locals as 'Bog Island') in Canning Town, East London. It previously housed a number of factories and no residential buildings. Now, like many new 'luxury' developments in London, there is a resident's lounge, a concierge, a swimming pool, a spa and a gym. In 2017 I briefly rented a studio on LCI through Arebyte - a studio provider and gallery[4] - who Ballymore have given free work and gallery space to for ten years (they have now been there for five). The provision of space to cultural activity is part of Ballymore's 'placemaking' strategy — developed with placemaking agency Futurecity[5] — and geared towards framing LCI as a 'cultural hub'. Placemaking is the creation of 'places' (I will shortly define my use of the term 'place') through the planning and design of spaces and amenities that contribute to shaping an area or development's identity. There are many different forms that placemaking may take, but it often includes the creation of lively public spaces, landscaping that attracts people and promotes wellbeing, and strategies to implement culture, such as the commissioning of public artworks, or the inclusion of gallery spaces and workspaces for cultural workers, as in LCI. It can also include attempts to attract particular retailers or amenities to the area which, in the case of LCI, includes a small supermarket, a restaurant, a café and a number of small boutiques. Placemaking strategies can be implemented by governments, the community themselves (for example, a community garden initiative), or, in the case of LCI, private developers. As well as the provision of gallery and workspace, the 'cultural hub' that Ballymore set out to create provided a new home for the English National Ballet as well as an ongoing programme of events designed to 'activate' the area, such as an occasional food market, outdoor exercise for residents, and screenings in the shared courtyard.

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[4] Arebyte have multiple studio buildings across London, usually operating through a process of obtaining use of buildings that are soon to be redeveloped. Their London City Island studios are the odd-ones-out in that sense, as they have been granted free use of the space for ten years, including a space that they run as a gallery. The artists still pay rent, but this goes directly to Arebyte to fund their gallery programme, rather than the Ballymore. For more information see: https://www.arebyte.com/

[5] Futurecity is a placemaking agency that 'creates cultural strategies, brokers cultural partnerships and delivers major arts projects for clients across the public and private sectors'. More information is available at: https://futurecity.co.uk/

Figure 1. Page taken from Ballymore promotional brochure.

The 'exclusive island neighbourhood' (Ballymore, 2015) of LCI was carefully designed to attract global investors and residents that would identify with the lifestyle on offer, injecting a neglected slice of land with culture and carefully curating its history in order to control its narrative and present potential buyers with something desirable. An image that omits the island's past life as a site of industry, and its position as situated within one of London's poorest boroughs[6], in favour of citing proximity to Canary Wharf and London City Airport. The artists' role in such processes of urban redevelopment — which I have introduced in more detail below — is a common thread throughout this thesis. I have highlighted London City Island as an introductory example of the shift from housing-as-home to housing-as-financial-asset, a process that has been unfolding across the globe in different ways

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[6] According to a 2021 report by Trust for London, 50% of children live in poverty compared with the average of 37%. More information available at: https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/newham-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/

and at different speeds. I have examined four housing topologies in this thesis, case studies of real estate forms that have developed and gained popularity in recent decades. I first define three terms that will recur throughout each chapter and which describe non-generic processes that contribute to the construction of what I am calling financialised housing. Following this, I have considered how these processes can be applied to both local and global contexts and what the local-global dichotomy means for notions of place and power: both factors that contribute to the realisation of financialised housing forms. I have then introduced my case studies and their locations in more detail before outlining the theoretical grounding for my concept of 'gating' versus 'ungating', which forms the central argument of this thesis.

i. The Mechanisms of Financialised Housing.

Neoliberalism

To define my use of the term neoliberalism, I turn to the writing of David Harvey (2003, 2007a, 2007b). With neoliberalism's rise often attributed to Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in 1979, it is characterised by a focus on private property rights and the liberation of 'individual freedoms'. The 'freedoms' referred to here are entrepreneurial ones that 'reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital' (Harvey, 2007a, p. 7). This has served to accelerate the shifting of power into the hands of a small economic elite.[7] Harvey perceives a gap between neoliberal theory and neoliberalism in practice, arguing that when the principles of neoliberalism clash with the need to sustain elite power, they are twisted or abandoned. Regardless of this, neoliberal ideas and practices have shaped how global capitalism has been operating for over four decades. Key neoliberal features include the deregulation of markets, the facilitating of competitive flexibility; the dismantling of the welfare state; and the privatisation and corporatisation of public enterprises, namely the transfer of public assets from the state to private companies (ibid, p.23). This privatisation, in

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[7] Writing on December 7th 2021, the world's richest people now own 11% of the world's wealth. That is, the top 0.01% of individuals – 520,000 people who have at least $19 million. More information available at: https://fortune.com/2021/12/07/worlds-richest-inequality-richer-during-pandemic/

the UK and elsewhere, has included social housing,[8] as I will examine in more detail in Chapter Three.

In famously declaring that there 'is no such thing as society, only individual men and women', Margaret Thatcher (1987) ushered in an era of individualism that has seen value placed on private property, conservative ideas of the family (though this was arguably nothing new), and an increase in *personal* responsibility regarding housing, employment, education and health. Under this logic, if an individual becomes homeless it is deemed their own fault. Neoliberalism has brought with it a burden of debt – seen itself as a tradable asset – as evidenced clearly by the practice of mortgage lending as well as the wider use of credit to aid consumption of luxury and everyday goods. It operates through a pattern of uneven geographical development (Harvey, 2006), unfolding and appearing in different manifestations across the globe. For this reason, my use of the term seeks to describe an overarching and wide-ranging process, rather than a well-defined and generic one that has similarly affected each city and country discussed in this thesis, which it has not. I implement the term to refer to a situation in which 'the boundary between the state and corporate power has become more and more porous' (ibid, p.78). Though, in reality, the implementation of neoliberal theory into practice has happened only partially in most contexts, I feel that it sets the stage for the processes of financialisaton and gentrification that I shall now introduce and which define the shift towards home-as-asset.

Financialisaton

To set the parameters for my use of the term financialisaton, I refer primarily to Manuel B. Aalbers' (2016) theorising around the financialisaton of housing, which is the subject of my investigation. Much like neoliberalism, financialisaton is a broad-reaching term whose usefulness is often contested for being vague or imprecise (see, for example, Christophers, 2020). However, I find the term to be useful in describing the economic context that frames this thesis. Each chapter will draw out

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[8] Social housing in the UK is homes provided by housing associations or local councils, who act as the landlord. It is sometimes called council housing, but technically here is a difference in terms of the tenancy agreement. Social housing intends to offer rents that are lower than the private rental market. For more information see: https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/what_is_social_housing.

specific processes, characteristics and practices of financialisaton as is evidenced by the property developments I have examined. Aalbers defines financialisaton as 'the increasing dominance of financial actors, markets, practices, measurements and narratives, at various scales, resulting in a structural transformation of economies, firms (including financial institutions), states and households' (2016, p.109). Financialisaton is a pattern of accumulation that occurs through financial channels such as the stock market, and benefits actors *within* financial markets such as investors, hedge funds and lenders. Finance itself is a growth industry that has the capacity to draw other industries, not typically thought of as financial, into it. This, importantly, includes real estate. Closely related to neoliberalism, financialisaton operates through a logic of speculation, and housing has become a central feature of this.

In *The Limits to Capital*, Harvey (2007b) argued that the land market provides capitalism with a geographical system with which to configure the distribution and circulation of capital. Aalbers argues that finance and housing are increasingly co-dependent. The value of a house often remains stable or increases, in contrast with other consumer goods, and this stability relates to the land beneath it which tends not to decrease in value. Thus, housing is a reliable store of wealth and its exchange value can be exploited. This propels the speculation that underpins the real estate market and forms the now-common practice of purchasing housing for the exclusive aim of selling it at a higher price rather than living in it. Of course, property has been tied into the financial throughout its history, though the function and form of the financial has continued to evolve as spatial relations shift and technologies develop. To look further back in time, 'property' as a concept with a legal definition emerged in the 17th Century (see Aylmer, 1980). In the 19th century, Karl Marx analysed its development and history, writing in 1867 about what he termed 'primitive accumulation', which saw the enclosure of common land and resources, demarcating them as private property with the use of fences and ditches (Marx, 1867). This transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture – further detailed in 1884 by Engels in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* - enabled private property to emerge and function as a barrier to communal equality (Engels, 1884). Whilst I will not go into this history in any great detail, it is important

to bear in mind that land as a commodity is nothing new but has shifted over time in relation to specific historical conditions.

Gentrification

Neoliberalism and financialisaton contribute to shaping the socio-spatial process of *gentrification*, a process that will recur throughout this thesis in different forms and to different extents. Gentrification was first defined by Ruth Glass in 1964, in her writing about London and the infiltration of middle-class people into working class areas. It involves social displacement through an increase in property prices, with those who are displaced having to move further out of the city, in turn transforming the character of the place that is gentrified (Glass, 1964). We can consider this a classical definition of gentrification. Neil Smith developed 'rent gap theory' to explain this process (Smith, 1979). A 'rent gap' refers to the effects of disinvestment in a particular area, which results in buildings falling into disrepair, versus the rent that *could* be charged if the property was renovated or the area redeveloped. Landlords may deliberately reduce maintenance work and offer poor-condition housing before selling to another landlord or developer, who has the means to renovate or rebuild, thus exploiting the rent gap to charge higher prices. It creates an opportunity for landlords, developers, planners and homebuyers, to extract increasing value out of an urban area in order to generate a profit.

New forms of gentrification have been theorised in recent years including, most notably, supergentrification.[9] Lees (2003) has described supergentrification as an intensified form of the process whereby already gentrified areas are infiltrated by even higher-income professionals, who push land and property values higher up and thus instigate further displacement. In the neoliberal city, governance is *entrepreneurial*: cities and districts compete with each other for investment, public space is privatised, and regeneration projects are implemented to increase property values. Gentrification can also appear as a form of neoliberal urban *policy* (Smith, 1996). In London, large regeneration schemes unfold across boroughs, utilising

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[9] Sometimes referred to as hyper-gentrification. Terms such as 'green gentrification', 'climate gentrification' and 'rural gentrification' have also been used.

culture as a tool to make areas more attractive to investors. Supergentrification is a process enabled by corporate investors and developers who are granted governmental support such as subsidies and tax breaks (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2007). It may also involve the construction of new forms of housing that are targeted specifically towards investors rather than owner-occupiers. I would argue that this process is not *dependent* upon classical gentrification as a preliminary stage; run down and poor neighbourhoods are often now transformed through a more strategic and less organic process (such as London City Island, as detailed above, which did not have a preliminary phase of gentrification).

Further evidenced by the case of London City Island as a strategic 'cultural hub', artists have long been agents of gentrification, commonly moving into low-income areas where rents are cheaper. Artists may then enact aesthetic practices upon the spaces they occupy, stylising life in an attractive way by opening galleries, cafes, bars and studio spaces. Their cultural capital is then extracted as economic capital by developers, planners, governments and estate agents. To cite a number of examples in London, there are now guided graffiti walks for tourists in Shoreditch; the graffitied backdrops of Hackney Wick have informed the design of new property developments that appear beside them; developers have commissioned artworks for the indoor and outdoor spaces of luxury developments;[10] and areas with high populations of artists have become havens of fashion boutiques, fine dining and high-end commercial galleries.[11] In many cases, the artists themselves end up priced out, moving on to the next 'cheap' place. Culture and real estate are now committed companions. In the case of London City Island, when an agreement between the government and a private property developer[12] was first established,

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[10] See, for example, the Vista Development by Berkeley Homes in Nine Elms, which saw commissions for public artworks by Matthew Darbyshire, Nicky Hirst and Lucy Cash. Ballymore's development Embassy Gardens includes commissioned public sculptures by Guggi, Sarah Lucas and Simon Fujiwara.

[11] An example of which would by Hackney in London, which saw an influx of commercial galleries in the late 2000's, and has developed from a highly deprived borough to a home for artists, and has seen property prices increase exponentially, with an influx of young professionals.

[12] The agreement between the local authority and the private developer – Section 106 – sets the terms for the construction, based on how it may impact a local area. This can mean that a developer has to include a certain percentage of affordable housing within the development, provide outdoor space that can be used by the public, or provide a community center. Although not always strictly adhered to, this is how both local authority and developer justify and embark upon a new development. For this reason, London City Island contained a block of

the developer then went on to *invite* the artists and cultural industries as part of their overarching vision. In comparison to the classical gentrification of artists gradually moving into and changing an area, LCI is a strong example of supergentrification.

I should again stress that gentrification is not a uniform process that unfolds in the same way and at the same speed in every location. As I have elaborated on in Chapter Four, it is debatable whether the term applies to processes in certain countries that *appear* similar, such as urban developments in China, but which are in fact framed by a very different political context. Throughout this thesis, processes of gentrification thread in and out in different forms and to different extents, the artist ever-present.

Figure 2. Hoarding for new property development in Canary Wharf, London, 2021.

affordable housing, outdoor spaces that in theory can be used by the public, and spaces such as Arebyte that are also open to the public.

ii. Place and Power Between the Local and Global.

I will now consider the above processes in relation to globalisation and the notion of place: two factors informing the realisation of financialised housing models. Globalisation, as we understand it today, has been shaped by neoliberal ideals such as that of 'individual freedom', as mentioned above. 'Individual freedom' here includes the concept of companies as individuals, and the 'freedom' of companies referring to free markets, free trade and property rights. This economic freedom is thought of as the key factor of individual freedom — which is considered in the form of entrepreneurial self-ownership — so it is claimed that if companies have freedom, then the individual's freedom will follow. Individual freedom in this sense incorporates homeownership as dependant upon mortgage-refinancing schemes as well as other forms of consumer credit (Graeber, 2011, p. 376) including the current proliferation of payday loans. Individual freedom thus becomes tied into and dependant upon economic growth, with a companies 'success' ensuring the individual's wages, that are in reality often insufficient to meet the individual's needs and wants, and so life is reorientated towards the management of credit and debt (Beaumont & Kelly, 2018). This 'individual freedom' serves to enhance the difficulty of collective action towards political change, by way of creating precarious conditions under which individuals must struggle to make ends meet within the trappings of consumerism, speculation and entrepreneurialism.

Neoliberal globalisation extends the economy beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and is shaped by policies, such as free trade[13] and deregulation, that enable the fluidity of capital across borders. At the same time, restrictions on immigration remain, despite an increase in migration; the more economically privileged an individual is, the more mobility they may have. In the same way, economic globalisation has created a hierarchical global grid of strategic places, with some holding more power than others. The global city, as defined and popularised by sociologist Saskia Sassen (1991), is one of such places that plays a significant role and function within a globalised economic network of finance and trade. The global city is part of the complex and layered architecture of this economic activity:

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[13] See, for example, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. These agreements function to reduce trade barriers on a global scale.

important geographical points in a scattered global network of finance, post-industrial production and circulation. Economic globalisation can be associated with the neoliberal effect of reinforcing the global elite through maintaining their power, whilst vast inequality and poverty continues across the globe. International flows of goods and money are nothing new, but are important to recognize when focusing on the period of globalisation that has framed the development of financialised housing models over the past three decades.

Many developers, agents and investors now operate on a global scale, and many wealthy individuals purchase properties — either to leave empty, rent out or as a secondary home — in multiple countries. Real estate, in major global cities such as London and New York, is a financial mechanism largely marketed towards the urban elites — the 1%[14] (Graeber, 2011) — but financialised housing appears in different forms in different locations, including those not typically thought of as global cities (an example of which I will examine in Chapter Two). In recent years, issues of financialised housing have been explored in relation to various cities across the globe (see Marcuse and Madden, 2016; Minton, 2009 & 2017; Boughton, 2018; Rolnik, 2019; Stein, 2019). These studies have been valuable in helping me understand the similarities and differences that occur when these processes are enacted within different geographical contexts.

Harvey has theorised relationships between urban and global processes; drawing upon Marxist geography and putting forth a theory of relational space-time that is similarly understood through human practice. This is key in understanding urban processes under capitalism (1973). Criticising Harvey's concept of space-time (1990), Doreen Massey argues that the local is equally important in these structural processes, acknowledging the differences in how capitalist processes unfold in different contexts, exploring various regional contexts and their specific relations within global structures of space. Whilst Harvey discusses globalised capitalism and space-time compression as eroding the very notion of place, Massey argues that places are instead being *reworked* and still hold great significance (1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1995). She contends that a complex network of interconnected flows, links and dependencies constitute place; places being simultaneously local and global,

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[14] The 1% refers to those in the top 1% of income globally.

as established by their social, economic and cultural relations that are global yet retain local characteristics: *routes not roots* (Massey, 1991a, p. 27). Whilst Harvey sees places as fixed, related to permanence, and deeply affected by capital relations that are in contrast mobile, Massey argues the significance of power relations, proposing the idea of 'power geometries' (ibid, p. 25) — which incorporates not only economic forces but factors such as race and gender — and a more fluid understanding of place that is not defined by idealised and exclusionary claims to authenticity.

These power geometries contribute to the defining of boundaries and social stratifications, and thus those who are excluded — an idea that supports my understanding of the housing topologies I have examined. Pointing out that '"place" and "community" have only rarely been coterminous', Massey sees the longing for this coherence as a symptom of the the geographical fragmentation of our times, the result of which she terms as a 'defensive notion of place' (ibid, p. 24). It is Massey's understanding of the relations between place and the global that I will implement towards formulating this thesis. The defensive notion of place she describes, and the longing for simplification, can be seen as embodied by the housing topologies I will examine and the forms of the subjectivity they construct.

iii. New Topologies of Housing.

The housing case studies I focus on can be seen as extensions of the architecture of the global economy in its current figuration, their specific architectures and property relations designed by the present-day conditions I have outlined above. The four housing topologies I have examined are: a squat-turned-luxury-apartments in Berlin, private student housing blocks in Newcastle, a large co-living space in London, and a gated community for expats in Beijing. Throughout each chapter, I have demonstrated that the apparatus of financialised housing — its spatial, social and economic infrastructure — constructs repetitive urban forms, ways of living, and dependence upon flows of people and capital on a global scale. Yet each of these models offers something different that is made clear to the potential buyer or renter through their branding, marketing and design. Not only does the construction of such housing enact social cleansing through excluding and displacing existing and long-term residents and communities, but it also continues to set the terms for what

people view as a desirable form of home and lifestyle. In each example we see a practice of 'curating' communities through the prescription of tailored subjectivities based around consumerism and an opportunistic form of individualism. Thinkers – some of whom I have already touched upon - who have drawn heavily upon the writing of Marx, such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Saskia Sassen, Frederic Jameson, and Doreen Massey, have discussed this shift from value to price and home to real estate within the context of advanced capitalism, as well as the relationships between the global and the local and how they interact to produce space. The work of these geographers and sociologists can be considered as forming the background to my own project; the building blocks that set the urban and global context for this thesis.

My case studies have emerged in four cities of differing global status: London, Newcastle, Berlin and Beijing. Whilst London has been described as a global city since Sassen's first use of the term — with her 1991 book *The Global City* focusing on New York, London and Tokyo — Beijing has more recently grown into this category,[15] with China's emergence as a global power and Beijing as China's political centre. In contrast, Berlin has been thought of as working towards global city status throughout the 1990s following the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, with previously state-owned land being privatised and real estate markets recreated and opened to international investors (Colomb 2012). In the 2020 edition of Kearney's Global City Index,[16] Berlin rose to fifteenth position. Newcastle is perhaps the odd-one-out in this study, being furthest from global city status and smallest in scale. However, the role it does play in the facilitation of educational exchanges through reliance on attracting international students[17] has led to the rapid development of

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[15] In the 2014 A.T Kearny Global Cities Index, Beijing ranked eighth. See:
https://www.kearney.com/documents/20152/4977265/Global+Cities+2014.pdf/68d46899-ac72-7b2a-4817-a50d6b3c0d54?t=1500555507875

[16] The Kearney Global Cities Index is an annual ranking of cities from consulting firm A. T. Kearney, that is based on their "economic standing, globalization rate, human capital, information and technology, cultural experience and political engagement" on a global scale (https://www.kearney.com/global-cities/2019) and is used as a tool by businesses and investors. It provides a rough guide in line with Sassen's definition and is based on conversation with her and a number of other experts on cities

[17] This is a UK-wide phenomenon and according to a report by the Economic and Social Research Council, one in five students at UK universities were international, with 37% of their total fee income coming from international students (around £7 billion). Report Accessed 20th September 2021:

purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), which I have examined.[18] I suggest
that this is a displaced form of the global: a city that is not recognised as 'global' but
has developed in such a way that it is, to some extent, still reliant on global flows of
money and people. Thus, the forms of housing I have examined in each of these
four cities are linked, to different extents, to the functions, processes and ambitions
of globalisation, whilst playing different roles within their geographical localities and
social landscapes. Whilst the example of London City Island exemplifies a particular
form of investor-driven luxury property development, the topologies of housing I
have examined have thus far been given far less attention (though my opening
Berlin case study is another iteration of the LCI luxury development model, in a
different location).

iv. A Gated Community Without Gates.

In using the phrase 'gated communities without gates', I want to introduce my
concept of *gating*. The central argument of this thesis revolves around my definition
of these four housing topologies as re-imaginings and variations of the 'gated
community'. In order to make this argument, I have examined not only the typical,
physical gates or boundaries (including security guards and CCTV cameras) but the
political, social, economic and psychological processes that enact different forms of
'gating' that are both visible and invisible. I likewise do not only focus my discussion
on the price of buying or renting these properties, as this is a clear barrier that
requires less unpacking. Instead, I have proposed an expansive understanding of
'gating', one tied into wider processes of globalisation and financialisaton, in
dialogue with *place* and *community*. The gated community is both a physical and
ideological construction and presupposes that there is a status quo or desirable
reality that can be chosen, purchased, and then maintained with ease. The history
of the gated community is as long and varied as the history of property itself
(Bagaeen and Uduku, 2010). For example, fortresses and medieval walled towns
are often cited as early examples of gated communities. Today, they are not only

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https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/BN283-Drop-in-international-students-would-imperil-university-finances.pdf

[18] Purpose-built student accommodation is housing that is specifically built, by private developers, for university students. I will discuss this form of housing in more detail in Chapter Two.

about fear and protection but can also emerge in the form of an exclusive club that is related specifically to status, and whose members are promised a particular form of desirable lifestyle that signifies a superior status (Wu & Webber 2005).

It is a feminist understanding of difference that I have implemented in order to illustrate the 'inside' and 'outside' (or rather the impossibility thereof) of these gated communities. The work of Doreen Massey provides the blueprint for my exploration of the many forms that these gates can take and I argue that it is the narratives, structures and processes enacted by property developers, estate agents and the state that attempt to form enclosures that enable exclusive relations between bodies and space; in other words, Massey's *power geometries* (1991a, 1993, 2005). Space is socially produced and not fixed (Lefebvre 1974; Massey 1991a, 1991b) and therefore so are boundaries and enclosures, with community being a continually evolving and fluid performance of such boundaries. Thus, the nonlinear reality of community forming and un-forming can never truly fit into the linear and enclosed propositions and spaces offered by models of financialised housing, despite their offerings of community-as-product. Their illusions of place generate an understanding of interiority and exteriority that reproduces the 'place' or 'home' as a locality into which one can fully retreat.

Much as Massey considers places as forming through relations between a *perceived* 'inside' and 'outside', I consider these forms of financialised housing as unfinished upon their materialisation, and significantly affected by the locality of their position; we might consider this the afterlife of the product-form in which they are imagined by the real estate industry. The 'interiority' of these housing models can loosely be thought of as not only that which falls within their literal boundaries — walls and gates — but that which is shaped by the forms of lifestyle, communication and consumerism that are constructed for us to conform to; to conveniently slot into and become part of the overarching product-form. These closed-off and unsatisfactory structures contribute to marginalisation, structural injustice and fear or rejection of difference. They are gates that attempt to isolate, categorise and organise space and bodies to facilitate flows of global capital. I have drawn upon Judith Butler and Athena Athansiou's (2013) discussion of the subject as incorporating both that which is outside of us, and the 'outside' that resides within us; rejecting the closed-off subjectivity that each housing topology pertains to.

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My discussion considers the outside and inside as relating more to the social than to space and my thoughts around how communities form, re-form and un-form have been shaped by feminist material philosopher Rosi Braidotti's ideas around nomadic thought and nomadic *becoming* (1994). Braidotti's nomadic thought embodies both the critical and creative — much like the examples of ungating I discuss in this thesis — and addresses the 'internally contradictory multifaceted subjects we have become' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 13). This 'creativity' — albeit a vague and difficult term to define — is, as this thesis will continue to demonstrate, implemented as a marketing tool by property developers, governments and urban planners as an aesthetic tool and finished product: a means to a definitive and exclusionary end. Transdisciplinarity, which includes this notion of creativity, becomes a tool with which to discuss and represent the unfixed *nomadic subject*. Braidotti argues that linear thought is insufficient in tackling the challenges of a polycentric present (Braidotti, 2011, p. 13). The dominant vision of the unitary subject[19] has at its core the reterritorialisation of desires designed towards maximum short-term profit, and the illusion of the perpetual 'new'. The unitary subject is in denial about the fact that identity is fluid and relational and allows one to be both an outsider and an insider (Nast, 1994). In the enclosed context of financialised housing, individualism prevails and identities that have been prescribed via the construction of aspirational norms and promises of pleasure are consumed. Real estate and its practices of placemaking attempt to homogenise space and in turn design and market illusions of community – a *we* – that form invisible gates that enact forms of exclusion through the branding and privileging of certain identities, as well as the editing and curation of historical narratives.

It is important to further stress the centring of difference when talking about the negotiation of interiors and exteriors, which brings me to the work of post-colonial feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Mohanty identifies community as 'the product of

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[19] We can define the 'unitary subject' as that which the Enlightenment defined, and which presupposes that a subject can experience the world detached from both its historical context and bodily sites of being. In opposition to the 'rationality-driven consciousness' and universalism of the unitary subject, Braidotti positions herself in favour of a complex process of becoming that rejects the historical European understanding of difference as 'postulated on a hierarchical scale that opposes it to the vision of Subjectivity as Sameness' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 13).

work, of struggle', explaining it as a 'complex process of becoming political by way of actively producing and reproducing the very politics of community' (2003a, p.104). Much like Massey, Mohanty's perspective on community is one that equally incorporates the local, the global, the universal, the spatial and the temporal, with various scales at play. Gates are constructed not only by the workings of the global economy but the power geometries that include race and gender. The gated communities produced by the kind of urban planning enacted throughout my case studies emerge from the patriarchal power structures of global capitalism (ibid) and strive to offer up 'community' as a readymade product that facilitates individuality but in fact attempts to contain communities within sameness. In opposition to this exclusionary process of community formation, Mohanty argues for solidarity — as defined by recognition, accountability and mutuality — as the basis for relationships among diverse communities: relationships that acknowledge and respect difference in order to produce and maintain alliances. Working and fighting together is only possible through active struggle and resistance, and it is this struggle that continually shapes our sense of community.

Mohanty's book *Feminism Without Borders* (2003a) sets the scene for my argument of financialised housing as marking out a territory through an infrastructure of security, safety, familiarity, and sameness. If we are shaped in relation to the built environment, we are equally shaped by the structures and mechanisms that it conceals; the struggles that are obscured and restricted. As Mohanty so eloquently describes it: 'change has to do with the transgression of boundaries' (2003a, p. 97). We cannot sit back and expect community to form around us; we cannot buy into communities that are designed by property developers, and we must be active in forging connections, enacting belonging and instigating change. This brings me to my concept of *ungating*, which I will now introduce.

v. *Ungating* the Community.

I have framed my concept of ungating with reference to the ideas of a number of feminist thinkers whose work has been integral to my own understanding of, not only processes of gating, but what strategies of ungating might be. Ungating requires making the gates visible then finding the openings in these enclosures; the points at which we might intervene, infiltrate and enact transformation, or what

Massey also calls the *chance* of space (2005, p. 111). In addition to Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjectivity; Massey's power geometries and progressive sense of place; and Mohanty's emphasis on community as the product of struggle; a recent and ongoing project of Hélène Frichot and Helen Runting's that proposes 'feminist real estate' as a new critical domain has provided a valuable companion in thinking around how financialised housing constructs and sells closed-off forms of subjectivity (Frichot & Runting, 2015). This echoes Butler and Athanasiou's (2013) theorising around subjectivity and dispossession, that I have mentioned above.

To return to the notion of an 'inside' and an 'outside', and the relationship between the two, Elizabeth Grosz states that 'the outside is a peculiar place, both paradoxical and perverse' as it 'can only ever make sense, have a place, in reference to what is not and can never be — an inside, a within, an interior' (2001, p. 15). The inside, which depends upon the unstable structures of finance capital — of speculation and risk — is permeable and forms a relationship to the 'outside' of space: the community that forms through its acts of exclusion. Despite efforts to detach through language and design, the communities on the 'outside' and the 'inside' are co-dependent, leaking and seeping through their abstract boundaries in various unpredictable ways. It is possible to 'infect' the inside of financialised architecture with its outside; or what I am calling 'ungating' and vice versa. Throughout this thesis I argue that it is through these moments of infiltration that we can affect transformation or becoming, and I propose the 'outside' as having equal potential to infect the 'inside'.

To return to Braidotti, she considers nostalgic calls for 'overthrowing the system' to be ineffective given the contradictory processes of lived experience within a 'schizophrenic global economy' and the inequalities they produce; this carries forth to how we might open invisible gates. This perspective is echoed in much feminist writing and shapes the way we must approach the gates in order to open them, for a nomadic becoming is a rejection of interiority in favour of an openness to the 'outside' and an embracing of difference towards 'a collective assemblage,[20] a relay

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[20] I must here reference Gilles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari, whose work has been highly influential for Braidotti. Deleuze and Guattari's Assemblage theory was originally introduced in their 1987 book *A Thousand Plateaus*, and defines social complexity as reliant on a the relationships between unfixed and unstable parts. Processes such as stratification and territorialization work together to form assemblages, which are constellations made

point for a web of complex relations that displace the centrality of ego-indexed notions of identity' (1994, p. 151). It is processual and sensitive to multiple overlapping and intersectional[21] connections: an embodiment of the multi-centred, fragmented and scattered nature of our capitalist society, an embrace of contradictions for the sake of challenging cartographies of power. Massey considers identity, space and time as mutual allies that escape solid and final definition, thus allowing the possibility of *openings*, stating that;

> *places do not have to have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures. 'Boundaries' may of course be necessary, or the purposes of certain kinds of studies for instance, but they are not necessary for the conceptualisation of a place itself. Definition in this sense does not have to be through simple counterposition to the outside; it can come, in part, precisely through the particularity of linkage to that 'outside' which is therefore itself part of what constitutes the place. This helps us get away from the common association between penetrability and vulnerability. For it is this kind of association which makes invasion by newcomers so threatening.* (Massey, 1991a)

Boundaries form and unform as our lives in the city unfold. Personal boundaries — in all areas of life — shape our relationships with others but are not simply conjured from the depths of our minds; they are informed and affected by the environments we find ourselves in, and the power relations we are part of. To *ungate* is to find openings and enter them. In entering these openings, the relationship between the inside and outside is altered, albeit perhaps only temporarily, before it closes, and needs opening again. But if openings are continually located and exploited by the outside, the gates fall further apart, and the space or product of financialised housing becomes open to further change. In each chapter, I follow an examination of a different housing topology with a project that I argue enacts forms of ungating. These projects do not sit particularly comfortably in any one category: art, activism, architecture, community organising. All are considered here overlapping and in

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up of matter (including the social, the philosophical and the linguistic) around a body, matter that is affected by, within and amongst other bodies.

[21] By intersectional I refer to the manner in which individual's identities consist of multiple social and political factors including gender, race, sexuality and religion.

dialogue with each other, but for the sake of my argument, I refer to them as 'projects'.

I discuss the projects in each chapter in line with Max Haiven and Alex Khanabish's (2014, 2018) understanding of the radical imagination and its potentials. Haiven and Khanabish argue that the radical imagination is a collective process that enables us to work together to imagine the world differently, rather than an individual possession, and that it is vital despite its lack of concrete content. They state that the radical imagination

> …represents our capacity to imagine and make common cause
> with the experiences of other people; it undergrids our capacity to
> build solidarity across boundaries and borders, real or imagined.
> (Haiven and Khaznabish, 2014, p. 3).

The methods adopted by the selected projects are firmly rooted within practices of everyday life that relate more to the inter*social* than the inter*disciplinary*. Whilst they may be considered examples of projects that are often described as critical spatial practice[22] (Rendell, 2003), I feel that this term would enact some exclusion towards those involved who do not strictly identify (or strive to be) artists, architects, designers, planners, philosophers or other forms of practitioner who might lay *claim* to performing critical spatial practice. Critical spatial practice not only implies a merging of art and architecture, or theory and practice, but an implementation of such towards social transformation. Likewise, the selected projects do not fall strictly (or at times at all) under the similarly broad category of 'art'; instead, they rely on various characteristics that we have come to associate with art, which Haiven and Khanabish understand as the 'radical imagination'. 'Creativity' is a contested and concerning term these days — a reality that will appear at various points throughout this thesis — and even Braidotti has a tendency to romanticise it without acknowledging the nonlinear applications of it in the neoliberal city (Braidotti, 2011, p. 235). Although 'radical' is also a complicated and often misused term, I feel it honours and more directly acknowledges the hope, imagination and solidarity

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[22] Jane Rendell defines 'critical spatial practice' as describing projects that are located between art and architecture, and which operate a crossroads between theory and practice; public and private. It is works that share the characteristics of the critical, the interdisciplinary, and the spatial. For more information see: https://criticalspatialpractice.co.uk/

enacted by these projects in a way that the 'critical' and 'creative' may not, due to their association with acts of intellectual or artistic exclusion, and their easily monopolised nature. Of course, whilst I cannot deny that my own work as an artist and PhD researcher has its limitations in this sense (as further considered throughout each chapter), I believe art and academia *do* play a vital role in contributing to a wider discussion; in making ideas and problems *visible*; in offering multiple entry points to an issue or conversation, and in feeding into collective processes of knowledge building and action. The 'radical imagination' aligns comfortably with the notion of ungating, which I will argue requires an anti-elitism and a rejection of privatisation and commercialisation.

Also central to my argument is the work of French Marxist social theorist Henri Lefebvre – in particular his highly influential 1968 text *Right to the City*. The right to the city, Lefebvre argues, is focused on the benefit of democratic participation and a culture of local politics that should be inclusive, accessible and participatory. The right to the city is complex, fluid and allows for the appropriation of urban space, which might be something as simple as the ability to gather with others in public spaces such as parks and streets without violent consequences; as well as the right to get involved in the decision making that shapes the city and its ambitions. Though the specific capitalist context has evolved since Lefebvre was writing this — at the time around one-third of the world's population was living in cities, now it is more than half[23] — current processes of speculation on real estate act to further erode the 'right to the city' for most urban dwellers, as well as their right to housing. I argue that this is one of the most fundamental rights to the city: the right to inhabit. This can be seen through the reduction of social housing, which is discussed in more detail in Chapters One and Three.

Both access to the spaces of the city and to housing shapes our sense of belonging; this 'right' should be considered in the form of participation rather than *ownership* or individual legal entitlement, which is at the core of the very problem of privatisation that supports the exclusion of the majority from participation. Ownership is the 'right' to the city purchased by investors in the form of property and even histories and views of the city: its image, façade, the 'finished product'. And it is this ownership

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[23] See: https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization for more statistics on how this has changed.

that prevents so many from residing and remaining in the city as prices rise and evictions reign. Lefebvre does not offer a guide on how to achieve this 'right' for all but puts forward a proposition to reconsider everyday life and its mechanisms of inequality, advocating a new politics that starts with the inhabitant and reworks both the politics of citizenship and the social relations of capitalism. By employing the idea of the inhabitant, Lefebvre argues *against* the notion of 'citizenship', which operates by a logic of nationality as equating to 'membership' and, in some cases, ownership. Instead, the right to the city is earned by everyone who lives and performs their everyday lives there and consists of

> *..models and spatial forms and urban times without concern for their current feasibility or their utopian aspect. It does not seem possible that these models result either from a simple study of existing cities and urban typologies, or from a combination of elements. Other than contrary to experience, the forms of space and time will be invented and proposed to praxis. That imagination be deployed, not the imaginary which invests itself in appropriation (of time, space, physiolocal life and desire).* (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 155)

Lefebvre believes that this can only be achieved through defeating 'currently dominant strategies and ideologies', with the strategy of urban renewal becoming '"inevitably" revolutionary, not by force of circumstance but against the established order' (ibid, P. 154). This idea of Lefebvre's has shaped not only a vast breadth of academia that has followed, but a multitude of social movements across the world,[24] with David Harvey considering it a working slogan and a political ideal (2008). He notes that 'the right to the city has to be construed not as a right to that which already exists, but as a right to rebuild and reconstitute the city as a socialist body politic in a completely different image – one that eradicates poverty and social inequality' (Harvey, 2012, p. 138).

vi. Outline and Preliminaries.

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[24] For example, the Right to the City Alliance in the US; the Nuit debout movement in Paris; the *indignado* movement in Spain and the Recht auf Stadt initiatives in Germany.

As introduced above, this thesis is divided into four central chapters that each explore a different topology of financialised housing — their mechanisms of gating — and a different example of ungating. Chapter One takes us to AM Tacheles in Berlin: a development of luxury apartments and commercial space that incorporates the building of a former, long-standing squat known as Tacheles. I argue that this development performs a cynical rewriting of history and a disregard for Berlin's creative community in favour of a façade of creativity, as a marketing and branding tool, contributing towards the erasure of the city's history of alternative housing models. Chapter Two takes us to Newcastle and the excess of purpose-built student housing that has been constructed there. Focusing on the Shieldfield area of the city, I argue that these developments generate friction between students and long-standing, non-student residents and contribute to the student population's lack of investment in, or attachment to, the local area, as well as a process of 'studentification'.

Chapter Three examines The Collective in London: a large-scale example of a new form of 'co-living' that has been discussed since 2016 as the 'next big trend' in housing.[25] Having spent one month living as a resident in the building, I examine The Collective's claims of communality and freedom; its short-term contracts and hotel-style living, before considering how we might approach ungating this form of housing. I argue that this commodified version of 'co-living' does not enable collectivisation and merely uses the problem (an insecure private rental market) to sell an overpriced solution that further fragments and displaces communities. Chapter Four then explores the world of gated communities for expats in Beijing, as well as drawing upon similar housing complexes I have visited in Guangzhou. Designed to assist in attracting international professionals to China, these gated communities are often built in an American or European style and act as a barrier to integration between local residents and the international professionals who temporarily reside there. I argue that this encourages othering, enacting a form of neocolonialism.

AM Tacheles in Chapter One is the form of investor-targeted and luxury

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[25] See, for example, https://www.dezeen.com/2016/04/06/wework-welive-co-working-company-co-living-apartments-new-york/

financialised housing that has been most widely written about to date. The developments in Chapters Two through to Four are less studied thus far and have not previously been discussed in direct relation to each other. As detailed in the Preface, my research combines reviews of relevant literature, my experiences of living in or near these housing case studies or visiting them, conversations with people involved in the developments including those who inhabit them, local residents, and estate agents tasked with selling them, and the promotional materials associated with them. Finally, my conclusion summarises the key mechanisms that enact gating, and the key points that can be learnt from the examples of ungating that I have outlined in relation to these new forms of financialised housing. I draw upon these projects to propose a number of strategies that we might implement towards the ungating of financialised housing towards constructing and maintaining more inclusive and just communities and localities.

vii. A House for Artists.

As a prelude to my argument, I want to introduce a project that is currently being developed in East London. The project constructs both the former and latter 'bookend' of a process of urban development that incorporates art and culture as both a process of gating *and* of ungating. The artist emerges as an actor situated within a grey area: the gentrifier and, often simultaneously, an advocate of anti-gentrification in search of affordable accommodation themselves. So, I arrive now in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD), where I live. From the eighth-floor balcony of my flat, I have a view over central Barking. One building stands out in a sea of similar blocks, its large windows and geometric design complete with large circular window suggesting a different design process and brief to that which surrounds it. It looks more 'designed', more 'unique' in character. This building, which is nearing completion and is as-yet uninhabited is *A House for Artists* (AHFA).

A project by LBBD and arts organisation Create,[26] AHFA is a building containing

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[26] Create is an arts organisation based in London that, according to their website, 'works with local communities in cities to commission art and architecture that is ambitious, purposeful and useful'. They work on long-term projects that have included an adventure playground (The Idol), an alternative art school (Open School East) and a community centre on the Becontree Estate in Dagenham (The White House).

twelve flats for artists and a public community centre on the ground floor, with huge full-length windows onto the street. Described by Create as a new form of 'active tenancy' (Create, n.d.), the project seeks to address the issue of artists not being able to afford housing in London through a model that provides artists with 'affordable'[27] rent in exchange for each artist contributing half a day of work per week towards setting up, running and maintaining the community centre; implementing an ongoing programme of free public activities for people living locally to attend. As one of the original artists offered a flat within AHFA, following a three-part application process, I have been able to gain an intimate insight into the planning and thinking around the project. Whilst a multitude of political, social and financial reasons (many of which I hope are already becoming apparent) then led to my withdrawal, I will use the knowledge I have gained on the planning and thinking around this project over the past four years, to consider its implications.
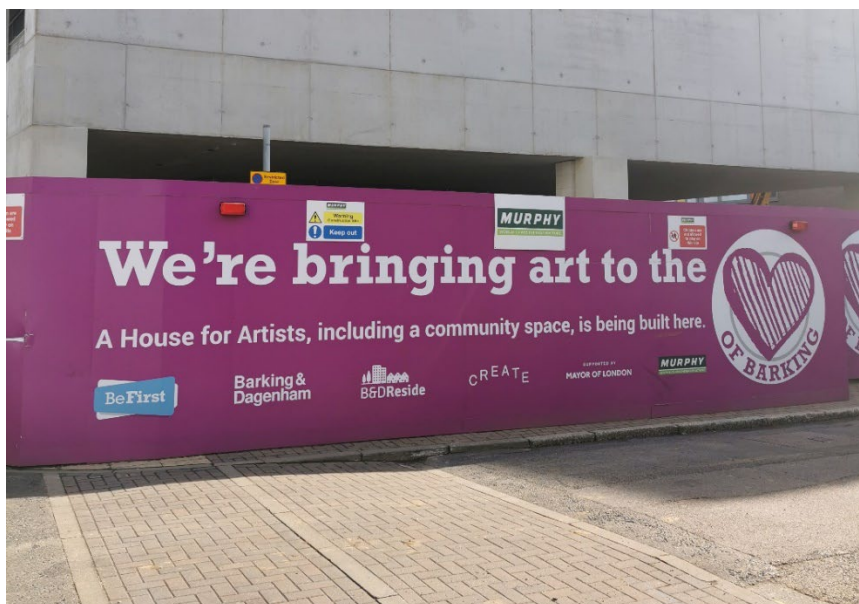
Figure 3. Hoarding around *A House for Artists* whilst it was under construction, London, 2021

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[27] LBBD work with a private company called Reside who provide 'affordable housing'; that is, housing whose rent is set at 80% of market value. In the case of AHFA, due to the additional labour commitment that the artists contribute every week, the rent will be set at 65% of market value.

Figure 4. The completed *A House for Artists*, London, 2022.

The framing of AHFA by Create and LBBD suggests that it seeks to address many of the problems discussed in this thesis. It is promoted using language that proposes it as a form of ungating, with a focus on inclusivity and community benefit. Yet, it likewise enacts many of the processes of gating that I have outlined throughout this thesis. I will briefly respond to several quotes taken from Create's description of AHFA in order to unpack some of these issues.

> *'The project lives strategically in policy around inclusive growth, specifically looking at increasing participation in culture…'* (Create, n.d.).

Let me first consider the role of the artists themselves: those expected to facilitate this inclusive growth by providing the culture. Despite having a three-year period between being selected for the housing and moving into it, six months prior to the

scheduled move-in date the future residents had no clarity around what would happen in this community centre, how it might be set up and managed, or what Create and LBBD's expectations for public-facing activities were. Create are due to manage, support and oversee the project for two years (after which time the artists will fully take over, or another organisation will be found to oversee it) whilst LBBD will review it each year to assess its achievements and ensure each artist is contributing the correct amount of time. At least half of the selected residents had no prior connection with Barking and Dagenham, and two months before move-in, no discussion had taken place around collective and individual aims, goals, philosophies or politics, despite the artists thus far being relative strangers to each other. Furthermore, no work had been done to find out what the community might *want*, or who they are. With most of this planning work set to take place *after* the artists have moved into the building, there appears ample chance for conflict to arise amongst residents alone, before anyone else enters the picture. Questions of how such a project might be governed, managed, and designed to prevent conflict and resentment as well as, of course, to provide the existing community with something useful; something they might want, were unexplored and unanswered until at least my official departure from the project in November 2021.

Work must be done to build relationships with the wider, long-standing community and I would argue such a task must be approached carefully, slowly, and with inclusivity that treats the community as equals rather than audience or material. If such a space is to benefit a community, the community themselves should be empowered to feel a sense of ownership over it and, furthermore, over the place they live, rather than feeling that they are in fact being priced out by the community centre and at the same time invited in by it. With AHFA being funded by, and reviewed regularly by, the council, the question is whether such a slow, reflective, inclusive approach might be supported or whether PR-worthy public events that attract attention and footfall are what counts for evaluative purposes. This focus on PR can be seen through their efforts at attracting extensive media coverage upon the completion of the building work — the building thus far being uniformly praised as a success story[28] — despite the artists being yet to move in, or any details

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[28] For example, two reviews have appeared in the Guardian newspaper, one in Wallpaper Magazine, Dezeen, Architectural Review and e-architect. Available at:
https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/dec/12/a-house-for-artists-barking-apparata-grayson-perry-

resolved. The potential impact of this yearly review process — when expectations have not been made clear, but undoubtedly exist — may serve to create a relatively high turnover of artist residents, meaning no guarantee of long-term investment in the community, which I would argue will be a key factor in the project's success.

'Neighbourhoods being chipped away at…' (Create, n.d.).

With this statement, a process of gentrification is alluded to by Create. But what is AHFA if not, itself, part of a wider gentrification strategy, initiated and supported by the council? AHFA is an impressive new building, a showpiece for Barking, not an old building refurbished that the artists have been given use of. It stands out, and — while the artists' rent is set at 65% of market value — the market value used was at the uppermost end for Barking, the same price as living in a new development complete with a gym and concierge.[29] Thus, there is no doubt that AHFA supports a wider strategy of increasing land and property values and attracting people of a higher socioeconomic status into the area. There is a visible demarcation of lifestyle or living standard between those on the inside and those that are not. Described as 'high quality' housing, the artists will be afforded a better standard of housing than most LBBD tenants. This is evidenced in the larger flats, much larger windows, ample outdoor space, and the apartment's aesthetic that appears to be inspired by the New York-style loft that has become a marker of a certain lifestyle favoured by creatives (Jacobs, 1972; Zukin, 1989; Schulman, 2013). AHFA, designed by young architecture office Apparata,[30] has been designed with greater care, utilising sustainable materials and with more attention to light and heat than the standard

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review; https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/dec/09/made-in-dagenham-the-artist-homes-designed-to-slow-gentrification; https://www.dezeen.com/2017/04/07/grayson-perry-apparata-house-for-artists-housing-studios-community-centre-east-london/; https://www.e-architect.com/london/a-house-for-artists-barking-town-centre.

[29] The monthly rent – at 65% of local market rent – has been set as: £798 for a 1-bedroom flat; £954.36 for a 2-bedroom flat; and £1052.42 for a 3-bedroom flat, plus an additional £20 monthly service charge for each flat. It would correspond that the market rent was set at: £1227.70 for a 1-bedroom; £1468.25 for a 2-bedroom and £1619.11 for a 3-bedroom. According to a rental report on the area by estate agency Foxtons, the average rent in the area for a 1-bedroom is £1060; a 2-bedroom is £1476.00; and a 3 bedroom is £1476.00.

[30] Apparata is an architecture, design and research studio made up of three members: Nicholas Lobo Brennan, Astrid Smitham and Theo Thysiades. According to their website, they 'work with how things are put together: materials, structures, identities, communities, landscapes'. For more information see: http://www.apparata.ch/

LBBD developments. Praise from the architectural press, as referenced above, has included a review describing the project as softening the 'impact of gentrification' (Wainwright, 2021) and standing out from the area's 'bizarre combination of big glum grey blocks, uncannily like the least charming estates of the 1960s' (Moore, 2021). I draw attention to this as a marker of division that is a visible manifestation of the presumed preferences of artists, the agenda of an art organisation who wish to produce a statement building that attracts widespread critical acclaim and substantial future funding, and the agenda of a council who want to draw attention to the borough, secure further investment,[31] persuading people of a higher socioeconomic status to move in, and thus the traditional process of gentrification unfolds and benefits the borough's economy over its people. This is precisely the 'chipping away' at neighbourhoods that Create claim, in their statement, to be tackling.

> *'…precarity, low pay and insecure employment condition…'*
> (Create, n.d.)

The third issue I will outline is the fact that this project serves to provide a community space for an area whose council, supposedly, do not have the funds to support such spaces. Create claim that the project is 'exploring the social role of the artist in the context of local state austerity' (ibid.). Here we are led to understand that this is an alternative strategy of providing services for the community, without the council being responsible for the costs in the long term.[32] With artists taking on this work[33] and responsibility in exchange for reduced rent, we see enacted an acceptance of austerity, an admission that there are not enough funds to cover this

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[31] In LBBD's 2020-2030 Growth Opportunity Report, councillor Darren Rodwell is quoted as saying 'The borough is growing fast offering new markets, new ideas and a range of investment opportunities for small, medium and large investors with substantial brownfield land for development. The report is available at: https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Londons-Growth-Opportunity-2016.pdf

[32] A House for Artists was funded by London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and the Mayor of London, and it was delivered by Be First, who managed the construction and provided pre-planning and planning services, land acquisition and site assembly. According to Be First's website, their mission 'is to accelerate regeneration in the borough, so that no-on is left behind'. More information available at: https://befirst.london/

[33] Create will, for the first one or two years, work with the artists to support the programme. Following this, the artists will take over unless they wish to find another organisation to take on the overall project management. It is as yet uncertain how funding will be attained to enable the programme in the long term.

kind of provision and thus artists should – and will – step up and do the work in exchange for somewhere cheaper to live because they, too, are struggling. This surely works to merely exaggerate the problem of a lack of government funding for culture, and for community and social spaces, rather than address it in a sustainable manner.

> *'…disappearing access to studio and venue spaces as a result of property development…'* (Create, n.d.)

Finally, the construction of this *one* building that offers twelve households of artists living and working space forgets the wider issue of housing provision and the project's own status as a property development poised to increase property values. As I have detailed, the rents set for AHFA (according to the pre-reduction market value figures) are not an average but a ceiling: they are higher than most housing in the area. Given well known trajectories of gentrification and social displacement, and the borough's efforts to establish itself as a cultural hub,[34] it is not difficult to predict the area's near future. Claims of addressing such issues, made by Create and LBBD, echo the hollowness of the marketing materials produced by the developers of the case studies I will introduce across all chapters.

The case of AHFA concisely communicates the complicated nature of art and culture in relation to financialised housing and urban development and the resulting socioeconomic impacts upon a locality and community. AHFA proposes a 'solution' that appears to have misguidedly and cynically been arrived at in order to address *both* the desire to redevelop and gentrify, and to provide artists who are being priced out of the city with housing in return for 'working their magic' on the surrounding area through engagement with the community. It is a compact meeting point for — and product of — these relations.

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[34] This is further illustrated by the 'Artist Enterprise Zone' that was established at the Ice House Quarter, and offers work spaces for artists and designers; as well as a six year Arts Council England funded project including festivals and artist commissions. More information on the borough's regeneration plans is available at: https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/our-growth-hubs . Additionally, it was announced in September 2021 that a building situated on the same street, Linton Road, as AHFA, will be redeveloped into a centre hosting makers, retailers, content creators, designers and start-up businesses.

Chapter One: AM Tacheles, Berlin: 'Where Community Meets Creativity'.[35]

'We are actually developing a small village inside Berlin Mitte!', the estate agent proclaimed.

I was sat in bed speaking to a salesperson for the new AM Tacheles development in Berlin, via the screen of my laptop.

'And I hear the façade of the building will remain?' I ask.

'Ah, the Tacheles building, yes. This is the only old building; it's going to be refurbished and turned into a museum. There's going to be a photography gallery, Fotografiska, you might know it from New York or Copenhagen… Stockholm… they have one in Dubai too and they're very famous. Only a few people know that this building was built as a shopping centre that operated for many years but was demolished, most of it, during the GDR. As you can imagine, a luxurious shopping centre didn't fit into the regime, so they tried to tear it down and almost succeeded but ran out of explosives and gave up. So, this part remained, and after the Fall of the Wall it was listed as a cultural heritage building which means it can't be torn down. So now we can only refurbish it. Anyway, sometime after the Wall came down, an original Banksy graffiti work was discovered on one wall and this is being kept as part of the new development. A little chapel has been built around it. Someone offered 1.5 million euros to buy the wall with the Banksy work from our building site, but the developer said it's not for sale. I believe it's going to be a hotspot for everyone else, so this development is going to be something really cool and vibrant.'

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[35] Phrase taken from https://www.burohappold.com/projects/am-tacheles-mixed-use-development-berlin/#

'And it was lived in by artists after the Fall of the Wall, right?'

'Yes, it was. Not only artists but a whole bunch of people interested in culture and art and everything in between. They threw parties, there was a cinema, sculptures outside, a bar, a cinema. It was a hub that was very vibrant. It was famous, it was very, *very* Berlin!'

He goes on, 'The architects of our new development are Herzog and de Meuron and they will guarantee that it turns into something magical. They designed these other buildings, including this one in Hamburg. And I can promise you, people in Hamburg, they have a new self-consciousness since this building arrived, as if they've turned Hamburg into a famous city. Every building here will have a different style. 'Frame' has ceiling heights of up to 3.6 meters. They've gone for a loft-y character with exposed concrete walls and ceilings. It's something for artists or gallerists who have huge works of art.

You could add more walls to make an extra room but, in my opinion, it would ruin the *concept*. It's like a piece of art and if you ask me, putting walls in anywhere would destroy the very idea. From an investment perspective, Herzog and de Meuron usually don't build residential apartments - in Germany this is only their second residential project. So, the apartments are really like a collectable, a fine piece of art. This is a very rare opportunity to live in their work. So, people will pay a crazy price to you later if you sell it.'[36]

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[36] This is a transcribed extract from a conversation I had with an estate agent for the AM Tacheles in Berlin, in October 2021. I was playing the role of someone interested in purchasing property there.

I had been told about the AM Tacheles development in 2019 when viewing a different property in Berlin managed by the same sales team.[37] The estate agent had commented that it would be 'perfect for an artist' like me. With construction now underway, I wanted to gain a deeper insight into how they were narrativising the project. AM Tacheles is a redevelopment that incorporates and expands upon the old Tacheles building on Oranienburger Straße in Berlin-Mitte. Tacheles (the Yiddish word for 'straight-talking') had, in its previous iteration, been a cultural centre that artists squatted in 1990 and continued to live and work in until 2012. AM Tacheles (AM translating as 'at the' or 'next to') will be a vast complex of luxury apartments, office space, retail, a gallery, bars and restaurants. It is similar in its plans and form — its aspirations and promises — to many new luxury property developments in London and other major cities. However, this form of housing — complete with concierge, gym and spa — is a newer addition to Berlin's real estate landscape than London's.

I begin my exploration of new financialised housing topologies with this study because it is the most common and widely discussed form: a fairly straight-forward case of luxury apartments targeted for sale towards international investors, as introduced by my previous example of London City Island at the start of this thesis. AM Tacheles will therefore enable me to further elaborate upon the basic function of home-as-asset, how this speculative urban practice impacts upon the wider environment it is situated within, and the role culture plays in narravatising and selling such developments. The trajectory of this development – from squat to cultural centre to luxury apartments – enables me to draw a clear link between real estate practices and the activities of artists, which I further complicate and unpack throughout Chapters Two to Four as I examine different forms of housing that are as-yet not widely discussed in terms of critical examination. To clarify, I refer to the new development as 'AM Tacheles' and its previous form as a squat and cultural centre as 'Tacheles'.

In order to contextualise AM Tacheles' past life as a squat, I begin by giving a brief overview of the history of squatting in Berlin from 1969 onwards. I then examine the

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[37] This was as part of my *ASSET ARREST* project rather than a genuine interest in buying property in Berlin.

cultural, social and political potentials of squatting as a practice and gesture, and then introduce the Tacheles building and its history and development alongside wider economic and political shifts in Berlin. I discuss the city's transformation post-unification in 1989, and how practices of real estate speculation have evolved and proliferated. I then go on to argue that AM Tacheles is a gated community not only by way of physical gates, security guards and CCTV, but through other political and social processes that are embedded within its marketing and construction. Finally, I have proposed an example of *ungating*, that I argue is useful in considering strategies and practices we might implement in order to open the gates of exclusionary investor-driven developments such as AM Tacheles.

1.1. Squatting in Berlin, a Brief History

Drawing upon a selection of key literature that examines the history of squatting in Berlin (Azozomox and Kuhn, 2018; Holm and Kuhn, 2013; Morawski, Mudu & Chattopadhyay, 2017; Vasudevan, 2017) — as well as a comprehensive database of Berlin squats from 1970 till 2015[38] — I now provide an overview of squatting activities in Berlin from 1969 onwards. Squatting is the act of occupying a building or piece of land without the legal right to do so. Its history is long and varied and each wave of squatting in Berlin is connected to the specific political and social context of its time. Berlin's post World War II developments, including the Cold War, provided the grounds for the specific activist and squatting movements that came and went in waves throughout the city at different times. From the start of the 1970s, a significant wave of squatting was underway, propelled by the 1968 revolts and the movements for radical change that were taking place around the world.[39] Activists sought out ways of living beyond the nuclear family and places they could live in a communal and non-hierarchical manner. The movements that unfolded in West Germany at this time were largely concentrated in bigger cities such as Hamburg, Frankfurt and West Berlin, out of necessity and in protest of rising costs and the widespread demolition of buildings to make way for the new. Each squat varied

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[38] Available at: https://berlin-besetzt.de/#!id=386

[39] This was in essence a student movement and lasted in Germany from 1967-1968 and consisted of mass protests as many young people became disillusioned with the establishment, and with elitist, patriarchal and traditional structures and lifestyles.

greatly in size and duration of occupation and the composition of the squatters included people of different class backgrounds, races, nationalities, sexualities and gender identities. Many held strong political views, including anarchists and environmentalists, and many were artists (Azozomox and Gürsel, 2017). The squats of this time were mainly in factories and non-residential buildings.

A second wave of squatting began in West Berlin in 1979, incorporating various social, political and subcultural movements and saw the construction of many collectives and cooperatives (Azomozox, 2015). Propelled by the abundance of properties sitting empty whilst there was a lack of housing — in West Berlin in 1980 around 80,000 people were registered as seeking homes (Holm & Kuhn, 2013) — people seized the opportunity to prove that these empty spaces were in fact liveable. In contrast with the 1969-1979 squats, many of these were in residential buildings: their owners often left them to become derelict in the hope that the government would eventually provide the funding to redevelop them and thus enable them to charge higher rents (ibid, p. 163). The state was implementing a strategy of demolishing older residential buildings in order to make way for new housing blocks with a design that created a more car-friendly city (Azozomox & Kuhn, 2018). In 1979, there were eight squats in West Berlin. Between 1980 and 1981 it had grown to 255, with more than 180 houses squatted within a period of five months. This wave of squatting lasted only a couple of years as the West Berlin senate implemented various laws to crack down on it and evict the residents. Squatters were accused of inciting riots, promoting violence and resisting arrests, as a strategy to get them under state control (Azomozox, 2015). In 1981, mass evictions began, and the squatting movement was weakened by the conflict that arose between the squatters who were willing to negotiate legalisation and those who were not. Those who refused to negotiate argued that they must resist state intervention in order to maintain these spaces as 'free spaces' as this was the only way that could threaten a capitalist system (Prujit, 2013b). A smaller third cycle between 1985 to 1988 saw just 25 squats, most of which were evicted within a matter of days.

A fourth, more significant, wave of squatting 'coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which had been in place since 1949, and the reunification process of the

two German states in 1989-90 (the Wende period)[40] thanks to the uncertain legal situation of that time' (ibid, p. 132). During the Wende period, there was a political power vacuum, the police and municipality lost much of their authority, thus allowing squatting to flourish. The GDR's housing policy was geared towards the construction of new homes and many old buildings in the inner-city became dilapidated and vacant (ibid, 169). For this reason, squatting during this time was concentrated around inner-city buildings in the East. Property that was previously nationalised was transferred to private ownership (Vasudevan, 2017). Whilst my overview of these cycles of squatting prior to this time has focused on West Berlin, there were similar occupations happening in the East before the fall of the Wall, but these had a different character due to the political regime. Squats in the East had been invisible, rather than declaring themselves present with banners and other activities, as in the West. In the East, the motives were less to do with the cost of rent – which was controlled – but many political and cultural dissidents squatted as they could not access public housing (Azozomox and Kuhn, 2018). Between 1989-1990, 130 buildings in the East were occupied before the state tried to evict them. Many evictions took place but some squats, eventually, entered negotiations in order to legalise their status and formalise a housing contract that included a nominal rent.

Azozomox and Kuhn further outline a fifth wave of squatting in Berlin, running from the year 1992 to 2016, in which there were 107 spaces squatted. 14 of these were legalised and the rest were evicted almost immediately (within a matter of hours, days or weeks) (ibid, p. 153). Many of the issues that gave rise to squatting are still faced today, including a lack of affordable housing, real estate speculation driving prices up, and the resulting displacement of low-income, long-standing residents. However, squatting in Berlin today is much more difficult, with squats tending to get evicted straight away. Some, that *did* enter negotiations with the state and were legalised, still exist in some shape or form, though most of these involve contracts and rent payments, thus removing them from the category of 'squat'. A total of 200

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[40] Die Wende translates into English as 'the turning point' and refers to the period of change between 1989-1990 that saw the fall of the Wall, the reunification of Germany, and the establishment of a democratic government.

squats have been legalized since the 1970s and 35 of those were purchased by the squatters themselves. The squat I will be discussing in this chapter – Tacheles – was one born from the fall of the Wall and which went through various changes throughout its 22-year lifespan, including a form of legalisation, followed by a return to squat status. Before we visit Tacheles, I want to outline the political, social and economic functions of squatting, and how it utilises the notion of the 'right to the city' towards action.

1.2. The Functions of Squatting

Squatting, as discussed above, is often a response to a context that includes a high level of buildings lying empty, a lack of affordable accommodation; unfair housing policies; and unemployment or low wages preventing access to adequate places to live. Squats may also be formed, less through necessity, but as intentional communities by those in search of more communal ways of living that operate against the notion of private property. The term 'intentional community' refers to those that are formed around a shared social or political value. Squatters act for various reasons and thus cannot be easily defined as a whole, with Hans Pruijt (2013b) outlining five different types of squats in relation to their motives. The five types he identifies are: deprivation-based squatting, squatting as alternative housing strategy, entrepreneurial squatting, conservational squatting, and political squatting. For a comprehensive study see Pruijt's essay *The Logic of Urban Squatting* (2013b), but I will give a short summary of the various possible reasons for squatting. *Deprivation-based* squatting is when squatting is enacted due to homelessness and a lack of access to housing, when there is no other viable option. Squatting as an *alternative housing strategy* does not always depend on economic necessity but can include those who are seeking a more communal living arrangement or who would like to invest more time in activities that are unpaid, as opposed to full-time employment, and thus they seek out a rent-free situation.

Entrepreneurial squatting describes squatters who use the space they have occupied to initiate projects such as social centres, artists' workshops, alternative schools, bars, parties, galleries and shops. It is not necessarily profit-driven and may include activities that raise money for charity, or free services for those in need such as migrants or homeless people. *Conservational squatting* is squatting with the

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aim of preventing a certain development from happening, within the urban or rural landscape, such as stopping the demolition of a building. Conservational squatting can also serve to prevent gentrification by preserving the function of a building and blocking its redevelopment into luxury housing. *Political squatting* serves a political agenda. Often with an anti-private-property and anti-establishment sentiment. A particular squat or individual may incorporate more than one of these categories or characteristics, which is how Tacheles operated, as I will be going on to discuss.

Before introducing AM Tacheles in more detail, I have outlined what I see as the political, social and cultural potentials and powers of squatting, in order to map out the forms of community and space that I see the new development as excluding through its acts of gating. Vasudevan defines squatting as a form of autonomous urbanism that creates new spaces for alternative living. This, he argues, happens through the construction of a common spatial field where cooperative living intersects with political commitments and the 'mundane materialisms of domesticity, occupation, and renovation' (2011, p. 5). Squatting movements have the potential to provide blueprints for alternative ways of inhabiting the city, forming acts of resistance against the urbanisation of capital. He describes the history of squatting in Germany as a series of 'imaginative acts of social agency enacted through architecture' (Vasudevan, 2014, p. 208). The tactics implemented by squatters claim a right to the city and reframe architecture as tangible, liveable spaces of possibility and openness. Vasudevan suggests that squatting *performs* architecture which I view as an act of transforming a building or space through the practice of *inhabiting*; it is a simple act in theory, but becomes more difficult to put into practice due to the illegal nature of accessing such spaces. It enacts an autonomy that is, as Shukaitis describes, not something

> *…possessed by an individual subject so much as a relation created between subjects; that is, a form of sociality and openness to the other through cooperative relations. It is relational, of relations composed of individual subject positions in the process of emergence, rather than something that is possessed by isolated individuals before an encounter.* (ibid, p. 22-23)

Squats are often fluid in nature: continually shaped and reshaped by an evolving group who adapt and adopt decision-making processes and maintenance and

management structures as the needs of the community change. Rather than replicating a traditional 'home', squatters have often used or defined space in more experimental terms. Borders between public and private are rearticulated, not only in relation to a gesture of undoing property rights but through the incorporation of social spaces that are open to a wider public and have a function for the local community. The Tacheles squat is an example of this, given its multi-functional nature and role as a cultural centre. When the needs of the squatter-residents change, buildings are often adapted to accommodate this, the space becoming more open and permeable than a typical 'home'. Squatting as an act of resistance establishes a new kind of space through occupation. However, it is important not to romanticise squatting as it often occurs through economic *necessity* rather than choice and can force its participants into highly precarious and unwelcomed living situations with poor housing conditions. This inevitably can have a detrimental impact on a person's life.

1.3. Invest in Berlin!

I will now briefly outline the urban processes that have taken place since the fall of the Wall, that have contributed to the increasing difficulty of squatting. As I have discussed, after this historical moment, the abundance of abandoned and derelict buildings enabled artists and musicians to appropriate these spaces towards their own needs and political aims. But at the same time, the new municipal government instigated a series of redevelopment and planning projects for the city. In her book *Staging the New Berlin*, Claire Colomb details the Berlin that began to unfold: the state turned to practices of place marketing that aimed to frame the city's complicated past and project an image of its bright future (Colomb, 2012, p. 5). The unification process meant reconfiguring the city's identity and the label of 'New Berlin' was implemented. Colomb describes a process that involved 'the privatisation of formerly state-owned land, the redistribution and restitution of property, the creation of new planning laws and the emergence of new players in urban development (private investors, local planners, citizens groups). Land and real estate markets, once recreated, were opened to international visitors' (ibid, p. 82). This led to the rise of land and property prices and the renewal of, and investment in, inner-city districts such as Kreuzberg, Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. Also contributing to the redevelopment process was the decision to move the

federal capital from Bonn to Berlin. The city became a building site and tax breaks were granted to developers to encourage construction projects.

The place marketing campaign presented areas of the city as complete and packaged products, much as the AM Tacheles development does. The city was reduced to a 'vibe' or total environment, with its history curated to suit the state's motives. The amenities and features assumed to be necessary for attracting global investment — shopping centres, creative quarters and waterfront development — were constructed. In 1994 a plan was established to redevelop the area surrounding Alexanderplatz and 'Manhattanise' it; in other words, fill it with skyscrapers. This entrepreneurial approach sits — on the surface — at odds with the attempt to sell Berlin as authentic with its unique 'creative' character; the reputation that the grassroots activities of squats had helped shape. The creative communities of Berlin, and their outputs and activities, were latched onto as symbols of *place*. This enabled Berlin to frame itself as a 'creative city'. This appropriation of cultural and grassroots activity is one of the methods of gating that I have elaborated on in the next section, but for now I wish to mention this as contributing towards the label of 'poor but sexy'[41] that Berlin attracted in the 1990's. The redevelopment of the Tacheles squat is a valuable example of this process in action.

1.4. Tacheles: From Squat to Luxury Apartments

I will now give an overview of the history of the Tacheles building in order to contextualise its redevelopment into AM Tacheles before discussing the implications of this development for the city, the district and its residents. The building is located on Oranienburger Straße in Berlin-Mitte, a central area of the city and former East. A five-storey building, it was built between 1907 - 1908 as a department store, which operated until 1914, when it was auctioned off. In 1928, it became a showroom for the *Allgemeine Elektrizitats-Gesellschaft* (General Electric Company). It was then used during World War II by the Nazis to contain French prisoners of

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[41] The phrase 'poor but sexy' was famously used by Berlin's Mayor, Klaus Wowereit, in 2003. It became a marketing slogan that sought to attract young creative types to the city.

war and much of the building became damaged during this time. Following this, various businesses and retailers moved into the building but did not stay for long due to the worsening condition of the building. Later, under GDR rule, it was partially demolished. Sitting empty for many years, artists took it over soon after the fall of the Wall - on February 13th, 1990 - around the time the building was scheduled to be fully demolished.

Upon occupying the building, the artists launched a legal battle and rescued the building from demolition by successfully getting it registered as having A-list heritage status in 1992. The spaces were then prepared for different functions that would be open to the wider community of the city, including exhibition and event spaces, a bar, a café, workshops, a small cinema and artists' studios. An association, Tacheles e.V., was formed in 1994, serving to professionalise the endeavour; we can consider this as relating to Pruijt's definition of *entrepreneurial squatting*. Whilst many artists lived in the building, others would visit to make art, buy art, or to attend parties, exhibitions, screenings and other events. Behind the building was a large yard filled with sculptures and lined with studio spaces for artists and bars that catered for parties.

Figure 5. Entrance to Tacheles. *Art house entrance, Tacheles*, by La Citta Vita, 2011, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Retrieved from: https://www.flickr.com/photos/49539505@N04/5852692846

In the mid-1990s, the government sold the site to a developer called the Fundus Group, who negotiated with the artists and gave them a ten-year lease — beginning in 1998 — for a nominal rent of 1 DM. This served to legalise the situation; however, the contract ended in 2009, after which the artists, living in the upstairs of the building, became squatters again. In 2011, the Fundus Group had become insolvent and the property fell into the hands of HSH Nordbank, who served an eviction notice to the tenants; but only some of the artists — those that worked in the downstairs area rather the ones that lived upstairs — left the building without a fight, taking a compensatory payment of one million euros. On September 4th, 2012, the remaining artists (totalling around 40-60) left and in September 2014, the site was sold to a New York-based company. The artists had occupied Tacheles for a total of 22 years and it had become one of the city's most famous squats and art centres; in 1995, Bruce Springsteen recorded a video in the courtyard for his popular song *Hungry Heart*. At one point, it was the second-most visited art attraction in Berlin. It's role as a cultural centre has paved the way for its current development into AM Tacheles, which I will now discuss in terms of the gating it performs.

1.5. The Gating of the Community

I will now outline two key processes of gating that I see as having been enacted by the development of this building into luxury residential and commercial space. The first process I will detail is the instrumentalisation of creativity and the activity of artists towards profit-driven urban redevelopment and real estate speculation. The second process is that of marketing a *luxury* development under the pretence of it being 'open' — in the sense of creating a flexible, permeable and accessible space — whilst simultaneously presenting it as a finished and complete *product*.

Figure 6. CGI rendering of AM Tacheles' planned entrance, positioned on the other side of the building from the original façade, which is inspired by and offering an updated version of. Photo © bloomimages / Herzog de Meuron.

a. The 'Creative City'

Construction of AM Tacheles began in September 2019 and continues today, scheduled for completion by September 2023. In advance of its construction, a publication — *After Now* — was released in 2017, celebrating the history and future of the Tacheles site and the wider area of Mitte. This publication is evidence of the developers' marketing efforts and their drive to shape its historical narrative. The title of the book was inspired by a large piece of graffiti that had been on the side of the building since 2004, which read: 'How Long is Now'. With only minimal reference to the squatters and their trajectory, the central focus of the book is a series of interviews with local businesspeople – '13 movers and shakers from the architecture, art, gastronomy, leisure, fashion and nightlife sectors' (Grunenberg, Bühler, & Raggamby, 2017, p. 7) – who share their positive views on the area. Conversations with those who previously lived or worked in Tacheles are excluded. Instead of detailing the work of the squatters and artists in any expansive or meaningful way, the texts gloss over its history, highlighting instead the contrasts supposedly present within the area: the merging of local traditions with international

influences and 'cosmopolitan flair'. This, they suggest, is what makes AM Tacheles such a timely and important project.

Prices for apartments start at €985,000 but many reach the €2-4 million price point: a marked contrast with the squatter's free or nominal rent, but clearly not a disparity that the developers *intend* to highlight. The eviction of the artists and squatters is evaded in the publication's history of the site, as are the reasons for the squat's inception. Instead, the artists are presented as grassroots property developers who were consciously paving the way for investors to enable the *real* redevelopment. I propose that the artists *were* in fact grassroots developers, but not necessarily through intention; rather, they fell prey to a well-trodden process and strategy implemented by governments, planners and property developers who utilise a rent gap towards re-branding an area and profiting from property speculation. As discussed in my introduction, this relationship between artists and gentrification is one that will return and repeat through each chapter, though the case of (AM) Tacheles is perhaps where it is at its most obvious; constituting a clear act of gating that shifts cultural activity from the grassroots efforts of the artists, towards the culture-as-branding (and therefore profit-generating) efforts of real estate. Tacheles' trajectory illustrates how the time, effort and energy expended by cultural workers can be appropriated and used to price out not only the artists themselves, but a much wider community. This is a practice that gained increased attention following Richard Florida's often-cited 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Florida was a pioneer of placemaking discourse, detailing the economic benefits of utilising artists and creative workers; describing how this was already happening, but in turn providing a blueprint for planners, mayors, property developers and others involved in urban redevelopment processes (Florida, 2002).

AM Tacheles features curated aspects of its previous iteration: a promotional video for the development (AM Tacheles, 2021) shows the entrance to the sales and marketing suite, which has retained sections of its former appearance. Colourful, graffitied fragments of wall and ceiling welcome potential customers. A kind of urban taxidermy, these sections of wall are torn from their original context and used to inject 'character' into the new development. As one ascends the staircase, a large lit-up sign proclaiming 'AM Tacheles' sits atop the heavily decorated wall. The irony of a luxury residential development retaining features of its former self – a *squat* – is

enacted here with a grotesque and unsettling confidence. The developers have approached the history of the site as a cultural pick-n-mix where they can select fragments for marketing purposes, retaining the façade of the original building, which is compulsory due to its heritage status. This façade acts as the entrance to the new complex and its residential and commercial buildings. A promotional video from Savills[42] proclaims the development 'a rich heritage with a creative future' (Savills, 2021). The marketing material goes on to boast 'AM Tacheles is located in the middle of Berlin-Mitte, perfectly integrated into the spirit of vibrant, cultural and creative Berlin… a place where the urban and creative history of the area is connected, new, varied spaces are created and an enriching attitude towards life is offered. Life where Berlin history, creativity and extravagance are at home' (AM Tacheles, 2021).

The process of gentrification that was already taking place in the area, but looks set to pick up speed due to the development of AM Tacheles, has served to displace many long-standing residents from the area; locking them out through an increase in rental value. This is perhaps the most common strategy of gating that I will discuss in this thesis; a tangible, material reality relating to a widely implemented economic and social process. I begin in this order to better establish the role that art and culture plays in the development of financialised housing. The second act of gating I have examined is the result and cause of this process: the luxury offerings of a development geared towards attracting international investment.

b. (Un)finished Business.

In *The Autonomous City*, Vasudevan details a meeting with one of the artists who had squatted Tacheles, who speaks of the feeling of entering the space: a space that appeared to be 'dead' but was brought back to life with by the squatters through acts of mending, maintenance and repair, and the construction of infrastructures that created new possibilities (2017, p. 135). It was a fluid space that attempted to continually evolve and adapt to the needs and desires of its residents and those

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[42] Savills were founded in 1855 and are now one of the world's leading property agents. They operate internationally, with 650 offices globally and advise on the buying, selling and renting of property. They also conduct research into trends across real estate markets, predict trends, offer urban consultancy, and advise on asset management, investment, planning and valuation. For more information see: https://www.savills.com/

working there. To jump ahead in time and return once more to the *After Now* publication of the same year, Berlin is described in the introduction as a 'paradox knotted in a time warp' with a 'past, present and future so dense, so complex, and yet open for exploration' (Grunenberg, Bühler & Raggamby, 2017, p7). The city is described as one that is continually in the making. But the open and unfinished urban landscape described in a positive light in this promotional book – that of the neglected and degraded central area after the fall of the Wall - is simultaneously contradicted by the motives and design of AM Tacheles, and the purveyors of expensive designer clothing and green smoothies that the book's interviews focus on. Despite paying lip service to the experimental ways of living that the artists of Tacheles engaged with, the overarching idea put forth is that this site will, finally, be *finished*. Hooray, the artists have achieved their goal of renovation and commercial abundance: a bitter irony prevails.

In my conversation with one of the estate agents for AM Tacheles, as quoted in the introduction to this chapter, I was informed about the transformation of the old Tacheles building into a museum and photography gallery; the preservation of the highly valued Banksy graffiti, the bars, restaurants, retail and office spaces that will move in, and the amenities for residents of the development including a gym, sauna, pool, private garden and lounge. The public area is described as a 'vibrant public square' before it has even been completed, and the connection of various differing functions is spoken about proudly. Vibrancy and a dynamic space is *assumed* to follow the construction, and thus presented as a product to consume. As described by the estate agent, a 24/7 concierge will not only open the door and receive packages for residents but will also 'serve you with different things you might need, like a cleaner, or tickets to a sold-out concert', providing you with 'anything you might wish for': another suggestion of *openness* and an unlimited possibility that most people cannot access. There will be a supermarket in the shopping area and residents will have direct access to it through a basement passage. 'If it rains, and you don't want to go outside', he explains, 'you can still get to the supermarket'. Assuring me that most new building projects in Germany don't include a kitchen, he describes AM Tacheles – who *do* provide a fully fitted kitchen complete with white goods – as a 'full-service package'. As with most new luxury property developments that I have viewed in London, the completed nature of the apartments makes it easy for investors who intend to rent it out or use it as a

second (or third, fourth) home. With so-called 'public spaces' owned and managed by the developer and lined with commercial enterprises that will no doubt have expensive offerings that are out of reach to many, the possibility that the local community can contribute to the development in any way that does not involve spending money or playing by the rules of the developer and the desires of the residents, is removed. Tacheles is framed *finished* and ready to generate more capital.

The Gated Effect

Drawing upon the features of AM Tacheles' branding and design that I have discussed, I propose that we can consider it a gated community, not only by way of its physical boundaries, CCTV cameras and security guards but through its appropriation of the work of its former artist-residents, and the design of its promotional material and amenities towards an *illusion* of openness that is in fact an act of exclusion. Curated aspects of Tacheles' history have shaped the image projected by AM Tacheles, and the cultural activity that preceded it has been edited and packaged for a specific audience who can afford to access it, with an eye to attracting international investors. At the same time, those who have contributed towards this 'creative' image were evicted from the space and squatting now remains as something near impossible to enact in any long-term way. Developments such as AM Tacheles further serve to increase rents and make access to affordable housing more difficult. This is causing a great deal of displacement within the inner-city, and thus we can consider that such housing developments are contributing to the division and exclusion of communities; indicative of the changes taking place in the district of Mitte and the wider city. Claims of this creating a vibrant and dynamic space repackage the energy of Tacheles as something that can be curated and consumed; offering residents and city dwellers, who can afford to buy into AM Tacheles, the chance to be amongst *people like them*.

1.6. The Ungating: Haus der Statistik

There is much work to be done towards resisting the proliferation of speculative real estate and the following project that I propose as an instance of ungating provides

an example of how such luxury developments might be prevented and the space redirected towards a less exclusionary model. The project I discuss is the Haus der Statistik project and the intervention that prompted its development. As an alternative counterpart to the practice of squatting, the project started with the occupation of a space that was lying empty. The redevelopment project that has been initiated as a result of this occupation is one that I propose as an alternative to the style of luxury development implemented by AM Tacheles. Despite both projects being developed at the same time in the district of Mitte and incorporating multiple functions, they are executing very different agendas with very different processes.

The Haus der Statistik (HdS) is a 45,000 m² complex of buildings by Alexanderplatz that was built between 1968-70 to house the headquarters of the German Democratic Republic's State Central Administration for Statistics and some shops on the ground floor. A prefab Socialist building in grey, reinforced concrete, it is spread over eight blocks, with three mid-rise buildings (between nine to twelve stories tall) and several smaller ones. After the fall of the Wall, German authorities used the building to house the Stasi Records Archive — where people could access Stasi files, but since 2008, it had been sitting empty: a dilapidated ruin in Berlin Mitte adorned with smashed windows and graffiti. In close proximity to the TV Tower and the many new shopping malls, offices and property developments of Alexanderplatz, it perches in stark contrast with the offerings of foreign investment and speculative real estate. Much like Tacheles in the post-unification era, the complex was scheduled for demolition, with a plan to sell it to investors to redevelop into apartments and offices, apartments that would most likely be financially unreachable for the majority of Berliners. Whilst the demolition had been repeatedly postponed, in 2009, there was a competition to design housing on the site. This never achieved full approval and the building remained vacant due to the government's indecision.

On 16th September, 2015, during Berlin Art Week,[43] four artists arrived outside the Haus der Statistik at 7am dressed in high-vis vests and hard-hats; they erected a spider lift in order to raise a caged platform 150 feet in the air (Berg, 2019). Two of

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[43] Berlin Art Week annual festival taking place in September and presenting a programme of contemporary art across the city, in collaboration with many art galleries and institutions.

the artists got into the cage and elevated themselves up the façade of the building; the other two broke into the building and ascended the stairs to meet them at the seventh floor. Together they secured a ten-metre-tall vinyl banner on the front of the building that mimicked the style of those seen on construction sites around the city, with bold red lettering. The artists' banner, roughly translated into English, read: 'Under Development Here for Berlin: Space for Cultural Affairs, Education and Social Projects' (Bibi Berlin, 2015). They initiated a pseudo-launch-event, inviting press, friends and supporters to congregate outside the building, and performed a mock thank you speech to the authorities for establishing this new social and cultural centre. Crowds gathered out of curiosity and there was orchestrated chanting. The intervention was a response to the ongoing privatisation of housing in Berlin, which was preventing many city residents from being able to access affordable housing and causing an overall rise in rents and land value. This has also made access to artists' studios difficult and has propelled many evictions of long-standing affordable workspaces to make way for new developments. In 2014, around 350 artist studios were lost and 500 more were in danger of being evicted (Berg, 2019). *Allianz bedrohter Berlin Atelierhäuser* (The Alliance of Threatened Berlin Studio Houses, or AbBA) was established in response, to protest this situation, and the artists who initiated this intervention were part of the group.

Figure 7. Haus der Statistik in Berlin-Mitte im März 2010, by De-okin (talk) 19:15, 4 March 2010 (UTC) - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0. Retrieved from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9650987

The banner on the building's façade was only hung for a day but functioned to secure the artists a meeting with the mayor of Mitte, an unlikely outcome but an opportunity that was seized productively by the group. This first meeting was met with resistance, as expected, but the group continued to develop a proposal, contacting the collective Raumlabor,[44] with whom they met regularly to shape and solidify it. Upon being informed by a finance officer of the Berlin Senate that they would require 50 million euros to convince the state to cancel their redevelopment plans, they managed to get assurance from a bank that a loan could be secured. Very soon, a second public meeting was agreed upon and was attended by over 300 people who discussed the possibility of turning the artists' plan into a reality. The mayor of Mitte supported the proposal, calling for the site to become a 'gentrification proof island' (Berg, 2019). This support helped secure the plan, with

[44] Raumlabour are a group of architects based in Berlin who came together in 1999 in response to the redevelopment that was taking place. For more information on their activities see: https://raumlabor.net/

the Berlin Senate becoming the official owner in May 2017. A formal group called ZUsammenKUNFT was formed in cooperation with the Alliance of Threatened Berlin Studio Houses (AbBA), and the Initiative Haus der Statistik[45] was formed. It was agreed that the redevelopment project 'would be led by a consortium of state-owned real estate companies and state and local government agencies' in partnership with the Initiative Haus der Statistik (Berg, 2019). With five partner organisations involved – now known as Koop5[46] – the project will continue to develop through conversations and collaboration between each party, and a wider public who are invited to participate. In contrast with AM Tacheles, Koop5 remains an incredibly open form of development: a rare project that is able to enact ungating throughout its planning process.

The planning continued with a design competition, which was won in 2019 by Teleinternetcafe and Treibhaus.[47] As well as the existing buildings a 65,000 m² development is due to be built on the surrounding site with 125 million euros being spent on the construction (Herzberg, 2019). It will include: workspace for artists; spaces for cultural organisations, small businesses, education and training purposes; the local administration offices; short-term refugee housing and long term social housing;[48] and green, communal outdoor spaces. The plan is to have 2000

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[45] Initiative Haus der Statistik refers to the alliance of actors (social and cultural institutions, artist collectives, architects, foundations and associations) who are involved in developing the project.

[46] The Koop5 have been cooperating since 2018 and is formed of the Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing; the Berlin-Mitte District Office, the state-owned real estate companies WBM Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Berlin-Mitte mbH and BIM Berliner Immobilienmanagement GmbH; as well as the ZUsammenKUNFT Berlin eG group that includes many artists, cultural workers, architects and activists. For further information see: https://hausderstatistik.org/koop5/

[47] Teleinternetcafe – a group in Berlin who work on architecture and urbanism projects - describe themselves as having 'a multi-perspective approach and the principle of shared authorship. The works of Marius Gantert, Andreas Krauth, Urs Kumberger and Verena Schmidt move at the interface between architecture and urban planning. They are characterized by process-based development strategies, cooperative approaches and an experimental approach to building and open space typologies. Dealing with the location and the situation forms the starting point for the search for new, open forms of the city.' For more on them see: https://teleinternetcafe.de/
Treibhaus are a landscape architecture firm based in Berlin. For more on them see: http://www.treibhausberlin.de/

[48] Social housing in Berlin is housing subsidized by the state, for those on a low-income who may not be able to find affordable housing on the free market. It is housing that has been constructed through subsidies being afforded to developers and construction companies (and also, in some cases, cooperatives) to provide the housing, with financial support from the state on an ongoing basis enabling the low rent. This is different from state housing, which is that built and owned by the public sector. As such, it is a public-private partnership. The increase in rents that the city has been seeing has been helped by the sale of numerous social housing blocks to

people living and working across the development upon completion. The Mayor of Mitte, Christian Hanke, wants to see 700 to 1000 refugees living in the development's housing, as well as student accommodations (Focus, 2015). The multi-functional nature is, in contrast with AM Tacheles, is designed to be inclusive and open to input from those who may inhabit the site. Since 2018, out of an old bicycle shop on the ground floor, a group of artists operate an information centre for the public and those involved, an unofficial annex — *WERKSTATT House der Statistik* — of the city planning department. Maps, renderings, plans and an architectural scale model fill the room. The team running the information centre are members of the ZUsammenKUNFT and they hold weekly events as well as communicating the planning process and its progress to the public, and allowing people to participate (Haus der Statistik, n.d.).

Given that this is a long-term redevelopment project and construction has not yet begun, I now highlight two aspects of HdS in its current form as expanding upon the way in which the project performs ungating: firstly, the 'Pioneer Uses'.[49] The function of the Pioneer Uses, which started in 2019, is to act as a prototype and contribute to the planning and consultation process. They have set up the process as cooperative and oriented towards the common good, focusing on learning, participation and developing a relationship with the local neighbourhood. It is a method of testing what might work in this site, as well as providing space to groups who have an urgent need for it, who may have been displaced due to rising rents or could not afford a space in the first place. The learning that happens during this phase will inform and shape the direction that the planning and development takes: an active, reactive and porous process. One pioneer use (though there are many) has been the involvement of Sonnenbeet,[50] an urban agriculture collective focused on sustainability that run a community garden in the centre of HdS and are benefitting from the stability and affordability offered by HdS. The community garden and complimentary educational programme have succeeded in bringing in long-standing members of the local community who have, in turn, become involved in

private developers. For more information see:
https://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/wohnen/wohnungsbau/en/mietenbuendnis/

[49] For a full overview of the Pioneer Uses, see: https://hausderstatistik.org/pioniere/

[50] For more information see: https://hausderstatistik.org/pioniere/sunseeker-sonnenbeet/ .

discussions around the future of the building (Bieber, Braun, Marlow, Mironova & Wood, 2021).

Figure 8. A southern view of a "city room" looking towards Karl-Marx-Allee, which will connect the existing buildings to the right, infill residential buildings to the left, and an "experimental building" to the south. This rendering is one potential vision for the final design, which will be determined by the architecture firms selected for the development. Image courtesy of Teleinternetcafé and Treibhaus Landschaftsarchitektur.

The second activity I now draw attention to is the *STATISTA* project that opened — with a nod to the intervention that prompted the HdS project, which took place at the same time three years earlier — during Berlin Art Week 2019; this was a collaboration between the KW Institute for Contemporary Art and ZK/U Centre for Art and Urbanistics. *STATISTA* stemmed from KW's *REALTY* project[51] that

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[51] *REALTY* was a project by KW Institut of Contemporary Art that ran from 2017-2019 and consisted of a series of events, commissions and research fellowships. To quote from the project's press release, 'The long-term project REALTY focuses on the role of contemporary art in the recent history of gentrification. Rather than illustrate art's failures once again, the project asks how contemporary art can be used to better effect. REALTY insists on long-term strategies and goals as a basis for concrete proposals—whether this takes the form of an educational blueprint, a legal proposal, or a pooling of resources into some new structure altogether. Whatever

launched in 2017 and was initiated by curator and writer Tirdad Zolghadr, centring around various discussions on the role of contemporary art in relation to processes of gentrification, including an examination of the ongoing HdS process (KW, 2017). *STATISTA*, as one branch of *REALTY*, was a speculative project and a 'blueprint for civic and civil cooperation in the interests of the common good, far removed from the rivalry of the "Creative City"' (Zolghadr, 2020a). Zolghadr proposes that HdS offers 'a blueprint for a statecraft for future occasions' (ibid, p.15).

STATISTA comprised of an exhibition, conference, student blog — and later, a book — that brought together many groups and practitioners working in a speculative and research-intensive way. The commissions focused on engaging with the neighbourhood or 'devised scenarios for making the HdS more sustainable, inclusive and efficient as a future-oriented endeavour' (ibid, p. 20). One commission, 'Voices. Stimmen — First Recording', by raumlabor and Bernadette La Hengst, was a response to the physical building. They set out to 'coordinate various polarities in and around HdS (acoustics, sound, on-site performances, etc.), and to bring together, as a choir, the many different voices that constitute an urban community' (raumlabor and La Hengst, 2020, p. 95). They appropriated the space using sound, giving a voice to 'a collective sense of place' and raising questions 'regarding the future of this particular building, and the city in general, not to mention the role that people can play within it' (ibid). A choral performance took place to mark the opening of *STATISTA* and implemented wooden megaphones to amplify voices, shouting out current statistics on living conditions in Berlin such as skyrocketing levels of rent, and moving through the building as they sang. They drew attention to the building's architectural features and signs of wear, whilst celebrating the collective nature of the project.

Berg (2019) described HdS as a 'lesson in how outsiders can claim political power'. Through a momentary intervention, the property was rescued from the speculative real estate market and reclaimed for social use. Questions of the sustainability of the project and how those involved will work together throughout the long completion process remain, but the hope is that HdS provides a template and

the result, contemporary art's appetite for subtlety should make way for a collective shot at solutions, however vague or naïve' (KW, 2017).

inspiration for many more sustainable and affordable living and working spaces to be built in the city. It is a project that champions inclusivity. Described by housing activist Michael LaFond[52] as a 'classic Berlin project' (Manthai, 2018), it brings to mind my conversation with the salesperson for AM Tacheles, who described the previous Tacheles as 'very, *very* Berlin'. However, the HdS is an example of a non-speculative housing and cultural development. It has emerged from the unpaid work of many artists, activists and others who are resisting the climate of unaffordable housing and real estate in Berlin rather than an internationally operating property developer. But, unlike those who occupied Tacheles, their work has contributed to establishing a collective and long term project that has taken the site *out* of the speculative real estate market through strategically thinking about their own role as cultural workers in relation to the urban space they have claimed.

Areas of Concern

As much as we should avoid romanticising the practice of squatting, it is worth bearing in mind the issues that HdS might raise and which could jeopardise its ambitions. Whilst the area it is situated within has already gone through a process of gentrification, the mayor's declaration of a 'gentrification proof island' (Berg, 2019) is one that is difficult to take at face value. The opening of the *STATISTA* exhibition highlighted the nature in which the project is being received by the art world: the opening seeing a crowd that was not without 'the usual suspects' who 'still clinked champagne glasses and crunched over the tarmac to embrace one another' and 'the surreal landscape of Prada bags amidst the rubble piles' (Rafferty, 2020). In the eyes of the state and developers, can an area ever be gentrified *enough*? The potential for HdS to attract international attention (as it already has), become a tourist attraction (including art-world tourists) and thus contribute in some to an increase in property values remains, despite the area being perceived as already gentrified. I view this as being similar to *A House for Artists* in London, which I discussed in my introduction. Whilst this concern in relation to HdS should in no way

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[52] Michael LaFond is an activist who founded and works with ID22, a 'multidisciplinary, non-profit organization based in Berlin' who focus on the 'theory and practice of creative sustainability, emphasizing self-organization and local urban initiatives'. For more info on his work please see: https://michael-lafond.net/

prevent such an ambitious and hopeful project from taking place, ongoing work will need to be done, including after the development has become inhabited, to ensure it does not reinforce the exclusions that developments such as AM Tacheles are contributing to. The other aspect that will require continued work is the fact that the planning, development and construction process is set to unfold over a ten-year period. This allows ample time for agendas to shift, processes to change, and ambitions to become unachievable. Whilst I perceive the process HdS Initiative has implemented to be incredibly rigorous and collaborative, I am interested in how this will be maintained in the long term, as people and communities shift.

1.7. Conclusion

I argue that we can draw links between the Haus der Statistik project and that of the post-unification squats that emerged as social and political projects, such as Tacheles. By bringing the two cases together, I have considered their successes, failures and possibilities as acts of occupation and as claiming space within the city for the common good. Although squatting has become increasingly difficult today, its characteristics can still prevail through different forms of occupation that may exist for only a short time, such as the intervention that led to the HdS plan becoming a reality. Whilst not providing an immediate home or workplace for anyone (as squatting does), such occupations — or acts of ungating — can still be used for leveraging change, even when they take a large amount of work in the long term. The HdS is an example of how change is possible when approached with cooperation, imagination and political determinacy, which is something that becomes possible when working in an intersocial arrangement of fragmented communities, groups and parties. There remains the issue of negotiation – as was sometimes entered between the squatters and the state – and how it can be navigated. However, the long-term scope of HdS is much greater than that of any squat, as it is creating affordable housing for people — such as refugees — who are often excluded from accessing it and who face the brunt of the impact of luxury developments, such as AM Tacheles. Although it is a rare instance of a small intervention leading to a large and important development, it instils a great sense of hope regarding what is possible within the city of Berlin and further afield.

Chapter 2: Purpose-Built Student Housing in Shieldfield, Newcastle: 'A big city in a small space'.

It was 2007 and I was in Glasgow, a third-year student at the Glasgow School of Art. Opening the newspaper, I saw a photo of my boiler in the kitchen of the flat I was renting with three other undergraduate students. The article read, 'Probe is launched over landlord's gas safety certificate', explaining that 'inspectors from the council's Houses in Multiple Occupation team, which weeds out rogue landlords, have filed critical reports on conditions in several of Dhillon's flats over the past two years' (Musson, 2007). A week before, a man from the council had come round to safety check our boiler after we had lodged a complaint about it leaking and malfunctioning. He had informed us that it was not, in fact, safe to use and nor was anything electrical in the entire flat. Feeling nervous about even switching the lights on, we went straight to our landlord, who told us none of it was true and refused to do anything about it. We had been living largely without hot water in a flat overrun with mice, no smoke alarms, windows falling apart and now this. Outside the flat, in the courtyard behind, was a mountain of rubbish that reached up to the second-floor windows. In the scheme of things, the flat was cheap; we were struggling students and put up with a multitude of bad conditions there for two years. I regularly argued with the landlord, but it never achieved anything. My experience was commonplace and many friends were living in flats of similarly poor standards: ceilings that fell in, smashed windows and front doors that didn't lock properly.

Woodlands – the area of Glasgow I was living in – was known for its high student population, run-down flats and rogue landlords (although this existed alongside flats owned and occupied by non-students that were well maintained). This situation played into the 'studentification' effect that the student population was having upon the area, as it is a short walk from Glasgow University, the Glasgow School of Art, and the centre of town where Strathclyde and Caledonian Universities are. The term 'studentification' – coined by the academic Darren Smith in 2002 – refers to the impact that student bodies have on the cities around them (Smith, 2002). It is a socio-spatial impact that incorporates cultural, physical, social and economic factors that I will be elaborating upon in this chapter. Studentification is the result of students being concentrated in particular areas of the city and forming what have been described as 'student enclaves' (Hubbard, 2009). The studentification that

could be seen in Woodlands was the result of flats being offered as Houses of Multiple Occupancy,[53] meaning homes in which more than two individuals from different families could live together. We might call this 'classic' studentification: that which involves students residing in properties that are already in the housing stock and are managed by individual entrepreneurial landlords (Revington, 2021). The form of student housing I discuss in this chapter, however, is a more recent one that has come to be known as purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA).

PBSA was first introduced in the UK by the Unite Group over 30 years ago. They remain one of the largest providers of this form of housing.[54] For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing exclusively on the student housing offered by private companies such as Unite rather than the form offered by the university, typically known as student halls of residence,[55] and which has existed since long before the emergence of PBSA. I will first outline the reasons that have made PBSA a popular form of housing. I will then go on to introduce Shieldfield, an area in Newcastle that I have focused my examination on due to its high concentration of PBSA; my own status as a student in the city, and a number of events and projects I have been involved in around the issue of its studentification.[56] After contextualising the development that has taken place in Shieldfield, I deconstruct the reasons – beyond the physical gates and security – that I argue shape this housing topology into a version of the gated community. I then finish the chapter with an examination of a project that acts as a form of ungating; one that seeks to address the boundaries

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[53] A House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) means a landlord must obtain a license for the property, which is given on the basis that certain criteria are met. These responsibilities include: proper fire safety including fire doors and smoke alarms in each room; annual gas safety checks; checking the electrics every five years; and ensuring the property is not overcrowded and there is enough cooking and bathroom facilities for those living there. More information is available at:
https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/private_renting/houses_in_multiple_occupation_hmo

[54] The Unite Group is the largest and oldest PBSA provider in the UK and currently have 180 properties in the UK that provide homes for around 73,000 students, with an aim of increasing that by 2000 every year. For more information on the company see: https://www.unite-group.co.uk/

[55] Oxford University – the oldest university in the English-speaking world – is known to have existed in some form since 1096. In the 13th century, riots between the students and townspeople prompted the establishment of 'halls of residence'. This is the earliest known example of such accommodation in the UK. More information can be found on their website, available at: https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation/history

[56] This includes a series of ASSET ARREST podcasts I produced with NewBridge project as part of Durham Univerisites' 'The Politics of Urban Social Innovation' in 2019; and my involved in an exhibition for the project 'Prospect Us' at Shieldfield Art Works, and a related discussion panel at BALTIC, in 2021.

that have been constructed between the student and non-student populations within Shieldfield.

2.1. The Purpose-Built Student Housing Boom

I have identified three key factors that have prompted the proliferation of PBSA. Firstly, the reality that my introductory anecdote depicts: poor conditions, unsafe housing and exploitative landlords. This is obviously not an ideal situation and many students — or their families — look for alternative options that provide safer and better-maintained housing. PBSA buildings are relatively (or very) new, are maintained by a corporate management company and have a reliable infrastructure in place such as Wi-Fi, heating and electricity, the cost of which is included in the total rent. This brings me on to the second factor contributing to its popularity: convenience. And by convenience, I refer not only to the all-inclusive rent, but the fact that much PBSAs offers communal spaces and amenities such as a shared lounge, co-working space, a cinema room and gym. Furthermore, PBSA offers students access to a community of other students in a city that they might be unfamiliar with and have no prior contacts in. It removes the hassle of searching for rooms in flatshares and provides the student with a guaranteed room or studio with minimal hassle and no lengthy process of flat hunting. The accommodation can be booked online from anywhere in the world, giving international students and their families peace of mind in advance of their move. I return to this idea of convenience in my examination of the gating processes later in this chapter.

The third factor I would like to highlight is the sharp increase in student numbers that has taken place over the past three decades. This has involved both an increase in the number of international students and an increase in the number of UK students undertaking university degrees. Regarding UK students (those who already reside within the UK), there has been a drive to widen participation as well as a lift on the cap of student numbers across courses at UK universities[57] which came into place in the 2015/16 academic year (Hillman, 2014). Applicants in 2020 increased by 3.2%, setting a new record and accepted applicants increased by

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[57] Previously, universities were penalised for exceeding the maximum number of students. They are now able to recruit and accept as many students as they like.

5.4%. which was also a new record (Bolton, 2021). In 2019/20 there were 2.46 million students studying at UK higher education institutions (ibid, p. 4). In addition to wider participation from UK students, UK universities attract students from all over the world, selling themselves on strong reputations that promise a high quality of education in English, which in turn increases the student's career opportunities in a global job market (Naidoo, 2007). After the United States, the United Kingdom is the second most popular study destination for international students (Hubble & Bolton, 2021, p. 3). UK universities have now come to *rely* on money from international students in order to simply sustain themselves, prompted by cuts in public funding (ibid).[58] According to a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in 2020, the fee income from international students in 2018/19 was £7 billion across UK universities, which accounted for 17% of the sectors total income (Britton, Drayton & Erve, 2020). International students pay significantly more than UK students,[59] which now, includes EU students, due to Brexit. Education has become an international business and a method through which to develop global knowledge and awareness of other cultures and systems. This can help countries operate as part of a global system and increase their economic competitiveness. China and India are the top two countries of origin of international students in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2020).

To further elaborate on the example of China: as well as the UK presenting an attractive place to study due to university reputations, the opportunity to experience another culture and to improve one's English language skills; scholarships are often offered by the Chinese government – through the China Scholarship Council[60] — on

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[58] The Department of Education estimated in 2018 that higher education's value in the UK in 2014-15 was £25.8 billion, with international students responsible for £10.8 billion of this. . The UK Government launched a new International Education Strategy on February 6th 2021, outling their aim to recruit 600,000 (In 2019/20 there were 538,600) international higher education students annually, increasing education exports to £35 billion per year by 2030. Several policies have been introduced to assist with this including a two year Graduate Route post student work visa and a three year work visa for PhD graduates.

[59] At Northumbria University, the fees for UK students are: £9,250 per year for fulltime undergraduate courses; variable for Masters courses but, for example, the Masters in Fine art is £15,900 for a two year course; and ranging from £4,969 to £11,589 per year for PhD and MPhil programmes, depending on the resources and facilities required (all for academic year 2022/23). For EU and International students these are: £16,500 per year for fulltime undergraduate courses; vary for Masters courses but, for example, are £26,400 for a two year Masters in Fine Art; and range from £14,984 to £21,642 per year for PhD and MPhil programmes, depending on the resources and facilities required

[60] The China Scholarship Council is a not-for-profit organisation that funds international academic exchanges. They fund roughly 65,000 students to study abroad each year, as well as supporting international students to

the basis that the student returns to China afterwards and works there — using the knowledge they have gained — for a minimum set term (Fedasiuk, 2020). Another government incentive includes those in the science and technology fields being offered research funding opportunities upon returning; foreign degree certificates are often valued highly in a competitive job market (Counsell, 2011). The opportunity to study abroad is often limited to citizens who have the finances (unless full funding is obtained) and the level of English to make it possible, but many parents are eager for their children to study abroad and make huge efforts to save the required funds (Cheng, 2019).

At the same time, UK universities work hard to attract international students such as those from China, with some running fast-track courses at Chinese universities that promise students entry into their UK branch. Alternatively, they may offer entry courses at their UK campuses that guarantee international students' acceptance onto a BA course upon successful completion.[61] Many UK universities have also set up branches in China and other countries.[62] These branches enable students to study in one country whilst being awarded their qualitifcation by a university in another. This is known as Transnational Education (TNE) (Universities UK, 2021). These various push and pull factors serve to increase international student numbers and thus bring more money to UK universities. This increase in student numbers — both UK and international — is arguably the main factor that has prompted the building of PBSA on a mass scale.

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study in China. For more information see: https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/the-china-scholarship-council-an-overview/

[61] An example of this is the BA (Hons) Fine Art (Extension Programme) at Goldsmiths, University of London, that allows international students to do a one year full time course as an introduction to the three year BA (Hons) Fine Art course.

[62] An example of this would be a collaboration between The University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong University, who established the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in 2006, which offers many courses in English, accreditation from The University of Liverpool as well as Xi'an Jiaotong University, and opportunities to study across both the China and UK campuses, such as doing two years of an undergraduate course at the Suzhou campus and the remaining two at the Liverpool campus (where UK fees apply). Fees for both home and international students are 88,000 RMB for undergraduate and vary for postgraduate programmes. In 2021, it was reported that the UK's 136 Universities have 39 foreign campuses abroad, with the majority located in the UAE, China, Mayalysia and Singapore. It is also reported that a number of universitie shave plans to open branches inside the EU as a result of Brexit. More information is available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/scale-and-scope-of-uk-he-tne.pdf

Phil Hubbard and Darren Smith reinforce this idea, arguing that 'these exclusionary, "student-only" spaces are becoming more widespread due to concurrent trends in the commodification of student housing and studenthood, which are encouraging the formation of 'new frontiers of student segregation' (Hubbard & Smith, 2014, p. 92). The proliferation of PBSA places providers in competition with each other. Many students make bookings before arriving in the city they will be studying in and, having little knowledge of the rental market there, they often pay much higher prices than they would in flats or rooms rented from individual entrepreneurial landlords in the same area. PBSA enables students to purchase a full student *experience* which includes certain signifiers of the student lifestyle: events encouraging social mixing, co-working spaces and marketing focused on proximity to nightlife. This bears similarities with the more 'grown up' new developments of luxury apartments (such as AM Tacheles as discussed in Chapter One) which offer a slicker version of similar facilities. PBSA also bears similarities with the form of co-living that I will be discussing in Chapter Three. Having now given an overview of the key reasons for the boom in PBSA, I introduce Shieldfield and how it has been reconfigured since the sale of the first plot of land for the development of PBSA in 2001.[63]

2.2. The case of Shieldfield, Newcastle

> *'Just east of Newcastle city centre is Shieldfield, a small student area that gets its name from the old Anglo-Saxon term for a shelter in the forest clearing. Contrary to the name, Shieldfield is more buzzing city than country – boasting a range of pubs, restaurants, shops and cafes.'* (UniHomes, n.d.)
>
> *'Living in Portland Green Student Village means that your student accommodation is in the heart of trendy Ouseburn, meaning you can expect a fashionable and tasty night out that will make you feel as though you're living in Camden.'* (Abodus Student Living, n.d.)

Shieldfield is a small area east of the city centre, in close proximity to both

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[63] This is according to a map produced for *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth*, which I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, on the Dwellbeing project. The map details the sales of land for all PBSA in Shieldfield and is based on research conducted by University of Newcastle Masters students Josh Chambers, James Maloney and Hannah Swainston. This first plot of land sold was 1 Falconar street on 31.08.01 to Brackenshaw Ltd.

Northumbria and Newcastle universities. The above quotes are extracts from the promotional materials of two PBSA blocks in Shieldfield, illustrating the role the area plays in their image projection. Firstly, UniHomes describes Shieldfield as 'boasting a range of pubs, restaurants, shops and cafes'; they are largely referring to the neighbouring area of Ouseburn: Newcastle's trendy, up-and-coming area that offers a range of bars, pubs, dining options, recording studios, designer's studios, and live music venues. Whilst Shielfield features a café, a small Tesco, a recently opened bar,[64] Shieldfield Art Works (SAW) (which I will be discussing later in this chapter) and the newly relocated NewBridge Project,[65] it is not what one would typically think of 'buzzing' in the sense of fashionable shopping and nightlife. In the second quote, we see Portland Green Student Village - technically situated in the Shieldfield area – more directly associating itself with Ouseburn. As well as the above reference to Camden, Ouseburn has been described as the Shoreditch of the North (Kelly, 2018). Shieldfield is an area regularly left out of maps of Newcastle[66] as well as the PBSA marketing materials. A neglected area that has seen the closure of pubs, cafes and social spaces, Shieldfield is not a selling point in the way that Ouseburn is, and is often written out of the students' awareness and understanding of the area. This act of rendering invisible ignores Shieldfield's history and long-standing, non-student community. I will now look at how this situation has arisen.

After the financial crisis of 2007-2008, and encouraged by the government, Newcastle City Council began to sell off swathes of Shieldfield's land to private developers. Newcastle is not, like London, full of quite such an abundance of the investor-driven 'luxury' accommodation, such as London City Island as detailed in my introduction, due to Newcastle not sharing the same global city status that serves to secure London's place on a global economic network, and ensure it is perceived as a reliable location for investment, with high land values leading to high

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[64] I refer here to Ernest café and bar, although on their website they also describe themselves as being situated in the 'top end of the Ouseburn'.

[65] NewBridge Project provide workspace to artists as well as a programme of exhibitions, events, projects and artist development. They relocated to Shieldfield, from Gateshead, in 2021.

[66] I refer here to both the information provided on the websites of PBSA providers which often fails to mention Shieldfield or refers to itself as being situated within neighbouring Ouseburn; as well as the example of the 'WalkRide' map produced by Newcastle City Council in 2006, which provided information on how to both walk and take public transport around the city but failed to list Shieldfield as an area. There are no doubt further examples.

profits. So although there are a number of luxury developments in the city, the market for such is far smaller. So, in Newcastle, a different form of accommodation has become a more significant vehicle for international investment, developers opting to build an array of competing PBSA blocks, of which there are now 20 in Shieldfield alone. With the highest rate of student housing in the UK, in 2018 it was reported that in Newcastle, one in every 15 homes in the city was a student home (Holland, 2018). PBSA in Shieldfield increased by 467% between 2011 and 2015 and the area is now largely populated with PBSA, the existing community and landscape having been affected in various ways that I unpack below.

Prior to this development — and according to three residents of Shieldfield estate that I spoke to — the plots of land were either empty or were amenities that have now closed down, such as the town hall and one remaining pub.[67] Shieldfield estate makes up the majority of housing that existed in Shieldfield before the influx of PBSA and is surrounded by a few streets of Victorian terraced houses. The architecture of the PBSA buildings is unremarkable and follows a cut-and-paste logic enabling maximum return on the space. Cheap materials, poor spatial quality and generic interiors enhance the feeling that the private rooms are little more than a collection of cells (though, as I will soon outline, the communal spaces often project a different image). Shieldfield's PBSA forms a dispersed gated community with its students choosing to live within this bubble of dormitories for part, or all, of their time in the city. To consider the relationship between the student housing and the existing community within the area — as well as the wider landscape of Shieldfield — I have first examined what I view as forming the *gates* of these student communities; what they function to *contain* and *exclude*.

2.3. The Gating of the Community

In order to outline the factors that I argue enact processes of gating, I have drawn

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[67] Although, I should note, there were historically far more pubs in the area and in the early 20th Century there were 16 pubs and 19 beer shops that catered for the residents of nearby houses, and workers of factories that were located there at the time. At this point there were also around 90 shops in the area. However by the time that PBSA started to be constructed there was only one pub remaining and the empty nature of the area was seized as an opportunity by the city council and developers.

upon existing literature on the effects of PBSA, conversations conducted with several students who live in PBSA in Shieldfield, as well as a number of local residents who are not students and who have been contending with the impact of PBSA in the area. I also refer to my own experience and impression of the PBSA properties in Shieldfield that I have had tours of, and met students in. There are three processes of gating that I will outline: the investor-driven model of financing that supports its construction, the architecture of convenience it offers, and the resulting process of studentification and its effects.

a. A Mainstream Asset Class

The first process of gating that I discuss is the nature of investment that enables the construction of PBSA. A 2012 article in the *Financial Times* described student housing as the 'best-performing asset in the US and UK property markets', with the market providing double-digit returns (Hammond, 2012). Between 2017 and 2018, over £4 billion was invested into PBSA (Dale, 2020). With such a large amount of global capital being funnelled into the industry, it is said that PBSA has become a mainstream avenue for investors rather than an alternative one (Dale, 2020). In a report by RWInvest — a property investment company with offices in Liverpool, London and Manchester — Newcastle is listed as the eighth best UK location to invest in PBSA in 2021/22. The student population stands at 42,000, the average gross rental yield as 6.85% and the predicted regional house price growth is at 23.9%. Nightlife in the city is named as one of the key draws for students. They describe investment in PBSA as a 'completely hands-off investment' that offers 'two forms of return through both rent and capital growth' (RWInvest, 2021).

More recently, in 2021, over a third of PBSA deals were financed by private equity and student numbers were projected to increase by 8.5%, despite Covid-19 and Brexit (Robertson & Konotey-Ahuli, 2021). Private equity refers to investment funds that may be made up of hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds or capital from high-net-worth individuals (HNWI),[68] which is managed by a private-

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[68] High Net Worth Individuals are defined as those with an individual with liquid assets of more than $1 million. For more information see: https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hnwi.asp

equity firm.[69] It is an investment in an entity that is not publicly traded or listed in stock exchanges. Information is largely tailored towards overseas investors and paints a picture of a safe investment that is fail-proof due to constantly increasing student numbers. JLL predict that there will be a further 500, 000 full-time students in the UK by 2030 (JLL Student Housing Report, 2019). Whether or not this will become a reality, the information serves to encourage further investment into this form of real estate. And whilst the longer-term impact of Brexit and Covid-19 on student numbers in the UK remains to be seen, this gives an indication of the mindset and narrative-control that has encouraged the widespread building of PBSA.

With much PBSA in the UK being owned by global investors and investment funds, areas of the urban landscape are abstracted from the hands of those who live in or around these buildings. For *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth* — a project by the Dwellbeing group (Dwellbeing Shieldfield, 2019) who I introduce and discuss in the next section as an example of ungating (and whose ungating methods include research such as this) — Newcastle University Masters students Josh Chambers, James Maloney and Hannah Swainston created a map that shows how much was paid for each plot of land in Shieldfield, the date the land was purchased, the investment company and where they are registered. To quote the printed material, this information 'highlights that this money is international in nature, often lying offshore, and has little relationship to the local or regional economy' (Dwellbeing Shieldfield, 2021). For example, it is detailed that One Barker House is owned by Torminalis Ltd, registered in Cornwall. They paid £835,000 for the land in 2014. Several were sold to companies registered in Luxembourg including Nido – the Bridge, Stepney Yard and Union Square locations – and the Stephenson Building. Portland Green – Plots seven, eight and nine were purchased in 2016 for £3,210,000 by Far East Orchard Investments Ltd who are registered offshore, in Jersey.[70] Far East Orchard Investments Ltd are a member of Far East Organization,

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[69] A private equity firm is an investment management company that raises and manages a pool of funds to invest in specific projects.

[70] Jersey is considered by many as an offshore financial centre or tax haven though this is something the Government of Jersey disagrees with. The reason, however, that it is treated as such is that in Jersey there is no inheritance, corporate, wealth or capital gains tax. This has served to encourage corporate tax avoidance and attract many High Net Worth Individuals to move there or register trusts and companies there.

Singapore's largest private property developer (Far East Orchard, n.d). The total cost paid for all plots in Shieldfield amounts to – as the title of the project indicates – *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth* (Dwellbeing Shieldfield, 2019).

This map lays bare the vast sums of money flowing through the neighbourhood, totalling at £130,195,678, which has barely touched or benefitted the estate and wider area. In selling off so much land in Shieldfield to private and international developers, the council has neglected the needs of those already living there. The investors, developers and management companies are not required to feedback into and benefit the existing community, thus dividing the land as well as Shieldfield's population. In other words, this model of private financing constructs affective and real barriers within Shieldfield's urban landscape — as well as amongst its student and non-student populations — that we may consider as gates that emerge from a global process of financialisation.

b. An Architecture of Convenience

I will now discuss the convenience that PBSA offers in more detail and as an act of gating itself. Upon moving to the UK, many international students face problems relating to their transition to an unfamiliar cultural and social context, including racial discrimination, loneliness, homesickness, adjusting to a new cuisine, and money issues due to the high cost of studying or difficulty finding part-time employment. UK-based students may also encounter problems if embarking on a university education means leaving the parental or guardian home for the first time. Smith (2005) discusses the 'ontological security' that is afforded to students by PBSA: a sense of belonging within a student population and an all-inclusive living package that makes renting straight-forward. Institutionalised spaces may signal safety within a confusing landscape of online property listings and flat shares with strangers. As with each housing topology discussed in this thesis, a sense of belonging and community is sold in the form of a particular lifestyle into which a 'membership' can be purchased. The branding of these spaces reinforces the notion of a student identity and promises a curated community of others at a similar life-stage. For those arriving from abroad, or other parts of the UK, this promises to facilitate friendships and a support network at a daunting time. This is just one aspect of the convenience offered by PBSA.

Having spoken to a number of students residing within different PBSA complexes in Shieldfield, the main draws for them emerged as — in addition to the guarantee of a community as described above — the other forms of convenience offered: all bills and facilities being incorporated into one monthly payment (with payments, complaints and repairs often handled through a central app installed on a smartphone); the proximity to universities and city-centre amenities such as shops and nightlife; the security of knowing they had somewhere to live if travelling from another city or country (with advance bookings possible and requiring no in-person meeting); and the safety offered by the building itself, in the shape of CCTV, security guards and a concierge at the entrance. This highlights the extent to which we now organise our lives via online platforms and apps, and the appeal this convenience has, particularly for a younger generation of students. Whilst visiting a number of PBSA blocks, I watched Deliveroo riders entering and leaving these properties at high frequency whilst packages of fast fashion purchased from websites such as ASOS, boohoo and PrettyLittleThing formed piles on reception desks, further reinforcing this progression towards architectures of convenience that operate between physical and digital space.

Reducing the students' need to leave their building, the eight blocks I visited offered communal spaces including a shared lounge, sometimes a large kitchen for cooking together, co-working spaces, meeting rooms, and even a gym, at the higher end of the price range. These communal spaces adopted a more lived-in and homely aesthetic than the private rooms, with bright colours, full bookshelves, soft furnishings, and artworks or painted slogans on the walls. They projected an image of home and togetherness, which stands in contrast with the cell-like dorm rooms and narrow corridors lined with closed doors. Whilst the experience is often positive for students who, through this housing, meet friends and form communities, they are very much contained by the building and isolated from the wider community who do not live with the same conveniences. One Shieldfield resident I spoke to pointed out that whilst the PBSA buildings offered social spaces for their residents, amenities for the non-student population, such as a pub and the town hall, had been pushed out through the sale of land for these developments. The boundary constructed is the stark division between the way of living afforded for the students in comparison wit the non-student population. The efforts made in offering the students a full living

experience that reduces their need to leave the building and contains them within a bubble of studenthood. This constructs a gate in the form of a lifestyle barrier, marked out by consumption patterns and an architecture of convenience.
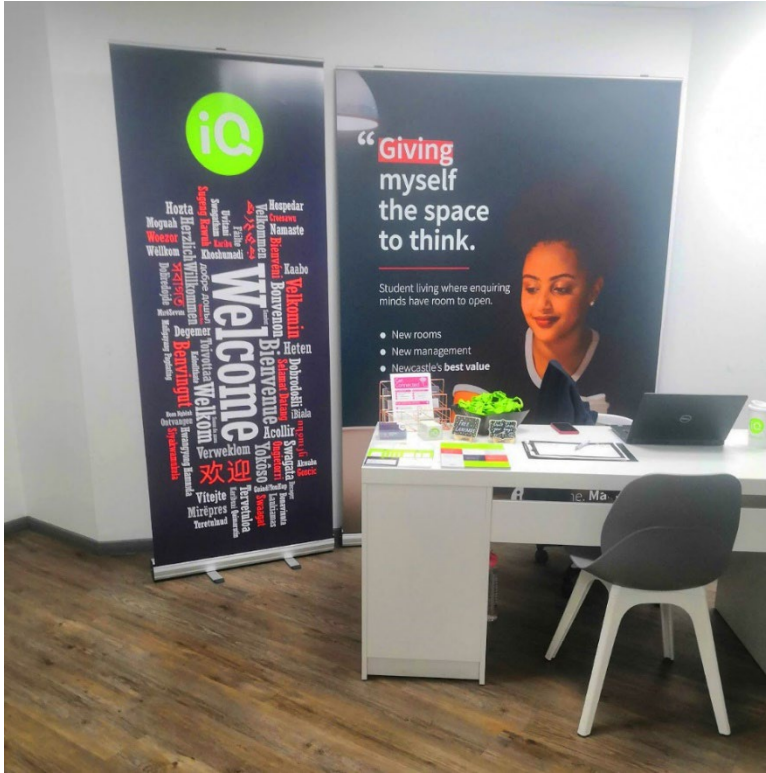
Figure 9. The entrance to a PBSA block – Liberty Quay - in Newcastle, 2021.

Figure 10. Communal lounge in The Shield, PBSA block in Shieldfield, Newcastle, 2021.

c. Studentification

The final form of gating I will outline returns to the process of what has become known as studentification (Smith, 2002), which I define below. Studentification in Shieldfield has established a clear division between the non-student and student residents. Students tend to stay for up to three years, with a minimum contract term for the PBSA usually being one academic year. This tends to be a locked contract, with students paying rent either monthly, per term, or for the full year at once, and unable to terminate the contract early. Speaking to a woman who runs an alternative student accommodation agency that pairs international students with non-PBSA flats and houses,[71] she informed me that many students who wish to leave their PBSA early must themselves find another student to replace them. This means that they must promote the room (for example, in Facebook groups) rather

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[71] This organisation is called Erasmus Living and matches the student to a room and organises events to connect students with others and get to know the city. For more information see: https://www.erasmusliving.co.uk/

than detail any of the negative experiences that may be propelling them to leave, and so a positive image of the PBSA is maintained despite potential problems.

The short-term nature of the rentals means that there is a revolving door of students who do not view Shieldfield as their 'home' or as a community they feel invested in, tending to move in at the beginning of the academic year and usually spending summer and holidays elsewhere. This results in an incredible amount of chaos and noise in September: term times spent partying and drunk behaviour in the street (often disturbing the estate residents who have responsibilities such as children and full-time jobs with regular hours); and emptiness over the summer months, Christmas and Easter. In his 2008 essay *Regulating the social impacts of studentification: A Loughborough case study*, Phil Hubbard discusses how the town of Loughborough has become overwhelmed by students, replacing established residents with a 'transient, generally young and single, middle-class student social grouping' (Hubbard, 2008). He cites a Student's Union survey of 218 students from 2005, which suggested that '63% did not feel a sense of belonging to the town of Loughborough and 47% did not feel welcomed', along with 54% saying they had 'made no effort to integrate with the town, and as many as one in five felt they had 'nothing in common' with the town community' (ibid). Hubbard identifies community cohesiveness as the main problem posed by studentification, and compares the language used by established residents when referring to the student population as mirroring racist and xenophobic language (Hubbard, 2008). The Loughborough case is echoed in Shieldfield, with the student and non-student populations ending up in conflict, though I did not experience any racist or xenophobic language being used during my interviews.

Smith (2005) outlines four dimensions of studentification: economic, social, cultural and physical. The economic refers to the inflation of property prices that occurs when single-family homes are reconfigured as HMOs, and PBSAs charge higher rents than typical flats and houses.[72] Students travelling from abroad may not be

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[72] To give an example from Shieldfield, prices vary greatly from one block to the next with, for example, a one-bedroom studio at Falconars House being £208 pppw; rent at Barker House starting at £109 pppw; and rent at The Shield ranging from £117 pppw to £143 pppw for a Gold En Suite. Given the vast variation in price, the rent of many rooms and studios is set much higher than the non-student accommodation that neighbours it.

familiar with the rental market in the area and thus are willing to pay higher rents. The social dimension refers to the displacement of existing and long-standing communities by way of these rental increases. This often means an influx of young and mobile residents who replace or displace those of a lower socioeconomic status, or those with families, which establishes new patterns of segregation. The cultural dimension is the resulting provision of retail and services that cater to the student population. In Shieldfield, for example, this has meant the closure of a long-standing pub — which was the only remaining one in the area — and a community centre. However, this can work both ways, with the potential for shops opening in areas that were previously under-served, in turn benefitting the local community as well as the transient student population. It can also mean the extension of transport links into the area, which is generally perceived as positive. Finally, the physical aspect, which can see the upgrading of the physical environment, as well as a possible downgrading depending on how properties are maintained and occupied. Whether or not the area is seen to have been 'upgraded' by such changes ultimately depends on the individual's perspective.

Smith later considers potential overlaps between gentrification and studentification and proposes that the latter may represent a factory for the former: a 'training ground for potential gentrifiers' (ibid, p. 74). This is due to the lifestyle associated with students, their socioeconomic background, and that they are studying towards embarking on certain career paths with potentially secure and high incomes (though this, of course, varies greatly depending on the course one is studying, and one's career ambitions, it is not necessarily a factor that differentiates them from the wider population of the area). Whilst students do not tend to have high levels of capital, due to age and employment status, Smith likens them to the artists and creatives who are often the 'pioneer gentrifiers' that initiate the process of gentrification in a particular area (Smith, 2005). In this way, they are not necessarily the people who benefit from the gentrification process (though the opening of a new café or bar may be considered a positive development by the students) but may themselves eventually be priced out of the area. He suggests that it is perhaps the investors and landlords that we might consider as the 'studentifiers' or possible gentrifiers, rather

than the students themselves. Whilst I would argue that all actors play a role in the problems associated with studentification, I very much doubt that students set out with the *intention* to participate in this process — much like the majority of artists, as I have discussed in Chapter One — and make housing choices based on what is visible and accessible to them or their parents, carers or funders.

To consider the long-term impacts of PBSA development in Shieldfield, I come lastly to the idea of 'de-studentification' which refers to a reduction in the student population within areas that have been studentified (Smith, Kinton & Harrison, 2016). De-studentification can happen for a number of reasons including a decrease in the number of students enrolling in universities, or the popularity (or unpopularity) of certain housing. For example, a new PBSA may open that is cheaper or closer to the university, taking business away from others. With 20 PBSA blocks in Shieldfield, a concern for the future is an oversupply.[73] Given the design of the accommodation, this begs the question of what it might become and whether these buildings could perform a different function for a non-student population. The impacts of studentification – and the potential for a resulting de-studentification or gentrification – constructs yet another gate between the student and non-student populations of Shieldfield, increasing the likelihood of social displacement, encouraging resentment to grow and failing to foster understanding and respect.

The Gated Effect

Based on the processes of gating that I have discussed, I argue that we can consider PBSA as a form of gated community whose gates extend beyond the typical markers of security and physical barriers. The ownership structure of these properties serves to neglect their localities in favour of attracting foreign investment and appealing to a broad, international customer base. This takes a sense of

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[73] This may, in fact, already be the case as many local residents I spoke to suspect that most buildings are not operating at capacity and have many rooms sitting empty. Whilst PBSA providers will not reveal the level of capaicity they have reached, regular deals on rent suggest the need to attract more students and occur throughout the academic year. I viewed student accommodation at various points throughout the academic year and all providers in Shieldfield that I contacted and visited had available space.

ownership out of the hands of those who have lived in the area long term. The convenience offered by the PBSAs, by way of a curated community, an all-inclusive package, and an array of shared spaces and facilities, marks the students' lifestyle out as different to that of other non-student residents in the area. These factors play into a wider process of studentification, which may in turn feed processes of gentrification as areas are redeveloped to attract students, businesses are established to serve the needs and desires of the students, and the students that graduate and enter the workforce adopt gentrifier lifestyles. The non-student residents of Shieldfield complain of issues such as noise interrupting their sleeping during term time (and thus affecting their energy for work or education); periods of over-population during term time and under-population during holidays; a lack of care for or investment in the area by students, leading to littering and a degraded environment; and the fear of displacement due to increased rental value. These issues all serve to create friction between student and non-student communities and often leads to the displacement of long-standing residents who are priced out of the area or find they are no longer at home in their reconfigured communities. Given this disconnection between the two 'sides' of the population, I now consider how we might ungate this community through the removal of these real and affective barriers.

2.4. The Ungating: Dwellbeing

The project that I argue enacts ungating is one that was set up in direct response to the issue of studentification within Shieldfield: *Dwellbeing*. Dwellbeing is a 'community benefit society and co-operative of 30+ community members of the estate of Shieldfield' (Dwellbeing, 2020), which operates largely out of Shieldfield Art Works (SAW), an arts organisation that focuses on contemporary art, community activism and theological reflection. Initiated by art collective JHA (Julia Heslop, Hannah Marsden and Alison Merritt Smith), the project developed as a response to the frustrations that local Shieldfield estate residents were feeling around how their area was changing and being sold off with no consideration for the community and environment that already existed there and the multitude of issues that the studentification of the area continues to present, as discussed above. Working with an evolving group of more than 20 people who live or work in Shieldfield, they hold weekly meetings that 'alternate between processes of action, such as field trips,

practical or craft workshops, data gathering, reflection such as group discussion, reflective journaling, revising shared aims and objectives, and planning future actions' (ibid). Activities include creative workshops, fieldtrips, making artworks, and organizing events, which are all designed and implemented collectively. Whilst activities such as making artworks may not immediately appear to help develop strategic plans for the area in the way that other research-based activities do, the process of developing artworks can function to visualise the problems and thus communicate them to a wider audience. This has included the brick sculpture made for *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth* (as briefly introduced above), which I will discuss in more detail below. Dwellbeing implement a membership scheme; 'core members' encompass those who live, work, study or play in Shieldfield, and 'supporter members' being those outside of these parameters but who may be advisors, local authority workers, and general supporters of the project. A democratic voting system is in place for making key decisions, with core members representing 75% of the voting strength, and supporter members representing the remaining 25%. Through this structure, Dwellbeing encourages community members to play a role in shaping life in Shieldfield and thinking towards its future.

Figure 11. One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth, exhibition at Shieldfield Art Works, Newcastle. Photo by Matthew Pickering, courtesy of Dwellbeing. Retrieved at: https://www.dwellbeingshieldfield.org.uk/urban-development/one-hundred-and-thirty-million-pounds-of-earth.

Dwellbeing implements a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which serves to cultivate a 'creative and socially owned process of research that has the potential to increase long term community capacity to deal with future urban change' (Dwellbeing, n.d.). PAR is a 'collaborative process of research, education and action, done *with people* not *on them,* focused on social transformation' and involving a 'collective enquiry into an issue, with the goal of improving it for the better' (Dwellbeing, 2021). PAR focusses on the needs of a specific group and enables them to gain a greater awareness of the situation they are in through research, reflection and action (Jacobs, 2016). It draws upon the group's experiences and their wider histories towards making social changes. PAR has its origins in emancipatory philosophy and social action research, stemming from the work of Kurt Lewin — a German American psychologist — in the 1940s that promoted social empowerment. However, its precise origins are contested, and it has emerged from a broad tradition of collective experimentation (Macaulay, 2017). Rejecting the idea that objective distance is required in order to conduct such

research, PAR grounds itself in the community affected by the issues being examined.[74] Those involved with Dwellbeing are co-researchers and equal partners. Continually engaging in planning, action and reflection enables the project to be fluid and respond to the needs of its members, to provide a supportive environment for their neighbours, and to empower Shieldfield's community.

The PAR process eschews the prevalence of knowledge production through formal education and its conventional, often elitist, structures that exclude and interrogate issues from a distance. The education undertaken by the student population of Shieldfield – who are largely studying at Newcastle or Northumbria University – comes at a high cost and is not accessible to everyone. In this way, the PAR structure creates a meaningful contrast with, and challenge to, the privatised and financialised structure of higher education and PBSA. Dwellbeing allows the two forms of learning to meet by providing a space for Shieldfield's long-term residents and the student population to work together. This enables Dwellbeing to offer a more inclusive educational alternative that prizes not only academic research but lived experience, and therefore acts to ungate both the community of Shieldfield, and the very approaches through which knowledge is generated and research is conducted. Through this process, research is valued whether researchers have a formal education or not; this collective knowledge production posing a challenge or alternative to the formal education that the student population is engaged with. In other words, the PAR process does work towards removing an educational barrier.

Dwellbeing is made up of of three working groups: Stewards, the Shieling Working Group, and the Youth Working Group. Stewards manage the overall organisation and plan future activities whilst reflecting on the ongoing programme. They also do the administrative work such as managing memberships, finances and promoting events. The Shieling Working Group run the public engagement activities, which include growing produce in the allotment; improving, maintaining and creating community spaces and working in collaboration with Shieldfield Art Works to do so. According to an introductory video, the Shieling programme 'aims to build knowledge and action around urban development and horticulture. This is especially

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[74] For a comprehensive discussion on PAR see, for example: Cahill, 2007; Cameron and Gibson, 2005 and Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2010).

important in a neighbourhood that has seen a lot of urban development over the past ten years' (Dwellbeing Shieldfield, 2021). Growing food is part of a long term answer they are developing to address the unaffordability and unsustainability of food, issues that Covid-19 has perpetuated and rendered more visible. As well as the community garden that brings people together, there is practical support offered to help residents grow food on their balconies or in their gardens. Lastly, the Youth Working Group enables children and young people living in Shieldfield to take part in a programme of activities designed to enable them to make friends, learn new skills and become active community members. A Youth Working Group Manifesto lists the objectives of: creativity, equality, unity with nature, freedom, social justice, meaning in life, kindness, a world of beauty, wisdom, and an exciting life (Youth Working Group, 2021). I now outline two specific activities to demonstrate the effectiveness of Dwellbeing in uniting and empowering Shieldfield's community.

One activity I see as particularly effective as an act of ungating is a survey that was conducted in order to create a digital map of Shieldfield.[75] This map, hosted online, serves to indicate the places in Shieldfield that residents feel need improvement, allowing them to add locations and comments that share frustrations or ideas around specific features within the area. Issues currently detailed include places that lack lighting or aren't looked after properly and therefore don't get used. The map feeds and develops a plan for improvements, bringing together the community's knowledge and personal experiences in a format that anyone can access and contribute to. Some examples of suggested improvements include introducing wild planting sections to improve air quality; re-planning an existing parking lot; the addition of benches; and the running of a film night. Whilst the suggested changes I have highlighted may not be the priorities or interests of all residents of Shieldfield, this project demonstrates the ways in which Dwellbeing has encouraged local residents to take ownership of the area they live in and feel entitled to the space and its amenities. It is an ongoing process that will shape not only the physicality of the environment, but forge relationships between residents as well as those formally involved in the development and planning of the area.

A second activity I draw attention to is the one I referred to above titled *One*

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[75] Available at: https://miro.com/app/board/o9J_lNqkcRQ=/

Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth. This project, which materialised as an exhibition, was developed in 2018-19 with research conducted by five Planning Masters students studying at Newcastle University as well as the Dwellbeing group in its earliest form. The students analysed the landownership of PBSA sites in Shieldfield, surveyed planning documents and investment patterns, and conducted interviews with various stakeholders. It was identified that much of the land sold to the PBSA developers was done so at a cheap price and thus guaranteed profit for the developers, whilst generating money for the council after the 2007-2008 financial crisis. As I have already outlined, the low land values and plentiful empty space was the reason for these developments happening in Shieldfield. This project and research culminated with an exhibition at SAW between May and July 2019 and featured an installation in which each new student accommodation building had been recreated using handmade bricks. The size of each model corresponded to the amount paid for the land, with a brick representing £250,000 of value, hence its title: *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth*. An accompanying map was created, detailing the owner of each of the 20 PBSA blocks, as well as the date it sold and price at which the developer purchased the land.

Here we see in action Massey's power-geometries (1991a, 1993, 2005); a complicated and unequal relation between wealthy overseas investors and a community of people fighting to improve the place in which they live. It highlights a complex and inseparable relationship between the local and global. Through the sale of land to such companies, Shieldfield is now dependent upon a range of national and international investors to ensure the maintenance of their properties (though technically this is done by a management company who facilitate the operations and day-to-day running of the PBSA complex, rather than the investment fund who have a hands-off role). Dwellbeing's work maps out these complex relations and considers the different scales at which they are operating. This performs ungating through the simple act of finding, visualising and communicating information on the financial infrastructure underpinning much of the area: presenting it in a simple format that is accessible to a wide audience in the local area and beyond.

I now return to Mohanty's notion of *community as struggle* (2003a), which recurs throughout this thesis and highlights the work and collaboration that needs to be

done in order to maintain and create an inclusive community that incorporates understandings of difference. Whilst Mohanty's work calls for solidarity across national borders, I will apply the same importance to communities situated within place. However, despite being rooted in place, the population of Shieldfield also emerges through cross-border relations, shaped by both flows of global finance and flows of a transient international student population. The PAR process utilises the diverse experiences of those within the community towards enriching their research whilst operating in a non-hierarchical manner that is fluid and reflexive.

Mohanty further points towards the public funding cuts to education that have occurred, which are relevant to the situation in the UK and US. Both countries have seen an increase in fees and the privatisation of education, which Mohanty argues turns radical theory into a commodity: 'no longer seen as a product of activist scholarship or connected to emancipatory knowledge, it can circulate as a sign of prestige in an elitist, neoliberal landscape' (ibid, p. 971). Part of this commodification is the PBSA that has become an object of real estate speculation, as well as a framework for replicating standardised and generic architectural forms throughout cities. Dwellbeing positions itself in productive contrast to the knowledge-production enacted by the students living in PBSA who *are* in formal education, which shifts collective responsibility towards individual characteristics. This physical proximity but theoretical difference is a factor that I find to be key in the ability of Dwellbeing to *ungate* the community. It offers an alternative model that incorporates the diverse nature of the community, enabling anyone to contribute and guide the project. This is important because, to quote Mohanty again, we need to return to a politics of 'the contextual as both local and structural and to the collectivity that is being defined out of existence by privatisation projects' (ibid, p. 987). Dwellbeing provide a framework for *collective* knowledge building.

Areas of Concern

To conclude this discussion of ungating, I would like to first point out that as yet, the group is primarily made up of non-student members of the Shieldfield community. The reasons for this are no doubt many of the factors I have discussed in this chapter: the relatively short-term stay of students, the exiting of students during summer and holidays and the lack of opportunities for engagement with the non-

student population who may not frequent the same bars and social spaces in the surrounding area. As I have outlined, this leads to the student resident feeling less of a connection and responsibility to the area and its existing population. At the same time, the students may be alienated from the non-student population due to feeling attacked by non-student residents and their dislike of Shieldfield's PBSA and – sometimes - the students' own behaviour. There is currently only one locally residing student who is part of the Shieling group but a number volunteer to help run the youth programme. Whilst students cannot, of course, be forced to get involved in the project, and may not be motivated to due to the short-term nature of their stay, the involvement of more would help bridge the gaps and foster solidarity between these two 'sides' of Shieldfield's population.

Another potential area of concern relates to the structure that has enabled the project to exist. As I have outlined above, knowledge projects within the neoliberal academy have their limitations (Mohanty, 2013) and long-standing non-student residents of Shieldfield are situated subjects with in-depth and valuable knowledge gained from lives lived within the area, which is a key factor in Dwellbeing's operation. Dwellbeing explores how this population might be brought into dialogue with the less-rooted student population. However, we must take into account the complex forms of exploitation that can occur through such a process. With many such projects, it is the university researcher and department who ultimately accrues 'capital', be that cultural or academic. Although the implementation of the PAR approach may involve an extended community in the research, they are less likely to be renumerated for their time or rewarded with the work and education-based opportunities that those working in academia or the arts may be. The artists who initiated Dwellbeing may feature the project in a portfolio of their work, thus enabling them to attract further funding or opportunities and commissions. At the same time, it is unlikely that non-artist or non-academic participants are able to so effectively translate their work on Dwellbeing into opportunities that are financially supported. Whilst I am not accusing the Dwellbeing initiators of having such intentions, or having gained career opportunities as a result, it is something that is important to bear in mind whilst working on such projects to avoid a situation in which there is an unaddressed hierarchy operating amongst the group.

2.5. Conclusion

I have identified the key issues that Shieldfield's non-student population is facing, many of which are effects of the process of studentification. Beyond Shieldfield, neighbourhoods within many UK cities and towns are facing similar problems. The problem lies not necessarily with the students themselves *as students*, but with the sheer quantity of them concentrated in one area, and the fact that so much land in the community has been sold for development (with the money of international investors) without any benefits being seen or experienced by the community that was already there. They do not pertain to offer benefit to the wider community such as public green space or social housing — as many non-PBSA property developments in the UK do[76] — but claim to foster community amongst the students within their buildings. This reinforces the idea of a community within a community, positioning the students in conflict with the long-standing residents. The quantity of PBSA in Shieldfield reflects poor planning on the city's behalf, and the encouragement of developments that serve profit over anything else at the expense of existing residents, facilities and space.

The model of Dwellbeing is one that could be applied in other locations in order to research and plan towards addressing the issues presented by studentification, enabling the long-standing community to claim a sense of ownership over the area again and communicating the issues to a wider group who may be unaware of these issues (including the students themselves). The long-term nature of Dwellbeing demonstrates a dedication that I view as capable of effecting meaningful change. Work towards the future must face the issues of de-studentification and gentrification that may closely follow. With such a large quantity of student accommodation — mostly in the form of small studios or dormitory-style rooms — what might these buildings become if demand lessens? Would they remain empty whilst many of the city's residents are facing unaffordable, inadequate housing or

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[76] Regarding the construction of regular, non-student accommodation, the agreement between the local authority and the private developer – Section 106 – sets the terms for the construction, based on how it may impact a local area. This can mean that a developer has to include a certain percentage of affordable housing within the development, provide outdoor space that can be used by the public, or provide a community centre. Although not always strictly adhered to, this is how both local authority and developer justify and embark upon a new development. I am not claiming this as a well-functioning model, rather pointing out that there is even less effort made by councils to ensure these developments do not negatively impact upon their localities.

homelessness? The same issue applies to the housing topology that I will be discussing in the following chapter: that of co-living, which I suggest can be seen as a natural progression from the form of PBSA I have discussed.

Chapter 3: Co-Living at The Collective, London: 'A Haven of Community and Creativity in Vibrant East London'.

In the future, we will all be homeless.

— James Scott, Chief Operating Officer, The Collective.[77]

Sat in 'The Lounge', I could hear several American accents coming from corners I couldn't see: 'I came here hoping for more networking opportunities!'; 'I rent because I like to have a change every 6 months or so'; 'They just have to be more *creative*; you know?'. The conversation continued in this way as if the marketing material for the building was coming to life and filling the physical architecture; branding *as* architecture shaping the interactions between those who occupy it. I was sat in what looked like a hotel complete with a roaming security guard, decorative books and laminated safety notices. I faced my laptop for company and protection. It was May 2021 and I was in one of the communal living spaces of The Collective's East London branch – a large co-living complex in London where I was staying for a month in order to better understand how it operated, how its spaces felt to live in, and how its day-to-day reality compared with the confident claims made in its marketing materials and by its founder, Reza Merchant.

The Collective has two locations in London and one in New York; the branch I was in opened in October 2019. It is the 'world's largest co-living building' (The Collective, 2021). Their plans for further expansion — a planned 100,000 units globally (Sell, 2020) — are most likely impossible now: as I write this in October 2021, it has just been announced that they have gone into administration. Whilst this had not yet happened when I stayed there five months prior, it was clear that the pandemic had impacted their resident numbers due to travel restrictions and their dubious status as housing, which will become clear throughout this chapter. I

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[77] In 2016 Scott announced he was taking a career break to go travelling, and The Collective's website – accessed October 2021 – now lists the Chief Operating Officer as Neil MacLeod. Available at: https://www.thecollective.com/about-us

draw attention to this now to acknowledge how much Covid-19 has interrupted what was presumed to be business-as-usual: open borders, mobile urban elites, global-city-living and location-independent[78] working (though this has likewise taken on a new meaning with the proliferation of working-from-home due to the pandemic). With swathes of the world forced into their homes to work and remain for extended periods of time, The Collective has been proven not to be the *home* it claims to be, but its fate will be determined by the administration process over the course of the next year.

With these events in mind, this chapter draws upon the time I spent living there and posits an argument as to why The Collective — and to an extent the wider trend in this style of co-living — is a form of gated community, outlining the various spatial, social and administrative processes and structures that enact this gating. As in every chapter, these processes construct both real and affective barriers. The final section of this chapter interrogates an example of a housing campaign group — Focus E15 — that I argue implements strategies of *ungating.* This instance of ungating performs useful tactics that might be employed in opening up the spaces of commodified co-living as exemplified by The Collective. I first outline what I mean by co-living in both current and historical contexts before introducing The Collective in more detail.

3.1. From Radical Communes to Commodified Co-Living

For the purpose of this study, I will give a brief overview of the history of what we can loosely categorise as 'co-living' in order to highlight the disparity between The Collective and other, more established, forms of co-living.[79] The term co-living conjures to mind various different and more established forms of communal living: housing cooperatives, monasteries, convents, hippy communes, co-housing and ashrams (to name a few). The history of co-living arrangements is vast and varied,

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[78] This term was coined by Lea Woodward who runs a website of the same name. It refers to a way of life that revolves around one's ability to work from anywhere. Associated with the digital nomad movement, it tends to refer to computer-based freelance work.

[79] For a more comprehensive overview of the history of co-living see for, example, Oved, 2013; Ferrara, 2019; Andrusz, 2019; Field, 2004; Bunker and Coates, 2011.

with different models tending to revolve around different philosophies, political ideologies, religions and lifestyles. We might say that a common thread that runs throughout is that they place a high priority on the fostering of community in a form that relates to a shared purpose. We can also call these living arrangements intentional communities: ones in which residents share a common belief, ideal or purpose and choose to work and live together in order to create and maintain a lifestyle that reflects their core values. They are typically managed collectively, and at a scale that makes it possible to do so. The residents tend to share the labour and responsibility of maintaining the building and organising themselves as a community and household.

A similar term, co-housing, originated in the late 1960s in Denmark (although the Danish term is *bofællesskab* which translates into English as 'living communities'*)* with groups of families organising housing projects that enabled them to share childcare duties and meals and live a more social life with their neighbours. It was part of a revolt against the nuclear family and emphasised 'gender and power equality, common child-rearing, voluntary division of labour, dissolution of one-to-one relationships and common outward-directed political and creative activities' (Larsen, 2019, p. 1351). It is important to point out here that there is a difference between forms of co-living, or co-housing, that are anti-establishment, and those that are state-sponsored or managed. For example, since 1981 in Denmark, co-housing projects are now heavily supported by the state through legislation, loans and subsidies: it is a well-established housing option that is cross-generational. The state even factors the development of such housing into wider regeneration plans (Larsen, 2019). Whilst co-housing in the UK has not been established on this scale, it was announced by the government in 2021 that there is a new £4 million Community Housing Fund from the Greater London Authority (GLA)[80] that will support housing co-operatives and other community-led housing organisations to realise their projects (Voinea, 2021). As of 2019, there were only 21 completed co-housing schemes in the UK (Stockley, 2019) but a further 60 are in various stages of development (Cook, 2021). There is, of course, the possibility of governments co-

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[80] The Greater London Authority (GLA) was established in 2000 and is the governance body of Greater London and the City of London, having powers over transport, policing, economic development, fire and emergency planning, land use planning, highways and energy policy. For more information see: https://www.london.gov.uk/

opting co-housing as a way to 'legitimise economically, socially and/or ecologically unsustainable large-scale urban restructuring' and co-housing can potentially propel gentrification (Thörn, Larsen, Hagbert & Wasshede, 2020, p.1).

An example of an anti-establishment form of co-housing — or co-living, if we are to use the language of The Collective and extend its definition to a broader notion of communal living — might be that of squats, which I discussed in Chapter One. Whilst not all squats would describe themselves as projects in communal living, some echo similar sentiments with other forms of communal living arrangements that are legal but may be established in this manner for the sake of greater autonomy, which would not be felt so strongly in the state-subsized forms of co-housing as described above. Different political aspirations shape the form that a communal living project might take, whether it operates through grassroots organising or top-down governance. Whilst squats may strive for mutual self-help, solidarity and empowerment, a government-supported development is more likely to operate through a logic of regulation and marketization (Holm & Kuhn, 2013).

With these histories and variations in mind, 'co-living', in its recent reincarnation, is a housing topology that has emerged as the residential equivalent of the co-working spaces offered by companies such as WeWork that provide flexible workspace with a view to enabling networking and community building (La Pietra & Rowell, 2019). Here, a community is presented as a network that allows the individual to find collaborators and opportunities in the realm of their work, as well as increasing their productivity.[81] Both co-working and co-living have been expanding rapidly in tandem with the growth of the gig economy, which sees people less tethered to buildings and long-term employers whether through choice or having no other option. In global cities like London and New York this has taken the form of large-scale buildings containing individual rooms and a range of communal spaces that are supposed to make up for the lack of personal space offered by the small private

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[81] For example, WeWork write on their blog, 'we believe so strongly that community is the active ingredient that brings office speace and technology to life that we've woven it into every aspect of our workplace experience. We see how the "vide" and sense of community in an office shapes employees' experience and their engagement in their jons in a way that tangibly impacts the bottom line. Relationships between people are critical to employee satisfaction and output. For more information see: https://www.wework.com/ideas/research-insights/expert-insights/creating-workspace-community

rooms. The language used by these corporate landlords tends to focus on promises of offering a cure to urban loneliness and a solution to the inconvenience of private renting, with its long-term contracts and multiple bills that are hard to keep track of (which will be evidenced and elaborated on below). The precarity of renting in the private market is rebranded and a solution sold back to the individual — who can't afford to buy property or chooses not to — as something luxurious and fashionable that offers freedom and convenience. Freedom to leave when one wants, freedom to stay for a short time, freedom from the weighty objects that accumulate in space over time.

In an article for *Failed Architecture*, Matthew Stewart identifies the most 'alarming feature' of The Collective as being the claims of a 'new way of living' which is, in fact, a 'commodified old way of living; one that is steeped in the language of modernism yet robbed of its radical social intent' (Stewart, 2016). Stewart specifically likens The Collective's mission statements to descriptions of 'British inter-war experiments in modernism', pointing out that the defining difference is that these embodied a social agenda that 'held civic value above monetary motives', with a 'belief that a decent standard of life should be available to all through healthcare, housing and work reforms' (ibid). Stewart cites the example of Isokon, built between 1933-34 as an experiment in minimalist living that provided communal spaces such as a kitchen, as well as on-site services including cleaning and meal delivery. Bearing resemblance with the living-as-service model[82] that The Collective offers, the difference here is the scale. Consisting of 36 flats, Isokon was conceived at a much smaller scale than The Collective's Canary Wharf branch which has 705 rooms. However, Isokon can neither be thought of as providing housing that was available to all as it, also, offered a particular style of communal living that may not *appeal* to all, and, rather than social housing, it was an experimental project that became a centre for intellectuals and artists. Thus, we might consider Isokon as a predecessor of *A House for Artists*, as discussed in my introduction, rather than The Collective.

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[82] Living as Service is defined as an all-inclusve living experience that enablea renters more freedom. It includes fully furnished accommodation, utilities that are included in rent and ready to go, and management via an app. More information available at: https://www.dezeen.com/2016/07/15/in-the-future-we-will-all-be-homeless-says-co-living-entrepreneur-the-collective-james-scott-housing/.

I would also take this comparison in a slightly different direction and draw links between the language adopted by The Collective to that of *post-war* housing in Britain, which also put great importance on communal spaces in the shape of community halls as well as the design of walkways and landings. In contrast to the low-rise developments of the interwar period, these tended to be high-rise blocks that claimed their lifts to be facilitators of neighbourly relations, with quick access to other floors helping residents maintain relationships: far closer to the scale of The Collective than Isokon. To give an example, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, who was commissioned to implement a post-war redevelopment scheme for Plymouth in 1941, developed a plan with an emphasis on 'community'. With widespread criticism around the cottage suburbs of the interwar period, Abercrombie used language that focussed on the 'spirit of companionship' and a revival of community, rather than the practices of consumerism that people had become accustomed to (Boughton, 2018). The modernist architecture of this time drew upon Le Corbusier's approach, which revolved around the provision of 'an environment that was spiritually fulfilling, creating harmony between people and their surroundings and freeing communities from the misery of poor housing' (Clement, 2018). In a similar vein, the language used to sell The Collective, as seen on their website and marketing materials, includes phrases such as 'a better way of living'; 'our mission is to build and activate spaces that foster human connection and enable people to live more fulfilling lives'; and 'co-living is a way of living in cities that's focused on community and convenience' (The Collective, n.d.). On the contrary, the claims made by The Collective are framed by their status as a profit-driven corporate landlord and accompanied by other phrases found on their website that promote the corporate ideology of networking, 'hustling harder', and harnessing 'the power of our global following' (The Collective, n.d.). These suggestions of individualised entrepreneurialism sit at odds with notions of collectivity.

To return to the quote that begins this chapter, The Collective's ex-Chief Operating Officer James Scott, in proclaiming that 'in the future we will all be homeless', alludes to the fact that in The Collective's vision of the future we will not be tied down by property ownership and will instead be free and mobile global citizens supported by 'Living as a Service' or renting as we have known it thus far. This idea

of Living as a Service – which stems from the wider subscription economy[83] and the structures of 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek, 2016) - is one of the key factors that differentiates co-living in this scaled up form from other, older and typically smaller forms such as housing cooperatives. 'Living as a Service' means, in the case of The Collective, that you pay a monthly flat rate that covers your room, occasional cleaning, all bills, use of communal spaces and facilities, and council tax, echoing the structure of the PBSA discussed in Chapter Two. It is the home-as-platform that one can plug in and out of, switch on and off as desired. When one feels like a change of scenery, the 'refresh' button can simply be pressed, and one reappears in remarkably similar surroundings in a different geographical location. Scott goes on, 'We're slowly decoupling all of those things that tie back to your physical space. The bubble in which you live is completely separated from the space in which you live' (as cited in Manthorpe, 2016). He continues, comparing co-living to the music industry

> *Ten years ago, the value was in the physical piece of music. Nowadays, people want to consume music for free, so the music industry needed to monetise the community. If you apply that back to co-living; if the value is in the community that are in these spaces, I monetise the community. That means I don't have to monetise the space anymore* (ibid).

Here Scott has explicitly stated that they have monetised the very idea of community. Whilst this speech was directed towards entrepreneurs and investors, it is perhaps enlightening for the potential resident in search of housing and community. The remark reads as saying that space need not be monetised because their currency is community, which they are selling as a product. This enables them to draw less attention to the private rooms for residents, and more to the communal spaces and facilities, which are used to justify and distract from the small rooms. 'Community', in reality, is less important than filling units of space with bodies, because The Collective is a real estate project involving a network of investors. The Collective propose that their potential residents sacrifice one thing – adequate personal living space that adheres to typical spatial standards (an

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[83] For a longer description of Living as a Service (LaaS) see: https://www.outsite.co/blog/living-service

issue that I elaborate on below, and a factor that The Collective do not explicity state) — and instead acquire something that is in fact more valuable: *a ready-made community*. I consider this type of co-living space as another mutation of the gated community, for reasons that I have examined below.

Figure 12. The keycard for the 'micro-apartment' at The Collective, Canary Wharf, London, 2021.

3.2. The Gating of the Community

I now outline three ways in which gating is enacted in the case of The Collective: the design and functioning of the building itself; the marketing and branding of the concept (which I have begun to introduce above); and the membership contract that replaces the typical tenancy agreement. I should point out that I am considering the

rent a separate factor that I do not elaborate on because this is perhaps the biggest barrier to anyone looking for housing, and a barrier that is a given with any form of residential property. Putting this immediate barrier of the price aside, I examine in more detail the other factors that mark out this co-living complex as exclusionary and non-porous in its design and intentions.

a. Hotel-Style Living

The first method of gating I discuss is the design of the building: its rooms, facilities and interior décor, which fall under the remit of the hotel-style living that has become popularised by new (often billed as 'luxury') property developments such as AM Tacheles as discussed in Chapter One. Hotel-style living is taken to an extreme by The Collective whose 'micro-apartments' more accurately resemble hotel rooms. In addition to this, The Collective functions not only as a co-living space but as an *actual* hotel, allowing people to book rooms for as little as one night despite most of their marketing efforts revolving around the notion of their building as a home. Whilst their website at no point uses the word 'hotel' - instead opting for 'short stay' (under three months) and 'long stay' (three months and upwards) - it is unlikely someone would consider accommodation they spend one night in as their home or somewhere they need to establish community. For the purpose of this study, I refer to 'long stay' guests as residents (although as will be elaborated on below, The Collective refer to them as 'members'); 'short stay' residents as hotel guests; and those visiting the bar, café or restaurant as including the 'public' (i.e. those not staying overnight in the building). The boundary between resident and hotel guest is significantly blurred, with the same style of rooms and many communal spaces and facilities being accessible to both. This serves to create a hierarchy of inhabitants present within the same space: those who invest more time and energy in the space and get to know people – the residents - and those who pass through on holidays or business trips for a few nights as a time, or have a drink in the bar upstairs. I see this as an act of gating: the construction of boundaries between the inhabitants and users of the building themselves.

I begin now in the 'micro-apartment'. I rented a 'standard size' unit which was compact, clean and neutral: a room I would feel comfortable in as a hotel guest, but

which would be difficult to inhabit in the long term due to its size. Regulations around spatial standards[84] are bypassed[85] by The Collective through transforming old office blocks[86] or constructing their buildings entirely from scratch rather than adapting existing residential properties. The bathroom was only just large enough to stand in one place, the toilet on one side of my body and a narrow shower on the other. A kitchenette was situated a metre and a half away from the bed, and a small breakfast bar with an uncomfortable stool provided space for one person to eat or work though not at the same time. The proportions and aesthetic features of the room — small shelves with minimally arranged books and ornamental objects — strongly suggest that this is indeed a hotel room; one that accommodates only one body and its laptop companion. It is clear this is a space for a specific kind of person with a specific kind of lifestyle: one that does not involve being disabled, having children or pets or, ideally and thanks to the proportions of the room and bed, a partner or two. Not only does the design of the rooms drastically limit the occupant who can reside there, it limits what they can do in their personal space. For example, it would be difficult if not impossible to host a small group of friends for dinner or have visiting family members stay over. In their essay *In Captivity: The Real Estate of Co-Living*, Frichot and Runting (2017) discuss the design of co-living spaces such as The Collective as the creation of an infrastructure that does not support intimacy. Through the standardised and ungenerous design of the micro-

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[84] According to a government guide, 'Housing Design: Quality and Standards', the minimum size of a one-person, one-bed, or studio dwelling is 39sqm. For a two-bed apartment (The Collective claim their micro-apartments to be suitable for two people) it is 50sqm. The Collective's micro-apartments fall well below these figures, which has been enabled by government deregulation (the converting of non-residential buildings into residential means the standards do not need to be adhered to) as well as the fact that residents are 'members' rather than 'tenants'. The government guide is available: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/hdspg_2020_module_c.pdf

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[86] Converting non-residential buildings to residential allows developers to bypass the standard, lengthy planning permission process. In bypassing this process, they are able to get around many standard regulations around how many people may reside in the building, the requirements for windows, and what the size of a home must be. This has resulted in an abundance of sub-standard housing. However, as of 31 July 2022, these kinds of conversions will be subject to revised legislations and requirements. For more information see: https://www.allsop.co.uk/media/permitted-development-a-window-of-opportunity-and-responsibility/ .

apartments, gating is enacted in the form of excluding those who do not fit a narrow, inflexible and pre-determined mould of inhabitant.

Let us now venture out of the micro-apartment and into the communal spaces to understand how they perform yet another act of gating. Downstairs in the building's entrance are luggage trolleys and a reception desk, creating the appearance of a hotel lobby. The ground floor space is filled with tables for people to work and socialise at and a café area housing a company that sells dumplings and noodles and draws in the public, immediately marking the ground floor out as separate from the rest of the building that the residents are meant to call home. By the entrance to the accommodation hangs a blackboard that lists 'community activities' by date. These include casual meetups for coffee and drinks, alongside workshops and classes that include face yoga, paper marbling and taco making. The door to the largely private portion of the building, which is twenty floors high, is monitored 24/7 by a security guard, a relatively solid boundary despite members of the public being allowed to visit the top floor bar and restaurant. This demonstrates the confused yet porous boundary between residents' 'home' and the publicly accessible spaces.

Throughout the rest of the building, the communal spaces oscillate between facilities that a hotel would offer such as a swimming pool and bar, and facilities that a luxury apartment block or co-working space would offer such as meeting rooms and desk spaces. Writing in *The Capsular Civilisation*, Lieven de Cauter describes the effect of capsule architecture[87] as minimising 'communication with the outside by forming its own time-space milieu, an enclosed (artificial) environment' (Cauter, 2005, p.41). Whilst this was in reference to a particular kind of architectural design that The Collective does not explicitly identify with, we can see something similar happening with their selling of convenience: the facilities and events they offer work against a certain relationship between person and place as they reduce the need to venture outside to, for example, get a drink, meet friends, or go to the gym. This is another act of gating that inflates the separation between residents and those on the outside, limiting the possibility of chance encounters and encouraging residents to perform most aspects of their daily lives within the confines of the building.

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[87] Capsule architecture is a term that was coined upon the building of Kisho Kurokawa's Nakagin Capsule Tower in Shimbashi, Tokyo, in 1972.

Arguably, a building with 705 rooms still provides an array of unfamiliar faces and chance encounters, however, these are framed and shaped by the exclusive and inflexible nature of the space that I am describing.

Moving further through the communal spaces, I was reminded again of Lieven De Cauter's description of the architecturally generic as embodying 'the phantasm of weightlessness and mobility in the artificial paradises of consumption, where people sample a personal identity based on corporate material' (ibid, p. 41). The Collective's communal spaces are frozen in a state of completion. They reject and prevent signs of lives lived and signal what the resident is supposed to do and where, as prompted by its signs, layout, furniture and decorative features. The 'lounge', the 'den', the 'study' and the 'library' offer a dark colour palette that emits a feeling of traditional luxury and artificial homeliness that is often encountered in hotels, and can perhaps be seen as a more upmarket version of the communal spaces offered by PBSA as discussed in Chapter Two. Mood lighting and oversized cushions encourage bodies to relax and linger.

Figure 13. 'The Lounge' in The Collective's Canary Wharf branch, London, 2021.

The 'Zen Room' is light and airy with cushions on the floor, low-rise tables, and natural materials. In contrast, the 'Workspace', 'Assembly Space' and 'Breakout Room' offer a clean, fresh and minimalist aesthetic with white walls, practical furniture and lighting that supports work and concentration. Cleaned daily and unable to be altered or decorated by residents, The Collective attempt to maintain these rooms as they are depicted in the promotional images, thus closing them off to many potentials. The 'Communal Kitchen' features signs notifying residents that if they leave any food in the shared fridges overnight it will be removed and binned, further illustrating an attempt to control the usage of the space, and to what extent people may inhabit it.

However, the suggestion of how to use a room can only go so far in a building where more than 700 people might live at one time. On the 'community' section of The Collective's app, I observed residents complaining that others were *working* in the 'Zen Room'. It is easy to imagine additional situations in which conflict would arise: one table in a room being occupied by someone working quietly on their laptop or talking loudly on a business call, and another occupied by a group of friends having beers and lively conversation. Conflict then extends to the possibility – and likely occurrence – of a resident bringing friends who are not residents into the space. Attempting to indicate what residents do in each room could therefore have an anti-conflict function, but the moments that inevitably rupture the intended operation of each space create divisions between the community of residents. With up to 705 rooms-worth of people sharing a living room and an office, it would be difficult to let them do as they wish and make the space their own *or* alternatively fully control what happens there beyond the cleaning of the space and the prevention of blatant acts of law or rule breaking. The scale of the building and resulting design of its communal spaces is itself a site of conflict that encourages divisions to form: another instance of gating but again within the space and amongst the co-living community itself; as well as through the reduction of potential to interact with a community beyond the building's walls.

b. Marketing the Curated Community

After the building had been designed and constructed, the next step in attracting the type of resident (or, more accurately, client) The Collective had in mind was its slick branding and confident marketing strategies, which can be seen through their website, blog, YouTube channel, and documentation of talks given at various corporate events. At the 2017 Tech Open Air Festival in Berlin, founder and then-CEO Reza Merchant speaks about The Collective's model of co-living. He sets the scene by describing the current societal context as one in which marriage is decreasing, life expectancy is increasing, millennials stay in jobs less time, young people prefer spending money on experiences rather than material possessions, there is greater acceptance towards polyamorous and open relationships, and there is a realisation that conventional lifelong monogamous relationships are not the only solutions to having love and intimacy in your life. This, he proclaims, is why The Collective's model is vital (The Theory of Everything, 2017).

With the concept of community so central to The Collective's brand, I argue that the importance they appear to place on fostering community is little more than a marketing tactic that serves to form community through superficial, aesthetic means, only to then fragment that community through the design and functions of the building itself, as detailed above. The Collective's claims of communal living are framed by the fact that they are a corporate landlord with an overarching agenda of maximising profits. Through an array of colourful, confident and consistent branding, a sense of belonging is sold to potential residents as membership to an exclusive club: a curated illusion of community.

At the end of Reza's empowered speech, an audience member asks a question about the 'diverse' community he claims The Collective will foster. 'With The Collective's management deciding who gets to move in and who must move out, how,' she asks, 'will they select people and oversee what kind of culture and dynamic is created?' (ibid). Reza's answer is careful but vague, outlining two factors that allow them to exercise some control over who is moving in: firstly, there are 40-minute tours of the building that people can sign up to before moving in so that both parties can ask relevant questions (though this is optional); and secondly, the contract includes strict terms outlining that if anyone is to offend or misbehave, they

would get a strike, and after three strikes they would be asked to move out and their membership terminated (ibid.). Whilst this essentially means that anyone who agrees to the terms of the contract can move in, it is standard that one cannot know what it is like to live with an unknown person before doing so. However, the difference between this process and many of the more established forms of co-living is that it entirely excludes the other residents from the decision-making process. Whilst it would of course be chaotic to involve potentially more than 705 people in decision making of this nature, it places emphasis on the power of the corporate landlord as establishing and managing the community to suit their own vision or agenda.

At the end of his answer to the question of diversity Reza stresses, again, that The Collective is not an exclusive members club for 'nomadic millennials' (despite all appearances) but is a diverse and inclusive community for all kinds of people. It is difficult to believe this given what I have already discussed, as well as many of the contradictory statements and marketing material The Collective has released, even within this one ten-minute speech itself. There is plenty of evidence that suggests they are specifically targeting young, predominantly millennial, residents who are largely single and cannot afford to buy property – or choose not to - but can afford to pay a high price on rent[88] and are without disability, child, pet or, ideally, partner. Through their branding we see claims of likeminded individuals' side-by-side with declarations of diversity. Whilst both of these facts can indeed be true — and are something we must foster and encourage — there is little evidence that diversity in any meaningful and expansive way can be supported by the design and functions of the building (and of course the cost).

This 'solution' offered to the new millennial lifestyle ignores that fact that many of the characteristics described are *inflicted* upon individuals and are not through choice. A precarious gig-work economy, a lack of secure housing options, and the choice not to have children, which is often connected to financial realities. This so-called lifestyle is itself a barrier against forming community. When one is perpetually forced to *move on,* it is difficult to feel part of a community or to invest in a locality. The

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[88] As a funded PhD student earning the equivalent of a minimum wage full time salary, my entirely monthly income would not even cover the rent on a standard size room at the Canary Wharf branch.

Collective cannot solve this by providing yet more short-term housing and packaging community as a product. The Collective put a distracting gloss over the real issues and their causes, rebranding precarity and selling a solution to this 'new way of life' to economically privileged millennials whilst the majority are left to contend with these insecure and exploitative conditions. The Collective is undeniably a gated community for those of a specific socio-economic status.

c. Membership not Tenancy

I now elaborate on the notion of the 'member', which is defined by the contract between The Collective and the resident and serves to shape the manner in which people inhabit the building. In addition to bypassing typical legal standards of space as I have already outlined, the membership contract enables them to offer their residents reduced rights compared to a typical private-rental tenancy agreement. I will outline a number of clauses that illustrate this arrangement. The contract begins by stating: 'This document is not intended to create a landlord and tenant relationship'. The term 'rent' is not used; it is instead called a 'license fee'. In Section 1 of the contract, it is further stated that:

> *The Collective reserves the right to move the Member at any time to alternative Accommodation of a similar standard within the Residence or to alternative Accommodation of a similar standard outside the Residence. Where reasonably possible The Collective will give the Member not less than 48 hours' notice of such a move.* (The Collective, n.d).

This reduces the rights of the inhabitant and the hotel-style living arrangement that privileges a lack of stability and a prevention of the resident personalising their space. In contrast with this rule, if a member wishes to move room and it is approved, they are subject to paying a fee of £300. Section 3 continues:

> *The Collective, the Managing Agent or any contractor, officer or servant employed by The Collective or the Managing Agent (Management) may access your Accommodation at any time to carry out any of its responsibilities under the Membership Agreement or for any other reasonable purpose without notice.*

(The Collective, n.d).

This differs from a standard tenancy agreement which would usually enforce that the landlord gives at least 24 hours' notice before entering the property for any reason that is not an emergency.[89] Further points of difference include the fact that students in full time education cannot, due to the nature of the accommodation, apply for council tax reduction or exemption; the possibility of a £250 fees for breaking rules (one woman, writing in a google review, was fined £250 for buying a drink in the bar and taking the lift downstairs to go out and smoke, with the drink in her hand);[90] and the fact that if a resident wishes to end their membership early and leave their accommodation, they must not only find another member to take over the remainder of their membership but they must also pay a fee of £300.
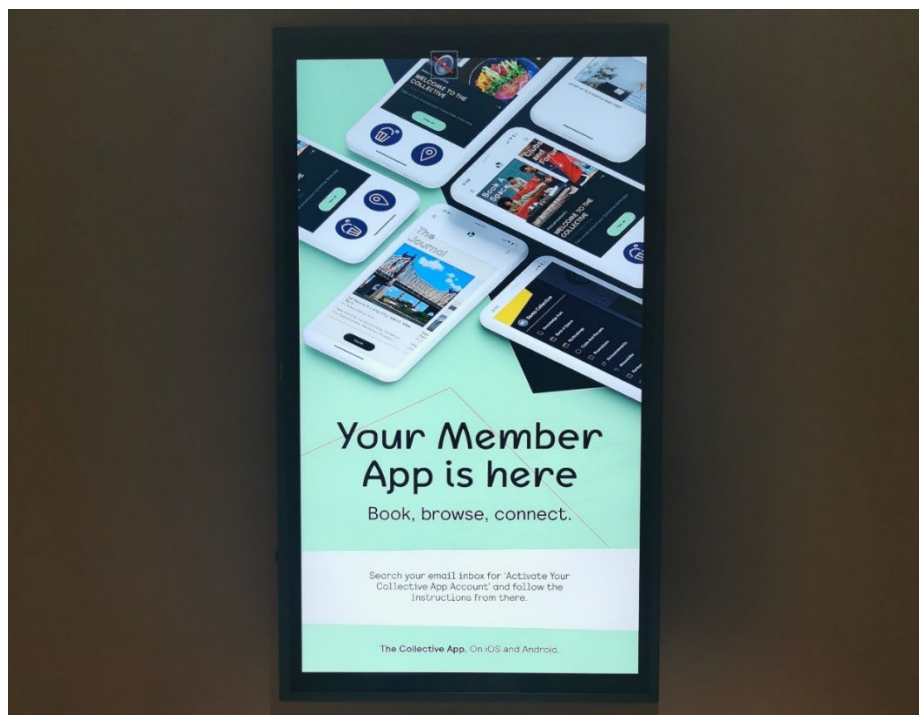
Figure 14. Screen promoting The Collective's Member's App, situated beside the life in their Canary Wharf branch, London, 2021.

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[89] This is the case in all standard tenancy agreements used in the UK. More information available at: https://www.gov.uk/private-renting

[90] This story was told in a Google review of The Collective, accessed October 2021.

Whilst it is typical to have to see out a contracted term of residence, private landlords often allow a tenant to find a suitable substitute without having to pay an additional fee. In contrast with standard tenancy agreements,[91] which commonly switch to a month-by-month agreement after the duration of the original tenancy agreement has been met, The Collective ask that residents who wish to extend their time beyond their original membership term agree to a minimum of 3 months more. As with any contract, rules relating to safety and maintenance are laid out to ensure residents act appropriately but, in the case of The Collective, this is backed up by CCTV cameras in communal spaces and occasionally roaming security guards, which generate the feeling of being monitored and subject to control. The membership terms as evidenced by the contract, mark out the arrangement as a costly club rather than a home, reducing the resident's rights to the space and creating opportunities through which The Collective may collect additional fees from their members. These factors are all barriers to the residents' ability to feel at home and therefore invest in the space or its community.

The Gated Effect

Drawing upon the features of The Collective's branding, design and contract that I have discussed, I argue that we can consider this housing complex a form of gated community. Whilst the more established forms of co-living I mentioned in the introduction enable their communities to take ownership of their homes and feel a sense of belonging, The Collective reduce the rights and involvement of their residents and make inhabiting the space over a significant length of time difficult. Rather than contributing to making and maintaining a home that they want to live in, residents are expected to slot into an overly determined situation managed by a corporate landlord, a situation that cannot adapt over time as people age and their lives change. Instead of a solution to the housing crisis and urban loneliness, The Collective offer no extra security or affordability and their claims to be helping foster community are tenuous as they rely on the individual feeling comfortable enough to engage, get involved, and approach others — not easy for everyone in a building shared by potentially more than 705 people.

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[91] The most common tenancy agreement used in the UK is an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST).

In *Dispossession: The Performance in the Political*, Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou discuss a process of 'dispossession' as involving the undoing of the unitary subject and its associated power through letting oneself become dispossessed. In doing so, they argue that 'one is moved to the other and by the other — exposed to and affected by the other's vulnerability' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 1). Through this form of dispossession, we are moved by both what is outside of us as well as the 'outside' that resides *within* us. Butler and Athanasiou extend such subjectivity to the fantasy of the 'good life': a 'life defined, for instance, by property ownership, commodity fetishism, consumer excitement, securitarian regimes, national belonging, bourgeois self-fashioning and biopolitical normalcy' (ibid, p.30): a fantasy that The Collective have reconfigured into a new form of housing: of living as service. The form of subjectivity that The Collective create is narrow and prescribed: human life — both individual and collective — becomes capital. Individuals are put in their place; they are prompted to identity with a particular lifestyle as dictated by those tasked with branding and designing these developments. This demarcates, once again, not only those inside and those outside, but the subjects' thinking and ways of seeing.

The precarity of renting in the private market has been capitalised on by The Collective who sell a solution to the individual customer as something luxurious and fashionable. Whilst preaching freedom and community, The Collective's policed and prescribed spaces serve to limit and mould how their members live their daily lives and form social relations. The short stays (and even long stays, which may only be 6-12 months) and lack of commitment they instil further limits an individual's ability to engage with a community of any sort, restricting the motivation to invest in the area or the people residing there. This reinforces the idea that this assortment of digital nomads, international students and young professionals seek out likeminded people who live similar lifestyles to themselves in order to make a geographical context shift as smooth as possible, ensuring that they will be surrounded by people like them and therefore a community they can easily plug in and out of. It is a community of sameness curated by a corporate landlord, framed by an architecture of convenience and aesthetic of exclusion and perpetual newness. In buying into this model, and the model of community-as-product, residents accept barriers that shape how they might invest in, and inhabit, a locality and community.

3.3. The Ungating: Focus E15

I now discuss an example of *ungating*: the Focus E15[92] campaign. I argue that the group's activities have demonstrated various strategies of ungating: tactics of occupation and community-building that we can learn from, replicate, repeat. Unlike the solution to the housing crisis[93] sold by The Collective, the Focus E15 campaign demonstrates methods through which we can fight towards better, more just and inclusive forms of living. In order to make this argument, I focus predominantly on one of their activities: the 2014 occupation of the Carpenter's Estate. Focus E15 are an activist and community group who work towards tackling the housing crisis in ways that are a world apart from The Collective's profit-driven motives and curated community vision. I have selected this example not to demonstrate an alternative model of co-housing (although genuine social housing would be an alternative I would, like Focus E15, argue for) but because there are aspects of both the hostel accommodation that this campaign launched in response to, and the co-living agenda of The Collective, that bear resemblance to each other. They feature characteristics that mirror one another but sit at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of need for, and access to, housing. These similarities include the temporary nature of the dwelling (The Collective's residents through choice and economic privilege, and the Focus E15 hostel's residents through having no home, no other option, and being *placed* there), and the micro-sized rooms which are again a case of choice versus no choice. In both cases we see very different methods of community being constructed and deconstructed by the providers of the housing.

Several overviews and histories of the Focus E15 campaign have already been written (McCarthy 2020; Sendra & Fitzpatrick, 2020). Established in 2013, the Focus E15 campaign was born out of a group of twenty-nine young, single mothers — all under 25 at the time and many of them teenagers — who had been temporarily housed in the Focus E15 Foyer:[94] a 210-bed hostel that provided temporary shelter

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[92] Originally called Focus E15 Mothers but later renamed to reflect their widening agenda.

[93] Although I use the term housing crisis, I should point out that I perceive this crisis as an integral part of capitalism and something that is present throughout its history, rather than simply the current state of order.

[94] A foyer is a French concept and developed throughout the UK in the 1990s. Foyers are hostels for young people that seek to address the relationship between youth unemployment and homelessness through offering

to young and homeless residents. At the time, each of them was paying £125 per week (and using housing benefit to do so) for a small flat within the mother and baby unit. The women had been housed there temporarily whilst the council was supposed to help find them permanent accommodation. An eviction notice was served to them in 2013 after Newham Council decided to reduce the funding of the 16 young parents' units by £41,000, leading East Thames Housing Association to withdraw their support for the women (Butler, 2013). In its place, the women were offered private rental accommodation outside of London in locations such as Hastings and Manchester, where they had no support network or desire to go. They were told that if they refused to move into this housing, they would be deemed intentionally homeless and evicted with no support and nowhere to go.

Since moving into the hostel, the women had experienced feelings of isolation and were encouraged not to talk to their neighbours by both the management and the unsociable design of the building which offered no communal spaces and only long, narrow and unwelcoming door-lined corridors leading to their small apartments. They were told that 'everyone has been put here for a reason — so keep to yourself' (Macready, 2015). The one-bedroom flats were essentially small rooms, and even several-children families were forced to live in cramped spaces for many years despite being promised re-housing within six months. Despite their lack of contact with each other prior to the eviction notice, they were propelled to get together and devise a plan for fighting and resisting the upcoming eviction. Descending on the streets of Stratford to stage a small protest, they had a chance encounter with a group of women from the Revolutionary Communist Group who were running a stall against bedroom tax. This experienced campaign group assisted the mothers in developing confidence and devising a plan of action despite the fact that practices of activism were new to them. Following the initial circulation of a petition, the mothers instigated a series of direct actions including occupying the council's offices and attending events that the council had organised.

For the purpose of this study and delving deeper into some of the strategies they implemented, I concentrate on Focus E15's occupation of the Carpenters Estate

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accommodation alongside support such as developing life skills and offering work placements. For more information see: https://www.foyer.net/about-foyers

and argue that their presence in a space that was considered obsolescent and awaiting destruction performed a temporary ownership of the property, opening up a porous boundary that enabled new and unexpected social relations between diverse parties. I first give an overview of the estate and the occupation before detailing the effectiveness of these tactics and how they functioned as an act of ungating.

The Carpenters Estate comprises of three residential tower blocks and a number of low-rise flats and houses built in the 1960s. It is located in Stratford in close proximity to the ex-Focus E15 hostel and the Olympic Park. The estate currently has over 400 council homes sitting empty,[95] which has been the case for over a decade since before the 2012 Olympic Games, when a plan was put in place to redevelop it (Corcillo, 2021). The emptying began in 2004 when the council declared that the homes were not fit for habitation and consequently decided it was too expensive to refurbish them. As with London City Island, which I discussed in my introduction, I am familiar with this estate through the proximity of my now-studio (artists once again being intricately linked to processes of redevelopment), which is on the edge of the estate, looking onto it and in a building that is also caught within a drawn-out moment of awaiting its demolition. A couple of minutes' walk from the Olympic Park's Aquatics Centre, and overlooking Anish Kapoor's ArcelorMittal Orbit, these aging and neglected buildings stand out against the shiny legacy and architecture of the Olympics.

On September 21st, 2014 — coinciding with London's Open House Weekend[96] — Focus E15 occupied a number of flats in one of the disused blocks, Doran House, on the estate. The backbone of the occupation was the communication and labour of relationship building that took place in the run up to it as well as during the two weeks. In advance of moving into the space, Focus E15 worked with residents of the estate and got them involved, creating a situation in which they were not *invading* the building but rather *joining* it. On the 21st, a 'Family Fun Day' was held outside the estate, having been advertised on social media alongside the

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[95] As of February 2021. For more information see: https://focuse15.org/2021/02/09/move-families-out-of-brimstone-house-now/

[96] Open House Weekend is an annual event that sees buildings that are not usually accessible o the public being opened up for tours.

information that this Fun Day would be followed by a 'secret housing action at a secret location', the secrecy enabling them to avoid police intervention. A few hours later, with around 100 people in the courtyard, the metal grating from one of the empty flats was pulled back to the sound of cheers, revealing some of the mothers inside (Gillespie, Hardy and Watt, 2018). The occupation proceeded to take place over a two-week period with the group joined by the public and other activist groups to make a call for social housing, not social cleansing. The mothers and estate residents cleaned up the flats and put in some furniture, instantly transforming them into spaces that were liveable despite the council's claims of being unfit for purpose. One flat, which was in particularly good condition, became – through a humorous yet poignant act of mimicry and irony – the 'Show Home', with a sign placed outside reading 'Council Flats Available: Enquire Here' (Gillespie, Hardy & Watt, 2018). Banners proclaiming 'These People Need Homes' and 'These Homes Need People' were hung. Newham council tried various tactics to get the occupiers out including destroying water pipes that run into the building.[97] After two weeks, they reached a settlement with Focus E15, agreeing to house 40 families and individuals temporarily within the estate (Wales, 2014). Whilst this is obviously not a long-term solution to the situation in E15 and the Carpenters Estate,[98] the success of the occupation has manifested in various ways that I will now outline.

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[97] Though this only propelled members of the public to deliver water to the occupiers in support.

[98] In 2016, Newham Council bought the Focus E15 hostel which is now Brimstone House and continues to operate as temporary and poor-quality housing for those in need. In terms of the Carpenter's Estate, the Mayor of Newham announced in 2018 that plans to enlist a developer to lead the redevelopment had been shelved and promised that the redevelopment would be led by residents and include a minimum of 50 per cent affordable homes.

Figure 15. Members of Focus E15 during the two-week occupation of the Carpenters Estate in 2014. The last ones standing by Liam Barrinton-Bush, licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0. Retrieved from: https://www.flickr.com/photos/56937025@N08/15467974831

Firstly, I detail the strategies this occupation employed that I argue contributed to a successful act of ungating: the fluidity, the factor of nuisance, which generated attention and aggravated Newham council; the work of communication and community-fostering; and the double-edged physical and symbolic nature of it. Firstly, the fluidity. Not simply reducible to the category of 'activism', the occupation was a collective experience that featured creative and critical contributions from a wide array of people from different backgrounds: art, music, comedy, cooking and cleaning alongside political protest and discussion. Ideas and possible political futures were explored and performed, tactics were enacted and proposed, and networks of solidarity were established. The multifaceted nature of the social-centre-as-occupation enabled participants and residents to play out various political possibilities for the real world (Gillespie, Hardy & Watt, 2018). The fluid and improvised nature of it — shaped sporadically by those who showed up, supported and participated — fostered the kind of unpredictable encounters that continue to be restricted by neoliberal agendas and the curation of desirable communities through property developments and their lifestyle curators. It was a community centre that

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people could drop in and out of and play an active role in shaping and maintaining, rather than a pre-determined and inflexible pace.

Secondly, the performance of nuisance. In her article *Focus E15: performing nuisance as a feminist narrative of property*, Lynne McCarthy details how Focus E15 used their voices — and in this case also the occupation of space — as a 'feminist strategy of resistance', citing property scholar Carol M. Rose's (1994) claims that 'any legal claims to property are performative, as the act of ownership has to be witnessed in the public sphere' (McCarthy, 2020, p. 21). She argues that the group used the voice-as-nuisance as a feminist strategy of resisting the property regime they found themselves victim to, and I perceive this practice of 'nuisance' as extending into the occupation and the events it hosted. It is through this nuisance being directed at Newham Council — and the visibility of it on the street and in the press — that the group was able to enter into dialogue with them.

Thirdly, the work of communication and community-building. This two-week occupation and the following trajectory of Focus E15 encapsulates Mohanty's claims that community is the product of struggle. Through a shared struggle for housing, disparate communities were united by their common differences (Mohanty, 2003a). Mohanty suggests that it is women who lead place-based civic activism and that these localised actions and experiences do connect to wider, global struggles (ibid, p. 515). This is evidenced by the wide and international interest in the group, and how far their story has been shared. Behind this however was a great deal of work on fostering relationships between their group and the residents of the estate: it did not happen without work. These relationships have been continually nurtured and continue to develop today. The estate residents were highly supportive, many joining the occupation at various points. As well as local and estate-based residents, visitors travelled from all over London and included *ex*-residents of the estate, campaigners from other groups, and journalists who covered the occupation.

Focus E15 attracted (and continues to attract) a huge amount of press coverage including print, radio and TV, with the women making the front page of The Guardian's online version during the occupation as well as a feature on Channel 4 News. The Carpenter's Estate occupation gained a huge amount of traction and had an expansive reach which has enabled them to open up the conversation, raise

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awareness and have a greater impact. Members of Focus E15 have been invited to speak at events nationally and internationally and the group continues to operate, expand and evolve, with a weekly stall on Saturdays in Stratford. Two plays have been inspired by them and performed across the UK,[99] again indicating how expansive the campaign's reach is in critical and creative terms. Gillespie, Hardy and Watt have described this as 'an Olympic 'counter-legacy' that exists in opposition to the legacy of the 2012 Games', and Focus E15's counter-legacy as 'one of renewed power and agency amongst low-income inhabitants of austerity London' (2018, p. 827).

Lastly is the simultaneously symbolic and physical nature of the occupation. Speaking about Occupy London, Doreen Massey stated that what they did was create a new kind of space (Massey, 2013); this is what I see as being achieved and utilised by the Carpenter's Estate occupation. They found the cracks and openings within this closed off — and literally boarded up — space. The structure they entered and temporarily held was not only the physical architecture of this estate, but the wider political reality of austerity and a lack of affordable and secure housing. This symbolic act was something that resonated with many who are facing similar precarious housing conditions; and the activities that unfolded over the two-week period *held* this new and porous space.

Areas of Concern

Whilst perhaps different from the other projects that I discuss in this thesis — due to it not being initiated by a group of artists — Focus E15 has attracted attention from the art, culture and academic worlds: inspiring two theatre productions, as discussed above; bringing many academics in to join the occupation and write about their activities (as I am doing now); and contributing to programmes run by art galleries including the exhibition 'A Public Resource', curated by Louise Shelley, at Cubitt Gallery, and a discussion at Chisenhale Gallery. Whilst this is no small or negative feat, I raise it in line with the concerns expressed around the Dwellbeing project in Chapter Two: the tendency of artists and academics to accrue cultural

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[99] The plays were 'E15', which was developed by the FYSA Theatre Company; and 'Land of the Three Towers', directed and written by Nina Scott and Emer Morris.

capital from such endeavours and thus the non-artist/academic subject becoming exploited. At the same time, such activity can no doubt bring visibility to campaigns and has, in this case, contributed to the ongoing nature of the activities organised by, and attention garnered by, Focus E15.

3.4. Conclusion

In bringing together the case of The Collective — as an example of a gated community masquerading as a solution to the housing crisis — and the Focus E15 campaign as an example of ungating, my aim was to highlight how the 'monetised community' is an unachievable illusion that fails to foster any of the solidarity, belonging or inclusive and diverse social relations that are required to establish actual community. Through acts of branding, design and a membership structure, The Collective attempt to construct a closed-off space that shapes the subjectivity of its inhabitants. The management enacted by a corporate landlord serves to take rights away from the inhabitant and foster a culture of moving-on and a non-committal approach to community that is fuelled by a reality of precarious work and housing options but is accessible only to the economically privileged.

In contrast, the Focus E15 hostel was a space for those also affected by precarious work and housing but who did not have the economic stability to make a *choice* around where and how they lived within this political context. This hostel was far from acceptable accommodation, but the other option afforded to the women was homelessness. Through the shared experience of being served an eviction notice, they were united as neighbours not through the isolating architectures put in place by their landlord but through their collective struggle for justice and safety. Safety, in this case, is the opposite of The Collective's security guards and key fobs: it is the fight to ungate housing that has been closed off by damaging political tactics of urban regeneration and social cleansing. By occupying the Carpenter's Estate and appropriating it as a social centre, Focus E15 fostered community in a manner that went beyond — but included — the constructs of the building and immediate locality. The success of this occupation rested not only on the symbolic and physical act of *taking* this space, but on the immense work that was done in communicating with, listening to, and working with the estate's residents and wider communities

throughout the city. This is work that takes time and results in relationships that cannot be purchased as a commodity. Community is not a product nor a service.

Chapter 4: Gated Communities for 'Expats' in China: 'A Family Paradise in Beijing'.

Arriving in Beijing in 2011 I was collected from the airport and driven to a small supermarket. In the supermarket – 'Jennie Lou's' – an array of international exports was for sale. Cheese, Pop-Tarts, Kraft mac-and-cheese in a box, Marmite, Parma ham, wine: expensive products that catered predominantly to European and American tastes. Disappointed that the shop had the same offerings as most supermarkets back home, my guide proceeded to buy me 'essentials' to get me through the next morning: eggs, milk, bread, butter, juice, muesli. I got back into the car and was driven thirty seconds further to my accommodation. I arrived in a large, sparsely furnished live/work unit in a warehouse space on a quiet lane lined with artists' studios. It was situated in an 'urban village' – *Feijiacun* (费家村) - in the Shunyi district of the North Easterly side of Beijing, outside of the fifth ring road and a short drive to the airport. Upon arrival I walked down into the core of the village to start exploring. The paths were dusty, uneven and narrow. Houses and buildings were small and irregular whilst restaurants and shops selling vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, clothes and household goods lined the central area, creating a buzz of activity. People of all ages gathered in the streets to chat, eat, play and drink tea despite the cold weather. Sheets and clothes were hung out to dry and some of those without bathrooms in their homes washed themselves or their clothes in the street and visited the public toilets, whilst others cooked with woks on small hotplates: the domestic space spilling out into the street. The village was the home not only of the indigenous villagers, but many migrant workers and students in need of cheap housing (and to whom the villagers earned a living through renting to), as well as artists who had established an 'art village' on its outer edge due to the availability of cheap industrial units that were suitable as studios. Due to the existence of a residency programme in this 'art village' — the programme which I was participating in[100] — the local residents were accustomed to an ongoing trickle of international

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[100] This was the Red Gate Residency, which is a long standing programme that has been run by the Red Gate Gallery. Red Gate Gallery was founded in 1991 by Australian Brian Wallace who moved to China in 1984. The residency programme was established in 2001 and each year they host over 70 artists from across the world. For many years they had residency studios in Feijiacun village. More information available at: http://www.redgategallery.com/residency/resources

artists wandering curiously around their neighbourhood.

Venturing beyond the entrance to *Feijiacun*, I soon arrived again at Jenny Lou's. Following my exploration of the urban village, it felt even more out of place. The expensive, packaged imported food and drink products stood in stark contrast with the fresh produce on sale in *Feijiacun*'s shops and market: live chickens and seafood, and farmers who had brought in piles of colourful sweet potatoes, corn and other fruits and vegetables by bikes with trailers. I explored the building that Jenny Lou's was situated in, finding a Hong Kong diner, a French café, a hairdresser and beauty parlour with signs in English, and an Italian restaurant. It was upon crossing the road and finding the patrolled entrance to a gated complex of houses – 'Beijing Riviera' - that I realised this small complex was largely catering to a community of international professionals, or *expats* as we might call them, who resided in this gated community. I could just about catch a glimpse of its villas beyond the top of the walls and the security guard at the entrance stopping me from going any further, but I would later meet residents from the compound and find my way in to explore.

Whilst residing in Feijiacun for this two-month residency, I decided to find a job and extend my stay in Beijing. I found accommodation in another nearby urban village and continued my exploration of this area of the city — particularly Feijiacun and Beijing Riviera — over a period of 14 months. Throughout this chapter, I will draw upon this time spent living and working in Beijing in 2011-2012 as well as three other two–three-month stints living there, and a research trip to the Pearl River Delta Region cities of Guangzhou and Shenzhen in 2019, where I viewed an assortment of similar housing developments and met with estate agents and local residents (predominantly artists, architects and academics) to discuss the cities' redevelopment. The housing I viewed in Guangzhou and Shenzhen either resembled the gated compound model of Beijing Riviera or took the form of serviced apartments that more closely resembled a hotel. For the purpose of this study, I have focused on Beijing Riviera and its proximity with *Feijiacun* village.

My discussion is framed by the relationships between those I define as 'expat', 'migrant' and 'artist'; and how they are positioned within this area. I refer to the residents of Beijing Riviera as 'expats' (short for expatriates) as it is a word that is usually used in association with a certain level of class, wealth, privilege and

education. We might even say that the term expat typically signifies *whiteness* due to the way it is applied to select groups living in countries that are not their birth country (Leonard, 2010). It is used differently from terms such as foreign worker, immigrant and migrant: the 'expat' suggests a mobile existence facilitated by education, status and career, and, importantly, making the *choice* to relocate rather than doing so out of necessity due to factors such as war. This is how many residents of Beijing Riviera that I met referred to themselves, and it is a term that I feel is well-applied to the community there given their professional, high-salaried careers. In contrast, the 'migrants' living in *Feijiacun* were largely workers from other, rural, parts of China, looking to earn a better living and have money to send home or, if their family have travelled with them to Beijing, to support their lives there. Lastly, the 'artist' was situated in 'art village' on the outer edges of *Feijiacun*; part of the village but demarcated in terms of the larger live/workspaces they are able to occupy. This included both artists participating in the Red Gate Residency — as I was in 2011 — and Chinese artists who lived and worked there long-term due to the large industrial spaces that were available. The artist in this chapter is less directly embedded within the forms of gating that I outline but can be seen as an intermediary between the migrant and the expats: the migrant workers way of life in the village becoming a site of curiosity, inspiration and subject matter for many international artists; whilst cultural events such as exhibition openings and open studios often brining a few members of the expat community to the village.

4.1. The Role and History of the Gated Community in China

Since the economic reforms of 1978, there has been a huge and ongoing spatial, social and economic restructuring that has rapidly transformed Chinese cities. A major feature of China's urbanisation has been the globalisation of capital and the spread of transnational corporations due to improved transportation and communication. As well as the new urban spaces of high-tech, financial and central business districts; expansive shopping malls, high-end restaurants and luxury hotels; and spacious contemporary art galleries; the post-1978 shifts in regulation and regime have created new housing topologies. Before outlining two of these, as I have introduced: the 'urban village' (*chengzhongcun*) and the expat's compound, I will first briefly elaborate on the role of the gated community in China in historical and present-day terms. Whilst the gated communities for expats I will examine

attempt to recreate an exclusive and luxurious Western lifestyle that enables an easy geographical transition for their residents, gated communities in China are not exclusive to an elite socioeconomic class.

Gated communities exist in different forms and have evolved throughout China's history, tying into traditional Chinese spatial patterns. Walled cities and walled-off palaces were constructed in ancient China whilst ordinary city dwellers lived in enclosed courtyard housing. Following the Chinese Revolution in 1949 — Mao Zedong proclaiming the country the 'People's Republic of China' and the implementation of Communism — enclosed work-units (*danwei*) were developed. Work-units organised workers into social units that revolved around a workplace, whether that was a factory, a government office or a school (Huang, 2004). The *danwei* often provided workers with everything they needed including housing, childcare, healthcare and schools (this is particularly true of state-owned work units who were closer to the administrative hierarchy) and thus residents had little need to leave the compound. Each work organisation was a unit in a larger system controlled by the state, and this enabled the 'socialist tradition of governance' (Tomba, 2010). Since 1978, this system has been largely phased out but aspects of its social, spatial and economic functions and forms remain and play a role in shaping newer housing topologies. It is important to pay attention to this history – and the huge changes that began to take place post-1978 - in order to understand China's urban growth and redevelopment, and the ongoing role of gated communities.

4.2. Defining Urban Redevelopment in China.

In the context of China, terms such as 'neoliberalism' and 'gentrification', which appear at various points throughout this thesis, cannot comfortably be applied or explain the processes at work. Whilst some have theorised China's development as a shift towards a 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' (Harvey, 2007a), others (Ma & Wu, 2005) provide a more complex analysis that pays greater attention to China's political history and governance. Will Buckingham argues that most of the scholarship within China studies has either ignored neoliberalism altogether or simplistically reduced China's urban redevelopment to a product of a shift towards the primacy of the market as the 'ultimate arbiter of socio-political

conflict with private property rights as an ultimate social good' (Buckingham, 2017, p. 298). He goes on to explain that within China the 'market arguably remains subjugated to the priorities of the central and local state and all land is legally owned either by the state or rural collectives (while remaining effectively under the control of the Chinese Communist Party)' (ibid, pp. 298-299). David Harvey (2007a) – who coined the term 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' - argues that neoliberalism is a global ideology that has extended its reach across the world and infiltrated, if not fully taken over, China. Given Harvey's reach and influence, this phrase has been utilised widely when discussing China's urban redevelopment (Tang, 2021). Buckingham argues that whilst there are superficial similarities between what is happening in China and neoliberal Western countries, this theorisation misses the fact that China is subject to very different political, cultural and social dynamics that cannot be captured by the simple explanation of neoliberalism. Whilst economic elites may benefit from privatisation within China, they do not have as much independence from the state to 'truly be considered part of a transnational business class that pays no heed to the reference of international borders' (Buckingham, 2017, p. 300). He asserts that China continues to operate via a combination of 'market logic *and* state authority logic' (ibid, p. 305).

In line with Buckingham's argument, and regarding related claims of a shift towards becoming-Western, I agree with Ma and Wu that the transformation of Chinese cities is not simply a linear and effortless shift, as this Western perspective ignores the complexity of what is happening in the specific context, instead focusing on a very narrow selection of urban spaces (Ma & Wu, 2005, p.11). This outlook would further suggest that all Western cities exemplify a generic and simplistic model that can be replicated and to which Eastern cities converge. This is the argument of globalisation-as-homogenisation that Massey has argued against (Massey, 1991a), and I would likewise argue that there is a two-way relationship between the local and global. Ma and Wu call for an approach to understanding cities that involves analysing 'the impacts of and the relationship between global/general processes of urban development' and 'locally produced processes at the national, subnational and city levels embedded in local political, social, economic, cultural, historical and institutional systems and structures' (Ma & Wu, 2005, p. 11-12). They further theorise China's urbanisation through the concept of 'transitional cities', defining transitional as 'the process of change from one condition or a set of circumstances

to another without implying "convergence" or "switching" towards a preconceived and well-defined model' (Ma & Wu, 2005, p. 260). They stress the difference between this and a 'transitional economy' which typically refers to the shift from a socialist economy to a capitalist economy. In other words, the changes China has gone through in tandem with processes of globalisation are generated internally as well as externally. Ma and Wu summarise, claiming that 'the restructuring of the Chinese city is a local process that exploits and constitutes 'global processes' (ibid, p. 276). China's complex history cannot be ignored when theorising around recent developments in urban space and housing.

Regarding the 'gentrification' question, Hyung Bang Shin has given one of the most accurate explanations, arguing that in China, dispossession (Harvey 2003, 2007a) importantly precedes a process that bears some resemblance to 'gentrification' in that it enables the commodification of land and housing (Shin, H. B., 2016). This dispossession, according to Shin (2016), relies on coercion and co-optation and is intimately linked with China's socialist legacy. Whilst this results in a similar effect to gentrification as it plays out in the West – the displacement of existing communities and a form of social cleansing – the process by which it happens is quite different. This displacement, they analyse, is largely being enacted through the demolition of urban villages to make way for newer housing.

4.3. From 'Migrant's Enclave' to 'Exclusive Expat Compound'

Bearing in mind the issues of theorising and definition as described above, I do not propose a simplistic understanding of the expat's gated community as an exact replication of a Western gated community. I discuss Beijing Riviera in relation to its close proximity with the urban village of *Feijiacun* — the extreme differences between the two — and the process of redevelopment *Feijiacun* has undergone since I first visited. My study of these developments draws upon my experience of viewing and spending time living near such compounds; observations made during these times; my conversations with expats residing in Beijing Riviera during my time living in the city as well as artists living in *Feijiacun;*[101] listings and promotional

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[101] Unfortunately, this aspect of my research was limited by language as I do not speak Mandarin and most of the migrant workers living in *Feijiacun* that I encountered did not speak English.

materials relating to gated expat communities; and the literature that has been written on the subject in the past two decades. I outline the 'migrant's enclave' in comparison the exclusive expat's compound, detailing differences and divisions that will shape my examination of the gating performed. Despite the difference in nationalities between residents of *Feijiacun* and Beijing Riviera, the language and classification that is used to describe those who relocate is a political tool with effect and a means of dehumanising or excluding 'others', as will be elaborated on below in my discussion of gating. It is an exclusionary understanding of the term expat that I am implementing for the purpose of this study as it illustrates the defined and privileged status of the Beijing Riviera community – despite their position as foreigners — in contrast with the Chinese residents of *Feijiacun*.

Ma and Wu provide a comprehensive overview of the transformations that have taken place since 1978, detailing eight institutional shifts. The changes that are most important to this study are the 'shift from public (state and collective) ownership of land, and its free use, towards paid land use right with negotiated land use price based largely on location (thus the return of rent gap)' and the 'shift from virtually free provision of largely work-unit housing to commodified housing production' (2005, p. 4). These transformations have created 'spaces of differentiation and marginalisation exemplified by the emergence of exclusive gated communities and dilapidated migrant enclaves' (ibid, p.7). Smart and Tang have described these migrant enclaves — the 'urban villages' such as *Feijiacun* — as spaces of illegality and irregularity where the demand for cheap housing has encouraged the widespread building of 'irregular housing' that is rented to migrant workers in search of cheap housing by the urban villagers (Smart & Tang, 2005). Urban villages tend to be subject to overcrowding which is fuelled by the *hukou* system that defines a person's status and access to welfare benefits as well as children's education and employment without restrictions (Zhang, 2004). *Hukou* based on an individual's birthplace, which is their place of registration. While one can temporarily register within a city that is not one's birthplace, it is less common that one can obtain permanent *hukou* in such a place. For this reason, migrant workers cannot access public housing and nor are they typically able to buy commodity housing — due to its cost — despite an urban registration no longer being needed to do so (Huang, 2004; Ma & Wu, 2005). Thus, migrant workers struggle to find affordable housing and urban villages became one of the only

options.

Figure 16. Feijiacun Village in 2011.

Since the reforms, urban villages have largely been tolerated by the government. However, in the past decade, there has been a shift towards a strategy of redevelopment that begins with the demolition of urban villages. The collectively owned land is being compulsorily turned over to the state and people who are subject to eviction — except those residing in buildings deemed illegal — are compensated either financially, or with a new and better-quality apartment (Zhang, 2004). As relates to a common thread throughout this thesis, 'subsidised public housing in China is being privatised through massive sell-off, new private housing provided by property developers ('commodity housing' or *shang ping fang*)' (Huang, 2004, p. 192). This had led to a reorganisation of housing, with households organised socially, economically and spatially and prompting huge issues of stratification and segregation that are framed by both socialist institutions and market mechanisms (ibid).

Beijing Riviera is in no way a unique situation in China and many similar compounds can be found within major Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou (Wu & Webber, 2004). There has been an increasing number of international professionals entering China since they opened their economy to the world, foreign investment increased and branches of multinational companies opened; gated communities, such as Beijing Riviera (or 'foreign housing' as it is often described in China), now qualified as the most thoroughly commodified form of housing. The government remains positive about the contributions of international professionals and the building of gated communities is seen as an attractive prospect for drawing such workers in as well as attracting foreign investment. The possibility of such housing was facilitated through the wider commodification of housing that has occurred as well as the land-leasing system which means it can adopt full market-form rather than being obtained through 'administrative allocation, through which a payment must be paid to the municipal and administration bureau' (Fulong & Wu, 2004, p. 206).

In contrast with the pristine and manicured landscape of Beijing Riviera, *Feijiacun* is a dusty labyrinth of irregular housing and makeshift local businesses. Unlike the defined nature of the shops and restaurants in the plaza housing Jenny Lou's, the shops in *Feijiacun* often doubled as the business owner's house or offer multiple products and services from one space. A house might also be a multi-faceted business[102] that operates day and night, blurring the line between work and leisure. In the expat's compound, it is clearly marked out as an area of retreat and leisure-time: homes have multiple and clearly defined rooms and facilities provide areas for specific leisure activities. In *Feijiacun*, the boundaries are flexible in both the home, the workplace and the street: the outdoors a multi-functional space for work (the selling of goods and produce), leisure (eating and playing chess [*Xiangqi*] or cards); and social reproduction (washing and drying clothes, bathing and repairing bikes and household items). Restaurants often contain back rooms where staff live, and children can be seen doing homework at tables. The urban village as a whole is enclosed through its functioning and appearance — and how this is positioned

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[102] To give an example, I once visited a clothing repairs business that transformed into a shop selling sex toys in the evening, as well as housing the elderly couple whose business it was.

within the surrounding area and wider urban landscape — but within the village itself, spaces are ungated, porous and malleable. I do not highlight this to suggest that the overcrowded and often rundown housing is preferable to the luxurious offerings of Beijing Riviera, but to illustrate the extreme difference present between the two.

There appeared to be little relationship between *Feijiacun* and Beijing Riviera, though if there was an occasional meeting of the two worlds, it was typically prompted by the artists and arts organisations that had moved into the outer Northernly part of *Feijiacun*. Typically of a higher socioeconomic status than the migrant workers and long-term villagers, the artists rented cavernous studio spaces that bared little resemblance to the living conditions of most villagers, nor that of the expats. I occasionally met residents of Beijing Riviera at events held by both the residency and another gallery situated there: cultural activity being a reason for those interested and in the know to venture into the outskirts of the village. The artists existed somewhere in between the two disparate worlds: they functioned as a mediator that occasionally prompted the two sides to edge closer together. The artist — as echoed in each chapter of this thesis — occupied an ambiguous position in relation to processes of urban segregation and redevelopment.

4.4. The Gating of the Community

I now outline the acts of gating that Beijing Riviera enacts and argue that it can be considered a gated community whose gates extend beyond its physical borders. In examining this expat's community, I have discussed it as a point where both global and local forces can be seen explicitly. As well as physical gates, walls, CCTV, security key cards and roaming security guards — and the high prices that render the properties inaccessible to anyone other than international professionals and elite Chinese — there are a number of other structures in place that construct both real and affective gates. The conditions I have outlined are the 'architecture of elsewhere', and the relatively short-term nature of many expats' stay in China.

One additional form of gating that I would like to mention, is that of internet access. Whilst I was unable to access information about the WiFi on offer at Beijing Riviera, upon visiting several compounds for expats in Guangzhou in 2019, I was reassured

in each one that they had a special deal with Hong Kong that enabled the properties to access unrestricted internet, i.e. minus the firewall that prevents Chinese residents from accessing websites such as Google, Facebook and YouTube and many international news outlets. Immediately setting up a hierarchy of access to information, this caters to expats and the inconvenience to them of an unfamiliar internet landscape. Whilst VPNs can of course be used in China, they are regularly found and blocked leaving a slow and unstable connection that prevents a lot of web-based activity. This serves to provide a familiar online experience without the inconvenience of being unable to access websites one is used to using for work, keeping up on world news, keeping in touch with friends and family, and entertainment. Greater internet accessibility acts to extend the gates of the compound further, into the digital realm.

a. An Architecture of Elsewhere

I will discuss the architecture of 'elsewhere' in three ways: Firstly, the physical architecture of the complex which features European-style villas. Secondly, the range of amenities offered within the compound. And thirdly, the proximity of the compound to Beijing's airport. Beijing Riviera is the oldest villa compound in the city, having opened in 1996, and is widely regarded as one of the best. Developed by Hong Leong Holdings Limited (HLHL) — a Singaporean real estate developer — it was built on farmland in an area that previously had no shops or schools nearby. HLHL, however, took a risk and had faith in the city's growing economy. In 1993 '20% of all hotels were occupied by long term residents and the number of expatriates moving to Beijing was growing in volume and length of stay' (Hong Leong Holdings, n.d.). Expats had little option but to stay in hotels or hotel-style apartments, which were expensive (Wu & Webber, 2004). This presented an opportunity for HLHL who predicted that these expats would prefer to live in longer-term and more comfortable homes that made their move easier, particularly if they were uprooting not only themselves but their family. Although the residents of Beijing Riveria that I met whilst living in the city hailed from all over the world — from the US to Japan; France to Korea — they were homogenised in terms of their socio-economic status and career.

The Built Environment

Self-described as a 'family paradise in Beijing' (Beijing Riviera, n.d.), Beijing Riviera caters to a demand for lower density housing with green space and higher standards than typical Chinese housing, and suitable for car ownership (Wu, 2004). The compound covers 1.5 million square meters and contains 447 European style villas of different sizes and two three-storey blocks containing 124 apartments and 64 larger townhouses. The homes come fully or partially furnished and each villa has its own garden. Promotional materials and listings of available properties via various estate agents describe the compound as 'an expat-friendly community with wide outdoor space', suitable for families with children as well as dogs (ibid). Prices for apartments range from RMB 9100-9600 for a one bedroom, to RMB 19600 for a three bedroom. Villas are much larger and more expensive, going up to roughly RMB 75000[103] for a six bedroom (one bedroom being suggested as a room for staff) but it is also possible to purchase the property, which may appeal to those who plan to stay for a longer time, though this is not common. The HLHL newsletter features a testimonial from a long-term German resident, Hartmut Heine, who states that 'It was 1995 and we were the first Germans here. I was impressed with the Singaporean/European design' (Hong Leong Holdings, n.d.). The villas were designed in a style and feature multiple floors, spacious rooms, bedrooms with en-suites, good quality materials, car parking, and large gardens. They would not look out of place in a wealthy British suburb, but they stand in stark contrast with the architecture of the area surrounding the compound.

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[103] These figures are based on a number of searches for available properties there that I conducted throughout October 2021. The listings were hosted on various estate agent and relocation agents' websites.

Figure 17. A villa in Beijing Riviera, photographed in 2011.

The streets around the villas are wide and dotted with trees and flower beds, the winding roads and greenery bringing to mind the peaceful suburban streets families can be seen living on in American TV shows: a place that exudes safety and wholesome family life, free from the dirt and chaos of the city. The name itself, Beijing *Riviera* — riviera being the Italian word for coastline — further implies a certain sense of European luxury, though the development is nowhere near the coast. The French and Italian rivieras are popular and elite Western holiday destinations, the compound associating itself with thoughts of leisure, relaxation and beautiful scenery. From the name and walls, to the houses and furniture, everything in Beijing Riviera has been designed to suggest an *elsewhere* that is upmarket, safe and familiar, providing expats with a 'home away from home'. Fulong Wu has described this as a practice of *transplanting* cityscapes that is prompted by the idea of globalisation as 'a way of life' and creates the 'city as theme park' (2004, p. 229). It is effectively a suburb *within* a suburb, situated in a geographical suburb of the city but replicating a suburb of *elsewhere* through its design. In this way it acts to *remove* its inhabitants from the wider urban landscape rather than position them within it.

Luxury Facilities and Local Businesses

The compound features green spaces, lakes, a Country Club house, a laundry service, restaurants, a bar, a gym, sauna, a golf driving range, tennis courts, swimming pools, spas, car parking and hair salons. A management fee of $1.5 per month per square foot covers the maintenance and running of these facilities, which is a significant addition to the rent when considering the vast size of many of these properties. Events and classes bring the residents together and provide activity for leisure-time. Centring one's social life within this vast gated compound sits at odds with much sociality in China, which takes place on the streets, in public parks and plazas. Walking around Beijing, it is common to see streets filled with people playing games, eating together, dancing, doing karaoke, tai chi, or using the outdoor gyms that can be found in public parks and courtyards. As discussed above, in *Feijiacun*, public space is used for a multitude of activities that spill out of the home and workplace. In contrast, the defined leisure spaces offered by the expats' compound are based on the developer's consideration of 'lifestyle' as product. The amenities of Beijing Riviera construct an *exclusive* lifestyle that is physically inaccessible to non-residents (other than their guests who must be approved upon entry) and reduces the need for residents to leave the compound or engage with the wider surroundings. It is a highly exclusive club, or housing as a luxury product: a packaged landscape maintained to express *completion* and seclusion. This is an illusion that has been maintained throughout each chapter in this thesis, by each form of housing, in different ways.

International schools located by the compound increase the appeal for expats and include Dulwich College Beijing, the International Montessori School, the Western Academy of Beijing, and the on-site Dulwich Kindergarten. In Dulwich college, fees start at RMB 212,000 per annum for nursery level and increase by level up to RMB 320,000 per annum for Years 12-13. These fees might be paid by the parents themselves or by their employer — as another incentive for the relocation — and are seen as necessary due to language barriers. The migrants in *Feijiacun*, on the other hand, do not all have unrestricted access to public education for their children, meaning that migrant schools are often established and are unlicensed, therefore the quality of education is often considered very poor. Whilst it is not impossible for

migrants to send their children to licensed public schools, the process is made difficult and administrative obstacles may stand in the way, such as obtaining extensive documents. This can include proof of residence, a certificate from place of origin, and a work permit, and many are unable to legitimately obtain all of these. Such institutional discrimination extends to other areas of life, and many migrant workers have no social insurance, no pension, no medical insurance, and earn very low wages.

A ten-minute walk from the compound is the 'Beijing Scitech Premium Outlet Mall' which features well-known international brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Diesel, Coach, Ralph Lauren, Burberry, Lee, Michael Kors, Hugo Boss and Furla. The clothes are expensive and out of reach for residents of *Feijiacun*, which has its own offerings of clothes including many designer replicas that mimic the clothes found in the outlet mall. VisitBeijing.com describes the mall as offering 'colonial, Victorian and classical architecture — the first of its kind in Beijing' and food options include Starbucks, Subway and Baskin Robbins. Again, international food comes at a higher cost than local offerings and is generally too expensive for the migrant workers living in *Feijiacun*, at least to consume regularly. This range of businesses serves to extend the gates beyond the physical boundary of the compound, and into the surrounding area; decreasing the chances that the two communities encounter each other.

Airport Access

Whilst the construction of such developments in the outer suburbs of the city is partly due to the lower land prices that allow for the building of low-density housing (Wu, 2004), it is also, in the case of Beijing Riviera, due to the location of the airport. The promise of 'elsewhere' is reinforced when we consider the proximity of the compound to Beijing's Airport: a ten-minute drive up the Airport Expressway, which is located a minute's drive from Beijing Riviera. Listed as a selling point in the promotional material and rental listings for available properties, this is seen as an important factor in such a large city with such busy roads. With luxury property in London often detailing its proximity to airports and train stations as a key selling point, it is common amongst expats and overseas investors to desire easy access to a geographical 'somewhere else': a route out. This facilitates the global mobility they

are afforded, that the migrant workers are not.

b. A Short-Term Relocation

The factors detailed above contribute to providing an ease of transition that makes the move to China as comfortable and straightforward as possible. The process can begin prior to making the move, with relocation companies providing moving services such as shipping furniture and household items. I was informed by various estate agents I communicated with that the minimum term is one year, and the average stay, for rented accommodation, is five or six years, after which time many residents return home. The move may have been agreed on due to a salary increase or other perks such as a relocation salary for their partner,[104] or free schooling for their children in a prestigious international school. They may already have a family and a life set up in the location they are moving from, so the new life they embark upon is one marked by its relatively short-term nature. Alternatively, they are at the start of their career and have less ties put down and less responsibility in terms of children or their possible partner's career. On occasion, the expat might purchase the property, which has been possible since 2002 (*waixiao fang* means 'housing approved for foreign sale') but it is not straightforward and is uncommon due to the generally short nature of stays (Wu & Webber, 2004). Beijing Riviera (and the majority of compounds for expats that I have visited) is largely an evolving community of residents who come and go with great frequency, thus reducing the likelihood of them contributing to the wider community of the area they are living in. This reinforces language barriers, with many choosing not to learn Mandarin or being unable to due to a busy work schedule, as well as a reduced capacity to engage with the local culture.

The Gated Effect

Drawing upon the features of Beijing Riviera that I have discussed, I propose that we can consider this housing complex a form of gated community for reasons *beyond* its physical walls and gates. Gated communities for expats create pockets

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[104] For example, their partner may be paid a salary for a year, though these perks vary for each person and company.

of exclusion and attempt to reject the very essence of the city they are situated in through replicating an architecture of elsewhere. Whilst not all of the expats would have had access to such a luxurious and high-end lifestyle in their home country, their status becomes elevated in China as they carve out this exclusive space for themselves, slotting into an enclosed community that extends beyond the physical boundaries of the complex and operates through a process of othering. They embody a 'wealth-driven, growth-oriented idyll of conspicuous consumption in which individuals indulge their own celebrity/designer-styled existence in enclaves protected from those less fortunate'; the gated community becoming a 'microcosm, a metaphor for the ideology and interlocking relationships, global in extent' (Bagaeen & Uduku, 2010, p. 9).

Whilst the gates enable certain relationships and aspirations within them, they aggressively exclude the majority of the wider local community and culture, favouring the aesthetic and structure of a Western and 'global' familiarity for the purpose of the expat's convenience and comfort. This implies a toxic relationship between the global and the local, the expat's enclosure emerging as an emblem of entitlement and the commodification and financialisation of everything from the rhythms of urban space to the formation of human relationships. In his essay *Opening the Gates: An East-West Transmodern Discourse*, Ziauddin Sardar argues that the 'essence of urbanism is plurality, the coming together of diverse classes, groups and identities to create a symbiotic heterogenous community where mutual intercourse and exchange is the lifeblood of society'. Instead, they mirror the 'historic process by which the developed nations acquired their dominance and affluence' (Sardar, 2010, p. 10). Thus, we might think of the gated community for expats (and many more, but not all, versions of the gated community that have been discussed in this thesis) as the neo-imperialist colonisation of society: neo-colonialism, realised as 'empires within a city that maintain the relationship of the colonisers and the colonised, albeit in an urban setting' (ibid, p. 11).

4.5. The Ungating: HomeShop (家作坊)

I now discuss an example of *ungating* that I see as relevant to this context: the artist-run space and collective project *HomeShop* that operated in Beijing between 2008 and 2013. I argue that this group's activities enacted various strategies of

ungating: the creation of experimental economies, the effort to interrogate boundaries between public and private, and their focus on fostering dialogue and exchange between both local residents and 'art world' visitors.[105] I give an overview of their history and functioning before focusing on the public nature of their space, their approach to openness and *WaoBao!* — a series of 'swapping events that functioned as miniature experimental economies' (HomeShop, 2013). I have chosen to discuss HomeShop as it was a space that provided a meeting point for cultures and chance encounters, rather than a space of enclosure or division, as seen in the case of the relationship between Beijing Riviera and *Feijiacun*. Both examples involve a community of local Chinese residents and one of foreigners – in the case of HomeShop, this was tourists and cultural workers who had moved (either in the long or short-term) to Beijing, as well as Chinese cultural workers. I propose that HomeShop offered many amenities and facilities, much like Beijing Riviera, but in a drastically different and informal manner that provided a space for anyone who wished to visit.

A Shop with Nothing for Sale

HomeShop was established as a small artist-run space and collective that first opened in a vacant shop unit on *Xiaojingchang hutong* in Beijing. It was set up by Elaine Wing-Ah Ho in conversation with Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga and Ouyang Xiao and was founded on 'egalitarian and non-hierarchical values' (HomeShop, 2013). In November 2010 Homeshop relocated to *Jiaodaokou Beiertiao Hutong* and was run, developed and maintained by Wing-Ah, Lazaridou-Hatzigoga and Xiao with the addition of Orianna Cacchione, Michael Eddy, Twist Qu, Emi Uemura and Cici Wang. This second location was an enclosed courtyard house that had been turned into a *danwei* dormitory in 1997 but had only been occupied for a few years before lying empty since the early 2000s.

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[105] By the term 'art-world' I simply mean artists and cultural workers, and those associated with or interested in the arts.

Figure 18. Image of the front of the building at HomeShop's second location on Jiaodaokou Beiertiao. Photo by 何颖雅 Elaine W. Ho, 2010. Retrieved from http://rpwt.greenpapaya.art/2020/12/just-people-just-timing-homeshop-beijing.html.

An audio tour hosted on their website details their mission to 'think about the boundaries between public and private' (HomeShop, n.d.), which was first initiated by them demolishing a wall that stood in front of the storefront space and thus exposing the windows and door to passers-by and neighbours (Lazaridou-Hatzigoga, 2013). This opening-up of the space enabled activities that directly engaged with the public through encouraging people to enter and become intrigued by what was happening there. As a group who were committed to thinking through the economies in which they operated, the architecture of the shopfront was permeable, and informed their consideration around whether the 'affects produced around the space do not stop at the threshold', and if so, 'perhaps the project is somewhat less contained and vaguer than the political and economic self-sufficiency of a commune' (Eddy, 2013, p. 111). Much like the processes proposed by Doreen Massey that I have outlined in my introduction, HomeShop explored such boundaries in order to 'reimagine place', in a way that is 'i) not bounded, ii) not

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defined in terms of exclusivity, iii) not defined in terms of an inside and an outside and iv) not dependent on false notions of an internally generated authenticity' (Massey, 1999, p. 40).

They focused a great deal of time on the rules and administration that enabled the space to operate and be maintained (Eddy, 2013). These rules (such as opening hours, who would sweep the floor, who held keys to the space) were described by Ho as 'soft infrastructures' that indicated their 'shifting attitudes towards openness' (Ho, 2014). Another organizer, Qu Yizhen, spoke about the support they offered to each other in order to grow together as a project, and how they believed this was perhaps 'the true meaning of creating space' (Yizhen, cited in GreenPapya, 2011). Despite being framed by rules, the manner in which these were discussed and re-made by HomeShop's organisers and users as the project continued and developed prevented things being too defined, favouring a permeable boundary between HomeShop and the local community (facilitated not only by their physical architecture but by their programme of events). In an audio tour hosted on their website, one studio holder says: 'even if you can't exactly tell what HomeShop is thinking at least you can get an idea of what it is *doing'* (HomeShop, n.d.). The ambiguous nature of the space was enhanced by their rejection of a strong and consciously designed brand identity, instead letting their 'image' emerge over time in relation to the evolving context they found themselves in. HomeShop was predominantly self-funded rather than reliant on private money and sales or shaped by state interests, covering costs through renting out studio and desk space, which allowed some financial independence and a greater deal of openness regarding the way they operated.

In an introduction to their 2013 publication 'Appendix', HomeShop describe their project as never arriving 'wholesale to any singular identity', and that 'during its duration, a number of auxiliary aspects have become evident — namely, the possibility that different and additional worlds exist' (HomeShop, 2013). This realisation captures the multi-faceted functioning of the space that drew in a diverse audience for diverse purposes. Capturing a snapshot of the interactions that took place with visitors, 'Appendix' logs an archive of questions posed by visitors to the

space, including:

'What do people do here?'
'Can I come in and have a look?'
'How do you feel about the mood of Beijing now?'
'Do you love your country?'
'Is the road in your country wide?'
'Do you like China?'
'When will Chinese education change?'
'Does what you do matter to you or is it just necessary?'
'Can students and teachers be equal?'
'Do foreigners eat noodles?'

The questions indicate the range of visitors to the space – both local residents and international visitors - who brought with them different expectations and intentions. In an interview with Casco[106] for the *Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook*, HomeShop speak of the unlikely connections that were made due to their ambiguous status and appearance (HomeShop, 2014, pp. 218-222). With the appearance of a badly signposted shop, visitors were drawn in looking for something that was for sale. When informed that nothing was for sale, 'the way of approaching the space changes' and opens up another kind of interaction (ibid).

WaoBao!

WaoBao! (roughly translating as 'wow bag!') was a series of swapping events as experimental economies where people could bring along items they wanted rid of and swap them for new treasures that others were casting off. HomeShop state that 'each edition attempted to improve on its exchange system to explore the functional limits of a moneyless system of exchange' (HomeShop, n.d.). They explored processes of waste and recycling and brought together lectures on alternative economies and workshops alongside eating, drinking and artistic interventions. The workshops that took place taught 'upcycling' processes as well as how to make

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[106] Casco is an art organisation based in Utrecht, Netherlands. They describe their approach as being 'open to active participation from anyone who shares values around the commons and responsibility'. The 'Grand Domestic Revolution' project was instigated by Casco and saw two years of 'living research' residencies, meetings, productions and actions, followed by an exhibition and the publication of the handbook. More information is available via: https://casco.art/

tanghulu (a popular Chinese candied hawthorn snack typically sold from vendors in the street), which was taught by HomeShop's neighbours. Refreshments were offered in exchange for stories. Their interest in exchange extended into the use of multiple languages and the difficulty of translation – present as an issue amongst their fractured community. At *WaoBao!* objects became not fixed in obsolescence or undesirability, but tokens through which conversations could start and lives could be adapted, shunning the rigidity of things and the throwaway nature of consumption patterns. When an object was handed over, the person would receive a token representing the value of their item. This in turn could be exchanged for an item of a similar value. Naturally, value was questioned, and disagreements broke out regarding that value of things and which item was worthy of exchange for another. They claim that 'the ticket system inevitably broke down each iteration, through a combination of miscalculation, inflation, theft (or alleged transfer) and hoarding' (HomeShop, 2013). This illustrates the impossibility of an entirely equal exchange, yet the desire to achieve it, the work towards achieving it being an important factor in the building of communities of difference. Deliberately complex and ambiguous, the events were experiments in economy and exchange that were imperfect but open for discussion and alteration, not hindered by the breakdown of the exchange system.

We might consider HomeShop the opposite of a gated community in its intentions and general functioning rather than an enclosure. They describe their community as 'fractured', which they assert as a 'more realistic understanding of one's relations than a category enabling certain goals' (HomeShop, 2013, p. 46). This notion of the fractured community proposes something very different than the gated community of Beijing Riviera: it acknowledges difference and embraces a lack of completion or, alternatively, rejects the community-as-product model that expat compounds promote, in favour of fostering solidarity. The fractured community, 'according to a business or marketing logic', will 'not offer an optimal connection to questions of economy, sustainability, or security' (ibid). With this statement they acknowledge the inconvenience of the fractured community from the perspective of a monetary exchange. This is reflected by the *WaoBao!* events that saw the breakdown of the ticket system, as well as their own model of self-funding. Whilst they struggled financially, covering costs largely through the renting out of work spaces, they maintained that it might be 'exactly the fractured community that may be most easily

sustained, because there is no formal structuring body needed to establish it, maintain it, or declare it dead.', and that 'Fractures can lead to a wholly other kind of fluidity' (ibid).

Figure 19. Scene from a WaoBao! event. Photo courtesy of Homeshop. Retrieved from: http://rpwt.greenpapaya.art/2020/12/just-people-just-timing-homeshop-beijing.html

Areas of Concern

Regarding questions of gentrification (although as I have outlined, this term does not comfortably or accurately apply to the context of China), the openness that HomeShop nurtured and maintained enacted a reflexivity that acknowledged their position within processes of urban redevelopment and processes of real estate, whilst striving to add a different and non-monetary form of value to the neighbourhood. Whilst they undoubtedly played a role in attracting certain people to the area — including artists such as myself — much of the redevelopment of the *hutongs* in China is closer connected to state-led planning and stems from a multitude of policy interests including housing density, the development of a tourism industry, and historical preservation or 'beautification'. We may see their location, as

well as the village of *Feijiacun*, as affected by the role and practice of the artist who works there, but the precise role played in the ongoing redevelopment is not as clear cut as it tends to be in somewhere like London (at least from my position as an artist and researcher). And despite the interest of visiting artists, the activities of HomeShop provided opportunities for discussion and overlap with the local community, which led to moments of learning, connection and understanding. In working with a fragmented community, HomeShop did some work towards mapping power relations and identifying sites and strategies of resistance (Braidotti, 2011).

However, as is a common trajectory in processes of gentrification, in 2013, HomeShop was informed that their rent was going to increase threefold. After much brainstorming around how it might be manageable to pay this whilst still operating in the way they wanted to, they had to make the difficult decision to exit the space and conclude the project. However, the conversation did not stop there: despite the physical space and collective ceasing to exist as it had, their publications, website and documentation continues to attract attention. Their members may have dispersed, and their fractured community fractured further but they continue in the form of rumours, memories and material that circulates both on- and offline. The five-year span of the project is perhaps too short to have made a lasting impact upon their locality and its community. Perhaps ideally they would have continued to work from this space and play an evolving role within its local community for a longer period of time - but in lieu of this I suggest we can remember them as an example of an artist-run endeavour enacted in Beijing with care, consideration, ongoing reflection and a commitment to openness and dialogue.

4.6. Conclusion

Ziauddin Sardar sees gated communities as a symbol of an obsolete modernist idea of progress that disregards equality and rejects non-Western cultures, arguing that what we need to open their gates is to reshape the world through what he calls *transmodernity* (2010, p. 11). Transmodernity would involve the 'going beyond' of the gates of progress, rethinking ideas of 'progress' in order to *include* better structures of community to enable equality and understanding (ibid). Cultures have never existed in isolation. Community emerges based on interaction and shared meaning and we must disassemble the aesthetic and aspirations of the global in

order to open the gates; reassembling the city and its interactions to construct new gates with foundations rooted in meaningful human relationships across cultures that empower the less privileged and marginalised.

In contrast with the bustling, makeshift and changeable nature of *Feijiacun*, Beijing Riviera appears as a finished product, perpetually maintaining itself as new, clean, safe and complete. It is an enclosed bubble, an environment that attempts to reject cultural differences and relies on its consistency to draw in expats looking for a convenient relocation and familiar lifestyle. To what extent these expats want to engage in local communities and culture varies from person to person, but the design of the compound serves to reduce the possibility of chance encounters and removes the work that goes into community-building and maintenance. Whilst I, of course, do not intend to romanticise the overcrowded and precarious nature of the urban village, the proximity between *Feijiacun* and Beijing Riviera demonstrates the vast and explicit socioeconomic segregation that exists within urban China today.

Though it was only a relatively short-lived project, HomeShop provides a model for how an individual or group might embed themselves within a space or locality and foster interactions between a diverse public. Their reach has gone beyond their immediate surroundings and continues today, including my own interest in writing about the project as an example of ungating. In bringing together the case of HomeShop alongside the Beijing Riveria and its neighbouring *Feijiacun*, my aim has been to highlight how relationships between locals and foreigners are constructed and might be directed towards inclusivity. Whilst the artist district on the outer edges of *Feijiacun* felt distanced from the rest of the urban village and its activities, HomeShop rejected the idea of being a space that supported only the artist in favour of a dialogue between multiple parties. The closed-off space and exclusive lifestyle offered by Beijing Riviera attempts to offer up community as a pre-determined finished product. For Braidotti, '*becoming*' is an erasure and renegotiation of the boundaries between self and other (2011) and this is something that I see enacted in the activities and approaches of HomeShop. She states:

> *We have to learn to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity. Becoming-nomadic, by constructing communities where the notion of transience, of passing, is acknowledged in a sober secular manner that binds us to the*

multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations. Kinship systems and social bonding, like flexible citizenship, can be rethought differently and differentially, moving away from the blood, sweat and tears of the classical social contract. Given the extent of the transpositions brought about by advanced capitalism and the dislocations of traditional values and social bonding they have triggered, the conditions for a renegotiation of our being in this together are timely. (Braidotti, 2006, pp. 265-6).

In contrast with *Feijiacun*, HomeShop provided a space for 'nomadic actvity' which 'takes place in the transitions between potentially contradictory positions' (ibid, p. 29).

Conclusion: Towards a practice of ungating.

Throughout this thesis, I have not disguised my own complicated role as an artist in relation to the issues I have examined, having chosen instead to highlight various personal experiences that have shaped my research and provided important moments for reflection and exploration. I partly chose to do so in order to think through the importance of what Donna Haraway (1988) calls 'situated knowledge': the importance of context, and the experiential as research. Regarding the task of ungating that I am arguing for, I view this as integral. Situated knowledge is a key factor of what I am calling the intersocial, which sits in contrast with the academic associations of what gets called the 'interdisciplinary'. Throughout each chapter I have considered my own role as an artist as implicated within the *gating* processes discussed, and I can extend this to thinking about my role as a PhD researcher within processes of *ungating*. Whilst work done within the context of a university can be incredibly important, it is only one part of a wider process of knowledge building, and conversations around change. As demonstrated by each of my examples of ungating, collective processes of knowledge building amongst diverse communities of difference are a necessary component of ungating, and we cannot rely only on the knowledge that is gained at a distance from the context of enquiry.

Each chapter of this thesis was intended as a window into a different set of gates, and a different example of ungating rather than progressive stages in a process of conceptualising ideas of gating versus ungating. I have aimed to define a range of ways in which 'gates' — both real and affective — are constructed in regards to these new, financialised housing topologies. The four case studies I have presented share similarities, but are different in their branding and target demographic. They represent housing for people at different 'stages' of their lives: episodic domestic infrastructures. The logics of gating that I have examined operate in combination to produce a range of effects incorporating the physical, financial, psychological, cultural and social. They work as a set of processes that are governing how urban redevelopment is unfolding, social displacement is taking place, and desirable forms of living and dwelling are being set. I have argued that we need to *ungate* these physical and conceptual spaces. Ungating, as I have sought to define it throughout this thesis, is an attempt to disrupt the visible and invisible gates in order to create

new spaces of resistance, transformation and becoming. In unfolding four examples of projects that exercise strategies of ungating, I hope to have demonstrated some of the ways in which we might approach these visible and invisible barriers and boundaries.

Before outlining the key strategies of ungating that I suggest we can take away from this investigation, I reiterate the various ways that the artist, and culture more generally, has factored into this discussion, and will likely continue to unless we can break the links between them.

i. The Artist as Grassroots Developer.

Throughout each chapter, the artist has appeared and reappeared in different guises and to different effects. We can see this relationship most clearly in Chapter One where I introduced a textbook example of financialised housing that is targeted towards investors. The key point of interest with the case of AM Tacheles was the role that art and artists have played in shaping what this development has become; its transition from squat to luxury apartments. The building's previous life as a squat and cultural centre, and the energy and time that the artists and residents had put into it, has assisted the developer to frame the new complex as vibrant, dynamic, cultural and part of the 'creative city' that Berlin has come to be known as. Whilst this is nothing new or unique, it is an example that is extremely visible and clearly illustrates a common process of gentrification that unfolds in many cities across the world, albeit in different ways and at different speeds. My introductory example of London City Island highlighted how gentrification need not unfold in an organic manner led by artists anymore, but can be initiated by developers and councils, with artists and cultural organisations invited in *after* the luxury development has been planned and built.

In Chapter Two, I looked at the problems presented by the aggressive development of purpose-built student housing in the Shieldfield area of Newcastle and the ongoing process of studentification. Whilst not clearly related to the role of art and culture, these developments support the burgeoning educational industry of the neoliberal university. I propose that, in line with Smith's investigations (2002, 2005, 2014), studentification may indeed pave the way for gentrification, which already

appears to be happening, judging by the arrival of an arts organisation — The NewBridge Project — into the area, and the opening of a new bar - *Ernest* - that was set up by and is run by artists and describes itself as 'situated in the top end of ouseburn', rather than within Shieldfield (Ernest, n.d.). The example of ungating I examine in this chapter — *Dwellbeing* — is furthermore a project initiated by artists and an academic framed within the context of a university – a potential arrangement that could foster exploitation – but, as I have argued, they have successfully extended the project beyond the confines of an 'art world' via the Participatory Action Research philosophy and the long-term nature of the project's ambitions.

In Chapter Three, I detailed co-living mega-complex *The Collective* and their claims of solving the housing crisis and urban loneliness through the provision of a new, more communal, way of living. With its design and branding slotting into cliches of creative 'start-up' culture — precarity rebranded as a desirable lifestyle — The Collective offers a hotel-style living experience at a high price, in which the 'community' at their Canary Whard branch is up to 705 rooms' worth of people staying in 'micro-apartments' within a 20-storey block; it is framed by an appropriation of the language of more radical, alternative and communal forms of living. Taking hotel-style living even further than the usual luxury property development, as in that of Chapter One, many of these residents are, indeed, actual hotel guests, with stays of one night upwards being possible. The example of ungating I outlined — Focus E15 — is a housing campaign that has garnered attention from the art world but, unlike the other three projects examined in each chapter, it was not a campaign *initiated* by artists. What real impact the interest of the worlds of art and academic has upon the project and their aims is difficult to pin down, but — as with Dwellbeing — the potential for exploitation is there: for artists and academics to benefit from it as a subject to examine, in the form of cultural capital acquisition. This is, again, something that should be kept in mind.

In Chapter Four, I travelled further afield to examine a gated community for expats in Beijing. Whilst not directly claiming any cultural narrative, the art district in the neighbouring urban village of *Feijiacun* provided a point of tension: a space where migrant workers and privileged 'expats' would sometimes converge, the artist drawing the expats in yet remaining somewhat separate from their luxurious lifestyle. The artist sat between the two, neither here nor there; an agent of both

gating and ungating. The ungating project examined — artist-run space and collective HomeShop — offered up space for culture and exchange in a way that sought to bring together the many sides of the city and localities' community. Whilst the term and process of 'gentrification' does not comfortably apply to the political context of China, it is possible that HomeShop imitated a process of urban redevelopment that priced long-standing residents out of the area. Whilst I do not believe this undermines the project's achievements, this is an area that would benefit from further research.

ii. The Mechanisms of Gating

As I have sought to demonstrate throughout each chapter, financialised forms of housing generate potentially endless variations of the gated community, the gates being not only a physical and technological infrastructure of security but a series of economic, political, social and spatial processes that reconfigure urban space and communities. The gates are both *real* and *affective*. I have sought to illustrate that, whilst art and culture is highly intertwined within processes of financialisation and urban development, there are strategies through which it can be used towards what I have termed ungating. To summarise, I will first outline the key factors of gating that I have addressed.

1. *Global flows of capital.* Perhaps the most all-encompassing process of gating — one which supports and summons into existence each of the four developments examined in this thesis — is the circulation of capital on a global scale. This is two-fold. Firstly, there is a network of wealthy companies and individuals (High Net Worth or Ultra High Net Worth)[107] that invest in the development of such housing. This not only produces a rentier capitalism that privileges economic actors as the controllers of value (Christophers, 2020), but takes ownership and access to land out of the hands of those who live in or near it, instead trapping them in a cycle of precarity and debt. It operates through a logic of detached speculation, putting little back into the localities it extracts value from. The 'gate' here is that between owner and user, a gate constructed through power geometries (Massey, 1999). A clear

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[107] As defined earlier, High Net Worth Individuals are typically described as those with more than $1 million in liquid financial assets. Ultra High Net Worth Individuals are described as those with more than $30 million.

example of this is the AM Tacheles development discussed in Chapter One, and its focus on selling to overseas investors. This produces not only tangible, economic and spatial gates but affective ones in that a community feels a reduction in ownership of the place they live.

The second form this process of global movement produces is the flow of people that support this economic activity by way of generating profits for the developers and investors. With the example of purpose-built student housing in Chapter Two, I describe the economically mobile international student population that it extracts profits from. In the case of 'co-living', as detailed in Chapter Three, we see housing designed for young professionals (and also students) who may hail from near or far, attracted by the smooth transition from one geographical context to another, range of facilities, and readymade community this development appears to offer. And with the expat housing discussed in Chapter Four, we see the replication of an American or European style of architecture and neighbourhood life that caters for international professionals who relocate — often with family — for work. In this regard, the individuals these housing forms sell themselves to are *specific* and often marked out by their transitory mobility and privileged socioeconomic status. This is a form of gating in that it generates communities *within* communities, containing arrangements of people who may have little in-depth relations with those that sit outside their walls but in their proximity. Again, this is a *real* and physical gate that also performs acts of affective gating, through offering inhabitants ontological security and a familiarity that reassures.

2. *Curated communities; community as product.* Each of the developments discussed sell themselves on providing instant access to a 'community'. Community here is presented as a readymade product, a thing that can be curated through branding, and into which anyone who 'fits' (or so desires to and can afford to) can slot. Whilst communities and friendships *do* form within the confines of their boundaries, it would often appear to be at the expense of the wider local community who are not included as part of the curated vision and are often actively excluded. Focus is placed on the notion of 'likeminded people' which, in the case of The Collective in Chapter Three, appears to relate largely to the productivity that this can encourage: the opportunity to network and collaborate rather than a mere neighbourly relation. In the case of purpose-built student housing and housing for

expats, it is about generating a sense of comfort and familiarity at a time of change in one's life. With AM Tacheles, we see the common strategy of promoting a luxury lifestyle set within an enclosure of upmarket consumption. Community here will emerge through meetings in the gym, spa and resident's lounge; and encounters in the bars, cafes and restaurants that the development incorporates.

3. *Lifestyle as product, a prescribed subjectivity.* In *Dispossession: The Performance in the Political*, Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou discuss two forms of dispossession: one relates to Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession, which I have already visited in this thesis. This is the form of dispossession that includes, amongst many other forms, the loss of land and community and the subjection to military and economic violence, and poverty; loss of land defining the original sense of the word. The other form that Butler and Athanasiou outline — that is equally relevant to the discussion of gating — is dispossession that involves the undoing of the unitary subject and its associated power through letting oneself become dispossessed. In doing so, they argue that 'one is moved to the other and by the other – exposed to and affected by the other's vulnerability' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 1). Through this form of dispossession, we are moved by both what is outside of us as well as the 'outside' that resides *within* us, the result of which is a displacement that may provoke a feeling of being a stranger to oneself. And yet, at the same time, it can help us better understand ourselves. They argue that this can challenge notions of property and sovereignty, and prompt a reclaiming of common, collective and public assets (ibid). The forms of subjectivity that the housing topologies in Chapters One-Four construct are narrow and prescribed: they make clear demarcations between inside and out; between those that are 'different' and those who are not. Individuals are encouraged to identity with a particular lifestyle as dictated by the image that the housing projects. This defines, once again, not only those inside and those outside, but the individuals' thinking and ways of seeing, of understanding and relating to others.

4. *An architecture of convenience*. Continuing on from the projection of lifestyle as product, the forms of housing discussed in each chapter use the provision of facilities as a marker of a desirable way of living. This not only indicates that those living inside this community can adopt a lifestyle different to those surrounding them who cannot afford such luxuries, it serves to reduce the need of individuals to reach

out beyond the boundaries of their homes. With amenities such as gyms, co-working space and communal lounges, residents are encouraged to remain *within* and centre their lives there, reducing the possibilities of chance encounters with the wider community in favour of convenience and immediacy.

iii. Strategies of Ungating

In arguing for a practice of ungating, I have sought to consider models of resistance and intervention that contain within them the possibility of challenging and disrupting the processes of gating I have described above. Drawing upon the projects examined in each chapter, and to summarise the key factors in a more compact manner, I now outline some key points or strategies that have contributed to my concept of ungating.

1. *The right to the city.* Returning to Lefebvre's (1968) conception of the right to the city, we see this ambition enacted in different ways through each of the projects discussed in Chapters One-Four. In Chapter One, The Alliance of Threatened Berlin Studio Houses (AbBA) who initiated the Haus der Statistik project did so through interrupting the building's façade, internal and external spaces, occupying them for a period of time. This prompted a process through which they — and many other groups as well as the local community — will be involved in planning for the future of this building. In Chapter Two, the Dwellbeing project is discussed as empowering members of Shieldfield's community to become involved in imagining and planning the Shieldfield they want, generating a sense of ownership. In Chapter Three, the Focus E15 campaign staged a series of interventions that claimed a right to housing within the city and draw attention to the unnecessary lack of affordable housing. Whilst their occupation of the Carpenter's Estate was short term, it propelled several positive outcomes. Finally, the Homeshop project discussed in Chapter Four encouraged an exploration of value, exchange and openness through activities that promoted neighbourhood interaction, facilitated by a porous boundary between inside and out. Each of these examples provides, to different extents, useful strategies through which we might claim a right to the city.

2. *The intersocial.* I have chosen to use the word intersocial as I feel it captures what I see as incredibly valuable in each of the ungating studies presented. I argue

that ungating requires not a model that situates itself comfortably within one realm — be that art, architecture, education or activism — but one that can enable groups of people, not defined by their education level, profession or socioeconomic status, to come together and work together. I want to position the intersocial as a partner of interdisciplinarity, but one that takes knowledge production further out of the realms of elitist institutions such as the university. Ungating requires *collective* methods of research and knowledge production, as demonstrated by the examples in each chapter. My next two points elaborate on some of the reasons for this.

3. *The Radical Imagination*. Whilst I have no conclusive answer to the question of whether resistance is, in fact, possible from a position — such as that of the artist — that is tightly embedded within the problem it attempts to resist, rather than autonomous from it, I do stand adamantly by the importance of various characteristics art can implement — such as experimentation, intervention and making *visible* — as being vital to life outside of the 'art world' as well as within art practice and cultural activity itself. I will reiterate Haiven and Khasnabish's definition of the radical imagination as something that we 'never possess but do (and together)', and something that stems from 'the experience of difference and the struggle for solidarity' (2014, p. 218). They go on to define it as shaped by 'conflict, contention, dissensus, difference and debate' (ibid). The radical imagination can be part of what we understand as art practice but can likewise emerge from, apply to, and be found within, other factions of life and work, produced and maintained by those who do not identify as artists. Whilst we may be afforded — through the overarching architectures that constrict lives to precarity and debt — little mental or physical space for endeavours of the radical imagination, the struggle for community and change will, and should, continue to find spaces; to open spaces. Much like Mohanty's (2003a, 2003b) notion of community as struggle, which I have repeatedly returned to, the radical imagination is born of struggle. The projects of ungating I have examined in each chapter enact processes of the radical imagination. As an artist who works both alone and in collaboration with others, in both a studio and gallery context, and through intervention in other commercial and everyday spaces, I know my work is little without the work of others, without the wider conversation that my own work may play a small part in. The role of art in this thesis is therefore one of a sidekick, a communicator, an organiser, an interlocutor, a concept-provider, a relationship-initiator, a cog within a larger machine, despite its role in processes of

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gating themselves.

4. *Situated knowledge, nomadic subjects.* Haraway's argument for 'situated knowledge' can be useful in unpacking the idea of the intersocial and stressing its importance. Situated knowledge respects the context and social location of the researcher. Haraway describes 'feminist objectivity' as being 'about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object' (1988, p. 583). Elaborated specificity, she argues, is not an alienating distance but an embodiment of feministic objectivity. In order to ungate we must acknowledge this and reject the platforms of the powerful as the premium perspective from which to perceive, to see, to understand. I feel this can be applied in conjunction with Braidotti's concept of the nomadic subject, which positions thinking as nomadic and reliant on the embodied. Braidotti 'invites us to rethink the structures and boundaries of the self by tackling the deeper conceptual roots of identity', arguing for an awareness of the multiple others and multi-layered social structures by which we are shaped, and rejecting an individualised notion of identity (1994, p. 4). Speaking of global mobility, Braidotti states that;

> *global migration is a molar line of segmentation or reterritorialization that controls access to different forms of mobility and immobility[108]. The global city and the refugee camps are not dialectical or moral opposites: they are two sides of the same global coin. They express the schizoid political economy of our times. The point of nomadic subjectivity is to identify a line of flight, that is to say a creative alternative space of becoming that would fall not between the mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner, but within these categories. The point is neither to dismiss nor to glorify the status of marginal, alien others, but to find a more accurate, complex location for a transformation of the terms of this political interaction.* (Braidotti, 2006, p. 60).

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[108] I once again must point out here that Braidotti is referring to ideas put forth by Deleuze and Guattari, whose notion of 'territory' is that of an environment that is constructed through the relations of the bodies within it, and serves to influence what bodies are *able to do* within it. Deterritorialisation is the territory thrown into chaos, leaving it unstable. Following this, the space can be reterritorialised through a restructuring of its coding, and the bodies finding a new way to order themselves within the territory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Ongoing cycles of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation is argued by them as a key function of life under capitalism. It is this idea that Braidotti is drawing upon and referencing above.

Both of these concepts stress the complex relations that constitute subject and knowledge, and the limitations of hierarchical structures of power. It is an approach that I perceive as accounting for the local and the global as equal partners, which I argue is vital in projects of ungating due to the global structures of power, and flows of capital, that have brought these financialised housing topologies into being.

iv. Final Thoughts

With the above four strategies in mind, I am arguing for the ungating of current forms of financialised housing — their modes of financing, branding, design and operation — through processes of cooperation, intervention, solidarity and struggle. In exploring the manner in which abstracted and invisible gates — both real and affective — are constructed through these examples of real estate projects, I hope to have set the context for how we might make them visible in order to challenge and dismantle them. A practice of ungating can utilise the strategies and thinking outlined above towards finding openings, facilitating encounters, and creating more porous boundaries that are inclusive of difference. Whilst the developers and investors attempts to offer lifestyle and community as finished product can, of course, never be fully realised, they do set the precedent for desirable and aspirational ways of living that must be rethought and resisted. They struggle to *contain* and there must be a counter struggle against this containment in order to break patterns of social displacement and control by financialisation.

As with any research, this examination has its limitations. Firstly, the focus is on four iterations of recent housing topologies that have emerged in different locations across the globe. These specific case studies, of course, do not speak for the multitude of different versions of the same housing topologies, as they have emerged in disparate cities and countries. Within each locality, such a housing development's effect will be significantly shaped by its geographical, social and political context, as I have considered in each chapter. A more expansive study would allow for a deeper exploration into how these topologies function on a global scale in relation to issues of place, space and community. Gentrification does not enact the exact same process in cities across the world and therefore we can speculate that real estate developments do not either. Comparative links might be mapped, for example, between co-living spaces in the UK and those in China;

luxury property developments in London and those in Berlin. The second limitation is perhaps that which has also driven, shaped and informed this thesis: that of my own position as an artist. Does this position, which situates me both inside and outside of the issues discussed in this thesis, generate certain 'blind spots' that skew my perspective as a researcher? Whilst my own implicated position allows me a valuable insight into, and intimate experience of, these processes, I believe it is only in collaboration and conversation with others — with diverse communities, planners, architects, activists — that change can be made towards a new kind of urban and residential space that does productive work towards ungating its communities.

To conclude, I return briefly to *A House for Artists* in Barking, London, which I outlined in my introduction, as an example of a project that incapsulates ambitions of both gating and ungating in one. Due to launch in 2022, it remains to be seen how the artists, the arts organisation Create, and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham will implement their aims of widening participation in culture. From all angles, it appears to me that this project will simply facilitate familiar patterns of gentrification; raising property values in the area and in turn propelling social displacement through the council's agenda of cultural regeneration. With my position as a neighbour to this building and project — part, in reality, of the 'community' they seek to 'benefit' (though, as a fellow artist, not who they necessarily have in mind) — it is my intention to continue researching and observing the project as it unfolds over the coming years to continue my thinking around how artists might be able to participate in development projects *without* facilitating processes of gentrification. Whilst I do not expect any definitive answers to immediately emerge, this is vital work that needs to be done in order to ungate the communities that financialised housing models continue to divide and enclose. A 'solution' developed and constructed by councils, planners and other institutions is counterintuitive given the current political and economic climate but — not without struggle, conflict, collaboration and debate — the energy exerted by the 'grassroots developers', as exerted by the projects in each chapter, can be harnessed towards transformation.

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