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Road – Gate – Enclosure: Elite securityscapes in London and Mexico City

Emma R. Morales [a]*, Rowland Atkinson[b] and Katie Higgins[c]

[a] Departmento del Hábitat y Desarrollo Urbano, ITESO, Tlaquepaque, Mexico https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7675-6419;
[b] Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9801-9380; Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8624-8044

ABSTRACT

The demand for security by urban elites has driven the subtle transformation of their neighbourhoods – and the wider city – with a more closed and fragmented public realm, 'anti-disorder' design strategies and increasing control. This article explores signature elements of securityscapes in affluent domains of Mexico City and London, two very different cities yet with similarly fragmenting and inhibiting modes of urban design. Extensive immersion, systematic observation and visual matrixes are used to counterpose key design elements and atmospheric qualities of the securityscape: securitisation, privacy and fortification, transforming the 'path-portal-place' elements of the city into a logic around 'road-gate-enclosure'.

1. Introduction

This article contributes to discussions about the design features and related atmospheric character of urban public spaces through a critical series of observations of selected elite neighbourhoods in London and Mexico City and their 'securityscapes', spaces oriented to the provision of safety in city settings (Low and Maguire 2019). It presents a consideration on how key aspects of urban design in these spaces shape the wider experience and aesthetic qualities of space, affect, mobility flows, and exert forms of social-spatial control over users of these spaces. These interests are shaped by an interest in elite variants of what Sendra and Sennett (2020) call 'passage territories' and the experience of passing through (or being deterred or blocked from) different spaces in the city. The analysis is based on a concern with the privatisation and increasing control of domains within the city in general, and in affluent districts in particular. The approach was grounded in the extensive walking, observation and time in place in key neighbourhoods and territories of affluent urbanites, explore both the design and aesthetics of such spaces but also engaging the more intangible textures and atmosphere of these spaces (Stefansdottir 2018). The work identified a surprising overlap in elements of these spaces' visual, physical and symbolic qualities. The article, drawing on a range of interviews with academic, policy and local actors and in-depth observational and photographic work, offers an interpretation of these diverse contexts; it also discusses the implications of public access, participation and exclusion generated by urban design strategies deployed in elite and super-affluent urban spaces.

In an attempt to create 'well-integrated' organised urban environments after World War II, planners and architects have often made the inadvertent contribution of creating

more homogeneous, less inviting and indeed more fragmented small territories (Janoschka 2002) and spaces that are disconnected from the public urban realm (Sendra and Sennett 2020). While contemporary urban design practitioners tend to focus on the spatial, aesthetic and functional aspects of neighbourhood planning, they do not always evaluate the wider political and social ramifications of implemented measures. In many cities, design has been co-opted as part of a wider armoury of strategies to pacify, coordinate and exclude/include social groups and users stratified by spending power and social class (Zukin 1995; Atkinson 2003). This article focuses on two cities: Mexico City in the global south and London in the north. These cities possess differentiated yet nevertheless surprisingly overlapping strategies regarding urban design and public space management. These strategies have increasingly been seen as exclusionary and divisive as they operate in urban residential (Wiesel 2018a), leisure and shopping districts (Flint 2006). However, such strategies are often heightened in elite areas, raising important questions about the relative accessibility and inclusivity of urban space.

Intensifying social inequalities in many cities have made them focal points of debate regarding the acceptability of elite withdrawal and its effect on urban life more broadly (Andreotti, Le Galès and Moreno-Fuentes 2015). While the discussion has focused on questions of taxation and contribution (Piketty 2020) and forms of segregation and disaffiliation by higher income and wealthy urbanites (Atkinson 2020; Wiesel 2018b), physical boundaries and internal design measures now seen in many affluent areas may be considered as key elements of a wider 'disembedding' of more advantaged urban groups out of urban physical and social space (Rodgers 2004). In this sense, forms of social 'exit' may be facilitated by urban design features that include gates, street furniture (or its absence) and varying symbolic markings of enclosure and spatial demarcation. Such strategies enable a kind of 'cover' or cloaking of the presence of high-income and wealthy urbanites while also enabling the removal of those who may be unwanted. COVID-19 has further intensified elites' submergence from public sight into zones of relative refuge, hygiene and distance from pervasive but negotiable risks. These elements may assist in the stratified management of urban populations, working in subtle ways to achieve feelings of wholesomeness and safety for the wealthy and high-status groups while restating or intensifying modes of exclusion and symbolic violence towards less well-off groups (Ureta 2008).

Concerns regarding urban social and physical divisions underpinned the project, which sought to consider the subtle design strategies through which city spaces and urban society are becoming increasingly fragmented. Both cities share, to varying degrees, an experience of urban space that is linked to the central and delegated management of diverse sources of risk. This aspect of city governance has driven a range of design and public space co-ordination strategies that have led to the fragmentation of management, matched by complex negotiations and avoidance strategies by private elite citizens (Krozer 2018; Atkinson and Blandy 2016). These calculated mobility strategies and residential practices are also tied to distinctive design features in the destination districts and prestige neighbourhoods of each city visited extensively — Knightsbridge, Mayfair and Highgate in London, and Polanco, different sections of Las Lomas and Santa Fe in Mexico City (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Elite Areas in London and Mexico City (Maps by E. Morales, 2021) See Figure 1 at end of document

The focus of analysis is both the neighbourhood spaces and commercial or leisure zones of each city. This work builds on White's (1999) influential taxonomy of urban fabrics in terms of paths, portals and places. Working with this influential schema suggests that its focus on broadly open city forms and social constitutions requires greater cognisance of how deepening privatization and inequality in many city settings have generated more circumscribed and private city contexts. This is neither to say that public space has been eradicated or that the rich live fully private lives, but rather to recognise the careful negotiations of the city by the affluent and their connection to design and architectural practices that help to facilitate a selective engagement with street-level urban life outside the home. In both cities, it is easy to find wealthier subdistricts with the installation of gates across streets, enclosed and guarded residences, and discrete zones of consumption whose symbolic boundaries deter those who do not belong. Both cities display, as presented here, similarities in their design, ambience and the way that spaces are used to accommodate and extend the capacities of affluent users to submerge themselves from street view or find hyper-secure and socially delimited destinations in which to enjoy and consume a variety of experiences.

The structure of the article is as follows. Section two offers a glimpse of the main characteristics of wealth and elite urban configurations in London and Mexico City. Section three presents the methods used to analyse these elite neighbourhoods based on three key thematics, or signatures elements, which emerged from a comparative visual analysis of the sites: securitisation, privacy and fortification. Section four discusses some of the key similarities and differences drawn from observation of the public life around these elements.

2. The case studies: Mexico City and London

In the last four decades, Mexico City and London have experienced an increase in wealth inequality. Billionaires in Mexico have not increased in number, but the concentration of wealth is higher. The 1% constituted by 145,000 millionaires now account for 64% of the nation's wealth (Esquivel-Hernández 2015). The pandemic is contributing to the concentration; thirteen of Mexico City's businesspersons included in the *2021 Forbes' World's Billionaires List* are worth one third more than in 2020 (Dollan 2021). Elite groups have often built their fortune on state-led policies like privatising public companies, deregulation or concessions (Esquivel-Hernández 2015). There is a link between the affluent and weak regulatory and fiscal systems protecting their investments, properties, inheritances and lifestyles.

Mexico City's affluent groups share similar attitudes, behaviours, expectations and routines with the global super-rich (Krozer 2018). Over the last decade, the ranks of the wealthy have expanded in the city alongside a booming luxury real estate market in elite neighbourhoods like Polanco, Las Lomas and Santa Fe. These spaces are increasingly bounded by walls and gates as a result of fears of burglary, kidnapping and extortion (Villarreal 2020). London's prime real estate market remains distinctive in offering

relatively open neighbourhoods, but recent real estate projects aimed at the wealthiest have also introduced more defensible strategies and spatial configurations that offer parallels with the Mexican context.

London remains a distinctive city in the European context. Despite the existence of other urban contexts with finance-oriented urban economies, like Paris and Frankfurt. Its economic pre-eminence brings with it a distinctive urbanism shaped by a particularly deep and historical set of relationship between capital, wealth and the, often regressive, effects of financialisation on urban life in which material poverty and exclusion remain significant (Cooper, Hubbard and Lees 2020; Hodkinson 2019). London's inequalities have endured due to the city's post-colonial ambitions to be a global centre of finance (Norfield 2016), cementing a political-economic worldview in which questions of social care and support have been neglected while finance and investment have been protected and supported. This socio-political context has yielded a distinctive architectural and design landscape comprising a range of measures that speak of forms of subtle segregation and social inequality; these include the use of 'poor doors' to mark the entrances to affordable and social housing in new developments for the lower-paid (Minton 2012; Rishbeth and Rogaly 2018). At the other end of the scale, the city is now home to around 100 billionaires, 3,500 super-rich residents and around 350,000 classed as wealthy (Atkinson 2020). Alongside shifts in the world economy, the cosmopolitanisation of London's wealth elites has ushered in changes to the aesthetic and design preferences of new members of the global super-rich who are drawn to the city.

3. Methods

This work focused on the urban design elements of key residential and public spaces lived in or used by the wealthiest residents and visitors of each city over a period of almost ten years. In both cities, policymakers, real estate agents and local key actors, including residents, were interviewed. However, the primary methodological approach involved the appraisal and evaluation of public spaces in, through and around a set of emblematic neighbourhoods, leisure and commercial districts. Extensive and frequent visits took place in both cities, including immersion in key public spaces and sustained, repeated and standardised observations, supported by photo documentation, of the physical appearance, social practices and design elements of the sites. Extensive notebooks with discussions of findings were kept as a team in order to identify common and unique features, uses and apparatuses. The authors documented features such as the deployment of street furniture, architectural design features including walls, gates and windows, as well as the visual, aesthetic elements of urban security elements (Nyman 2020).

The selected case study areas in London focused on Knightsbridge, Mayfair and Highgate, while those in Mexico City focused on Polanco, Las Lomas and Santa Fe, reflecting leisure, public and residential spaces in which the most affluent urbanites circulate in both cities. Extensive pedestrian and car touring in both cities allowed observation of how the neighbourhoods and intermediate spaces expressed distinctive or monoform aesthetic and design practices. The particular interest was, of course, in

methods of design that were used to regulate, monitor and control users and usage of these spaces and districts. Pedestrian touring was used in most neighbourhoods in both cities, except for some areas in Lomas de Chapultepec and Bosques de las Lomas as a result of the lack of pedestrian presence. When walking, the team experienced the inconvenience of being constantly approached by private security personnel from the embassies, offices and residential areas asking the purpose of their presence, which made sustained observation of this kind close to impossible.

Due to the highly surveilled nature and frequent access constraints on each site, different strategies were adopted (Nyman 2020). In London, walking through all the different neighbourhoods was the main strategy (though cars were also used in more suburban areas) of understanding the 'phantasmagoria' and seamless connectivity of the sites and spaces that make up these wealthy environs (Knowles 2017). In Mexico City, some areas, particularly in the Lomas sector, required the use of cars, parking at different gates or at specific nodal points within these districts (notably shopping malls, restaurants and offices) as well as walking the districts as far as this was possible. Key policymakers and academics were contacted in both countries to discuss insights and supplemented the analysis with available real estate intelligence and planning policy data.

Data gathering took place through street-level and mobile observation. The team visited the key sites to develop a joint appreciation of the signature features, similarities, differences, connections and contrasts related to each elite area's securitisation features and design elements. The team focused on three key elements of observation: residential spaces, destinations and circulations/mobilities. Extensive diaries were recorded to monitor the ambient look and visual impact of design strategies, and intensive photographic records were systematically made and thematically coded and compared into corresponding matrixes (distilled versions of this analytical approach are given below). Visual data examined and coded by each researcher and key exemplars of design features were placed into a simple matrix that was divided between the cities and then by different types of features, such as residential gates. This approach helped reduce the complexity of the data gathered and discuss it in relation to the notes and reflections stemming from the site visits. This matrix made it possible to reduce and develop a coding framework from which emerged the key signatures elements of the securityscapes reported below.

Team discussions yielded three key analytic categories that emerged from the consideration of the aesthetic and ambient elements of design practices in the neighbourhoods. Long lists of adjectives, concepts, notes and ideas were applied to the matrixes and compared to enable the development of our thinking about commonalities and differences in these spaces and their effect on temporary visitors to these spaces. We then used these to develop a visual lexicon (see matrixes below) that would help capture the more impressionistic feel and experience generated by the design elements in the sites. The finalised set of core analytic themes identified through this analytic strategy were security, privacy and fortification, discussed below in more detail.

4. Security, Privacy and Fortification: The street life and design of affluent public space in the two cities

4.1 Security

Elite groups in cities like London and Mexico City have increasingly introduced securitisation strategies to protect their lifestyles and everyday actions. While affluent residents appear to adopt similar strategies to keep 'safe'. Still, in practice, the display, communication, and the visual appearance of these strategies have noteworthy differences. During observation in affluent neighbourhoods in both cities, it was common to find private security companies, dog patrols, surveillance systems (CCTV), monitoring all-inclusive security and smart-home solutions. However, there were considerable differences in the associated aesthetic practices and thus the more intangible 'feel' and atmosphere of the different spaces. For example, defended wealthy neighbourhoods in Mexico City tended to have a bunker style, or reinforced look, meant to dissuade the presence of outsiders. One notable effect of such architecture is that it renders invisible interior and exterior spaces (such as gardens) (see Figure 2). Depending on the size of the house or apartment building, it is common to see security booths with one-sided mirrors. In the areas where the wealthier residents live, bodyguards may be present waiting in their cars or visible presence standing nearby. Access control in these zones is often obvious and visible, with most apartment buildings also having private security guards or other control systems like biometric systems or QR readers.

See Figure 2. Matrix 1 – Security. (Photographs by E. Morales and R. Atkinson, 2018-2020)

In the London site visits, private policing, CCTV cameras and emergency response services were visible in the study areas. However, such displays were often more discreet. Bodyguards and private security personnel are rarer, except at large mansions or houses where particularly wealthy residents live. Despite this slightly more subdued appearance of security, such spaces retain a feeling of intimidation to non-residents generated by strategically placed signage on walls, pavements and streetlight posts indicating the presence of surveillance systems (CCTV), private property, dog patrols and emergency response systems. In many locations, private security patrols are also evident, supplementing or appearing in lieu of formal public policing to act as stewards and guardians of residences. Yet even with these systems of regulation and detection, considerable effort is expended to orchestrate the appearance of an open democratic space. Despite the general porosity of space, the effect of signage and street-level staff and 'help' has the effect of offering sufficient exclusionary cues and symbolic elements to make these spaces uncomfortable or exclusionary for poorer urbanites.

Securitisation strategies in the affluent zones of both cities seek in large part to discourage, rather than to simply dispel, the presence of outsiders. In the Mexico City case, such strategies appear more visible, not only in terms of security personnel but also through the use of unambiguously 'hard' defensive features - electrified fences or gates with sharp spikes. The London case has a more subtle approach that is often almost indefinable in its resulting feel and atmosphere where gating and walls, though

present in many cases, are not additionally added to with more aggressive measures of defence – flat topped, yet high, brick walls and railings remain the default boundary markers. The design and maintenance of these areas generate a distinctive look conferred by the application of luxury materials (high gloss painted doors with multiple locks, tiled walkways and always immaculate cleanliness) and visible staffing (food delivery drivers, decorators, gardeners and multiple other personal service providers). The overall ambience can be described as one of close care and attention, whether to issues of security or to upkeep. The effect is to create the sense of a highly serviced and regulated space that speaks of enormous privilege and comfort, marking it as less comfortable for those not used to this level of manicuring and detail.

Residential securitisation in both cities emanates from similar drivers – the pursuit of status through a conscious display (or indeed lack of it) and overt security in design. However, the implementation of these drivers and their embodiment in the development and design of elite residential space is more visible and intimidating in Mexico City than in London (See Figure 2). A key difference between the cities is the scale and intensity of usage of connecting passageways for affluent residents' mobility needs. For example, London's affluent residents are usually comfortable with short walks for activities such as shopping, taking children to school or walking the dog. Mexican affluent groups are more likely to send someone else to run errands and walk as a leisure or sports activity; most activities, even going to a convenience shop, will be done by private automobile. This pattern can be seen when spending extensive time observing the users and social patterns of public and leisure spaces.

Another key difference is the more evidently enclosed or 'bubble-wrapped' nature of mobility in Mexico City, with affluent residents making extensive use of particularly large SUV-style vehicles, in some cases adapted with additional layers of target-hardening. This superficial difference belies a growing overlap as London has seen a significant expansion in the use of private and rented vehicles that adopt similar aesthetics of relatively intimidating and more militarised styling. Blacked-out rear windows, internal and external-facing security cameras and other shielding technologies (such as tinted or mirrored windows) are all readily apparent in London's streets. Analogous forms of mobility pathways permeate the middle- and upper-income areas of both cities. In this respect, site visits exposed that the wealthiest urban neighbourhoods and most luxury and upscale commercial and leisure districts are adapted or designed to provide clear drop-off points for quick access or enveloping underground car parking with internal lift access that assists a total avoidance of street-level presence.

These forms of visible enclosure and portals (manned doorways, car park entrances or ramps) help to give the impression of domains that lie beyond the limits of the immediate and relatively public streetscape. To some extent, more limits on such design measures are imposed in the case of London, where planning protections make large-scale physical adaptations to the built environment more difficult. Yet even here, underground car parking, car lifts in newer prime residential developments and basement extensions have become widespread design elements (Baldwin, Holroyd and Burrows 2019). Shielded cars have become a growing market in Mexico. Their wider effect in the public domain is a temporary and mobile security aesthetic. Where seen

passing through elite neighbourhoods or parked in front of exclusive clubs and restaurants, they offer an intimidating look. In some cases, small motorcades of bodyguards accompany the armoured vehicles of the city's richest residents. Attached to these imposing uses in physical public space; some restaurants and clubs provide special reserved valet parking arrangements for them recessed from the street.

The presence of police cars in both countries feels very different. In general, London streets have quite visible police cars and vans. These aspects of securitisation do not often impact the functionality of particular spaces and are more likely to form temporary emergency surges when required. As for Mexico City, in some cases, policing and transportation is intended to be visible to discourage and prevent crime. A clear example of this is the use by the city government of police escort services for people transporting large amounts of cash from or to banks, often accompanied by shotgun-wielding guards who monitor passers-by.

Cars are highly valued forms of mobility in both city contexts, but their use of the city is very different. Luxury cars in London are often found parked in the streets of elite neighbourhoods in plain sight. In Mexico City, such vehicles are usually 'hidden' inside the garages of houses or guarded by valet parking services. This is a sign of status and a sign of not being 'outside' the protection bubble within destinations. Interviews suggested that, for London, this appears to be more about protecting individuals from the inconvenience and insecurity of using parking infrastructure; in Mexico City, it is seen as helping to protect the car from theft or damage.

Securityscape elements vary considerably between the cities. Extensive observation in both cities indicates that the primary destinations that affluent groups visit on a daily basis are shopping areas, schools and universities, country clubs or restaurants. Mexican luxury shops and exclusive restaurants are usually protected by heavily armed public and private security guards. There is also a semi-permanent police presence outside high-end shopping malls as a precautionary practice. In London, this kind of aggressive display of arms and protective gear is more or less absent, aside from the sporadic placing of armed police in relation to terrorist threats. The London Metropolitan Police has a reasonably high visible presence, mostly cars, but very few foot patrols; but there are many subtle or informal 'guardians' in the form of security guards, door staff (mostly men but also women) or porters wearing Victorian-style uniforms outside five-star hotels and restaurants. The same type of staff is seen in elite Mexican destinations, but they are often presented as exclusive personalised staff rather than as security enforcers. In both cities, they play a crucial role in securitising places, as with five-star hotel front doors where they act as scanners of who is coming in, presented as a form of 'greeting' while checking clients. The same processing of space and entering groups is seen in many elite shops and restaurants. The staff here observe arriving visitors, whether a person has arrived by car or taxi or if they are a 'regular' and so on. In both cities, restaurants often have exclusive isolated areas or luxury shops which open out of hours for particular clients to create a further partitioning of space and further layers of security in which the invisibility of clients is clearly evident.

Multiple forms and distinct methods of managing and designing the public spaces associated with the wealthiest and elite zones exist in both study cities. White's (1999) typology of public space in terms of three constituent elements: paths, portals and places, is useful here as a basis for thinking about the kind of spaces studied. For White, portals are 'gateways' into the 'places' connected by 'paths.' According to White, the quality of space depends on the potential experiences, participation and 'invitational power' of these, essentially open, spaces. As we begin to find increased levels of securitisation in elite urban spaces, we seem to move from ideas of integrated paths, portals and places to the impression of gate-to-gate mobilities deployed in defensive ways by wealthy residents. In Mexico City, portals to key elite destinations are only 'inviting' or indeed capable of being opened by those who have the means or displays of symbolic capital necessary to pass through them; paths are made to feel safer via a police presence or design elements like emergency police buttons placed on poles in public spaces.

Overt discrimination is not legal in both cities; in Mexico City, there is a legal obligation to present a 'No Discrimination' poster at the entrance of all commercial establishments. Nevertheless, there are various ways to make outsiders feel uncomfortable or inadequate. London's elite spaces can be exclusive and unwelcoming if one does not fit embodied ideals of taste and particular displays of clothing; these places are also highly rule-bound, including conventions on dress. Guardians of these spaces are also gatekeepers, such as doormen, and though usually seen with a sense of conviviality, informality and smiles, their presence also acts as a form of monitoring that is tacitly understood as a method of signalling the expectations and requirements of access. Here smartly dressed, physically fit (male) staff are presented at the front of the store or restaurant, acting as eyes and ears.

4.2 Privacy

The second key signature in both city contexts relates to modes of privacy (the relative capacity of wealthier urbanites to remain unmonitored) and the privatisation of public spaces (the related process by which the regulation and management of intervening spaces are delegated to forms of private ownership and regulation). The analysis of this signature element's aesthetic and experiential aspects both overlap and disjuncture. In London, some of the changes and features seen in very affluent residential spaces are associated with the increasingly international basis of the city's wealthy elite. This trend has seen a related tendency to design and create residential spaces capable of allowing a more withdrawn engagement with public space. London is a historically open and more or less democratic space (Sendra and Sennett 2020), but there has been a notable and creeping shift in the general character of residential and public spaces, with gates, symbolic gating (such as the use of booms across some streets), conscription of land and space to private ownership and other strategies designed to reduce state responsibilities and, ostensibly at least, to improve maintenance and social regulation (Minton 2012). Mexico City shares elements of these strategies, but with an even more militarised aesthetic via the presence of (armed) private guards who are almost ubiquitously placed in residential, public and leisure spaces. Despite these differences, each city's spatial syntax shows how this signature element offered many similarities.

In both cities, the topology of the elite built environment is predicated on privacy and control, shifting from the tall townhouses and tower blocks of central London to the larger standalone homes and residences of the inner suburbs to the north and southwest with larger homes, gardens and external boundaries. The desire for privacy comes to imprint and bind together the concrete experience of these social spaces. Recognisably elite and very affluent neighbourhoods respond through design, construction and management to assist this pursuit of privacy and distinction.

A key element of the aesthetic composition of elite residential space can be seen in the subtlety with which privacy is enabled. Here the substance of social life takes place behind closed doors, within homes, in private leisure settings and in a much more truncated mode at street level (particularly so in Mexico City) and via the use of automobiles that allow shielded engagement with the wider city. In many ways, these neighbourhoods exemplify what Sendra and Sennett (2020) define as the overdetermined and 'brittle' city, a space in which only a limited range of behaviours and uses are possible or permitted and in which the visibility of disorder or social difference is directly regulated or limited. Such points indicate a more private subset or subspace of the cities in which many elements of elite residential life stand out for how outsiders are monitored or made more manageable. These design elements include the use of street pillboxes or guardhouses, the frequent use of CCTV systems, street patrols (more so in Mexico City) and low levels of social engagement with semi-public space, which means the presence of arrivals is only made even more obvious.

In both cities, the analysis of the systematic and repeated visual arrangement of elite spaces, or their syntax, highlighted a highly managed form of social withdrawal, which enabled privacy and the control of space. This withdrawal is achieved through high walls and the gating of thoroughfares and entranceways. However, a closer analysis of field notes and photographs also highlights important differences in this landscape. In Mexico City, affluent residential space is notably marked by the frequent use of 'blind curtain walls' (acknowledging the term curtain to describe the exterior walls of castles). These are generally tall, more or less featureless boundaries that suggest the almost total disappearance of the domestic residence's street-level visibility in many cases. This form is distinct from the traditional Mexican house, which, depending on weather conditions, would tend to sit in relation to the street itself (open porch, see-through gates, main door open during the day). Today, entrance to the home in elite neighbourhoods is frequently made through the garage, usually a remote control–operated drive-in mode of discreet access. Vegetation is also here deployed to further enhance privacy and 'defensive planting' (Armitage 2013) with thorns or high structural integrity deters the possibility of intrusion. The look of these spaces is withdrawn, quiet and manicured, but its aura is also one of intimidation, offering little to passers-by and only a partial or entirely absent sociability. The streets in these zones are very quiet aside from occasional passing cars, as in London's alpha areas.

In both city cases, there is a streetscape element of this signature of the securityscape that might be described as passive frontages, with London seeing an advance in architectural styles that could be described as a shell home style. This style often takes

the form of a defensive and blanker, more featureless exterior, sometimes softened by planting, which increasingly comes to resemble in many (newly built) examples the kind of blind walls without openings or windows found in Mexico City (see Figure 3). Despite these changes, in many cases, the traditional forms of the London streetscape and domestic architecture have endured due to the planning and conservation status that regulates changes and sees the maintenance of form and function where possible. In central London, adaptations are limited either to the deployment of 'deepened' security measures or to the physical excavation of space beneath the home, often for servants' quarters, swimming pools, wine storage rooms and, to a lesser extent, car parking with lift access from street level.

See: Figure 3. Matrix 2 – Privacy. (Photographs by E. Morales and R. Atkinson, 2018-2020)

In London's central and inner elite neighbourhoods, the general sense is of a symmetrical and ordered central city (West End) that presents homes directly onto an open streetscape, or, in the inner suburban alpha areas, one finds very large homes of the 19th and 20th century with a variety of architectural styles on large plots with larger gardens, walls and gating. These two dominant modalities of vertical (if not high-rise) central city homes and broader and detached suburban homes vary in the extent of their capacity to confer complete privacy or security. There is some contrast with the general geography of the elite neighbourhoods in the outer west of Mexico City, which tend more uniformly to larger, withdrawn and externally featureless homes in general.

London's central elite neighbourhoods mostly contain properties with 'absolute' street frontages, technically available to casual passers-by. In this sense, central London offers a more integrated space where domestic residences tend to face directly onto generally public streets. Yet, even here, it is possible to make adaptations to prevent random or unwanted encounters, such as installing electronic systems to the relatively small gates that intervene between the home and the front door (see Figure 3) to prevent unwanted contact. In Mexico City, rapid opening and shutting of garage doors operated through remote control systems have become prevalent, but the use of this mechanical/technological infrastructure has also proliferated in central and suburban London's most affluent neighbourhoods.

At the larger 'ultraland' (Atkinson 2020) residential developments in Mayfair, Knightsbridge and Chelsea, car parking underground with electronic access and guards is now common. Ironically, the stucco-fronted traditional streets of the West End are the least amenable to privacy but most coveted as some of the most iconic and high-status spaces to live by both foreign and domestic nationals. But the advance in London of automated entry systems has enabled newfound privacy among residents, offering urbanism more associated with that found in the Mexico-City–style absence at street level as residents' cars access the home's interior from secured garage spaces.

The demarcation of privately-owned space is particularly underscored in London, where prominent signage highlights the ownership and regulations attached to spaces. In many ways, this is an aesthetic rather than a legal reality. London offers a proliferation of

interdictory signs that highlight ownership or the rules of usage (such as parking) when, in fact, these elements are in place in Mexico City but are not 'advertised' in this way. These restrictions can be seen using other design elements, like the frequent use of large planters to block informal uses of pavement areas (see Figure 3). Such design approaches are in their own right informal methods to control space without authorities' permission and have the effect of privately controlling public spaces in ways that are difficult to challenge. Walking is not encouraged by the streetscape and location of neighbourhoods that have few public services or retail points. In both cities, subtle micro-fortification design practices are used in elements that help control and regulate visitors. The effect is often a kind of anti-pedestrian feel (less so in central London, however) in which the absence of a personal vehicle tends to mark visitors or passers-by as non-residents that can be challenged. Despite this, London's inner suburban elite areas offer a checkerboard of gated and non-gated, secured and more open residences. This unevenness stands in some contrast to the Mexican case, where privacy and security are more emphatically entwined (see Figures 2 and 3).

4.3. Fortification

The final signature of the securityscapes we explored as a key feature of affluent residential landscapes is a marked tendency across urban spaces to produce more emphatically 'fortified' architectures (Atkinson and Blandy 2016). Several studies of elites have highlighted the anxiety and increased paranoia that can come with great wealth (Atkinson 2020). This sense of risk shapes urban design and residential fortification in affluent neighbourhoods, visible in CCTV cameras, private security guards, automated gates, booms across residential streets and signs warning visitors that they are being watched (see Figure 4), but in a manicured package designed to allow affluent residents to live unimpeded by such fortifications. Coaffee, O'Hare and Hawkesworth (2009) suggest that there is a 'spectrum of visible security' ranging from overt and obtrusive techniques of fortressing, such as security checkpoints and stealthy security features embedded seamlessly into the urban fabric to 'invisible' deliberately concealed structures, such as collapsible pedestrian pavements. The entire spectrum is evident in the case study sites.

See: Figure 4. Matrix 3 – Fortification. (Photographs by E. Morales and R. Atkinson, 2018-2020)

Polanco is centrally located and still maintains a permeable urban structure with a relatively open streetscape. Residential spaces are mostly two- to three-storey apartment blocks and houses in a mix of architectural styles, from Californian 'Colonial' style reminiscent of Beverly Hills to modern minimalism. Many detached houses are visible from the streets, with ornate fencing and automated gates, planting that offers both decoration and heightened privacy. Other detached homes have tall, unmarked concrete walls and automated gates blocking a view of the house, but with ornate fences and planting above them. This recognises the desirability of a neighbourhood aesthetic featuring relatively open facades. The upper classes that choose to live in these more open spaces may correspond with Ramos-Zayas' (2020) study of Puerto Rican and Brazilian parents who viewed residents of gated communities as more provincial (pp.4-

5). In this respect, elite urban withdrawal and the ever-increasing sophistication of security infrastructures may act as tools of social distinction and aspirational models for living, but they may also mark their residents as less cosmopolitan in certain contexts.

Further from the central amenities of Polanco, the houses in Las Lomas are larger and more spread out. The detached houses are uniformly hidden behind tall plain concrete walls and automated garage doors. Plants beautify some of the walls and visible electric fences and barbed wire topping many of the walls and gates behind them. The suburbs' edge has a small number of high-rise buildings, restaurants, malls and luxury car showrooms, but the area is mostly low-rise residences. There are largely inexpensive cars parked on the street that tend to belong to people working in the area rather than living there.

To the west of the city, Santa Fe is a much more fortified space; residential spaces and destinations are all protected by some type of physical border. This area is often featured as an exemplar of the city's inequality, including a widely circulated photograph from Johnny Miller's (2021) 'Unequal Scenes'. The area has poor connectivity to the rest of the city by car, with heavy traffic in the mornings and evenings, which more affluent residents and visitors can escape through helipads and private road toll fast lanes. The 'feel' of the place as a pedestrian is uninviting, characterised by tall skyscrapers with ample provision for underground parking but few places to walk. 'Public' spaces often have a similar ambience; *La Mexicana* is a large, well-maintained park surrounded by expensive high-rise apartments regulated by a resident's group. Though by ownership, this is a public park, with neat lawns and seating areas, the visible presence of private security guards protecting more affluent visitors generates a strong sense of social demarcation in the space (see Figure 3).

The medium-rise Georgian terraces in Mayfair mostly face more or less immediately onto the street. They are immaculately maintained, with flower baskets, tall windows, low-standing but spear-topped iron fencing and perhaps a modest and lockable gate barring access to the main door. The Grosvenor Estate manages large parts of the area with an eye for long-term reward, offering reduced rents for pubs and certain venues to ensure a neighbourhood ambience. At lunchtime, there is a steady stream of professionals in suits, tourists, shoppers, construction workers and dog walkers occupying the wide streets and parks. Its walkability is advertised by local estate agents, with signs proudly announcing '22% of Mayfair residents WALK to work'. The density of wealth in affluent neighbourhoods grants residents a kind of anonymity through being, in many ways, rather unremarkable (Atkinson and Blandy 2016). Cafes and bars spill out onto outdoor seating where customers can see and be seen. Every so often, the gentle hubbub of the street is disturbed by the deafening sound of supercar engines passing nearby. However, there are also ways to ensure 'appropriate' behaviour. In Knightsbridge, Public Space Protection Orders signs can be found granting residents and visitors' routes to combat anti-social motoring as the supercar season approaches.

A little further from central London, the Victorian terraces in Knightsbridge are less contained than Mayfair, are more spread out and have more garden parks. Although gates and walls are not as visible as in Las Lomas, there are control and surveillance

reminders with signs frequently warning 'PRIVATE MEWS: NO LOITERING'. There is a rarefied atmosphere and little pulse of street life. There are private security guards in the street. Fortification of residential space is usually subtle in London, with a few exceptions, such as the luxury flat building of One Hyde Park with its visible gates, remote access–controlled interior garages, spikes and the use of signs to keep visitors away. Two male concierges, one more austere in a black suit and the other more formal in a grey suit with a top hat, wait under the awning. The latter flags down taxis and organises cars while the former watches. As a supercar drives up to the building, an automated door opens to reveal a lift, the car drives inside, and as the doors close, the car starts to lower down to the basement, revealing the mechanics of the shielded mobility system that is integrated here with the residential block itself.

In the north of the city, the more affluent residences in Highgate are detached and not visible from the street, with high, plain concrete walls, tall-automated gates and CCTV. In some cases, the signs advertising CCTV, the house number and keypads are the only signal of a house behind the physical boundaries. Unlike the tradition of architecture oriented to the street in the central districts of Knightsbridge and Mayfair, the more affluent parts of Highgate are more likely to be characterised by more anonymous walls and entranceways. This removal of facades is also visible in the fortified enclaves of Las Lomas and Santa Fe in Mexico City — linked to the specific planning regulation, the political economy of developments and historical pathways of each area (Graizbord, Rowland and Aguilar 2003).

Through the cultivation of a fortress aesthetic, residents hope to deter threats and disorder. Fortress here refers not only to discrete structures or territories, such as the eponymous fortified castles that emerged in the Middle Ages in Europe, but also to the 'broader sensory coding of security logics into the design of physical, geographical and infrastructural milieux' (Ghertner, McFann and Goldstein 2020,5). Ranging from the subtle interdictory signs and surveillance of residences with relatively open facades to the anonymous residential facades, underground parking and private roads of 'stealthy' ultra-secure homes, to the armed private security, barbed wire and canine patrols of a more 'spiky' aesthetic (Atkinson and Blandy 2016), elite residential design preferences in both sites ultimately contribute towards more fragmentation of urban space - that is more secure for some and yet also more undemocratic.

5. Conclusion

This article responds to the call to offer more nuanced analyses of elite securityscapes, acknowledging both their potentially pro- and anti-social effects and ambiences. This work offered an analysis anchored in both cities' aesthetic and design elements (the look and experience of these settings) to help reveal the increasingly privatising modes of design now being deployed in these cities.

The securityscapes of London and Mexico City, found in elite residential and leisure settings, are placed, designed, controlled and patrolled in ways that act to delimit users. Thus, in place of White's analysis of relatively open and inviting senses of space and design, this work suggests the need to understand how elite uses and design practices

may work to distil or bracket the functions of urban spaces to operation within key parameters. Thus, along with various other analysts working in urban studies and design, this article shows how a more securitised, privatised and fortified city operates through roads, gates and enclosed settings. These are spaces largely reserved and designed in ways that accommodate the winners in local and global economies. Through the analysis and the development of the idea of securityscape signature elements of city life – notable and characteristic design elements and experiential aspects of space – this article helps us to create a vocabulary of these spaces that acknowledges their core, distinctive features. Recognising these signatures allows us to see continuities of form and usage while also understanding the internal and cross-case variabilities and unique elements of life in the cities.

This work was initiated from the intuitive feeling that there was an increasing overlap of built forms, design elements and lived realities in the elite residential spaces of the case studies. Through close observation and analysis of the two cities over a long period of time, it was possible to see key changes and deepening security arrangements that showed signs of overlap. The site visits and previous research engagements in the area were fundamental to the observation exercise, as these enabled the team an idea of how these features evolved or appeared over time. While urban design professionals and theorists continue to advance inclusive and cohesive ideas in city settings, the possibility of promoting more vibrant, liveable and inclusive public spaces has become harder to accomplish as elite imperatives override and (re)organise both public urban and residential city spaces. Through the use of observation and the development of a kind of lexicon of the ambience of security in spaces that are often seen as inaccessible or even less relevant to the wider fabric of the city life, this work tried to convey these aesthetics and to think through their effects. In doing so, this work seeks to contribute to continuing debates about the transnational rise of urban space that appears increasingly given over to the mandate and control of the most affluent urbanites, often to the exclusion or reduced participation of other citizens.

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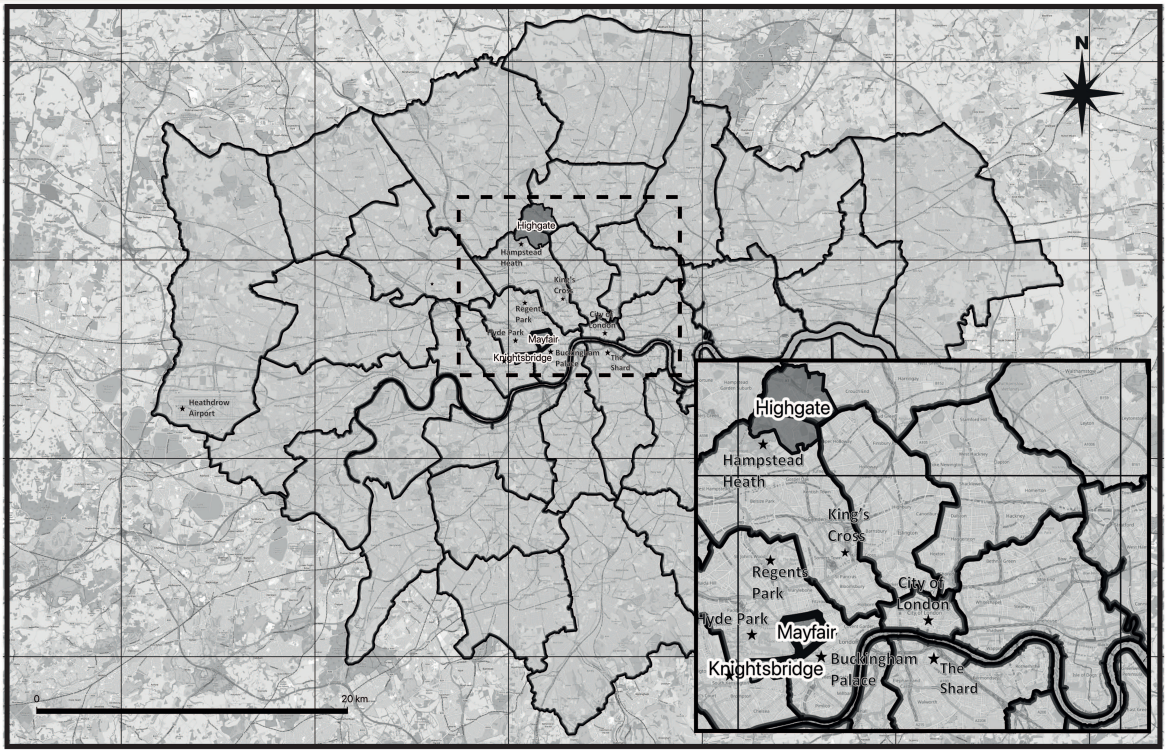
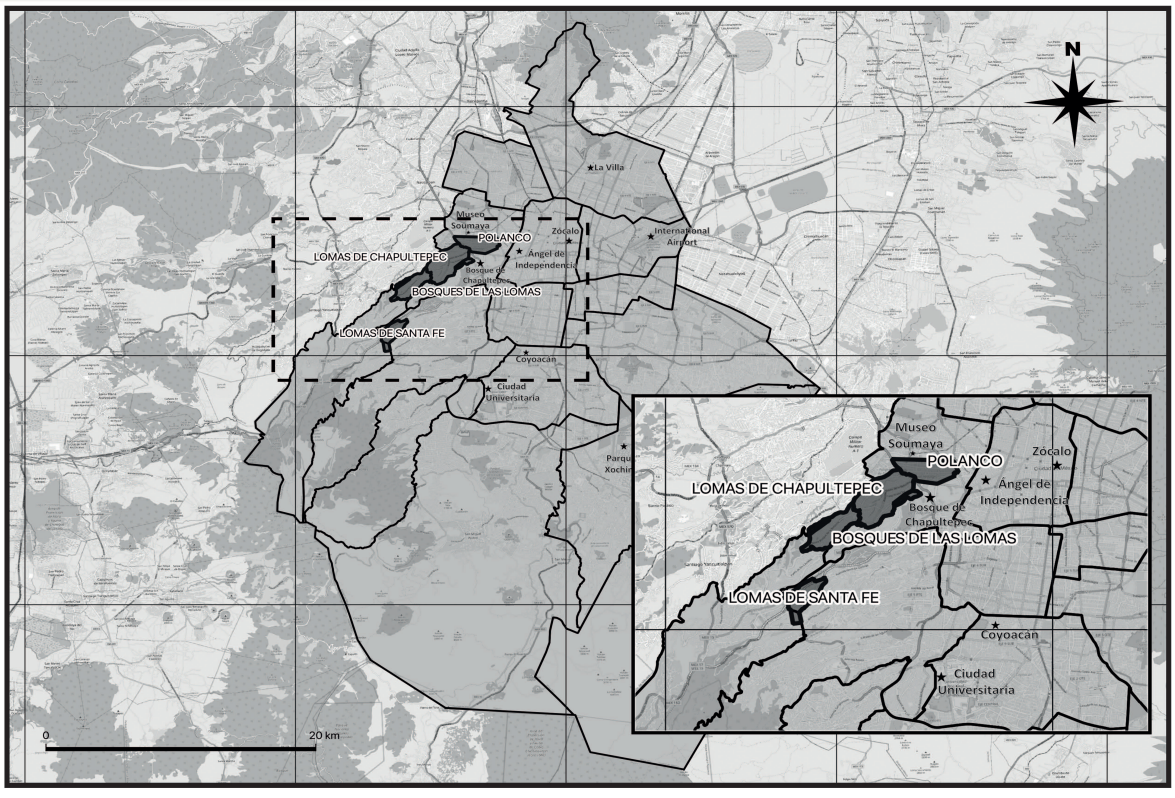
FIGURE 1. ELITE AREAS IN LONDON AND MEXICO CITY

LONDON



MEXICO CITY



Matrix 1 : **Security**

MEXICO CITY

Aesthetic signatures

- Surveillance (CCTV) cameras
- One-side mirror security booths
- Bodyguards / waiting (under trees or by cars)
- Semi-permanent police presence
- Access controls
- Motorcade security
- Police escorts
- Heavily armed public and private security guards
- Monitoring all-inclusive (emergency) security systems
- Biometric systems or QR readers

Ambience

- Intimidating
- Visible technological tools
- Aggressive
- Armed, ‘besieged’
- Bunker or reinforced look
- Effective rendering of interior and exterior space (gardens)
- Access control obvious and visible

LONDON

Aesthetic signatures

- Surveillance (CCTV) cameras
- Private security staff, at gates and shop doors
- Private Security signage
- Emergency systems and alarms
- Dog patrols (residential) and private policing by security guards
- Formal Met police highly visible, police vans
- Unmarked police cars
- Occasional sight of security units and ‘details’

Ambience

- Spaces feel intimidating to non-residents
- Invisible and discreet systems of control
- Informal security guards, old styles of dress (Victorian)
- Rule-bound space – signage, parking prohibitions
- Sense of ease, informality, smiles
- 5* hotel front doors act as scanning
- High service levels

Matrix 2 : **Privacy**

MEXICO CITY

Aesthetic signatures

- Blind / Blank tall walls
- Entrances through garages
- Non-active frontages
- Automatic garage doors
- Powerful outside illumination
- Planters and barriers to discourage outsiders
- Barriers, fences and borders
- No views inside
- Access control and VIP entrances
- Executive taxis
- Private schools transport
- Chauffeurs for day
- Valet parking services
- Car-oriented access

Ambience

- Withdrawn
- Hidden
- Walling
- Exclusive
- Unequal
- Discriminatory
- Walking not encouraged
- Costly

LONDON

Aesthetic signatures

- Security signage ubiquitous
- Lack of people
- Ordered, symmetrical, neat
- Gating, automated
- Blank high walls
- Variability – both porous boundaries and closed, and open and closed home settings
- Visible signage of private pavements, private streets
- Signage on shops regarding security
- Mobilities – Luxury private taxis, black cabs
- Employed chauffeurs
- Underground parking and car lifts

Ambience

- Display – gates
- Pruned and manicured
- Feel of openness and democratic encounter
- Highly maintained and clean
- Impression of presence through lighting
- Private streets but still open
- Exclusive but comfortable
- Rudeness and politeness

Matrix 3 : **Fortification**

MEXICO CITY

Aesthetic signatures

- Gates
- Fences
- Electric fences
- Barbed wire
- Blind walls
- Non-human, imposing scale
- Lack of pedestrian access
- Armoured cars and SUVs
- Anti-riot/ anti-protest materials

Ambience

- Visible
- Magnificent
- Defended
- Power /status
- Fear of crime and perceived danger




LONDON

Aesthetic signatures

- Interdictory signage
- High walls, hedges, gates
- Gates – external post boxes – lockable
- Cameras, infrared lighting
- Cage style interior shutters
- Illusion of traditional streetscape
- Visible locks
- Private cars with chauffeurs
- Locking doors of shops

Ambience

- Silence and hushed in prime neighbourhoods
- Comfortable, spacious
- Blank walled streets in suburban areas
- Low pedestrian traffic
- Few eyes on street
- Noisy at times/ places - expensive cars, super charged engines
- Superficially inviting but socially scripted to those with serious money