VOID POTENTIAL

Absence, imagination and the making of community in London’s Olympic Park

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Declaration

I, Saffron Woodcraft, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the text.
Abstract

This thesis examines the meaning and making of community in London’s Olympic Park where five new neighbourhoods - described as model communities for the 21st-century, and known as the Legacy Communities Scheme (LCS) – are currently under construction. ‘Thriving new communities’ have been identified by government as an indicator of the success of the Olympic legacy regeneration programme, which promises to transform the prosperity and life chances of people living in east London. Planned urban development is the vehicle for this transformation, of which the LCS is a significant component. This research interrogates the social and material effects of the Olympic legacy regeneration programme by examining the process of ‘making’ Chobham Manor, the first LCS neighbourhood, from the perspective of the professional planners, architects and regeneration practitioners engaged in the planning and placemaking process.

Based on ethnographic data collected over two and a half years, the thesis describes a series of social, spatial and discursive ‘voids’ – territories, gaps, absences and emptinesses - that emerged as prominent and agentive entities in the work of imagining and making Chobham Manor. It examines the investments made by different actors in producing, protecting and sometimes over-coming, the potential of these voids to support, disrupt or sustain the making of ‘community’. The thesis deconstructs how the voids shift through material registers and operate to produce and exert power in coercive and subtle ways, and from this empirical base, develops a typology of voids as an analytical device to interrogate the production of power, space and citizen subjectivities in the neo-liberal city. By engaging with ‘voids’ as vital and contingent entities that produce dynamic social, material and temporal relationalities, this thesis advances the analytical potential of the void beyond current engagements with the immaterial and transcendent.
Impact Statement

This thesis examines the social and material effects of London’s Olympic legacy regeneration by focusing on how ‘community’ as political ideology and policy construct shapes processes of urban transformation. In focusing on the work of ‘elites’ - professional planners, architects, regeneration practitioners and public policymakers - engaged in planning and constructing new neighbourhoods, it engages with two aspects of urban transformation that anthropologists rarely examine together: first, the intersection of political ideology, planning policy and neo-liberal economics, and second, how ‘community’ operates as a form of governance. These insights have wider relevance to non-academic audiences in particular, public policymakers, and built-environment professionals. However, the main academic impact from this work is an extended ethnographic engagement with, and critical analysis of, social, spatial and discursive ‘voids’ – territories, gaps, absences and emptinesses – that produce and exert power, and shape urban space and citizen subjectivities in myriad ways. This thesis presents a new typology of urban voids, developed from empirical data, as an analytical framework for anthropological engagement with the production of power, space and sociality in the neo-liberal city. This typology advances the analytical potential of the void beyond anthropology’s current engagements with the immaterial and transcendent, and has potential to be theoretically developed in the future.

My ethnographic fieldwork with the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) was the starting point for establishing an on-going research collaboration between the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) at UCL and LLDC to develop new citizen-led metrics for measuring the social impacts of the Olympic legacy. In 2015, IGP and LLDC undertook the Prosperity in East London Pilot Study, involving qualitative research in the Olympic Park and surrounding neighbourhoods to examine how local residents and businesses are affected by regeneration. This partnership was the catalyst for IGP to launch the London Prosperity Board, a cross-sector partnership involving the Greater London Authority, local authorities, public agencies, community organisations and businesses in east London, and the Office of National Statistics, to
translate findings from the pilot study into London’s first citizen-led prosperity metrics, which will be adopted by these partners in 2019.
Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to everyone who contributed to this research, in particular, to the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) for being willing to trust in, and support, the work. Special thanks to Emma Frost, Karen Partridge, Layla Conway and Victoria Stonebridge at LLDC for finding time in incredibly demanding schedules to be open and enthusiastic contributors to this project over a number of years. The dedication with which they approach their work deserves recognition and I am delighted that we are now collaborating on new projects. Many other people shared their perspectives and opened up their work to examination – special thanks to Belinda, Kirk, Matt and Rebecca. Gillian Evans, who I have met only recently, paved the way for my fieldwork by demonstrating to the Olympic Park Legacy Company that collaborating with an anthropologist is a worthwhile venture.

At UCL I am indebted to Victor Buchli for his intellectual provocation, patient support (while I tried to write, work, and have a family life) and humour. His insights have improved this thesis immeasurably and made the whole endeavour enlightening and fun as well as hugely challenging. Thanks to colleagues in anthropology and at the Institute for Global Prosperity - Kelly Robinson, Jane Dickson, Gabriel Ackroyd, Carol Balthazar, Jeeva, Timothy Carroll, Antonia Walford, Hannah Knox and Hannah Sender for their advice and encouragement along the way. In particular, grateful thanks to Connie Smith, writing partner and co-conspirator, for unfailing enthusiasm and support, and to Henrietta Moore, for guidance, patience and setting ambitious goals. Thanks to Helena Rivera, formerly of UCL, for providing a quiet place to work.

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This endeavour could not have been undertaken without the unfailing love, support and patience of my closest friends and family, who gave me the confidence to think I could pull this (and many other things) off successfully. Love and thanks to Honor,
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<td>Academy for Sustainable Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>CABE</td>
<td>Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCLG</td>
<td>Department for Communities and Local Government (now Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government)</td>
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<td>GLA</td>
<td>Greater London Authority</td>
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<td>HCA</td>
<td>Homes and Communities Agency (now Homes England)</td>
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<td>IDeA</td>
<td>Improvement and Development Agency</td>
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<td>IOC</td>
<td>International Olympic Committee</td>
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<td>LCS</td>
<td>Legacy Communities Scheme</td>
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<td>LHDFG</td>
<td>London Housing Design Guide</td>
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<td>LLDC</td>
<td>London Legacy Development Corporation</td>
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<td>LOCOG</td>
<td>London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games</td>
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<td>NDA</td>
<td>Non disclosure agreement</td>
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<td>NLV</td>
<td>New London Vernacular</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Olympic Development Agency</td>
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<td>ONS</td>
<td>Office for National Statistics</td>
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<td>OPLC</td>
<td>Olympic Park Legacy Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPDC</td>
<td>Planning Policy Decisions Committee (LLDC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>Project for Public Spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>QEOP</td>
<td>Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce</td>
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Chapter 1  Creating community in the void

“This is about community cohesion. This is the social space, the space where people will stop and talk to each other, where people will live in the space,” says E, presenting an architectural drawing of a two-storey atrium; the fulcrum of a planning proposal teetering on the edge of refusal. “This is the social space. This is where the community will be made,” he reiterates pointing to the part of the drawing marked ‘void’.

A heated discussion ensues as E, the architect, and B, the property developer, seek to convince the Planning Decisions Committee for London’s Olympic Park\(^1\) that the void is the building’s reason for being; all other functions – dwelling, socialising, making, exhibiting art – will revolve around the void. The phrase ‘community cohesion’ is invoked several times in a space of minutes as E and B argue that, without the atrium’s emptiness - its void potential - the social relations and sense of community the building is intended to create will not (cannot) materialise.

The Planning Decisions Committee remains unconvinced. The proposed building is one-storey higher than planning policy permits. B resists the Committee’s suggestion to remove the atrium and lower the building’s height; the atrium is a realisation of social life in the neighbourhood, he argues, which has been painstakingly observed by the design team and discussed with local dwellers in the preceding 12 months. The space is designed for “the meandering, making and showing” that, B argues, characterise the fluid forms of art and creative practice that emerge in, and often

\(^1\) Decisions about planning, development and heritage conservation in, and immediately around, the Olympic Park are made by the London Legacy Development Corporation’s Planning Decisions Committee (LLDC PDC); a panel made up of LLDC Board Members, local ward councillors and independent members drawn from architecture, planning and regeneration professions. The role of the PDC is to ensure that decisions on planning are “made in an open, transparent and impartial manner.” (‘Planning Decisions Committee’ n.d.). The PDC meets monthly in sessions that are open to the public.
engage directly with, Hackney Wick’s\(^2\) myriad of neighbourhood spaces. To varying degrees the spaces B refers to are ‘vacant’ - intentionally so in the case of the warehouse gallery and performance spaces waiting to be programmed, and informally in the sense that the neighbourhood’s yards, walls, streets and canal towpath are ‘open’ for creative appropriation. Whatever form they take, vacant spaces in the neighbourhood accommodate a shifting array of uses that often blur definitions between dwelling, work and leisure, such as creative interventions, exhibitions, performance, club nights, food, multiple forms of production, community meetings and more. B’s new building promises “harmonious continuity” with existing social and spatial practices by creating a new void for the neighbourhood’s artists to occupy. Without a void at its heart, B argues, the building is without purpose - neither the building nor its inhabitants will flourish.

Frustrated, E points to the void in the drawing once more. “Here,” he says. “Here, this is where the community will be made.” A site visit is momentarily mooted by the planners to unblock the impasse. I make a note to revisit this suggestion and unpack the idea of a site visit to consider an imagined empty space in a building that does not yet exist. Minutes later, the proposed visit is abandoned and the Committee votes for a deferral. Planning approval is not granted.

\(^2\) Hackney Wick is a neighbourhood to the west of the Olympic Park. The area is said to house the highest concentration of artists studios and creative practitioners in Europe. It is adjacent to the East Wick and Sweetwater site where the second new LCS neighbourhood will be constructed.
I open my thesis with this vignette because it encapsulates two concerns that dominated my fieldwork – the work of ‘making community’ in London’s Olympic Park and ‘absence’ as an essential social, spatial and temporal condition for this work to be done. This thesis is based on ethnographic data, collected over two and a half years, while following the work of a team of regeneration and built environment professionals involved in ‘making’ Chobham Manor; the first of five residential neighbourhoods and 10,000 new homes that will be built in the Olympic Park by
2030. The new neighbourhoods - known as the Legacy Communities Scheme (LCS) - constitute a major part of the legacy investment programme of London’s 2012 Olympic Games, which aims to transform east London’s prospects, potentials and physical landscape. The LCS neighbourhoods have been imagined as model communities for the 21st century - “a blueprint for sustainable living” (DCMS 2008, 6).

The ‘professional team’ are a distributed network of individuals from several organisations who work collaboratively, yet not often physically co-present, to plan, design, construct and create a new community at Chobham Manor. The team is constituted by institutional and contractual relationships that vary between parties and determine the role and function that each organisation performs in relation to others. The primary institution is the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) – as the landowner and planning authority for the Olympic Park, the Corporation is publicly accountable for delivering the ‘physical’ legacy of the 2012 Games. Its stated purpose is:

“To promote and deliver physical, social, economic and environmental regeneration in the Olympic Park and surrounding area, in particular by maximising the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, by securing high-quality sustainable development and investment, ensuring the long-term success of the facilities and assets within its direct control and supporting and promoting the aim of convergence – raising living standards so that in 20 years east London communities have the same social and economic chances as their neighbours across London.” (2010, 8)

In practical terms, LLDC is responsible for determining planning policy for the Olympic Park, selecting and contracting development partners to finance, construct and manage the LCS neighbourhoods and delivering on socio-economic, environmental sustainability and community engagement policies. The development partner for Chobham Manor is Chobham Manor LLP - a joint venture between Taylor Wimpey, a residential housebuilder, and L&Q Group, a housing association and residential developer. Chobham Manor LLP commissions the development team who provide essential services to plan, design and construct the neighbourhood – the architects,
urban designers, consultants specialising in planning, sustainability, transport and inclusive access, landscape architects and commercial property agents. Another tier of advisors and consultants have adjunct roles working alongside the development team.

My fieldwork focuses on a sub-set of this complex assemblage, work that can be broadly described as ‘placemaking’ - a term in common use among planning and built environment professionals in the UK, Europe, Scandinavia and North America (Pugalis 2010; Arefi 2014). I use the term ‘placemaking team’ as shorthand to situate the arguments in this thesis in relation to this specific group of individuals who were involved in placemaking at Chobham Manor. The placemaking team includes individuals with an array of expertise – community development practitioners, regeneration managers, architects, urban designers, planners, housing managers and development project managers – from several organisations including LLDC’s Communities and Business Team, Taylor Wimpey, L & Q Housing Trust, architecture practices and other members of the extended development team. LLDC’s Communities and Business Team holds overall responsibility for developing the vision, strategies, evidence, and many of the initiatives to drive the placemaking efforts, for the LCS neighbourhoods and the Olympic Park. Much of this work involves marshalling and shaping the placemaking efforts of Taylor Wimpey, L&Q, and other organisations in the extended network that makes up the development team and supporting advisors and consultants.

Anthropologies of planning have tended to focus on its role as a technology of government (see for example Foucault 1991; Rabinow 1995; Holston 1989) examining how the state exercises power and control over citizens by regulating and arranging territorial and conceptual space, often in the context of colonial expansion. In these accounts, urban planning - and by extension, the production of architecture

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and public spaces - is theorised as a linear and future-oriented process. Abram and Wezkalynys describe this perspective on urban planning as overly rationalistic, and instead argue for anthropological analyses that highlight situated ideas about time, space, materiality and imagination by examining the work that planners, plans and citizens do themselves (2013, 4). Yaneva (2012) and Till (2009) develop similar arguments about how architecture is practiced, studied and theorised, calling for more attention to be paid to the contingencies and conflicts inherent in architecture as a social process and the after-life of buildings once the designing and construction is complete. Following this call to pay attention to the conflicts and contingences of architectural practice, I extend this approach to hybrid practices of placemaking at Chobham Manor, which include planning, architecture and community development.

In professional use, placemaking refers to a deliberate, expert-led process of imagining, designing and managing space that pays close attention to the social dynamics of places and how they are influenced by material and spatial conditions. The goal, as described by one of the architects working at Chobham Manor, is to design and produce places that work for people and create a sense of community. Professional placemaking is a process involving a set of overlapping practices – planning, architecture, landscaping, community engagement, community development and place management – that in principle, are oriented towards dialogue with citizens and participatory design methods that draw on local knowledge and experience of buildings and places. In this sense, placemaking is a hybrid practice that seeks to connect different disciplines and advocates holistic approaches to thinking about places. Placemaking as a professional practice is distinct from citizen-led, participatory spatial practices that are motivated by a desire to reclaim urban space and engage in socially inclusive alternatives to land-use, planning and development, such as self-build housing, urban agriculture, or community-led energy production. Such efforts are often characterised by self-

\[4\] Literature examining expert-led placemaking processes identifies the power differential between decision-makers and citizens, arguing that there is often little scope for citizens to engage in placemaking processes in inclusive and meaningful ways (e.g. Cerar 2014; Hou & Rios, 2003; Krivý & Kaminer, 2013).
organising networks, locally produced knowledge, ‘sweat’ equity and community governance. Both forms of practice involve deliberate interventions in the built environment and, in the process, construct specific notions of place, belonging, and what it means to ‘be’ part of, or ‘speak’ for, a community. Whether expert or citizen-led, organised and deliberate efforts at placemaking inevitably become entangled with individual practices for making sense of the world and giving meaning to the places people occupy. Gupta and Ferguson argue all associations of place and people are social creations; the result of ongoing political and historical processes, and should be approached as anthropological problems, not natural facts (2001, 4). To this end, one of the goals of this thesis is to interrogate the assumptions and associations that underpin conceptualisations of community in placemaking efforts at Chobham Manor and in so doing, to reconsider the analytical value that ‘community’ offers to anthropological engagements with urban space and forms of citizenship.

1.2 Thesis findings and argument

Fennell (2015) argues that the matter of built form in urban social life, is not so much matter per se, but rather a process by which complicated entanglements of built form become a question of collective concern. This thesis is an exploration of ‘absence’ as a collective concern in the planning and placemaking efforts in the Olympic Park. In the chapters that follow, I examine how absences are configured as metaphorical and material ‘voids’ – social, spatial and symbolic gaps and emptinesses - by the placemaking team, and sometimes the citizens with whom they interact, at critical points in the planning, design and community development process. I unpack how these voids become entangled with political discourse and public imaginaries of failure and success - acquiring specific characteristics, working through different registers, and operating at different scales - to become agentive entities that potentially ‘make’ or ‘disrupt’ the way social relations, and a sense of place and community, develop at Chobham Manor.

My research began with the question ‘what does it mean to build a sustainable community in contemporary London?’ and an expectation that my fieldwork would
be concerned with the material practices of imagining and making a new place. My original intention had been to examine the ‘social production’ (S. M. Low 1996)\(^5\) of new homes in the Olympic Park; undertaking a processual ethnography of the spatial planning and architectural design work involved in materialising London’s Olympic legacy promise. To some extent, this was the case – fieldwork interactions involved looking at plans and architectural models, discussing the political temporalities of concrete, and listening to arguments about the power of reclaimed bricks to mediate feelings of belonging. It rapidly became apparent, however, that it was the ‘absences’ that emerged in everyday practice that were significant in terms of their potential and/or problematic character. Planning and constructing a new neighbourhood is a highly complex material process that requires specialised technical knowledge, expertise, collaborative processes and resources. Yet, despite this complexity, the placemaking team shared a sense that the material dimensions of community-building were predictable and controllable, whereas this is not the case for social aspects. Conversations would frequently shift from the certainties of the plan to the uncertainties and risks of ‘making’ a community with intangible social relations and unpredictable processes of relationship building. Where I had anticipated focusing on bricks and buildings, my data was about the spaces where people were imagined not to be – the ‘lack’ of community, the gaps in knowledge about how people and places shape each other, empty spaces that could be sites of risk or potential – and what they did to mediate or unsettle a path to the future. This thesis starts from the established position in material culture that people, buildings, and other material forms, are mutually constitutive of self and place, and work in dynamic social and temporal relations to make and remake symbolic, social and physical landscapes (Buchli 2013, 2000; Bender 2002). From this beginning, I examine the agentive potential of spaces where buildings and people are determined not to be – exploring

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\(^5\) Setha Low’s concepts of social production and social construction are useful in considering how economic and political factors interact with social meanings of space, in particular, the disjuncture that occurs between idealised and actual uses. Social production encompasses the processes of shaping the urban environment - planning, design and construction, as well as ideology and technology – and encoding it with meanings; social construction describes the individual and collective experience of giving space meaning through use and everyday life.
how these gaps, spaces and imaginaries are given form, the work they do and how absence, materiality and power intersect with the idea of urban ‘community’.

This thesis examines absence ethnographically, and thereby works with the concepts and categories employed by the placemaking team in everyday practice. Empirical accounts of these gaps and absences, and their associated materialities, are presented in the following chapters as they unfolded in my fieldwork. However, in addition to these ethnographic narratives, I use ‘void’ as an analytical framework to bring these different forms of absence into productive correspondence. This shift from ethnographic description of specific gaps, absences, emptinesses and losses, to void as an analytic category is performed to allow for comparison between ‘void types’: to examine their characteristics and qualities; to map evidence of relationships between void forms; and to explore their material and social effects. This analysis demonstrates that ‘voids’ are not simply spatial (marginal or temporary by-products of development processes that generate possibilities for new forms of urban practice) but are social and discursive entities, crafted with particular ideological intentions and deployed strategically and relationally by urban placemaking actors. The thesis moves towards a grounded theoretical account of ‘void types’ as agentive entities that produce and exert power in the making of urban space, citizens and communities, and in doing so, this work takes anthropological engagements with both absence and community in new directions.

The thesis is organised in two parts: section one ‘Void Potential’ (chapters three to six) examines how questions about success and failure in the Olympic Park intersect with wider political and popular concerns about the state of community in contemporary Britain, and become entangled with social, spatial and discursive voids. In chapter three, I examine how a particular ideological notion of community is embedded in urban policymaking and interwoven with ideas about architectural form and its capacities to engender, or fail to produce, particular forms of urban sociality and community feeling. I describe how architectural failure and community dysfunction are discursively configured as a ‘social void’ – a symbolic absence of ‘proper’ social relations. I argue that a preoccupation with architectural failure -
which shapes placemaking efforts at Chobham Manor in myriad ways - obscures a more significant political concern about what ‘community’ is, what it should be, and the wider societal risks posed by its absence. In chapters four and five I describe how thriving communities are imagined in the Olympic legacy masterplan and translated into architectural and spatial forms – a ‘new London vernacular’ - intent on producing specific forms of urban sociality, citizenship and community at Chobham Manor. This analysis demonstrates how Chobham Manor’s architecture configures socially productive voids – gaps and spaces between buildings where community can be formed – and acts as a conductor of community feeling; a frictionless surface that enables sociality and goodwill to flow around the neighbourhood. Chapter six engages with a different form of void – examining the ‘problem’ of conceptualising, understanding and measuring intangible feelings and relationships that constitute a sense of community. This chapter describes how indicators and metrics are used by the placemaking team to make these relations and attachments visible, and argues that this shift in materiality transforms locally-situated relations into a new form of mobile, economic value.

Section two ‘Imagining Nothingness’ (chapters seven to nine) explores absence as a way of seeing and the dynamic and asymmetrical power that voids produce. Chapter seven examines absence as a way of seeing; describing how the Lower Lea Valley was discursively constructed as an unproductive and peripheral wasteland – a spatial and social void that could be reclaimed and reintegrated into the moral and economic circuits of the city through the Olympic regeneration programme. This chapter examines the pre-Olympic wasteland discourse in the context of accounts of the Lower Lea Valley as a marginal urban space of creative possibility, experimentation and freedom where alternative value and exchange systems could flourish. It goes on to explore how these qualities are appropriated and reproduced in ‘intentional voids’; planned and managed voids that seek to reproduce the characteristics of marginal spaces that fit with neo-liberal values – creativity, innovation, social productivity and citizen-led urbanism. This chapter makes a connection between the enclosure and remaking of the Lower Lea Valley and anthropological theories of ritual practice, which bring opposing forces and value systems into a form of
Chapter eight examines how Chobham Manor’s show apartments operate as ‘aesthetic traps’ (following Gell, 1996) – spaces where a home should be that offer the promise of certainty in a volatile and high-risk property and financial market. I argue that the show apartments occupy a space at the apex of a process of risk and commodification and act to momentarily equalise the extreme power imbalance between individual home buyers and the global network of institutions that drive property and mortgage-finance industries. Chapter nine concludes this thesis; here I shift the scale of analysis from empirical descriptions of the materialities and dynamics of particular voids to present an emergent typology of voids. The typology of voids is developed as a heuristic device – a means to engage with higher-order relationships, intersections and forces that can be identified from the data, and with this in mind, the typology may be of value to anthropologists and urban scholars engaged with questions about power, subjectivity and urban transformation. I conclude by arguing that this thesis demonstrates how social, spatial and discursive voids operate as agentive entities that produce and exert coercive and subtle forms of power to produce urban space and citizen subjectivities.

1.3 Situating this research

The arguments in this thesis draw mainly on three areas of anthropological theory and cross-disciplinary literature on architecture, urbanism, regeneration and housing. In this section, I situate my research in relation to these bodies of work. In section 1.3.1, I engage with literature examining the political reinvention of ‘community’ in Britain and its relationship to urban politics and spatial practices, which have significant implications for how citizenship and community are understood in policymaking and professional placemaking practice. In section 1.3.2, I engage with anthropological literature examining the meaning and construction of community, in particular, recent empirical and theoretical engagements with consociate forms of community in contemporary urban neighbourhoods, where my approach is heavily influenced by Vered Amit’s work (2012, 2002b, 2002a). Section 1.3.3 summarises anthropological theories of planning, architecture and place that are important to this thesis, and describes how I approach ‘the city’ and interventions
in urban placemaking as imaginaries and social processes that are embedded in governance and political structures, yet open to interpretation and fluid meaning-making. In this sense, I approach the legacy regeneration planning in the Olympic Park as an assemblage (following Ong and Collier 2005) – a mobile, dynamic and emergent composition of people, things and places that includes physical spaces and future imaginaries, historical narratives and political promises, design practices and materials, and multiple notions of belonging, identity and community. Section 1.3.4 summarises the different approaches anthropologists have taken to theorising absence and presence and how this literature frames the analysis in this thesis. This section highlights the significance of literature that acknowledges the generative potentials of forms of absence (see contributions in Bille, Hastrup, and Sørensen 2010b), and situates this work in relation to approaches from architecture and semiotics that engage with the ‘void’ conceptually in urban space and linguistics. In the chapters that follow, I examine how bodies of literature theorising community and absence can productively intersect and be developed in new directions. My thesis draws on this extensive body of research and I am indebted to the authors who have advanced anthropological theory about the interaction of social and material, human and non-human, temporality and memory, absence and presence in the context of imagining and producing urban spaces and architectures. This research is influenced by anthropological perspectives that seek to connect ideology and intentions, economic and political systems, cultural values and social practices in ways that transcend place-bounded communities.

While London’s Olympic legacy promises to frame this inquiry, and the Olympic Park is the setting for my fieldwork, this thesis does not directly address questions about the emerging outcomes of the legacy regeneration programme for communities in east London. Analysing the social and economic benefits of the Olympics is a field of scholarship in its own right (Baade and Matheson 2016; Zimbalist 2015; Gaffney 2010; Poynter and MacRury 2009), and an extensive cross-disciplinary literature addresses various dimensions of London’s Olympic legacy, including work on regeneration (Ryan-Collins, Lloyd, and Macfarlane 2017; Ward 2013; Davies 2012; J. Davis and Thornley 2010); housing, gentrification and displacement (Bernstock 2014;
Watt 2013; P. Cohen 2013; Porter et al. 2009); and, health outcomes for local communities (Thompson et al. 2013). These authors engage with the Olympic legacy regeneration as the latest phase in a process of long-term social and economic transformation in east London. In so doing, they build on an established body of research that documents the dynamics of economic change in east London, and the associated impacts on living standards and working conditions for east Londoners, since the early 19th century (T. Butler and Rustin 1996; Begg and Whyatt 1996; Marriott 1989). Rustin identifies three major shifts in east London’s economy and economic prospects, which have shaped current regeneration trajectories: first, is the shift from early 19th century industrialisation characterised by slum conditions and exploitative labour practices, to the rise of modern industrialism between the 1930s and 1960s, which brought major new industries, organised labour and greater job security to east London. This shift coincided with post-war public investments in new housing, health and education intended to reduce levels of deprivation and improve living standards and opportunities. Second, is ‘global restructuring’ – the deregulation of capital, labour, goods and tariffs during the 1970s and 1980s, which undermined manufacturing industries in east London, and Britain as a whole, and led to the eventual closure of London’s Docklands. The job losses and decline in living standards that followed east London’s de-industrialisation have had lasting impacts from which many communities have not recovered. Third, is the redevelopment of London Docklands as Canary Wharf, and the growth of new service sectors, creating thousands of new professional jobs in banking, financial services and communications industries, but employing very few of east London’s former industrial workers. Writing in 1996, Rustin argued a significant proportion of east London’s population is “in a marginal relationship to any labour market” (1996, 6) – a situation that persists in the form of high levels of poverty, deprivation and low-wage employment for many working class households (‘London’s Poverty Profile: Overview of London Boroughs’ 2017), and which Olympic legacy regeneration seeks to address. MacRury and Poynter’s pre-Olympic analysis of east London’s regeneration trajectory identified the relationship between “growth points such as the development of Canary Wharf” (2009, 33) and increasing social inequalities over two decades.
This thesis focuses on housing as one aspect of the Olympic legacy regeneration strategy for east London, which aims to make the Olympic Park a model for sustainable living as well as attracting major employers, economic investment and new forms of service, cultural and educational sectors to the area. New forms of housing have been closely tied to different phases of east London’s history of economic and social regeneration from the efforts of Victorian housing reformers to post-war state-led social housing, and in this sense, reflect the changing roles of public and private sector actors in leading efforts to improve living and working conditions. In this thesis Chobham Manor is treated as metonymic of the large-scale, multi-stakeholder regeneration projects that characterise much contemporary urban development in the UK and other major global cities, in which public-private partnerships combine public land and infrastructure investment and encourage private investment in residential and commercial assets to underwrite the provision of social housing and public space – a model that Swyngedouw, Moulaert and Rodriguez describe as neo-liberal urbanization (2002). I argue that attending to the specificity of planning and placemaking at Chobham Manor, in particular the values, knowledge and concepts that drive this work, discloses a distinct ‘void aesthetic’ that produces specific spatial, architectural and social effects in the Olympic Park’s new neighbourhoods – insights that can be productively applied to analyse the contemporary production of urban space in other contexts.

1.3.1 Localism and the political reinvention of community

Community is a touchstone in British public and political life, a powerful imaginary that, while rarely defined, is called upon to express a wide variety of ideas about collective identity, sociality and belonging. It may be an outdated and highly contested concept in the social sciences - its ambiguity and historical baggage felt to “fatally undermine” its analytical value (Amit 2012, 3) - but community retains an important popular symbolism in Britain, deeply invested as it is, with ideas about belonging, trust and proper ways to live in the face of rapid social and economic change. In political terms, creating stable, safe and ordered urban communities has been a concern of government since the rapid urbanisation of the industrial
revolution. Community has taken on new political significance since the late 1980s under the guise of the urban renewal policy agenda. Both Conservative and Labour governments have pursued some form of urban renewal policy to revitalise post-industrial inner-city neighbourhoods affected by economic decline, physical decay and high levels of social deprivation. However, the re-imagining of urban communities reached its peak under New Labour (Raco 2007; Imrie and Raco 2003) which, in contrast to the Conservative’s focus on property-led regeneration in catalysing economic growth, emphasised the renewal of social and civic life as well as the physical and environmental infrastructure of cities. New Labour’s “popular socialism” (Baron 2004, 7) incorporated a widespread adoption of modern Communitarian principles (Raco 2007; Prideaux 2002), drawing heavily on the work of contemporary Communitarians such as Amitai Etzioni who advocates social connection, civic values and moral responsibility (1995). New Labour set out to reconstruct the idea of community (Brown 1994), imagining the moral restoration of society through a redistribution of power, opportunities and responsibilities that would reshape relations between citizens and the state (Hoban 2008; Levitas 2000).

Described as a new settlement between the government, communities and individuals, New Labour sought to rebalance economic and political power differentials by re-establishing both the rights and duties of citizens. This new settlement was both in response to Thatcher’s neo-liberal individualism and an attempt to distinguish between New and ‘old’ Labour thinking on the relation between social and economic life, based on the principles that individual potential is greater than can be realised in a wholly capitalist society; that people are not purely driven by self-interest but are also co-operative, and that being part of a strong community is essential for individuals to achieve their potential (Brown 1994; Baron 2004). It is in this articulation of the relationship between individual and community that Baron (2004) argues takes New Labour’s reinvention of community beyond

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6 The Conservative government under Thatcher championed Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) as the vehicle to facilitate urban renewal policy, encouraging private investment and large-scale property re-development in targeted areas such as London’s Docklands and Merseyside. UDCs were criticised for their intention to circumvent local government planning powers and endow central government with local decision-making power (Imrie and Thomas 1999; Raco 2005).
Communitarianism to embrace and reinterpret the notion of social capital, shifting from Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital as a means of protecting and maintaining social status and structural inequality (1986), to social capital as a means to realise the potential of disadvantaged individuals and groups by expanding their networks and connections to power. In practice, individuals and communities were encouraged through new rights and duties to take greater responsibility in areas previously controlled by the state and to develop their social capital in the process - focusing on social inclusion as a necessary condition for individuals to develop their own potential (Baron 2004), encouraging communities to take greater responsibility for their local environments (Imrie and Raco 2003), and encouraging an awareness of the interdependence and collective social action required to counter the fragmentation of urban social life.\(^7\)

New Labour’s adoption of ‘community’ as an ideological and operational principle is the subject of an extensive literature, including notable critiques of the fluid political rhetoric around community (Levitas 2000), the \textit{a priori} assumption that ‘community’ exists (Wallace 2010), the ethics of constructing categories of citizenship and community, based on levels of civic participation (Schneider and Ingram 1997), and of the urban subjectivities generated by New Labour’s pre-occupation with community safety and social order (Raco 2007). A critical review of this wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary work is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I draw on the literature to articulate the significance of community to political ideology in Britain since the late 1990s, and specifically, to draw out the ways in which community is conceptualised and deployed in political discourse, and as an object of policy, and further materialised in urban spaces.

\subsection{1.3.1.1 Privileging the local}

‘Local community’ acquired a significance as a political imaginary for New Labour for both philosophical and practical reasons. Community was understood as the “key scale of meaningful human interaction” (Imrie and Raco 2003, 5) and while it lacked

\footnote{7 In particular, the idea that community is “a good thing” (Driver and Martell 1997, 34).}
a clear definition in much of New Labour’s policy (Painter et al. 2011; Levitas 2000), ‘community’ was operationalised around the notion of locally spatialised social relations bounded by administrative geographies (e.g. a housing estate, a political ward, a ‘priority neighbourhood area’). Flagship urban renewal programmes, like the New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, were designed as place-based initiatives targeting the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. Investment was contingent on partnerships between local state actors (for example, local authorities, police, health and education agencies) and civil society, meaning individuals and organisations that could ‘represent’ local interests or ‘give voice’ to local concerns. This interpretation of community is very close to Etzioni’s notion that “communities are social webs of people who know one another and have a moral voice” (1995, ix). ‘Local community’ was conceived as the primary site of social connection and civic participation in urban renewal policy, revitalising an ideal of community rooted in tradition and face-to-face collectivity, but it also triangulated other domains of social policy. Community safety, wellbeing and race relations policy, for example, were predicated on the notion that local social relations and active local participation are essential to the stability, control and cohesion of urban neighbourhoods. New Labour’s intellectual investment in community was institutionalised through an extensive apparatus to embed this normative concept of ‘community’ in central and local government, the voluntary sector and with citizens and communities.8 I argue that this imposes an imagined homogeneity on urban social life that negates other forms of identity such as race, ethnicity, culture or gender and denies the contested nature of places (Woodcraft 2016). Arguably, multiculturalism, globalisation, austerity and now Brexit, have refocused public attention on community as an expression of territorial belonging and the rights to citizenship and public goods this endows – including space in the city. This is an increasingly

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8 Numerous public and quasi-governmental bodies and knowledge centres were established by New Labour to build the capacities of the public sector and civil society to advance policies on planning and building sustainable communities. These include the Academy for Sustainable Communities (the ASC, later merged with the Homes and Communities Agency), Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE, established 1999 and merged with the Design Council in 2011), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA, established 1998).
important aspect of contemporary thinking about urban place-based communities in Britain, particularly in the context of the ‘super-diversification’ (Vertovec 2007) of urban areas like east London, Leicester and Birmingham (Dorling and Thomas 2007) as a result of immigration. Mintchev and Moore argue that discourses about community cohesion in Britain are, not only about the politics of social exclusion and inequality, but also about the politics of class identity and cultural/ethnic/racial identity:

“each form the basis of competing models about how British society is divided, who gets left out, and what needs to be done to improve social cohesion.” (2016, 569)

1.3.1.2 Making urban subjects

In 2003, New Labour launched the Sustainable Communities Plan which identified the renewal of urban neighbourhoods as a vital element in repopulating cities and stimulating economic growth. Urban neighbourhoods were prioritised for intervention because of the contextual effects of concentrated poverty and deprivation in certain areas of cities. This policy agenda introduced two initiatives intended to reconfigure urban populations, which have had far-reaching consequences for urban communities and will directly impact the social composition of new neighbourhoods in the Olympic Park. First, the Mixed Communities Initiative (MCI) - launched in 2005 with the goal of transforming deprived, mono-tenure, mainly inner-city neighbourhoods, by changing the housing stock to attract new populations to previously run-down areas (Lupton and Fuller 2009). Britain has a history of planning policy intent on creating mixed communities: Garden Cities and post-war housing estates were designed to house people from different class backgrounds. The MCI was informed by ‘area effects theory’, which puts forward the argument that the day-to-day co-existence of people from different backgrounds can increase social interaction, thereby increasing the likelihood that low-income households have access and exposure to “more advantaged and aspirational social networks” (Silverman et al. 2005, 9) and increasing the likelihood of, and reducing, distance and prejudice (Atkinson and Kintrea 2001a; Allen et al. 2005). The second broad area of policy is the ‘active citizenship agenda’, which was introduced by New
Labour and has taken various forms under successive governments, intent on the creation and mobilization of active communities and citizens (Raco 2007), understood as individuals involved in local volunteering and democratic participation, and strong social networks at the neighbourhood level to encourage community self-help (Seyfang 2003). Sometimes described as a post-welfare political ideology (McGuirk and Dowling 2011), active citizenship is intended to encourage citizens to take greater responsibility for their own welfare and that of their communities based on the logic that “more developed communities and communities with more capacity are safer and healthier places to live” (Kelly, Caputo, and Jamieson 2005, 308).

The sustainable communities’ policy agenda has received widespread criticism from urban scholars with studies questioning the validity of area effects theory (Lupton 2008a), arguing that the mixed communities principle is a form of state-led gentrification that displaces low income households (Lees 2008; O’Hanlon and Hamnett 2009), and problematises deprived communities by seeking to establish a connection between social need and unsustainability (Raco 2007). Nevertheless, the sustainable communities concept, along with mixed tenure and active citizenship, have become institutionalised in planning policy (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012; Greater London Authority 2011).

1.3.2 Community in theory – culture, place, modernity and super-diversity

‘Community’ has been widely used by social theorists as a conceptual vehicle to investigate the changing nature of social relations in modernity - from early social theories addressing the changing forms of association observed in industrial cities (Durkheim 1889; Tönnies 1957), to work by the Chicago school of sociologists on the city as a networked ecology and its impacts on the development trajectories of urban communities (Lin and Mele 2005). East London has a special place in this process: Young and Willmott’s study of family, kinship networks and belonging in inner-city Bethnal Green, and how they are affected by post-war population dispersal to planned suburban estates and new towns, has become a classic sociological text (Family and Kinship in East London, 1957). Crow and Allen argued Family and Kinship
has become the most widely read sociological text in Britain (1994). Critics claim that Young and Willmott fetishised the close-knit social networks they encountered in Bethnal Green - presenting a sentimental account of working-class cohesion that disregarded divisions within communities and the aspirations of those families that had chosen to relocate to new suburban homes (Clapson, n.d.). Butler argues that Young and Willmott promoted an idealised concept of the family, the supportive nature of working-class kinship networks, and the role of women in society – positions that drew on pre-existing intellectual interests in the relevance of the extended family in modern society – and offers a reminder that “present-day strands of nostalgic, relational, and communitarian thinking within the British left derive from a rich intellectual lineage” (2015, 224). Family and Kinship was only one of several area-based community studies undertaken in the post-war period, however, it remains the most high-profile and has contributed to a cultural imaginary of ‘East End’ kinship and community as a situated value system with specific modes of language and behaviour, which is comparable to the anthropological tradition of theorising community as an interaction between culture and place. However, anthropology’s historical focus on overlapping notions of people, place, identity and culture, has created specific disciplinary challenges to engagements with community. In the context of post-colonialism, globalization, trans-national migration, mass population displacement and global urbanism, the anthropological imaginary of distinct territorialized cultural groupings has been unseated by new forms of super-diversity and cosmopolitanism prompting new theoretical approaches to collectivity and community focusing on fluidity, movement, disjuncture and discontinuity in social and territorial spaces (Hannerz 2010; Olwig and Hastrup 1997a; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue this ruptured social and theoretical landscape has, ironically, increased the salience of spatialized ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, especially in the context of ‘remembered’ places like diasporic homelands or areas undergoing widespread and rapid social and economic change like east London. These shifts motivated anthropologists to engage with community as a form of collectivity that is both delocalized and decoupled from social interaction. Two studies have been particularly influential in shaping this turn towards the symbolic and imaginary; these are work by Cohen (1985) addressing
community as a system of meaning rather than an organizational structure, and Anderson (1983) on the historical conditions shaping the emergence of nationalism as a form of imagined community that obscures differences and inequalities within society and makes it possible for national identity to be something people are willing to fight or die for. Cohen and Anderson develop different formulations of community as a symbolic imaginary that conveys cultural difference, however, both authors work with the concept of the boundary. Whether a group of co-located Shetland islanders, as in Cohen’s case, or an imagined national fraternity in Anderson’s - sameness and difference are examined in relation to the symbolic boundaries that people draw between categories of insider and outsider, and the effort and meaning that is invested in maintaining these imaginaries. Cohen argues community is a boundary-expressing symbol (1985, 21); while the symbol can be shared by members of a collective, the individual meanings and feelings invested in that symbol may be varied in their content and intensity. In this sense, the efficacy of community lies in its imprecision and ambiguity as a shared symbol - rather than as a clearly defined mode of social interaction - which disguises the manner in which meaning and commitment to that imaginary might vary within a collective, as well as between groups that are separated by symbolic boundaries.

Theorizing community as a form of imaginary collectivity has been problematized by anthropologists (Amit 2012, 2002a; Olwig 2002) who argue that it places too great an emphasis on pre-determining the characteristics that groups are presumed to hold in common and which can be ascribed to individuals by unknown others, like national or ethnic identity, religion. A consequence of focusing on the manner in which imagined communities are constructed is that insufficient attention is paid to the categories and meanings that individuals draw on to construct their own notions of self and belonging, and to the multiple and diverse forms of social interaction and collective association this entails – including relations that may be partial, intermittent or short-lived as well as those with emotional charge (Amit 2012, 2002a). In recent years a number of anthropologists have shown renewed interest in community as an ethnographic framework for examining the forms and practices of collectivity that emerge under these everyday conditions and are sustained among
subjects and in settings that are characterized by diversity, transience and mobility. This body of work examines how individuals from heterogeneous social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds construct notions of community and engage in a variety of voluntary and deliberate efforts at social interaction, including for example Wallman’s work on feelings of local belonging as one dimension of plural subjecthood in a south London neighbourhood (1984), Howell’s analysis of the construction of community among Norwegian adoptive families and adoptees (2002), Dyck’s work on organized sports for children as a catalyst for social connection and belonging in suburban Canada (2002), Olwig’s body of research on communities of sentiment and locality in the context of trans-national migration (2002, 1996), and Dawson’s innovative work on ageing as constitutive of elderly people’s experience of community (2002). This literature applies a consociate, rather than categorical, theory of community to social interactions, arguing that consociate relations emerge from the shared experience of everyday interactions such as meeting neighbours, using shared public spaces, being part of a church group, or a local sports team. Consociate relations are theorized as mutually intentional, experiential and context specific (Dyck 2002) – associations and interactions that may or may not develop into lasting or emotionally significant relationships, yet do not lack meaning as a consequence of their modest or sporadic nature (Wallman 1984; Amit 2012). These works identify agency and intentionality as significant aspects of consociate communities in the sense that participation is a strategic choice by individuals that requires considerable effort and creativity, yet may be met with indifference or disengagement:

“Neighbours living beside each other on the same suburban street may have disparate schedules, competing obligations and understandings of locality, privacy and proximity that render any effort at building a consociate relationship ineffectual.” (Amit 2012, 27)

By focusing on concrete efforts to build or participate in different forms of community, and examining the particular meanings invested in those efforts, these ethnographic accounts confront claims that community is hollowed out by ambiguity and overuse and thereby of dubious analytical value (A. Cohen 2002; Baumann and
Instead, the proliferation of everyday settings and affiliations to which the term is applied are taken as evidence of community’s continuing relevance in social life and thereby of its importance as an analytical concept (Amit 2002b, 2012). My research about the meaning and making of community at Chobham Manor has drawn on the theoretical and ethnographic account described here, in particular arguments by Amit (2012, 2002b) for considering the range of consociative forms of community in everyday life, and the different values that individuals and collectives ascribe to those forms. These approaches have been invaluable to my fieldwork – helping to situate the conceptual model of community that the Chobham Manor placemaking team are working with, and to consider how this relates to the aspirations and experiences for community that residents and neighbourhood associations describe. One of my aims for this thesis is to interrogate the assumptions that underpin conceptualisations of community in the placemaking efforts at Chobham Manor, and in the process, to take up Amit’s call for anthropologists to bring ethnographic insights to bear on developing a “working model of community that may lead us to a variety of situations and concepts” (2012, 4). In this spirit, my research explores what community is understood to mean to a particular set of actors in a specific social, political and temporal context. As the following chapters describe, I work with community as an ethnographic category and analytical framework to engage with questions about urban space and forms of citizenship in contemporary London, and from this perspective identify the conceptual and material significance afforded to forms of ‘void’ in the making of successful communities in the Olympic Park.

1.3.3 Planning futures, imagining subjects

Anthropologists have long recognised the ways in which the material world becomes implicated in wider processes of societal transformation. The home - as the primary site for the transmission of social structures and cultural values (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Bourdieu 1970) - is a microcosm of the dominant values, relations and systems in wider society, thus has been the locus of ideological interventions intent on social reform, moral improvement and modernisation through the 19th and 20th
centuries. Changing societal notions of progress, modernity and morality are linked to debates about proper ways to live that address both the micro-scale of bodies in the home and the macro-scale of city, nation and society. In this way, aspirations for the home, family, changing household gender roles and class relations in wider society, have become enmeshed in debates about spatial and material orders that reflect ‘proper’ relations between the urban and the rural, city and suburbs, public space and private property. Consequently, spatial planning and architecture have been used as instruments of social change in the context of the industrial revolution, colonialism, the rise of architectural modernism, and the present era of global urbanism, in efforts to re-order society and eradicate problems of poverty, inequality, pollution, social disorder and underdevelopment. New forms of city, suburb and architecture, as well as the arrangement of domestic space and furniture, the display of artefacts and images and household management practices, have been deployed to radically reimagine possibilities for living and to mediate planned transitions to new social futures (Buchli 2000; Attfield 1999; Cieraad 1999; Holston 1989; Epstein 1973). As Taussig writes, these are questions about the organisation and materiality of built form, yet: “they belie deeper and more significant questions concerning the very terms of being, of which being modern, that is being fully ‘human’, is one of the key questions.” (Taussig 1993 as cited in Buchli 2007, 46).

Britain has a long history of spatial planning and architectural experiments intent on radical social reform, from the first model communities and factory towns planned by landowners, industrialists and philanthropists to improve the productivity of the working poor (Gaskell 1987; Briggs 1959); to the collectivist ideals of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City movement designed to tackle the squalid living conditions of industrial cities by reconciling the best of urban and rural living (P. Hall and Ward 1998; Fishman 1982); and, commitments to universal welfare and social inclusion embodied by modernist post-war housing (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994). The ideological roots of these historical initiatives differ, yet they are motivated by the belief that centralised planning is the mechanism to re-order the social world and solve problems created by the failure of industrial capitalism in cities (Holston 1989; Fishman 1982). Britain’s history of utopian planning experiments, in particular
Howard’s Garden City concept, has influenced the emergence of centralised planning regimes and inspired the construction of garden cities and suburbs in diverse contexts, including colonial Nairobi (Smith 2017) and Patrick Geddes’ modernist vision for Tel Aviv (Payton 1995). Buchli describes the influence of the Garden City movement on the development of both modernist socialist planning and urban anthropology:

“... the movement aimed to address the worst evils of rapid urbanization and industrialization through a network of small conurbations that combined the best that the city and the country had to offer ... [Howard’s] ideas on social organisation (and their materialisation) inspired early socialist planners and architects, but also indirectly fed into a strand of ethnographic enquiry that valorised the small community over the centrally planned and sought to find and explain systems of local order amid apparent chaos.” (2007, 3).

Yet in spite of their global influence, Britain’s centrally-planned cities, communities and housing complexes have received little attention from anthropologists. Melhuish’s phenomenological study of the Brunswick Centre, a modernist ‘mega-structure’ in London (2005), stands out as an exception among anthropological literature that encompasses Brasília, Brazil’s planned modernist capital city (Holston 1989; Epstein 1973); Buchli’s detailed account of the Soviet Constructivist Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow (2000, 1998, 2017); Boudon’s account of lived experience at Le Corbusier’s Pessac (1972); and Gans’ work on life in a new American suburb (1967). Instead, Britain’s centrally-planned settlements have been examined by sociologists and social historians with a focus on the impacts of dispersal to post-war New Towns and suburban estates (Clapson 1998; Durant 1939; M. Young and Willmott 1957).

Anthropologies of urban planning have tended to focus on its role as a technology of government - inspired by Foucault - examining how states exercise power and control over citizens by regulating and arranging territorial and conceptual space in the context of colonial expansion (Rabinow 1995; Robertson 1984), and forms of city and local government and governance (Abram and Weszkalnys 2011; Baxstrom 2011). In these accounts, urban spatial planning - and by extension, the production of buildings
and space - is theorised as a linear, future-oriented process that is ‘done to’ citizens by professionals, officials and experts. Abram and Wezkalnys’ wide-ranging review of anthropological engagements with planning observes that even new inquiries into forms of resistance, activism and citizen participation tend to focus on how people become implicated in larger systems of power and governance (2011), a perspective that risks over-emphasising structures and systems at the expense of the contingent, relational and temporal aspects of planning. Other authors make similar arguments about anthropology’s engagement with architecture - calling for methodological and theoretical engagements that address architecture as a social process characterised by controversies and compromises, not a fixed materiality (Yaneva 2012), and inquiries that shift beyond themes of domination and oppression that focus on buildings as “imposed forms” covertly adapted and appropriated by dwellers (Melhuish 2005, 9).

1.3.3.1 Intentionality and fluidity

Two accounts of architectures produced by state-led centralised planning have been particularly influential in shaping my research and framing the presented analysis: Holston’s meticulous analysis of the utopian intentions driving the planning and design of Brasília (1989), and Buchli’s innovative account of the Narkomfin Communal House (2000) as a materialisation of Soviet Constructivists’ intentions to use radical architectural forms to provoke the transition to socialism, and ultimately, communism. The authors take different theoretical approaches; however, in both cases they seek to examine built forms – housing complex and city – in their wider social, political, economic and historical contexts. Buchli approaches the Narkomfin Communal House, not as an exemplar of constructivist architecture – a fixed and stable entity, but as the embodiment of the “contradictory dynamics” of Soviet social and political life across distinct periods (1998, 160). Furthermore, Buchli’s attention to both the ideological intentions of socialist planners and the lived experience of Narkomfin residents reveals the fluid and contextual meanings of Soviet material culture and brings issues of temporality and contingency to the analysis of architecture. This nuance has been invaluable to my research about new
neighbourhoods in the Olympic Park, where I have attempted to examine the shifting meanings ascribed to architectural forms, space and building materials, and the contradictions and tensions they reveal.

Holston engages with intentionality by examining how the modernist ideal of Brasília is linked to social practices and transformed into forces that act on the social world – spatial planning and architecture, being examples of “domains of intentions” (1989, 11) that are then subject to translation and interpretation. The plans, statements, texts, models, discourses and ideas generated by Brasília’s main actors are the focus of Holston's critical analysis, examined for their premises, categories, aspirations, then re-assessed to find the implications, consequences, gaps and conflicts that subsequently arise. Furthermore, Holston recognises the necessity of understanding the present as a product of historical processes of transformation, moving beyond a historical context for the ethnographic present to establish historical influences on contemporary spatial and social relationships. This perspective has been important in contextualising my fieldwork and making sense of the ways in which historical narratives, forces and processes shape how places are discursively, as well as physically, shaped. In east London, historical notions of otherness and underdevelopment framed the conditions for the legacy regeneration strategy to unfold and continue to shape planning policy.

1.3.3.2 Temporality and memory

In the context of late modernity, social theories of the city have shifted from the totalising machine-metaphor of modernism to an emphasis on network culture and cities as nodes on communication networks (Castells 2002; Sassen 2008, 2006) that reflect post-modern concerns with trans-nationalism, fluidity and more flexible forms of capitalism. In this context, anthropology’s engagement with urban planning has shifted to focus on the inter-relatedness of the built form, social experience, politics and economic systems that link the local and global in multiple ways (Blier 2006), and to propose new theoretical directions that focus on the inseparability of human and material domains and include a recognition of the agency of non-human actants such as artworks, buildings, plans, materials and landscapes (Gell 1998; Latour 1993;
History, memory and temporality have emerged as anthropological concerns in the context of planning and architecture and are significant issues for my research in east London. For example, Huysen’s work about the reconstruction of Berlin describes the temporal reach of urban imaginaries that place a variety of things - memories, historical ideas, imagined alternatives – in one place at a particular moment that unseat the apparent fixity of the city. Huysen deploys the literary trope of the palimpsest to urban spaces to consider how material worlds unfold through time without reducing architecture to a critique of representation. The urban palimpsest, he argues, is a technique for “reading historically, intertextually, constructively and deconstructively at the same time” (2003, 7). Vike takes a different perspective on temporality to argue that distinct yet conflicting concepts of time are at work in urban planning – contemporary time, which promises real solutions to immediate problems, and utopian time, whereby problems are resolved in a future that is always deferred and out of reach (Vike 2013). While Abram and Wezkalnyş examine temporal misalignments in the context of neo-liberal regimes that weaken state planning powers while strengthening corporations: “It can be seen as the clash of two temporal trajectories, the modernist seeking ideal conditions, and the capitalist seeking complete exploitation of the markets” (2011, 7).

1.3.3.3 Planning and magic

Abram argues that there is no coherent theoretical or empirical model capable of demonstrating how planning theory achieves the outcomes people experience, since: “Textual plans never exactly correspond to actual material changes on the ground, and they can never robustly be tested for effectiveness” (2011, 34). This observation resonates with the ongoing public and political concern about progress towards London’s Olympic legacy promise of inclusive social and economic regeneration, which will unfold over a period of 20-30 years. In this context, public documents such as the Olympic legacy masterplan and regeneration strategy documents, take on particular significance as they represent commitments from the state to the public about the future that citizens can expect, and embody the promise of transformation that state-led planning represents. The rational nature of planning is called into
question by Abram, who applies anthropological concepts of ritual, magic and witchcraft to produce a highly innovative analysis of planning as a belief system (2011). Planning is presented as a set of practices that predict the future, invite forms of prosperity, and ward-off dangers in ways that deploy ritual linguistic practices, covert bodies of powerful knowledge and embodied performances of state power and citizen participation that can be difficult to challenge. In the context of my fieldwork, Abram’s creative analysis opens up the possibility of gaining distance from planning as a bureaucratic and technical process, to question the fundamental values and principles upon which it operates.

1.3.4 Absence, presence and the void

Humans make sense of the world through interactions with things. Individually and collectively we craft our identities, sustain relationships, find meaning in the past, and narrate possible futures through material engagements. Anthropologists have shown, however, that neither people or things need to be ‘present’, in the sense that they are physically accessible or can be known experientially, to have significance or emotional charge. This claim is argued convincingly in Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen’s Anthropology of Absence (2010a), which examines absence as a presence in everyday life through ethnographic accounts of the material practices in which people engage to maintain relations with the dead, connect the human and the divine, and recover the possibility of a future following trauma. Meskell, in this volume, observes that absence is not only tied to mourning and nostalgia for people and things that are lost, but presents opportunities for reimagining and remaking future selves in relation to people, things and places that are not-yet, unknown, or temporarily out of reach (2010). In this sense, absence and presence are not clear-cut oppositions in experiential, temporal or conceptual terms, but rather co-exist on a spectrum of possibilities: an “ambiguous materiality” (Meyer 2012, 105). People and things can be ‘present’ in many ways without being physically co-located with others, or ‘absent’ while ‘present’ in a positivist sense, as illustrated by Buch’s work on the lives of Palestinian women who are related to political prisoners or martyrs (2010). Buchli’s work on early Christian technologies for materialising the divine, explores this
problem by introducing the idea of propinquity - understood as “degrees of nearness in different registers, rather than presence” (2010, 186). Buchli puts forward an argument for re-considering the range of possible sensorial engagements with the immaterial – considering how analogy, nearness in time, and unstable forms of materiality pose a challenge to the dominance of visual and physical co-presence in western thought.

The question of spatial absence is most commonly addressed by anthropologists through engagements with heritage, monuments, ethno-archaeology, or with ruin and decay – the focus being on what was once, and is no longer (Edensor 2005a; DeSilvey and Edensor 2012; Edensor 2005b; Meyer 2012). Scholarship on contemporary ruins and urban dereliction has multiplied since the mid-1990s. DeSilvey and Edensor (2012) argue that this relatively newfound preoccupation with urban dereliction is in reaction to the proliferation of structured public space in cities, and the desire to see alternatives to the homogeneous, aesthetically-coded built environment that neo-liberal development produces. This thesis foregrounds the question of absence in and of space, by examining how and why specific locales are understood to be ‘empty’ of people, things and potential, while other spaces are afforded significant financial and symbolic investment. Critically for this thesis, Bille et al. (2010a) demonstrate that absences are not merely ideas but have “object-like” (Fowles 2010, 27) properties; developing potentialities, taking on political and social significance, and acquiring powers that have material effects. Yet as Meyer argues, absence is not only “something that does. Absence is something we engage with, something we do something to” (2012, 104, italics in original). This perspective on absence as dynamic, agentic and indeterminately material is my starting point for engaging with the social, spatial and discursive voids that emerged as significant entities throughout my fieldwork.

1.3.4.1 Nothingness and the void

Thinking anthropologically about absence as generative and future-oriented provides an alternative to philosophical perspectives that theorise absence as a state of perpetual wanting (see Bille, Hastrup, and Sørensen 2010a, for discussion of
Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Fuery); and to religious concepts of nothingness as a state of being and awareness, an emptiness of desire, and a cosmological void – absolute emptiness, non-existence or non-substantiality. These concepts are highly-developed in Buddhism (śūnyatā, mu, kung) and Taoism (wū) (Toyota, Hallonsten, and Shchepetunina 2011; Ornatowski 1997), with context-specific meanings and historical manifestations that make cross-cultural translation challenging (Ornatowski 1997). Ohnuki-Tierney’s investigation of absence in Japanese semiotic systems focuses on the significance of nothingness, emptiness, void and zero as folk concepts with material effects in everyday life (1994). The void has particular significance in semiotics where it is theorised as a structural entity, producing gaps and intervals that give meaning to other material forms such as spaces in and around text, temporal breaks in speech, and spaces deliberately left empty. In this context, voids are not merely spaces where something has been left out or left behind (Tanaka-Ishii 2013, 2), but are the gaps upon which meaning is contingent. Ohnuki-Tierney (1994) offers an ethnographic perspective on the form, function and meaning of such voids in Japanese speech, cosmology and aesthetics by examining zero-signifiers - signifiers without materiality such as absent pronouns, voiceless vowels, religious taboos that prohibit the naming or representation of deities. Ohnuki-Tierney argues the ma is the zero-signifier most closely implicated in the social and material aspects of everyday life in Japan. Understood as a spatial and temporal void, the ma is a zero-signifier whose presence is signalled materially - through the presence of rocks in a Japanese garden or objects in the home that are surrounded by space that is deliberately left empty, or intervals in speech. The power of zero-signifiers becomes evident through transgression – to deploy a pronoun in speech where it should be absent is to insult, to fill an architectural or discursive space that should be left empty is to render it meaningless:

“The ma is crucial even for an individual’s house where walls should never be filled with pictures, since the empty space has powerful meaning (Hall 1996). In fact, the meaning of the entire wall rests more on the space left ‘empty’, without which the aesthetics of even a masterpiece is diminished.” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994, 65).
1.3.4.2 Gaps and complexity

Strathern approaches the potentials of absence in a different way; engaging with the question of complexity and comparison in anthropological inquiry, she notes:

“...if at each juncture something more is generated than the answer requires, that something more acts as a kind of ‘remainder’, material that is left over, for it goes beyond the original answer to the question to encapsulate or subdivide that position (the question-and-answer set) by further questions requiring further answers. Or, we might say, it opens up fresh gaps in our understanding.” (2004, xxii).

Strathern elaborates the notion of opening up gaps in understanding by engaging with Gleick’s analysis of Cantor’s Dust – a nineteenth century mathematical model of fractal time (Strathern 2004). In Gleick’s account, the Cantor Dust begins with a line:

“remove the middle third; then remove the middle third of the remaining segments; and so on. The Cantor set is the dust of points that remains. They are infinitely many, but their total length is 0.” (James Gleick as quoted Strathern 2004, 4).

Strathern observes how the elimination of material in the Cantor model serves to reveal gap after gap yet argues that the data points that remain do not lose either their complexity or their meaning. Intermittency, partiality and gaps have value in drawing attention to deliberate choices to remove or retain materials. Strathern applies this notion to the work anthropologists do in organising data, representing meaning and action, and to writing as a means to overcome the random nature of these choices and present a coherent narrative. This is a useful reminder that gaps, absences and intervals are subjective and contingent. What is meant by void, a void or the void is always determined by wider systems of meaning that reflect situated hierarchies of power, knowledge and scope to act in and on the world.

1.3.4.3 Seeing emptiness

Semiotics and architectural theory intersect around the question of cognition and ways of seeing absence. The cultural significance of the void in forms of philosophical, religious, artistic and linguistic practice in east Asia, most notably Japan and China, is
compared to western European notions of emptiness by examining differences in perception (Toyota, Hallonsten, and Shchepetunina 2011) and how these meanings shift in the context of globalisation and the increasing influence of western rationalism in east Asia (Tanaka-Ishii 2013). Architecturally, absence and presence are pre-requisites of geometric space, which is understood as a relation between solids (the physical matter of buildings, walls, bridges, monuments) and voids (the gaps between). Solid structures give form to space by configuring and constraining the voids, while voids make movement and communication between solids possible. Roads, streets, parks, public squares, atriums, courtyards and domestic interiors are all ‘void’ spaces in this classificatory system. Holston describes how Modernism “breaks decisively with this traditional system of architectural signification” (1989, 133) by inverting the relationship between solid:void and private:public space, seeking to eliminate the figural street. Brasilia’s modernist plan exemplifies this movement, in deploying “vast areas of continuous space without exception form the perceptual ground against which the solids of the buildings emerge as sculptural figures.” (ibid., 133, italics in original). In this configuration, the avenues and streets of the modernist city are no longer contained and subordinate to its architecture.

The void is an enduring, and somewhat ambiguous, conceptual device in architectural theory – a vehicle for interrogating the material limits of architecture, its place and purpose in the city, and the life and death of buildings (Koolhaas and Mau 1995; Jonas and Rahmann 2014; Cairns and Jacobs 2017). The void is deployed conceptually to consider what forms urban space should take: Akkerman argues the urban void is the authentic antidote to modern urban planning, which has become “object-directed” and “insists on forging a city as an urban technological artifact” (2009, 205). Choosing to position the void as the “unplanned place that represents the pre-rational, the genuine and the unadulterated” (ibid., 205), Akkerman argues that 21st century urban design should focus on the preservation, recognition and deliberate crafting of voids as conduits for self and temporal-reflection and authenticity in the city. Stoppani advances a different argument, theorising the ‘architectural void’ as the relational space where architecture and the city intersect. In this context, the architectural void is a space of ‘non-coincidence’ that encompasses spaces, networks and interactions
that are not directly shaped by architectural projects but are densely occupied by architectural concerns:

“As architecture is not only building and it addresses not only buildings, its work in the context of the city must concern itself also with that which is not architecture (but is built), as well as with that which is not built but both influences and is influenced by architecture (and is therefore its concern)” (2014, 98).

Here, the void is deployed to liberate architecture as a discipline and form. In this sense, voids are never empty but are anthropological spaces - the “scene of an experience with the world on the part of a being essentially situated in relation to a milieu.” (Merleau Ponty, 1973, as quoted Auge 1995, 80).
Figure 2: Isle of Dogs Solid-Void plan, 1975, reproduced from “The Isle of Dogs: Four development waves ...” (Carmona 2009).
Chapter 2  A ‘not-yet’ and ‘no-where’ field site

On 6 July 2005, ecstatic scenes unfolded in Trafalgar Square and Stratford as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that London had beaten Paris in the final round of voting, winning the right to host the 2012 Olympic Games. London’s promise of a real and long-lasting Olympic legacy was central to its success in securing the 2012 Games (Thornley 2012). The logic of London’s bid justified major public investment for a temporary event by promising long-term social, economic and sporting benefits for east London and the rest of the UK (Vijay 2015), as this statement by Sebastian Coe, then chairman of the bid team, illustrates:

“Legacy is absolutely epicentral to the plans for 2012 ... Legacy is probably nine-tenths of what this process is about, not just 16 days of Olympic sport” (Horne 2016, 245)

Legacy has assumed a complex range of meanings in the context of mega events like the Olympics and speculation is rife about the long-term benefits of being a host nation. London’s Olympic bid was built on a special vision of the Games as the catalyst for the next phase of east London’s social and economic transformation, which began in the 1980s with the development of the Docklands (MacRury and Poynter 2009). London’s bid to the IOC made two key promises about the long-term impacts of hosting the Games: one, creating a legacy to transform sport in the UK and, two, regenerating east London communities and the environment (London 2012/LOCOG, n.d.). New homes and sustainable new communities in the Olympic Park have been identified as key indicators of the success of London’s Olympic legacy (Mayor's Office 2011; London 2012/LOCOG 2010). It is the process of materialising this promise that my fieldwork addresses.

This chapter situates my fieldsite, research methods, and reflects on the methodological challenges encountered. First, I summarise the significance of new homes and communities to London’s Olympic legacy promise and explain why and how Chobham Manor came to be the object of my research. Second, I describe my fieldwork methods and discuss the challenges of research with an ‘elite’ group of
professionals who, while working towards a shared goal, were spatially dispersed and often hard to access. Third, I discuss the methodological challenges of research about a place that is coming-into-being as a physical entity, yet already exists as a social reality at different points in space and time. And finally, I reflect on the tensions and conflicts generated by my shifting status as both a part-time doctoral researcher (seeking some form of distance from my subjects), and a part-time applied researcher with several years’ professional experience in regeneration and housing policy research.

2.1 Home and community in London’s Olympic Legacy promise

From the early days of London’s bid, the 2012 Games were envisaged as a catalyst for investment and development that would “change the face of the capital forever” (Tribe, 1999, as quoted by Vijay 2015, 427). London’s legacy strategies have developed around the goal of ‘convergence’ – the commitment to close the gap in prospects, health and prosperity between people living in the poorest and wealthiest areas of the city within 20-years of the Games. East London has a long history of poverty and deprivation compared to other parts of the city:

“The facts remain that people in (East London) earn less, have fewer qualifications, are more likely to be unemployed, live in poor and overcrowded housing, be a victim of crime and die younger than an average Londoner. This has been true since Victorian times and has blighted the lives of successive generations whilst at the same time holding back the performance of the East London economy.” (Mayor’s Office 2011, 1)

Convergence is measured by assessing progress towards targets for improvements in several key areas: educational attainment, reducing child poverty, increasing the number of economically active adults, increasing life expectancy, reducing housing overcrowding, and reducing levels of gang-related violent crime (Mayor's Office 2011, 1). Conceptually, convergence is a means to mediate tensions between the current reality of deprivation in the Olympic host boroughs, the promise of legacy regeneration, and the financial reality of limited public resources (MacRury and Poynter 2009). In this sense, ‘convergence’ is a concept that provides a point of
common interest between the Olympic boroughs, the Greater London Authority, the Mayor’s Office and the many other stakeholders who may otherwise have competing visions and interpretations of London’s legacy.

It is in the context of historical deprivation that the Olympic Park has been planned as a transformational entity: a catalyst for the physical conversion of under-used land and economic and social transformation. Physical redevelopment of the land is the primary vehicle for change - creating new housing, commercial and retail spaces, a cultural and educational quarter that will attract major institutions like the V&A, two new university campuses for UCL East and Loughborough University, sporting facilities and new schools. By 2030, almost 10,000 new homes, along with schools, community spaces, neighbourhood parks and shops, will be built inside the Park’s boundaries. Known as the Legacy Communities Scheme (LCS), the five new neighbourhoods constitute a major part of London’s Olympic legacy investment programme (see figure 3). The LCS neighbourhoods are envisioned as a new model of sustainable urban living in 21st century London (DCMS 2008, 6); Chobham Manor is the first of these new neighbourhoods and will comprise 859 new homes, a neighbourhood park and new community centre. As a model of urban sustainability, the Olympic Park has been conceived as a vehicle to produce socially cohesive and sustainable communities with a healthy and economically productive population. These goals are explicitly detailed in planning and strategy documents that describe how the housing, public realm and sports facilities will improve quality of life and bring about behavioural changes at the individual level, which will have wider social benefits:

“Tradition and innovation, side-by-side in a landscape of great buildings, international cultural attractions and vibrant open spaces: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park will offer all of this and much more. It will be the crowning glory of London’s eastward shift, establishing a new hub for business, leisure and life. Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park will define the next generation of living and working in London ... It will cater for Londoners who want to live and work without a long commute and raise a family in a stable urban community. It will be a place where the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic heritage provides the impetus for a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, anchored by sports and active living. Its homes and
streets will be inspired by London’s heritage but served by cutting edge infrastructure fit for the digital and carbon reduction needs of the 21st century.” (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2010, 10).

In this sense, the development of the Olympic Park continues a tradition of utopian thought in urban planning. It is the latest in a long line of new communities, towns and cities (of which England has a particularly rich history) that have been planned with social transformation as the goal, such as the model dwelling companies of London’s Victorian philanthropists, industrial model villages such as Port Sunlight and Bourneville, Ebenezer Howard’s Garden Cities, post-war social housing, England’s New Towns, and internationally, Modernist cities including Brasilia and Chandigargh. In each case, new architectural and spatial forms were intended to challenge, even eradicate, pressing social problems of the time by re-ordering space and social relationships on different spatial scales: family, home, community, city and countryside.
Figure 3: Map of the five new neighbourhoods planned for the Olympic Park.
Image downloaded from http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk
2.2 Elites and ‘cultures’ of expertise

London’s Olympic Park is one of the largest and most high-profile regeneration programmes in the UK, in which the development of new housing and planned new communities are a significant aspect of wider strategic efforts to boost economic development. In east London at a time when the meaning and purpose of ‘home’ are being transformed by a convergence of economic, political and social forces. Arguably the most publicly immediate of these conditions is the UK’s housing crisis – the chronic shortage of affordable housing that is affecting many areas of the country and is particularly acute in London and the South east. Although not the subject of my research, the UK’s long-term housing crisis was the backdrop to my fieldwork – occupying the attention of home owners, home seekers, housebuilders, politicians and mortgage providers alike. What this means is that questions about the form, purpose, supply and economics of housing in London are public concerns. The kind of housing we build as a society, who should own or have access to it, who should manage and pay for it, what these decisions mean for the way we live together, and what community means in the UK, are part of everyday conversation for people all over the city. My field notes from 2014 and 2015 contain multiple references to snippets of conversation overhead on buses and tubes about London’s “luxury flat epidemic”, heated discussions with taxi drivers about absent international landlords, the nomadic existence of Generation Rent9 as they move from rented home to rented home every few months. Having spent 10 years working on community-based research about urban regeneration and estate renewal, it was notable how public interest in housing and regeneration seemed to reach a tipping point in mid-2014. Housing, previously an issue for activists, policy makers, and campaign organisations like Shelter, became a mainstream public concern. Art installations critiquing regeneration, which had been previously confined to neighbourhoods popular with artists, began to surface in new locations. Anti-gentrification protests increased in

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9 ‘Generation Rent’ is a term used by various media sources in Britain to describe the generation of people born from the 1980s onwards who are more likely to rent their homes than to be able to purchase their own homes because of the housing shortage and the disparity between housing costs and incomes.
number during this time, and articles and debates critiquing the social impacts of urban regeneration on neighbourhoods in London began generating pages of print and online news - including in the Evening Standard, London’s main daily newspaper with a largely right-wing editorial stance, not previously known for its criticism of London’s spiralling house prices. A public and political debate about the changing meanings of home, house and community took on new and widespread significance across the capital.

Domestic space and vernacular architecture are the subject of an extensive anthropological literature addressing social and symbolic practices of home-making (Blier 2006; Shove 2006; Cieraad 1999; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Bourdieu 1970). For anthropologists, the home is an explicitly political space; a critical site in the social organisation of space in terms of gender and class relations, materialising belief systems and political notions of citizenship and embedding forms of governmentally in the domestic sphere. Yet, with the exception of a handful of notable studies - such as Holston’s work on Brasilia (1989), Buchli’s study on the Narkomfin communal house (2000), Melhuish’s work on London’s Modernist Brunswick Centre (2005), and more recently Murawski’s work on the Palace Complex in Warsaw (2017) – anthropologists rarely examine architecture and social life together in modern urban contexts (Buchli 2006). Moreover, Buchli’s observation that “dwellers are rarely ever builders” (2006, 262) in such situations, is possibly one reason why interactions between the “elites” that produce housing and the “residents and workers” (S. Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003, 20) who occupy it, have been infrequently examined. Furthermore, the social, spatial and economic processes associated with urban renewal and regeneration are well documented in the context of Britain’s recent political history (Borden and Rendell 2000; Minton, Pace, and Williams 2016; Lees, Slater, and Wylly 2008; Stephen Hall 2008; Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009; Hamnett 2003), and by anthropologists researching gentrification (S. Miller 2016; Herzfeld 2010; Perez 2002). Yet many of these studies focus on the structural aspects of urban development, and in so doing, gloss over both the agency and the compromises of the professionals who must interpret policy documents and apply them to real sites with very real social, economic and physical constraints.
Planning as a form of state governance, particularly in the colonial context, is the subject of an extensive literature (Bremner 2012; King 2012; Myers 2003; Rabinow 1995). Yet there is relatively little attention paid by anthropologists to the professionals who do this work, with the exception of a small number of studies (Abram 2011; Yaneva 2012; Abram and Weszkalnys 2013; Yaneva 2009; Holston 1989; Epstein 1973).

Holmes and Marcus identify “the expert, and the culture of expertise that he or she inhabits” as a preferred subject of contemporary anthropology because of the social and cultural forms that are devised and enacted within domains of political, technical and professional knowledge and practice (2008, 82). Placemaking professionals - property developers, architects, planners - are an “elite group” following Abbink and Salverda’s (2013) definition; a relatively small number of organisations and individuals with considerable power over urban space and urban futures. In a city like London where land is a limited resource and very few people can build their own homes, a relatively small number of individuals exert considerable power over land use, capital, governance frameworks and legal instruments that structure social and physical space. My decision to research professional perspectives on the meaning and making of community was motivated by having spent seven years working as an applied researcher at The Young Foundation; an independent research institute in east London with a long history of academic and applied research about forms of community in Britain. The Young Foundation takes its name from Michael Young, sociologist, social entrepreneur, and co-author of Family and Kinship in East London (1957). Young co-founded the Institute for Community Studies in 1954 with Peter Willmott, co-author of Family and Kinship, to bring insights from social research about family and community life to welfare and planning policymaking, in particular, policy on the planned dispersal of households to new suburban housing estates and new towns on the fringes of Greater London (Clapson, n.d.).

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10 The UK has much lower rates of self-build housing than other European countries. Self-build housing accounts for around 7-10% of the UK housing market compared to approximately 60% in France and 80% in Austria (W. Wilson 2017).
Young’s politics were shaped by a sociological conception of family as a source of mutual support and social solidarity, with emphasis on the role women played in family and community networks. In this sense, *Family and Kinship in East London* was a form of traditional ‘village’ ethnography and a deliberate intellectual and political project to show the continuing importance of the extended family in industrial society. Butler argues Young’s work at the ICS speaks to a broader interrelation between post-war social science and politics, and offers a useful reminder that present-day strands of nostalgic, relational and communitarian thinking within the British left derive from a rich intellectual lineage (2015). After Young’s death, the Institute was rebranded and relaunched under the direction of Geoff Mulgan, former New Labour advisor, with a renewed focus on research about the politics and dynamics of community in contemporary Britain. Between 2005 and 2012 I worked on projects examining local meanings of community, belonging, civic participation and forms of local governance in neighbourhoods around the UK, and latterly on research about estate regeneration and ‘social’ planning for large-scale new settlements. The work involved action research with communities and local government actors, close collaboration with central government policymakers, and research with planners, housebuilders and architects. Several recurring issues emerged in this work; foremost, was the tension between a national policy environment that strongly emphasised social inclusion and local empowerment, and widespread recognition among the policymakers and practitioners whom I collaborated with that neither mixed communities, planning policy or private-public regeneration partnerships were succeeding in delivering inclusive social change in many areas. Most people I collaborated with during this time were strongly committed to progressive forms of political action and policymaking; they worked in different ways, and across political parties, to advocate for the devolution of power, forms of community governance and ownership, social and economic inclusion, and a revitalisation of local communities. Many of these individuals held senior positions as executive decision-makers, public servants, and policymakers in local authorities and public agencies working to implement national policy in local neighbourhoods. Yet, the problems and frustrations they encountered with regard to the lack of transparency in the planning process, the “fictions” of affordable housing policy, the
difficulties of holding private sector developers to account with planning obligations, seemed in many ways to be similar to the vexations that residents and community groups recounted when describing the impacts of regeneration on local residents, businesses and communities. The consequences for policymakers and public services I worked with were clearly far less dire than for communities directly affected by the threats of change, displacement and demolition. However, there appeared to be a disjuncture between the intensive human effort directed towards imagining and bringing into being ‘better places’ - much of it explicitly values-driven - and the outcomes being produced. It was evident that established policy frameworks, bureaucratic systems and economic models had a significant role in limiting the outcomes of planning for regeneration or sustainable communities. However, these are not merely mute structures but relational processes driven by individual and collective practices that involve interpreting and challenging dominant systems and forms of knowledge, as well as working within their limitations. This thesis is motivated by the desire to explore the practices and processes that produce urban spaces and shape urban communities from the perspective of individuals and institutions whose influence is often out of sight or hard to distinguish in the formal, yet performative and ritualised, aspects of spatial planning. My aim is to explore the meaning and making of community in contemporary London by examining the relational and contingent elements of placemaking practice, the ways in which knowledge is produced and applied, and how power is exercised through subtle forms. Here, the aim is to interrogate the ethnographic possibilities of examining these processes “in flight” (Latour and Yaneva 2008, 80) to engage with the wider question of what analytical and theoretical value ‘community’ holds for anthropology.

2.3 Getting into the field

This thesis is based on two and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork that began in September 2013, not long before planning approval was given for the first phase of housebuilding at Chobham Manor, and finished mid-2016, by which time the first few homes were occupied. This extended period of fieldwork was driven by two factors:
first, my status as a part-time doctoral researcher, which in practice meant spending roughly half of every week on fieldwork and the other half working in a professional capacity; and second, the time it took to negotiate a way of ‘getting into’ the field.

In preparing for fieldwork, I spent time mapping out the assemblage of organisations and individuals working on Chobham Manor and the extensive framework of advisory committees, design panels, quality review boards, public agencies, civil society organisations and other stakeholder networks with an interest in the Olympic Park (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Mapping the human/non-human actors and entities connected to Chobham Manor at the beginning of my fieldwork in November 2013. Networks mapped in red and blue include actors I had hoped to engage throughout my fieldwork.

Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
The picture was complex: an extensive and distributed network of organisations and individuals was further complicated by hundreds of legacy and planning documents relating directly to the Olympic Park, national and London-wide planning policy and design guidance, and other reports and resources that were influential throughout my fieldwork. It was apparent that gaining access to the ‘field’ would depend on one of these organisations agreeing to act as a champion and host for my research and, hopefully, assist in brokering connections to others organisations and individuals. As my starting point was Chobham Manor’s architectural and spatial form, I first approached the L&Q Group, the housing association in the development partnership joint venture. Most housing associations are not-for-profit social businesses and some, like L&Q, are regulated charities. My assumption, based on previous professional experience of working with public and private sector institutions, was that as an organisation with a social purpose, L&Q would be more open to collaboration, and had more to gain from the insights that research might uncover, than a private house-builder. Dialogue with L&Q began in July 2013 with a promising meeting but soon ran into difficulties as concerns about the risks of participation began to surface. After unsuccessfully approaching other members of the Chobham Manor development team, I proposed a research collaboration to LLDC, and in February 2014, the Corporation agreed to support my fieldwork.

Assistance came in the form of granting permission for me to work alongside the Chief of Design and the Communities and Business team - at that time, four people with responsibility for various aspects of community engagement and development, placemaking and innovation projects and local partnership development. In a call with the Chief of Design, we agreed my time at LLDC should be spent largely working with the Communities and Business team and as much as possible, with the Chobham Manor development team. An informal agreement was reached whereby LLDC would encourage partners in the development team, and their extended networks, to engage with my fieldwork. A monthly schedule of ‘shadowing’ days was to be negotiated with the Head of the Communities and Business team. This took a further three months to agree and fieldwork ‘began’ nine months after my first meeting with L&Q.
The team were welcoming, open and enthusiastic about my research. As well as being highly-experienced in their own fields, they had clear ideas about the role for research in supporting their work, exploring questions about how relationships and networks form in new communities and how to measure subjective feelings of place, belonging and attachment. The team were involved in various research projects and partnerships with universities, local think tanks, community groups and a burgeoning network of academic researchers working in the Olympic Park. Before the 2012 Games, the social anthropologist Gillian Evans had spent time researching the legacy planning process at the Olympic Park Legacy Company (see 2016b), LLDC’s predecessor agency. As a result, my main interlocutors at LLDC were familiar with anthropological concepts and ethnographic methods, and in this sense, they fit Holmes and Marcus’ description of “reflexive subjects” with “preexisting ethnographic consciousness or curiosity” (2008, 82).

I spent time at the Corporation’s office in Stratford sitting alongside the Communities and Business team, observing their work and attending as many of their meetings and activities as possible. As my time with the LLDC team was limited - by my constraints as a part-time doctoral researcher and the team’s concern that my fieldwork would demand too much of their time - considerable effort was expended in keeping track of their work, negotiating access to meetings and conversations that seemed to offer the most promise, and prompting my hosts to encourage other members of the Chobham Manor team to meet me. During this time, I made several direct approaches to other organisations involved in placemaking efforts at Chobham Manor requesting an opportunity to discuss my research and to invite their participation. Some of these approaches eventually produced results, but the majority were ignored or rebuffed. Instead, attending meetings alongside the LLDC team proved to be a much more effective way of legitimising my research and establishing relationships with the wider development and placemaking team. Most of these meetings were private, so each interaction was first negotiated with and through the LLDC. A condition of my participation was agreeing to the terms of a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) pertaining to any commercially-sensitive information that might be discussed in the meetings. Where permission was granted, and I could
attend a meeting or workshop with other organisations, my introductions were then extended by requesting a formal interview, subsequent fewer formal interviews, and over time, seeking opportunities to observe and participate in the work being done outside the LLDC. Even with the LLDC championing my fieldwork, brokering introductions and actively encouraging the professional team to allow me to participate in their conversations, proved to be a difficult process that was frequently blocked or stalled by a form of professional inertia. While none of the organisations in the development team would actively decline my requests, especially those made in front of the LLDC team, when it came to the practicalities of setting up an interview or finding out where a workshop was taking place, my emails and phone calls would not be returned. For example, it took five months of persistent requests to secure a meeting with one organisation in the development team, which was eventually negotiated through the organisation’s public affairs agency.

After six or seven months, I had established a core group of individuals from a small number of organisations in the extended development team who were willing to engage with my fieldwork. This group became regular ‘informants’ and are the ‘placemaking team’ that I refer to throughout this thesis. Over time, in most but not all cases, our relationship shifted, and my role became that of participant-observer, rather than purely observer. Often this took the form of discussing emerging findings from my fieldwork and how these insights could assist the professional team in conceptualising patterns of social interaction in urban neighbourhoods and understanding what ‘community’ means in local terms. These conversations drew on my doctoral fieldwork, but more often focused on the professional work to which I had previously been engaged. One aspect of this work that was invaluable in building trust and persuading people it was worthwhile making time to engage with my fieldwork, was previous research I had undertaken to measure and track changes in community feelings and interaction between neighbours.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} This work had been undertaken over several years at Social Life, a social enterprise established by the Young Foundation in 2012 – www.social-life.co
Referring to the ‘placemaking team’ suggests a unity in ways of thinking and working, whereas in practice, much of their work involved interpreting and negotiating different institutional imperatives. While each individual and organisation was working towards the shared goal of creating a successful new community at Chobham Manor, perspectives on what constituted success - social and economic transformation, selling high-quality homes, providing affordable housing for local families, creating a community that would thrive - varied from individual to individual and organisation to organisation. Professional architects, planners and housebuilders, are of course also dwellers who bring their own experiences and understandings of place and what makes a good community to the design process. For the individuals I interviewed and worked alongside, their personal values were tightly interwoven with the professional work they undertook for Chobham Manor. Much of the emphasis on sustained dialogue with local residents, and bringing local experience and priorities to the planning process, was driven by strongly-held personal commitments to improve the outcomes of regeneration for long-established residents and businesses in east London. What is evident here is the intimacy of moral value and the uncertainty and possibility this brings to the work of city-making, which is commonly theorised as linear and structural. It is this contingency that makes the observation of planning, design and placemaking ‘in flight’ so critical.

2.4 Data collection

For the first year of my fieldwork, much of my time was spent observing and participating in meetings that the LLDC team had initiated and then following up on connections made during these events. These interactions were a mixture of ‘internal’ meetings with other teams and departments at the LLDC, and ‘external’ meetings with other organisations involved in placemaking efforts at Chobham
Manor and in the Olympic Park, such as Triathlon Homes and Get Living London, the two landlords managing rented housing in the East Village.\textsuperscript{12}

As structured exchanges of information between actors, organised with varying degrees of formality, meetings are critical sites for building relationships, acquiring or distributing knowledge, developing and negotiating shared values and ways of working – particularly for networked collaborations like the placemaking team. Meetings are ritualised, hierarchical and performative social encounters - where and how they take place, who leads and who attends, what is and is not said during, what is said informally afterwards, what happens next and who actions which items - conveys much about the character and quality of associations between individuals, the power dynamics between organisations, and how these are mediated through personal relationships. Meetings structure the working day and a significant amount of working time is dedicated to organising and preparing for meetings. Important meetings demand advance preparation, which requires further meetings to plan and review the work being produced, and often a review meeting to track progress. For my fieldwork, meetings were critical sites for collecting data on the problems and issues concerning the placemaking team and the ways in which concepts and ideas were constructed, moved around the network, and were (or occasionally, were not) materialised. While my informants were comfortable with digital recordings being made of our individual conversations, recording meetings would have been a breach of business etiquette. Instead, I introduced myself as a doctoral researcher from UCL, shared information about my fieldwork, and obtained verbal consent to collect data in the form of detailed notes of such interactions, which were later transcribed. Some of the meetings I attended were open to the public – for example, the monthly Planning Decisions Committee (PDC) meetings held at the LLDC,\textsuperscript{13} residents’

\textsuperscript{12} East Village is a new residential neighbourhood on the eastern boundary of the Olympic Park. During the 2012 Games it housed athletes. The apartment blocks were refurbished after the Games to provide 2,818 new apartments and townhouses available for rent through two landlords - Get Living London and Triathlon Homes (see http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/the-park/homes-and-living/local-developments/east-village)

\textsuperscript{13} Minutes of these meetings are publicly accessible at: http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/our-story/the-legacy-corporation/our-committees/planning-decision-committee
meetings, and community events and meetings. At both public and private meetings, I identified myself as a doctoral researcher from UCL.

Alongside attending and participating in meetings, I undertook a series of semi-structured interviews with the core professional team working on placemaking at Chobham Manor. The interviews were recorded digitally wherever possible, and then transcribed. Various informal discussions and interactions took place alongside formal interviews, these I recorded in written fieldnotes. In addition to interviews and observations with the core group, I undertook a series of interviews with individuals from organisations whose work intersected with the team at certain points during my fieldwork. For example, with community groups and youth networks in and around the Olympic Park who were involved in a particular project at a particular time, and with consultants working on specific placemaking projects at Chobham Manor. Participant consent was obtained and these interactions were recorded digitally and later transcribed. The identities of participants in this research have been pseudonymised in this thesis, with the exception of two participants who explicitly requested that they be identified (see Jude and Julian in chapter seven).

Finally, I took part in a series of events and debates addressing questions about how to ‘make’ sustainable communities. These events were significant in a number of ways; they prompted debates among the team about the approaches being proposed and new sources of evidence being put forward, which often fed into day-to-day conversation. New reports and research were discussed as opportunities to extend the team’s knowledge, build an evidence base, and substantiate their own claims about how to foster social connections and encourage a sense of community in neighbourhoods. Following these debates to identify and unpack their material effects took me from planning and community meetings in Stratford to locations around London – architecture studios, policymaker briefings at Westminster, tea at the Houses of Parliament with a local MP, and the basement office of a city law firm where contractual negotiations pivoted around the expectation that property investments in the Olympic Park would also yield transformations in the social and economic circumstances for deprived neighbourhoods.
My fieldwork was spatially dispersed, a reflection of the distributed nature and complexity of multi-stakeholder partnerships that characterise major regeneration and development programmes. Consequently, much of my time in the field was spent moving between LLDC’s Stratford headquarters and the offices of other organisations across Greater London. A significant number of these interactions were in and around the Olympic Park, but very few took place ‘at’ Chobham Manor. In part, this was because Chobham Manor was a construction site surrounded by hoardings for much of my fieldwork, therefore opportunities to see the site were limited to the view from the Sales and Marketing Office (see figure 5). In the second year of my fieldwork, a single street, with eight occupied homes was publicly accessible (see figure 6).

![Figure 5: View from Chobham Manor Sales and Marketing Office in September 2014.](image)

Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
Figure 6: The first eight homes to be occupied at Chobham Manor in February 2016.
Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
My requests to meet ‘on-site’ at Chobham Manor’s Sales and Marketing Office, or to walk and talk in the Olympic Park, were rarely accepted. In part this was due to the time pressures my informants experienced and the difficulty of taking time out of the working day to travel to the Olympic Park from other parts of London. However, this experience reflected a wider issue about the way that knowledge about ‘place’ is constructed and curated in the context of regeneration and spatial planning (see chapter six for further discussion). It was particularly evident from my professional research, although also apparent during my fieldwork (especially in the context of my shadow field site), that certain forms of knowledge have a privileged position in the production of expert knowledge about localities. For example, technical data such as GIS co-ordinates, infrastructure maps detailing energy grids and sewers, detailed assessments of the physical characteristics of the landscape, phasing and massing schedules, tenure distribution tables, and transport infrastructure assessments. These objective data that measure, map and evaluate the physical characteristics of places must be produced during the planning process; however, much of this knowledge can be, and is, accessed without ever visiting a neighbourhood or estate that is scheduled for development. Other forms of embodied, subjective or locally-produced knowledge, such as experiential accounts of being and dwelling, psycho-sensory evaluations of place, life histories, citizen-led needs assessments, or straightforward interviews with residents about quality of life, are rarely accessed by professionals, policymakers and practitioners engaged in placemaking and planning. Professional knowledge about particular localities and general theories about how the social and material aspects of place interact are, in the main, curiously detached from the places they subsequently influence. This was not the case for the LLDC team that I spent most of my fieldwork collaborating with, or with two of the architecture practices that also actively participated in my research, and one housebuilder that I worked with closely in professional practice. However, these are the exceptions that stand out from 15 years of work in this field.

I comment on the distributed nature of my fieldwork here for its methodological relevance to the question of what, and where, my field site is understood to be. Multisited ethnography, often characterised by the process of ‘following’ a thing, person,
concept or conflict, has become an established aspect of fieldwork since the 1990s (Candea 2007; Marcus 1995) as anthropologists have shifted their attention to non-traditional fieldwork settings. This movement from bounded locales and face-to-face interactions to more complex, networked, and distributed ethnographic engagements has called into the question the continuing relevance of anthropology’s commitment to holism and status of ‘the field’. Advocates of multi-sited ethnography argue in favour of the freedom it offers anthropologists to engage with culture as fragmentary in a world that is increasingly mobile and interconnected, while moving beyond the tendency to reproduce ‘village’ ethnographies in contemporary settings by focusing on urban enclaves or connections between global networks and bounded locales. While critics of the multi-sited debate argue that all fieldwork locations are arbitrary creations – “a contingent framing cut out of this seamless reality” (Candea 2007, 171) that “has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualisation to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred” (Amit 2000, 6). Following Candea, I approach Chobham Manor as a field site imaginary – bounded by certain political processes that do not necessarily have significance or meaning to people outside the process of legacy planning - yet a necessary delimitation to make fieldwork possible. The process of data collection took place in many different locations, yet for the most part these were a backdrop to the work of engaging with Chobham Manor as an imaginary and emergent place. I do not consider this research to be multi-sited; instead, I think of Chobham Manor as a field of relations that have significance at a point in time (Dalsgaard and Nielsen 2015; Olwig and Hastrup 1997b).

2.5 A shadow field site

While I was struggling to find members of the Chobham Manor team willing to engage with my research, I was invited to join a team bidding to win the contract to develop another LCS neighbourhood in the Olympic Park. The bid was led by a housebuilder, who if successful, would construct the new neighbourhood. The bid team were appointed by the housebuilder to conceptualise, plan and design a winning masterplan – to include new housing, commercial space, community
buildings, retail space, public realm, neighbourhood parks and infrastructure - and prepare the supporting business plan, put in place finance, and develop various social, economic and environmental development strategies. The bid team comprised an extensive network of built environment professionals and consultants - architects, urban designers, landscape architects, sustainability consultants, cultural masterplanners, transport planners, social impact consultants and commercial property agents. Competitive tenders of this nature are high-risk, intensive, and expensive processes with much at stake, commercially and reputationally, for those involved. In this case, LLDC as landowner and planning authority, would award the contract.

I was invited to join the bid team as a consultant, working with the housebuilder and lead architect to advise on aspects of the socio-economic strategy. This work was intended to situate proposals for the new neighbourhood in relation to the current population - Who currently lived in the neighbourhood? What might they want and need from future development? Did they have the skills to work in new industries? - and to help the bid team determine which strategies and investments in community building to put in place. This work would determine the processes the bid team would follow to begin a dialogue with communities, think about how to approach the design of space for local enterprises and new community buildings, and establish contractual arrangements with suppliers about local employment and procurement.

The invitation to join the bid team placed me in an awkward position. As a part-time doctoral candidate, I was also working in a professional capacity as an applied researcher roughly half of the time. Until this point, my professional work in London had been elsewhere in the capital, which conceptually at least, enabled me to maintain a separation between my professional and academic interests and obligations. The bid project, however interesting it would be, created a conflict of interest between my ethical obligations to LLDC and the Chobham Manor team, and my professional obligations to the bid team. I discussed the invitation with LLDC and proposed to suspend my fieldwork for the duration of the bid to avoid any conflict of interest. I was told that this would not be necessary if I agreed not to reveal to the
bid team any of the insights I gained from my position as ethnographer. Ethically and professionally this request made sense, however, it prompted me to reflect on what I knew, and how I had come to know it. What of my embodied knowledge of local places? The passing conversations and interactions that made up a rich, but not commercially sensitive, understanding of how things worked in different neighbourhoods? After careful consideration I agreed to a further set of terms with LLDC, which governed what I could and could not do as part of the bid team. Similar terms were agreed with the bid team, covering confidentiality surrounding the tendering process, my position as an anthropologist embedded with LLDC, and the scope and content of my fieldwork. Once in place I joined the team and the work of imagining, planning and designing a new neighbourhood became my shadow field site.

Architecture is made up of the dramas of design and construction – “not a stable materiality but a fabric changing at different speeds” (Yaneva 2012, 20) - shaped by forces that intervene in the process and unexpected events that occur along the way. This unstable fabric was what I observed and could participate in as part of the bid team – the translation of a design brief to a concept of place and onwards into a plan; the tensions between community as an idea and a reality; the multiple and diverse understandings of place within the team; the way ideas emerge and are played with and abandoned; and, the compromises between social value, architectural quality and the economics of development. In short, all the contingencies and trade-offs that shape the production of urban spaces, neighbourhoods and homes, which are disguised in the planning process. Moreover, this exposure was invaluable in helping me to think through the temporalities and materialities of placemaking. While I have been scrupulous in only presenting data in this thesis that relates to Chobham Manor - beyond this short commentary - the project was invaluable in shaping questions and areas of inquiry. ‘Our’ neighbourhood was a living thing, a social reality no less potent for not-yet existing as a habitable place. The work went far beyond spatial planning and architectural design; partnerships were established to deliver social and economic programmes including jobs and apprenticeships in estate management, education programmes with local schools, and a programme to deliver low-cost
workspace and artists’ studios. ‘Our’ bid did not win, so the network dispersed to work on new projects; however, many of the ideas and partnerships were transferred to other proposed schemes.
“The ambition of this project is to rid architecture of the responsibilities it can no longer sustain and to explore this new freedom aggressively. It suggests that, liberated from its former obligations, architecture’s last function will be the creation of the symbolic spaces that accommodate the persistent desire for collectivity.”

Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, Strategy of the Void (1995)
Chapter 3 The ‘social void’ - absent community and urban risk

“The consequences of failure to achieve the development of successful and thriving communities on the Park would be considerable and it may end up being a key measure of the overall success in Legacy from the Games. Failed communities in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park will cast a deep shadow over Legacy and will not only damage the reputation of London 2012 but would represent a huge missed opportunity.” (Blume and Zander 2014, 20)

The devastating fire in Grenfell Tower, London on 14 June 2017, which trapped residents in the 24-storey tower block killing 71 people, gave renewed momentum to a long-running political and popular debate about the nature of tower block living and the perceived failure of Britain’s post-war social housing estates. In the days following the fire, a series of articles appeared in national news media examining how the intersection of technical and political forces – the use of flammable exterior cladding panels, austerity politics, disinvestment in social housing, disregard for health and safety regulations, the mismanagement of refurbishment contracts – had produced a lethal set of conditions in Grenfell Tower (see for example Farha 2017; Foster 2017; Hanley 2017). The authors – politicians, journalists and social commentators - were quick to re-animate a well-rehearsed and long-established discourse about the problematic nature of high-rise living, in which tower block architecture is implicated in community breakdown; its form driving social isolation, mental health issues, crime, anti-social behaviour, gang violence and drug abuse.

Writing the day after the Grenfell Tower fire, the Guardian columnist Simon Jenkins, opened his opinion piece with this statement:

“High-rise blocks are wholly out of place and character. Rather, a modern, sociable city needs neighbourhoods ... How many times should we say it? Don’t build residential towers. Don’t make or let people live in them, least of all families. They are antisocial, high-maintenance, disempowering, unnecessary, mostly ugly, and they can never be truly safe.” (2017)

Jenkins’ casual negation of high-rise housing as an appropriate architectural form for contemporary urban life reproduces the claim to an association between tower
blocks and social dysfunction. Moreover, the article raises a weightier question (and a long-standing anthropological concern) about appropriate ways to ‘be’ and ‘dwell’ in the city. In juxtaposing the anti-social effects of tower block architecture with the pro-social spatial order of the neighbourhood, Jenkins implies there is both a ‘right’ way for modern citizens to live alongside each other and ‘proper’ ways to organise urban space and the built environment to bring forth these conditions.

Other commentators were quick to join the debate, including London’s Mayor, Sadiq Khan, and Labour MP, David Lammy, who, respectively, described high-rise housing estates as “the worst mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s” (Khan 2017), and some of the “capital’s worst homes” that have “condemned the vulnerable and the voiceless to Corbusier-inspired blocks” (Lammy 2017). This choice of language typifies the visceral and emotive rhetoric that dominates political and cultural representations of tower blocks in Britain. A powerful dystopian imaginary has developed around high-rise housing since the 1970s, to the extent that the tower block housing estate is a symbol of urban life gone wrong - a cultural trope with an established place in media headlines, television drama, documentary, literature, art and advertising.14 The renaissance of high-rise living (Baxter, Lees, and Raco 2009) in British cities like London and Manchester since the late 1990s (as seen in the construction of new tower blocks and the growing number of former council houses in private ownership)

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14 See J.G. Ballard’s 1975 novel (High Rise translated to cinema in 2016), film (Farenheit 451, which features people burning books on the Alton Estate in south west London), and a Stanley Kubrick film (A Clockwork Orange filmed at the Thamesmead Estate in south east London, Trainspotting high-rise, one of the tallest in Europe), documentary (The Great Estate: The Rise & Fall of the Council House and Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle, 2017), comedy (Del and Rodney’s flat in a Peckham high-rise is the backdrop for Only Fools and Horses), advertising (Channel 4 received harsh criticism for the dystopian ident it filmed on the Aylesbury Estate in 2004), autobiography (Linsey Hanley’s account of growing up on an housing estate in Birmingham), song lyrics (Hawkwind’s High Rise to Pet Shop Boys’ View from your Balcony.)
has neither rehabilitated the image of post-war high-rises,¹⁵ nor diminished the
power of the tower block failure discourse; a tension that discloses the non-obvious
meanings invested in tower block ‘failure’ as a political and cultural imaginary.

This chapter unpacks the nature of ‘tower block failure’ discourse and examines how
a political pre-occupation with architectural form obscures a deeper philosophical
concern with urban dwelling and proper ways to live together in a dynamic and
unstable modern world. I argue that this concern shapes the terms on which success
and failure are imagined in relation to other urban communities and intersects in
myriad ways with the futures imagined for the new Legacy neighbourhoods in the
Olympic Park. In this chapter, I examine how the tower block has come to represent
an absence of community in political and public discourse. I begin by mapping the
rhetorical framing of tower block failure, exploring the ambiguous terms upon which
failure and success are constructed, and then examine the claim that tower block
failure discourse disguises a broader concern with the nature of community and the
risks associated with its absence in contemporary society. I articulate this absence as
a ‘social void’ – an aesthetic figure that shapes urban politics and spatial practices as
planners, architects and housebuilders design new neighbourhoods in response to
the failed communities that tower blocks represent. In this sense, the aesthetic figure
of the social void shapes the work of the professionals designing new
neighbourhoods in the Olympic Park; influencing choices about architectural design,
building materials, the configuration of public space and investments in community
projects.

Failure, as Carroll et al. theorise, is always a moral issue, a devaluation of a person,
object or idea that occurs when “objectification ceases to adhere” (2017, 2) and
‘something’ shifts position to become radically ‘other’. The post-war tower block has

¹⁵ A small number of Britain’s high-rise tower blocks are exceptions to this statement and
have been listed by English Heritage (e.g. Trellick Tower and Balfron Tower, both designed
by Ernő Goldfinger, and Park Hill in Sheffield, have Grade II* listed status – or are the
subject of active campaigns to preserve and celebrate their architectural value (e.g. Robin
Hood Gardens in east London failed repeatedly to achieve heritage listing and has since
been demolished).
indeed shifted in position – from the materialisation of the Welfare State’s promise of an inclusive social future; to an embodiment of urban decline, social fragmentation and political disinvestment of the Thatcher years. And now, in the present, as an emergent and contested symbol of the widening inequalities and insecurity that characterise life for many people in the neo-liberal city. In this sense, the tower block is a stubborn material presence – at once a reminder of the past and a warning that other social futures have the potential to fail.

3.1 Failure and form

In January 2016, David Cameron - then Britain’s Prime Minister – announced “an all-out assault on poverty and disadvantage” (2016) as a key goal of his second term in office. Setting out his agenda in The Sunday Times, Cameron listed the social problems limiting life chances in Britain: blocked opportunity, poor parenting, addiction, mental health issues. Cameron’s argument swiftly moved to associate these issues with post-war housing estates (overlooking the complex socio-economic conditions that might drive these problems) and announced the launch of a £140 million estate renewal programme, targeting 100 of the “country’s worst housing estates” (GOV.uk 2016). He wrote:

“There’s one issue that brings together many of these social problems – and for me, epitomises both the scale of the challenge we face and the nature of state failure over decades. It’s our housing estates ... Step outside in the worst estates and you’re confronted by concrete slabs dropped from on high, brutal high-rise towers and dark alleyways that are a gift to criminals and drug dealers. The police often talk about the importance of designing out crime, but these estates actually designed it in.” (ibid.)

Cameron’s article portrays post-war housing estates as spaces that are ‘outside’ society - describing them as “cut-off, self-governing and divorced from the mainstream” (ibid.) – and drawing on a Durkheimian model of normlessness (1889) to articulate the risks of social non-conformity. Furthermore, he associates the marginal status of post-war housing estates with the threat of contamination to the
wider population as problems are allowed to “fester”, “grow unseen” (ibid.), and erupt into social unrest:

“The riots of 2011 didn’t emerge from within terraced streets or low-rise apartment buildings. As spatial analysis of the riots has shown, the rioters came overwhelmingly from these post-war estates. Almost 3 quarters of those convicted lived within them. That’s not a coincidence.” (ibid.)

By connecting architectural form and deviant behaviour, while discounting the complex spatial relationships between housing and poverty, Cameron perpetuates the central claim of the tower block failure discourse - that there exists a straightforward relation between high-rise housing, social alienation and crime. This theory of architectural determinism has haunted Britain’s tower-block housing estates since the 1970s (Urban 2011; Glendinning and Muthesius 1994; Horsey 1988). Proponents argue that, in scale and form, tower blocks are dehumanising and disrupt the ‘natural’ forms of everyday movement and social interaction that build familiarity, trust and co-operation between neighbours. It has long been argued that the design features that characterise post-war tower blocks - high-rise walkways, open parkland, alleyways, communal stairwells, underground car parks - encourage and enable crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as enhance social isolation by emptying public spaces of social life and diminishing the co-presence that engender a sense of safety (see following pages for a discussion of this literature). In the dominant cultural imaginary, high-rise housing is a dystopian landscape that

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16 A report published by Space Syntax, based on publicly available datasets about the 2011 London riots, identified a link between incidents of rioting and the spatial proximity of large post-war social housing estates. The report argued that earlier work by Space Syntax founder Bill Hillier, suggested the proximity of rioting to large post-war housing estates “may not be the result of social housing in itself but the type of social housing: most post-war housing estates have been designed in such a way that they create over-complex, and as a result, under-used spaces. These spaces are populated by large groups of unsupervised children and teenagers, where peer socialisation can occur between them without the influence of adults. This pattern of activity, and the segregation of user groups, is not found in non-estate street networks.” (Space Syntax 2011)
functions neither socially or symbolically as a recognisable, meaningful or productive place to dwell.

It is important to note that this argument has historical precedent, echoing as it does the sentiments of Victorian housing reformers – such as Henry Mayhew, Charles Booth and Octavia Hill - who 170 years earlier argued that narrow alleys and enclosed courtyards of east London’s slums enabled crime and encouraged criminals by eluding the gaze of ‘civilised’ society (R. Evans 1978; Tarn 1973). Victorian reformers generated their own ‘failure’ discourse around the slums of the urban poor, which were described as plague-ridden and moral swamps (Gilbert 2007; Wohl 2002; Farrar 2001; White 1946), language that persists in contemporary accounts of tower blocks as ‘sink estates’, ‘no-go zones’ and ‘high-rise hell’. The notion that an individual’s moral and physical condition are aligned was sufficient justification for Victorian reformers to advocate slum demolitions and re-housing the urban poor in model dwellings, designed to spatialise and embody middle class morality and responsibility (Gaskell 1987). Victorian-era slum demolition was ostensibly proposed on the grounds of sanitation and health, yet as historian Anthony Wohl writes, the safety of middle class city dwellers was also a consideration:

“At no time did the Victorians feel completely safe from the possibility of social unrest, and it was against a background of fear and uncertainty that the housing reformers proffered better housing as a bulwark against revolution.” (2002, 65).

Cameron’s estate renewal policy follows the same logic. His proposal to “tear down anything that stands in our way” (ibid.), much like Victorian housing reformers or Haussmann’s redesign of Paris, reasons that remaking the physical environment will assimilate the dangerous bodies and territories that exist at the physical and metaphorical margins of the state (Asad 2004).

3.1.1 Social malaise and design disadvantage

The enduring power of architectural determinism in relation to Britain’s tower blocks has been discussed widely (see for example K. Evans 2015; Urban 2011; Ravetz 2001;
Much of this literature focuses on the research of Canadian architect Oscar Newman, city planner and author of *Defensible Space* (1973a), a study identifying a link between high crime rates and high-rise public housing in New York. Newman argued that design attributes of high-rise housing such as communal walkways, alleys, greens and open areas, lacked ‘defensible space’ or clearly defined territories over which individuals could develop a sense of ownership, responsibility and social surveillance. Newman’s theory of defensible space associates physical and spatial design attributes with social control and crime prevention and, conversely, connects a lack of defensible space to crime and disorder. While Newman’s research focused on US housing projects in St Louis, New York and Ohio, his work has been highly influential in Britain. In 1974, the BBC’s Horizon programme broadcast *Writing on the Wall* (Mansfield 1974), a documentary following Newman on a walk around the Aylesbury Estate, a Modernist high-rise housing estate in south east London that is now the focus of a controversial regeneration programme. The film’s visual aesthetic is ominous – featuring shots of broken windows, empty walkways and dark underground carparks. The film closes with an image of two children playing on swings - shot from ground level, a concrete high-rise fills the frame and appears to loom over the children. Towards the end of the film, Newman speculates on the prospects of the first generation of children to grow up on the Aylesbury Estate:

“... what happens one wonders, do they develop any sense of pride? Any sense of self? Any understanding of responsibility in an environment that is so open and undefined? Can they ever really develop a sense of their own rights and a corresponding sense of the rights of others? It is very difficult to believe that children growing up here will grow up feeling any sense of responsibility, any sense of their role in society, any sense of a contribution they can make.”

Campkin’s analysis of 20th century urban decline and renewal in London examines the lasting impact of Newman’s research on attitudes towards high-rise housing. Campkin argues the film’s framing of the Aylesbury Estate as a dysfunctional environment in which the architecture encourages crime and disorder is an “unusually direct example of the application of architectural theory” (2013, 87) that
has played a significant role in the multi-faceted imaginary of decline that continues to hang over this and other high-rise estates. Jacobs and Lees (2013) trace the influence of Newman’s research on the work of Professor Alice Coleman - author of *Utopia on Trial: Visions and Reality in Planned Housing* (1985) and political adviser to Margaret Thatcher – whose controversial adaptation of Newman’s methods enabled their movement from research into policy. Coleman’s research focused on a quantitative analysis of design disadvantage (1985) by mapping the relationship between architectural features, like overhead walkways, and the presence of observable indicators of social malaise, defined as graffiti, litter and vandalism, and provided an evidence base for experimental architectural and spatial changes made to the Mozart Estate in north west London. These claims sparked a ferocious intellectual response from other academics, who challenged Coleman’s evidence base and her proposed programme of physical changes to Modernist estate (for analysis of this debate see Lowenfeld 2008). In spite of a problematic intellectual lineage, defensible space has had a lasting impact on political discourse and professional practice in the UK - it is the foundation for various contemporary ‘design against crime’ initiatives and has a significant place in Chobham Manor’s spatial and architectural form (see chapter five). Jacobs and Lees argue that *Defensible Space* and *Utopia on Trial* are “textual intermediaries that play a role in the building of science and technology networks” (2013, 1564). In this sense, these texts are producing, and not simply representing, certain forms of urban reality, drawing on theory from the social sciences and psychology to legitimise claims to architectural failure.

### 3.1.2 Myths of failure

“There is one phrase in the English language that has come to be larded with even more negative meaning than “council estate” and that is “tower block”” (Hanley 2007, 97)
The counter-discourse to tower block failure is equally fierce. Proponents argue that claims to failure are an abstraction that over-simplifies a complex history of disinvestment and mismanagement (Bristol 1991), the privatisation of social housing over several decades (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994), and one that lacks any grounding in the lived experience and memories of residents, for whom high-rise estates provide much-needed and much-loved homes for low-income (often flourishing) communities (see for example literature by Baxter and Brickell 2014; Baxter 2017; Mar 2003; and materials created by residents such as Cifali 2007; Zimmerman and Roberts 2015; ‘Around the World in 80 Blocks Part 1 | Block Storeys’ 2013). Arguments to this effect were also quick to emerge in the days following the Grenfell Tower fire. One such account was written by journalist Basia Cummings, to challenge the “well-worn myths peddled about high-rise living and council blocks” (2017). Describing her childhood growing up on a high-rise housing estate in east London, Cummings recounts the density of social life in the close-knit estate community where neighbours helped each other with household repairs and childcare, and ‘failures’ - such as broken lifts and drug dealing - encouraged a sense of camaraderie between residents rather than social breakdown. Cummings’ article – and others like it (see for example Foster 2017; Vulliamy 2017; R. Moore et al. 2017) - publicly challenges generic claims of failure by bringing accounts of personal meaning, emotional connections, and strong social ties to the suggestion that a universal tower block ‘culture’ shapes social relations and forms the basis of a collective identity, irrespective of situated local conditions. Critics point out that ‘failure’ is only associated with tower blocks originally designed as social housing estates and not with the new generation of ‘luxury’ high-rise buildings appearing across London – a claim that is evidenced by 455 towers of over 20-storeys that are currently in the capital’s planning pipeline (‘NLA London Tall Buildings Survey’ 2017).18 As the architectural historian Mark Jarzombek observes, not all towers are

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18 New London Architecture has been tracking the rise in tall buildings in London since 2014. It produces an annual survey that reports on London’s tall buildings ‘pipeline’, which includes planning proposals, planning approvals and towers under construction.
alike or for the urban poor: “Capitalism figured out how to make them compatible with the rich and the elite.” (2011, xii).

Both poles of the failure discourse draw on an encyclopaedic body of research that spans decades of work in the social and historical sciences, architecture and urban planning, economics and politics; indeed, anthropology has its own (albeit limited) literature that engages with the tower block (see D. Miller 1988; Buchli and Lucas 2006; Chevalier 1995; Moran 2004). Much of this work does indeed examine the nature of tower block failure – detailing early problems with construction methods and materials exemplified by the partial collapse of Ronan Point in east London in 1968 (K. Jacobs and Manzi 1998), the social isolation experienced by residents (Amick and Kviz 1975), and problems of anti-social behaviour and crime (Rainwater 1970; Newman 1973a, 1973b; A. M. Coleman 1985; Power 1997). However, more recent literature situates these ‘failures’ politically - critiquing the policymaking that led to chronic disinvestment in social housing (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994), challenging the evidence supporting links between high-rise architecture and social alienation (Spicker 1987), and examining the effects of the tower block failure discourse on the reputation of public housing (K. Jacobs and Manzi 1998), and in the context of state-led urban renewal and estate regeneration policies (Lees 2003a, 2003b; Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009). Yet, in spite of this extensive body of evidence that reveals fundamental flaws in the critique of high-rise housing estates, it is the association forged between tower block architecture and catastrophic social failure that has captured, and continues to dominate, the public and political imagination.

The success of other post-war mass housing programmes have also been called into question. Clapson describes the emergence of the term “suburban neurosis” during the 1950s and 1960s, used by psychologists to describe the isolation reported by the first people to move to Britain’s post-war New Towns (often young mothers separated from family and friends and with few opportunities to meet neighbours) (1998, 121). Suburban neurosis was translated by the news media into the more catchy ‘New Town Blues’ - a term that was recently revived in a report commissioned by health professionals to examine the dramatic rise in mental health issues in the new neighbourhood of Cambourne in Cambridgeshire. The report found that the
neighbourhood lacked amenities and spaces for residents to socialise, concluding that: “planning for the hard infrastructure alone would never build a community” (Goh and Bailey 2007). However, these ‘failures’ are understood to be of a different order to those of high-rise tower blocks. Speaking at the Courtauld Institute in the mid-1990s, the architectural historian Adrian Forty, observed that it does not matter whether post-war high-rise housing estates did or did not fail - what matters is the public perception of failure on a scale that is understood to be complete, cataclysmic and beyond redemption (1995, 26).

3.2 “Avoiding the mistakes of the past”

In January 2010, The Young Foundation, an independent research institute, hosted an event at the House of Lords to launch Future Communities, a research collaboration with the government’s Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to address the question of why some new communities succeed and others fail. Attending the event were housing managers, policymakers, researchers and planners from central and local government, public agencies, housing associations, and housing advocacy groups. A working paper, titled Never Again: Avoiding the mistakes of the past (Bacon 2010), framed the inquiry and set out a proposition to be discussed at the launch, as follows: at a time of acute housing need and newly-imposed austerity measures, how can the next generation of large-scale house building programmes succeed where previous experiments with mass housing have failed? What can we learn from past mistakes? And, how can these lessons be applied to future policy and practice?

Leading the discussion were Lord Victor Abedowale (a life peer with a long career in housing associations and homelessness services), Sir Bob Kerslake (then Chief Executive of the HCA), and Geoff Mulgan (then Chief Executive of The Young Foundation). The speakers’ opening statements acknowledged the scale of housing need in Britain and new types of pressure coming to bear on government and

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19 The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was the government agency responsible for investing in homes, business premises and regulating social housing providers in England between 2008 and 2018. The HCA was renamed Homes England in January 2018.
citizens: 4.5 million new households are predicted between 2006 and 2026; half a million households are already waiting for social rented housing because they are homeless or living in overcrowded dwellings; less government spending to support public services as a result of austerity; less mortgage finance for existing and potential homeowners; and, more people needing housing support as a result of unemployment. The speakers argued that the pressure to meet this burgeoning need at a time of dwindling public resources and global economic uncertainty presented a new form of risk: in the rush to build houses, the complex process of creating flourishing communities may be side-lined, increasing the likelihood of future failure:

“There is a fear now that in the drive for numbers, and amidst the difficulties of brokering and managing relationships between public bodies and developers, broader issues of social success may be overlooked ... if homes do not become successful communities, the risk for the future grows: of managing the consequences of failure, and associated pressures on the public purse. Social design is an issue of public value.” (ibid. 2010, 1)

Geoff Mulgan, presenting a summary of The Young Foundation’s Never Again working paper, offered the audience a new way of thinking about failure. The problem, he argued, is not solely architectural but also intellectual; there is a gap in the knowledge accessible to built environment experts about how to design places that can be socially, as well as economically and environmentally, ‘successful’. Presenting what policymakers often call the Egan Wheel - the government’s framework for planning sustainable communities (see figure 7) - Mulgan argued that professional knowledge about how to plan, design and construct high-quality and ecologically sustainable buildings is far in advance of professional knowledge about the complex social and behavioural interactions between dwellers and the places they inhabit. As a consequence, too much attention is paid to investing in the physical and structural aspects (e.g. transport infrastructure, environmentally sustainable housing, local economic development, job creation in construction, and local governance systems), and too little attention is afforded to understanding lived experience, and how planned interventions and investments can support the social
and cultural life of places. Where, he asked, are the people in our vision of sustainable and prosperous communities?

Figure 7: The Egan Wheel – a framework identifying the factors that make a sustainable community.
Image downloaded from The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities.

3.2.1 Making and re-making failure

The Young Foundation’s argument has continuity with the dominant tower block discourse in the sense that ‘failure’ manifests as an absence of community in the normative sense, understood as the presence of strong social networks, trust between neighbours, and a sense of belonging and civic participation. Yet its framing of the problem shifts the cause of failure from the material to the social realm. It is not architectural form that drives a lack of community feeling, but a lack of social ‘infrastructure’, understood as the spaces and systems that foster social interaction in the neighbourhood. Some of these are indeed physical – local shops, parks, schools, community centres and playgrounds – while others are recognised as social
forms – local civic and democratic institutions, community associations and faith networks. However, for Mulgan it is the overlap between the social and the physical - between local spaces, services, associations and systems in the neighbourhood - where potential lies in encouraging social interactions that build familiarity and support loose social ties that make ‘successful’ places. He argues much is known about these interactions and the social dynamics of community life from research and practical work on sociology, community development, the social determinants of health and wellbeing, but this knowledge is not accessible - at the right time, or in the right form - to the professionals and policymakers who need it.

This is a subtle, but significant, shift away from the claim that the ‘dehumanising’ form of high-rise housing causes a disruption to social life and a sense of community. Instead, this perspective recognises spatial planning, architecture and place governance as social practices with a dynamic and relational nature; not merely bureaucratic expressions of state power but assemblages that implicate an extended network of global and local corporations and experts in the production of places. Moreover, Mulgan’s argument situates ‘failure’ in a rationalist framework - the problem lies in the absence of networks to transfer knowledge from one discipline and profession to another. In reconfiguring the terms upon which failure and success are constructed, The Young Foundation’s argument changes the order of the problem and thereby, what can be thought, said, and done in response. The claim is legitimised by offering evidence that practitioners and policymakers also recognise the lack of knowledge to be a problem:

“Our work to date has demonstrated that there is considerable interest amongst practitioners in finding practical ways to do this. While both policy makers and practitioners recognise that there is substantial thinking and experience to draw on, there is also strong support for trying different ways of working and generating practical solutions.”
(Bacon 2010, 2)

What makes The Young Foundation event worthy of discussion here is its place in a wider discursive field; the debate was not an isolated event but one of numerous events, reports and workshops that took place during my fieldwork - engaging with
the question of past failure and future success and seeking to influence future policy and practice. For example, in 2011, the Berkeley Group, a major UK house-builder, hosted a debate and published a report titled, *Putting the S-Word back into sustainability: can we be more social?* (Dixon 2011), arguing that in an era dominated by environmental concerns, planners and built environment professionals are losing sight of the social aspects of placemaking. In 2012, the architecture practice John Thomson & Partners hosted a debate as part of London’s Festival of Architecture exploring the role of ‘pro-social’ design in creating socially sustainable communities. In 2013, Professor Tina Saaby, Copenhagen’s City Architect, addressed the Academy of Urbanism’s *Digital Urbanism* conference with a call to “consider urban life before urban space; consider urban space before buildings” (2013). And, in April 2014, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), a 250-year old organisation that describes its purpose as finding innovation and practical solutions to today’s social challenges, also took up the cause with a conference titled *Developing Socially Productive Places*. Around 100 delegates convened at the RSA’s central London office, including architects, planners, developers, policymakers and a former housing minister, to debate how investment in the built environment can strengthen local communities by contributing to economic and social productivity. The RSA’s Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor - echoing Geoff Mulgan’s 2010 commentary - introduced the conference by calling on delegates to consider the importance of gaining a deep understanding of how communities work, and how people understand their own places, in order to make investments in the built environment more effective. LLDC made its own intervention in this debate with the publication of *An Action Plan for Building Community in a New Estate* (Blume and Zander 2014) – a report bringing together examples of successful approaches to community development from Europe and North America to address questions such as: ‘Why do ‘good’ social relations emerge in some urban neighbourhoods and not others?’ and ‘What enables a sense of community?’ The report was commissioned by the LLDC to draw together case studies and examples of ‘what works’ in supporting new communities as a practical resource for the development partners at Chobham Manor and future LCS neighbourhoods.
3.2.2 Rhetorical strategies and non-obvious meanings

Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi (2003) apply a social constructionist perspective to the making of problems in British housing policy, describing the discursive processes by which ‘problems’ come to be determined, recognised, and acted on. Citing case studies that illustrate the problematisation of anti-social behaviour on housing estates, the authors identify three conditions that must exist for a social problem to emerge and to capture the attention of policymakers. First, a convincing and plausible narrative that presents a compelling account of the problem and its effects. Second, the formation of a credible coalition around the problem. And third, the coalition must act to influence policies and interventions that legitimise and address the problem (2003, 430). The authors describe a process of competitive claims-making that takes place throughout the stages of problem formulation and advocacy - a pattern that can be seen in the events described here. Each institution configures ‘success’ as a thriving, socially and economically connected resident population with a sense of community, which interventions in the built environment have helped to produce or enhance. Yet each also uses subtle variations in language to configure and name a distinct interpretation of the ‘problem’. For example, The Young Foundation introduces the term ‘social design’ to describe the process of shaping social environments, which incorporates different forms of knowledge about the social life of places, specific interventions and design practices. The RSA uses the phrase ‘socially productive places’ to refer to its own formulation of the problem of failing communities. The Berkeley Group and John Thompson & Partners use ‘social sustainability’ to situate their interpretations in relation to a wider global discourse on urban sustainable development practices.

Framing a social problem – such as the tower block failure, the lack of adequate social infrastructure in neighbourhoods or undeveloped capacities in social design – is also a dynamic and sometimes opportunistic practice, which interacts with wider political and economic conditions and to other strands of discourse as they arise. For example, the challenge of meeting housing needs in an era of austerity and public sector spending cuts is cited as a reason for investments in the built environment that are portrayed as needing to work harder (RSA 2014); while for a brief period after the
2011 riots discourse focused on urban space and social order (The Berkeley Group 2012). Such discursive shaping of social policy problems does not mean they are without significance; however, meaning and intent in this context can be ambiguous and difficult to locate, as words and phrases acquire new, non-obvious significances and operate as discursive ‘shorthand’ for a set of values, knowledge and organising principles within a particular group or epistemic network. Making sense of discursive practices requires an understanding of where and how claims are situated in relation to existing knowledge, the contested terrain in which problems are formulated, and the context in which speech or text is communicated.

Theorists of discourse and linguistics have observed that what is said is not always what is meant (Foucault 1991; Austin 1979, 1962). Language is performative in the sense that words are often intended to do much more than simply present a fact, as the tower block failure discourse demonstrates. Meaning and intent are relational and must be interpreted in their broader social and institutional context, which means paying attention to who speaks, the materialities of discursive practice and its dialogic nature. Bakhtin’s (1992) theory of dialogic discourse emphasises the dynamic and interactive character of language, recognising how the prior uses and meanings of specific words and phrases are deployed anew in relation to other works and voices. Baumann illustrates: “the ways that the now-said reaches back to and somehow incorporates or resonates with the already-said and reaches ahead to, anticipates, and somehow incorporates the to-be-said” (2005, 145). In this sense, dialogic discourse is always bracketed by what has come before – the “immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings” (Bakhtin 1986, 170) - yet is enriched, not limited by, prior associations, which can be recalled and reconfigured in novel ways to construct new claims and concepts. Bakhtin terms this practice ‘heteroglossia’ – recognising the continual repurposing of language that incorporates many voices, historic propositions, rhetorical styles, and assumptions that are not the speaker’s ‘own’, but belong to others (1992, 294). In this sense, dialogic works repurpose historically contingent concepts through new configurations of discursive practice.
Gastil examines how linguistic practice operates in ‘political talk’ to deliberately obfuscate meanings or convey significances to an informed audience that are undetectable or meaningless to outsiders. He identifies four distinct practices: ‘lexicon’ – the use of euphemisms or technical, imprecise and loaded words; ‘grammar’ – including naming conventions and speech acts; ‘rhetorical strategies’ – such as the use of metaphor or myth; and ‘conversational tactics’ – such as agenda setting and framing the limits of debate (1992, 473). The phrase “avoiding the mistakes of the past” is a case in point. Deployed by The Young Foundation in the earlier example, it is also an expression in common use among professionals, policymakers and commentators engaged with planning, housing and community-building issues. Consequently, it is a phrase I frequently encountered during my fieldwork, both directly in conversation with my informants, and in the context of wider industry events, reports, policy guidance and general news media. The success and failure of urban communities as a result of urban regeneration initiatives is a pervasive concern for policymakers, practitioners and residents in the neighbourhoods in question. Yet the terms on which success and failure are constructed are not always transparent, which means that assumptions, biases and connections to prior claims require close analysis to contextualise and make sense of their material effects. For example, Geoff Mulgan makes use of the phrase “avoiding the mistakes of the past” at the Young Foundation’s House of Lords’ debate. As does Nicholas Boys Smith, founder of Create Streets, a social enterprise and research institute that figures prominently in political debates about housing in London. Create Streets describes its purpose as “encouraging the creation of more urban homes with terraced streets rather than complex multi-storey buildings” (2013, 2). Mulgan and Boys Smith embody the poles of ‘failure’ discourse. Mulgan, as Tony Blair’s former head of policy, director of strategy at Number 10, and adviser to Gordon Brown, is one of the architects of New Labour’s communitarian policies on localism, sustainable communities and social inclusion. Boys Smith, on the other hand, co-created Create Streets with Policy Exchange, a centre-right institution described by The Telegraph as “David Cameron’s favourite think tank” (Helm and Hope 2008), which is publicly critical of high-rise housing. Both Mulgan and Boys Smith deploy rhetorical strategies that make use of the claims associated with tower
block failure to problematise housing and to advocate specific solutions. In so doing, both use the same linguistic shorthand, yet their intentions are quite different. One proposes that policymakers and built environment professionals make better use of available evidence about how people interact with each other and the built environment to take account of the physical and social support that communities need. The other advocates for the demolition of high-rise housing on the grounds of empirical evidence that overwhelmingly demonstrates that “Multi-storey housing is more risky and makes people sadder, badder and lonelier” (Morton and Boys Smith 2013, 29).

3.3 “Getting it right” in the Olympic Park

In April 2013, I began a series of exploratory interviews with the Chobham Manor placemaking team and community stakeholders living and working in and around the Olympic Park. My goal in the early interviews was to get to know the team and to explore how they approached the task of translating the Legacy imaginary into a situated material reality at Chobham Manor. I was keen to identify what influenced their thinking, where different professional interests aligned or came into conflict, and to understand which of the many facets of imagining and building a new community mattered, and to whom. The answers – “getting it right” and “avoiding the mistakes of the past” – surfaced in the first few minutes of my first interview and in the weeks and months that followed, it became clear that the terms upon which success and failure were configured were pervasive concerns. All manner of concerns from national planning policy, community gardening, digital time banking, psychogeography, satellite TV aerials, apartment balconies, and the democratic qualities of brick, unfolded as sites where imaginaries of success and failure at Chobham Manor, and the Olympic Park, were constructed, challenged and acted upon by the placemaking team.

The pursuit of success for such a high profile, tax-payer funded initiative is not, in itself, remarkable. London’s Olympic Legacy is the subject of intense global and local scrutiny. Globally, host cities compete for soft power that accrues with a successful legacy and the Olympic Committee and future hosts pay close attention to the
decision-making processes that concern legacy planning. London’s legacy is under close scrutiny from past and future Olympic host cities. During my fieldwork, a number of delegations from Tokyo, host of the 2020 Olympics, visited LLDC and the Olympic Park to learn from London’s experience in legacy planning. In the run-up to each Olympic Games, images of neglected and abandoned former Olympic stadia become staple media content as accounts of failed legacies and public fund squandering were reported (see figure 8).

![Image](https://www.citylab.com/life/2012/07/beijings-olympic-ruins/2499/)

**Figure 8:** Former venue for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games kayaking competition. Image: David Gray.

In local terms, east Londoners are closely watching to see if, and how, regeneration succeeds in meeting local housing needs and creating jobs without driving a “tsunami” of gentrification that seems to be the “inevitable outcome of regeneration” in east London - as one long-term resident of Hackney Wick described. Local housing for east London is a considerable need, affordable family housing even more so, yet there is anxiety in the neighbourhoods surrounding the Olympic Park that regeneration will compound, rather than alleviate, the housing shortage. This
thesis primarily focuses on the perspectives and practices of the institutions with a stake in Chobham Manor and the LCS. However, the question of whether the Olympic Games will deliver on the legacy promises, and who is likely to benefit, is a major consideration for local residents, community organisations and policymakers. Consequently, the terms upon which success and failure are constructed and measured in the Olympic Park are front-of-mind for both the placemaking team and the local stakeholders to which they interact. What success and failure means in the Olympic Park will be ultimately determined by the specific legacy investments and commitments made by the succession of Olympic agencies responsible for delivering the Legacy. However, success and failure are also judged in relation to contemporary regeneration initiatives elsewhere in London, and to the discursive parameters of the political failure discourse, which means locating the precise meaning of either term and its referents can be challenging.

In my early interviews with the placemaking team and local stakeholders, the phrase “avoiding the mistakes of the past” arose, unprompted, on several occasions. In each case no accompanying information was provided to situate the mistakes being referred to – itself a form of deliberate linguistic void. When asked to elaborate, the speakers assumed the meaning of the phrase was implicit: it referred to post-war housing initiatives that had failed to create thriving communities as exemplified by tower block council housing, but also encompassing other problematic new developments. For example, the post-war New Towns such as Harlow, whose primarily suburban, low-density form was decried by contemporary architects as characterless, the “anti-thesis of towniness, which results from the social impulse” (Cullen 2016), and large-scale housing estates developed during the 1980s criticised for their lack of social infrastructure and over-reliance on private cars (C. Turner, n.d.). Yet, while the shorthand referred to the same problem – a lack of community and associated risks – its causes were understood to be varied, from architectural form to policy, determining the allocation of social housing, approaches to estate management and the economics of housing finance. These differences of opinion were not always in opposition, but nor were they in alignment. Statements that, on the surface, appeared to suggest that people held the same views, in fact expressed
quite different interpretations and intentions. For example, in an interview with a
local politician, “avoiding past mistakes” unequivocally referred to a specific set of
social conditions associated with high-rise council housing – unemployment, welfare
dependency and anti-social behaviour. However, it also became clear that the
shorthand contained assumptions about specific policies – such as the undesirability
of mono-tenure estates and a preference to allocate housing to in-work families.
Referring to a well-known tower block in east London, the politician said:

“...We don’t want to develop a new generation of sink estates with no-
one employed on them ... as an elected representative I have to make
sure it doesn’t turn into a sink estate with a negative future.”

By comparison, in an interview with a housing association, “avoiding mistakes of the
past” was also used as shorthand for the failed communities associated with high-
rise council housing, but was intended to convey a different set of problems to do
with the support available to residents to maintain their tenancies. While for the LLDC
Communities and Business Team, the characterisation of high-rise housing estates as
universally problematic was felt to be a naïve and overly-simplistic portrayal, lacking
in both contextual specificity and political savvy. These examples are presented to
illustrate both the ambiguity surrounding the terms upon which claims to failure and
success are constructed, and the extent to which concerns about the risk of failure
pervades political discourse and urban spatial practices. As Carroll et al. observe,
failure is an ever-present possibility that is always pending and must forever be
prevented (2017).

3.4 Conclusion - The ‘social void’

This chapter has examined how imaginaries of success for the Olympic Park’s new
neighbourhoods are configured in relation to ‘failed’ communities and architectures
of the past. It examines how the cultural imaginary of tower block ‘failure’ intersects
with a higher-order discourse about what constitutes community in contemporary
Britain and the risks posed by its absence. I argue the pre-occupation with the failure
of tower block architecture that pervades political discourse, and planning and
architectural practice, disguises deeper concerns about the nature of urban
socialities and proper ways to live together in the city. The ideological reinvention of community, started by New Labour’s communitarianism and continued by the Conservative government under the banner of Localism, seeks to renew social and civic bonds between urban dwellers and make cities more liveable. In this political landscape, the normative ideal of a successful community is determined by the performance of specific citizenship practices that fall under the broad heading of Localism; the focus of which is to build social capital through neighbouring, volunteering, mutual aid, participation in local decision-making, supporting household and community wellbeing, and drive ‘self-efficacy’ - understood as the latent potential within local social networks to come together or take action in times of need. The underlying goal however, is to transform the relationship between citizens and the state, from one of state-led social provision to citizen and community-led action and responsibility (Rodger 2000). This has implications for all aspects of political and social life; from how public services are delivered, to the design and economics of housing, the form of local political systems, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens (see table 1).

Table 1: Shifting political values under Localism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-war welfare capitalism</th>
<th>Communitarian ‘Localism’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modernist &amp; rationalist</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-led social progress</td>
<td>Citizen &amp; community-led social mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare State – statutory rights to ‘social wage’</td>
<td>Welfare Society - rights by responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State provision / universal services</td>
<td>Market provision/privatisation of public services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralised political system</td>
<td>Devolved political system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting household and nuclear family</td>
<td>Mobilising community networks and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State control over society and economy</td>
<td>Active citizenship/self-sufficiency/privatisation of responsibility for wellbeing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysed on these terms, community is not merely about revitalising urban neighbourhoods and fostering social cohesion and integration. It is a governance framework – a policy apparatus with a somewhat ambiguous status that operates through state, corporate and citizen relationalities to shift responsibilities once held by government to local community infrastructures and citizen-led networks. In this context, the absence of ‘community’ as a structure for the effective governance of bodies and places, and a means for individuals to negotiate and make sense of urban life, presents a risk to political legitimacy. The tower block failure discourse that is so readily deployed in political and popular discourse is allegorical; the tower block as architectural form represents a moral absence - a ‘social void’ where ‘community’ should be in the form of proper social relations. The preoccupation with architectural form – the idea of the tower block, rather than the emplaced social life of the tower block - acts like a magical misdirection; enabling an illusion by diverting attention from the magician’s sleight of hand. It disguises a concern with what is not (proper social relations) by diverting attention to what is (improper architectural form). In this sense, the tower block comes to stand for societal risks and dangers of not conforming to proper ways of urban living in contemporary British society and the threats this presents to morality, social order and economic productivity.

The imaginary idea of normative community that underpins Localism has a symbolic opposite in the aesthetic figure of the social void - defined by its absence of community. This pairing of ‘ideal’ and ‘void’ states for urban communities are given aesthetic expression in a variety of social, material and discursive forms that deploy them in oppositional relations – potential and risk, success and failure, order and chaos, dynamic and stuck. David Cameron deploys the aesthetic figure of the social void to vivid effect in the launch of the estate renewal programme described earlier in this chapter:

“I remember campaigning in London as far back as the 1980s in bleak, high-rise buildings, where some voters lived behind padlocked and chained-up doors. In 2016, for too many places, not enough has changed. Of course, within these so-called sink estates, behind front doors, families build warm and welcoming homes. But step outside in the worst estates, and you’re confronted by concrete slabs dropped
from on high, brutal high-rise towers and dark alleyways that are a gift to criminals and drug dealers.” (GOV.uk 2016)

In the chapters that follow, I explore how aesthetic figures of the ‘ideal’ and ‘void’ community become evident in different material registers in the placemaking efforts at Chobham Manor. I argue that the pairing constitutes a ‘void aesthetic’ that follows an observable pattern of making particular communities ‘void’ through deliberate efforts to discursively configure people and places as alienated and unproductive, and to associate dysfunction with particular architectural forms. Once made ‘void’ in this way, urban space is reclaimed for ‘community’ to be forged under new conditions. In the context of major regeneration programmes in Britain, these conditions have seen new forms of partnership emerge between state and corporate actors as well as transformations in the physical landscape. This is a recursive dynamic that plays out in urban regeneration programmes across London, and arguably other neo-liberal cities around the globe, and illustrates how political ideology, policy and private capital intersect in social, symbolic and material spaces of the city.
Chapter 4  Architecture for ‘more community’

In 2010 the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC), the predecessor agency to the LLDC, unveiled its revised legacy masterplan: a vision for five, primarily family-focused neighbourhoods, drawing on London’s traditional housing typologies replaced the outline masterplan approved in 2004, which had proposed 10,000 – 12,000 new homes in high-density apartment blocks. The revised Olympic Park masterplan rejected the earlier high-rise vision in favour of an urban form felt to be more ‘characteristically London’ – terraced housing of various types within a pattern of streets, neighbourhood parks and squares. The new plan was inspired by London’s 17th and 18th century ‘great estates’ - areas such as Bloomsbury, Belgravia, St John’s Wood and Primrose Hill, which were purpose-built neighbourhoods of their time. The OPLC argued the enduring popularity of these neighbourhoods was evidence that, under the right conditions, purpose-built developments can thrive, adapt and become integral parts of the city. The great estates thereby offer a model for ‘successful’ large-scale urban development, based on sizeable tracts of land in single ownership being developed and managed over time. The masterplan set out a vision for the Olympic Park – also a large site in public ownership – to become a 21st century great estate.
Figure 9: The revised Legacy Communities Scheme Site Wide Park Illustrative Masterplan, first announced in 2010 and released in 2011.

Image downloaded from www.planningregister.londonlegacy.co.uk
A study of London’s contemporary form, historic processes of transformation, and analysis of the ‘success factors’ of the great estates, provided the basis for the legacy masterplan’s six “lessons from London” (2011, 49) – spatial, architectural and place management principles to be reinterpreted in the Olympic Park. Two such lessons are particularly significant to the way success and successful places are conceptualised in the context of London’s past and present, and the Olympic Park’s future. The first is the observation that the great estates, while purpose-built, exhibit many of the characteristics of London’s historic ‘urban villages’ - places like Battersea, Dulwich, Hampstead and Richmond that were once semi-autonomous settlements on the city’s periphery. Absorbed by London’s expansion they are now urban or suburban neighbourhoods in the wider metropolis, yet in many ways they continue to function as ‘local’ - places with a distinct identity and neighbourhood social life, forged from the intertwining of architectural character, public spaces, and local shops and services.

The second ‘lesson from London’ is the success attributed to the ‘urban block’ form that is characteristic of the great estates and other residential neighbourhoods across the capital. A figure-ground plan of Doughty Street and Doughty Street Mews in Bloomsbury is published in the masterplan to illustrate the spatial and architectural properties of a typical London block (see figure 10) including a distinctive street pattern, terraced housing of different heights, densities and uses that creates a continuous street frontage - formal spatial principles that determine relationships between public and private space.
Figure 10: Aerial photograph and figure-ground plan of Doughty Street and Doughty Mews illustrating London’s urban block form.

Image downloaded from Legacy Communities Scheme: Design Access Statement.
The Olympic masterplan links the popularity and adaptability of the great estates to the prevalence of these forms, yet states that blocks and buildings should be not confused; the urban block is a more “mute and enduring order within the city than its architecture” (ibid. 2011, 51). While it is subject to functional principles, the block is argued to be an inherently adaptable spatial form, able to incorporate changes of use and adjustments in scale – from the large Georgian townhouses and mews of the great estates, to the Victorian workers cottages, workshops and shopfronts found in places like Hackney and Brixton, and Edwardian mansion block apartments in Battersea and Maida Vale – while retaining recognisable proportions and street patterns. This flexibility is contrasted to tower blocks whose “singularity of form and scale is resistant to change and reinterpretation” (ibid. 2011, 51) – a rigidity, that in planning and placemaking discourse, has become inseparable from the idea of failure. Together, the reimagined urban village and block/terrace configuration are the foundation of the revised legacy masterplan.

When the revised masterplan was made public, Margaret Ford, then Chair of the OPLC, described the new vision to The Architect’s Journal as “… a stronger masterplan with much more community” (Fulcher 2010), which is a compelling statement. Ford seems to suggest the strength of the revised masterplan lies in its capacity to produce ‘more community’; a claim that assumes that changing the spatial and architectural configuration of the Park’s new neighbourhoods will also change their social nature. The neighbourhood, described in the masterplan as a territorial and material entity, is afforded the agentive potential to produce the social entity that is ‘community’ – inferred to be the relations, attachments and practices that take place in a neighbourhood and in relation to a neighbourhood. Implicit in Ford’s statement is the supposition that high-rise architecture produces ‘less community’ than the urban block/terraced dwelling composition of the revised masterplan. Changing the spatial and architectural form proposed for the Olympic Park appears to become a rational question of value; if the measure of future success is ‘more community’, which built form will be the most socially productive? Configured on these terms, the relation between neighbourhood and community takes on a transactional quality, in which material inputs must optimise social outputs. This perspective is a reversal of
architectural determinism, as discussed in the previous chapter; instead of high-rise tower blocks being configured as the cause of social dysfunction and community failure, the re-imagined urban village of streets and terraced housing is the agent of sociality, community formation and, ultimately, success.

Figure 11: Urban block form and house types proposed for Chobham Manor, produced for a public consultation in 2013. Imaged reproduced from ‘Welcome to Our Chobham Manor Consultation’ leaflet.

4.1 Scale and rupture

Ford’s statement illuminates a tension between plan and practice that surfaces regularly during fieldwork and which the placemaking team must negotiate in their day-to-day efforts to build a successful community at Chobham Manor. One configuration of the problem is the friction between the generally-held belief in the
transformative power of physical regeneration to catalyse social and economic change (a promise that upholds planning as a political and professional practice), and the recognition among the placemaking team – and among planning, design and housing policymakers and professionals more widely – that the causal relationships between the social and material dimensions of place are not well understood. There is no doubt among the team that ‘place’ - and moreover, a ‘successful place’ - is recognised to be much more than an interaction between landscape, built form and local social life; that places are both localities and imaginaries shaped by individual aspirations, social histories and collective symbolism. These concerns are widely theorised in the social sciences, yet in observing discussions between members of the placemaking team, it is clear that little of this intellectual capital is translated into knowledge that can be applied to urban spatial practice and policy. In professional terms, knowledge about the processes by which a sense of community takes shape in super-diverse urban settings is felt to be limited. Moreover, how the built environment mediates social experience is not widely understood in terms that can be applied to the practice of designing urban spaces capable of producing specific social effects. A lack of research about the social dynamics of purpose-built estates, neighbourhoods and cities\(^{20}\) - as opposed to studies addressing political economy, spatial planning, architecture or demographic change – further confounds the problem of understanding how social relations develop in new neighbourhoods, and how other factors enhance or inhibit the process.

At one level – politically and institutionally - this lack of evidence does not undermine belief in the Olympic promise that regeneration will drive prosperity in east London, or in the efficacy of the legacy masterplan to create neighbourhoods with ‘more community’. However, in the context of day-to-day professional efforts to build a neighbourhood and community at Chobham Manor, numerous discrepancies arise for the placemaking team - between promises of transformation and the complexity

\(^{20}\) The social worlds of new purpose-built settlements are the subject of The Levittowners, Herbert Gans’ work on life in a new American suburb (1967), and studies of post-war council estates in Britain (M. Young and Willmott 1957). Other notable studies of the English new towns, suburbs and council estates have taken a historical perspective (See Bayliss 2001; Clapson 1999, 1998; Ravetz 2001)
of realising the legacy vision, how things look and what they are intended to do, and where the agentive potential to make ‘community’ is understood to reside. That gaps between vision and reality are a common feature in urban planning, and are recognised to be productive as well as sites of conflict, is a well-established argument in anthropological literature, as Abram and Wezskalny summarise:

“\[\text{The plan is perhaps the most explicitly future-directed and agentive document of all. Yet ... the relationship between spatial plans and the realities imagined in them is always fragile and multivalent; they both encapsulate and exclude worlds of imagination.}\](2011, 15)\]

The interventions and appropriations that occupy such gaps and unsettle progress towards idealised futures have been examined in diverse geographical and political contexts and shown to operate at different scales. Holston (1989) and Epstein (1973) provide detailed accounts of the discrepancies between the modernist vision for Brazil’s new federal capital of Brasília, as a planned and purpose-built city intended to symbolise social and economic progress for the nation, and the reality of spatial appropriation and peripheral slum dwellings that reproduce the urban practices and structural inequalities of Brazil’s older cities. Boudon (1972) and Attfield (1999) analyse open plan domestic interiors as spaces of contestation, exploring how the intentions of modernist architects to ‘democratise’ the home, and challenge established class and gender hierarchies through the creation of new forms of living space, are undone by dwellers who use partitions and furniture to recreate ‘traditional’ closed domestic spaces. Others, such as Smith (2017), De Boeck (2012) and Baxstrom (2011) challenge claims that ‘success’ is determined by the realisation of a specific plan. Instead, these authors explore how alternative materialities – digital renderings of prospective homes or cities, billboards and consultancy reports – motivate urban dwellers to orient their futures towards these visions, regardless of whether they materialise or remain distant promises.

The literature described here primarily addresses how citizens anticipate, appropriate and act upon visions for new urban futures that are created by elites – governments, global corporations engaged in creating and marketing smart or
sustainable city strategies, and the investors and developers who realise them. In the next two chapters, this research takes a different approach by exploring how the placemaking team - themselves an elite group of professionals - act to interpret the masterplan’s idealised visions of the future and negotiate the tensions arising, as conceptual and strategic goals are translated into material and specific interventions. Abram conceptualises the masterplan as “a device to navigate the temporal transition to an ideal future” (2011, 22). The Olympic Park masterplan is commonly referred to as if it were a single document, in particular when planning proposals are being communicated to the public. Yet it is a suite of inter-related documents – maps, policy statements, design guidance – that interweave visionary aspirations for the future with data and technical descriptions of social and spatial conditions in the present. This makes the Olympic Park masterplan a complex artefact – part manifesto in its visioning of a new version of ‘the good life’ for east London; part promissory note to citizens in its multiple policy commitments to affordable housing, job creation and ecological sustainability; and part technical specification in its precise mapping of land parcels, allocation of space to different uses, and the application of design standards. The distinction between aspirational intent and measurable policy commitments can be hard to discern for non-expert readers, as evidenced by my conversations with people living close to the Olympic Park about the masterplan and its relationship to subsequent detailed planning applications. From ‘the outside’ - as residents frequently described their relationship to the LLDC - plans appear to be fixed; yet from the ‘inside’ the legacy masterplan is understood to be a dynamic document that will continue to evolve as local circumstances, national politics and potentially, global economic conditions, influence how development unfolds.

Paying attention to the work of the placemaking team as they interpret the masterplan, illustrates how different forms of elite knowledge and practice interact; on one hand, the masterplan represents the dominant mode of conceptualising processes of urban social and economic change that privileges spatial transformation and material agency. On the other hand, this notion of material agency and the forms of knowledge that underpin the masterplan – statistical representations of the population, land use maps, urban policy frameworks – operate at a scale of
abstraction, making it possible to separate visionary goals from the situated dynamics of specific locales, which often obstruct a smooth path towards the future in the form of short-term political cycles, entrenched social deprivation or ‘difficult’ landscapes. The placemaking team work with, and within, these expert knowledge frameworks; depending on the task at hand, they both create the kinds of statistics, maps and policies described here, and at other times, actively challenge their relevance and efficacy. However, the tensions that arise in the process of translating the masterplan vision to a new neighbourhood at Chobham Manor cannot be neatly characterised as oppositions between a visionary plan and complex reality, state or corporate power and grassroots activism, or professional expertise and community knowledge; the conditions are more contingent and mutable than these binaries suggest. Rather, the tensions appear to pivot around the question of scale and the point at which assumptions about the capacity of the masterplan to catalyse social and economic transformation in east London, and the agency of the Olympic Park’s new legacy neighbourhoods to produce ‘sustainable communities’, begin to breakdown. This moment of rupture becomes evident at the point where plans shift from abstract to specific, from the conceptual level at which the masterplan operates to the neighbourhood level where it begins to materialise. I argue that at this point two things occur: first, it becomes evident that despite the close attention paid to architectural form and materiality, it is the space between buildings, rather than the materiality of the buildings themselves, that emerge as agentive in the making of communities. And second, it is in these ‘empty’ spaces that human agency reinserts itself in the form of professional efforts to programme these spaces and create the conditions for community social life to flourish.\footnote{Harvey and Knox identify a similar dynamic in their ethnographic study of road construction in Peru, which foregrounds the relational interactions of infrastructural systems and draws attention to the social “work that goes into holding things together” (2015, 6).}

In the next two chapters I unpack these claims by examining the attention paid to architectural and spatial form in the Olympic Park masterplan and how this is translated into a series of ‘socially productive’ voids – spaces that will engender the creation of community - at Chobham Manor.
4.2 Urban villages - restoring London’s ‘natural’ form

Early in 2014, I met LLDC’s Chief of Design, L, an architect and urban designer, and F, the Head of the Communities and Business team, responsible for managing the various forms of outreach and engagement with communities and organisations in and around the Olympic Park, including extensive consultation on the masterplan. We are discussing the “sea change moment” when the vision for the legacy masterplan shifted from high-density, high-rise apartment blocks to the urban village model. L recounts how public feedback on the initial masterplan at a design charrette – a form of participatory workshop that brings together citizens, community organisations, planners and design professionals – was the catalyst for change:

“It was clear that people didn’t understand the design or the feel of the initial plans. It didn’t ‘feel’ like London ... it felt like a piece of Barcelona had landed in east London. I don’t want to say that places can’t change and be dynamic ... but people wanted the Park to be recognisable as part of the city. There was a radical rethink moment at the design charrette when the vision for the masterplan changed. Learning from London and what worked in the city became a very serious focus of the design. Looking at morphological and topological lessons from the city influenced how we thought about scale and form and shaped what we have now, which is things people recognise – streets, terraces, mews.”

F describes the emphasis placed on involving local residents, community organisations and businesses:

“The Park is an opportunity of such scale and profile ... everyone wanted it to be a platform for demonstrating that you could have genuine community empowerment and that started with a design scheme that had to be true to local voices and local ideals ... we were genuinely committed to asking real questions ... What’s it like growing up in east London when you are 14? What are your aspirations? Why have certain issues developed in east London? What sustains them and what are the barriers to change? What can change the physical landscape do? But at the same time recognising that change had to be social and economic one.”

In the Olympic Park masterplan, the Lower Lea Valley is described as a “significant break in London’s characteristic pattern of urban villages” (2011, 49), a reference to
Patrick Abercrombie’s analysis of London’s spatial and social form that was produced to inform post-war reconstruction in the capital (1943). Abercrombie’s analysis sought to reveal London’s distinctive urban character, working with the notion that the totality of the city was composed of a pattern of discrete local communities around which the social and functional aspects of everyday life were organised. This analysis posits the urban village as a ‘natural’ spatial form for London, one that has evolved organically resulting in a multiplicity of places that are individually diverse in character yet loosely conform to a higher order pattern that is both legible and appealing to city dwellers (see figure 12). The Olympic Park masterplan revives the notion that the urban village is a natural socio-spatial form for London - establishing the credentials for this claim by observing that some of the urban villages mapped by Abercrombie can be traced to the Domesday Book of 1086.

Figure 12:  London’s ‘urban villages’, drawn by Arthur Ling and DK Johnson for Patrick Abercrombie in support of the County of London Plan (1943).

Image from Legacy Communities Scheme: Design Access Statement available from http://planningregister.londonlegacy.co.uk
Bauman argues that some words evoke feelings of warmth, inclusion and belonging, referring to the positive associations that the term ‘community’ enjoys in popular use (2001). Arguably in Britain his claim can be extended to the word ‘village’, which evokes images of discrete rural settlements and distinct ways of life. The archetype of the rural village is a place where the local takes prominence in social and economic life. Shared economic interests and labour practices linked to the land – farming, fishing, mining – intersect with kinship networks to create a complex web of social histories and attachments to place. Village shops and services – the butcher, baker, grocer, school, doctor, pub and church – form a physical infrastructure that encourages face-to-face social interactions. Classic sociological and anthropological studies of British community life have tended to reinforce the imaginary of villages as distinct and isolated by focusing on locally-specific ‘cultural’ practices – speech, accent, food, mythology, dress (see for example Frankenberg 1989; Pahl 2005; A. P. Cohen 1982) – that emphasise difference between localities, rather than addressing class conflicts and social differences within localities (with the exception of Newby’s work on rural stratification Strathern 1982a). Many British villages are no longer geographically isolated, yet the concept of ‘village-ness’ as a source of identity and belonging persists. Strathern’s work in the Essex village of Elmdon, 50 miles from London, explores this symbolic power through the notion of “villages of the mind” (1982b, 249), in which the village is both reality and imagery. Strathern observes how categories of ‘villager’ and ‘stranger’, ‘belonging’ and ‘non-belonging’, ‘localism’ and ‘mobility’, are applied fluidly and accorded different values in Elmdon depending on the relations at hand. Mobility, for example, can be cast as the flight from the village in pursuit of education and career opportunities or as the ‘non-belonging’ of a geographically mobile stranger; situated positions that are not constructed solely in relation to local identity but operate in a wider symbolic system of class hierarchies and distinctions.

As an ideal, the village archetype reifies certain social values, practices and aspects of material culture, in this case, a particular imaginary of the good life that celebrates social ties, attachments to place and ways of life associated with stability, continuity and tradition. Transposed to the city, the ‘village’ contains the promise of a degree
of local social connection as an antidote to the anonymity, dynamism and instability of urban dwelling; as the Olympic Park masterplan claims - small, stable entities “render the vastness of London more tractable and ‘human’ in scale as its residents go about their daily lives” (2011, 49). Several of London’s largest contemporary estate regeneration schemes have adopted the ‘village’ moniker;\textsuperscript{22} the Ferrier Estate, a modernist housing estate in suburban south London, which acquired a reputation as a ‘failed’ neighbourhood and has been the subject of a controversial demolition and regeneration programme, has been re-imagined as Kidbrooke Village a “safe, sustainable modern community in one of London’s most desirable boroughs” (‘Kidbrooke Regeneration’ 2018). Similarly, the Aberfeldy Estate in Poplar, east London, is now Aberfeldy Village, where apartments are being marketed to Asian investors as “delivering the Art of Vision in London Living” (Hamptons Asia n.d.).

4.2.1 “Stitching the fringe”

The claim to ‘naturalness’ is used to argue that new urban villages in the Olympic Park can repair and restore London’s natural form. To this end, the notion of ‘stitching’ the Olympic Park into east London’s urban fabric is a metaphor that is deployed to powerful effect, as this statement made by Andrew Altman when he was Chief Executive of LLDC, illustrates:

“For generations, a lack of investment and opportunities has made the Lower Lea Valley a tear in London’s urban fabric; the work in this book shows the excellent progress that has already been made to help stitch it back together.” (‘Stitching the Fringe: Working Around the Olympic Park’ 2012)

‘Stitching the fringe’ is a phrase the LLDC team use to describe how the Park’s new neighbourhoods are intended to socially integrate, as well as physically with the existing landscape. L says:

\textsuperscript{22} East Village in the Olympic Park, Greenwich Millennium Village on the Greenwich peninsula, Aberfeldy Village in Poplar, Kidbrooke Village in south east London, and Creekside Village in Deptford, are some of London’s largest regeneration schemes.
“I get worried when people talk about the ‘Park’ as an entity because the legacy neighbourhoods are not five ‘new’ neighbourhoods but extensions of what already exists. The vision is to stitch into the grain of what is already there so the legacy neighbourhoods have more in common with what is next to them than with each other. This means getting the grain right so new development doesn’t feel completely alien. We felt very strongly that regeneration in the Park should connect up neighbourhoods that couldn’t be connected before ... that couldn’t get across the Lea Valley to each other.”

This also refers to the possibility of social fragmentation and division in the future and the necessity of managing this risk in the present. The desire for the Olympic legacy to be an exemplar, and provide a new “world class model for inclusive urban regeneration” (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2011, 143), acknowledges public and political criticisms about the negative externalities of large-scale urban regeneration programmes, notably rising land values, rents and house prices, and associated dynamics of direct or indirect displacement for low income households and small businesses. Like the Olympic Park neighbourhoods, most strategic urban regeneration programmes rely on private capital, often supplemented by public funds or access to low-cost public land, to invest in infrastructure and housing - costs that are later recovered through the private sale or rent of assets at market (or just below market) values. Negotiating the inherent tensions between public good and private capital in this model is an issue of personal and professional integrity for the LLDC team, who are individually motivated by a desire for development in the Olympic Park to be “true to local voices and local ideals”, which in practical terms, drives on-going dialogue and interactions with the same groups of residents and local organisations over a period of years. Returning ‘value’ to local neighbourhoods in the form of development that meets local needs and enhances integration within and between communities, is also understood as ‘stitching’ existing and new social and physical fabric together.

4.3 Re-imagining the London terrace

The reimagined urban village and terrace have significance beyond the boundaries of the Olympic Park as part of a wider discourse about what constitutes an appropriate
architectural aesthetic for contemporary London. In 2009, Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London, issued a draft London Housing Design Guide (LHDG) intended to influence new housing developments being supported by public agencies.\(^{23}\) Ostensibly, the LHDG was issued to address falling standards of new housing in the capital, following a period of years when London’s new-build properties were among the smallest in the developed world. To this end, the LHDG introduced new minimum Dwelling Space Standards for domestic interiors, specifying room sizes for living, work and study, storage and utility, and private open space in the form of gardens, balconies and terraces. Johnson’s foreword to the LHDG emphasises the importance of larger, better-quality homes and the role of standards in delivering this goal, yet the narrative running through the guide makes it clear that functionality alone will not suffice. Johnson sets out a design challenge to create ‘A New London Vernacular’ - an architecture appropriate for a 21st century city, capable of improving the quality of life for Londoners, coping with the challenges of climate change and population growth, and reflecting London’s unique character. While this call may sound like an invitation to experiment with bold new forms and sustainable materials, the Mayor’s vision for the future meant initially looking to London’s past successes and failures:

“If we are to renew the capital’s tradition of design excellence, we must understand the thinking behind the city’s design achievements and its failures.” (2011, 4)

“London’s terraced houses, apartment buildings, streets, squares and the best of 20th century development have created highly successful residential environments with enduring appeal. This guide aspires to encourage a new London vernacular that can take its place in this rich fabric.” (2011, 5)

Three short paragraphs in the design guide’s introduction sketch out the architectural and spatial characteristics present in the “best areas of housing” (2011, 5) that the new vernacular should take account of: London’s connected street-based form and hierarchy of busy high roads and quiet residential areas; its network of local public

\(^{23}\) The LHDG was intended to inform new developments receiving investment from, or being built on land belonging to, the London Development Agency (LDA) and the Homes and Communities Agency London (HCA).
spaces; its strong and singular architectural character and use of high quality materials. New housing should focus on “great background architecture” (2011, 6), not “iconic buildings that are at odds with their contexts” (2011, 18), and avoid recent “less successful trends” for over-dense apartment blocks with which the guide argues “we have risked creating a damaging legacy for future generations” (2011, 6). Architectural detail is encouraged:

“Beautiful doors, ceramic tiles, elegant balustrades – little details like these can help housing developments go beyond the perfunctory, and add delight and dignity to people’s daily lives.” (2011, 6)

If the aesthetic ideal of modernism is the search “for the eternal classic form that supersedes any sense of passing time” (Attfield 1999, 80), then the New London Vernacular’s attention to beauty, detail and history is a distinctly anti-modernist aesthetic.

4.4 A new moral architecture?

Over the past decade, a New London Vernacular has indeed materialised and is observable in much new housing in the city (Urban Design London 2012; New London Architecture 2012). The ‘NLV’, as it is commonly described by architects and urban designers, can be distilled into a simple list of architectural and material characteristics – a predominance of brick, deep-set portrait windows in a regular pattern to echo the proportions of Georgian terraces, parapet rooflines, front doors to the street, and ‘defensible’ private gardens. This makes for a distinctive, albeit relatively subtle, aesthetic that is easily identifiable by anyone with a vague interest in built form. Architecture practice Hawkins\Brown has distilled the design attributes of the NLV into a “dummy’s guide” (2013).

The merits of the NLV have been widely debated by design practitioners, housing developers and architecture commentators. Critics argue that it is an inherently conservative design practice that appeals to risk-averse planners and developers and undermines architectural innovation in the city (Emmett 2012; Hatherley 2014;
Heathcote 2016; & also think tank Hawkins\Brown 2013). Proponents of the NLV argue in favour of coherent and restrained design; architecture based on proven design precedents reduce the likelihood that buildings will ‘fail’ in as much as they prove unpopular with dwellers, cost too much to construct and manage, or risk losing public confidence in high-rise design (Urban Design London 2012).

Arguably Johnson’s vision for a new vernacular architecture for London is more ambitious and far reaching than the design guide’s attention to dwelling size and standards suggests. The LHDG’s close attention to the aesthetics of new housing in the city acknowledges the symbolic role of architecture, both in terms of what it conveys about London’s status and future ambitions, and in Johnson’s desire, to embed certain values (beauty, dignity, humanity) in the urban landscape and produce architecture “which can raise the spirit and represent the aspirations and ambitions of our times.” (2011, 18). Furthermore, the design intent of the LHDG extends beyond the boundaries of residential dwellings to the relationship between buildings and the wider neighbourhood, and specifically, the social effects that architectural and spatial configurations can produce in terms of social interactions in public spaces, visual and bodily connections between home and the neighbourhood, and sensations of belonging. Urban Design London recognises there are indeed potent design intentions behind the New London Vernacular, although it refers only to one – minimising communal space:

24 The LHDG is structured around six key themes. The first theme – Shaping Good Places – focuses on the relationship new housing should have to its wider neighbourhood context. Emphasis is given to the importance of design that enhances integration with the wider physical social landscape and pays close attention to the existing grain and character of an area. The second and third themes – Housing for a Diverse City and From Street to Front Door – shift down a scale to consider the relationship between street and house. Here the guide emphasises house types, sizes, densities and tenures, that are “appropriate to the location” (ibid. 2011, 11), before moving to address how entrances and thresholds between public and private space should be addressed.

25 Urban Design London is a not-for-profit network for built environment professionals in London. Its goal is to support the creation and maintenance of well-designed places by providing resources, workshops and design panels.
“Hidden beneath this polite architecture, there are powerful drivers, chiefly the avoidance of complicated access arrangements” (2012, 7)

This seemingly neutral statement appears to be driven by a practical desire to reduce wear and tear in communal spaces and minimise maintenance costs (“Removing the pressure of large numbers of children living in apartment blocks served by double-banked corridors will save significantly on maintenance.” (ibid. 2012, 15)); yet the next point acknowledges that reducing communal space and increasing private space are part of:

“a palette of details that collectively ensure residents are happier and have less reason to find communal arrangements daunting and more opportunity to get on and build a community.” (Urban Design London 2012, 15)

The neutral language that characterises reports like the LHDG, Urban Design London’s *New London Vernacular*, and much other planning policy, masks the broader political and social intent of urban spatial and architectural change. The rhetorical strategies (Gastil 1992) described in the previous chapter ‘decouple’ language from its political and historical context and obscure the specific meaning and intent of certain phrases and words, except to an informed audience that is familiar with the linguistic shorthand and loaded meanings of phases as they are presented in text. In conversation, however, the associations and meanings reappear: talking to architects, urban designers, and other urbanists engaged with current debates on London’s built environment, the connections between the LHDG, the New London Vernacular it promotes, and discourse on success, failure and architectural form discussed in the previous chapter become more explicit. For example, the following exchange with an urban designer took place at an event about evaluating regeneration; we were discussing the demolition of Modernist tower blocks in London and the new ‘NLV’ blocks being built in their place:

“We all love brick. It’s homely, it’s recognisable as residential, it breaks down the proportions of large buildings and puts things on a more human-scale. Let’s face it, the debate about scale is a critique of high-rise council blocks and the social problems associated with them. The
human-scale city movement is about ‘normalising’ social interaction in urban space ... creating streets and spaces where people feel safe again ... so reworking the terrace, defensible space, revitalising streets ... it’s all about not building high-rises that people think are alienating and crime ridden. Concrete is associated with failure in this country, it’s political. And so is brick ... it’s political because it’s not concrete!”

The design intent of the LHDG, realised in London’s new vernacular, can be understood as a material response to the social failures associated with high-rise council housing. Failure and success can be discursively and materially mapped onto one another in a way that reflects the political aesthetics of British modernism and communitarian Localism:

Table 2: Mapping failure, success and political aesthetics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-war welfare capitalism</th>
<th>Communitarian ‘Localism’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State-provision</td>
<td>Market provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-rise modernism</td>
<td>Street-based New London Vernacular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Brick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance in domestic space</td>
<td>Governance through public space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5 Conclusion – A material culture of community

How London looks today and what it should look like in the future - what of its past should be celebrated, quietly retained or destroyed - is highly contested public terrain. The kind of housing, public space, infrastructure and landmark buildings the city does or does not need, and what these investments say about how the capital is changing and who it is - and will be – for, are the subject of popular debate. After a decade of austerity defined by rising living costs, wage freezes, struggling public services, benefit cuts and increasing homelessness, central London’s skyline is still
punctured by cranes constructing new residential and commercial buildings. Moving around the city by bus, taxi or on foot, it is difficult to avoid billboards and construction hoardings advertising luxury apartments alongside undertakings to provide affordable housing, new public spaces and jobs for local people. These emerging architectures are sites of everyday political engagement with London’s future, articulating tensions - often viscerally expressed - about the empty promises made by property developers and the precarity of life for many ‘ordinary’ people in the face of rising housing costs. In this sense, London’s local architectural landscape concentrates and amplifies feelings of social inclusion or exclusion connected to national and global political circumstances. So prevalent is public engagement with emerging architectures, that during my fieldwork I had a notebook dedicated to recording conversations overheard in public places about London’s new residential buildings and ‘what they say’ about who the city is for. It is to be expected, therefore, that my conversations with people living around the Olympic Park often concerned the design of new housing in east London and what it conveyed about the place for ‘local’ people and communities in the Olympic legacy.

Buchli observes that a preoccupation with surfaces and how cities look is about “being able to discern appropriate social categories – recognising a modern society, nation and way of life” (2007, 45) or in the case of the Olympic Park, recognising whether new housing will be “family houses we need” or “more luxury flats that aren’t for people like us” as a long-term Leyton resident remarked. For people living in Hackney Wick and Leyton, new housing in Stratford was often a point of reference for current and future changes in our conversations. In recent years, several new high-rise apartment blocks have been developed on Stratford High Street; most are clad in bright colours – purples, reds, oranges – in what feels locally like a clear effort to distinguish new residential towers from the neighbouring post-war, high-rise former social housing blocks that are threatened with demolition. For many long-term residents in the surrounding areas, Stratford’s new towers are emblematic of the large-scale planned development that is transforming east London so rapidly that people describe a sense of dislocation from their own lives, of having failed to keep time with change, as the material culture of neighbourhood life is dismantled around...
them. The loss of ‘ordinary’ places in the neighbourhood – sandwich shops, pubs, corner stores, low-cost food shops and community buildings - to artisan cafes, health food shops and wine bars, intensify feelings of exclusion from the social and economic life of the city and come to stand for the veracity of claims to a community-led Olympic regeneration. The orientation, form and aesthetic of the Olympic Park’s new neighbourhoods carry considerable symbolic weight because of what they convey about the complex value judgements that lie behind the surfaces and the possible disjuncture between the rhetoric and reality of a legacy for east Londoners.

All politics is aesthetic, asserts American philosopher, Crispin Sartwell (2010), who seeks to reclaim aesthetics as a theoretical mode of engagement with the material embodiments of contemporary political ideologies.26 Following Ranciere (2006), Sartwell employs broad definitions of both politics and aesthetics - expanding the former beyond the limits of state governance to all manner of interventions in political thought and action, and the latter beyond a strictly delineated artistic realm. This move is intended to shift the analytical focus from texts as the primary representation of political ideology to the “excess of their content” (2010, 3) or the other materialities they produce – architecture, music, fashion, governance structures, knowledge systems, demography and economic frameworks. However, Sartwell’s examination of Thomas Jefferson’s “self consciously aesthetic” American Republicanism is perhaps the most relevant framework to apply to this thesis (2010, 234). Jefferson’s immersion in Greek and Roman classics is evident in an aesthetic system that brings together text, rhetoric, design of constitution and architecture - in particular, an emphasis on proportion, used “almost equivalently with ‘harmony’ ‘measure’ and ‘fitness’” (2010, 229) as notions that could be as applicable to the design of republican institutions and public architecture, as to art and philosophy. Arguably, there are echoes of Jefferson’s self-conscious aesthetic in Boris Johnson’s New London Vernacular, which also draws on classical values. The close interaction between discourse, practice and design guidance around a new vernacular architecture for London, and the consideration afforded in the LHDG to place,

26 Sartwell aims to distance, and thereby reclaim, political aesthetics from its historical associations with fascism and propaganda (Benjamin 2008; Sontag 2002).
identity, belonging and interaction in the public realm, alongside housing space standards, indicates an intent to influence how city dwellers interact in the landscape and produce certain forms of sociality. The New London Vernacular materialises wider political efforts to stimulate, enhance and shape the nature of urban social life and the formation of normative communities. In this sense, it is one element of a ‘material culture of community’ that realises the core political values and concepts associated with New Labour’s communitarian ideology, which now underpin the Conservative’s Localism agenda, and operates through the organisation of urban space and architecture, through governance and civic participation, and through multiple domains of social policy that cover crime to policing to health. London’s new vernacular architecture may not be as explicitly political or aesthetically bold as that of Britain’s post-war modernist tower blocks, yet arguably, it is every bit as distinct and intent on the transformation of social and economic futures.
“Places where people want to live – and that are sustainable – do not happen by chance. They are the product of visionary thinking and commitment by highly skilled civic and national leaders, developers and professionals, with the full engagement and support of local partners and communities” (Department for Communities and Local Government 2004, 7)

Establishing what exactly is meant by community in the legacy masterplan is not a straightforward task; there is no definitive explanation of how the community and neighbourhood are conceptualised in relation to the plan, or to each other, and the terms are used somewhat interchangeably throughout the masterplan and other vision documents.27 Seeking clarification on how community is understood involves navigating several layers of vision statements (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2012), site-wide objectives (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2011, 73; ‘Design Quality Policy’ 2012), design and placemaking principles (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2011, 77), and policy commitments (London Legacy Development Corporation 2012a, 2012b) in the multiple documents and plans that make-up the legacy masterplan and its numerous associated policy statements. Collectively, this mass of texts contains many and various references to the general social and spatial qualities that successful communities are understood to possess, the importance of community engagement for the legacy and to the process of creating sustainable places, and the diversity and vibrancy of east London’s existing communities, of which these are typical:

“In successful and safe places individuals take ownership of their surroundings and communities thrive. Working with existing and emerging communities will be vital to ensuring that old and new communities feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the places being created...” (London Legacy Development Corporation 2012a, 10)

“Community engagement is at the heart of the Legacy Corporation’s philosophy and activity because of its role in helping build long term stable communities. The relative strength or success of any community

27 The numerous attempts by scholars and policymakers to reach a definition of community point towards the difficulty (and some say pointlessness) of the task (Amit 2002b).
will have knock on effects in all quality of life indicators such as safety, crime, antisocial behaviour, health, wellbeing, education, employability, attitude and perception. Ultimately, the Legacy Corporation aspires to help shape successful neighbourhoods and to achieve that, working with people is essential.” (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2010, 170)

“Well designed homes and neighbourhoods create better and healthier places to live and build strong communities. They can reduce crime and provide homes that keep their value.” (It All Adds Up, RIBA, 2011, as quoted in Olympic Park Legacy Company 2010)

“Our key outcomes are to create: ... A vibrant and active place, connected to the surrounding neighbourhoods that creates thriving places of exchange where new and existing communities mix to share amenities and engage in cultural, sporting or play activities ... An engaged and inclusive community that takes an active role in the stewardship of the park .... ” (London Legacy Development Corporation 2012b, 20)

This chapter explores how the placemaking team work with community as a ‘fuzzy concept’ – a shared notion upon which various Olympic legacy promises rest, yet one that lacks a clear, operational definition. I explore how the placemaking team draw on their prior practical experience to conceptualise the ways in which the social, physical and symbolic aspects of place interact to produce a sense of community. I develop a working model of community from these accounts and examine it in relation to social capital theory, which dominates political thinking and policymaking concerned with communities in Britain. I develop the claim, introduced briefly in the previous chapter, that in spite of the close attention paid to the specificities of architectural and material form in the Olympic legacy masterplan, it is the absence of buildings and the spaces between buildings that emerge as agentive in the making of communities.

5.1 Understanding community through practice

In the early stages of fieldwork when I was getting to know different members of the placemaking team, much of my time was spent observing meetings and talking to people about their day-to-day work of translating the masterplan vision into reality
Many of these early conversations revolved around the question of what constitutes a ‘successful’ and ‘sustainable’ community, thereby exploring how peoples’ professional and personal experiences intermingle and how these perspectives are brought into design, construction and placemaking work at Chobham Manor.

One such conversation was with C, the community investment manager for Chobham Manor, who I met in November 2013. C has managed community investment for a number of housing estates and purpose-built neighbourhoods and has a good sense of the practical support that people with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, and little in common beyond a shared experience of dwelling, need to develop a shared sense of place. She describes her job as “fostering a sense of community in the places we create … and it’s very much about making sure our estates don’t develop social problems.” When we meet Chobham Manor is still very much an idea; the site is a flat expanse of gravel and puddles waiting for construction to begin and the first occupied households are at least two-years away (see figure 13). C’s role is to imagine Chobham Manor’s future social world and put in place the ‘community infrastructure’ that will help new residents settle and feel comfortable in the neighbourhood.

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28 Some of these interactions were semi-structured interviews that I instigated, exploring individual perspectives on what the built environment ‘does’ for community building. However, many of the interactions I noted during that period were exchanges between members of the placemaking team, observed in the context of private meetings and informal office conversations, about the questions, problems, new projects and initiatives arising from everyday work.
Infrastructure is often materially understood as the physical stuff of roads, bridges, buildings, telecommunications and energy networks – although anthropologists have recently begun to examine infrastructures as socio-technical assemblages that illuminate dynamic processes of contemporary social change (Harvey and Knox 2015). In the context of neighbourhood development, the term community infrastructure is most commonly associated with neighbourhood amenities like parks, playgrounds, shops, community centres and GP surgeries. When C describes three distinct – but overlapping – qualities of successful places, it is this kind of local physical infrastructure that she lists first: well-designed and good quality housing, a green space in the neighbourhood, a nursery for pre-school children, local shops and spaces for community groups to meet. The phrase ‘thoughtful design’ she uses to describe these amenities and services that make everyday life in the neighbourhood easy and enjoyable for new residents. ‘Thoughtful design’ extends to the material infrastructure that enable the smooth functioning of the neighbourhood; in C’s words...
these are the “not very glossy or exciting ... but very important” design decisions that
make the difference between a neighbourhood looking good and feeling cared for
(or not). Bin storage areas, where people put recycling, where they keep bicycles,
how communal gardens are designed and managed, whether the neighbourhood is
kept clean and tidy – these are critical aspects of neighbourhood design that are
“largely invisible” when they succeed, yet are the source of complaints and irritation
when they fail, which, C says, unfortunately they often do.

5.2 Building social connections

The community infrastructure to which C refers when describing her work at
Chobham Manor is predominantly a human resource-oriented towards building
social connections in the neighbourhood. The complexity of creating a new
neighbourhood in an entirely new district of the capital means this aspect of
community building cannot be left to chance. A sense of community is something to
be carefully nurtured and supported, through investments and initiatives such as
those C oversees, to give new neighbourhoods the best chance of a successful start,
as she describes here:

“The key thing for making a ‘sustainable’ community is to bring people
together and make connections in the real world. Whether people feel
at home in a place, whether they feel positive about where they live,
whether people feel comfortable being alone while out in the
neighbourhood ... these feelings are shaped by the physical and social
environment. It matters how the neighbourhood looks, if it feels cared
for, if there are places where people can bump into each other and say
hello. Building community is about giving people - new residents - the
tools to get to know each other and establish local relationships. Feeling
part of something is more likely to encourage people to be part of
something.”

‘Social connections’ is the shorthand C and the LLDC team use for these types of
everyday, informal, and often fleeting, interactions that are exchanged between
dwellers in urban neighbourhoods. As individual occurrences - a wave, nod or
greeting to a neighbour, a conversation with a local shop owner, or exchange of local
news at the school gate - do not seem significant, yet for the placemaking team they
are like a social sediment – a residue of sociality building up gradually over time and creating familiarity, trust, and perhaps at some point, a sense of shared emotional investment in the neighbourhood. C describes the process:

“It’s very small things that make the difference ... like stopping and chatting on the street, parents with young children talking to other families in a local park. That can lead on to swapping information about playgroups, things to do and then maybe getting together for a coffee ... making people feel like they are part of a community.”

In theoretical terms, the social connections the placemaking team imagine and aspire to generate at Chobham Manor are a form of consociation – a sense of fellowship and association that arises from “embodied and emplaced” social histories (Amit 2002b, 15). Consociate relations do not rely on shared cultural or ethnic values, or collectivity that is tightly-bound to history or territorial identity, instead they emerge from the common experience of urban dwelling - sharing streets, public spaces, housing and services - and the necessity of negotiating “being-togetherness” (Amin 2006, 1012) with its attendant social and sensory overload, that urban social life demands. Jane Jacobs, urbanist and now adopted figurehead of the global placemaking movement, argues that the basis of trust between city dwellers relies on the quotidian aspects of consociate relations; frequent and cumulative interactions, most of which are “ostensibly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all” (1961, 56). Wallman (1984) and Amit (2003) make a similar claim in that the consociate relations that characterise urban dwelling may be a more partial and intermittent form of sociality, yet they are no less meaningful as a consequence. This is a sentiment that the placemaking team share; social connections built on everyday interactions are the first steps towards establishing a ‘sense of community’ – a quality that successful neighbourhoods are understood to possess, and which I discuss further in the next section. As a consequence, C, the LLDC team, and sometimes also other members of the Chobham Manor development team, manage a host of carefully planned and executed projects intent on creating the conditions for people living in, and on the fringes of, the Olympic Park to come together. These initiatives ranged from residents’ meetings to guided walks around the Park; music, cookery,
photography and gardening projects; training young people to comment on planning
documents; organising tea dances for older people; architecture internships;
workshops on bike repairs; and, and school outreach projects. C referred to these
projects as:

“[They are] all about looking into the future and building social
connections ... we are always looking for ways to connect people,
connect projects, connect neighbourhoods on one side of the Park to
the other. Stitching it all together, this is what will make the Park work.”

“Thinking about the future population we imagine people being rooted
in the place, feeling there is mutual support in the neighbourhood,
social connections, belonging ...”

5.2.1 Social capital theory in public policy

Though the placemaking team do not explicitly cite Robert Putnam’s research on
social capital as an influence on their work, Putnam’s theorisation of social capital
has been the most influential social theory to shape British policymaking over the
past two decades.\(^29\) The social connections the placemaking team aim to cultivate in
the Olympic Park are the ‘weak ties’ Putnam theorises in *Bowling Alone* (2001). The
publication of *Bowling Alone*, which documents a decline in community interaction
and civic life in America, coincided with New Labour’s expanding communitarian
policy agenda, the focus on neighbourhood urban renewal, and race riots in Bradford
that prompted extensive debate about community cohesion in Britain. In this
context, Putnam’s characterisation of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ forms of social capital that
perform distinct functions within and between groups provided a model for making
sense of urban social relations. Strong ties - characterised by dense and emotionally
intense networks of connection grounded in shared territories, histories and cultural

\(^29\) Putnam’s work was taken up by influential advocates, among them Geoff Mulgan and
Matthew Taylor, independent think tank leaders and former policy and strategy advisers to
New Labour, and Richard Halpern, seconded from Cambridge to the Cabinet Office to lead
the Social Capital Project. Local government, public agencies, central government
departments and numerous civil society organisations have developed policy interventions
and programmes based on Putnam’s social capital theory intended to build weak social
capital networks in local neighbourhoods.
identity (like the close kinship networks Young and Willmott observe in post-war Bethnal Green) - perform a ‘bonding’ function, reinforcing associations and values within homogenous groups. Weak ties - characterised by loose associations between heterogenous groups and across networks - perform a ‘bridging’ function between individuals from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Putnam’s work focused attention on the potentially negative effects of bonding social capital, in terms of isolating marginalised groups, reinforcing intolerance of diversity and discouraging communities from acting on anti-social behaviour where it would challenge close-knit social networks; and, the potentially positive effects of bridging social capital to facilitate associations and connections in diverse urban areas.

Social capital has a long intellectual history: Tönnies’ (1957) conceptualisation of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft preceded Putnam’s model of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ ties by over a century, Durkheim (1889) and Weber (2001) theorised social capital in relation to modes of societal transformation, and Bourdieu examined social capital in relation to class, status and the transmission of social and cultural values and inequalities (1986). Contemporary scholars conceptualise social capital as an individual and collective resource that is the basis for trust, co-operation, and the operation of democracy, as well as individual advancement (see following references). In this sense, social capital has come to be understood as an indicator of opportunity and quality of life, prompting numerous studies examining its relationships to economic prosperity and international development (Woolcock 1998; Fukuyama 1996; Grootaert 1998), public health (Szreter and Woolcock 2004), wellbeing and happiness (Huppert et al. 2009; Layard 2011), and as a mechanism for analysing the effects of inequalities (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Kawachi et al. 1997).

Several aspects of social capital theory have been influential in relation to British urban social policy and, in particular, to the ways in which ‘local community’ is conceptualised and acted on within the field of urban planning, regeneration and development. First, is the claim that weak ties in a neighbourhood can facilitate connections between individuals from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds thereby encouraging cohesion and the emergence of collective, or community, social capital as well as individual social capital; second, that weak ties
can drive co-ordination and co-operation that generates local benefits by giving place-based communities a voice in decision-making and thereby greater control and influence over local problems; and third, that community social capital will increase as trust, interaction and reciprocity in the neighbourhood intensify and become more embedded in networks that connect individuals to each other and to institutions, which has motivated numerous interventions to ‘build’ local social capital as a neighbourhood resource. The prominent position that social capital has assumed across numerous policy domains, and specifically in relation to urban planning and the sustainable communities policy agenda, arguably has, in practical terms if not intellectually, seen concepts of place, community and social capital elide so that the presence, strength and activity of neighbourhood-based social networks have become the dominant way of imagining and measuring the nature and quality of ‘community’ in Britain.

While Putnam’s work remains most prominent among British policymakers, research by US social scientist Robert J. Sampson on the relationships between place, social capital and levels of violent crime in Chicago neighbourhoods, has contributed significantly to the way social capital theory is spatialised. Sampson’s ‘neighbourhood effect’ seeks to explain varying rates of violent crime between neighbourhoods by exploring how the socio-economic variables associated with criminal behaviour are shaped by living in a particular place (R. Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). Furthermore, Sampson and colleagues examine the spatial patterning of social behaviour and its effect on encouraging or inhibiting informal social controls in the neighbourhood, which is theorised as collective efficacy – or a mode of action that transforms social capital from a resource into specific outcomes (R. Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). Collective efficacy has attracted considerable attention from policymakers concerned with urban renewal in the UK; weak forms of place-based social capital have been conceptualised as a resource that can be directed towards addressing a broad range of related policy goals, from increasing community safety and reducing anti-social behaviour, to improving wellbeing and public health, reducing social isolation and loneliness, and critically, supporting community cohesion (DCLG 2007; Bacon 2013; Newham Council 2013). Furthermore,
neighbourhood effect theory has been influential in establishing in policy and professional practice the idea that ‘places’ are agentive in shaping both positive and negative social behaviours; for example, encouraging neighbouring practices, exercise, or pro-environmental lifestyle choices like recycling, cycling or car sharing. This shift is not unproblematic and has prompted academic debates, which have also filtered into policy and practice, about the methodological and conceptual problems of a broad application of neighbourhood effect theory to housing and urban renewal policy due to the complexity of disentangling social, economic and material conditions in the present from the legacy of historical interventions (see for example Lupton 2008b; Atkinson and Kintrea 2001b) and cultural notions of the good life that shape future aspirations. However, it is here that discourse about place, social capital and collective efficacy intersects with the discourse on material form and success and failure discussed in the previous chapter. That the built environment mediates social relations, identity and memory, through functional, sensory and emotional responses to place, has over the past 20-years become planning orthodoxy, as illustrated by this extract from a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation intended to inform urban regeneration practice in the UK:

“The social value of public space is wide ranging and lies in the contribution it makes to ‘people’s attachment to their locality and opportunities for mixing with others, and in people’s memory of places’ (Dines and Cattell et al., 2006). Places can provide opportunities for social interaction, social mixing and social inclusion, and can facilitate the development of community ties.” (Knox and Worpole, n.d., 5)

It is this orthodoxy that makes it possible to speak of a masterplan that has “much more community” (returning for a moment to Margaret Ford’s statement about the revised Olympic Park vision (Fulcher 2010)) and motivates planning policy and design practice that is intent on creating physical environments that will generate local social capital. And yet a relational analysis demonstrates how this planning orthodoxy obscures human agency and the effort required, both from citizens and placemaking professionals, to realise the Olympic Park vision of active citizens and engaged communities.
“If we hold that the effort to construct communities is fundamentally an effort, whether successful, partial or failed, to mobilise social relations, then, as Fredrik Barth has noted, communities cannot be created simply through the ‘mere act of imagining’ (1994:13) or, one could add, the act of attributing.” (Amit 20)

5.3 Conceptualising a ‘sense of community’

One of the on-going challenges the placemaking team addresses is how to understand what appear to be different ‘states’ of community – loose social interactions, active local relations that foster joint commitment and civic action, and a sense of community. In observing the team working with these ideas, a number of problems emerge: how are different ‘states’ distinct? What interventions can accelerate the formation of loose or active social connections and a sense of community? What are the dynamics of movement from one state to another? How is a sense of community sustained once established? The placemaking team continuously engages with these questions as they make decisions about the investments and infrastructure to put in place at Chobham Manor, which range in scale from the configuration of neighbourhood parks to deciding on a budget allocation for future spending on local events. What works in other neighbourhoods is a question that receives considerable attention - the team’s extensive prior experience and other ‘best practice’ examples are carefully analysed in an attempt to isolate the social and material conditions that can be replicated or adapted for the Olympic Park. Much of this investigative effort is focused on understanding the processes by which sentiment and social interaction take shape; examining the positive associations that people refer to when describing a sense of community – “feeling at home”, “being part of something”, “belonging”, “pride”, “attachment” and “community feeling” - and what can be done to translate these associations into real-world relations.

The consociate model of local relations in which loose social connections accrete through everyday interactions and function to “turn strangers into neighbours” - as one member of the team describes the process – is one ‘state’ of community. Consociate relations drive familiarity and trust and thereby underpin a sense of
community, yet are not a form of collectivity from which a lasting association, joint investment or action will automatically progress. This is a situation the placemaking team recognise and frequently encounter; community feeling and action are sporadic, distributed unevenly across people and time, and once established may not be sustained emotionally or practically. It is in this context that loose social connections are understood to be a powerful, yet fragile, neighbourhood resource with both intrinsic and instrumental value. The Olympic legacy vision of communities and citizens driving local civic action relies on local social connections shifting from a ‘loose’ to an ‘active’ mode; a desired shift in states that is reflected in the breadth of placemaking projects underway at Chobham Manor to intervene at different points along a spectrum of potential social interaction and engagement.

A ‘sense of community’ is understood by the team to be a more expansive and nuanced ‘state’; one that is responsive to social interaction, but is not entirely reliant on face-to-face relations, yet neither is it an entirely imagined community of the sort theorised by Benedict Anderson (1983). There is a potency of feeling attached to this sense of community, which the placemaking team recognise foremost as an interior mental state. F, who leads LLDC’s Communities and Business team and has spent several years working with communities on engagement, development and placemaking projects, gives this example:

“I think there’s a bit of a movement going on at the moment ... which is a hunger for wanting to be able to do more ... I mean specifically locally, people are craving a bit of a sense of place and a sense of purpose. And a lot of that is because we are becoming more and we are in a globalised world, a faster pace, families are more fragmented, everyone wants to find their role ... there’s a real keenness to be more involved in a community ... doesn’t mean everyone wants to volunteer in a traditional sense, people are looking for ways to identify. Five-years ago there was a massive surge in people wearing I Love Hackney badges.”

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30 The ‘I Love Hackney’ campaign launched in 2006 following a Channel 4 programme that identified Hackney as the worst place to live in the UK. The campaign was coordinated by Hackney Council with support from local residents and businesses. Promotional materials, adapted from the I ♥ New York branding, and an exhibition at Hackney Museum, kick-started a decade of initiatives celebrating Hackney as a destination (‘I Love Hackney: 10 Years On’ 2016). Similar campaigns – including I ♥ Brixton - have since been launched in other London neighbourhoods.
That was a craze in itself, but it was symptomatic of people wanting to identify with their patch. Now it’s got even more local … there are I Love Hackney Wick and I Love Dalston campaigns. People really resonate with their neighbourhood and somehow that local identity matters a lot more than it did before.”

There is an affective charge to such practices that resonates beyond individuals. The team recognise this as a “ripple effect” – a point of connection between people that produces or amplifies a feeling of belonging yet requires little in the way of common interest, experience, meaning or temporal frame. In this regard, ‘a sense of community’ is both a state of mind and a public feeling; it can operate independently of face-to-face practices, like speaking to neighbours, and yet be amplified by them. Moreover, it reaches back and forward in time to interact with individual mental models and shared imaginaries of what community should be. Bauman argues that ‘community’ stands for the kind of world we wish to inhabit but which is no longer available to us, one where people knew their neighbours, front doors were left open and children played in the streets (2001). This view of community as something lost that cannot be recovered is a powerful cultural imaginary in Britain; the extent to which local social practices, like speaking to our neighbours, are observed and commented on nationally suggests that the nature and quality of ‘community’ is a proxy for the health of society (see chapter six for a more detailed discussion). The loss of community is a narrative with particular resonance in east London, in part because of the special place ‘East End’ identities hold in the sociological and popular imagination, as constructed through research, social histories and popular culture (P. Cohen 2013), and in part through the role community holds as the referent for processes of rapid social and economic transformation. In this sense, peoples’ everyday experience of ‘community’ emerges from a negotiation between the form and quality of situated interactions in relation to a subjective ideal about what entails a community. The degree to which narratives about local community, belonging, inclusion and change, cohere or break apart is determined by the distance between lived experience and expectations.
The ‘states’ of community described here are understood by the placemaking team as discrete - each associated with particular social practices, feelings, dispositions and potentials. This way of conceptualising community is subtler and more nuanced than the social capital model that dominates public policy, which privileges face-to-face social interactions over subjective and symbolic engagements. Neither does it assume an automatic progression from loose relations to shared commitments and active citizenship, but instead conceptualises ‘community’ as a more dynamic state where social practices, identities, imaginaries, and sometimes also place, intersect, yet are fluid with partial engagements. In this sense, community - as it is imagined in the Olympic Park - can be conceptualised as a triad, composed of loose and active social connections that are mediated by a subjective and affective ‘sense’ of community.

From the perspective of the professional placemaking team, these states of community can be produced and amplified by the material and social conditions in the neighbourhood. The “right mix” of architectural and spatial form creates a socially productive environment: a neighbourhood that is conducive to community building (unlike the tower block architecture described in the previous chapter) as these extracts from a conversation with the LLDC team describe:

“Micro-level meeting points in the neighbourhood are really important for creating a sense of community ... a lack of these prohibits casual social encounters, everyday ephemeral interactions ... people need places that aren’t structured, where they can stop and talk ... for this you need a landscape that supports this type of social interaction.”

“Intimate public and private spaces are important ... we have the iconic buildings and spaces in the Park, but people need neighbourhood spaces too if they are going to have a chance to develop a local sense of place and community.”

“Communities that work have a natural spill out onto the streets ... different people and different activities overlapping ... having spaces to recognise neighbours in the street encourages a really organic development of neighbourhood and sense of community.”

Certain materials and design attributes receive particular attention in the Olympic Park masterplan and detailed design proposals for Chobham Manor because of their
capacity to induce feelings and social practices that build community. Bricks, front
doors, thresholds and streets, for example, are given particular prominence. In the
next section, I explore the agentive potentials afforded to these forms and describe
how they are understood to function by the placemaking team.

5.4 Productive spaces

Architecturally, Chobham Manor is a close interpretation of the urban village model
envisioned in the Olympic Park masterplan (see figure 14). “All of the best bits of the
NLV are embedded in it” according to T, one of the architects, who describes
Chobham Manor as:

".. a nod to the Victorian streets around the Park ... it draws on the form
and materials of the neighbourhoods around it ... a familiar street
pattern, brick, 3-5 storey houses with private gardens ... and other forms
that are recognisably ‘London’ mansion blocks, townhouses with mews
houses behind them, housing overlooking neighbourhood parks.”

Chobham Manor has been imagined as a family-focused neighbourhood, which in
practical terms means that 75 per cent of the housing will have three or more
bedrooms, many with private outdoor space. The urban block and grid street form
are predominant and housing is a mixture of terraced townhouses with continuous
street frontages and private front and rear gardens that overlook landscaped public
gardens. Mews housing is situated at the rear of townhouses echoing the spatial form
of areas like Bloomsbury and Notting Hill, and mansion blocks are interspersed with
terraced housing.

Occupying a roughly rectangular plot of land between the Velopark and East Village,
Chobham Manor is oriented around two east-west cross streets that link it to a
residential area of Leyton. Phase one, some of which is already occupied, borders the
Olympic Park and looks over Timber Lodge adventure playground. Phase two, in the
middle, is largely residential. Phase three, which will be developed last, will contain
housing and a multi-purpose community building that is intended to create a “place
of exchange” (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2011, 12) - a shared social space at the
threshold between Chobham Manor and Leyton, which is a manifestation of the intent to ‘stitch’ together urban and social fabric. A linear park, known as ‘The Greens’, will run the length of the neighbourhood.

This section examines the relationship between materiality and sociality in Chobham Manor’s design.

5.4.1 Front doors

Front doors are one of the design attributes given special attention in the masterplan, which commits to over 40 per cent of dwellings having their own private entrances to the street: “Front doors opening on to streets and open spaces making them safe and active throughout the day and night.” (Olympic Park Legacy Company 2010, 12). Properties with street-facing front doors are understood to fulfil two distinct social functions associated with flows of human movement around the neighbourhood. The first is to generate a regular exchange of bodies between private dwellings and public spaces, which creates a flow of ordinary social activities that ‘animate’ streets and make people feel safe and comfortable in the neighbourhood. To this end, Chobham Manor will have a mixture of residential and non-residential buildings with street-level private entrances - town houses, mews houses, stacked maisonettes and ground floor commercial space underneath terraced apartments. Private front doors fulfil a second social purpose, which is to reduce the potential for friction between dwellers who must share communal entrances. The Mayor’s housing design guide, and supporters of the New London Vernacular more widely, also seek to minimise shared entrance and access arrangements in new housing. Reduced maintenance costs are cited as the main motivation for creating private rather than shared entrances; however, Urban Design London recognises that replacing communal with private entrances would mean “less reason to find communal arrangements daunting and more opportunity to get on and build a community.” (2012, 15).
Figure 14: Artist’s impression of a terraced townhouse at Chobham Manor.
Image reproduced from ‘Welcome to Our Chobham Manor Consultation’ leaflet.

5.4.2 Thresholds

Thresholds between private, communal and public areas also receive close attention. Design standards for the Olympic Park dictate that street-facing properties must have 1.8 metres of ‘defensible space’ in front of dwellings to meet requirements for cycle and refuse storage. As discussed earlier, defensible space is a concept that emerged from the critique of high-rise tower block housing, based on the assumption that ‘good’ physical design engenders feelings of responsibility for neighbourhood space, which encourage residents to both care for, and informally police, its use. Encouraging citizens to feel responsible for their local communities is one of the central values of New Labour’s communitarian ideology and policies that are now embedded in the Conservative’s Localism agenda. Political interest in civic responsibility originated from concern about the corrosive effects of anti-social behaviour, disorder and neglect to local areas (Squires 2006), drawing on Wilson and Kelling’s Broken Windows theory (2003) that argued visible neglect in the form of broken windows, vandalism or graffiti, creates an environment that encourages
further crime and prompts a spiral of urban decline that can see residents who are able, leaving the neighbourhood. The theory gained global attention when applied to the policing strategy in New York in the 1990s by Mayor Rudy Guiliani, and Police Commissioner Bill Bratton. During the 2000s, New Labour applied the theory to a cross-departmental initiative to improve the conditions of urban neighbourhoods and public space, prompting the launch of its prominent “Cleaner, Safer, Greener” (Department for Communities and Local Government 2003; O. Wilson and Hughes 2011) policy implemented by local authorities in priority neighbourhoods. These campaigns addressed improvements to urban space and sought to encourage citizens and community organisations to make an emotional, as well as practical, investment in managing neighbourhoods; in short instituting a collectivisation of responsibility for the surveillance of petty crime and anti-social behaviour as well as management of neighbourhoods that has parallels with Foucault’s panopticism as a metaphor for power in modern societies (1991). At Chobham Manor, defensible space takes the form of small patio gardens, which are demarcated from the street by brick walls or railings reflecting the form of public/private boundary spaces found in Victorian and Georgian terraces around London. Threshold spaces like these are designed to contain practical functions like refuse storage and also perform a psycho-social function, as T, one of the architects, describes:

“It’s all about arriving … it’s slightly poetic but it’s about feeling that you’re home … you can lock the door behind you and relax”

R, one of the landscape architects continues:

“We imagine people will personalise these spaces … you know, with planting or maybe even a table and chairs … so they can also become social spaces that connect homes to the rest of the community.”

5.4.3 Streets

Front doors and defensible space have particular social functions, yet they fulfil a larger purpose in mediating the relationship between private and public space in the neighbourhood, in particular, between dwellings and streets. Streets are afforded
considerable weight in the legacy masterplan as sites of diverse social interactions, the functions and qualities that are linked to feelings and practices that support different dimensions of community life. Foremost is the intent to create ‘active streets’ – places that exhibit a diversity of social interaction, dynamism of movement, and the potential for creative and surprising uses of space. The active streets concept stems from Jane Jacobs’ celebration of New York’s neighbourhood sidewalks detailed in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). City sidewalks, she argues, are the setting for all manner of casual social interactions between passers-by, some who will be familiar and others who will be strangers. Busy streets are interesting to observers, pleasant to visit, and work to normalise the presence of large numbers of strangers. Jacobs’ central argument is that social diversity in urban space motivates a ‘natural’ regulation of behaviour and encourages safety and cohesion that can be expanded and developed in numerous ways (see Amin’s (2008) work on urban surplus, Vertovec on super-diversity (2007), Hall on diversity and high-streets (2012) and Sennett (2006)). The significance of streets as socially productive sites becomes clearer when considered in relation to the ideas about failure, discussed in the previous chapter. T, one of the architects working on Chobham Manor, explains:

“An urban streetscape normalises social interaction ... I mean people can interact casually, come and go, stop and talk if they want to or just nod and go by. Walking from place to place and not worrying about safety ... people aspire to this kind of normal use of space. A criticism of high-rises is the dead space ... not having other people around makes you feel vulnerable ... streets feel more homely and are recognisably as social spaces.”

The street as a site of social regulation and surveillance is well-established in urban theory, policy and practice, as discussed here and in the previous chapter. Streets are understood to be democratic forms of public space (CABE Space 2004, 2008; York et al. 2007) - accessible to a wide range of people in a way that other public spaces such as parks or squares may not be (although there are always exceptions to this norm as illustrated by spatial practices that discourage homeless people or large groups of adolescents gathering on the street). This extract from the *Manual for Streets*, design
guidance for planners, architects and local authorities, illustrates the way streets are understood by the placemaking team as socially productive public spaces:

“people meeting one another on a casual basis strengthens communities and encourages a sense of pride in local environments; and people who live in good-quality environments are more likely to have a sense of ownership and a stake in maintaining the quality of their local streets and public spaces.” (Department for Communities and Local Government / Department for Transport 2007, 16)

The examples shown here illustrate how certain material forms and design attributes are understood by the placemaking team to induce feelings and social practices that build community. Collectively, the features work together to create socially productive spaces. In this sense, residents are co-opted into a system of governance and social regulation that focuses on public space as the prime site for the production of citizenship. Conversely, some objects are understood to have disruptive potential if ‘out of place’ or ‘mis-used’. The next section explores how disruptive objects are understood to threaten the formation and flow of sociality upon which a sense of community relies.

5.5 Disruptive objects

One evening in January 2014 I was at LLDC’s Planning Decisions Committee meeting, a monthly public forum to review and make planning proposal decisions for the Olympic Park. Towards the end of the evening, the discussion about a planning application under review became heated when questions were posed about how the balconies in the proposed apartments would be designed to minimise the risk that residents would “mis-use” the space by hanging out laundry or storing bicycles, furniture and children’s toys. The architect responded by emphasising that careful consideration had been given to this potential problem; balconies would be “part-solid” (rather than glazed or finished with railings) in order to offer some privacy to dwellers and conceal any “mis-use” of space from neighbours. The questioning persisted, and the architect eventually responded, somewhat exasperated, by saying “But that is life, when buildings are occupied.” Unsatisfied with this response, one of
the Committee members interrupted and quickly moved to raise the problem of TV aerials, asking who would be responsible for regulating their presence in the neighbourhood:

“But how many TV aerials will there be? Do you have a sitewide strategy for managing aerials? What levers do you have to address poor housing management? By year five will there be aerials sprouting off all the blocks? Look around Newham, there is really poor management of housing. How will we avoid this?”

This exchange came relatively soon after my first meeting with C and our discussion about the role of “thoughtful design” in minimising friction between residents. In our earlier conversation, C identified certain objects in the landscape (bicycles, rubbish bins, pushchairs and laundry racks, for example) as potentially disruptive to community life for two reasons: either their mis-use inconvenienced other dwellers (in the case of communal areas used to store bicycles or balconies being used to dry laundry), or their presence signified disorder (front gardens being used to dump rubbish or store furniture). In both cases, ‘out-of-place’ objects in the neighbourhood are a source of discord between dwellers. C described how these circumstances might initially cause only minor irritation between one or two people, yet if left unattended, could escalate into a larger problem involving several households, in which estate managers may be called on to intervene or mediate between residents. Such friction between dwellers presents a risk to the formation and maintenance of a sense of community by creating bad feeling and disrupting the formation and maintenance of social relations. Consociate relations in urban neighbourhoods, such as the ‘weak’ social connections the placemaking team hope will form at Chobham Manor, are thought to be relatively resilient to change because of the socially dynamic nature of city living. Yet, in a seemingly contradictory fashion, they are also conceptualised as a fragile resource in the sense that community ‘spirit’ can be adversely affected by material changes in the neighbourhood – like bins, bikes and rubbish not in their proper place. ‘Objects-out-of place’ pose a symbolic risk to the community because they signify indifference to, or disregard for, normative ideas about collectivity, responsibility and shared space. As summarised in the previous section, the Broken Windows theory that remains so powerful in planning discourse...
and housing management, claims a linear relationship between casual disregard, persistent neglect, anti-social behaviour and social decline. As discussed in chapter three, failed high-rise tower blocks are discursively constructed as places of otherness that lie outside mainstream society, as evidenced by their lack of conformity to normative codes of urban living. In professional terms, therefore, TV aerials and balconies must be regulated to keep them in their proper place, both spatially and socially, to maintain order in the neighbourhood. Objects-out-of-place can disrupt, block or break the formation and free movement of social connections and positive community feeling that Chobham Manor’s architectural configuration is intended to produce; a disruptive potential, sufficiently significant to create problems outside the neighbourhood, as this comment from one of the housing management team describes:

“Neighbourhoods that don’t get off to a good start can suffer tensions and problems that can quickly lead to the area gaining a bad reputation that can be hard to shake off. If problems aren’t managed you can see a spiral of decline – people withdraw, become fearful and don’t trust their neighbours, stop caring about the neighbourhood and want to move away if they can. Most often you see good communities are places that are really well managed – by professionals and residents working together. Having a face in the neighbourhood, a housing manager, who is there every day, can make the difference between success and failure.”

5.5.1 Doormats, nails and screws

Over the following months I compiled a list of objects that, at different points in the placemaking work and through different circumstances, were characterised by the placemaking team as potentially problematic. For instance, the balconies and TV aerials described above, the disruptive nature of such objects usually arose in the context of other work the team were doing, for example, working on a project to put a potting shed in Chobham Manor’s neighbourhood to encourage people to socialise while gardening, or working on a scheme to encourage cycling. Curtains, blinds, benches and footballs, were added to the bikes, bins and balconies that can disrupt community life. This way of seeing objects as disruptive and in need of careful management is not unique to Chobham Manor. Rather it seems to characterise the
way housing and places are managed by institutional landlords like housing associations, as the following example from East Village illustrates. One afternoon I received an email headed ‘Rules’ from K, who was living in East Village. Attached to the email was an image of a letter notifying residents in his apartment block that an inspection of communal areas was scheduled for the following week. The letter noted that “personal items” were being left in communal areas in breach of tenancy and lease agreements and that items had to be removed or they would be confiscated and “held for retrieval.” Door mats were also singled out as problematic in light of potential fire risk.

K and I had worked together over the previous summer on a community research project in the Olympic Park.31 Between interviews, we spent time discussing my fieldwork and K’s thoughts on living in a new neighbourhood. Our most recent conversation had been about the rules imposed on East Village residents by the landlords, which K and his neighbours felt to be excessive. Not long after the email about door mats, I visited K’s flat where he showed me a folder, two or three inches thick, containing pages of rules governing residents’ behaviour and guidance on how to clean and care for the appliances and materials in the apartment.32 K pointed out some of the regulations he and his neighbours felt represented more significant intrusions into private life: window coverings had to be selected from a limited range provided and installed by the landlord; balconies could not be used to store bicycles or to dry clothes; interior walls could not be painted until tenants had been resident for 18 months and had to be returned to the original white before the tenancy was relinquished. As we flicked through the folder, K pointed out that “nails and screws are causing a real problem” and proceeded to explain that tenants were prohibited from putting nails or screws into the walls until they had been resident for 12-

31 The *Prosperity in East London* study run by the Institute for Global Prosperity at UCL.
32 The regulation and inspection of housing, and provision of guidance about how to manage and style domestic space, has been observed to be a common feature of institutional and state-led housing projects – see for example, Buchli’s account of the *Sovety Proltetarskoj Khoziaike Advice for Proletarian Housewives*, published in 1924, providing guidance on how to appropriately dress doors and windows appropriately for a socialist household (2000), or Gilbert’s work on domestic regulation and guidance as an aspect of Victorian social reform (2007).
months. This regulation had prompted considerable discussion among K’s neighbours about the excessive and arbitrary nature of the tenancy guidelines: “What difference does it make if you have lived here for 365 or 366 days? One day you can’t hang a picture and the next you can. Do the extra 24 hours make me a better person? Am I a fully-fledged member of the community then?” said G, one of K’s friends who lived in a nearby block. Some of his neighbours had ignored the rules and drilled holes to hang pictures and photographs to make a home. Most homes in East Village are rented from two institutional landlords – one managing private housing and the other ‘affordable’ housing - making the majority of people tenants rather than homeowners. However, K, had a shared-ownership apartment, a relatively new form of tenancy designed to make home ownership more accessible to first-time buyers by enabling them to buy a share of a property and rent the rest. As part-owner/part-tenant, he and his girlfriend, M, felt they had more of a right to personalise their home than someone renting; yet at the same time, they also felt they had too much at stake to risk an errant nail or screw coming to light during an inspection. For K, the sense of insecurity that comes with renting, rather than owning, a home can be articulated by a lack of a nail in the wall. The conventional logic of strict tenancy agreements is to protect residents’ safety, maintain high standards in the properties, and ensure the smooth-running of the neighbourhood. In this sense, institutional efforts to mitigate the risks that disruptive objects present to the formation and flow of sociality and community feeling, also disrupts the work of home and self-making that dwellers see as part of the process of forming attachments to a place. In seeking to protect and nurture a sense of community, institutional efforts to regulate space and social order appear instead as displays of micro-power that illuminate the imbalance between institutions and individuals that undermine the goal of community-building.

5.6 Conclusion – Community in the ‘in-between’

This chapter has examined how certain material and architectural forms in Chobham Manor’s built environment are understood to have the capacity to provoke feelings and interactions associated with the normative idea of a ‘sustainable community’.
The forms described here - bricks, front doors, thresholds and streets - are configured to encourage visual, social and emotional connections to the neighbourhood by orienting bodies and minds outwards, from private interior space to collective public space. Planning concepts like ‘eyes on the street’, ‘active streets’, ‘doorstep play’ and ‘natural surveillance’ consolidate collective spaces in the neighbourhood as primary sites for the formation and practice of community. In this sense, the aspiration of the Olympic masterplan to design an urban environment that can produce ‘more community’ is firmly embedded in Chobham Manor’s architecture; yet arguably, its generative potential resides, not in the buildings themselves but in the spaces in between. I argue the ethnographic data presented so far shows the agentive sites in the neighbourhood are understood to be the gaps and absences where material forms give way to space, producing voids with social potential, like the example of the atrium void, where “community would be made” that introduced this thesis. Chobham Manor contains a series of such voids, which shift in scale – from balconies and patio gardens to neighbourhood parks - and move along a spectrum from semi-private to fully public space. At one end of the spectrum are private balconies in apartment blocks and ‘defensible’ spaces at the thresholds of private and shared dwellings, which are oriented towards the street to make them publicly visible and therefore socially connected; at the other end of the spectrum are public spaces – streets, neighbourhood parks and public open spaces. Arguably, this pattern of voids as sites for community-building extends from the household to the neighbourhood and upwards in scale to the Olympic Park as a whole which, as chapter seven examines, was conceptualised as a wasteland and reimagined as a catalytic void for east London’s social and economic transformation.

Situating the potential to create community in the gaps within and between buildings creates a dynamic in which architecture encourages an outward perspective, even when dwellers are in their private space, which creates and encourages a feedback loop between people and place that is suggestive of sociality and association. This way of viewing interactions between materiality and sociality in the neighbourhood acknowledges their dynamic relation. In theoretical terms therefore, the placemaking team see, and work with, Chobham Manor as an assemblage of people,
buildings, space, political and public imaginaries, and social possibilities, which are continuously overlapping and interacting. Yet, paradoxically, in their day-to-day work, planners and architects in the placemaking team make a conceptual distinction between place and people; the former is a material realm that is quantifiable and under their control, the latter is intangible, unpredictable and difficult to grasp in terms that enable action. To this end, the ‘social’ is often discussed by the planners, architects and housebuilders in the team as a realm that is not well understood within their respective disciplines. To some extent the team members who, in broad terms, could be called community development or community engagement professionals, also agree that this relationship is not well researched or clearly conceptualised in planning policy or placemaking practice; yet, they understand the relationship between the material, social, symbolic and potential aspects of place to be more tightly interwoven and contingent in a way that is redolent of Barad’s “intra-action” (2007). Barad argues that agency is not an inherent property of an individual or a thing but emerges from the interplay of dynamic forces (ibid., 141), the process of which produces phenomena relationally, thereby forging radically new entities rather than creating hybrids of pre-existing entities. As Buchli observes, what we think of as a given materiality - in this case architecture, public space and a neighbourhood - is the outcome of a particular and mutually constitutive material and discursive intra-action (2013, 113). Following this argument, Chobham Manor’s architecture is not simply an effort to update the London terrace aesthetically and spatially for 21st century dwellers, it is refiguring the materiality of community life to produce new meaning and specific forms of urban sociality from the arrangement of buildings, space, materials, people, ideas and policy - the material specificity of the Lower Lea Valley and its urban landscape in relation to a discourse of architectural failure and success, the political reinvention of community, locally-situated imaginaries about who the beneficiaries of east London’s regeneration should be, and local and global discourses about the nature of urban dwelling. I argue that architecture has a specific modality in this intra-active setting: it generates socially productive voids by framing the spaces where community can be formed and creates the conditions to generate a flow of social connections and community feeling around, and between, neighbourhood spaces. Flow is an important metaphor because it reflects the way
community is imagined by the placemaking team, and in urban social policy more widely, as currents and movements of actual and potential connections, feelings and symbolism. In social policy terms, the much sought-after states of social integration and community cohesion that characterise ‘successful’ neighbourhoods rely on connection flows between individuals, neighbourhoods and different forms of community – of place, faith, interest and so on. In this sense, Chobham Manor’s architecture is a conductor of community feeling - its terraces and blocks conceived as a frictionless surface that enable social connections to flow smoothly around the neighbourhood and into surrounding areas. This claim is most clearly illustrated by the ethnographic data showing how certain objects in the neighbourhood landscape are understood by planners and other members of the placemaking team to be disruptive because they cause friction between dwellers, which can impede or block the formation and flow of sociality and goodwill upon which a sense of community relies. Surfaces matter for what they convey about for whom buildings and spaces are intended. Chobham Manor’s architecture is meant to be ‘read’ by dwellers as human-scale and inclusive, in contrast to the alienating form and materials of the tower blocks described in the previous chapter. However, I argue that architectural surfaces at Chobham Manor have more significance than merely sign value; they are implicated in the making of sociality and community feeling in ways that are more direct and dynamic.

The previous chapters have demonstrated how an analysis of the planning, design and placemaking process in the Olympic Park illuminates the political and social significance of ‘community’ in Britain, and the ways in which ideals and anxieties about the nature, stability and meaning of urban social life are entangled with specific architectural forms. At one scale of analysis, the transformative potential of reshaping the built environment dominates both political imaginaries and professional practices. In this sense, east London’s future prosperity appears dependent on the process of making new housing, new public spaces and new commercial spaces. Planning technologies, like the Olympic masterplan and design guidance, operate at a level of abstraction from everyday life that enables planners, architects and politicians to maintain conceptual boundaries between social and
material domains; the social, being characterised as intangible, unpredictable and difficult to manage, in relation to the material environment, which can be mapped, measured, ordered and produced in relatively controlled circumstances. This conceptual separation is upheld in political discourse, as well as planning practice, because it works in varied ways to support claims that the built environment has generative capacities and that the conditions to create normatively successful communities can be embedded in particular material forms. This way of seeing the built environment means that the re-imagined London terrace and urban village become socially productive political imaginaries, able to encourage and accelerate citizenship, neighbouring practices and community feeling, by connecting dwellers to others through a continuous flow of visual, social, symbolic and embodied connections to a collective space. In this sense, streets, parks, thresholds and other public - or semi-private but publicly visible - spaces emerge as primary sites for the creation of community and inculcation of normative citizenship practices. This is a form of governmentality that is rarely examined in anthropology due to the prevalence of the body-house-society metaphor in anthropological theory and a pre-occupation with ethnographic studies of domestic space, consumption practices and self-making in the post-war period. Yet it represents a shift in the focus of the state from that of moulding modern citizens in the home - which Britain’s post-war tower blocks sought to achieve with new forms of domestic space and modes of dwelling - to producing active citizens and forging communities in the public sphere.

Ethnographic data examining the hybrid practice of placemaking shows how this social-material binary is challenged when the masterplan vision is translated to the neighbourhood scale at Chobham Manor. At this point, assumptions about material agency, and in particular, the work that architecture performs to encourage social interactions in the neighbourhood, are called into question by the scale of the human effort that is required to engineer connections between residents and give meaning to claims to community. The conceptual boundaries between the social and the material that cohere in the masterplan, or in political discourse about transformation,

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33 With the exception of studies by Holston (1989), Buchli (2000) and Low (1996).
start to rupture at the neighbourhood-level where community takes shape through a more dynamic interplay between people, buildings, space, political ideology and cultural imaginaries. This contingency is partially acknowledged by some members of the placemaking team, although the social-material boundary is retained by others. Architecture is better understood in this context as one part of the material culture of community as described in the previous chapter, which works intra-actively (following Barad) to create meaning, attachments and forms of sociality, and to enable these to flow uninhibited around the immediate neighbourhood and surrounding areas.
Chapter 6   The material value of community

On one of the first days I spend at LLDC, I sit in on a progress meeting with the team responsible for managing consultations, engagements and outreach activities with local residents, businesses, community groups, and other users of the Olympic Park. The team talk through the programme of work they were managing, new projects in the pipeline, and future ideas. The scope of work is diverse; it includes a project to encourage school visits to the Olympic Park, a forthcoming planning consultation at Chobham Manor, extending a programme of architectural apprenticeships for young people living in deprived neighbourhoods, updates on a photography project with local women, a regular programme of meetings with residents in the neighbourhoods surrounding the Park, and the publication of research mapping the range and types of community facilities in the immediate area. Once the work-in-progress is covered, the team move on to discuss some of the larger and more ambitious initiatives they are developing: emerging proposals to establish digital timebanks in each new neighbourhood, a programme of temporary projects to use space that will not be developed for several years for community activities, and commissioning research to look for international examples of successful community development projects in new neighbourhoods. The projects have been devised to test new approaches to placemaking and community development, and to put into practice LLDC’s goal for the Olympic Park to be an exemplar regeneration initiative. The meeting moves at a fast pace and there is a sense of urgency to the team’s work that manifests as a drive to squeeze as much as possible from every activity. The conversations move between project updates to questioning how to make individual projects “work harder” by connecting them to other local initiatives. Another question that arises is how to measure the impacts and outcomes of the various projects to fill some of the gaps in evidence and professional knowledge about ‘what works’ when transforming new neighbourhoods into thriving communities.
After the meeting, I spoke with F about the pace and urgency evident in the team’s approach to their work. She accounts for this in two ways: first, the scale of public expectation and political ambition surrounding the Olympic Games and legacy regeneration programme has encouraged a ‘culture of innovation’ at LLDC, which translates into a professional commitment to do more, push things further, and test new ideas:

“It is an opportunity of such scale and profile, and with such a lot of political support, everyone wanted to use it as a platform for demonstrating that you could have genuine community empowerment, could have devolution of power, and could illustrate these things in a practical way.”

Second is an awareness of the importance of time to the work they are trying to achieve. The Olympic Park has its own bureaucratic time system - ‘Park-Time’ – a linear, yet bounded temporality that is structured around the major cycles of planning, design and construction and marked by material changes in the built environment. Park-Time has three ‘epochs’ – Mobilisation, or Games-Time, from 2009 to 2012; Transformation from 2012 to 2015; and Regeneration from 2015 to 2030 - that structure LLDC’s regeneration planning, investments, partnerships and community development activities (see figure 15). Park-Time is a planning technology - a way of conceptualising space in time or what time brings to space (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013) that has powerful political and material effects. On one level it is a strategic political tool for demonstrating that change is occurring and progress is being made towards the Legacy promise. Yet it also structures the day-to-day practices of LLDC staff who situate themselves and their work in relation to the Park’s epochs, using phrases like “We are in Transformation” or “When we get to Regeneration”, to plan and organise their work.
‘Park-Time’ ends with the completion of the Olympic Park’s physical regeneration in 2030. LLDC, like its predecessors the OPLC and ODA, has been established as a ‘time-limited’ institution with a specific purpose; when the legacy regeneration work is complete it will be disbanded and its responsibilities for estate management transferred to other public bodies. The abrupt end of Park-Time is a materialisation of the conceptual boundaries between physical and social aspects of place that continue to dominate built environment practice and are reflected in anthropological theory. Buchli identifies a tendency for anthropologists working in contemporary urban settings to engage with either built or lived form, rather than engaging with the varying temporalities and materialities of their inter-relatedness. As a result, the built environment is often presented ethnographically as unchanging and existing “indefinitely and unproblematically as an ideal type of background in which the ethnographic drama unfolds” (Buchli 2006, 263). However, for the communities team
at LLDC, ‘post-occupancy’ is another ‘Park-Time epoch’ that they consider to be the most important phase in the life of the Olympic Park. Post-occupancy does not figure in the Corporation’s main strategic planning documents, however, it is being written into existence by the discursive and practical efforts of the communities team. The *Action Plan for Building Community in a New Estate* (Blume and Zander 2014), cited in chapter three as LLDC’s intervention in political and professional debates about learning from past failed attempts at community building, sets out a conceptual framework that Chobham Manor’s placemaking team are encouraged to adopt and apply to their own community development strategies and interventions. The framework is evolutionary in its approach – detailing three stages of social development and community formation, which are based on an analysis of community development found in other new neighbourhoods. First is ‘early occupation’ which approximately takes place in year one. This is followed by ‘full occupation’, which reflects the stabilisation of the new population in the neighbourhood enabling a social process of ‘building and connecting’. Third is ‘steady state’ in which social connections and attachments are understood to be sufficiently stable that dwellers can sustain local networks and initiatives. For the communities team, the sense of urgency driving their work is motivated by the recognition that it will take years, in some cases decades, for the work they are currently engaged in to be realised. As the post-occupancy framework suggests, it takes time for social interactions to accumulate and develop into the feelings, trust, practices and initiatives that the team hope to see emerge at Chobham Manor and the other LCS neighbourhoods. As F, who heads up the team, describes:

“What’s really important is bring people together, building communities, building cohesion, making connections that can last. We are working to kickstart this … bringing people together to create a sense of community. It’s engineering a baseline a bit, but this is important because it can take 15 years for places to feel like a community, for people to feel settled. We don’t have 15 years to make these places work.”

The team have a fixed period of time in which to create the social infrastructure to support new residents and neighbourhoods as they occupy the Park: start the
process of encouraging connections between new dwellers and established communities; explore what innovation in regeneration looks like; and, put new ideas and approaches into practice. It is evident from the way the team imagine Chobham Manor’s future - and design interventions to fulfil this vision - that they view a sense of community as something that can be produced under the right conditions. A critical issue here, is to understand not only which interventions in the neighbourhood can catalyse and sustain a sense of community, but if, and how, these effects can be fast-tracked. A considerable amount of time is given over to exploring this question in the context of designing projects, events and spaces that will “stimulate”, “animate” and “accelerate” the formation and progression of community at Chobham Manor. The team’s desire to “engineer a baseline” of community feeling (as F describes it), by inducing a movement from fleeting social interactions to more sustained and meaningful relationships, presents the problem of how to quantify a sense of community in such a way that it is possible to measure change and account for causality. This chapter explores how efforts to quantify a sense of community at Chobham Manor intersect with questions of knowledge production, innovation and forms of value. It is not my intention to engage with indicators as problematic forms of knowledge; indeed, the authors discussed in the next section offer a critical analysis of this question. Instead, drawing on anthropological theories of value, I argue that the practice of developing indicators to measure and monitor how people feel about their local relationships and attachments to the neighbourhood, illuminates how situated social value, that exists outside systems of economic exchange, is transformed into a form of mobile financial value that institutions can relocate and exploit in new settings.

6.1 Measuring ‘stocks’ of community

Statistical measures of poverty and deprivation have been used to inform social policy in Britain for over a century (Glennerster et al. 2004). Forms of statistical representation are acknowledged to “shape what counts as real, what facts and factors are possible, what relationships can in the end by countenanced” (Kreager 2004, 41), and in this sense to have powerful governance effects (S. Randall 1989; C.
Randall 2014; Coast et al. 2016). Davis et al. (2012) have observed a rapid proliferation of indicators as tools of global governance over the past two decades, and a corresponding rise in the number of professional organisations dedicated to the construction and management of metrics. Strathern notes how these forms of calculative practices have acquired new social significance in numerous domains of public, political and professional life; focusing on accountability measures in academia as illustrative of a wider “ethics of accountability” emerging from global governance regimes that privilege efficiency, transparency and openness (2000). Shore and Wright argue that while measurement practices are not new phenomena, the extent to which the use of indicators has become institutionalised and financialised, along with their expansion from counting to quantifying subjective experiences such as trust, wellbeing and one’s quality of life, represents a new turn in the scale and significance of audit cultures:

“To be audited and inspected is now regarded as an axiomatic part of personhood: an inevitable and natural aspect of being a worker, student or company employee today.” (2015, 23)

6.1.1 Auditing the Olympic legacy promise

The unfolding impacts of the Olympic legacy are audited annually by assessing the performance of 22 indicators that have been adopted by the Olympic boroughs as proxies for Convergence. The 22 convergence indicators measure dimensions of the Convergence Framework, a strategy intent on aligning the life chances and opportunities of east London’s most deprived areas with the most affluent parts of the city:

“Within 20 years the communities who host the 2012 Games will have the same social and economic chances as their neighbours across London” (London’s Growth Boroughs 2015)

The Convergence Framework is organised around three themes: creating wealth and reducing poverty, supporting healthier lifestyles, and developing successful neighbourhoods. The table in figure 16 shows how performance against convergence
indicators is reported, in this case illustrating changes recorded between 2009 and 2015.

![Figure 16: 2015/16 report on 22 indicators measuring Olympic Convergence.](www.growthboroughs.com/convergence)

The Convergence Framework indicators represent the political and public investments made in the promise of the Olympic legacy. In this sense, they are critically important measures for taxpayers, citizens and politicians to determine whether their risk and investment has been rewarded. However, from the perspective of LLDC’s communities team, the convergence indicators are ‘conventional’ counting measures that report on what has happened and not on the quality of peoples’ lives or how they experience life in a particular place. In this sense, the measures are felt to be inadequate to the task of exploring the questions that guide the team’s work: “What is it like to live here?” “What opportunities do people feel they have?” “Can they act on them?” “Who do they know?” Here the LLDC communities team identify that new metrics are needed that can examine highly-localised social interactions and feelings about the community at geographies that
are meaningful to dwellers. This section looks at some of the metrics used to measure levels of ‘community’, both regionally and nationally, and efforts to develop new measures for the Olympic Park.

In Britain, the rise of evidence-based policymaking has contributed to the expanding number and scope of indicators used to audit public life and guide public policymaking, of which the Olympic Convergence indicators are an example. Among the new audit measures are numerous indicators of social capital, social inclusion, wellbeing, belonging, neighbourliness and civic participation, which have been developed and incorporated into government statistics over the past 15 years as such concepts have been adopted across different policy domains and initiatives (see for example Harper and Kelly 2003; Adler and Seligman 2016). A set of harmonised measures are used in national, regional and local surveys commissioned by various government departments, public agencies and local authorities, to provide decision and policymakers with trends data about the state of social relationships and community feeling in local areas and among particular population cohorts, as this introduction to the Office for National Statistics Social Capital Bulletin describes:

“Social capital represents the connections and collective attitudes between people that result in a well-functioning and close-knit society. We measure social capital because the connections between increasing rates of social capital and positively functioning well-being, economic growth and sustainability are extensively noted. For example, social capital is recognised as a driver for economic growth and as a facilitator for a variety of improvements for individual and wider community well-being. This makes social capital valuable not only as a snapshot of the UK’s general community involvement and cohesiveness levels but also as a valuable source of information and insight for policy makers in terms of resource allocation and others looking to help strengthen and facilitate individual well-being, community well-being and societal cohesion.” (Morrison 2017)

Several national data sources on aspects of community life and citizenship in Britain inform decision and policymaking and include: the Annual Population Survey, which includes wellbeing and social capital measures; the Community Life Survey, undertaken annually by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS),
which reports on social capital, citizenship and community cohesion; Understanding Society, a longitudinal study of 40,000 British households surveyed annually since 1991\textsuperscript{34}, which includes wellbeing, social capital, community cohesion, belonging, neighbourliness and citizenship measures; and, the British Crime Survey, which also reports on social capital, belonging and community cohesion (a materialisation of the close conceptual links made between crime, social order and community). In addition, these harmonised measures are included in numerous other surveys commissioned and used by local authorities, public agencies and civil society organisations. Survey data are published as statistical bulletins, tables and maps, which report on temporal, geographical and social changes in levels of community feeling and practice, and reports and policy briefings that seek to account for these movements (see for example Patel 2016). For example, figure 17 below, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), reports on changes in levels of social capital over a three-year period, based on an assessment of four harmonised indicators. While figure 18 is a screenshot from an interactive dashboard of personal wellbeing measures, also published by ONS, that compares how levels of personal wellbeing change over time and differ from place to place. The image compares levels of happiness in Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney – three east London boroughs that border the Olympic Park – with the localities where people reported the highest (Craven in the Yorkshire Dales) and lowest (Hertsmere in Hertfordshire) levels of happiness in Britain in 2017 (Tabor 2017).\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Understanding Society launched in 2009, building on its predecessor project, the British Household Panel Survey that launched in 1991.

\textsuperscript{35} ONS measures personal wellbeing using four subjective indicators: life satisfaction, feeling worthwhile, happiness and anxiety. For standardised wellbeing measures see (‘Measuring National Well-Being - Office for National Statistics’ n.d.).
Figure 1: Assessment of change – social capital indicators
UK, May 2017

Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 17: Changes to social capital indicators used by the Office for National Statistics. Image from Social Capital in the UK: May 2017.

Downloaded from
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/socialcapitalintheuk/may2017
Figure 18: ONS Personal Wellbeing Explorer, an interactive dashboard comparing data on wellbeing, happiness, life satisfaction and anxiety.


6.1.2 Rationality or ideology?

Solesbury attributes the rise in evidence-based policymaking to a movement to modernise government and improve governance in Britain and the EU, noting the commitments made in the 1999 Modernising Government White Paper to encourage a greater use of research in decision-making. He argues that the shift to evidence-based policymaking represents a “rational turn” in political decision-making driven
by New Labour’s desire to challenge established forms of political knowledge and action:

“Its stance was anti-ideological and pragmatic. It had a new agenda and so new knowledge requirements. It was suspicious of many established influences on policy, particularly within the civil service, and anxious to open up policy thinking to outsiders.” (2001, 6)

I challenge the claim that evidence-based policymaking is anti-ideological. As discussed in the preceding chapters, New Labour’s communitarian politics and use of social capital theory in public policy were ideologically-driven efforts to re-shape the form of relations between urban citizens and the state. New Labour deployed theories, data and evidence in particular ways to confront modes of governance established by the previous administration. Davis et al. characterise indicators as specific forms of knowledge that are attractive to decision-makers because of their perceived impartiality, scientific authority, consistency and comparability (2012). The authors describe the complex ways in which indicators work to simplify complex social phenomena and to disguise the claims and value judgements (about theories, concepts and use of data) that shape their construction and application. Solesbury notes, however, that despite claims to rationality, not all evidence is treated equally; certain forms of evidence and indicators acquire primacy because politics and policymaking are discursive practices and evidence is “an important part of the weaponry of those engaged in the discourse” (2001, 9); a claim illustrated clearly by the way ‘evidence’ is deployed in the tower block failure discourse. While anthropologists have analysed the social processes surrounding the creation of indicators (see K. E. Davis et al. 2012), little attention has been paid to the ways in which urban form and sociality become entangled with modes of quantification.

It is apparent from the scope and scale of the measures used to inform policymaking that the extent, nature and quality of ‘community’ at any given time or place, is of critical political and public importance. In this sense, the ‘state’ of community is a proxy for the health of society in the same way that the GDP measure of economic vitality is a proxy for societal prosperity. As examined earlier, the political reimagining of community that has taken place over the past 20 years, driven first by New
Labour’s communitarian policy agenda and consolidated by the current government’s Localism legislation, has firmly embedded the notion in both public and political life that a sense of community has both intrinsic and instrumental value to society. As a result, a sense of community, understood in normative terms, is a public good to be pursued, protected, nurtured and sustained because of the social and economic stability it returns to society. Measures of social capital, wellbeing and belonging are a means of making visible the structures of feeling and social relations from which a sense of community is constituted. The state of community life in Britain is accounted for as if it were an asset with stocks that may rise or fall and are measured in terms of their strength and potential for growth, or, as indicators of exposure to risk as the discourse of risk around urban failure and the absence of moral communities and proper social relations suggests. I argue that this way of conceptualising community lends it substance-like properties that are analogous to a dynamic element, which under the right conditions and with appropriate interventions, can be produced, managed and channelled. In this sense, community is treated as a form of matter - a compound of sentiment and social relationships that responds to outside impulses.

6.2 Indicators, innovation and value

In late summer 2014, the suggestion that LLDC should create a measurement framework to assess how new residents at Chobham Manor feel about the neighbourhood and capture data against which future change could be benchmarked, began to solidify. The question of how to measure community feeling and the social impacts of regeneration had been circulating among the team for a few months. It had been discussed in project meetings, in casual conversations among the placemaking team, and in the context of the numerous reports, articles and events that had taken place over the preceding months that also questioned how to measure a sense of community. For the LLDC communities team, discussions about understanding and measuring change focused on the following questions: What difference does it make if we take a holistic view of people and places as opposed to a development that focuses purely on material change in the built
environment? Can specific effects be identified? What are they? Can we identify and understand the relationship between interventions and outcomes? Can these interventions be replicated elsewhere?

After a number of these discussions, I was invited by the LLDC team to explore how such a measurement framework could be developed and tested in the Olympic Park. At the time, I was working at a social enterprise developing ways to measure the social impacts of estate regeneration in London. My proposal to LLDC was to consider the different conceptual and methodological approaches to a pilot study; questions like, who should decide which concepts and theories inform how ‘community’ is defined? Would adopting social capital, wellbeing and neighbourliness measures used by government departments provide the right sort of data, or should new indicators be developed? What role should residents and communities play in selecting what should be measured? Should the study focus on change occurring in places or track the experience of a particular group of people over time? Should it compare if and how community feeling differs between established and new neighbourhoods? I scheduled a series of interviews with other members of the placemaking team to explore these questions and to gauge their interest in participating in the pilot. By October 2014, the first set of recommendations had been developed. In Spring 2015, LLDC established a research partnership with the Institute for Global Prosperity at UCL and the pilot study was launched that summer. A comprehensive account of the social processes surrounding the indicators developed for the pilot study is beyond the scope of this thesis (for a discussion, see H. L. Moore and Woodcraft 2019). Instead, what I examine here is the shift in register that occurs in the process of measurement and what is revealed by this movement. Indicators are a form of abstraction that makes visible subjective conditions like the ‘intangible’ social relations and feelings some of the placemaking team struggle to grasp. I argue this process of materialisation transforms the nature of community, moving it from

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36 The Prosperity in East London Pilot Study was a collaborative research project in three neighbourhoods in/surrounding the Olympic Park. The work was undertaken by IGP in 2015/16 with a group of citizen scientists.
the sphere of situated social relations that have an intrinsic and non-transferrable social value to the individuals involved, to the sphere of economic value, where it becomes mobile and can be transformed into new forms of financial capital.

6.2.1 Forms of value

The political significance of strong and inclusive communities in Britain means that considerable attention is paid by policymakers and policy commentators, like independent think tanks and research institutes, to the different forms of value that are associated with successful communities. Through my experience of working as a professional researcher in this domain for over a decade, as well as during my fieldwork, I observed how the question of what strong communities ‘return’ to individuals and to society in the form of social and economic value is an enduring interest for policymakers and public and private actors. As concepts like social capital, wellbeing, natural surveillance or the social determinants of health, have taken hold in British policymaking, questions have evolved and been explored in new ways, asking: What is the intrinsic value of strong social ties for urban citizens in the modern world? What do people gain from being supported by local social networks and feeling part of a strong community? Which public health outcomes can be addressed by strengthening local social connections and support networks? These questions have become more important in the context of austerity politics. Reductions in public spending have sharpened the focus on understanding the instrumental value of strong communities and motivated efforts to conceptualise and quantify these benefits under the broad heading of social value – a loosely defined term that is used in a number of different ways in planning and placemaking practice. One application of the term social value describes the individual psychological and social benefits that people derive from being part of a local collective, for example, safety, a sense of identity and purpose, social networks that provide access to mutual support or connections to work. Another application of the term is concerned with additionality, a term borrowed from economics to refer to the additional social value that can be generated for local communities through public investment and services investments (Dancer 2008); for example, how an estate regeneration programme designed to
improve housing standards may also create local jobs or address health problems associated with poor living standards. Tools like Social Return on Investment (SROI) have been adopted by government, public agencies and civil society actors, to attach monetary amounts to these outcomes in order to translate social impacts and outcomes into a ‘universal language of value’, as this extract from *The Guide to Social Return on Investment* published by the Cabinet Office, explains:

> “SROI measures change in ways that are relevant to the people or organisations that experience or contribute to it. It tells the story of how change is being created by measuring social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them. This enables a ratio of benefits to costs to be calculated. For example, a ratio of 3:1 indicates that an investment of £1 delivers £3 of social value. SROI is about value, rather than money. Money is simply a common unit and as such is a useful and widely accepted way of conveying value.” (‘A Guide to Social Return on Investment’ 2009)

It is evident from this brief account that several different concepts of value are entangled here: the intrinsic value of interactions between one person and another; the collective value of these human interactions to a local community; and, the economic value that strong and well-functioning communities offer to the state in terms of health, wellbeing and lower public spending. Graeber argues anthropology lacks a systematic theory of value and instead offers the observation that there are “three large streams of thought that converge in the present term” (2001, 1). These are: systems of values, “conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life”; value in an economic sense, “the degree to which objects are desired, particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them”; and, value in the linguistic sense, which following Saussure, can be “most simply glossed as meaningful difference” (2001, 2). Graeber claims anthropology’s struggle to develop a coherent theory of value for each broad approach stems from insufficient consideration of the mutual relationships. Using this loose framework to

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37 This articulation of social value as added-value to society and to local communities has been consolidated by the Social Value Act, passed by Parliament in 2012, which requires public service commissioners to consider how to secure wider social, environmental and economic benefits from procurement.
examine how forms of value are conceptualised in relation to the vision of successful communities at Chobham Manor, it is clear that a sense of community derives some of its social value from its position as a cultural imaginary of the good life, in which community in modernity offers some promise of inclusion, belonging, safety and civility. A sense of community is understood by the Chobham Manor placemaking team to be constituted from everyday social interactions, rather than from shared histories, identities or cultures, which lend this form of community a fluidity and mobility that classical anthropological theories of community-place-culture lack. In this context, community is a relational practice and an aspect of identity which, following Wallman, is optional – not always important, or important in the same way, and temporally variable in the sense that emotional and practical resources may sometimes be invested locally and sometimes not (1984, 39). In the context of super-diverse urban neighbourhoods, community is a loose and practice-based category of identity; its strength and continuing relevance lies in its elasticity, which can stretch to cover multiple expressions of belonging and attachment.

Like other aspects of identity, is it the local social relationships and feelings of belonging that make up a sense of community and that are enmeshed with the material world – buildings amplify feelings of inclusion or exclusion, neighbours may exchange gifts to maintain social networks. However, cultural and political imaginaries of community in contemporary Britain are characterised by a perpetual anxiety about modernity, change and alienation that is heavily influenced by ideas from classical social theory (Tönnies 1957; Durkheim 1889). As Bauman observes, community is always out of time – it has been, or will be again in the future, but is lost to the present (2001). In this mode of thought, the value of community lies in the authenticity of human relationships and actions; for example, the investment of time and energy between neighbours to co-produce a feeling of belonging. These relationships and actions may be augmented, mediated and symbolised by the exchange and movement of things, but conceptually, community feeling and neighbourly relationships are understood to be distinct from material and economic systems of exchange. What matters is human actions that produce and reproduce a sense of community, and the circulation of feelings that accompany such actions.
A sense of community is a situated form of social value; it exists in the relationships between particular people in a particular place. In order to sustain and enhance this social value, the exchange and flow of human interactions and community feeling must be continuously made and remade through everyday interactions. If this flow stalls or is interrupted, the social value that these interactions and attachments provide is diminished. So, while a sense of community may expand to incorporate a larger network of people, grow in intensity as attachments deepen, and through these efforts become embedded in material forms created by the community – like public space, gardens or community buildings – its value and potential remain in the realm of human action. Physical community assets, like those just described, have economic as well as social value in as much as they can generate revenue, services and products, yet the community effort that goes into making these endeavours possible is most often given voluntarily, so remain outside of the sphere of economic value. Community development professionals, like the team I work with, are part of a placemaking economy that exists to engender and accelerate the formation and flow of community relations. The interventions they make are developed in partnership with, and for, the communities they support, sometimes over a period of years. Yet, an outside/insider distinction is still made between professionals, who are intervening, and the individuals and groups they support, who are making and creating places. Applying an assemblage lens to the placemaking efforts at Chobham Manor may challenge this perspective, emphasising the inter-relatedness of different human and non-human actors, albeit with differential power; however, a value lens offers an alternative perspective. It is evident the dominant anthropological theories of value that Graeber identifies do not easily account for the concepts and forms of value described here; a problem Graeber observes and seeks to address by introducing Munn’s analysis of value in Gawan society, which he argues is largely overlooked because it takes a radically different direction to most existing theories of value (2001, 46). Munn’s work departs from mainstream anthropological theory because she proposes an alternative analysis of the famous Melanesian Kula system, which is defined by a continual exchange of armshells and necklaces between partners in the Kula network. The items are rarely worn, instead their value is associated with their continual circulation as heirlooms, the most famous of which
acquire names and histories associated with their movement and are the most desirable to acquire, albeit it temporarily. Graeber argues that previous analyses of exchange systems like the Kula have tended to “look at such phenomena in terms of ‘spheres of exchange’, in which “different sorts of valuables can circulate only among others of the same sort” – a perspective that seeks to find value primarily in objects (2001, 44). Munn’s analysis shifts the focus from objects to human actions, arguing that Gawans are concerned with their ability to develop relations outward into the inter-island world producing a spatio-temporal extension of the self. Kula exchange and the practice of hospitality are acts that “create potentialities for constructing a present that is experienced as pointing forward to later desired acts or material returns.” (1992, 11). Munn argues it is Gawan hospitality, the dynamics of giving and travelling, and the subjective practices of remembering and projecting these memories forward to future reciprocity, that are the measures of value and determine the extent to which individuals gain control and influence through space and time (“intersubjective spacetime”). To this end, Munn proposes “levels of value” as an alternative to “spheres of value”, in which the former reflects the creation of value through human action as opposed to value acquired through the movement of objects in a pre-existing system of exchange. Graeber suggests that Munn succeeds in circumventing the problem of having “to choose between the desirability of objects and the importance of human relations, one can now see both as a refraction of the same thing” (2001, 45) by seeing ‘value’ as something that emerges in action and can be transformed into perceptible forms. Arguably, Munn’s theory of value offers an analytical framework for making sense of the situated social value that constitutes a sense of community.

6.3 Transforming the value of community

LLDC’s interest in measuring whether and how a sense of community is forming in the Olympic Park is motivated by several overlapping interests: one is a desire to understand the impact of the Corporation’s placemaking work in the Olympic Park to inform the way that places are planned, services are delivered, and programmes designed. Another is to create an evidence base to demonstrate to development
partners at Chobham Manor, and future legacy neighbourhoods, that people place a high value on feeling that there is a sense of community where they live and that investments in placemaking make a difference to the speed and success with which these attachments form. Placemaking might be a well-known term among built environment professions in Britain, but placemaking practices that go beyond the design of public space to create the necessary social infrastructure to support community development are not yet part of mainstream practice for the majority of housebuilders. Larger housing associations, like L&Q, are more likely to invest in community development and placemaking projects because they retain a long-term interest in a place, however even these efforts tend towards small-scale initiatives. The scope and ambition of the placemaking programmes initiated by LLDC, reflect aspirations for the Olympic Park to be a model for innovative and inclusive regeneration. As discussed in chapter three, political discourses of urban failure are associated with an absence of thriving and socially productive communities (the social void) and a lack of knowledge about how social and material aspects of a community interact to produce places ‘that work’. In this sense, the ‘social’ is problematised as a domain that is not well understood and demands attention, and action, if wider efforts to create successful and sustainable places are to be achieved. From the perspective of built environment professionals – housebuilders, architects, planning and sustainability consultants – this makes ‘the social’ a space for innovation; such organisations that can develop new ideas, evidence and services to fill the gap will be able to leverage a competitive advantage.

While I was exploring LLDC’s idea of a measurement framework for the Olympic Park, I met with the Chobham Manor team and a wider group of people – architects, housebuilders, researchers and civil society organisations – engaged in different ways with the question of how accurately to define and measure the social and subjective aspects of community life to better understand how and why places succeed, struggle or fail. Depending on their particular ideological stance, research discipline or professional background, people worked with different concepts to frame their interest; sustainable communities, placemaking, social sustainability, resilient communities, socially productive places and community wellbeing, were all
discussed, and sometimes used interchangeably to bracket a particular aspect of the debate. In spite of the constellation of concepts in this discursive space, the debates cohered around the broad question of how to make well-designed communities that work socially. One of these conversations was with a development director from a major UK housebuilder. His corporation framed the question around the three pillars of sustainable development - social, environmental and economic sustainability (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) - a familiar structure within the housebuilding industry because environmental sustainability is a highly regulated aspect of design and construction. Social sustainability, however, is seen as “unclaimed territory”, as he describes here:

“Environmental sustainability is a hygiene factor now everybody else is doing it. It doesn’t mark you out at all and you have no choice anyway. Being sustainable ... in future, it won’t be about environmental. That leaves economic: not easy to deliver but easy to define and count - jobs, apprenticeships - and you have to do it. And social: hard to count, hard to define, not assumed to be our expertise.” (Woodcraft 2016)

This sentiment was echoed in several of my conversations with architects, planning consultants and housebuilders. High standards of environmental sustainability have become institutionalised in planning policy, along with tools to evidence how development will generate new jobs, and therefore no longer offer the competitive advantage they once did. One architect described his relief that the “green bling is over” and practices no longer compete on the grounds of the environmental sustainability of their designs: “Environmental can just be done now. ‘Green’ is embedded in policy so it has to be embedded in design. It doesn’t have to be a point of difference anymore.” In this context, getting ‘the social’ right, presents an

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38 The Code for Sustainable Homes was introduced by the government in 2006 to improve the environmental performance of new buildings (‘Code for Sustainable Homes’ 2006). It was withdrawn in March 2015 and replaced with the Home Quality Mark, a voluntary standard to measure the environmental footprint of new housing as well as other indicators (‘Home Quality Mark’ 2015)

39 Economic Impact Assessments are produced as part of a wider Environmental Impact Assessment to evaluate the impacts of proposed development programmes. Economic Impact Assessments calculate likely direct and indirect benefits, such as job creation, tax revenues, office and retail space created.
opportunity for built environment professions to generate new forms of value, as illustrated by these extracts from an interview with another major housebuilder:

“Face facts, this [socially sustainable communities] is about improving the reputation and profitability of the business ... and quality of life.”

“This agenda is a way for us to punch above our weight. We can show we are forward thinking. But we need to get into this space quickly and seize the opportunity.”

“This is a way to demonstrate that new places can be good places to live ... measuring community ... it will shift [the public’s] thinking that ‘new development is therefore bad’ ...”

These comments reflect a wider sentiment among housebuilders and planning consultancies - that there is reputational, marketing and financial value to be exploited from creating sustainable communities, which goes beyond the economic gains to be made from designing and selling homes. Configuring ‘the social’ as a value-generating practice follows an established logic in built environment professions (Woodcraft and Smith 2018). Several authors observe how ‘landmark’ urban sustainability projects – such as Bosco Verticale in Milan, the California Academy of Science in San Francisco and Masdar City in Abu Dhabi - are closely associated with entrepreneurial modes of urban governance, which have emerged over the past 25-years as cities competing to attract investment (see for example Brand and Thomas 2013; While, Jonas and Gibbs 2004). Cugurullo and Rapoport examine the ideological landscape of landmark urban sustainability projects and argue that they offer a way of fitting environmental considerations into “a tool that is largely about property development” and is grounded in the belief that sustainable development can, and should be, a profit generating activity (2012, 4). In this context, measurement frameworks and metrics that can materialise the structures of community feeling in a particular place transform situated social value, what in local terms is embedded in human actions, into new forms of economic value that can be moved, leveraged and ultimately traded. Two housebuilders, one architecture practice, and one of the housing associations I engaged with at the time, had experimented in developing their own measurement frameworks and indicators, or
applying metrics developed by others in the industry (the tools mentioned included The Berkeley Group 2012; ‘Changing Lives, Changing Places : Assessing the Impact of Housing Association Regeneration’ 2013; ‘Communities – BREEAM’ n.d.; Mguni and Bacon 2010; ‘SPeAR: A Sustainable Decision Making Tool’ n.d.). Each of these frameworks works with a slightly different concept – community wellbeing in two cases, social sustainability in another, social impact in another, and sometimes a combination – and deploy different research methods. However, what they share is an effort to simplify, categorise and structure aspects of subjective and social experience to find measurable proxies for community feeling; in most cases, working with normative models adapted from existing research or policy while paying little attention to evaluating the in-built ideological models and assumptions. The outcomes of these efforts are metrics and data that allow institutions deploying them to compare levels of community feeling between one place or population group and another, in a similar, yet more geographically concentrated fashion, to the public statistics earlier described. For example, figure 19 shows how one housebuilder, Berkeley Group, collects survey data and measures different aspects of community life in its own developments and benchmarks performance against neighbourhoods with a similar population profile (The Berkeley Group 2012). Indicators in green show that survey responses in the development are more positive than average data for areas with a similar population. Indicators in red show results that they are worse than average.
Figure 19: ‘Social sustainability ratings’ for Saffron Square in Croydon.

Image downloaded from Living in Saffron Square report by The Berkeley Group and LSE. http://www.lse.ac.uk/business-and-consultancy/consulting/consulting-reports/living-at-saffron-square

Figure 20 shows an application of ARUP’s SPeAR (Sustainable Project Appraisal Routine) tool, which, in this case, includes measures of community life (inclusion, health and wellbeing, satisfaction) to assess the impact of development over time.
These technologies materialise the social value that people attribute to a strong sense of community. As previously discussed, the value of community feeling exists in human actions, in the everyday interactions that produce and reproduce a sense of community and in the circulation of goodwill that is generated through practice. From the perspective of local neighbours, the social value is situated. If someone leaves the neighbourhood to live elsewhere, some of their social relationships may endure (although their character will shift from neighbour and community member, to friend or associate), but the social value to the community is lost because it is only in the bodily practices of everyday, local interaction, that a sense of community is maintained. However, metrics and data transform this social value into a new form of economic value for the institutions with a stake in the neighbourhood. The ability to quantify and measure good relations between neighbours or how satisfied people feel with their community, enables institutions to transform feelings and attachments into reputational and financial gains. One of the housebuilders describes how this process works - being able to demonstrate a track-record of building ‘successful’ neighbourhoods with a strong sense of community increases the likelihood of securing new contracts and quicker planning approvals in the future:
“Reputation matters because if planners know they are going to get a good product from you, and if you then also have a way to prove it will work, be a community, make people happy, that gives you the credibility to develop more.”

This shift in register materialises community feeling and enables it to shift from one sphere of value to another, enabling institutions like housebuilders to transform social relationships into data, data into reputation, and reputation into increased profits. As many of the large housebuilders in the UK are publicly listed companies, arguably the number of people who speak to their neighbours in places like Chobham Manor is a factor in the institution’s share price. In a presentation to financial analysts and institutional investors, Pete Redfern, Chief Executive of Taylor Wimpey, identifies “a growing re-understanding of the importance of community” (2018, 8) as one of the trends that are changing customers’ expectations of new housing. To that end, Redfern listing “community development and interaction” (2018, 21) as one of the company’s changing operational metrics for 2018 to 2023, and lists understanding the background of the community, community cohesion, and creating a sense of belonging and pride, as efforts to enhance social value. This process of abstraction, from situated human interactions to globally-traded stock, mobilises as well as materialises a sense of community. With metrics and data, institutions can transfer situated social value in one neighbourhood to the promise of a strong community, with all the commercial gains this brings, in another. In this sense, community feeling moves through space and time - or “plays forward”, as one housebuilder described it, in the possibilities of planning. Davis et al. argue that indicators can have dynamism because of the way different actors use them and how users are connected:

“‘Successful’ indicators become significant or authoritative as they accumulate networks of constituents, technologies, and things.” (2012, 22)

HACT (formerly the Housing Action Charitable Trust) has taken the idea of social value in local communities a step further. Working with the behavioural economist, Daniel Fujiwara, HACT has published the Social Value Bank, an open-source database containing over 120 indicators relevant to housing management and social and
economic aspects of community life. Designed as an impact measurement tool for housing associations, the Social Value Bank assigns monetary value to positive and negative social, economic and environmental conditions. For example, moving someone from unemployment to full-time employment is assigned an average value of £14,433 (Value Details - Employment 2018). Talking to neighbours regularly is assigned a value of £6,820 for people aged over 50, and £4,007 for people aged 25-49 living in London; feeling that the neighbourhood is a good place to live has an average value of £1,7847 (ibid 2018).

6.4 Conclusion – Community as matter

This chapter has explored how efforts to quantify subjective and social aspects of community life enable situated social value to be transformed into new forms of economic value. It is evident from this account, as other authors have noted, that indicators are powerful technologies and problematic forms of knowledge. In the context of the tower block failure discourse earlier discussed, statistical measures of deprivation, disadvantage and crime, are commonly used by central government and local councils to build a case for estate regeneration. Deprivation statistics played a critical role in determining the target areas for major, state-led place-based regeneration programmes, like the New Deal for Communities, which identified the most deprived areas in the country based on data from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Arguably the narratives developed to support London’s bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, and the post-Games Convergence Action Framework, rely on statistical representations of life chances in east London. Measures of community strength and vitality, however, are rarely presented and the tools available to built-environment professionals to make their case for creating successful communities far surpass the resources available to residents and community groups who would wish to make the same claims. The question of how to measure and materialise a sense of community presents theoretical and ethical problems regarding the claims to causality that are made and the extractive nature of the power dynamics at work; engaging fully with these issues is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis. However, residents of housing estates threatened by regeneration - like Carpenters
Estate on the margins of the Olympic Park and Cressingham Gardens Estate in Lambeth – are beginning to adopt similar tools to challenge planning authorities. Increasingly, resident-led action groups are working with academic and practitioner networks to give a voice to local meanings and practices of community, and to challenge claims that deprived neighbourhoods are unsatisfactory places to live. In some cases, community researchers and resident-led groups are appropriating the metrics used by local councils and housebuilders to demonstrate that local ‘stocks’ of community and levels of wellbeing exceed those of more affluent areas. And, furthermore, using this data to argue that the social costs to a community of disrupting local networks, such as impacts on mental and physical health, wellbeing, and local productivity, are too high to justify regeneration.

This chapter argues that ‘community’ is conceptualised in social policy terms as a public asset – a resource that is quantified and measured in terms of its strength and potential for growth and, under the right conditions, can be produced and directed. In this sense, community is treated as if it were a form of matter, stocks of which can be counted. Indicators and metrics play a critical role in making visible and monitoring the stocks of ‘intangible’ feelings and social relations that constitute a sense of community. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates that indicators and metrics transform ‘community’ from a locally-situated public good into new forms of economic value that can move through space and time. The ability to quantify and measure good relations between neighbours or how satisfied people feel with their community enables property developers to transform situated and subjective feelings and attachments into planning approvals and financial gains. Community as a governance framework and a tool for legitimising political action with far-reaching

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40 The People’s Plan contains an assessment of levels of wellbeing among residents on the Cressingham Gardens Estate that uses research tools developed by Social Life and HACT’s wellbeing value model (‘The People’s Plan: Cressingham Gardens Estate’ 2016).
41 See UCL’s Just Space Network, which has worked with residents of the Carpenters Estate in Stratford, and collaborated with the London Tenants Federation, Professor Loretta Lees and Southwark Notes Archive Group to produce An Anti-Gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London (London Tenants Federation et al. 2014); Architects for Social Housing [ASH], which works with residents to develop research and architectural alternatives to estate regeneration.
material effects is a theme running throughout this thesis. The preceding chapters have examined how political ideology, planning policy and neo-liberal economics intersect at the point of imagining and realising urban communities. This points to the need for anthropologists to pay attention to how ‘community’ is understood ethnographically by the elites that are transforming urban space, which increasingly means turning our gaze toward corporations working in partnership with the state. Under these conditions it is not always obvious how ‘community’ is conceptualised and applied as an analytical or policy construct. This raises ethical issues about how anthropologists should engage with, and talk about, community in dynamic urban settings like east London, where community is both a meaningful form of local sociality and an exercise in self-making, and a powerful force in urban transformation and governance that has much to reveal about the changing forms of capitalism.
SECTION 2

“IMAGINING NOTHINGNESS”
“Where there is nothing, everything is possible.

Where there is architecture, nothing (else) is possible.”

Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, Imagining Nothingness (1995)
Chapter 7  Seeing emptiness and making alterity

“The problem is there’s no-one there,” says J. He gestures out of the floor-to-ceiling glass windows of LLDC’s Board Room towards the Olympic Park, 10-storeys below. It is 2014, two years after London hosted the 2012 Olympics, and the games-time infrastructure is being dismantled so the Park can begin its post-Olympic legacy. J is an architect; part of Chobham Manor’s development team, whose professional interactions are the focus of my fieldwork. He is talking to T, a development manager for the housebuilder working on the same neighbourhood. In front of us is a model depicting a future Olympic Park: wooden blocks indicating the location, height, and density of the five legacy neighbourhoods, sit on a map. The future it depicts looks slick, ordered and certain.

J and T are discussing the difficulties of creating a “brand new community” in a “new piece of the city” for a future population that is as-yet unknown. J asks:

“Who will be coming? How will they want to live? Do they want houses with big windows or open plan space? Homes for families or flat shares? Cafés? Schools? Spaces to meet? A place where people know their neighbours? Who knows? Everyone is just making an educated guess ... who can we talk to to understand what people want? There is no-one to engage ... there is no-one there.”

T nods in agreement.

We turn and look outward to the imagined emptiness of the Olympic Park. On the streets below there is a bustle of activity. Orange lights flash on construction vehicles moving behind hoardings and wire fences. Cranes are working on the concrete core of a new office tower on the edge of the Olympic Park. Tube trains roll in and out of Stratford Station. Hundreds of people flow across the pedestrian bridge linking Stratford High Street to Westfield, east London’s giant new retail mall and gateway to the Olympic Park. The southern end of the Park has already opened to the public and people walk and cycle around The Aquatic Centre and the fantasy steel sculpture that is the Arcelor-Mittal Orbit. From the Board Room we can look west towards central London where The Shard, Canary Wharf’s towers and the City’s Square Mile
punctuate the skyline. Closer by, we can see rows of low-rise post-war housing, Stratford High Street’s new generation of brightly coloured high-rise apartments, Hackney Wick’s former factories, and the sixties tower blocks of the Carpenters Estate - a visual narrative of London’s housing history.

I am curious; what do J and T mean when they say there is no-one there? What kind of absence are they referring to? The cityscape is thick with people, things, physical traces of the past and evidence of emerging futures.

“Surely there is someone to talk to,” I say. “Nowhere is totally empty. Even a brand-new neighbourhood in London will have people living all around it.”

I point to the wooden blocks on the map that represent East Village (the former Athlete’s Village) and the coloured lines indicating the streets of Victorian and post-war terraced houses to the east of the Park.

“What about the people living here and here?’ I ask. ‘Surely they will have opinions about what it’s like to live in the area ... what the neighbourhood needs.”

J nods:

“Yes, but they are a very different type of community ... some of them have lived here for 20-30 years ... it’s a well-established area, quite low income, ethnically diverse. The new people will be young ... professionals ... they will want different things ... but we don’t know what.”

I ask J to say more about who the right kind of people would be to talk to about living in the Olympic Park, but he pauses, and then responds with a question of his own:

“On a human scale ... we [built environment professions] still don’t really understand how people interact with the built environment. How do buildings and people affect each other? How do we make a new community? What makes a community work?”
J and T’s exchange seems matter-of-fact; a conversation between two professionals about a place that is yet to be built, and the notion that different people will want different things from where they live. Yet this brief discussion illustrates how absence figures as a day-to-day concern in the work of the professionals making Chobham Manor. J’s anxiety at the lack of an appropriate resident population to consult with on the emerging design work was expressed by reference to the ‘emptiness’ of the Olympic Park. Objectively, the Olympic Park was not empty; it did not lack residents, neighbours, visitors - or indeed ‘experts’ - who could act as proxies for future dwellers when it came to informing design decisions. For J and T, however, absence was an immediate problem with material consequences: how could they design a new neighbourhood if there was no-one to design for? How could they start to build connections between Chobham Manor, as a place awaiting its future resident population, and people living nearby? And, how could they create the conditions for Chobham Manor to become a thriving community when knowledge about how to do this was incomplete? From this perspective, the Olympic Park was indeed an ‘empty’ space in as much as the relations that J and T needed to forge with particular people and particular ideas in order to get their work done, were absent.

Over the course of my fieldwork, this configuration of absence - articulated as a lack of the right people in the right place at the right time, and the problem of imperfect knowledge of how communities form – was a recurring challenge for the placemaking team. From a planning perspective, Chobham Manor is a specific, bounded territory that is fixed in space using various technologies – maps, GPS co-ordinates, planning documents, and, for much of my fieldwork, the perimeter fence enclosing the construction site. However, in ‘making’ the new neighbourhood, the placemaking team work concurrently on different aspects of physical and social design that have quite different temporal frames. Engaging in detailed design work for development that will not take place for several years foregrounds the gaps to be bridged between the long-term vision for the Olympic Park articulated in legacy planning strategies, and the everyday experience of people living and working in the locality today. The past also exerts force on the processes of making the future; imagining a new social world at Chobham Manor meant also paying attention to the complexity and
multiplicity of the people and places nearby and negotiating local identities and histories in relation to the present.

Considerable time and effort were channelled into reflecting on who was and wasn’t ‘there’, when the ‘right’ people might be ‘there’, and who to talk to in the ‘meantime’. These questions had implications for how the placemaking team approached a variety of tasks; for example, deciding who to consult on design proposals for the community centre that would be built in three-year’s time, or writing a community investment strategy that had to anticipate the kind of neighbourhood projects and associations future residents might want or need a decade after occupation. In this sense, different aspects of Chobham Manor’s social and spatial futures co-exist in the present in ways that are not always coherent or harmonious. A problem for the team was to establish how, when, and where Chobham Manor would come into being in a social sense for its future residents, while acknowledging it was already a material reality for people living on its borders. A practical response to the inherent difficulties of this work - not just imagining an alternative future but bringing it into being for unknown others - is to work with the idea of ‘space to grow’ in the neighbourhood’s physical and social fabric. For the placemaking team, this involved finding - and sometimes making - gaps, and spaces that could be left ‘unplanned’ for future residents to shape, occupy and manage through their own dwelling and placemaking practices.

Buildings and places do not have to exist on a physical plane to have social significance, as others have noted (Meskell 2010; Meyer 2012), and plans have the power to generate all manner of speculative investments, political actions and public anxieties, without needing to bring forth the physical, economic or social changes they propose (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013; Baxstrom 2011). Smith describes such economies of anticipation at work in Nairobi where the government’s Vision 2030 promises a new social and economic future for citizens that is slow to materialise and seems to offer little promise of progress for low-income neighbourhoods. Rather than wait for a future that may not include them, Nairobians engage in multiple practices to bring the future to them (2017). In the context of the Olympic Park, it is
evident that absences do not have to ‘exist’ contemporaneously on either a physical or temporal plane to have significance and shape action. The claims of the placemaking team that “no-one is there” appear to be in response to the complexities of working with a pluri-temporal social and spatial world in the Olympic Park. Yet, investments made in ‘seeing’ and ‘making’ emptiness, and the social possibilities that some urban voids are afforded, can also be understood as efforts to align spatial and social practices with specific neo-liberal notions of economic productivity and social value. This chapter compares two different instances of urban voids in the Olympic Park: first, examining the discursive problematisation of the Lower Lea Valley as a social and economic wasteland before the 2012 Games; and second, the creation of an ‘intentional void’ at Chobham Manor – a temporary community garden that emulates the spatial and social characteristics of former projects displaced by the Olympic Games.

7.1 Making a wasteland

“The square mile of ground on which the Olympic Park now sits was once a wasteland, pockmarked with derelict factories, electricity pylons and breakers’ yards. For a time, it was famous for a hillock of abandoned fridges. The boroughs touching it — Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest — have long been stopping-off grounds for immigrants and chancers, drawn by cheap rents and access to jobs. The unemployment rate exceeds 10% in all four.” Urbanolic steroids, The Economist, June 22, 2013

One of the most powerful narratives surrounding London’s Olympic legacy is of the Lower Lea Valley’s transformation from a rogue wasteland at the margins of the city to the Olympic Park - a habitable, healthy, safe and economically productive part of the capital. From the submission of London’s Olympic bid, east London was problematised as out of time with the rest of the capital, its long history of poverty, deprivation and poor health, a degraded physical environment, and more recent struggles with a post-industrial legacy, were presented as evidence of east London’s underdevelopment relative to the rest of the capital (Hansard 2005).
Public and political representations of east London as a site of crisis, and therefore a legitimate target for interventions to tackle social and material deprivation, have deep historical roots (Thompson et al. 2013). The efforts of Victorian philanthropists to improve the health and morality of the urban poor by tackling slum housing and overcrowding have echoes in contemporary regeneration initiatives, which follow the logic of achieving social progress through transformation of the physical environment. East London has been the target of successive waves of interventions since the late 19th century to the present day, each reinterpreting previous discourses of need and dereliction, and offering a solution: Victorian model housing, slum clearances, post-war social housing programmes, the dispersal of working class households to suburban new towns, estate renewal and the development of mixed communities (Kennelly and Watt 2011). London’s bid to host the 2012 Games, and the subsequent legacy strategies, proposed urban redevelopment on a transformative scale as the only viable solution to bridge the social, spatial and temporal gap between east London and the rest of the capital. The ‘East End’ was not contemporaneous with the rest of London, but left behind (Vijay 2015) and the Olympic legacy would be a modernising force and would succeed where other attempts at regeneration had failed.

Thompson et al., argue that east London was problematised in three distinct ways during the Olympic bid process: first, through a visual discourse of blight, dirt and deviance; second, through an objective assessment of deprivation and underdevelopment; and third, through an emotive rhetorical framing of east London’s character and potential for transformation (2013). The authors observe a shift in political narratives after the bid was won; from deprivation and need in east London to contamination, waste and abandonment in the Lower Lea Valley. These extracts - from a parliamentary Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and Department for Culture, Media and Sport report - illustrate how the wasteland narrative was deployed politically:

“Public money is being used to transform the Olympic Park, a contaminated wasteland, into a cleansed zone ready for redevelopment” (House of Commons 2007)
“The Games were sited in Stratford, East London, deliberately to exploit the opportunities they present to develop and accelerate this regeneration agenda. This regeneration has cleared away and cleaned up over 300 hectares of centuries-old industrial contamination and blight in the heart of East London.” (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2010)

“In the fifty years that preceded London’s Olympic preparations, the Lower Lea Valley had struggled with a difficult inheritance from a more industrial past, and decades on the margins. Right in the heart of east London, it had become one of our great city’s most physically fragmented, environmentally compromised and socially deprived districts.” (‘Stitching the Fringe: Working Around the Olympic Park’ 2012)

Visual media play a critical role in constructing imaginaries and mediating public experiences of the city (Georgiou 2013). Photography and film were decisive in translating the wasteland narrative from the political to the public domain and conveying the marginal and otherworldly character of the Lea Valley. News media, in the UK and globally, produced a stream of articles, images and video content, examining the Lea Valley’s decaying industrial infrastructure, polluted waterways, and wild overgrown landscapes (see figure 22). Stories of illegal raves and burnt out cars helped to construct the wasteland narrative and represent the Lea Valley as a space of deviance and danger, in contrast to London as an advanced, cosmopolitan ‘world’ city. Certain images such as Stratford’s fridge mountain (see figure 21), described as Europe’s largest collection of abandoned white goods, were widely circulated as evidence of the strange existence of such a void in a world city, elsewhere consumed with the productive use of space.
Figure 21: Stratford’s ‘fridge mountain’ in 2006. The image featured in a Time Out article called ‘Stratford then and now’.

Imaged downloaded from https://www.timeout.com/london/things-to-do/stratford-then-and-now
Figure 22: Media articles reporting on the Lower Lea Valley’s transformation from a wasteland.

From barren wasteland to sports metropolis: As London welcomes the world, stunning images show the seven-year transformation of Stratford’s Olympic Park

- Spectacular Stratford site seven years in the making is ready to welcome the world
- £550m Olympic Stadium and £105m Velodrome highlights of stunning Olympic Park

By CHRIS PARSONS


And as these pictures show, the current Olympic site has gone from dusty wasteland to gleaming landmark during one of most ambitious building projects ever seen on British shores.
Wasteland to Wonderland: Amazing pics of the Olympic Park under construction

See how the Lower Lea Valley was transformed, step-by-step, with this incredible gallery

Olympic stadium

1710 days to go. With 28 months gone since London was awarded the games, the site still looks like an industrial wasteland on 22 November 2007

(Image: Barcroft)
How The Olympics Completely Turned Around A Bad London Neighborhood

Tori Mathew  Jul 24, 2012, 10:39 AM

The center of the 2012 London Olympics actually used to be an industrial backwater.

The Olympic Park — which contains the Olympic Village, the Olympic Stadium, and seven other venues — sits on a plot of land in East London that Reuters described as “a patch of polluted wasteland” as recently as 2005.

But now the Stratford area of London has been split by a host of improvements.
Stratford: From wasteland to homebuyer’s dream

Andrea Dean for Metro Friday 11 Jul 2014 6:00 am

Stratford’s East Village was originally the Athletes’ Village during the Olympics (Picture: supplied)

Stratford is one of London’s biggest success stories. At the beginning of the millennium it was a run-down, inaccessible area that few outsiders had reason – or desire – to visit. Barely 15 years later, this former industrial wasteland has been transformed into an exciting, vibrant new quarter, with unbeatable transport connections.
7.2 Enclosure and materialising the void

Discursive efforts to portray the Lower Lea Valley as a social and economic void, were followed by physical efforts to make real the claims to emptiness, waste and dereliction. In 2006, the area of land that would become the Olympic Park was enclosed by an 11-mile perimeter fence (figure 23). This act of containment shifted the materiality of the Lower Lea Valley ‘void’ from a floating discursive imaginary, to a physical and territorial reality, which could be further reproduced in images, maps, and texts as definitive proof of its wasteland status. Phil Cohen, long-time observer of east London’s urban transformations, describes the power of this shift in material register:

“The materiality of build work and its technologies appears to offer consolidating evidence that things are really what they seem to be, because they can be shown, demonstrably, to be happening. What you see is what you get. Yet this transparency hides the density and complexity of the fabrication process. The nature of that complexity is described in the term itself. ‘Fabric’ means both a manufactured material and a frame, structure, or texture. The term thus refers us to a form of worked-on matter that has something irreducibly symbolic about it; fabrication - making things up - has the connotation of artifice or even dissimulation.” (2013, 176–77)
Figure 23: Blue perimeter fence enclosing the Olympic Park site in 2007.
Image credit Peter Scott, downloaded from http://thejunket.org/2012/07/issue-four/this-is-legacy/

Qvistrom’s work on the necessarily partial nature of redundancy in the built environment examines the complex materialities, temporalities and spatialities that arise from efforts, such as the erection of the perimeter fence as they are reinterpreted by other actors (2012). The blue perimeter fence was intended to secure the Olympic Park site, preventing public access so buildings could be demolished and decontamination of land could begin. There are various, compelling personal accounts and visual records compiled by people who, to greater or lesser degrees, breached the perimeter fence to (continue) to explore the Lower Lea Valley (Robinson 2014; Scott 2012; diamond geezer 2009) as this quote from photographer Toby Smith illustrates:

“Early security efforts had only a futile grasp of the 11 mile blue fence and the perimeter had blind spots of responsibility. Simply donning a hi-vis jacket afforded unchallenged vehicle access to complete ‘personal topographic’ surveys. Once frenetic businesses were left unsecured for the scrappies and opportunist scavengers to attack the architecture with crowbars and wire strippers.” (as quoted by Robinson 2014)
The blue perimeter fence did not simply enclose the Olympic Park site, it also signified a shift in status that can be usefully analysed by drawing upon observations from anthropological theories of ritual practice. Ritual is consistently depicted as a means
of negotiating problems of integration, appropriation or transformation, and furthermore, conflicts between thought and action. Bell argues, based on a wide-ranging analysis of theories of ritual practice, that:

“ritual is a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing or cultural forces comes together. Examples include the ritual integration of belief and behavior, tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and the imaginative ideal.” (1992, 16)

In the context of the Lower Lea Valley’s transformation, there is merit in considering the conditions under which regeneration coerces opposing value systems into some form of correspondence. Before the otherness of the Lower Lea Valley can be repurposed and integrated into the urban mainstream, it must first be destabilised, segregated and physically reclaimed. This process echoes the tri-partite structure of cross-cultural ritual process that Turner, following Van Genepp, develops in his work on liminality (1977). Turner argues rites of transition in many cultures broadly have three phases: separation, margin and re-aggregation, which “detach ritual subjects from their old places in society and return them, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, to new places.” (ibid. 1977, 36). Turner is concerned with the middle phase in this process, which he refers to as liminality, or mid-transition, which in the context of his work in Central Africa is frequently associated with death, limbo or structural ‘invisibility’. With the latter, he describes ritual practices that take subjects out of their everyday worlds to socially and symbolically segregate them - changing names, changing clothes, learning new skills and acquiring new rights - before being refashioned and returned to mainstream society. A connection can be drawn between Turner’s liminality and the seclusion, renaming and remaking of the Lower Lea Valley, which recovers, makes safe, and returns the transformed space to society.

7.3 Terrain vague – social possibilities in emptiness

Iain Sinclair, prolific author and long-time east London resident, is one of the most prominent public critics of Olympic development in the Lea Valley. As a self-styled contemporary flaneur, much of Sinclair’s writing draws on minutely-observed
changes in east London’s physical and social landscape collected during walks around the Lea Valley and beyond (Sinclair 2012b, 2003, 2010). Before and during the Games, he launched a furious campaign against Olympic regeneration, defending the Lea Valley as a magical wilderness in the city and drawing attention to the richness of human possibilities afforded by the intersection of natural landscape, industrial architecture, and space that is not overly managed (Sinclair 2012a, 2008; BBC News 2012). This understanding of the Lea Valley as a site of alterity that challenges conventional notions of urban space and dwelling is redolent of work by urban theorists on community-led practices that transgress spatial and social norms to produce their own environments and systems (see Frangos 2016; Sebregondi 2012 on urban gardening; Doron 2010 on squatting and cultural practices). Architect, historian and philosopher, Ignasi de Solà-Morales, developed the term ‘terrain vague’ in the 1990s to describe such marginal spaces - empty plots, suspended construction sites, unused or forgotten neighbourhood spaces - that are part of the city and yet conceptualised or experienced as ‘outside’. Such sites, he observed, are frequently characterised as strange, unproductive, unsafe and uninhabited: “foreign to the urban system, mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city, its negative image” (2014, 26). For de Solà-Morales, terrain vague are city voids, with ambiguous status that frees them from the tyranny of neo-liberal urban governance, surveillance and regulation to become spaces of imagination, experimentation and potential, where alternative social and economic practices can flourish and challenge dominant ways of thinking about contemporary urban experience.

The strangeness and otherness of urban dwelling, in particular the tension between alienation from others and the need to live together with strangers, are central to Solà-Morales’ thinking. The spatial and material qualities of terrain vague are directly implicated in their potential. In this sense, ‘empty’ space is afforded the power to bring forth all manner of social possibilities, meanings, and connections in, and to, the city. Levesque applies this theory to Beirut - expanding the scale of terrain vague from small, singular and uninhabited urban spaces, to ‘vague urbaines’, large swathes of the city where, like the Lea Valley, property ownership is ambiguous, and informal behaviours are part of everyday life. She argues that vague urbaines are distinguished
by the complexity and multiplicity of the social possibilities they enable. Yet, it is this very potential that lends *vague urbaines* contradictory meanings and makes them appear threatening to secure and established ways of life (2014).

As noted earlier, scholarship on urban dereliction and contemporary ruins has multiplied over the past two decades (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012) and much of this work posits ruination as both a material state and a way of seeing buildings and space. Doron’s assessment of urban planning practices in 20 cities across Europe, America and Asia, concurs with this perspective, identifying that ‘wastelands’, ‘dead zones’, ‘dereliction’, void’, ‘nothingness’ and ‘*terrain vague*’ are now concepts in common use by planners and architects. Doron, like Solà-Morales and Levesque, observes that spaces designated as ‘wastelands’ or ‘void’ are replete with meanings and possibilities, and describes such spaces as ‘residuum’ that, as well as accommodating alternative activities and marginalised communities, are occupied by unwritten histories, residues of violence (such as bomb-damaged plots from wars in Europe), and real estate speculations (2010, 250).

In this sense, urban voids are imaginaries; an assemblage of spaces, social practices, politics and possibilities that can be deployed as efforts to appropriate, confront and challenge dominant social and economic systems or to spatialise power, take possession of urban territories, and erase lives and histories. As van Dijk argues:

> “Colonisation is part of what architecture does, and the imagery of the void was invented for this reason, instead this time it is not far continents that are occupied but the back yard.” (1996).

### 7.3.1 Challenging colonisation

Julian wears a t-shirt proclaiming, ‘London 2012 Official Protestor’. He and Jude are leading a poetry and living history walk around the Olympic Park called *Everything you wanted to know about the Olympic Park and never dared to ask*. An hour into the walk we have paused in front of the hoarding that wraps around Chobham Manor, separating the construction site from the street (see figure 25). The hoarding stands out as a rare field of colour in this part of the Park, where the landscape is dominated
by pale chalky apartment blocks and the grey and grit of new pavements. We stop to talk about the statements that run along its length:

‘Positive change - nobody left behind’
‘Togetherness’
‘Generation after generation’
‘Everyone used to talk to each other’

Figure 25: Living Wall hoarding at Chobham Manor in 2016.
Image: Saffron Woodcraft.

Further west along Honour Lea Avenue a sign identifies the hoarding as ‘Tapestry’ by David Shillinglaw, a London-based artist of global repute. Tapestry, the sign explains, is a “modern day take on the Bayeux tapestry [that] represents the changing story of east London as told through the eyes of the local community”. The tapestry metaphor is elaborated in the text that describes how local writer, Anna Delancey, collected memories and stories from the local community and surrounding areas, which were then interpreted by the artist David Shillinglaw, to “weave a new story for east London.” Julian and Jude are unimpressed by the project’s claim to represent the views of local people. Julian singles out one of the hoarding’s statements:
“One Big Community’ ... I mean what’s that? The people who lived here are no longer here ... they got rid of them all. It’s typical propaganda ... art as propaganda, designed to cheer people up and eliminate any memory.”

Figure 26: Julian and Jude leading the ‘Everything you wanted to know about the Olympic Park and never dared to ask’ walk in 2016.

Image: Saffron Woodcraft.

The people Julian talks about are the 450 former residents of the Clays Lane Estate, which stood on the site that Chobham Manor now occupies and where he lived until 2007. The Clays Lane residents were among those displaced by the Olympic Games. Hatcher argues that over 1,000 individuals were forcibly evicted from homes and businesses when the London Development Agency issued “the largest and most
controversial compulsory purchase order in British history” (2012, 197) in order to ‘assemble’ the land required for the Olympic Park. Among them were 280 businesses (‘House of Commons Debates “London 2012 Olympic Bid”’ 2005) and the Manor Garden Allotment Society, which by virtue of its resistance and protracted legal battle against eviction, has become one of the most high-profile cases of displacement in the Olympic regeneration story.

Julian and Jude lead the walk to a small hillock in the Olympic Park overlooking Chobham Manor, and indicate where the Manor Gardens allotments used to stand:

“This zone had a lot of local uses,” says Julian. “Volunteers were working here ... they actually planted a wood on this site ... repairing the canals, planting trees along the canals. There were cycle paths, nature walks ... I don’t deny the presence of crime, litter or neglect, but the point about this ... it was a wild area ... they call this parkland, but this is not parkland. Over here, which has been eliminated, was the Manor Garden allotments.”

Jude picks up the story:

“For some of us it [Manor Gardens] was really one of the most beautiful places in London ... as well as being incredibly productive and wonderful relationships developed there. One of the features were the very artistic improvised DIY huts. Some of them were extraordinary ... green clapboard with lace curtains and little hanging pots ... others were great shards of glass. They were commented [on] widely and photographed. When it was clear they couldn’t stay they tried to be incorporated into the Olympic Park. They argued they were a wonderful example of multiculturalism, healthy living, of recycling ... they ticked every box of virtuous, healthy living and anyway they were wiped out.”

42 A Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) is a legal function that allows public bodies in the UK (eg. local councils or highways agencies) to force homeowners to sell their property if it obstructs a regeneration or infrastructure project. The public body must demonstrate that Compulsory Purchase is necessary for the ‘greater public good’.

43 As Evans recounts, Manor Gardens Society occupied 4.5 acres of land in the Lea Valley since it was gifted in perpetuity to the allotment holders in 1900, as part of a larger effort to improve the livelihoods, wellbeing and education of local working-class households. Consequently, 80 allotment plots had been cultivated for over a century, some by several generations of one family, and deceased allotment holders’ ashes are scattered on the land, creating an inseparability between the gardeners and the soil (2016a).
Figure 27: Manor Gardens Allotments – still from Memo Mori, a film made in 2009 by Emily Richardson.

Image downloaded from emilyrichardson.org.uk
A multiplicity of voices has contested the characterisation of the Lea Valley as abandoned, polluted, unsafe and economically unproductive, as evident from the scholarly attention paid to the question of displacement (see for example Traganou 2016; Porter et al. 2009; Watt 2013; Bernstock 2014; Kennelly and Watt 2011) and extensive efforts to document the changing landscape and its occupants before the Games (see for example Sinclair 2008; Gill and Sinclair 2007; Braden and Campany 2016; Barson and Lewis 2012). Among these, accounts of the personal histories and legal battles of Clays Lane residents and Manor Gardens allotment holders have been extensively documented (Husni-Bey 2012; Traganou 2016; Hatcher 2012; G. Evans 2017). It is not my intention to recount these narratives here, or to suggest there is a simple binary between voices that critique the Olympic regeneration and those that support the changes it has brought about – and there are many people that do. The picture is far more complex and nuanced. However, I reference Clays Lane Estate and Manor Gardens here to restate the claim, already argued by others, that the Lea Valley was neither a wasteland or abandoned but supported a multitude of
livelihoods and creative possibilities for being and dwelling in the city. ‘Making’ the Lea Valley a wasteland was a deliberate discursive strategy, part of a wider political effort to represent this part of east London as socially, physically and temporally discontinuous with the rest of the city. In this context, seeing emptiness and dereliction is an explicitly political act; a nullification of the (primarily working-class) lives, histories and economic activities tied to the Lea Valley. Other authors have observed a similar dynamic at work in the discursive construction of dereliction and decay in other low-income neighbourhoods. Jervis Read gives an account of the place of the urban poor in planning discourse in New Delhi and its relationship to changing notions of citizenship and land rights in the city (Davidson and Lees 2010). Fernández Arrigoitia examines how decaying lifts and stairs in high-rise public housing are problematised in discourse, legal cases and lived experience, in efforts to justify and contest the demolition of the Las Gladiolas housing project in Puerto Rico (2014). Lees examines the uneven power dynamics at work in the discursive construction of the Aylesbury Estate, a post-war modernist social housing complex, as a “sink estate” ahead of its regeneration under New Labour’s urban renewal agenda (2014).

Davidson and Lees take up the question of displacement in industrial and post-industrial areas, arguing that large-scale new-build developments on urban brownfield sites, like Chobham Manor in the Olympic Park, are a new mode of gentrification. Gentrification is ‘classically’ understood as middle-class colonisation of low-income neighbourhoods, where low-cost housing is refurbished by owner-occupiers (Glass and University College London 1964). The authors argue that large-scale new-build development creates a different dynamic, which they define as super-gentrification to describe an intensification of the gentrification process in terms of scale and speed, and a geographical concentration in ‘world cities’ like London and New York (Lees 2003c; T. Butler and Lees 2006). This raises questions about how displacement is understood in the context of marginal urban spaces: if no-one is ‘living’ on a former industrial site then can anyone be displaced by development? Or is the working-class population simply replaced as neighbourhood demographics change over time?
Davidson and Lees argue that displacement is over-simplified and under-theorised - too often conceptualised as the moment of having to move from one place to another when in fact it is a phenomenological experience that involves the withdrawal of diverse supports, such as spaces of social and emotional significance, social networks and political representation, as well as disinvestment in the built environment (2010). This perspective is relevant to the analysis of the Olympic context because, as an abandoned wasteland, the Lea Valley could be reclaimed and rehabilitated for the greater public good, or “settled not stolen” to borrow a phrase from Australian colonial history (Chamarette 2000). The spatial politics of 'seeing emptiness' are most clearly evident in Australia’s colonial past where Terra Nullius - the legal principle of ‘Nobody's Land’ - was employed by English colonial powers to occupy Aboriginal territories. Terra Nullius was a form of colonial strategy linked to European cultural notions of land use and agriculture, in which property rights were understood to be established through farming bounded tracts of land and the ownership of animals. Terra Nullius was founded on the logic that Aboriginal people did not practice agriculture thus did not need access to a large land mass, so the British government could legitimately have the right to use the land (2014). What Jude and Julian describe during our afternoon walk around the Olympic Park is also a clash of belief systems, in which radically opposed meanings of value, productivity and waste confront each other. One system is based on a dominant neo-liberal economic logic; while the counter-narratives of freedom and alterity are suggestive of other, possibly multiple, local systems of value at work, which privilege non-economic practices such as sharing, making, re-using and growing. Recognising this tension between the different value systems and the meanings that have significance in the re-imagining of the Lower Lea Valley connects to wider issues of urban governance in London and other ‘world’ cities. The uneven power dynamics of urban development, dominance of productivity narratives in land-use, and accompanying processes of gentrification and displacement have been extensively analysed in different political and socio-economic contexts (see for example Marcuse 1985; Weller and van Hulten 2012; Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008; Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009; Hamnett 2003; Zuk et al. 2017), and as previously observed, notions of citizenship are
discursively made and closely tied to rights to urban space, public services and housing.

It is more than 10 years since the evictions took place, however, they are not events consigned to the past but are processes that continue to unfold. The social, psychological and legal implications for the individuals directly, are severe and ongoing (see Burrows 2017) and testimonies and images from Manor Gardens and Clays Lane continue to circulate among networks of housing activists and anti-regeneration campaigners, who use digital and visual media to bring these experiences to bear on current planning debates and policymaking processes to advocate for new forms of community-led regeneration. What I am concerned with here, however, is a pattern of seeing and making emptiness that extends beyond the discursive construction of absence and dereliction as a justification for transformation, and the resulting making of void space through demolition or enclosure. In the next section I examine how a new ‘intentional void’, which appropriates and reinterprets the social and material qualities of terrain vague, is created at Chobham Manor as a space of social and creative possibility.

7.4 Re-purposing the void

The configurations of emptiness so far discussed in this chapter have focused on marginal urban spaces and the possibilities they present for alternative dwelling and citizenship practices. Sebregondi examines the social possibilities of a different type of emptiness - the temporary, patterned voids that appear where construction is underway as a consequence of planned urban development, much like the void produced by the enclosure of Chobham Manor. These are, he argues, more than physical vacancies; they are sites for the reconstruction of urban subjectivities free from the constant injunctions of the city (2012). Sebregondi’s argument is based on field research at the (now demolished) Heygate Estate in south London; the enclosure and partial demolition of which Sebregondi argues produced unoccupied, unutilised, unprogrammed space that was radical in its suspension of productive use. This form of void, he argues, is not a subtraction but a product - a positive addition to the urban environment where new spatial, cultural and political practices can emerge. In the
case of the Heygate Estate, these included a campaign to designate, and advocate for, an urban forest. Sebregondi’s patterned voids share some of the social qualities exhibited by de Solá-Morales’ *terrain vague*, and practiced in the spaces of the Lower Lea Valley, namely citizen-led practices that co-opt space and bring alternative meanings and value systems to urban experience. However, there is also an important distinction between the two; one – *terrain vague*, like the Lower Lea Valley - has a marginal status that enables it to exist beyond mainstream social and economic systems, and in this sense is truly radical and oppositional. The other exists as a brief suspension of order within a dominant system and is overlooked, or sometimes tolerated, because of its ephemeral status. In light of the social, creative and disruptive potential of these intentional voids, Sebregondi argues the very nature of architecture as building should be challenged, and posits that were architects to see their role foremost as creating spatial relations, then one of the most urgent tasks for architects is “not to design places that are better integrated to the contemporary city, but precisely to discover, invest and invite its ephemeral voids.” (2012, 343).

During my fieldwork, Chobham Manor had such an intentional void; an ‘empty’ space that was designated for a temporary use community garden by LLDC. This section describes the Mobile Garden City that was developed on the site – examining how the project was conceived as a space of potential and innovation and a critical site for catalysing connections between people living in the Olympic Park and the surrounding neighbourhoods.

7.4.1 “Energy and edge” - animating and activating space

Temporary use projects, also called interim use or meanwhile space, have become an established aspect of urban spatial practice in UK cities over the past 15 years (Ferreri 2015; Bishop and Williams 2012) as city planning authorities have encouraged short-term occupation of ‘vacant’ land and buildings as a means to revitalise declining high-streets and involve citizen-led coalitions in the production of urban space. The social use of vacant land and buildings is an integral part of the urbanisation process, as the previous examples of informal settlements, squats, urban farms and artists’ projects in cities around the world serve to illustrate.
However, the planned temporary-use of urban space has become part of a distinctive discourse and aspect of placemaking practice in European and north American cities (Ferreri and Lang 2015; Bishop and Williams 2012; Temel and Haydn 2006). Colomb argues that the emergence of global ‘creative cities’ discourse has driven a shift in urban policymaking in which planners are engaged in the strategic production of creative spaces. In this context, temporary use is encouraged as part of wider efforts to reinvent cities and become tools to negotiate potential conflicts between creativity and profit:

“Temporary use has already become a ‘magical term’ on the one hand, for those many creative minds who, in a world ruled by the profit maxim, are trying nevertheless to create spaces that reflect and nurture their vision of the future; and, on the other, for urban planners to whom it represents a chance for urban development.” (Urban Catalyst and K. Overmeyer 2007, 17)

Temporary use practices encompass a diversity of intentions and scales, from small-scale, citizen-led interventions that take place under the loose banner of ‘tactical’ or ‘DIY’ urbanism (Lydon et al. 2016); to efforts by entrepreneurial organisations acting as intermediaries between citizens and planning authorities to revitalise ‘under-used’ spaces and buildings for local economic and community benefit (Ferreri 2015). While DIY urbanism often focuses on neighbourhood improvements, like pedestrian or road safety, creating space for children’s play, public realm improvements or community projects (see figure 29) - intermediary organisations often bring professional skills to community projects that combine economic development with wider social aims (see figure 30).
Figure 29: Student project to improve pedestrian and cycle safety in Palm Beach.

Temporary use projects have gained popularity in the context of large-scale regeneration programmes like the Olympic Park, which have long-term development cycles and phased construction that produces a series of temporary spatial voids. Planning authorities and property developers have recognised the potential of programming these voids for community and cultural events, urban greening, entrepreneurialism and place marketing, all of which support goals of placemaking practice. Furthermore, temporary use is understood as an effective means of introducing dynamism, vitality and sociality into new urban environments that might otherwise lack a sense of place. F from LLDC describes the value such interventions bring to regeneration programmes:

“People are starting to realise that what makes places thrive is mix. It’s that diversity, it’s that magic combination of elements, that’s what gives somewhere a real energy, a real edge and where creative stuff sparks from ... [you] need to somehow allow the space for creativity and diversity to flourish. Activating spaces so they become places is really quite key ... and the earlier you can do that the better and the more you can allow that to change through the programme of development the
Two texts are central to the ideas and values that underpin expert-led placemaking in Euro-American cities. First, is Jane Jacob’s classic anti-planning treatise *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), which argues that to understand cities we must embrace complexity and acknowledge that diversity in, and of, urban space is the source of vitality, conviviality and sociality. Such diversity - of populations, social and economic practices, architectural and spatial form - generates multiple, overlapping and continuously evolving practices that animate urban streets and public spaces. Jacobs argues that freedom from bureaucratic spatial planning is essential to create the conditions that generate the kind of exuberant disorder that characterises urban streets and districts. Second, is William H Whyte’s *The Social Life of Small Urban Places* (1980), which emerged from The Street Life Project, an ethnographic observation of New York’s public plazas in the 1970s. Whyte’s Street Life Project had a practical purpose – to understand, through direct observation, which city spaces ‘worked’ for people and which did not, those that were well used and those that were not, in order to produce interpretations and recommendations to guide the work of New York’s city planners. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS), was founded in 1975 as a non-profit organisation to expand and apply Whyte’s work. “Cities fail or succeed at the scale of human interaction” reads a quote on the website from PPS Senior Vice President, Ethan Kent, along with text noting the 3,000 established placemaking projects, PPS delivers planning, design and education programmes to help communities and planners revitalise public spaces and build stronger communities.44 In the next section I explore how the institutionalisation of

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44 During the period of my fieldwork I met with numerous architects, planners, urban designers and planning consultants working in the UK, USA, Scandinavia and Australia, in the context of professional research projects. I became interested in the seminal texts guiding their professional practice on which they would draw to inform, and also advocate for, their work. Of these interactions, which I estimate to be over 30, there was rarely an office that did not prominently display both these titles.
temporary urbanism produces vitality, conviviality and sociality that are central values of placemaking practice, yet under new conditions.

7.4.2 A garden with agency

On a hot afternoon in July 2015, a crowd of visitors to Chobham Manor’s Mobile Garden City cluster around the ‘Town Hall’ for a tree-planting ceremony to mark the official opening of the community garden (see figure 30). In reality, the garden has been open for several weeks as the community gardeners and a team of volunteers have built and planted 100 raised beds that now populate the expansive gravel site. Among the crowd of visitors include some of the volunteers who have helped to prepare for the opening, people living in the East Village apartment blocks that overlook the garden and in the neighbourhoods that border the Olympic Park, and volunteers and organisers from other growing and gardening projects in east London. Some sit and chat in the sunshine, others are busy planting squashes and sunflowers, and a group of children are in charge of watering the new beds. Gardeners from Groundwork, the environmental charity contracted by LLDC to manage the community garden, hand out seeds and provide direction to the volunteers.
The opening event is the culmination of months of work by a team at LLDC that has involved obtaining planning permission, overseeing groundworks to prepare the site, commissioning landscape architects, contracting community gardeners, working with L&Q on communications and community engagement, and setting up partnerships with local organisations to run other community projects from the site. Situated at the eastern end of Chobham Manor, in what will eventually be phase three of the development, the garden occupies a large site, roughly 20 x 30 metres, with two small grassed areas, rows of beds mainly planted with fruit and vegetables, a polytunnel, a tool shed, benches and stools made from recycled materials, and the ‘Town Hall’ – a multi-purpose structure intended to shelter outdoor meetings, training and education programmes, or simply provide shade and a place to eat. The Mobile Garden City is one of three temporary use projects that LLDC is managing during the period of my fieldwork that constitute the initial phase of the Corporation’s *Interim Uses Strategy* (‘Interim Uses Strategy for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park’ 2013) -
a significant material component of LLDC’s commitment to innovation in regeneration and placemaking practice.45

The goals of the Mobile Garden City are ambitious and LLDC’s investment of time, money and resources in the project total a significant £200,000+, which will be spent on the garden during its residence at Chobham Manor. The intention is for the Mobile Garden City to move to a new temporary site on the other side of the Olympic Park after 19-months, when phase three construction is scheduled to begin.46 The garden’s infrastructure is modular as a consequence of the need for mobility – individual planters are designed to be lifted onto a flatbed truck to be driven to a new site and reconfigured.

A few months before the garden opens I meet W, the project manager, to review a new set of designs for the site and we talk for almost two hours about the various aims and intentions for the scheme. Explaining the background to the garden, W says:

“The garden has come from various different ideas and aspirations. It’s a bit about people wanting to get their hands dirty on the Park - it’s a lovely place to be, but it has a team of people who look after it and volunteer opportunities are quite limited. One of the big things we [LLDC] have always wanted, is to have space for people to get involved in gardening, food growing, making ... this is quite a big thing in east London ... so one of the early ideas was to have a training garden on the Park, where we could grow plants for the Park and people could learn about horticulture and landscaping. And of course, the other bit is about building connections and relationships between Chobham Manor, East Village, Leyton, the new school ... because it’s on that corner site between all these areas, it will hopefully start to make some of those connections, break down some of the feeling of ‘them’ and ‘us’ between people living in different neighbourhoods.”

The list of objectives for the garden grows as W describes some of the conversations underway about forthcoming developments and projects that might be run from the

45 See Ferreri and Lang for a detailed analysis of LLDC’s approach to community interim uses (2015).
46 Construction of phase three was delayed, as was the process of negotiating a new temporary use site for the relocation of the garden, so at the time of writing, the Mobile Garden City remained at Chobham Manor.

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garden in the future. She runs through the programme of community activities and events planned for the year ahead that include seasonal planting, garden sign-writers, harvest festival celebrations, building a communal clay oven and horticultural training for adults and young people. More speculative ideas include a partnership with a local chef who is running supper clubs in East Village, growing produce for local cafés, and creating a banqueting table to host monthly community lunches in the summertime.

W shows me the plans for the garden, which is inspired by Ebenezer Howard’s utopian Garden City concept. There are echoes of Howard’s radial plan in the garden’s form, with ‘avenues’ of plants that stretch away from the main entrance and zones for different forms of production and activity – such as the ‘Town Hall’ and ‘suburbs’ (see figure 32). W points to the polytunnel and describes it as the ‘factory’, a reference to the industrial zone in the Garden City model; moving across the plan she points out an area for the plant nursery and horticultural training, zoned as the ‘school’. A ‘pharmacy’ that will contain medicinal plants and herbs, and a group of raised beds known as the ‘glut-fields’ that will be for pumpkins and squashes, echoing Howard’s agricultural zones.
Figure 32: Drawing of the Chobham Manor Mobile Garden City produced for planning application.

Image obtained from LLDC.
The Garden City references are intended to be “playful” and “engaging” for users, yet the association also captures a set of values around co-production, sharing and community governance that are embedded in the design of both the Chobham...
Manor garden and Howard’s utopian aspirations for Garden Cities. Temporally, the two initiatives may be separated by almost 120 years, yet they both speak to imaginaries of the good life for urban citizens and seek to materialise a notion of community that is a values-based and locally-situated form of sociality and identity.

Productivity is an explicit design intention. The Mobile Garden City has been envisioned as a socially, horticulturally, nutritionally and educationally productive space; the kind of space that is generative of forms of social connection, citizenship and community-building, as described in chapter five. As the first significant space given over to community uses in the Olympic Park, its location on a corner plot where Chobham Manor, East Village and neighbouring Leyton intersect, its location has symbolic weight. The garden is a materialisation of the ambition to ‘stitch the fringes’ of the Olympic Park and create fluid connections to surrounding areas. Moreover, the LLDC team see the garden as a means for people to forge embodied connections to the Olympic Park through the physical act of engaging with the landscape, consuming the produce and owning the process of making and managing space. As W says: “Interim use is about starting the process of community development – getting people involved in the land, building connections with the Park or us [LLDC], getting people and communities talking and engaging, with us or with each other. And then we can get people involved in the process of moving the garden and start to create links across to the other side of the Park, to other communities and other projects.”

Our conversation turns to Chobham Manor’s future residents. Foremost, W says, the garden is intended to be an ‘early space’ for building social connections, however, it is also intended to make a connection to ‘The Greens’ – the three neighbourhood spaces that will make up Chobham Manor’s linear park running east-west through the length of the neighbourhood. The Greens have particular significance for Chobham Manor’s imagined, future social world and feature prominently in Chobham Manor’s masterplan, supporting planning documents, public consultation and place marketing materials. Furthermore, they are a common reference point in my interactions with the placemaking team because of the role they will play in the future social life of the neighbourhood. The Greens are imagined as intimate spaces
for the local community, distinct from the wide-open public spaces and iconic architecture of the Olympic Park, and the locus of social life in Chobham Manor. The imagined uses for The Greens are many and varied. Planning and marketing materials contain numerous computer-generated images of The Greens, showing children playing, people drinking coffee and reading newspapers, picnicking or cycling through the gardens (see figure 34). One of The Greens will have a small community garden and a potting shed. One of the architects described how they had been imagined by the design team as: “a bit like an ideal village green ... a space that will draw people out from their homes and make a connection to the neighbourhood and to their neighbours.”

Figure 34:  Computer generated image of ‘The Greens’ at Chobham Manor.
To this end, Chobham Manor’s terraced townhouses are oriented around The Greens. Communal domestic spaces like kitchens, living rooms and roof terraces, overlook The Greens and some properties will have glass doors that can be opened up completely with the intention that domestic activities can flow outwards. The idea of The Greens as a place where children can play safely while their parents watch from the kitchen or the living room is a particularly powerful idea in the narrative of the scheme. In this sense, The Greens are imagined as a communal, semi-public space that will mediate between private domestic space and the public spaces of the wider neighbourhood. As one architect described the vision: “the social life of the houses can spill out onto The Greens ... this is where the community will ‘bed-in’“. The Greens are intended to materialise the notion of productive ‘empty’ space – conducive to generating social, physical and emotional connections and attachments, as described in chapter five. The Mobile Garden City is an effort to catalyse this process. Throughout my engagement with project, it was treated as an agentive entity with
the power and potential to bring into being the social futures imagined for the Olympic Park’s new neighbourhoods and leave behind traces of this emergent sociality as it moves from place to place.

7.5 Conclusion – Making alterity

I volunteered in the Mobile Garden City for around nine months, visiting most weeks and taking part in the planting, watering and maintenance tasks needed to keep the garden running, as well as some of the organised events intended to open-up the garden to a wider local audience. A large area of the garden was given over to innovation projects run by local groups, each with its own set of volunteers. These included a communal tool shed and tool library, a woodstore and workshop to encourage making, a bike workshop, a ‘poetry shed’ containing an archive of local artefacts from before pre-Games, and an anaerobic digester – built by volunteers over a period of months using a re-purposed shipping container to process food waste collected from neighbouring homes. During this time, I met around 30 regular volunteers – most lived in East Village and others from Leyton and other areas of east London – although there were many others I did not get to know, including people involved in horticultural training and corporate volunteering groups.

It is evident from the scale and complexity of the Mobile Garden City that it is not a typical community garden. As one of the community gardeners commented early in the life of the project: “[this] is a space waiting for a community, rather than a space made by the community.” Its status as a temporary-use pilot, demonstrator and incubator for other community initiatives, as well as the scale of investment in the project, means it is implicated in wider networks that carry more social and political charge (Bender 2002). The design intentions embedded in the garden’s conceptual and material architecture are densely-layered and closely associated with the production of certain forms of citizenship and citizens who are self-organising, self-sufficient and engaged in healthy pursuits. The Mobile Garden City has analytical value here however, because it is metonymic of the institutionalised temporary urbanism emerging in large-scale urban regeneration programmes in the UK. The production and programming of ‘intentional voids’ seeks to reproduce the spatial,
social and political characteristics of marginal urban spaces that are deemed to be productive and desirable – creativity, innovation, experimentation, citizen-led urbanism - to meld them with urban policy priorities that are about producing stable, cohesive and healthy places. This ‘void aesthetic’ is increasingly evident in urban regeneration programmes across London, and other ‘world cities’, where urban voids are created: first discursively, then materially, before being repurposed as ‘intentional voids’ – spaces and places where alterity is manufactured and community can be made.
Chapter 8  Risk, enchantment and the illusory home

My mobile phone beeps and a text message arrives from Taylor Wimpey, the housebuilder developing Chobham Manor, notifying me that “A queue is starting to form outside the sales office.” It is around 7pm on 22 January 2015, the evening before the first new homes at Chobham Manor go on sale. When the text arrives, I am on my way to a community meeting in Hackney Wick, so it is past 9pm by the time I get to Chobham Manor. East Village, just one road away, is unusually quiet. Lights are on in the apartment blocks, but the streets are deserted and I wonder whether the queues have dispersed because of the bitter cold. The only signs of life at Chobham Manor are a van in the car park selling cups of tea, and a small white marquee erected on the grass in front of the sales office. As I approach I can hear voices inside the marquee. A conversation is underway about the “tricks” that developers play to make show homes seem larger than they are: “They don’t hang doors in the doorways and they use small-scale furniture!” someone says, followed by wry laughter from others.

The marquee is tightly sealed; I walk around twice before finding a corner entrance and fumble to open the flaps. As I do, a woman inside says: “Ah, someone else to join the party.” Inside there is a small camp: a row of two-person dome tents, interspersed with fold-up chairs, curves around the marquee walls. I count twelve people, although there may be more unseen in the tents. It is dark and almost as cold in the marquee as outside, but the atmosphere feels festive. The campers seem well prepared with quilted jackets, hats, gloves, blankets, pillows, flasks and food. In front of one tent are two small chrome pillars and a red rope, as you might find outside a nightclub for crowd control. Given the lack of heating and lighting, the red rope is both incongruous and playful, but is effective at signalling the occupier’s VIP status. The queue of prospective buyers starts at this tent and its owner, a woman in her late 20s, sits behind the red rope.

I am welcomed into the marquee as a fellow buyer, although I say straight away that I am only here to talk. I address everyone when I ask if it is okay to question their
motivations for spending a night in sub-zero temperatures to guarantee a place in the queue. The woman in the first tent says yes - as if giving her permission for me to talk to everyone. She and her fiancée have been queuing since 10am the previous day - 36 hours by the time we talk - to be sure of purchasing one of the two-bedroom apartments that will overlook the Olympic Park. They rent a flat in Hackney and want to buy their own home and start a family. She describes visiting the Park and the sales office the previous summer:

“We saw all the kids running around and playing in the pond ... having a safe environment for kids to grow up is really important. Who wouldn’t want to bring up their kids in a nature reserve? Green spaces in London are in really short supply.”

In the second tent are A and J, a couple in their late 20s, who share a rented flat in Woodford, east London. A had previously worked in urban planning so felt he knew a lot about the Olympic Park’s development programme. Being near the Park and Stratford’s transport connections is what appeals to them, and they have been saving for a year to raise a 10% deposit for a one-bedroom apartment, and are camping-out to be sure of securing a home. Next in line is S, in his late 40s, sitting alone in a fold-up camping chair, and opposite him at the end of the queue, also in a camping chair, is R, of a similar age. They both live in the same town in Surrey and work at Canary Wharf, one of London’s financial centres. Neither knew that the other was going to be spending the night at Chobham Manor. R, at the end of the queue, jokes that if he had known, he would have made sure he arrived earlier to be in front of his colleague, fellow commuter and neighbour. S is buying an apartment as an investment, although he thinks he may also live there for a while. “He is the Wolf of Wall Street,” R jokes and goes on to explain that after 20 years of daily commuting from Surrey to Canary Wharf, he is buying to be closer to work. He will swap his Surrey house for a smaller flat in the Olympic Park and relocate with his family. R has been queueing since the afternoon to buy one of a limited number of parking spaces on offer with the apartments. I ask if Chobham Academy, the brand new school for Olympic Park residents, influenced his decision, but he shrugs and says not really, it is the parking space - a scarce resource in London - that is worth queueing for.
Beyond the desire to purchase a home at Chobham Manor, there is no recognisable pattern in the life circumstances of the prospective buyers in the marquee. The group is small yet diverse - varying in age, ethnicity, race, life stage, sexual identity, background, and country of birth. Some want their first home, some want a second home, others are investors. Some describe themselves as ‘local’, while some are from other parts of Britain or live overseas. What they share however, is a willingness to make an emotional and financial commitment to an imaginary home and community. The ‘homes’ they intend to buy in the morning do not yet exist beyond the mainly two-dimensional materialities of planning - maps, plans, texts, and models - and are not intended to come into being in a form that is habitable for at least another nine months.\(^{47}\) Housing at Chobham Manor, like many other new neighbourhoods and apartment blocks under construction across London, is sold “off-plan”, whereby potential buyers pay a deposit to secure a specific plot in a future development at a fixed price. The volume of new-build housing for sale in London means that buying an off-plan home has become increasingly common. Off-plan buyers must project themselves into an imaginary future of multiple unknowns - into the psycho-sensory, symbolic and material worlds of a home and community that do not yet exist, and into an economic future in which a not-yet house in a not-yet place remains desirable, affordable, and potentially profitable, throughout the duration of its coming-into-being. In this sense, show apartments are a critical interface between potential and risks: of individual aspirations for home, self and family, the promise of thriving new communities in the Olympic Park, and the numerous realities that might intervene to unseat these futures.

Housebuilders use an array of proxies to mediate the absence of an actual property in off-plan transactions. At Chobham Manor these “technologies of imagination” (Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009) include maps, plans, videos, a 3D “fly-through” model, and two show apartments - decorated and furnished display properties that prospective buyers can visit to view the size, layout and finish of off-plan housing. Design historians have analysed the emergence and use of show homes

\(^{47}\) Delayed construction meant the first homes at Chobham Manor were not occupied until February 2016.
and model apartments throughout the 20th century as technologies that mediate the construction and consumption of modern lifestyles (Ravetz and Turkington 2011; Ravetz 2001; Floré and De Kooning 2003). For example, Ryan (1997) documents the emergence of the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition* from its launch in 1908, describing it as a three-dimensional advice manual representing and performing shifting notions of domesticity from suburban aspirations, changing gender roles, the emergence of a post-war consumer culture, and quasi-scientific solutions to household management. Other accounts address the role of material culture in expressing shifting notions of morality in the household in relation to cleanliness and comfort (Shove 2003), and femininity and sexuality (Hinds 2010; Hackney 2006). In this chapter I argue that Chobham Manor’s show apartments fulfil a different purpose: in occupying a space at the apex of a process of risk and commodification, they act to momentarily equalise the extreme power imbalance between individual home buyers and the complex network of institutions that drive the housing and mortgage-finance industries. Off-plan properties have a peculiar nature – as potentialities, they are immaterial commodities imagined to offer the promise of certainty in a volatile and high-risk property market. Following Miller (2000), I apply Gell’s notion of the ‘trap’ as an aesthetic form that embodies a nexus of intentionality between hunter and animal prey (1996) to examine the social efficacy of Chobham Manor’s show apartments. I explore how the show apartments operate as ‘aesthetic traps’ that disguise and normalise the absence of actual homes, and thereby the risks to which potential homeowners are exposed, in such a way as to align the individual and corporation in their roles as buyer and seller.

8.1 Off-plan homes: buying a promise

In England, where home-ownership is said to border on national obsession, the idea that buying a home is in the top three most stressful experiences of modern life is a narrative often repeated in general conversation and the media. For most British home owners a house is the largest purchase they will make in a lifetime. Yet buying off-plan means purchasing a property that cannot be known in a bodily sense. What is exchanged between buyer and seller is a commitment to acquire an off-plan plot.
An off-plan plot comprises several elements: a spatial location within a development and, in the case of apartments, within a specific building; an architectural design known as a house-type, which combines structural form and materials; an interior arrangement of space known as a floor plan; in many cases, a choice of interior fit-out from a limited range of options like kitchen or bathroom units; and, a duration of time until completion date. In this sense, an off-plan plot is a spatio-temporal promise: an idea, albeit highly specified, of a future home.

Location - as estate agents, home improvement TV shows, and property magazines regularly pronounce - is the most important factor in determining the market desirability and value of housing. Yet dwelling is, in considerable part, a psychosensory experience - a series of interactions between people, buildings, and the wider environment, that are emotional, physical, psychological and temporal responses to stimuli and space. Putting aside the geographic and symbolic aspects of a home, few people would disagree that some places, rooms or buildings have more character or atmosphere than others. Light, shadow, a view, the patina of materials, and background sounds lend some spaces an intangible quality of ‘specialness’ that is more than the sum of location, walls and windows. Purchasing a house involves emotional and sensory judgements as well as geographic and economic ones, and arguably even investors who are buying an asset rather than a home should consider the influence, and therefore the value, of such intangibles to future dwellers or purchasers. Off-plan buyers must engage with ‘home’ as a potentiality – a promise and possibility of material, social and economic futures. To lessen the presence and impact of these risks housebuilders take considerable efforts to communicate to prospective buyers that off-plan properties promise certainty in an unpredictable housing market. Prospective buyers are encouraged to see an off-plan home as an antidote to the stress, delays, and uncertainty of buying a ‘second-hand’ home. Taylor Wimpey's website lists eight ways in which buying a new home circumnavigates these problems. The first of these is: “Less chain means less stress and hassle” – offering prospective homeowners respite from the need to become embroiled in social relations with unknown others - vendors, competing buyers, property agents, surveyors, mortgage providers - or to compete with other buyers
and risk paying too high a price or being ‘gazumped’.48 “Your home will be high specification” is the second, in which “sparkling new appliances”, insulation, and appropriate heating counter the potential material failures of a second hand home - cold, damp, leaks, dangerous wiring or an unpredictable boiler. An off-plan home is presented as offering a certainty that purchasing a second-hand home does not, because of the character of the risks involved: one is a fixed purchase price; another is a ten-year warranty provided by the National House Builders Federation, which protects buyers by ensuring new build homes meet industry standards and provides insurance and resolution support if problems arise. A guarantee of structural integrity in the form of a warranty removes the need for prospective buyers to inspect an actual home, and in this sense, it dematerialises the architectural structure. Furthermore, an off-plan home has an imagined ‘purity’ - lacking any unwelcome traces of previous dwellers or the likelihood of material failure - as this extract from the Chobham Manor website claims:

“From the day you move in, you’ll love the fact that everything in your new home is clean and untouched. If you’ve reserved early enough in the build process you’ll get to choose from a range of brand new carpets, fixtures and fittings that will be installed in your new home before you move in. Which means as soon as you unpack you can enjoy each room in your dream home.”

And so the list continues: “You could save money on bills”, “You can finish your home your way”, “Your home will suit your modern lifestyle”, “You’ll have peace of mind”, “You could be part of a new community”, “Stay safe and sound.”49 Returning momentarily to the overnight campers in Chobham Manor’s marquee, these promises of certainty unquestionably resonate with the motivations of the potential home owners. A and J explicitly identify the promise of a fixed price as advantageous

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48 ‘Gazumping’ or ‘being gazumped’ is defined by the HomeOwners Alliance as “when another party makes a higher offer on the house you are in the process of buying and has that offer accepted, thus pushing you out of the purchase” - https://hoa.org.uk/advice/guides-for-homeowners/i-am-buying/what-is-gazumping-how-avoid-it/

- enabling them to buy a future home at current market prices while giving them more time to save and find a mortgage offer that is affordable. However, they are quick to point out that a good deal is a relative concept in London, where house prices have risen faster than household incomes for a number of years. “Affordability”, they explain, is not the same thing as "affordable" housing. “Affordability” is, in this context, a judgement about the risk of being priced-out of the housing market and the long-term insecurity this is felt to represent, against the risk of over-stretching household finances and “hedging bets” against future rises or losses in London’s housing market. A and J describe the trade-offs that influence their judgement to buy now that include job and relationship security, individual aspirations, a choice between high rents or high mortgage debt, long commutes versus smaller homes, and the lack of control that the prospect of long-term renting presents. The latter figures significantly in the accounts of many young people I meet during fieldwork, for whom the impossibility of home ownership is experienced as a suspension of adulthood and an obstacle to self-making.

Financial certainty conveys considerable benefits to housebuilders and their financiers as well as home buyers. “Forward funding”, as property agents describe off-plan sales, provides a predictable flow of capital to fund the high-risk exercise of constructing a new neighbourhood over a number of years. In a global city like London, property and financial markets are closely linked, and movements in one can be catastrophic for another, as the 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis demonstrated. Consequently, prospective buyers must make a trade-off between a fixed price and the risk that an off-plan property could be worth less when materialised than on contractual completion of the sale. This is a genuine risk: in 2007, Steven Dowd bought two off-plan properties at Caspian Wharf in Bow, east London, from Berkeley Homes, with mortgages for 90 per cent of the value. Dowd attempted to withdraw from the sale when the mortgage-lender advised that property values had dropped by 30 per cent. Berkeley Homes threatened legal action, prompting Dowd to launch The Berkeley Collective, a campaign group to support other off-plan purchasers in
the same position. An article in The Guardian about the case reported that 300 similar claims against ‘defaulters’ had been started by property developers.50

8.2 Shine and illusion

Chobham Manor announces itself in large silver-coloured letters, which in scale and aspiration seem more like sculpture than sign. The letters sit on a manicured lawn, punctuated with low box hedges and formal flowerbeds with striking, angular plants. Behind the sign is the Marketing Suite - or sales office - where prospective buyers can view Chobham Manor’s two show apartments. The Marketing Suite faces west, oriented towards the green spaces and waterways of the Olympic Park on the opposite side of the street, and further afield towards central London and the City. Notably, it does not turn east towards the established low-income neighbourhoods that mark the Olympic Park’s eastern boundary.

Entering the Marketing Suite involves moving through a series of zones - each with a distinct material signature - that transition visitors from the Olympic Park to Chobham Manor and ultimately, if they make it that far, to the show apartments on the first floor. The first zone, which favours “natural planting” in the form of large wild flowerbeds, long grasses and wooden seats and benches, moves people from the Olympic Park to Chobham Manor by way of a manicured lawn, formal planting and a cobbled path and small fountains (see figure 36). The second zone moves visitors inside - past a reception area, which seems to encourages people to present themselves and offer their credentials as potential buyers. Next, visitors move into an exhibition space that offers information about Chobham Manor’s connections to
other areas of London, CGI images of future homes and streets, and commitments to environmental sustainability. A 3D digital model on a touchscreen table offers visitors the chance to fly through the future neighbourhood and zoom in on specific plots to inspect floorplans and the views from different apartments.

On one of my visits to Chobham Manor’s show apartments, the plot of a five-bedroom town house is for sale. The Moselle is the last available property in phase one, its prospective buyer having recently pulled out of the sale. The sale price is £999,995, the same price as when it was first released nearly a year before. In London’s distorted housing market, The Moselle appears to represent something of a bargain, although still not a purchase decision to be taken lightly. On this visit, the 3D digital model of Chobham Manor is not working, so a fly-through the neighbourhood to find the town house and look at its design, aspect, and location is not possible. In the absence of an architectural model that we can touch and see, the sales team refer me to a brochure to work out where the home will be and what it will look like. The brochure contains an A3 double-page CGI image of the Olympic Park. Chobham Manor is at the centre of the image and various London landmarks are highlighted to help situate the future neighbourhood. We have some difficulty locating The Moselle plot and need to confer with the sales office manager. After a few minutes of scanning the picture, and a couple of false starts, we find the town house, although the picture’s perspective means the property is partly obscured by a neighbouring mansion block. The sales officer circles it and puts a dot where the front door might be (see figure 37). The image is smaller than my finger nail.

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51 By comparison, a three-bedroom terraced house in London Fields, a similarly family-friendly neighbourhood in Hackney, sold for £1,325,000 in 2014.
I am not a prospective house buyer, but I ask the sales team what would happen next if I were, and I am invited to view the show apartments on the first floor of the sales office. A staircase leads to the two show apartments, each on either side of a hallway, their doors firmly closed. In between are offices where serious prospective buyers discuss reservation fees, deposits and contracts. Though the show apartments are open to the public, having passed through different zones and crossed numerous thresholds to reach this point I have a sense of gaining privileged access to this space.

8.2.1 Hotel chic: erasing the reality of home

Chobham Manor’s show apartments quite literally sparkle with reflective surfaces, materials and objects. Stepping into the entrance hall, I am confronted by a glistening silver mosaic mirror with my reflection at its centre. I have only just crossed the threshold and already I am an actor in the relational performance of imagined
dwelling. The mirror hangs above a narrow, high-gloss, white table where three objects - a chrome bowl, a clear glass vase, and a black-and-white image of a baby in a silver frame - are carefully arranged. Behind the mirror and the table is a panel of textured silver and grey wallpaper; the other walls are white. The overhead lights, the mixture of reflecting materials and surfaces, and lack of clutter make the light appear to bounce off the walls.
Figure 38: Entrance hall in one of the show apartments at Chobham Manor in 2016. Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
I move into one of the bedrooms where the use of reflective materials continues, with mirrored panels on either side of the double bed, glass light fittings, satin-effect cushions arranged on the bed covers, and more carefully placed chrome objects. Another bedroom is seemingly decorated with a teenager in mind: brightly coloured curtains, bed covers, desk and armchair mark it out as a non-adult space. The innermost part of the apartment is the open-plan kitchen, dining and living room at the end of the hallway that runs the length of the interior. Immediately in front of the living-room door is a dining table set for six. Large wine glasses, silver candles, a tall glass jug and tall perspex salt and pepper grinders create a sense of height and formality. An elaborate glass lampshade above the table intensifies the shine from the collection of reflective surfaces. Nearby, two cocktail glasses and a chrome cocktail shaker wait on a coffee table in front of an L-shaped sofa with velvet cushions. Opposite the sofa is a low sideboard made of a white high-gloss material, on which sit more silver-framed photographs of children, chrome artefacts, a small selection of books and a small glass vase. The kitchen has white, high-gloss fitted cupboards and is equipped with cream and chrome appliances - kettle, toaster, coffee machine, blender. A single copper pan is on the hob with a cookbook propped up nearby. There are no handles to break up the smooth lines, and light from the room’s picture window creates a mirror-like reflection of the trees outside. Even the dark floors have a reflective sheen. The air is heavily perfumed and I begin to feel overwhelmed by the bright lights, shining surfaces and mixture of fragrances.

The combination of light, reflection and texture in Chobham Manor’s show apartments present an interesting challenge to Young’s work on the power of ‘neutral’ interiors in London’s second-hand property market. Young argues that ‘neutrality’ has become a socially acceptable, genderless currency (2004, 13) - signified by white, beige or magnolia walls, wood floors, and white fittings in kitchens and bathrooms - that enhances the exchange value of property because it potentiates the movement and making of fluid selves, while colour, texture, and pattern impede this flow by seeming to cramp and darken space, but also ‘attaching’ too greatly to the personality and taste of the vendor (D. J. B. Young 2004, 9). Young’s ‘neutrality’ is clearly not neutral – it both dematerialises and commodifies the
properties that Young examines by working to shift a buyer’s attention from a building’s structural materiality to the agentive potential of its interior surfaces, which are spaces to be animated by the people and things that dwell inside. McCracken’s examination of “homeyness” in north American domestic practices (2005) concurs with Young’s argument that colour, texture and pattern ‘attach’ to the dwellers. ‘Homeyness’, McCracken argues, is understood as a symbolic property of many aspects of domestic materiality that have forms of personal significance – mediating relations with family, friends or pets, celebrating memories, or playfully expressing aspects of family identity – and is explicitly a process of self and family-making that is about creating an environment that communicates its status as ‘lived-in’.

Chobham Manor’s show apartments contain numerous high-gloss white surfaces – kitchen units, ceilings, doors and bathroom fittings - yet the whiteness of these surfaces is overwhelmed by a multiplicity of other textures, colours, patterns and object tableaux, which do little to blend into the background. The result is far from Young’s description of neutrality that dematerialises built form in order to foreground the project of self and home-making. Chobham Manor's interiors deliberately and forcefully materialise an idealised aesthetic that appears to suggest a different way of dwelling is possible. The patterned and textured silver and grey wallpaper, deep purple quilted velvet headboards, arrays of silk and velvet cushions, purple bath towels, a ‘feature’ wall where one surface in a room is singled out with a bright ‘accent’ colour - are characteristic of a style of interior design called hotel chic – “hotel style translated to real life”, as the blog of the same name claims. Hotel chic, like Young’s neutrality, is constructed from a set of defined stylistic patterns that are clearly and consistently categorised by interior designers and stylists. A plethora of books, magazine articles, blogs, home-makeover TV shows, and DIY YouTube videos offering guidance on how to ‘get the look’ are testimony to its popular appeal. The design philosophy behind hotel chic embraces sophistication, glamour

and the suspension of reality. The hotel is “a perfect opposite” of home (Douglas 1991, 304) offering relief from the mundane and repetitive aspects of dwelling - the dirt, detritus and labour that are an inescapable part of household management; hotels dematerialise this effort - rooms are refreshed by invisible staff when occupiers are absent and meals can be conjured without thought. Traces of previous dwellers are eradicated and so hotels epitomise the promise of cleanliness that off-plan homes promise, and seem to offer an alternative kind of dwelling, which promises flow and movement, a permanent but desirable mobility that is unfettered by the tyranny of home (ibid, 1991) for prosperous citizens of a global world. The materiality of the show apartments is indexical of a certain aspirational lifestyle in which the messy reality of home is absent.
Figure 39: Dining room display in one of the show apartments at Chobham Manor in 2016.

Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
8.3 Disguising absence: “A home, all homes”

Each room and object tableau in Chobham Manor’s show apartments is suggestive of an imagined social world within the home. The cocktail glasses imply sophistication; the supper table conveys imminent sociality; the highly polished object-displays suggest control and order; and the framed photographs situate the household in networks of kinship ties and obligations. Yet the show apartments are not homes, and for all their cues to social connectedness, prosperity and morality, they occupy a liminal position between imagination and reality. Interior decoration is a process of self-making directed aspirationally at potential others (Attfield 1999), however these interiors are not a project of self-making. Each object has been selected and arranged to materialise an aesthetic that is executed by a professional interior designer - the result of a chain of corporate decisions. Anthropological work on modern urban domestic interiors identifies the home as a critical site of intersection between producers and consumers, where corporate and domestic decision-making intersect and ideas are converted into commodities (Shove 2006); however, much of this work focuses on the agency of dwellers and the practices they pursue to appropriate commodities - objects, furnishings, sometimes also housing - and give meaning to the selection and configuration of domestic space. The extraordinary complexity of the networks that shape these processes is, Shove argues, often “glossed over”, leaving the relationship between corporate and domestic unexamined. At Chobham Manor, the interface of corporate and domestic decision-making visibly overlaps, but in a different way. As I walk around the show apartment I notice that a suitcase, umbrella, handbag and pair of shoes are in the large cloakroom cupboard. They look awkward; something in the arrangement does not feel right, and when I come to think about it later, I realise that this projection of an imagined dweller into a show apartment feels uncomfortable. The show apartment’s object tableaus - framed photographs, cocktail glasses, coffee-table books - are suggestive of potential sociality in a way that does not imply actual dwelling. Instead, the careful selection and curation of objects produce a sense of domestic familiarity. In the cultural logic of a British household, they are the right kind of objects in the right kind of places, to be recognisable as the things that
mediate social ties in the home and between the home and the outside world. Taking the framed photographs as an example - large black-and-white photographs in silver frames are positioned opposite the front door, on the bedside tables, and in a prominent arrangement on a sideboard, opposite the room’s main seating area, in the living room. The presentation of family photographs in a home is not casual: photographs are efficacious social objects (Drazin and Frohlich 2007, 51) - a creative effort to materialise kin networks and demonstrate a future intention to maintain ties as well as to celebrate and memorialise. The presentation of photographs at Chobham Manor is not casual either: the images are of happy, healthy, smiling children - a metaphor for future prosperity; the silver frames suggest the images are highly valued, representing important relationships for the household. However, the social ties these images articulate are imagined. The images are of someone’s children, but whose? The interior designer? Or a stock photograph bought in from an image agency? The images are still the efficacious objects that Drazin and Frohlich describe, however, the relationships they mediate are of a different order. Abstracted from their own networks of relations, whether familial or corporate, the children in the photographs undergo a transformation; instead of mediating specific kin relations, they become general representations, proxies for all the possible kinship ties and obligations that a moral social home could and should maintain.
Figure 39: Photograph and object tableau in one of the show apartments at Chobham Manor in 2016.

Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
The shine, arrangement and careful curation of the photographs suggests that prospective buyers are intended to notice the individual objects and relate to them, perhaps unconsciously thinking: “That could be my child, grandchild, or family friend”. However, I argue that the photographs and other object displays are not meant to be noticed as individual artefacts because their efficacy is in their relationship as a whole and the sense of continuity this produces between actual and imagined homes. As an assemblage, the show apartments are just ‘real’ enough to generate a sense of continuity between actual and imagined homes, yet as individual objects the photographs, furniture and object tableaux lose their power. The show apartments are not a simulacrum or poor stand-in for home; instead, they are a totemic representation of the social world of urban homes. Not a home, but the possibility of all comfortable middle-class homes.

8.4 Conclusion - Illusory homes, absent community

As I walk around the show apartments with the sales team I ask a series of questions that I imagine prospective home owners might also raise: Are any of the rooms the same size as those in The Moselle townhouse? Is the layout of the kitchen the same? Does the show home share the same aspect? Are the floor-to-ceiling windows the same? Can I visit the plot where The Moselle will be situated? The answer to all of these questions is ‘no’. Sometimes a show home is an actual house or apartment that will be sold once a development nears completion. Alternatively, show homes are temporary display-spaces that occupy part of a sales office, as is the case at Chobham Manor, where visitors can view a two-bedroom or three-bedroom show apartment, two of several house-types for sale in the first phase of property to be released.

I feel perplexed by the lack of connection between the show apartments and The Moselle town-house. I understand that building a model of each house-type might be impractical and prohibitively expensive; however, the lack of any home to see, touch and interact with is unsettling. I ask if there is a similar house-type anywhere else in London I could visit; again, the answer is ‘no’: the Moselle has been designed exclusively for Chobham Manor. I am told that if I wanted to buy The Moselle, I could pay a reservation fee of £3,500 today and a 10% deposit in four weeks’ time, at which
point I am contractually bound to complete on the sale. I am struck by the peculiarity of this transaction: the emotional weight and financial risk of committing to buy an absent home seem disproportionate to the technologies intended to mediate that risk – maps, brochures, images, and display rooms. The show apartments appear to create a space for prospective buyers to momentarily project themselves into an alternate reality where new possibilities for home, self, family and prosperity can be imagined. However, prospective buyers are not trying-on alternative identities as they might while visiting a department store where they can imaginatively indulge in different lifestyles - as Shove describes the experience of visiting IKEA (2006). Nor can they buy the interior finishes and flourishes that are on display. In spite of the carefully curated room displays and the attention that interior design receives on Taylor Wimpey’s website, when buyers take possession of their new homes at Chobham Manor the walls are whitewashed and the floors bare chipboard. This leaves me with a question about what the show apartments do - devoid of a direct relationship to the not-yet Moselle town house a prospective buyer is left with a biro dot on a fingernail-size, slightly obscured CGI image, in a brochure: a million-pound biro dot?

Carsten and Hugh-Jones, drawing on Lévi-Strauss, describe the house as “an illusory objectification of the unstable relation of alliance to which it lends its solidity” (1995, 8) – an analysis of the metaphorical and material work ‘the house’ does to reconcile conflicted social relations and facilitate the reproduction of social orders through time. The authors address the potential conflicts in relations between men and women in the context of kinship, descent and alliance, examining the entanglement of the house and body in regulating social relations and practices (eating, sleeping, sex, child-rearing, ritual practices, death) and representing and reproducing the body-kinship-house in society. In this sense, the house is theorised as a problem-solving entity and a “productive fetishisation” of social relations in order to forge new relations that ensure continuity over time (Gibson 1995, 129, as quoted by Buchli 2013, 72), which remains in the background for much of the time, awareness of the house and what it does comes into being only in a crisis “under exceptional circumstances – house-moving, wars, fires, family rows, lost jobs or no money.”
(Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, 4). Carsten and Hugh-Jones’ notion of the house as an ‘illusory objectification of unstable relations’ can be productively extended from the kinship relations they analyse to the relationship between corporate vendor and potential home owner at Chobham Manor. The show apartments operate as ‘aesthetic traps’ (following Gell, 1996) working to disguise the immaterial character of an off-plan house, to mediate risk, and to bring buyer and seller into a temporary alliance that appears to equalise the disparity in power between individual and the expertise of a global industry. While buyers approach the show apartments as a way of ‘trying on’ the possibility of a new home and neighbourhood, I argue that the show apartment is an embodiment of Gell’s representation of the animal trap: “a transformed representation of its maker, the hunter, and the prey animal, its victim, and of their mutual relationship”.

Chobham Manor’s show homes quite literally dazzle prospective buyers. The shine, reflective surfaces, silver frames, high-gloss floors and perfumed air create an overwhelming sensorium akin to what Gell, in the context of the Trobriand Kula flotilla canoe prow-boards, describes as psychological warfare in which art objects are deployed as weapons to cause the viewers to take leave of their senses (1998). The intricately carved prow-boards are intended to dazzle and demoralise the Trobrianders’ trading partners, causing them to offer shells and necklaces of greater value than they would be otherwise inclined to. Chobham Manor’s show apartments fulfil a similar function - overpowering prospective buyers with the surface shine of interiors that promise a fluid and obstacle-free form of dwelling and mask the absence of architectural structure or interior, home or domestic space. Gell argues that the power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody - the skill and virtuosity of the Trobriand craftsmen - and their power to cast a spell over us, so that we see the real world in an enchanted form. Prospective buyers at Chobham Manor are committing to purchase one thing - a future home - on the basis of seeing something entirely different. This is not to suggest that Chobham Manor’s show apartments, or show homes in general, are a deceit. No one is really fooled by the performance of dwelling that framed photographs or cocktail glasses suggest, which is why the uncomfortable incursion of shoes, handbag and
umbrella in the cupboard feels jarring, because it interrupts the smooth working of the show apartment as a whole. For it is as a whole, as an overall impression of the social world of a British home produced by the careful selection of totemic objects and their configuration in patterns that follow an established cultural logic, that the show apartment mediates the absence of an actual home. It must be just ‘real’ enough to appear unconsciously familiar, yet not so ‘real’ that the presence of actual human others may intrude into the promise.

There is one important distinction between Trobriand prow-boards and Chobham Manor’s show apartments in their use of technologies of enchantment: while the prow-boards are deployed between parties who have broadly equal status in order to give one of those parties an advantage, the dazzling surfaces and carefully-constructed displays of Chobham Manor’s show apartments work to mask, or even erase, enormous disparities in power and agency between buyer and seller. One function of show apartments is to create the appearance of relative equality between buyer and seller by reproducing a material environment that has a veneer of objectivity. In fact, the show home sits at the apex of a global assemblage of power, wealth, knowledge and expertise that incorporates insights from consumer psychology, marketing, architecture, design and mortgage finance, all directed towards potential buyers. In this sense, the energies and motivations of an entire global industry are bearing down on a single buyer, one individual at a time, in a process that is comparable to the machine-gambling industry that Schüll describes in *Addiction by Design* (2014). In the context of a chronic housing shortage, which in the public imaginary has reached crisis proportions, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that housebuilders are selling an illusion - an immaterial commodity in the form of a home that does not yet exist - and stimulating demand for this absent commodity by limiting its supply. This returns us to the notion that Chobham Manor’s show apartments are a critical interface between producer and consumer, global industry and individual homeowner, and between the Olympic vision for thriving communities and the intensive efforts of the placemaking team to realise this promise. However, having spent time in the show apartments and talking with the sales team on a number of occasions, it is also evident that once inside the marketing office, the
relations between household and community that dominate the vision of legacy success and drive placemaking efforts are also supplanted by relations of a different order. ‘Community’ receives only passing references in the marketing materials available to potential buyers in statements like this one, which features on Chobham Manor’s website and brochures: “One of London’s most vibrant new communities.” Display boards in the sales office reproduce images and text from the website, which focus on sports facilities in the Olympic Park, transport connections to other parts of London, and shopping, eating and entertainment at Westfield centre, and green space. One of the few direct references to community is in relation to the new ‘commercial and international districts’:

“The digital hub will harness innovation and creativity in east London with a community focus including a conference centre and a pedestrian square for broadcasting major sporting events, along with cafes, restaurants and bars.”

The style and tone of these statements and accompanying aerial images of the Olympic Park appear to speak to a generic global audience with statements like: “Destined to become one of London’s most sought-after addresses, Chobham Manor offers an extensive selection of 1–5 bedroom homes.”54 There is very little to situate Chobham Manor in its east London context or to suggest to potential buyers that the neighbourhood will be ‘stitched’ into the fringes of surrounding Leyton. The public spaces and architecture intended to engender a sense of community, which the placemaking team have worked on so carefully and intensively, appear only in CGI images of people strolling on The Greens or walking along a terraced street. On one visit to the marketing office, a potential buyer raised the question of whether Chobham Manor would be a mixed community with affordable housing. The question was quickly dismissed by one of the sales team with a comment about affordable housing “having some separate blocks”. On another occasion, a potential buyer asked whether there was a sense of community in the Olympic Park – did it feel friendly? Was the area going to be a place where people got to know their neighbours or

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54 See https://chobhammanor.co.uk, last accessed September 2018.
somewhere that overseas investors kept their money? I expected this question to prompt a long response about Chobham Manor as a family-friendly neighbourhood, The Greens as a community resource, east London as a place where ‘community’ mattered. Yet, the response given focused on the Olympic Park’s green spaces and transport connections; nothing of the intensive planning and numerous investments to make Chobham Manor a thriving community was brought into the conversation. This connects to the problem of scale discussed in chapter four, in which the transformatory powers attributed to the masterplan break down as it is translated from a Park-wide plan to neighbourhood specificity. The visionary intentions of the planners and placemaking team - to create a community that is active, sociable, inclusive and cohesive - fracture at the point where potential community members and housebuilders interact. In one sense, the show apartments are at the intersection between the legacy masterplan promise of community and the individuals that will become future citizens and might make this imaginary a reality. They both materialise and fill the void where home and community should be. However, conceptually and materially the show apartments and the off-plan homes for sale at Chobham Manor are illusory - unstable potentialities that appear to offer buyers a promise of certainty and yet are devices to mitigate the risks of property development and to orient those hazards towards the buyers. From the perspective of the sales team, the show apartments are a vehicle to demonstrate the “upgrades that are available” - meaning the improvements in the specification of kitchens and bathrooms that prospective buyers can choose to make. The imperative is to sell homes, not to build community.
Chapter 9  Void potentials and powers

This thesis describes the social, spatial and discursive ‘voids’ – territories, gaps, absences and emptinesses - which emerged as prominent and agentive entities in the placemaking team’s efforts to imagine and materialise Chobham Manor. The preceding chapters examine the conditions under which different types of voids are produced and describe the investments made by diverse actors in protecting, challenging, and sometimes overcoming, the potential that specific voids exhibit to engender, disrupt or sustain the making of ‘community’. In presenting these empirical accounts I examine the form and character of voids and deconstruct the processes by which these voids produce specific engagements and perform specific types of work. Thus far, this thesis addresses voids foremost as ethnographic objects – forms of absence that can be observed, described, and said to produce distinct materialities and relationalities. The voids described here are specific entities – each a void with a distinct form, character and generative potential that operates in different ways to constitute urban space and citizen subjectivities. Chobham Manor’s mobile garden, described in chapter seven, is a specific form of socio-spatial void that materialises political efforts to generate normative practices of urban citizenship. While the ‘social void’ discussed in chapter three is a socio-historical cultural imaginary – a symbolic void, in the sense that it is discursively constructed from an imprecise melding of myth, storytelling and evidence about empirical instances of social isolation and community dysfunction, and historical in the sense that it is a form that has temporal precedents in east London. The pre-Olympic discourse of deprivation, immorality, unproductivity and waste developed around the Lower Lea Valley described in chapter seven is a continuation of 19th century Victorian discourses of social deviance, marginality and otherness in east London. The social void is a ‘no place’ and ‘no thing’, yet its material effects are as specific and concrete as those of the socio-spatial void that is Chobham Manor’s mobile garden. Both are deployed in efforts to legitimise and advance a particular set of values that govern proper ways to be and dwell in the city, in which community as a construct of communitarian political ideology is implicated as a form of governance. In this sense, the voids described here produce and exert different forms of power, which in some
instances are totalising and destructive, and in others almost invisible in everyday life.

In this concluding chapter, I argue that this thesis contributes a new perspective on the analytical potential of the void for anthropology. As an ethnographic engagement with a series of particular and situated voids, rather than a conceptual engagement with the void as an abstract theoretical framework, this thesis demonstrates the force and reach of voids as conceptual, social, spatial and discursive entities to constitute spaces, subjects and futures in east London. The voids described here are agentive in the sense that they recruit advocates and allies to their cause, as demonstrated by the persistence of the tower block failure discourse in policy and professional practice and the symbolic threat of the ‘social void’ – absent community and its associated risks – that drives all manner of investments and interventions to create a ‘pro-social’ built environment. I argue that symbolic and spatial voids work together – first, in creating a discursive landscape of otherness, risk, threat and potential, and then materialising a void with potential through enclosure and reparation, as seen in the creation of the wasteland narrative around the Lower Lea Valley and the promise of reintegration into the social and economic life of the city. However, it is also evident that the voids examined in this thesis are not equivalent in their power or potential – they exhibit different characteristics and work in different configurations. I make this argument by presenting an emergent void typology, developed as an analytical device to shift the scale and mode of analysis from ethnographic descriptions of specific voids towards a higher-level comparison of void types. This shift reveals the underlying relationships between different void types, how in some cases they are overlapping and mutually constitutive, and in other cases have distinct temporalities. I argue this analysis builds upon and extends anthropology’s theoretical engagement with absence as an everyday presence in two ways: the first of which is scale and the second is intentionality. This thesis examines a series of voids – from the Lower Lea Valley as a void in the urban fabric, down to the thresholds of individual homes at Chobham Manor - that work together in different ways to produce and exert power. Yet the voids described here are intentional absences – purposeful spaces that are crafted to fulfil particular aims as part of a wider set of processes of urban
transformation. In this sense, the voids are deployed as technologies of governance that, in many ways, sustain neo-liberal values that seek to maximise economic returns from urban land and development. In the case of the Olympic Park, this is evident in spite of concerted efforts by individuals in government and public agencies such as the LLDC to create frameworks and policies to mitigate the effects of displacement, dislocation, rising land values and housing costs. In this sense, the voids analysed here extend anthropology’s engagement with absence beyond instances of loss, grief, immateriality and transcendence to interrogate the production of power, space and citizen subjectivities in London as a neo-liberal city.

9.1 A typology of voids

Wallman et al. argue that anthropology has a public responsibility “to move beyond the empirical and particular context to search for underlying forces, factors or principles as open research questions.” (2011, 128). In this context, Wallman et al. propose that anthropologists must “make the effort of comparison, classification, and – ultimately – typology” (ibid. 2011, 128) while recognising that any such upward shift in the scale of analysis will reduce the nuance that thick description offers. The approach I take in developing an emergent typology of voids is motivated by this work, which proposes empirically-grounded typologies of neighbourhoods in London, Rome and Zambia as a device to compare and assess their capabilities to respond to change. This approach recognises that types and typologies are analytical devices that operate in the realm of ‘ideal’ forms with distinct characteristics and identifiable degrees of sameness and difference. In practice however, the allocation of ethnographic entities to ideal types is less clear cut, and it is in this spirit that I develop an emergent void typology as a heuristic – a means to think through the relationships, patterns and forces that can be drawn out of void potentials in my data to determine whether they have broader relevance to how anthropologists think about absence, power, citizenship and urban space.
Table 3: Typology of voids

(summary table - see appendix for extended typology containing ethnographic examples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Void type</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Void strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social void: Absence of community understood in normative terms           | Moral absence<br>– Social ‘dysfunction’ - otherness as societal risk<br>– Socially & economically unproductive<br>– ‘Block’ in urban circuits (closed)<br>– Coercive power | Deliberate effort to discursively construct place/population as failing, outside (and presenting a risk to) mainstream society – a political imaginary.  
– Works to delegitimise people/practices and justify physical occupation/colonisation of territory. |
| Utopian void: Conceptual space symbolising future promise                 | Future promise of transformation<br>– Always unrealised<br>– Abstract and disconnected from lived experience (open)<br>– Potential and lack, thereby contested and open to challenge<br>– Coercive power | Symbolises promise of future transformation and success to legitimise action in the present – a political imaginary.  
– Device for building political consensus.                                    |
<p>| Terrain vague: Marginal spaces (spatially and conceptually) that engender alternative forms of social practice | Contested&lt;br&gt;– Freedom in suspension of dominant orders (threat to dominant orders)&lt;br&gt;– Dynamic &amp; productive of ‘alternative’ value systems&lt;br&gt;– Break in dominant urban circuits (open)&lt;br&gt;– Subtle power | Deliberate efforts to occupy marginal urban voids to develop alternative value systems, citizenship and placemaking practices that challenge dominant systems. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Void type</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Void strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonising void: A transitional spatial void to materialise power and occupy territory</td>
<td>- Coercive power&lt;br&gt;- Expulsion of risk through physical enclosure&lt;br&gt;- Economically productive for dominant orders&lt;br&gt;- Temporary suspension of urban circuits (closed)</td>
<td>- Enclosure of social/territorial space to neutralise risk and reincorporate ‘social/economic voids’ into urban mainstream.&lt;br&gt;- Colonises space and eradicates existing people/practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional void: Planned voids with embedded design intentions</td>
<td>- Governance and control&lt;br&gt;- Socially &amp; economically productive for dominant orders&lt;br&gt;- Subtle form of power&lt;br&gt;- Reconnection of urban circuits (open)</td>
<td>- Deliberate efforts to construct productive voids that generate sociality, citizenship, community, and forms of economic value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge void: Absence of evidence and insight</td>
<td>- Potential and lack, thereby contested and open to challenge&lt;br&gt;- Conceptual space for competitive claims-making&lt;br&gt;- Production of value (knowledge that can be transformed into capital)&lt;br&gt;- Subtle power</td>
<td>- Deliberate efforts to problematise and represent society and space, and construct production of knowledge.&lt;br&gt;- Shapes understanding of risk, recruits advocates to public policy problems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.1.1 Void relationalities

The purpose of examining void types in this manner is to clarify the forms of relationships that exist between different voids and to interrogate the ways they produce and exert power. I argue there are three distinct relationalities that emerge from this typology that can be theorised in relation to the Olympic Park and to processes of urban transformation in London more widely.

First is the relationship between the social void - a symbolic absence of community that is configured as a moral risk to society - and the utopian void - a promise of an ideal community, an abstract concept that is disconnected from lived experience and thereby always remains unrealised. As argued in chapter three, the social void is an aesthetic form that has meaning only in relation to its symbolic opposite. One is an archetype of social alienation, risk and disorder, the other a normative ideal of cohesion, social connection and a self-sufficient community. In this sense, the social/utopian void is an imaginary that acquires form and force through the specific materialities of language, speech and visual media. The social/utopian void pairing is deployed in a deliberate effort to discursively situate particular people, practices and places as other and outside of mainstream society, and in so doing, to expose the gap between the two states – risk and potential, failure and success, chaos and order. The social/utopian void relation produces a particular form of coercive power; it works by delegitimising groups of people in particular places to create the conditions for social displacement and territorial occupation. Furthermore, it acts both as a means to undermine non-normative communities and to symbolise the societal risk presented by the absence of community.

In analytical terms, the social void can be applied to make sense of the creation of a wasteland narrative around the Lower Lea Valley, and the displacement of the Clays Lane Estate and the Manor Gardens Allotments. However, applying a different temporal frame to the analysis shows the social void/utopian void relation as a force that has shaped the transformation of east London over a much longer period. Victorian discourses of risk, otherness and normlessness in east London neighbourhoods (Wohl 2002; Choi 2001) deploy the aesthetic figure of the
social/utopian void to legitimise the demolition of slum neighbourhoods and their replacement with dwellings reflecting middle class values and moralities (Gilbert 2007; Dennis 1989; Gaskell 1987). Taking this long view, it is evident that a cyclical pattern of creating, containing and de-risking the social void can be mapped to successive political and ideological regimes – from the efforts of Victorian social reformers, to the ‘failure’ and subsequent demolition of high-rise housing across east London, estate regeneration and renewal programmes, and latterly in the reclaiming of the Lower Lea Valley. The power dynamics vary in each of these instances – Victorian social reformers were commonly philanthropists drawing on private capital to effect social change where the state would not, while the demolition of high-rise social housing has been driven by the state, and latterly by public-private partnerships. Yet in each case, the social void is a discursive technology to foreground risk, legitimise spatial transformation, and create the conditions under which material voids – construction and development sites – can be produced. This recursive dynamic is evident in the Olympic Park and at numerous sites across London that have been discursively made ‘social voids’ through narratives of alienation, dysfunction, risk and otherness to legitimise redevelopment, including post-war modernist estates like Robin Hood Gardens and the Heygate Estate, both of which have now been demolished, and the Carpenters Estate overlooking the Olympic Park, for which the future remains uncertain.

The social/utopian void is implicated in another void relation, which materially and temporally occupies a very different space. As discussed in chapter seven, the imaginary of the social/utopian void creates the conditions for the enclosure of social and/or territorial space and the materialisation of an actual spatial void. In the context of the Olympic Park, the wasteland discourse constructed around the Lower Lea Valley was a significant force in mobilising support for the Olympic legacy and thereby part of an apparatus that enabled the physical enclosure of the Olympic Park site and the creation of a transitional spatial void – a colonising entity that materialises efforts to neutralise alterity and risk. Like the social/utopian void configuration, this void type is a form of coercive spatialised power. Unlike the social/utopian void, it is a physical, as well as symbolic, entity that operates in
different material and temporal registers – enclosing and occupying space with construction hoardings, security and surveillance, and suspending social and spatial connections to networks and surrounding territories. Yet as the examples from chapter seven illustrate, the spatial enclosure of the Olympic Park construction site did not entirely eradicate the alternative uses and practices that had previously given the Lower Lea Valley its *terrain vague* status. Unauthorised incursions and transgressions into the Olympic construction zone continued and diverse creative engagements with the blue perimeter fence enclosing the Olympic site sought to challenge official narratives of regeneration with local dialogues about forced development (‘The Blue Fence Project by StudioSuperniche | Dezeen’ n.d.; Jones et al. 2009).

A third form of relationality is evident in the imbrication of intentional voids. These planned voids, such as Chobham Manor’s mobile garden, public streets or neighbourhood ‘Greens’, are deliberate efforts to engender particular forms of everyday social interaction through overlapping configurations of ‘empty’ space, material surroundings and social possibility. This dynamic occurs at the intersection of ‘empty’ spaces and material surfaces, where Chobham Manor’s bricks, windows and front doors materialise the intent to generate a series of socially productive voids where community can be formed. As described in chapter five, these intentional voids exert subtle forms of power that infiltrate everyday regimes. As with any typology, these examples of void types are intended to reveal possible patterns and relationships, not to provide a complete or precise classification of concepts. The ethnographic data does not fit neatly into mutually exclusive conceptual categories; for example, Chobham Manor’s show home can be considered a utopian void, just as the Olympic Park legacy promise – both are abstract potentials, although they operate at dramatically different scales. As discussed in chapter eight, the show home operates as an aesthetic trap (following Gell) that de-risks the absence of an actual home by offering an illusory promise of certainty. Yet it is a device to mitigate the risks of property development and to redirect those risks towards buyers - its subtle power working to disguise the power asymmetry in the relationship between buyer and seller.
9.2 Void types and power

Shifting from ethnography to typology serves to illustrate the concrete differences between void types. Here, Ohnuki-Tierney’s semiotic analysis of zero signifiers in Japanese ‘folk’ culture offers a valuable framework for considering how to draw out these differences. In semiotic systems, the void is a structural entity – “a spatio-temporal empty space in a representation” (Tanaka-Ishii 2013, 1) – that configures content by creating absences and intervals that provide meaning to other material. In this context, voids are not merely empty spaces where something has been left out, but are the gaps upon which meaning is contingent. Ohnuki-Tierney describes the distinct forms and meanings that such voids take in various aspects of Japanese life by analysing how zero signifiers are configured. Zero signifiers lack material representation by linguistic labels or objects, yet in the instances Ohnuki-Tierney describes, their presence is predicated on the use of other material signs; they are structured absences in an otherwise material system and the context in which each void is used, and its precise meaning, is different. The three instances described in this work include the absent pronoun, the *ma* and the *mu*. The absent pronoun is deleted from speech because it is understood to be too direct, and thereby offensive, and replaced instead with changes in speech register that convey the social status, associations, and deference of the speaker, spoken to, and absent subjects – “it is the indexical self constructed in relation to the others in the discourse” (*ibid.* 1994, 63) through a structured void. The *ma* is a deliberate temporal or spatial gap that gives structure and meaning to other entities, such as emptiness in a Japanese garden, intervals in speech, or space left around objects in the home. While the *ma* is without specific meaning, its presence assigns meaning by creating an amount of time or space to intensify the awareness of the material that *is* in the immediate environment such as a painting, poem or theatre. *Mu* - meaning nothingness or emptiness - is understood in cosmological terms as a state of non-being or no-thing, an absence that cannot be objectively grasped. Ohnuki-Tierney describes *mu* as the ‘hollow centre’ around which all other materials circulate. In this sense, *mu* has no meaning yet sustains infinite possibilities for meaning, which in semiotic terms makes it both full and empty of meaning. What is relevant here is the observation that voids take

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distinct forms and operate in particular ways to produce particular meanings and effects. The void types described in this concluding chapter also take specific forms and exhibit different relationalities. The social/utopian void type has a relational form; its meaning resides in the gap between the two void states and one loses its significance and power without the other. The colonising void is strengthened by a relationship with the social/utopian void, which works on its behalf to recruit advocates and allies for urban transformation, yet, it can also operate successfully without this support. The intentional voids work to fill the space created by urban transformation with new socialities intent on moulding urban citizens, fostering consociate relations and building community.

Meskell acknowledges the mobilisation of absence as an effective political strategy and the use of disappearance and erasure as tactic of control and cleansing (2010). The ethnographic data presented in this thesis demonstrates how social, spatial and discursive voids are crafted to fulfil particular ideological intentions in the Olympic Park. In showing the dynamic and contingent nature of these voids, and the ways in which they exert coercive and subtle forms of power, this thesis demonstrates how voids are agentive entities in the production of urban space and citizen subjectivities. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates how these potentials can be theorised to argue that the voids described here are not a product of urban transformation, but are constitutive of urban transformation: making and unmaking the social, material and imagined city.
Figure 40: Chobham Manor at the start of fieldwork, April 2014.

Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
Figure 41: Chobham Manor in September 2018.

Image: Saffron Woodcraft.
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Appendices

Appendix: Extended typology of voids including examples of empirical data that have been used to formulate the void typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Void type</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Material/temporal registers</th>
<th>Void strategy</th>
<th>Empirical data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social void: *Absence of community understood in normative terms* | – Moral absence  
– Social ‘dysfunction’  
– Otherness as societal risk  
– Marginality as threat  
– Socially & economically unproductive  
– Contested  
– ‘Block’ in urban circuits (closed)  
– Coercive power  
– Negative space for citizens (potential space for power holder) | – Discursive  
– Textual  
– Visual  
– Present | – Deliberate effort to discursively construct place/population as failing, outside (and presenting a risk to) mainstream society – a political imaginary.  
– Works to delegitimise people/practices and justify physical occupation/colonisation of territory. | – Tower block ‘failure’ discourse  
– Lower Lea Valley pre-Olympics  
– Clays Lane Estate |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Void type</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Material/temporal registers</th>
<th>Void strategy</th>
<th>Empirical data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Utopian void: Conceptual space symbolising future promise | – Future promise of transformation  
– Always unrealised  
– Abstract and disconnected from lived experience (open)  
– Potential *and* lack, thereby contested and open to challenge  
– Coercive power  
– Affirmative space (for power holder) | – Discursive  
– Textual  
– Visual  
– Future - always pending | – Symbolises promise of future transformation and success to legitimise action in the present – a political imaginary.  
– Device for building political consensus.  
– Works with social void to legitimise political action, can also work alone. | – Olympic Legacy promise  
– Olympic Legacy masterplan vision for Lower Lea Valley  
– Chobham Manor  
– Show apartment |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrain vague: <em>Marginal spaces (spatially and conceptually) that engage alternative forms of social practice</em></td>
<td>– Contested</td>
<td>– Physical spaces</td>
<td>Deliberate efforts to occupy marginal urban voids to develop alternative value systems, citizenship and placemaking practices that challenge dominant systems.</td>
<td>– Lower Lea Valley pre-Olympics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Freedom in suspension of dominant orders (threat to dominant orders)</td>
<td>– Social practices</td>
<td></td>
<td>– Manor Gardens Allotments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Marginality and otherness as potential (risk)</td>
<td>– Discursive</td>
<td></td>
<td>– Hackney Wick artists collectives</td>
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<td>– Dynamic &amp; productive of ‘alternative’ value systems</td>
<td>– Textual</td>
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<td>– Break in dominant urban circuits (open)</td>
<td>– Visual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Affirmative space for citizens (negative space for state/capital power)</td>
<td>– Present</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Subtle power</td>
<td>– Temporary</td>
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| Colonising void: A transitional spatial void to materialise power and occupy territory | - Coercive power  
- Expulsion of risk through physical enclosure  
- Economically productive for dominant orders  
- Temporary suspension of urban circuits (closed)  
- Negative space for citizens (potential space for power holder) | - Physical spaces  
- Discursive  
- Textual  
- Visual  
- Transitional  
- Present  
- Pending threat | - Enclosure of social/territorial space to neutralise risk and reincorporate ‘social/economic voids’ into urban mainstream.  
- Colonises space and eradicates existing people/practices. | - Olympic Park construction site  
- Chobham Manor  
- Regeneration sites across London |
| Intentional void: Planned voids with embedded design intentions           | - Governance and control  
- Socially & economically productive for dominant orders  
- Subtle form of power  
- Mimesis (of terrain vague/of ‘home’)  
- Reconnection of urban circuits (open)  
- Affirmative space (sometimes) | - Physical  
- Discursive  
- Textual  
- Visual  
- Present  
- Temporary and permanent | - Deliberate efforts to construct productive voids that generate sociality, citizenship, community, and forms of economic value. | - Mobile Garden City  
- The Greens at Chobham Manor  
- Streets, public realm, defensible space  
- Show apartments |
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| Knowledge void: *Absence of evidence and insight* | – Potential *and* lack, thereby contested and open to challenge  
– Conceptual space for competitive claims-making  
– Production of value (knowledge that can be transformed into capital)  
– Subtle power  
– Affirmative space (sometimes) | – Discursive  
– Textual  
– Visual  
– Past and present | – Deliberate efforts to problematise and represent society and space, and construct production of knowledge.  
– Shapes understanding of risk, recruits advocates to public policy problems. | – Tower block ‘failure’ discourse  
– Lack of expert knowledge about how social and material interactions that ‘produce’ place and community  
– Social metrics |