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picturesque

by Charlotte Prins

A case for social housing in a neo-liberal, Brexit-bound England

Ecole Polythechnique Fédérale de Lausanne
MA3 Final Dissertation

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2017/2018

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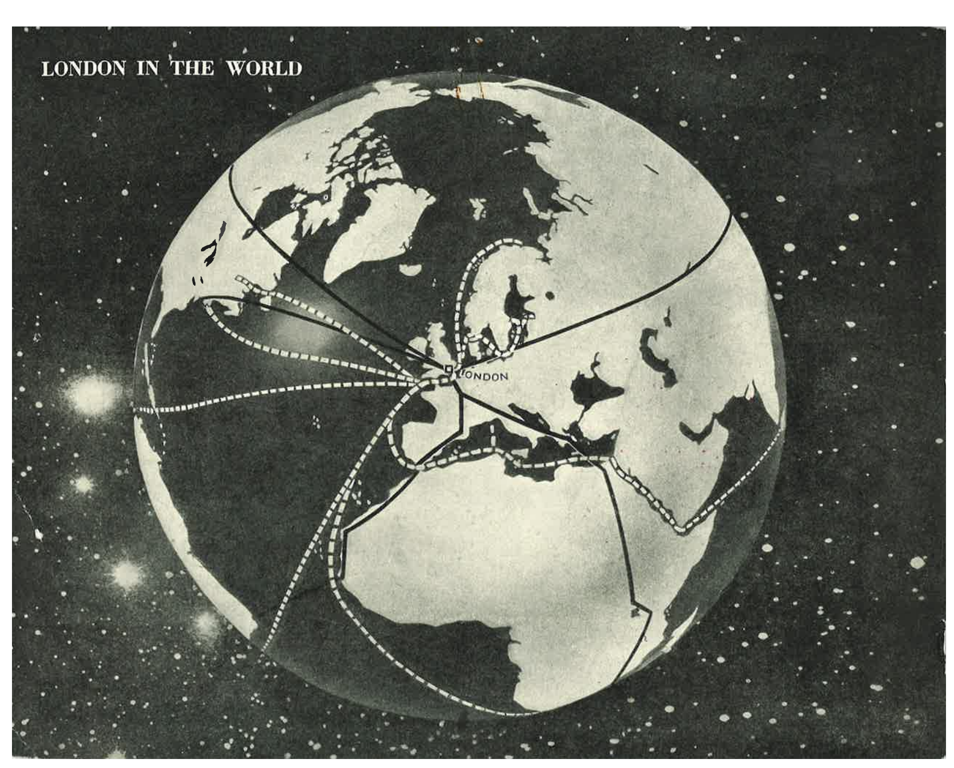

LONDON IN THE WORLD
LONDON

How can the failure of post war social housing become a lesson for contemporary London trapped in a vicious cycle of capitalist neurosis?

Looking back at post war Britain and focusing on London in particular, this dissertation aims to discuss how housing policy, legislation, society and culture have contributed to the radical change in ideology with regards to public housing since the foundation of the Welfare State. Four examples have been chosen as case studies with the objective of examining the key architectural values of post war housing, rapidly disappearing in 21st century London.

Introduction

As the United Kingdom wavers before the abyss, in hesitant preparation for the divorce from Europe, the future of London and the rest of the England has never been so unsure. The decision to sever bonds with our neighbours across the channel in favour of an egocentric and inward-looking Britain, however alarming, is very telling of the current atmosphere of mistrust palpable everywhere in the country. From foreign policy to internal British politics, the United Kingdom finds itself face to face with fundamental questions regarding its social agenda from immigration, inequality and widespread poverty through to government funded housing provision (or lack there of).
In this climate of financial uncertainty, the question of social housing is often brushed under the carpet. Wiped clear from the government check book in the mid-eighties, the question of housing has now become intricately linked with economic gain rather than social responsibility, resulting in major dislocation between the burgeoning metropolis and the people that have lived in it for generations.

Page 6
Fig 1
London in the World: infographic by Ernö Goldfinger

Britain's housing ideologies demonstrate a clear intention to improve living conditions for the working class. In an effort to clear unsanitary slums, government funded housing created an opportunity for poorer families to gain access to clean homes with electricity and water. This was pioneered by the London County Council and the construction of the Boundary Estate in East London in 1893. After the first world war, social housing became a national issue as governments feared revolt from an exhausted population. In 1919 the *Housing & Town Planning Act* was published stating that

"it shall be the duty of every local authority to consider the needs of their area, with respect to the provision of houses for the working class" (Acts of Parliament, 1919).

Local authorities around Britain had been given the green light to build *'homes fit for heroes'*[1]. The ambition to generate a more egalitarian society was carried through to the post-war years, and culminated in the creation of the Welfare State which had as objective to undertake, as part of government responsibility, the social insurance of *all* British people regardless of income.

From a state that regarded housing as a right to one driven by market forces, it is difficult to comprehend the radical shift in ideology that took place over a relatively short period of time. In light of the housing crisis that has hit London over the past decade, it seems essential - now more than ever - to look back to the post-war years in order to gain a better understanding of how fundamental

1. "Homes fit for Heroes" was a famous promise by George Lloyd to soldiers coming back from war, and the main ideal on which 1919 Town Planning act was founded.

aspects of London's essential character have been altered and focus on the qualities of British modernism born from vision and ambition - a symbol of a new future for England. Though a panoply of public buildings constructed immediately after the war became representative of the egalitarian post-war vision, it was publicly funded housing, that truly demonstrated the ambition of a classless society at its' most optimistic state and thus poses the question:
How can contemporary social housing in London learn from the architecture of the post war welfare state?

This paper is structured in three parts beginning with a historical outline that will highlight four key moments in the history of post-war housing which articulated the rise and fall of the egalitarian dream. By placing Britain in a wider historical context and discussing the political atmosphere of the era while simultaneously discussing British culture, society and housing policy this first chapter will attempt to identify fundamental characteristics representative of this post-war period.

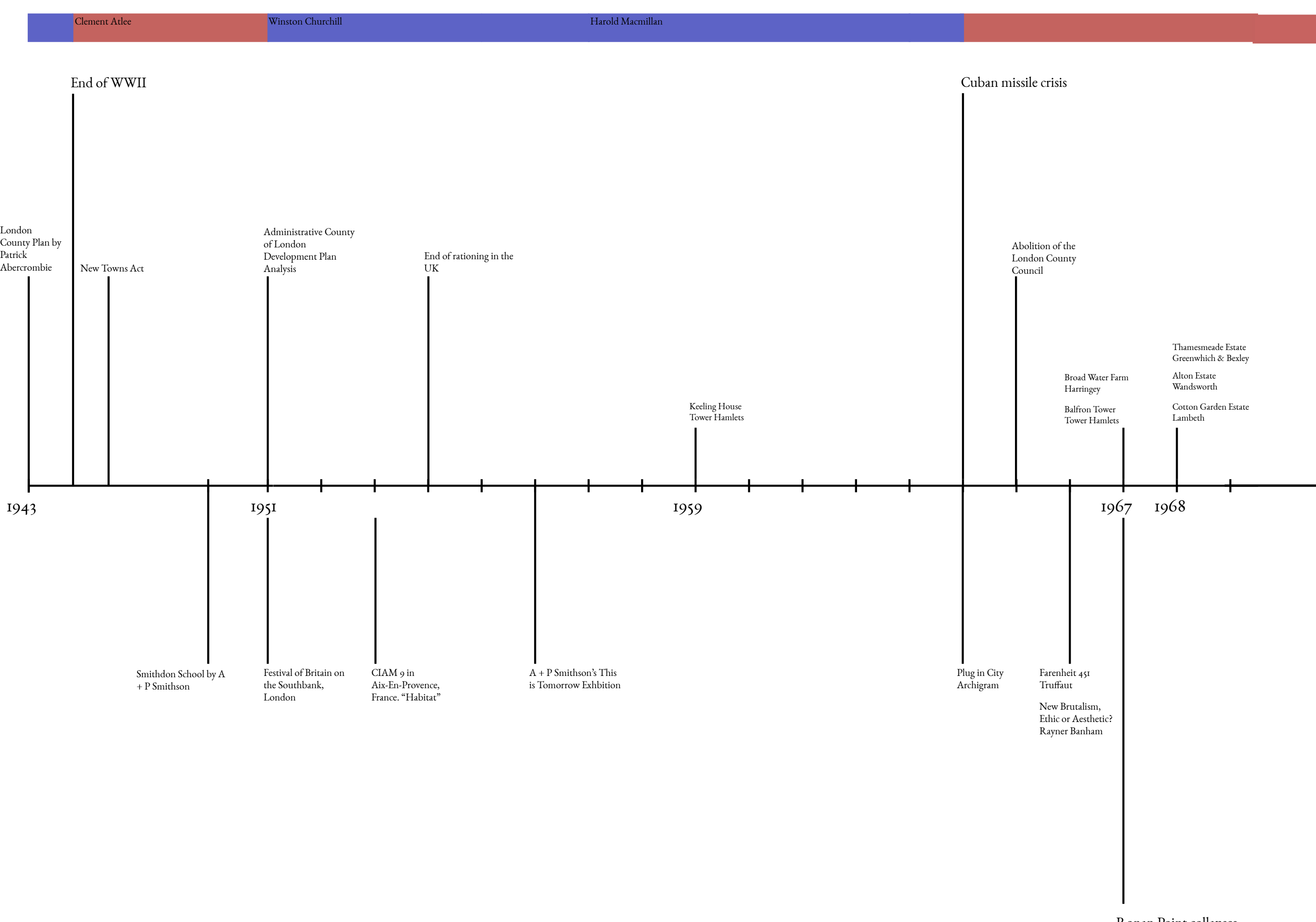
The historical introduction will be followed by a study of four examples of council housing built between 1972 and 1981; Alexandra Road Estate, Robin Hood Gardens, Dawson Heights and Southwyck House. These four case studies have been analysed based on a strict set of criteria in the ambition of comparing them and gaining an understanding as to how their architecture can demonstrate some of the core values of post-war British modernism.

In light of the current housing situation the third and final chapter will discuss the nationalised system of the post-war Welfare State and the present-day privatised system ruled by economic forces in an effort to make a case for what, I believe, are the key values of social housing. This chapter will attempt to raise major questions regarding the current housing situation and the role of architecture in the rising contemporary aesthetic of class divide.

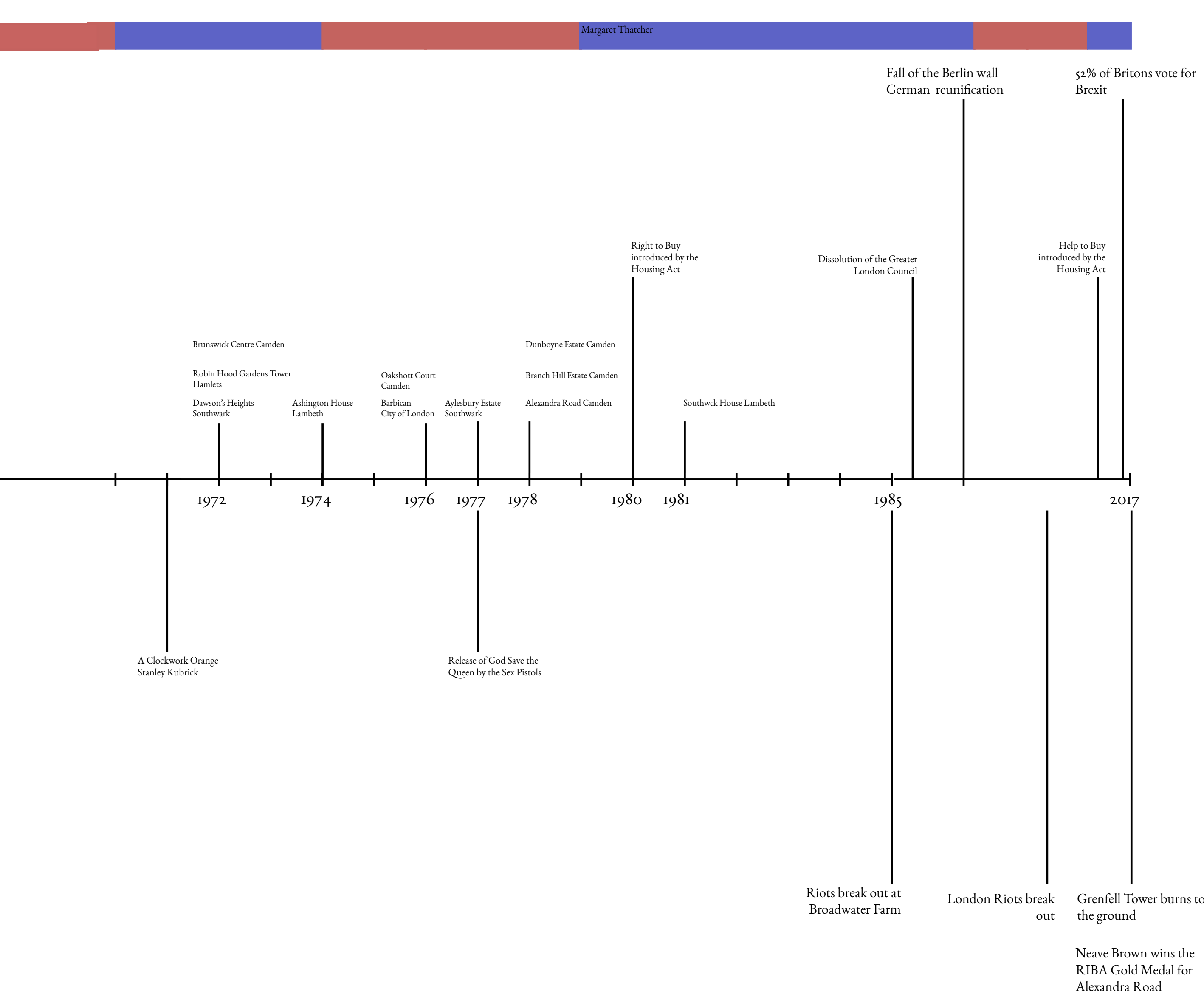
Part *one*

Paradise Lost

This first Part focuses on explaining key moments in the history of post war housing. While on one hand focusing on housing policy, politics and history this first section will also focus on the radical social changes of the time while also discussing the artistic and architectural undercurrents and discussions of the time.



Clement Atlee
Winston Churchill
Harold Macmillan
End of WWII
Cuban missile crisis
London County Plan by Patrick Abercrombie
New Towns Act
Administrative County of London Development Plan Analysis
End of rationing in the UK
Abolition of the London County Council
Keeling House Tower Hamlets
Broad Water Farm Harringey
Balfron Tower Tower Hamlets
Thamesmeade Estate Greenwhich & Bexley
Alton Estate Wandsworth
Cotton Garden Estate Lambeth
1943
1951
1959
1967
1968
Smithdon School by A + P Smithson
Festival of Britain on the Southbank, London
CIAM 9 in Aix-En-Provence, France. "Habitat"
A + P Smithson's This is Tomorrow Exhbition
Plug in City Archigram
Farenheit 451 Truffaut
New Brutalism, Ethic or Aesthetic? Rayner Banham
Ronan Point collapses



Margaret Thatcher
Fall of the Berlin wall
German reunification
52% of Britons vote for Brexit
Right to Buy introduced by the Housing Act
Dissolution of the Greater London Council
Help to Buy introduced by the Housing Act
Brunswick Centre Camden
Robin Hood Gardens Tower Hamlets
Dawson's Heights Southwark
Ashington House Lambeth
Oakshott Court Camden
Barbican City of London
Aylesbury Estate Southwark
Dunboyne Estate Camden
Branch Hill Estate Camden
Alexandra Road Camden
Southwck House Lambeth
1972
1974
1976
1977
1978
1980
1981
1985
2017
A Clockwork Orange Stanley Kubrick
Release of God Save the Queen by the Sex Pistols
Riots break out at Broadwater Farm
London Riots break out
Grenfell Tower burns to the ground
Neave Brown wins the RIBA Gold Medal for Alexandra Road

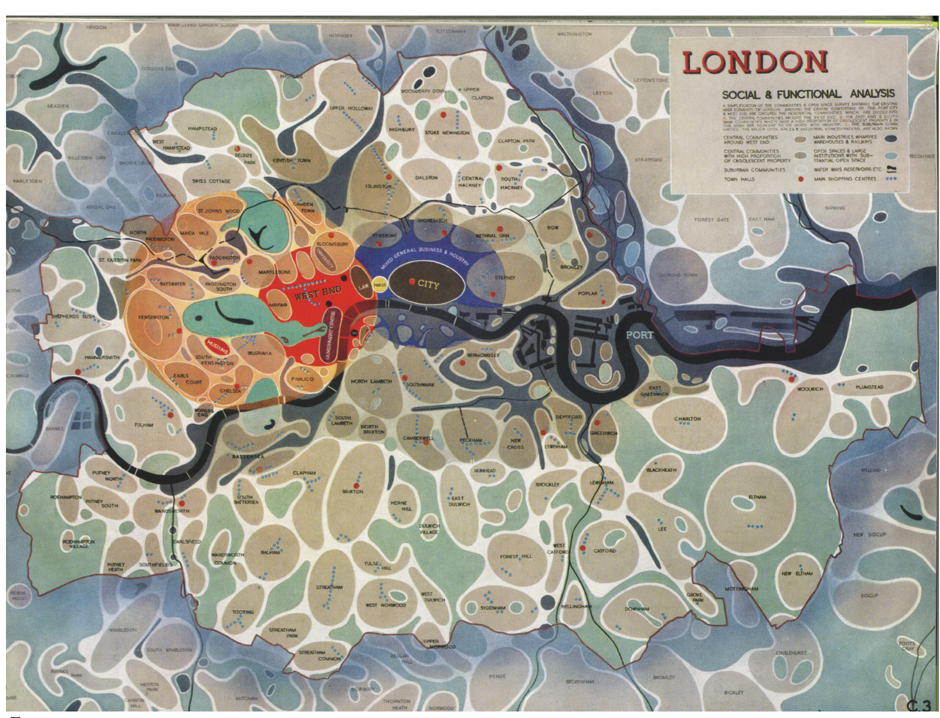


Fig 2

1943
The County of London Plan is published

Three months after he led Britain to victory in the second War, Winston Churchill was ousted by the British population as they voted overwhelmingly for a Labour government. It was time for change, something Mr Churchill had not anticipated when announcing the election. Exhausted, the British population wanted an end to austerity - a fresh approach to a brighter future, and so it was that Clement Atlee, leader of the Labour party, became prime minister in July 1945. (D. Brown 2001). Already during the war, the British population had been shown what this future could look like in the shape of the 1942 *Beveridge Report* which pushed the social welfare of all citizens to the forefront of the governments agenda by :

"spelling out a system of social insurance covering every citizen regardless of income. It offered nothing less than a cradle-to-grave welfare state" (D. Brown 2001).

This promise of radical social reform pledged by the Labour Party, proposed to nationalise a large part of Britain's economy such as the Bank of England, power utilities and transport services, as well as insuring the entire British population had access to free health services and decent homes. By 1944, the *Education Act* ensured free and compulsory secondary school for all and by 1948 Bevan's National Health Service had been set up (D. Brown 2001). With regard to housing, the Labour party had pledged to go above and beyond what had been attempted previously and had the main objective of clearing unsanitary slums and ensuring everyone would have access to decent housing. Government funded housing had already been a preoccupation in the inter war years, but became an integral part of the egalitarian dream after the war.

Similarly to the 1942 *Beveridge Report*, projecting a brighter future for all in the midst of death and destruction, London wasted no time during the war, getting busy with the re-planning of the city for peace-time London. By 1943, London's County Council's chief architect and planner E. J Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie had published the *County of London Plan*. This plan, drawn up as a reaction in light of the growing fear that London was developing in an unplanned, uncontrollable way, proposed a flexible reorganisation for a better future.
Using the pause in development due to the war, the LCC argued that this was

Fig 2
Social and Functional Analysis Map

the perfect opportunity for the planning of London to gain some stimulus. As of the 1932 *Town and Country Planning Act*, the London County Council was designated as 'statutory planning authority' granting it the power to make decisions with regards to the planning of London, without consent of existing local authorities - although it was encouraged (and did endeavour) to seek it (Carter and Goldfinger 1945).

The plan proposed a *"conditioned yet comprehensive"* re-structuring of London that took advantage of the Blitz to clear slums and redevelop large parts of the city. The LCC saw London

"as a doctor can see a sick but not dead body, as a structure of flesh and blood, unified whole composed of a mass of organic units all pulsating and alive, all having their own identity and yet all interdependent." (Carter and Goldfinger 1945).

Rather than being one large urban agglomeration, the very essence of London was in fact its complex structure of interdependent communities that each had their own identity. It was therefore decided not to 'start over' with a regimented utopian plan that ignored London's current state, or to 'disband' London by scattering it's population all around South East England, but rather to conduct surveys and analysis of these existing communities and enhance them on a case by case basis (Carter and Goldfinger 1945). The famous *Social And Functional Analysis Plan Of London* (commonly known as the 'potato map'), drawn up by Arthur Ling and D. K Johnson (fig 1), depicts London as a group of residential community bubbles, cohabiting organically like cells. Unlike many other cities, the sheer size of London meant that it had developed into smaller networks, like a conglomeration of medieval towns, coming together to form a metropolis (Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943).

"Recognition of the existing community structure of London must be implicit in any main reconstruction proposal; to ignore London as it exists and treat it as one vast area for experiment would lead to incalculable and unnecessary disturbance to people's lives (...) In all proposals put forward, therefore, an aim has been to accept the best of existing London, to respect and develop its structure and major uses, and to remedy its manifest defects." (Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943)

With the community at the forefront of all preoccupations, the plan focused primarily on the improvement of four major defects that it had identified as needing immediate attention: the depressed and monotonous state of the existing housing stock; the inadequate roads that resulted in loss of life,

congestion, fatigue and irritation on a daily basis; the lack of green open space, unevenly distributed resulting in children using the congested street as a play area and finally the unorganized and noxious mix of industry and housing.

The issue of housing was of utmost importance, especially in the East End, in areas adjacent to train lines or industry. Often home to low income wage earners, the dwellings were often sub-standard and inadequate for modern city life. Slum clearance would allow the reconstruction of decent homes that respected the recommended density of 136 persons per acre. By getting rid of useless roads and irrelevant industry, taking advantage of bomb damage sites and by starting to build flats rather than single storey houses, the plan intended to maintain the prescribed density while also freeing up land for green space (Carter and Goldfinger 1945).

The *Communities and Open Space Survey* illustrates how chaotic tangles of streets, industry and housing could be re-organised into modern communities based on existing boundaries, that had often been defined for centuries. Communities would be subdivided into *neighbourhood units* of 6'000 – 10'000 inhabitants, each with schools and other public amenities. Green space would surround the neighbourhood and act as a natural cut off between it and its entourage. A *community* would be made up of 60'000 - 100'000 inhabitants, and would be equipped with a dominant social feature like an avenue or large public building in an effort to give each community its own identity (Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943). Although the plan mainly suggested lower housing units for families, it did state that taller blocks of up to ten storeys may be popular for single people and childless couples. The Lansbury estate, completed in time for the Festival of Britain in 1951, is a prime example of the neighbourhood unit.

Housing and industry were intricately linked as many families in the heart of London lived close to their place of work resulting in over populated areas. The issue at hand here was how to de-congest these central areas while maintaining the current work-life proximity that many families enjoyed. The solution initially proposed by the London Plan was one of dispersal rather than vertical expansion and took advantage of the unplanned decentralisation that was already taking place. By doing so, they would offer attractive places in the suburbs that would encourage families to move out of the central units. The plan suggested that to achieve the required density, it would have to decentralize half a million people to new developments located *"within the Metropolitan Traffic Area"* (meaning within a 50 mile radius) – quite a radical proposal. (Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943). This proposal of decentralisation bore its fruit with the creation of the 1946 *New Towns Act* which allowed the

Fig 3

government to designate areas as new towns and delegate development and planning control to private 'Development Corporations'. This lead to the construction of satellite towns like Stevenage, Crawley, Harlow and Milton Keynes (to mention a few) (Burnett 1986).

All works necessary for the County of London Plan were to be undertaken by public authorities, authorised enterprises, public utility corporations and private enterprise while zoning maps would be carefully prepared to keep private developers in check and prevent all confusion with regards to attributed land use (Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943).

With the anxiety of never ending urban sprawl into the cherished British countryside, new towns were designed to be contained and controlled entities. Intended as mixed-use developments, they would bring people of different social classes together while providing high density, multi-storey buildings and traffic-free, pedestrian precincts with the objective of *"combining urban life advantages with integrated rural surroundings"* inspired by Ebenzer Howard's early 20th century, garden city – arguably the most influential method of urban planning in England which proposed the construction of entirely new, self-contained communities surrounded by a 'green belt', materialised with the completion of Letchworth. Though often designed as self-contained entities, with their own industries and commerce, New Towns were sometimes grafted to existing historic towns. This would enable them to relate to an existing cultural identity, something which had proved complex to accomplish (Burnett 1986). As rents were controlled by private Development Corporations they were often around 50% higher than local authority rents, and as a result tended to be inhabited by more affluent families. As these towns became more middle class, attracting young entrepreneurs and their families, it became ever more difficult as an 'under qualified' working-class citizen to get a place announcing the increasing social divide, that would take place over the years (Grindrod 2013).

In 1951, the Festival of Britain was launched in an effort to bring spirit back to the British population. Already earmarked for redevelopment by the 1943 London County Plan, the festivities, intended as a *"launch party for the welfare state"*, were to take place on what is now known today as the Southbank. A large cultural centre would be the focal point of this event, replacing the destroyed Queen's Hall on Regent Street. The Royal Festival Hall as it came to be known would be surrounded by other (temporary) pavilions that would *"celebrate the British spirit"*. These included constructions like the Dome of Discovery by Ralph Tubbs, the Sea And Ships Pavillion by Basil Spence, and the more eccentric Lion And Unicorn Pavillion by Dick Russel and Robert

Fig 3
Southbank exhibition, Festival of Britain, From the river

Godden. A spectacular vertical feature known as "Skylon" designed by the young duo Powell & Moya however, stole the show and was admired as the main attraction of the fair. These temporary constructions all celebrated post war architecture and were an advertisement for British Modernist design. To the east of the Southbank, in Poplar, the Live Architecture Exhibition stood as a prototype of post-war planning. The Lansbury Estate, built as a real time example of the neighbourhood unit, gave the public an idea of what had been imagined for the city of London (Grindrod 2013).

The enthusiasm for the modernist festival, a shot at national recovery celebrating the new socialist state, was short lived. Due to rising political turmoil within the Labour party which had lost over a hundred seats in parliament and amidst rising tensions with China and the Soviet Union, (resulting in the Korean War and later on the Cold War), an air of national nostalgia re-emerged with the return to power of a Conservative Party lead by Churchill (Grindrod 2013). Modernism as a method of promoting a classless society, had however, already woven its way into to British architecture, much to the dismay of Churchill who associated it with socialist propaganda. Already in the late 1930s, with the construction of Lubetkin's Finsbury Health Centre – first health centre in the UK to offer free care to the residents of its borough - the architecture of an egalitarian dream was stamped with the brand of modernism. The Russian-born architect went on to build housing that promoted this same social ambition. Lenin Court - a name for an estate which in itself was already very political - completed in 1954, was designed to have an entirely regular façade offering the same weight of importance to every dwelling reflecting the idea that everyone was equal. The monumentality of the central stair core, presented as a *'machine on display'*, celebrated the communal areas of the building, offering architectural value to the functional moments within the estate (Cordell 2010).

As well as constructing new buildings to make up for the desperate housing shortage, Britain had to adjust to a rapidly evolving society. The war had been won and Britons could enjoy living longer in conditions that were far better than they had ever been before resulting in a sharp increase of the British population in the immediate post war years. A strong increase in births, triggering the baby boom also contributed to the fast rise in population. With the provision of a welfare state promising to rehouse everyone, the Labour government immediately set about building homes despite the mountain of debt the country had accumulated during the war. By 1957, 2.5 million new houses and flats had been built, 75% of which had been provided by local authorities. Although this was a great thing, Britain had another problem, directly related to the social changes occurring with the rapid development of a modern society. From 4.6 persons per household before the war, the average

Fig 4
Lubetkin's central stair core at Lenin Court

Fig 4

number of family members living under one roof dropped to 2.7. This was due to factors like the rising number of divorce in the country, the ageing of a population resulting in more pensioners and the tendency to have smaller families. In 1961, only 5% of total housing stock provided one/two bedroom dwellings making it clear that Britain urgently needed to adapt to the changing conditions. As housing was being built at the speed of light the *Parker Morris Report* was published that same year, setting up minimum space standards to be respected when designing public housing (Burnett 1986).

In parallel to this, post war British society saw the levelling up for the working class, whose expectations with regards to comfort and convenience rose, and the levelling down for the middle class, who had been becoming less dependent on external aid since after the first world war. Servants, essential to the upkeep of middle class family before the war were deemed unnecessary which brought about a profound change in the traditional make-up of the home. With no more servants to prepare meals, the kitchen was 'elevated' from the basement, and became the centre of household activity. Rapid technological progress and the mass production of modern appliances also meant that kitchens were now much more well equipped and also began to be used for eating meals rather than the traditional "dining room". The increasing employment of women also meant that less time was being spent at home which in turn called for more efficient kitchens (Burnett 1986).

As the forty hour week was introduced and the working class were granted holidays with pay, families were spending more time at home bringing about a shift in hierarchy from the bedroom to the living room. Families of all echelons of society were now in a position to receive guests, and great care was taken to decorate the inside of homes (Burnett 1986).

Architectural power couple Alison and Peter Smithson, strongly denounced the idea that New Towns and mixed-use developments were the solution to the housing crisis which London was increasingly finding itself in, marking the start of what Hatherly in his essay (included in Brennan's *Regeneration!*) describes as an *"architectural cold war"*. In line with Khrushchev's contempt for decorative architecture that he dubbed *"architecture of excesses"*, the Smithsons criticized the eagerness to please of the Lansbury estate and other constructions expressed by

"slightly modernised, Georgian-cum-Scandinavian terraces around green public squares, a big Gothic Expressionist church by Gilbert Scott, a mild modernist school(...)deliberately trying to be friendly and homely and other values that were considered typically cockney." (Brennan 2015).

Though these traits all suggested 'leftist' ideals which the Smithsons were known to be in keeping with, the duo nonetheless expressed a sense of boredom and provinciality with regards to modern architecture of the immediate post war years. The emergence of New Brutalism came like an earthquake that shook British modernists to the very core. In radical opposition to architectural currents and debates of the time that looked back to the ideologies of the mid nineteenth century, Rayner Banham argues in his well-known article *The New Brutalism*, that they - the new brutalists represented primarily by the Smithsons - sought to set themselves apart from the rest by refuting architectural history as a methodology for design. Although coined from Le Corbusier's notion of *béton brut* the term was:

"adopted as something between slogan and a brickbat flung in the public's face. The New Brutalism ceased to be a label descriptive of a tendency common to most modern architecture, and became instead a programme, a banner, while retaining some sense as a descriptive label." (Banham 1955)

The qualities of Brutalist buildings were formally described by Banham as follows: *"formal legibility of the plan, clear exhibition of structure and valuation of their materials for their inherent qualities as found"* as could be understood in the first example, defined as New Brutalist – the Smithson's Secondary School in Hunstanton - where all materials (brick, steel and glass), appliances and pipes, stood as found, on show for all to see. Going beyond this however, brutalist ideas in art and architecture reflected a bold stubbornness and a celebration of the ordinary at its roughest state, it sought to give off an *image* defined by Banham as *"quod visum pertubat – that which seen, affects the emotions"* rejecting the idea of beauty in its most traditional sense (Banham 1955).

"What moves a New Brutalist is the thing itself, in its totality, and with all its overtones of human association" (Banham 1955)

Here lies the inherent paradox of the movement: while on one hand characterised by its "je m'en foutiste, in your face" attitude, this was matched with a keen interest in working-class social life. Heavily influenced by sociologists Willmott and Young's study *Family and Kinship in East London*, which argued that many New Towns lacked the social structure that had organically been formed on the dense East End streets, the Smithson attempted to rethink the architecture in which communal life could most effectively flourish. Their proposal came in the form of 'streets in the sky' designed for the Golden Lane Estate competition, raised decks that would enable ordinary activities of daily

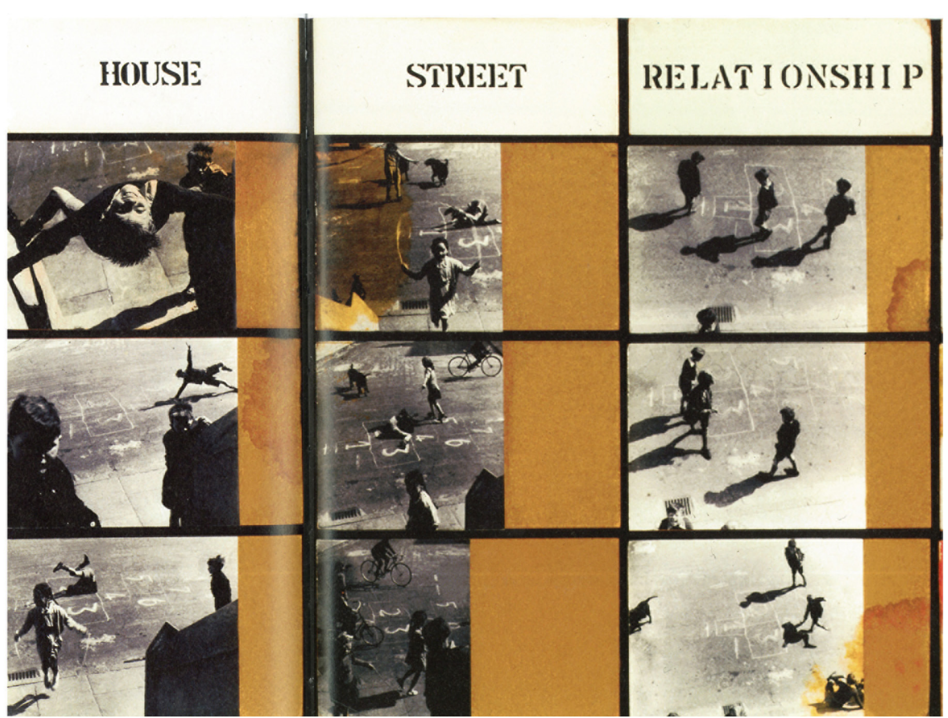


Fig 5

life to unfold, offering informal space for residents to interact with neighbours (Brennan 2015).
This social approach to architecture, was one that the Smithsons shared with their generation of architects as the CIAM 9 (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) in Aix-en-Provence would go to show. The debate in 1953 around 'Habitat', called for a new charter to be drawn up that would correlate with the older Charte d'Athène. This new charter, debated and discussed at length at the congress, was intended to guide the new wave of modern urbanism.
The discussion proposed to understand the city in terms of 'habitat' and resulted in the common desire to create relations between inhabitants through architecture and inherently between a building and its environment. It was regarded as essential to pay close attention to sociological and spiritual conditions of any project. The Smithson's presented the *Hierarchy of Associations* diagram, consisting of an 'urban re-identification grid' whereby they redefined the organisation of the city by recognising the scaled units of the house, the street, the district and the city. This was in direct reaction to the functional nature of the previously established hierarchy of: dwelling, work, recreation, transportation, put forward by the elder generation. The Golden Lane Estate project was again used to demonstrate this. Taken out of its context and used as a modular superstructure, the project tore the street from the heart of the Unité d'Habitation, to place it on the external façade where it acted as a *"conduit for playfulness"* and celebrated urban street life (Jos Bosman et al. 2006).

Radically different from any other school of thought, Archigram, collective of architects lead by Peter Cook, were also setting about redefining the city. Protagonists of the emerging British counter culture, they, not unlike the New Brutalists, sought to revere the ordinary vulgarity of the fast-evolving consumer culture, though not with concrete precast elements, but rather by celebrating mass production and pop-culture. The frantic city as an agglomeration of expendable products was intricately linked to the reality of this new fast-paced society. Like pop music, cities could only succeed if they would be able to keep up with consumer tastes, therefore inherently calling for architecture, like all products, to become expendable

"Our collective mental blockage occurs between the land of the small scale consumer products and the objects which make up our environment. Perhaps it will not be until such things as housing, amenity place and work place become recognized as consumer products (...) that we can begin to make an environment that is really part of developing human culture" (Cook 1972)

Fig 5
Part of the urban re-identification grid by the Smithsons promoting human interaction over a functional used of the city

More than just a built environment the city becomes a frantic accumulation of situations, a constant flow of traffic, a transient world of encounters and daily banality where the *"triviality of lighting a cigarette and the hard fact of moving 2 million commuters a day are both facets of the shared experience of the city"*. Modern life was to be re-evaluated and updated to reflect the consumer age increasingly linked to developing technologies.

Plug-in City, proposed by Archigram in 1964 as an alternative approach to the city, imagined a large-scale diagonal framework into which would slot expendable capsules, planned for obsolescence. Essential services linked to mobility and access ways would be provided while permanent cranes acted as the hands of a capitalist God replacing the outdated with the new. A hierarchy of relative permanence would be set up, giving each element a sell by date. The superstructure would be the last to go, eventually, it too becoming obsolete. This radical approach to the modern city, though ostensibly futuristic and radically opposed to anything that was actually being tested and tried, rang profoundly amongst their peers and demonstrated an astonishing clear sightedness seeming almost prophetic today.

Fig 6.(right) School at Hunstanton by the Smithsons. Dubbed first example of Brutalist architecture

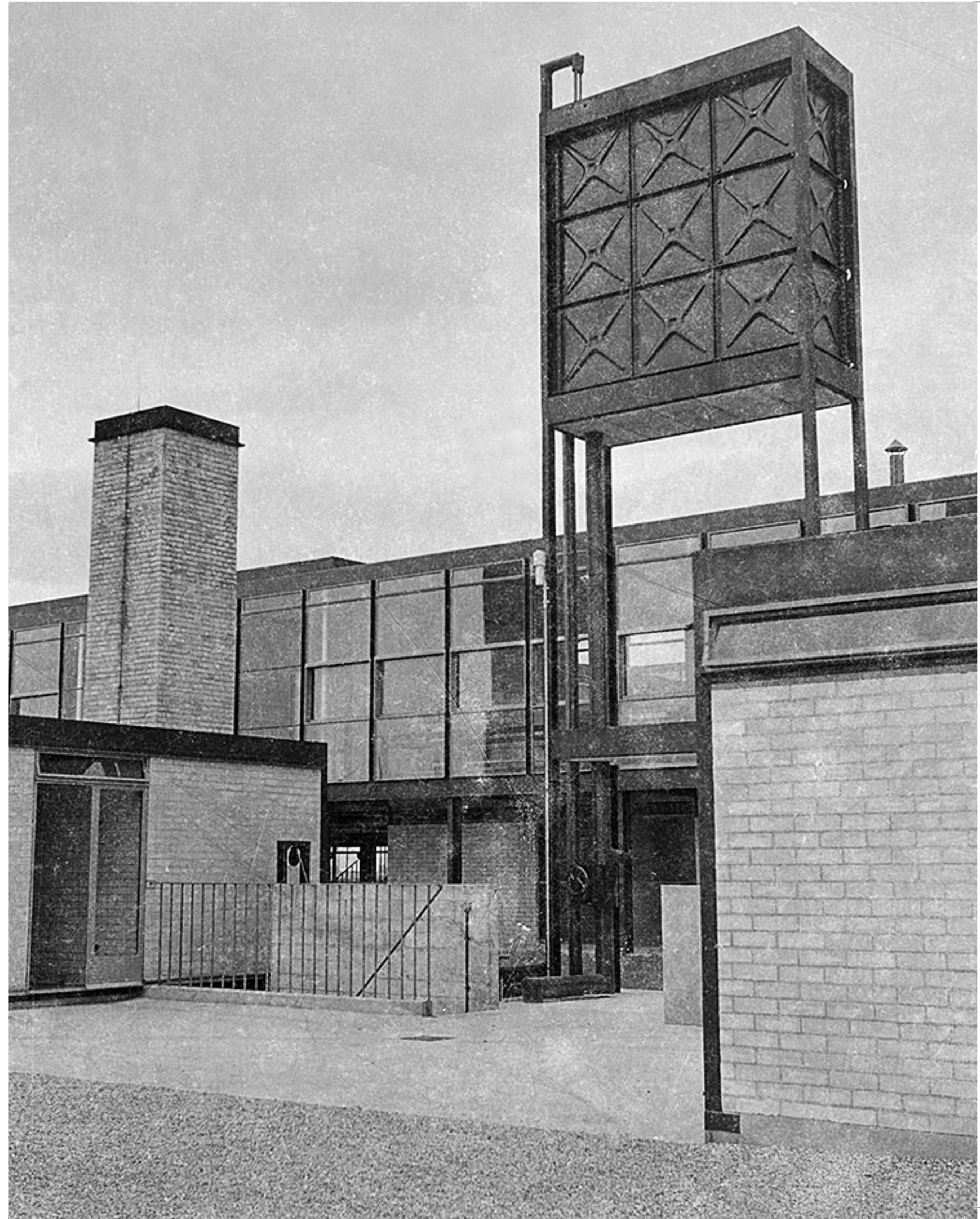


Fig 7

1968
Ronan Point collapses

Although, the construction of mixed-use new towns had been suggested as a solution to the housing problem in London, in an effort to control urban sprawl and clear over crowded districts of London, it eventually turned out that they were but a small contribution to the overall housing provision necessary to make up for the desperate housing shortage. Still petrified of overspill, government funded subsidies to build up higher than six floors were granted to local authorities. By 1964, multi-storey buildings of all heights accounted for 55% of all tenders approved (Burnett 1986). The construction of these point blocks, was at the time further encouraged as they mainly provided much sought after one and two bedroom flats, as well as freeing up space for parks in the manner of the *Ville Radieuse*. Industrialized building methods such as prefabrication provided an economic advantage to these blocks as well. The use of these methods was, however, not restricted to the construction of point blocks as new towns were also known to use prefabricated materials manufactured to be in keeping with the traditional architectural language of the local vernacular.

"By the middle of the decade (1965) government policy to extend green belts to cities other than London, and new subsidy arrangements by which for the first time, grants increased with the heights of blocks over 6 storeys, led to the adoption of tall point blocks of up to twenty-two storeys". (Burnett 1986)

One of Britain's strongest advocates for the point block was Hungarian born immigrant and proclaimed Marxist, Ernö Goldfinger. Very involved in British architecture and planning after the war, he went on to publish a small pamphlet *The County of London Plan explained by E.J Carter and Ernö Goldfinger*, book which carefully illustrated with the use of detailed infographics, the exact intentions of the plan - publication which briefly became a bestseller in London.

At the fourth CIAM in Athens, Goldfinger had already presented a 15 storey building, arguing that the basic principle of the tower block as social housing was *"to provide light and well planned living space while leaving rooms for parks, playgrounds, road access and other amenities at ground level".* An enemy of suburban sprawl, he saw London as a 'park city' and not a 'garden city', in keeping with social ownership and communal use rather than private closed

Fig 7.
Ernö Goldfinger's own photograph of the Ronan Point disaster

off land (Warburton 2004).

The opportunity to put his theories to the test came with the construction of Balfron Tower, completed in 1968. Separating the service tower from the living quarters, the concrete mass stood bold and imposing, setting itself apart from anything 'quaint', 'homely' or 'friendly' that the architects of the New Towns had previously sought to achieve. This tower, aesthetically sublime rather than beautiful, reflected a new vision for social housing, offering stunning views and making better use of land (Warburton 2004).

His involvement in designing the Balfron Tower did not stop as the last brick was laid (so to speak). With the mission to facilitate social intermingling and truly understand if his creation was in fact successful, he and his wife moved into the flat for several months.

"The success of any scheme depends on the human factor – the relationships of people to each other and the frame of their daily life which the building provides" Ernö Goldfinger cited by Warburton

Floor by floor they invited residents to their flat for champagne, in an effort – uncomfortably similar to that of Ballard's dystopian novel *Highrise* - to engineer neighbourly relations. Taking a keen interest in the daily lives of inhabitants, Goldfinger made it his duty to regularly visit the block even after he had left.

The 1968 Ronan Point Disaster however, annulled all positive publicity Goldfinger had endeavoured to promote for the point block over the past ten years. Caused by a small gas explosion on the 18th floor, an enormous chunk of the prefab tower crumbled killing five residents and injuring many more. This pivotal moment in the history of point block construction, brought on a wave of public outrage with regards to the diminishing quality of public housing. Increasingly regarding towers as vertical slums, *"responsible for the breaking up of working class communities and social deterioration"* they linked high rise blocks to the abrupt segregation of residents from the ground, not able to interact in the same way as on the east-end street (Warburton 2004).

Though this tragic event signed the death warrant of tower block construction in the 1970s, their popularity over the previous years had been diminishing as subsidies for building up were abolished in the 1967 *Housing Subsidies Act*, giving local authorities no more incentive to build high. In architectural circles as well, the ideals of the modern movement, *"codified by the Chartes d'Athène and accepted in a watered-down form by official planners"*, were beginning

to be avoided. Instead, students at the Architectural Association, like Neave Brown and his peers were turning towards a low rise-high density approach, inspired by influential schemes such as le Corbusier's Roq & Rob or Atelier 5's Halen Estate (Swenarton 2017).

As prosperity turned to penury, the 1970s marked the end of the post war golden age and became synonymous with social decay. Return of mass unemployment resulted in well paid workers becoming dependent on social security contributing to increasing class segregation.
Although the state of housing had massively improved as central heating and indoor toilets became the norm, economic pressures combined with the race between the Labour and Conservative parties to build housing saw the overall quality of housing drop dramatically. By the start of the 1970s only 20% of government funded housing stock in Britain respected space standards recommended by the *Parker Morris Report* (Burnett 1986).

A radical shift in policy with regards to housing programme saw the 1964-70 Labour government recognize "owner-occupation" as preferred tenure, dealing a large blow to the social agenda of the welfare state. Councils were encouraged to sell their housing stock, and funding was reshuffled to focus on the improvement of existing stock rather than on the construction of new homes. From a standard right, renting from the council became a last resort, to be used as a temporary solution, contributing to the widespread stigma about the social status of people living in public housing. Council estates became associated with anti-social behaviour and drug abuse, segregating the weakest part of society from the 'rest', categorising them as the *"fag-smoking dregs of society"* as described by Oliver Letwin now a Conservative MP. Brutal concrete estates were also synonymous with 'dystopia', often being used as backdrops for films that reflected a society gone terribly wrong. The notorious Thamesmeade Estate featured in Kubrik's, *Clockwork Orange*, while the several scenes from Truffaut's *Farenheit 451* were filmed on the Alton Estate in Roehampton. Many other dramas relating to 'life on the estate' were also released later such as *This is England, Trainspotting* or *Harry Brown*, depicting council estates as foreboding places, not to be approached by the well-to-do Englishman.

As a consequence, the 1970s saw a sharp decrease of council built property officially marking the beginning of the slow retreat of the government from their social responsibilities with regards to housing (Burnett 1986). At about the same time in London, another key change in policy was introduced. This was the dissolution of the London County Council in 1965, formerly responsible as a *"London wide, municipal authority"* for the construction of council housing

in what is known today as Inner London. The LCC was replaced by the Greater London Council (GLC) which extended it geographical area of responsibility to include an outer ring of administrative boundaries. Responsibilities with regards to housing provision were as a result delegated to the 33 newly founded London Boroughs that represented the local interests of each administrative boundary (Swenarton 2017).

The Labour government dealt two more blows to social housing in the next few years. The first one was the introduction of the of the 1974 *Housing Act* which stated that the Housing Corporation would provide financial assistance to private housing associations to make further provision with regards to subsidised housing in the UK. This was to become one of the main contributing factors towards the privatisation of the council owned housing stock.
The second blow came in the midst of Britain's' worst economic crisis. Forced to borrow 3.9 billion pounds from the IMF, the Labour government was forced into austerity and local councils saw their housing budget cut by 150 million pounds.

Fig 8. (left) Cult scene from Kubrik's A Clockwork Orange, filmed at the Thamesmeade Estate

Fig 9

1980

Margaret Thatcher introduces the Right to Buy

While ideology and economics may have been conflicting with regards to housing policy in the Labour government, this was not the case for the Tories whose neo-liberal approach to governing had no place for a social agenda with regards to housing. It wasn't until 1979, with the re-election of the Conservative Party under the reign of Margaret Thatcher, however, that government funded housing was well and truly erased from the political agenda. Serving eleven years as prime minister, her influence on British housing policy had more impact than any other head of state, triggering a fundamental shift in how British society was regarded. From a state whose priorities was the welfare and support of all citizens, it morphed into one with a more hard-lined approach of 'everyone man must pull his own weight and be responsible for his own actions and their consequences', launching what Neave Brown describes as the *"counter neo-liberal revolution"*. (N. Brown 2017)

With the introduction of the Right to Buy policy in 1980 as part of the new *Housing Act* the government took back financial control. By forcing local authorities to provide mortgages, the government offered social tenants a large discount of up to 50% on their council owned property. This policy was the next major step to the privatisation of council homes. As the families who could afford to purchase their homes, took advantage of the opportunity to buy and eventually move on, the poorer half of the working class remained stuck paying rent and claiming benefits. 1 million properties went on to be sold to council tenants in the next ten years, depleting local authorities' housing stock reducing them to shadows of their former selves as construction ground to a halt. Council homes were now for the poorest of the poor. They fell into disrepair and became places known for crime, drug abuse and delinquency (Hanley 2007). Unemployment at its peak, rising distrust due to racial tensions and inner-city depravation began to sew civil unrest amongst the poorest communities around England. Nationwide, this issue stemmed directly from the categorization of an entire segment of the population, isolated from the rest of society and let down by the welfare state. In April 1981, the Brixton Riots broke out, prompting bouts of revolt across the country, one in particular famously triggered in 1985 at the infamous Broadwater Farm Estate in Haringey after the death of Cynthia Garett and the subsequent stabbing of a police officer PC Blakelock.

Fig 9 Margaret Thatcher having tea with James Patterson and his family after having bought their concil flat.

Between 1980 and 1981 the percentage of council homes deemed unfit for

habitation rose and by 1997, the government needed £20 billion to make up for backlog of maintenance repairs that needed to be done on estates across Britain. The lack of maintenance was inevitable as local authorities had been forbidden to re-inject money from the sales back into building new homes and maintaining existing ones. Instead, they were forced to use it to help decrease the governments' general debt and reduce taxes. The selling off of these council owned homes meant that they were now in the hands of private owners and landlords who were able to rent the properties out at market rent. As a consequence of privately rented 'ex-council flats' and strapped- for-cash local authorities and a general rise in proseperity, rents went up and as a result forced social tenants to claim more benefits from the government; an unforeseen consequence that cost the government millions (Meek 2014).

"Right to Buy thus created an astonishing leak of state money – taxpayers money – into the hands of a rentier class. First the government sold people homes it owned at a huge discount. Then it allowed the original buyers to keep the profit when they sold these homes to private landlords at market price. Then government artificially raised rents by choking off supply – by making it impossible for councils to replace the sold off houses. Then it paid those high rents to the same private landlords in the form of housing benefit" (Meek 2014)

As the Right to Buy started stalling, the government of 1988 still refused to let councils borrow. This was to prevent the enormous financial risks taken by the Conservative party from appearing on Britain's total government debt. The only way around it? Housing Associations. As James Meek explains in Where will we live? :

"First, non profit making as they [Housing Associations] were, they were formally designated part of the private sector, making it possible for them to borrow on the open market without debt showing up on the governments books. Then, the government made it possible for councils to sell their housing stock wholesale (or estate by estate if they preferred) to housing associations specially created for the purpose." (Meek, 2014)

Fig 10 (right)
1985 Brixton riots

TO LET
CITY
CENTRE
BUREAU
CITY

Fig 11

2017

Grenfell Tower catches light

While the 1974 *Housing Act*, introduced by a Labour government had seen Housing Associations as complementary to public housing, the Conservatives saw them as a replacement. In an attempt to cut government implication in public housing further, the 1988 *Housing Act* stated that financial aid to Housing Associations was to be cut, binding these not-for-profit associations evermore to the private sector (Brennan 2015). This meant that in the past twenty years, housing stock initially handled by the public sector or the "tax payer" was now making its way into the hands of private associations.

The selling off of council owned housing stock to RSLs (Registered Housing Landlords) such as housing associations could not happen without the consent of a majority of tenants before being transferred, a clause which was added after parliamentary pressure (Meek, 2014). The choice given to tenants in most estates at the beginning of the millennium was to transfer to a housing association and receive grants for maintenance or continue to be tenants to the council and receive nothing. Some high performing councils also offered the possibility of ALMOs (Arms Length Management Organizations) which would ensure tenants remained with the council while getting upgraded homes, but such councils were few and far between (Hanley, 2007). There was a lot of pressures on councils to off load their stock to the private sector to minimize debt, and as a result 'yes to transfer' campaigns received public money while the 'no to transfer' campaigns didn't. In five years, one million homes were sold to RSLs and by 2008, 170 councils around the UK were left with no social housing stock (Meek 2014). Although this staggering amount of transfers to the private sector demonstrated the clear failure of the welfare state, a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2009, cited in James Meeks' article found that:

"most housing associations which took over and renovated council estates had exceeded the official standards for good homes, in terms of facilities and living space; had given tenants a bigger say in estate management compared to supposedly more democratic councils; and had gone beyond their remit to invest in community facilities like libraries and schools" (Meek, 2014)

It is important to note that housing associations are not-for-profit private charities and do not have shareholders or indeed pay dividends. Contrary to

Fig 11 (left) Grenfell Tower burning

what public opinion seems to believe, housing associations are prohibited from making profit and must reinvest all their assets back into housing. Though Housing Associations have become the main source of social housing built today, they represent a system that values entrepreneurial charities and a subsidised private sector over state funded and administered housing. With the privatisation of the stock comes the potential for profitability - a fundamental difference from any system relying on the taxpayer.

As public assets are continually sold off, the private developer has become king of the jungle. Acquiring vast areas of land, they have taken over chunks of London which they have been allowed to mutate at will into a profit spinning ghost town. *"Substituting community for vacancy"*, they go unchecked, replacing entire estates with empty residences sold off to foreign investors (Wainwright 2014). This undisputed, seemingly unstoppable, capitalist force has been allowed to flourish through a technical loop hole called Section 106, buried in the 1990 *Town and Country Planning Act*. Section 106 was introduced to encourage planning departments of local authorities to allow large developments within their boundaries by establishing a 'tax' that would enable the borough to generate profit from the impending development. This financial contribution is negotiable and is intended to allow local boroughs to adapt to the new conditions imposed by the development. Permission for the construction of a hundred new houses for example, might be made conditional on the funding of improvements to existing schools by the developer, possibly to accommodate new children living on the new development (Wainwright 2014). This clause has generated a loop hole allowing a form of legalised bribery whereby developers can argue their way out of social requirements through informal negotiation. The regeneration of Elephant and Castle in South London is a classic example of this. Replacing the 1200 council owned flats on wwthe Heygate Estate with 2300 private flats, property developer Lendlease was required to respect the required quota of 35% affordable (affordable meaning 80% of market rent) housing set by Southwark Council. Through negotiation with planners however, the developer has in fact contributed £3.5 million toward the construction of a community leisure centre, seemingly quite generous, until people realised that they had actually saved double the amount bypassing the 35% affordable rent requirement. Today, 'One the Elephant' as the development is called provides just 25% of units at affordable rent and a miserable 79 available for social rent (3.4% of the total) (Wainwright 2014).

In addition to this, in an ironic twist of events, leaseholders of the demolished Heygate Estate, who had purchased their properties under the Right to Buy, were handed Compulsory Purchase Orders (2) so low (£150'000 for a two-bed

2. Compulsory Purchase Order: legal action that allows certain authoritative bodies in the UK and Ireland to acquire land without the consent of the owner

apartment) that they were forced to move to the outskirts of London. Today, one bedroom flats on the new development go for £420'000 (Wainwright 2014). The dream of being a homeowner turned into a nightmare as leaseholders became unable to afford any property of the same size within the borough - a classic example of people being 'priced out of the area' which has been largely regarded by protesters as 'social cleansing'. The discrepancy between what properties are valued at by the council and what they are valued at by local estate agents is the real issue. What is the value of a flat when it is going to be demolished? Councillor Mark Williams of Southwark Council maintains that prices offered are 'market value' and says that leaseholders have been offered a range of Help to Buy options such as shared ownership. This means that homeowners would be able to buy a percentage between 25%-75% of a property and pay rent on the rest of it. If eligible, previous homeowners will revert back to being part-renters and lose the independence and security they saw as desirable in the first instance. (Wright, 2014)

On the 14th of June 2017, 24 storey council block Grenfell Tower, located in the wealthy borough of Kensington and Chelsea was burned to the ground, killing 71 people. Renovated in 2016, an aluminium cladding had been used to cover the building, instead of the recommended fire-resistant zinc version which saved the Kensington and Chelsea Tenants Management Organisation £300'000. Lack of fire barriers within the cladding, caused a chimney effect allowing the fire to spread to the entire building. Today, what remains of Grenfell Tower stands as symbol of the failed welfare state, a constant reminder to London of just how far it has strayed from the egalitarian dream it once strove to nurture. Not just an issue of housing, the Grenfell disaster reflected a much deeper *"abandonment of Britain's poorest"* (Ryan 2017) and the dramatic retreat of the state with regards to its social responsibilities. Policy failures and constant shifts in legislation systematically established strong class segregation and as the poor to became poorer, in London in particular, the rich became much richer.

Part *two*

A typological case study of the *slab*

This chapter will study four examples of council housing built in the period between 1972 and 1981. These buildings have been analysed with the ambition of comparing them at face value and gaining an understanding as to how they work at an urban scale as well as in their detail. These architectural points of analysis will then be used to discuss the precarious nature of social housing today in the aim of bringing to light key notions of post-war social housing.

The study was carried out in three steps: on site field research as a first approach to council housing in London, redrawing as a method for comprehension, and finally, analysis based on a set of criteria as a method of comparison.

Field trip

The aim of this fieldtrip was to be an initial face to face encounter with housing built by councils in the post-war period with the ambition of getting a feel for these buildings and understanding what they had in common and what their main differences were, not only architecturally but socially and economically. It was important in the first phases of research to visit buildings of all types, ranging from large mixed-use developments like the Aylesbury Estate to isolated tower blocks like Denys Lasdun's Keeling House and more linear constructions like Neave Brown's Alexandra Road. It was equally as important to visit a panoply of buildings that were located in as many different boroughs as possible. Due to the dissolution of the London County Council in 1965 (which lead to the creation of the Greater London Council) responsibilities were distributed to local authorities around London. From one centralised power, the system shifted to a constitution of democratically elected boroughs that made up what is still called Greater London today. From the dissolution of the LCC, these boroughs became responsible for the development of housing and the allocation of government funding within their administrative boundary. This shift in power had a major influence on the construction of council housing and the great variation in quality of schemes from one borough to the next .

The approach of the first visit, almost naïve, was intended to set the scene for future analysis. It was important to make a record of atmosphere, maintenance and surroundings by not only by visiting the building in itself but by walking around the area. In total, sixteen examples of council housing built between 1959 and 1981 were visited within seven different boroughs:

Fig 12 (left) Balfron Tower*

Date	Building	London Borough	Architect	Status[3]
1959	Keeling House	Tower Hamlets	Drake & Lasdun	Grade II*
1967	Balfron Tower	Tower Hamlets	Ernö Goldfinger	Grade II*
1967	Broadwater Farm	Harringey	C. E Jacob & Alan Weitzel	Not listed
1968	Cotton Garden Estate	Lambeth	George Finch	Not listed
1968	Alton Estate	Wandsworth	Rosemary Stjernstedt	Not listed
1972	Dawson's Heights Estate	Southwark	Kate Macintosh	Not Listed
1972	Robin Hood Gardens	Tower Hamlets	A & P Smithson	Not Listed
1972	Brunswick Centre	Camden	P. Hodgkinson & Partners	Grade II
1974	Ashington House	Tower Hamlets	Noel Moffet Associates	Not listed
1974	Lambeth Towers	Lambeth	George Finch	Not listed
1976	Barbican Estate	City of London	Chamberlin Powell & Lebon	Grade II
1976	Oakshott Court	Camden	Peter Tabori	Not listed
1977	Aylesbury Estate	Southwark	H. P. F Trenton	Not Listed
1978	Alexandra Road	Camden	Neave Brown	Grade II*
1978	Branch Hill Estate	Camden	Gordon Benson & Alan Forsyth	Grade II
1981	Southwyck House	Lambeth	Magda Borowiecka	Not listed

3. A listed building or structure is one that has been recognized for its cultural value by Historic England. This status offers protection from demolition and alteration, requiring special permission from local planning authority. In England and Wales there are three categories of listing. Grade I: buildings of exceptional interest, Grade II: particularly important buildings of more than special interest and Grade II: buildings that are of special interest.*

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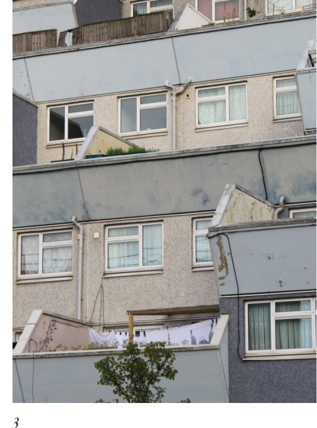

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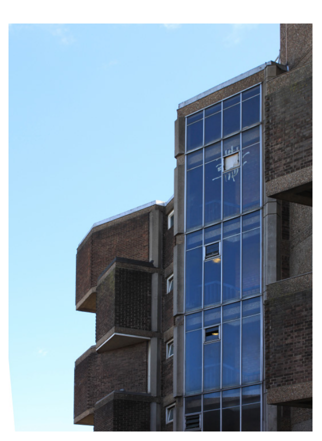

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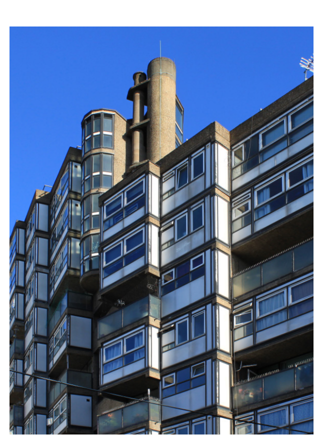

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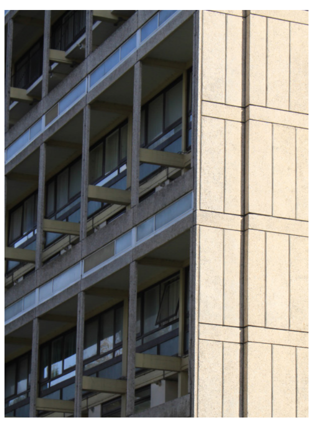

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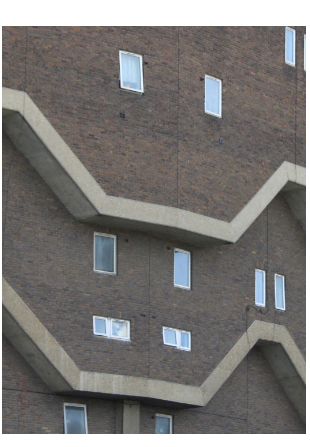
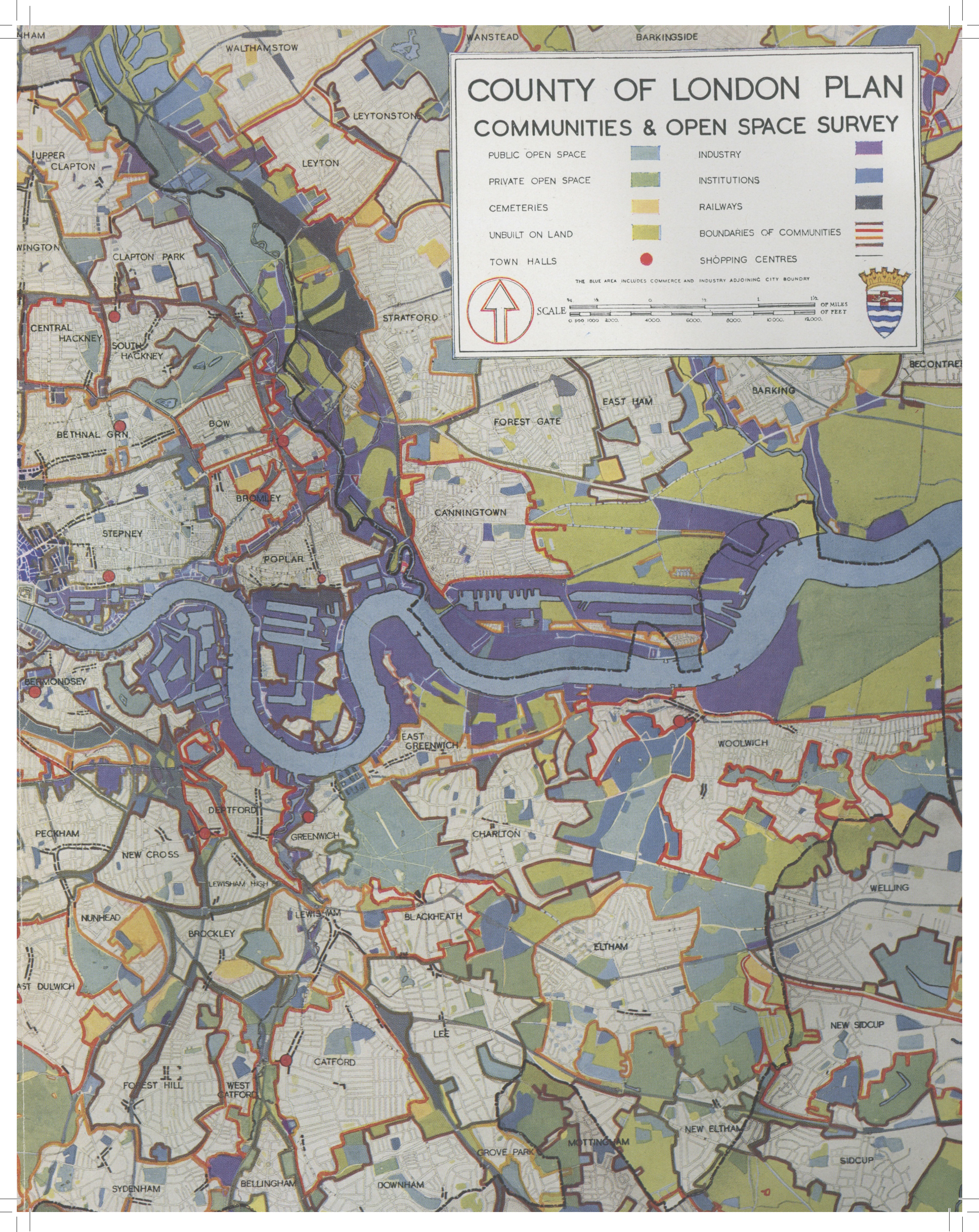


15

1. Keeling House
2. Balfron Tower
3. Broadwater Farm
4. Cotton Garden Estate
5. Alton Estate
6. Dawson Heiights
7. Robin Hood Gardens
8. Brunswick Centre
9. Ashington House
10. Lambeth Towers
11. Oakshott Road
12. Alton Estate
13. Aylesburty Estate
14. Branch Hill Estate
15. Southwyck House

*Fig 13 - 27**

QUEENSBURY
HENDON
HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB
HORNSEY
HARRINGAY
TOTTENHAM
KINGSBURY
GOLDERS GRN
HIGHGATE
NEASDEN
UPPER HOLLOWAY
CRICKLEWOOD
HAMPSTEAD
HIGHBURY
WEST HAMPSTEAD
BELSIZE PARK
WILLESDEN GRN.
BRONDESBURY
KENTISH TOWN
SWISS COTTAGE
DALSTON
ISLINGTON
HARLESDEN
KILBURN
KENSAL GRN
ST JOHNS WOOD
CAMDEN TOWN
FINSBURY
NORTH PADDINGTON
MAIDA VALE
BLOOMSBURY
PADDINGTON
MARYLEBONE
ST QUENTIN PARK
BAYSWATER
PADDINGTON SOUTH
CITY
ACTON
WEST END
SHEPHERDS BUSH
KENSINGTON
SOUTH BANK
HAMMERSMITH
SOUTH KENSINGTON
BELGRAVIA
NORTH LAMBETH
SOUTHWARK
CHISWICK
EARLS COURT
PIMLICO
CHELSEA
FULHAM
SOUTH LAMBETH
CAMBERWELL
NORTH BRIXTON
BARNES
BATTERSEA
MORTLAKE
PUTNEY NORTH
CLAPHAM
BRIXTON
ROEHAMPTON
PUTNEY SOUTH
SOUTH BATTERSEA
HERNE HILL
WANDSWORTH
DULWICH VILLAGE
ROEHAMPTON VILLAGE
WANDSWORTH COMMON
BALHAM
SOUTHFIELDS
PUTNEY HEATH
STREATHAM
ROBIN HOOD
WEST NORWOOD
DULWICH
TOOTING


COUNTY OF LONDON PLAN
COMMUNITIES & OPEN SPACE SURVEY
PUBLIC OPEN SPACE
PRIVATE OPEN SPACE
CEMETERIES
UNBUILT ON LAND
TOWN HALLS
INDUSTRY
INSTITUTIONS
RAILWAYS
BOUNDARIES OF COMMUNITIES
SHOPPING CENTRES
THE BLUE AREA INCLUDES COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY ADJOINING CITY BOUNDRY
SCALE
OF MILES
OF FEET
WALTHAMSTOW
WANSTEAD
BARKINGSIDE
LEYTONSTONE
LEYTON
UPPER CLAPTON
CLAPTON PARK
STRATFORD
CENTRAL HACKNEY
SOUTH HACKNEY
BETHNAL GRN.
BOW
FOREST GATE
EAST HAM
BARKING
BECONTREE
BROMLEY
CANNINGTOWN
STEPNEY
POPLAR
BERMONDSEY
EAST GREENWICH
WOOLWICH
DEPTFORD
GREENWICH
CHARLTON
PECKHAM
NEW CROSS
LEWISHAM HIGH
WELLING
NUNHEAD
LEWISHAM
BLACKHEATH
BROCKLEY
ELTHAM
EAST DULWICH
NEW SIDCUP
LEE
CATFORD
FOREST HILL
WEST CATFORD
NEW ELTHAM
MOTTINGHAM
GROVE PARK
SIDCUP
SYDENHAM
BELLINGHAM
DOWNHAM

What was most remarkable to me during this visit was the great variability in the evolution of these buildings, constructed at the same period for the same purpose. While a building like Goldfinger's famous Balfron Tower was in the process renovation and transition from a social hosing block to private flats, the equally as famous (in architectural circles) Robin Hood Gardens, five minutes walk away, and, more importantly, within the same borough of Tower Hamlets, was awaiting imminent demolition. This felt curious to me. What factors defined the survival of these buildings? Why was Tower Hamlets choosing to give value to one building and not the other? And finally, was this choice related to their architectural qualities or was it more to do with economic and political factors?

Page 48-49
Fig 28.
Communities and Open Space Survey

Visiting buildings all over London also made me understand to what extent attitudes toward social housing had varied from one Borough to the next. While some local authorities took care to build decent quality council homes around their borough, the quality of housing in others seemed very uneven. The Borough of Southwark, for example, struck me as council whose attitude with regards to housing shifted dramatically from one estate to the next. This was especially striking when comparing Dawson's Height pristine state and the Aylesbury Estate's lack of maintenance. The Borough of Camden was to me the most successful example of how government funded housing had, in the post-war period, become an area of experimentation where architects and planners had been allowed the freedom to try new things and develop a thesis of what social housing could and should be. When visiting the Brunswick Centre, Oakshott Court, Branch Hill Estate and Alexandra Road it became immediately obvious that Camden had developed an architectural style for social housing that valued low-rise high-density housing in the form of stepped apartments each with large private terraces. Though all placed in completely different urban contexts, these projects all provided an external public space be it in the form of a new street, stepping courtyards or a shopping centre. By their proximity to these public spaces, residents could feel related to a wider community establishing immediate dialogue between the estates and their surroundings.

The provision of public open space as part of the estate, not exclusively provided by the Borough of Camden, but also in projects like Dawson Heights in Southwark and the Alton Estate in Wandsworth meant that the building acted as a positive contribution to its community by offering these communal spaces to the neighbourhood. Some tower blocks on the other hand, often surrounded by high metal gates and locked doors, immediately felt ostracized from their context, this was the case for Cotton Garden Estate or Keeling House. On the whole, it felt like the slab typology was often more likely to be

well integrated into an existing urban fabric by creating a seamless connection between the public realm and the entirely private domestic space.

Finally, the last element I made a note of, was the "air of estateness" that some buildings carried while others did not. In her book, Estates – An Intimate History, author Lynsey Hanley describes "estateness" as a "psychological wall" between people living in estates and the rest of the city, linked to the stigma that was born around council estates in the late seventies. During the field trip, this manifested itself as an atmosphere of abandonment, made visible through a lack of maintenance and the anonymity of people's front gardens and balconies. Though all estates looked lived in, there was a clear difference between those that reflected a sense of pride through maintenance and domesticity and those that felt anonymous to the point of feeling forgotten. To me this air of abandonment was reflected the most at Broadwater Farm in Haringey and the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, two large mixed-use developments.

Focusing on the typology of the slab

With these intuitions in mind after the field trip, four projects that I deemed interesting were selected to be discussed in more detail: Alexandra Road in Camden, Robin Hood Gardens in Tower Hamlets, Southwyck House in Lambeth and Dawson Heights in Southwark. These four council estates located in different boroughs and built by different architects have a common horizontal organisation. The decision to study examples that related to the slab typology was informed by the radical change in perception at the start of the seventies with regards to the tower block when subsidies previously granted for building high were suddenly withdrawn (Burnett 1986). The horizontal form allowed for housing to dialogue with its environment in a way a high-rise point block could not, and, therefore, as of this era, the 'low-rise high-density' approach became the preferred solution in British council housing. Though most of the examples that I have chosen to analyse are not 'low-rise' per se (ranging from seven to twelve stories), they all have the tendency to extend in a horizontal direction, enabling dialogue with their surroundings rather than positioning themselves in the city as a punctual element. These horizontal buildings, through the intrinsic nature of their form, also generate a sense of protection from the burgeoning metropolis that the tower block cannot. Though this may seem in direct contradiction with the harmonious integration into the site and the importance of dialogue with an existing urban fabric, these examples will be used to discuss the nature of that dichotomy and the architectural negotiation between private space and the public realm.

Although the history of high rise blocks built in the post war period in England and Scotland is not to be ignored, I have decided to set it aside for this study with a hope of coming back to it at a later date.

To enable comparison, these four examples were all redrawn in the same way and at the same scale and will all be discussed on the basis of six criteria that I have set:

Degree of integration into urban fabric
Has the project succeeded in placing itself into its surroundings and contributing to the area as a new part of the city?

Quality of green space
Does the building offer outdoor space in a successful way for its inhabitants and the community?

Level of current maintenance
Has the building been well maintained? If not, why not? Is it due to the finances of Borough? How much is due to affluence of the area or the residents?

Financial viability
Is the scheme still financially viable today? Is it still entirely council housing? Who pays for it?

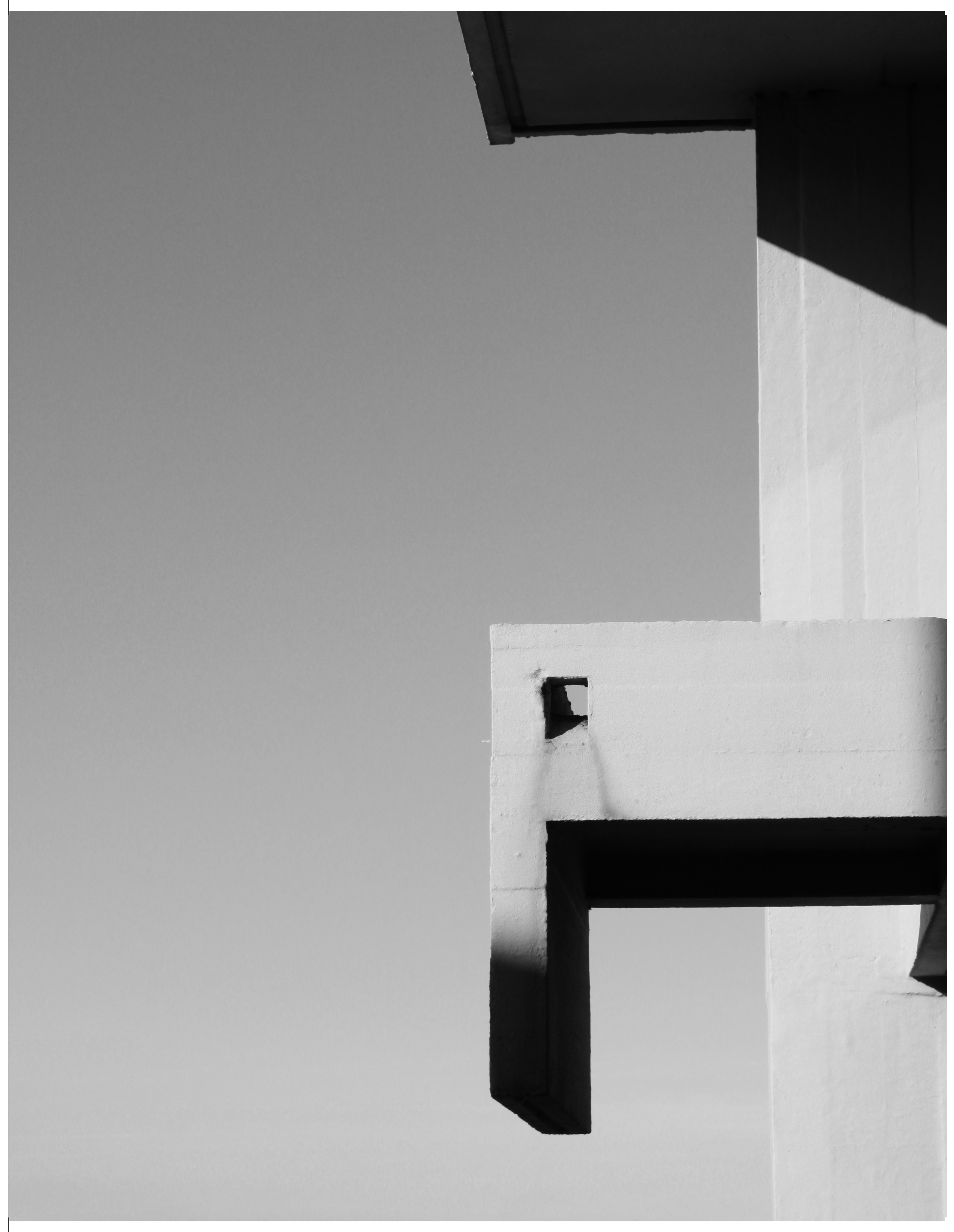
Satisfaction of inhabitants
Has the project succeeded in creating a valid and coherent society?

Architectural quality
Is it beautiful? Have the architectural elements contributed to the success of the building?

Please note:

All following drawings shown in this book are not to scale. Please refer to the A2 fold-out annexe provided to view all drawings to scale.

Fig 29 (right)
Entrance porch at Keeling House*



Alexandra Road
Concrete Suburbia

Architect: Neave Brown
Year of completion: 1978
Borough: Camden
Status: Grade II*
Dwellings: 520
N° of residents: 2217
GA: 10400 m2
Density: 0.21pers/m^2

History
Alexandra Road Estate was built and commissioned by Camden Council under the direction of Sydney Cook, head of Camden Council Architect's Department between 1964 and 1974. Designed by Neave Brown, also hired as part of the department, Alexandra Road became one of the most ambitious projects built by the borough and became a beacon of the architectural "Camden" style of housing. The housing project was the third in a series of stepped terraced schemes built by Brown. As the final chapter of his thesis on housing after Fleet Road and Winscombe Street the scheme became the pinnacle of his career although, paradoxically, was the last project he ever built in the UK (Swenarton 2017). Forty years later, in 2017, Neave Brown was awarded the RIBA Gold Medal for the scheme.

Formerly occupied by Victorian villas, the site was earmarked for redevelopment in the ambition of obtaining the required density of 136 people per acre and more than doubling the number of provided accommodation. Commissioned by the council, the scheme was intended to house social tenants signed up to the local housing register (Swenarton 2017).

Site
The northern edge of the site is bounded by Euston Railway and to the south by the existing Ainsworth Estate, which was incorporated into the design. Boundary Road flanks the southern edge of the site. The shorter edges of the site are framed by Abbey Road and Loudon Road.
In reference to the *Communities And Open Space Survey* drawn up in 1943 for the *London Development Plan*, the building finds itself on the edge of the St John's Wood community and is surrounded by neighbouring residential communities that are mainly separated by roads and other traffic axis.

Brief
The project brief required not only housing but a public park, a school, a community centre, shops and parking spaces. These requirements were often subject to change as the scheme took so long to be approved and therefore

Page 54
*Fig 30**
Central street at the Alexandra Road Estate

*Fig 31**
Diagram situating Alexandra Road

Fig 32

Fig 33

Fig 34

constantly had to adapt to change in legislation. The 1959 *Mental Health Act*, for example, required local authorities all over the country to provide care and education in specialised centres for children judged incapable of receiving education in state schools. Before 1965, this fell under the responsibility of the LCC, but with its dissolution was passed on to all local boroughs. As a result, Alexandra Road was required to incorporate a Junior Training Centre at the last minute.
The existing residents of the site, to be rehoused were mainly pensioners and families. The brief therefore required a majority of one bedroom and three/four bedroom dwellings (Swenarton 2017).

Scheme
Though part of the Modern school of thought still very much alive at the Architectural Association where he was a student, Neave Brown rejected le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* that he deemed a *"loss of continuity cultural and physical"* where the inhabitant became segregated from city life (Swenarton 2017). This disregard for the street, was *"throwing away a whole pattern of life"* that was an integral part of the British way. He equally rejected the strategy of mixed development, hugely popular in the fifties, arguing that a large complex of high rise and low rise blocks treated the city as one large sculpture and warned against the danger of 'residual space' and the importance of planning a site as you would do a building: as one entity (Swenarton 2017).

Neave Brown's solution sought another approach, more sensitive to British tradition. A new pedestrian street, entirely segregated from cars, flanked with stepped back terrace housing that would echo the pattern of the existing urban fabric. In this way, the scheme proposed the continuation of the Victorian street: a traditional pattern adapted to modern requirements. However, there were not only residential units, as this scheme also provided to the east of the site commercial units, a community centre, a school and a large parking. The parking also accessible from the east side of the site sits below the elevated street. Three rows of residential units, two facing each other and the last facing the existing Ainsworthy estate frame a public park. The outdoor green space also reveals a complexity of program proposing all types of different play areas for different types of activity. Recreation, however, is not just restricted to the green space as sloped walls, large concrete steps and curved partitions act as informal play areas for children throughout the estate (Swenarton 2017).

Fig 32
Green space at Alexandra Road

Fig 33
Alexandra Road under construction

Fig 34
Alexandra Road complete

Turning its back to the Euston Railway, the 500 metre long megastructure and tallest of the three residential rows, acts as a noise barrier for the domestic life it is seeking to protect. Vertical concrete walls slice the building creating an endless rhythm of support along the rear of the concrete structure. On the

other side, these walls cascade down to meet the street in diagonal bends that eventually morph into benches or planters. Invisible to the outside world, this brutal concrete structure provides a quiet environment where domestic life can flourish.

Resembling a skyscraper lying on its side, the scheme values the low-rise high-density approach. In the continuation of face-to-face, three/four storey, traditional Victorian terraced housing, all dwellings have a private garden and give onto the public street which is immediately accessible thanks to the regular distribution of staircases connecting the dwellings to the central public space. Although very connected to this public street, dwellings giving immediately onto it are protected by a first buffer of public furniture - a planter or bench, and directly behind it a second buffer - a void giving onto the parking below. A raised semi-private "street" above the fourth floor flats runs along the entirety of the structure from one end of the street to the other allowing a degree of separation from the public realm while still maintaining a visual connection with the red brick walkway.

The scheme, being entirely built of concrete, allows for architectural elements to seamlessly transform into one another creating an entire site that can be understood as one continual architecture, defined by the interdependence between components regardless of program. Architectural details are the same throughout the building further enhancing the idea of one large construction as opposed to the composition of separate entities. The façade is composed of vertical concrete elements poured in situ and horizontal precast elements assembled on site. Although the composition of the façade reflects a seamless repetitive system, a closer look at the diagonal folding of the vertical elements and the variation of the staircases reveals the complexity of the building and a structure which has been adapted to accommodate a wide range of varying flat typologies. This attention to detail is also reflected by the combination of thick precast elements (floor slab and balcony rail) and translucent glass that enhances the notion of depth with nuances of shadow across the building.
Units are organised in double bays that are separated by communicating staircases that lead up to the raised street. Entrances to the larger top floor maisonettes are stepped back due to this walkway. The series of bays seem to be articulated by a giant order defined by the shadows of the staircases meeting the raised street which in turn acts as a weightless cornice. The structure is interrupted every five/six bays by a lift shaft whose void is treated in the same way as that of the staircases acting as another vertical column of shadow in the endless rhythm of the street (Swenarton 2017).

Facade Elevation

Assessment

Degree of integration into urban fabric

By creating a modern street adapted to contemporary requirement that mirrors the urban fabric of its surroundings, Alexandra Road integrates itself its surroundings, and allows for a fluidity of public movement through the estate, while respecting the privacy of the domestic realm. With the provision of public amenities and green space as well as the effort of integration of the existing Ainsworthy Estate, the scheme does indeed make a contribution to its community.

Quality of green space

The only parts of the Alexandra Road Estate which are not accessible to the public are the residential dwellings themselves while the rest of the estate becomes part of the public realm offering itself up to all sorts of recreational uses. In this regard, the scheme has successfully offered outdoor space to its inhabitants and neighbouring communities.

Level of current maintenance

Alexandra Road suffered a lack of maintenance in the mid 80s, with the arrival of Thatcher's policy of "rate capping" restricting the budget that councils could spend on public housing, leading to dissatisfied tenants. This however, led to a campaign to restore the estate to its former state by getting the building Grade II* listed. Successfully listed as the first modern housing estate, funds for the maintenance of the building were restored. Today it remains well maintained. All public spaces are kept clear of trash, the concrete is regularly cleaned and greenery is flourishing. Going beyond the maintenance of the public realm, private dwelling also reflect a sense of pride. All balconies are inhabited: plants are tended to, laundry hangs to dry and bikes lean against walls. Although it is clear that Camden Council tend to the maintenance of the estate, the domestication of the private sphere on the estate adds as much to the sense of the well looked after estate, contributing in my opinion to its success.

Financial viability

Alexandra Road was Grade II* listed in 1994, meaning that as of then it was recognised as part of the England's cultural heritage. With this new found cultural status as well as the scheme winning the RIBA Gold medal in 2017, the estate has almost total protection from economic pressures that other estates may suffer. This protection does however come at a cost as alterations and repairs must be in keeping with the existing architectural nature. Maintaining the building and heating systems while keeping flats to the *Decent Home Standards* (4) therefore becomes an expensive affair. Today, approximately 150

4. Decent Home Standards: Programme set up by Shelter UK, aimed at improving council or housing association homes to bring them up to a minimum standard.

5. Self-management: residents managing their properties and not the council.

residents of 520 households are leaseholders but a vast majority of the overall population of Alexandra Road still remain council tenants. Self-managed[5] by the Tenants Association, funding for the upkeep of the building comes from the commercial buildings on site and rents. Empty apartments can also be rented at "intermediate rent", allowing new tenants who don't qualify for social housing but can't afford market rents either, to get a place on the estate (Camden 2007). Though the estate is expensive to run, the financial viability of the estate is more easily achievable as a result of its cultural recognition, although it is important to note that due to this recognition the value of dwellings on the estate has gone up.

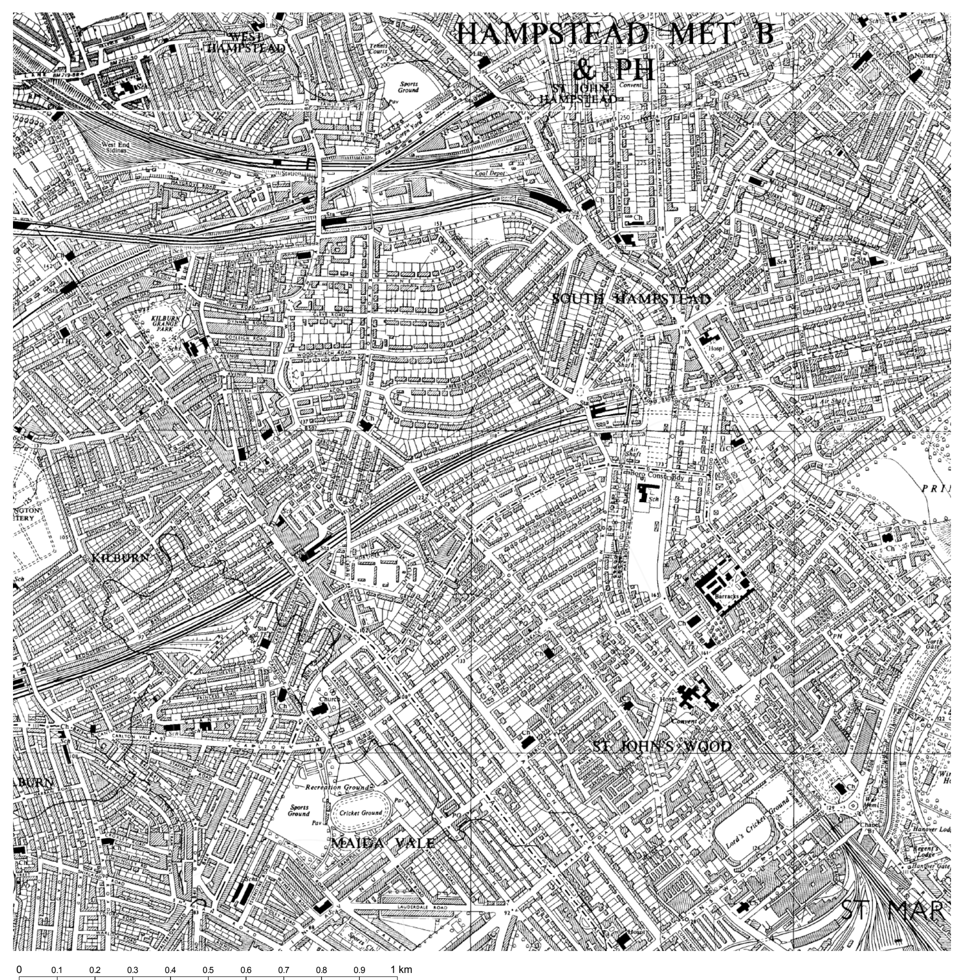
Satisfaction of inhabitants

Today a Tenants and Residents Association has been set up to promote classes and other activities happening on the estate. This factor combined with the overwhelming cultural recognition of the estate and continued maintenance, indicates the success and cohesion of the current community

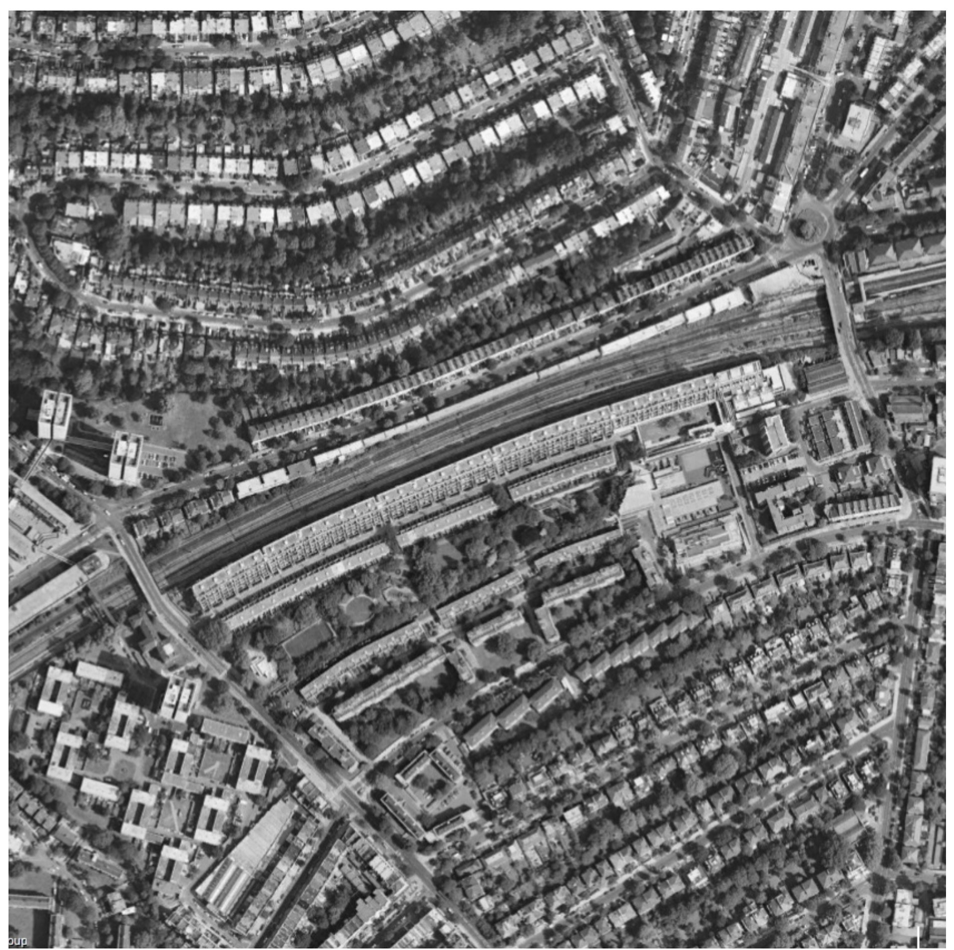
Architectural quality

The architectural quality of Alexandra Road contributes to the success of the building in so far as it is in keeping with a very British tradition of living on the street. The nuanced articulation of public amenities, semi-public walkways and the private realm makes sure the residents are not cut off from the existing community and on the contrary, make sure they play an active role in it.

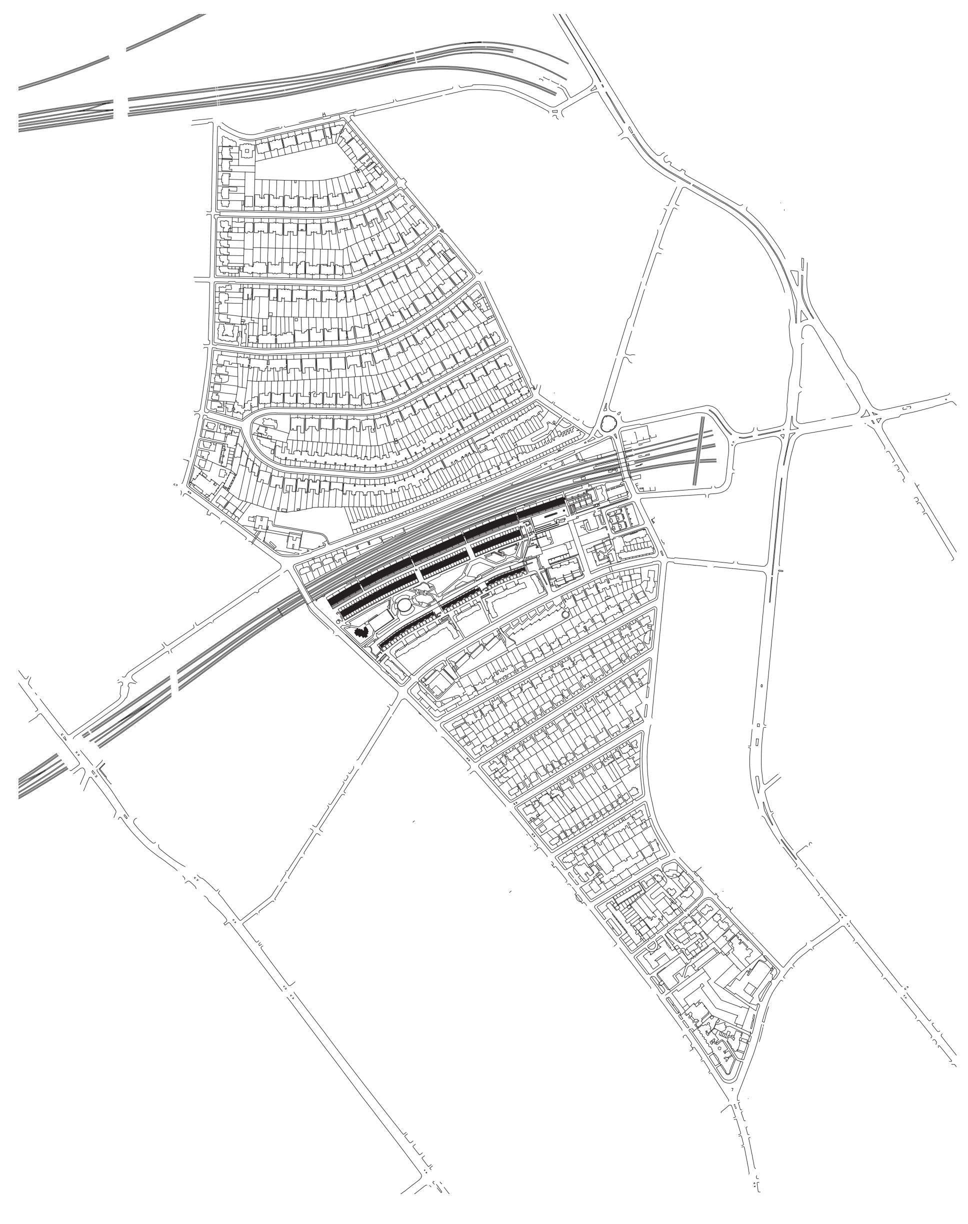
To me, Alexandra Road is successful in the way it has managed to negotiate the heroic large scale of the city and the much-reduced domestic scale of man. The finer articulation and systematic repetition of detail play an essential role in giving the estate a feel of one coherent project. The red brick central walkway, standing out in contrast to the brutal concrete, celebrates the tradition of the street which inherently commemorates a British way of life and in turn triggers pride of being a resident at Alexandra Road. This, to me, is another crucial factor in the success of the scheme.



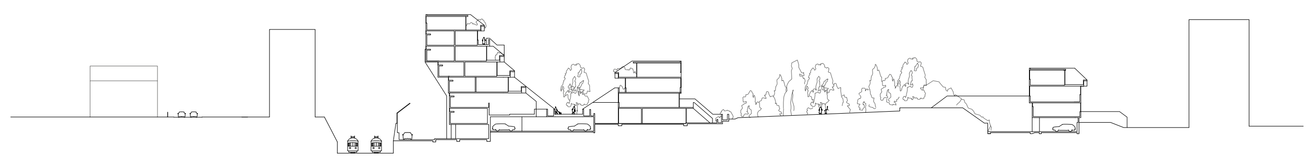
Camden, 1950



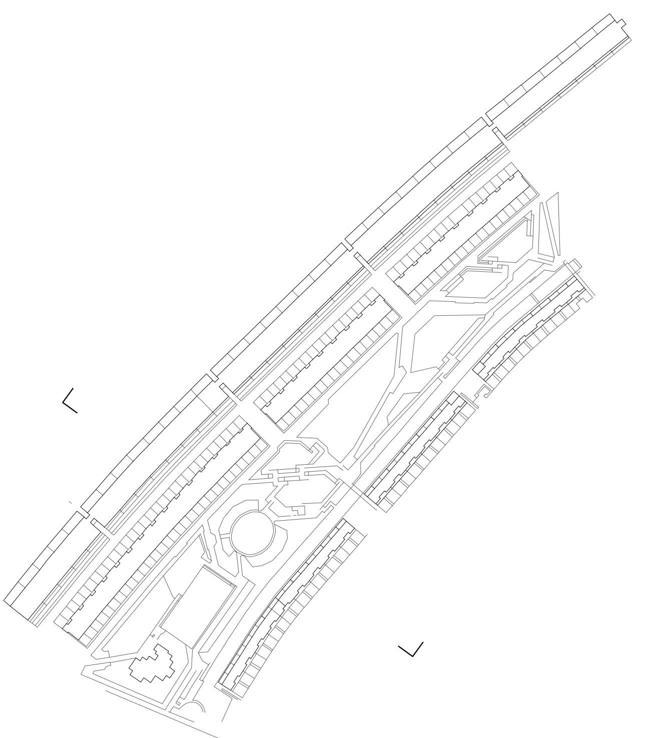
Aerial view of Alexandra Road



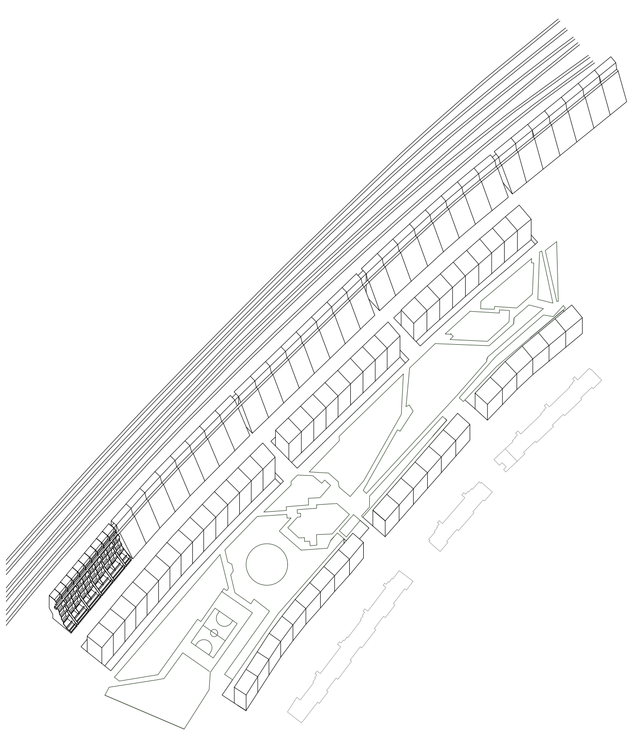
Site plan of Alexandra Road



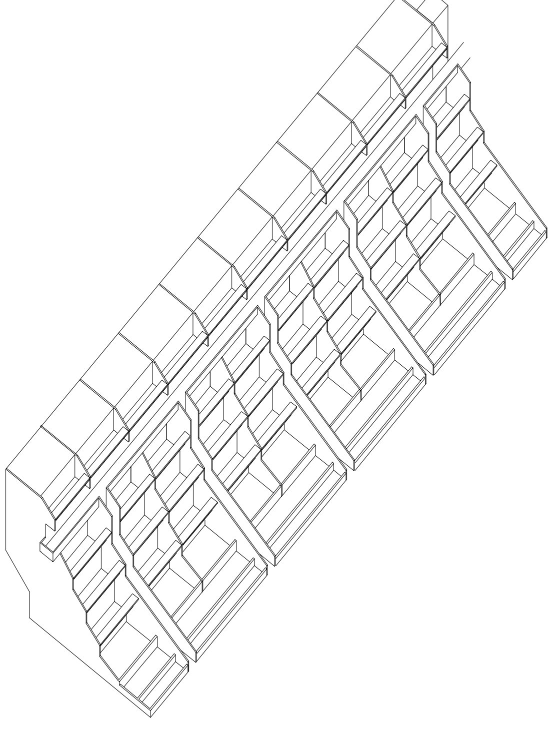
Section



Plan of scheme



Diagrmmatic axonometry



Axonometric view of units

*Fig 35**

*Fig 36**

*Fig 37**

*Fig 38**

*Fig 39**

*Fig 35**
Road to parking underneath Alexandra Road

*Fig 36**
View onto pedestrian street from top of stair core

*Fig 37**
Front view onto apartment terraces and lift core

*Fig 38**
Stair leading to apartments

*Fig 39**
Concrete detail of top balcony

Robin Hood Gardens

Dystopian Shelter

*Fig 41**

Architect: A + P Smithson
Year of completion: 1972
Borough: Tower Hamlets
Status: Demolished
Dwellings: 252 dwellings
N° of residents: NA
GA: 2750 m2
Density: NA

History
The history of Robin Hood Gardens is turbulent and ends in demolition and controversy. As the only case study examined in this dissertation with such a fate, it is imperative to understand the conditions in which it was built as well as the ones in which it will be demolished.
Robin Hood Gardens is situated in the former London Metropolitan Borough of Poplar which was, as a result of the creation of the Greater London Council in 1965, absorbed as part of what is known today as the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Although Poplar surroundings (Canary Wharf and the Docklands) today represent what was described by political activist Peter Gowan as "Wall Street's Guantanamo" (Brennan 2015) and the epitome of financial corruption, it was not always the case – in fact, it was quite the opposite. From the turn of the 20th century, Poplar was rapidly developed to house workers of the neighbouring Docks and other industries and became one of the most ambitious local authorities when it came to pushing a social programme and fighting for a more equal society.

In his essay Not the same as building for the socialist state, Owen Hatherly explains that under the direction of George Lansbury, the local council sought to establish a minimum wage for workers, offer equal pay for men and for women while also improving the far from decent living conditions through a programme called "poor relief".

"They didn't have tax revenues to fund this, and refused to raise their 'rates' in order not to punish the very workers they were trying to help. Instead, they demanded subsidy from London's wealthier boroughs – taxing the rich in essence" (Brennan 2015)

The ambition of an egalitarian society was such that in 1921, Lansbury lead the Poplar Rates Rebellion, a protest which denounced the unfair taxation policy on property whereby Poplar, one of the poorest districts in England was being taxed at higher rates than other wealthier boroughs in order to generate equal income from all parts of London. Councillors refused to collect the tax and

Page 72
*Fig 40**
Access deck of Robin Hood Gardens

*Fig 41**
Diagram situating Robin Hood Gardens

marched with 2000 people from Bow to the High Court. As a result, many councillors of the borough were jailed, but, despite this, were able to generate nationwide support. In response, the *Local Authorities Act* was written, which made this rebalancing of taxation legal (Brennan 2015).

This 'Poplarism' demonstrated just how much influence local authorities could yield over political and legislative decisions made by the state, a power which was, unfortunately, short lived. After 1945, councillors from other working-class boroughs attempted the same thing but were as result crushed and replaced. With the election of Thatcher, as discussed in the previous chapter, government funded subsidies for housing were basically abolished and taxation on properties known as 'rates' were replaced by council tax, whereby every inhabitant was taxed a fixed rate per head (Brennan 2015).

It was in this atmosphere of conflict between local authorities and central government that Robin Hood Gardens was built. With 52,000 people on the housing register awaiting a place, London County Council changed its policy to allow private enterprises to be hired rather than the in house architects at County Hall, already submerged with work (Powers 2010). Commissioned in 1963 by the LCC, Alison and Peter Smithson were initially invited as independent architects to design housing schemes for smaller sites neighbouring that on which Robin Hood Gardens stood. They were, however, invited thereafter to extend their design when the demolition of existing buildings on site was sped up (Brennan 2015).

Even as Robin Hood Gardens was being built, the whole of Poplar was in turmoil, going from being part of one of the poorest working-class districts in London to one neighbouring the wealthiest and corrupt dominions of Europe. With the elimination of business taxes, set up to protect the area from this very phenomenon, the Docks became the Docklands and formed an *"Enterprise Zone, a neo-liberal testing ground, where big business could basically do what it liked without the states involvement"* (Brennan 2015)

From the Docklands, just south of the plot on which Robin Hood Gardens stood, the 'enterprise zone' consisting of luxury offices and residences broke its chains and began to develop surrounding areas like Poplar Canning Town, Stratford, Shadwell and Woolwhich. Surviving on council tax and receiving little to no subsidy for housing due Thatcher's Right to Buy programme, local authorities were diminished. Once totally opposed to the Docklands, they now welcomed the extensive development into their midst as this generated tax that could allow them to carry out a minimum of their duties (Brennan 2015).

Fig 42
Photograph of the streets in the sky in 1972

Fig 42

The site, previously occupied by the 'Grosvenor' buildings, 19th century tenement constructions, was ready for development in 1963. Nine years later, as Canary Wharf was slowly starting to develop, the first residents moved in. In 2013, as financial land pressures intensified due to the extensive development of the whole area, the plot on which Robin Hood Gardens stands, was once again earmarked for redevelopment by Swan Housing Association. Using the argument of densification, the Association argued that it would be replacing 252 homes with 1575 new apartments. Permission to construct granted, and requests to give the building a listed status rejected, the fate of Robin Hood Gardens was sealed. In 2017 demolition began.

Site

Robin Hood Gardens stands on a plot surrounded by four major traffic routes in an urban fabric that lacks definition. To the north east of the plot a complex interchange links the Blackwall Tunnel Approach and the East India Dock Road while to the south-east Docklands Light Railway sails over another large network of roundabouts linking Aspen Way to Cotton Street. In reference to the *Communities And Open Space Survey* drawn up in 1943 for the *London Development Plan*, the building is part of the community of Poplar which already at the time was entirely surrounded by industry, severed from other communities. Today the industrial nature of the area has all but disappeared having since been replaced by heavy commercial use as the stark contrast between the sleekness of towering, glass skyscrapers and the dwarfed, precast roughness of Robin Hood Gardens demonstrates.

Brief

The Smithsons were hired for the job after the publication of their famous competition entry for Golden Lane, scheme which proposed a modern interpretation of civic life and neighbourliness, inspired by the old tradition of street. Their famous "streets in the sky" solution provided elevated decks absorbed by the building that became a semi-public extension of the domestic realm where neighbours could meet and random activities of daily life could unfold. The scheme for Robin Hood Gardens required a densification to the required 136 persons per acre while incorporating housing, a recreational green space, car parking and a communal area for an elders club (Gagneux 1975).

Scheme

Robin Hood Gardens is made up of two concrete slabs that surround green recreation space. Both slabs follow the shape of the plot acting like protective shields for this central space which acts as an island amidst the chaos of the exterior world. The taller, but shorter (in length) ten storey building – the

Blackwall Tunnel South Building follows the Blackwall Tunnel Approach while it's twin, though not identical is a lower, longer seven storey slab building - Cotton Street Building, runs along the slightly calmer Cotton Street. Parking is provided in a lowered 'moat' area around the scheme which also serves as service access liberating the entire ground floor from traffic

The protective nature of this scheme was at the forefront of the design and guided the the overall organisation of both blocks. Like a castle, the scheme has several layers of protection from noise and other external nuisances.

"To achieve a calm centre, the pressures of the external world are held off by the buildings outworks. This is effected, as near to the source as possible, by the first layer of a boundary wall. Noises that penetrate this layer to the access decks along the outer facades are diffused by more domestic noises. The access decks are separated from habitable rooms by the individual entrances and stairs so that this internal circulation acts as a further insulation to bedroom. These bedrooms have windows on the inner façade overlooking the quiet protected garden" (Smithson and Smithson 2001)

Robin Hood Gardens, was in effect the materialization of theoretical discussion that the Smithsons had been cultivating for quite a few years previously. Already at the CIAM IX in 1953, the couple had proposed a more phenomenological, humane approach to modern urbanism expressing a dissatisfaction with the modernist approach of understanding the city as being split up by functions (dwelling, work, recreation and transportation). Instead they proposed the city be comprehended as "scaled unities" which were the house, the street, the district and the city. (Jos Bosman et al. 2006). In direct criticism of le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation, the Smithsons suggested putting the street on the outside of the building where it could become a *"conduit for playfulness"*, a part of the *"urban décor, celebrating street life"* (Jos Bosman et al. 2006)

These 'streets in the sky', in the form of decks distributed every three storeys connecting main lift cores and escape routes to flat entrances that in turn lead to dual aspect dwellings distributed over two floors, above or blow 'deck level'. They define the link between semi private and public space and blur the limits of the threshold into the domestic realm while simultaneously trying to acquire a sense of intimacy. They take on the role of utility as a walkway, of recreation as a play space for children, as domestic overspill for washing that needs to dry and for social interaction for neighbours to converse. Its many functions do not stop there; in addition to often conflicting activities, the exterior decks, that culminate in monumental double height, protected spaces,

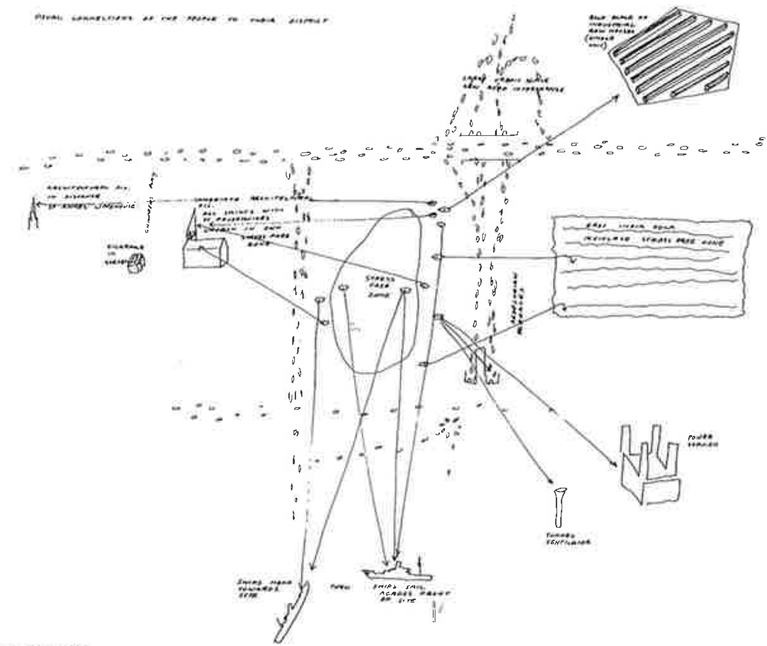


Fig 43

Fig 44

*Fig 45**

also established the uninterrupted visual link to the outside world - *"a visual connection for the people to their district"* (Smithson and Smithson 2001). The Smithson's diagram of visual connections point to landmarks it seeks to enter into dialogue with, some still recognizable today others entirely disappeared.

"It (Robin Hood Gardens) takes its stand alongside the heroism of what has been made before – the ports and the roads" (Eisenman 1972).

The concrete slabs are made up of prefabricated elements all the way to the last detail. The monotonous grid of identical balconies across the interior façade is subdivided by two orders of precast elements that disturb the rhythm and reflect the interior organisation of the dwellings inside. Windows pushed right up against the precast elements designate the location of the kitchen and the presence of the decks on the exterior façade. Shallow balconies running along the entire interior facade create depth between the elements at certain floors, indicating where the bedrooms are. A primary vertical structure of prefabricated elements, distributed every two bays, subdivide these balconies by flat typology. The keen eye will understand that the façade is subdivided into groups of 32 bays, that thus reveal the organisation of two, three and four bedroom flats (requiring respectively 2, 4 and 6 bays of balcony space). Secondary thinner elements hang between the primary structure and enhance the element of repetition. Concrete precast handrails are set at the same height as the subdivision of the kitchen windows enhancing the horizontal rhythm of the building. The ground floor offers single storey flats offering easy access and stair-less dwellings to elderly residents.

The brutal monotony of the rough concrete - seemingly irregular - grid, along with its socially oriented approach to the street privileging human interaction seek to represent a socialist dream. Setting itself apart from any form of traditional housing in Britain, Robin Hood Gardens proposes an alternative to the individual space, based on the economy of means and the importance of "inhabiting" together (Gagneux 1975).

<u>*Assessment*</u>

Degree of integration into urban fabric

Due to the complex and confusing nature of its surroundings and the way the plot was cut off physically from any other existing communities, it is no wonder that the first thought when designing the scheme was one of protection. Although Robin Hood Gardens seeks to establish visual connections between the inhabitants and their district, these connections remain somewhat

Fig 43
Diagram of visual connections between the residents of Robin Hood Gardens and their district

Fig 44
Central 'stress-free' zone

*Fig 45**
View out onto the Docklands and the river Thames

Facade Elevation

intangible, and bearing in mind the drastic transformation of the area, barely exist anymore. Robin Hood Gardens cannot contribute to the area as a new part of the neighbourhood because there is little to no community life left to dialogue with, although some relics such as the neighbouring church and school remain. Quite the opposite, the scheme seeks to create a shelter for its residents, where they can distance themselves from the pressures of the city.

Quality of green space
The central green space, overlooked by the residents, becomes *"the void that gives substance to the masses"* (Smithson and Smithson 2001). It is the central core of the project offering peace and quiet to its residents, the 'stress-free zone' without which the two slabs would make no sense. The mound at the centre of the space, made from the remains of demolished buildings, recall the hills depicted by Capability Brown, and of a far off picturesque tradition in absolute contrast to the brutality and repetitive monotony of its protector, the concrete fortification (Powers 2010).

Level of current maintenance
By the 1980s, Robin Hood Gardens was already suffering from anti-social behaviour and lack of maintenance due to insufficient funding from the Borough. The responsibility of maintenance once managed by the borough was handed over to external contractors, and the quality of all upkeep severely diminished (Brennan 2015). The street deck, had also suddenly become hugely unpopular and intricately related to criminal activities, despite the publishing of numerous reports stating that

"building with communal terraces offered several advantages: children are able to play safely, the husband is able to do jobs about the house, families are able to spend more time together and friendships are formed" (Powers 2010).

Although this may have been the case, however, interviews with former residents in Jessie Brennan's Regeneration! do not mention a staggering rise in criminal activity, although it must be said that her publication may not be a neutral source. It was difficult to judge the current level of maintenance during the field trip as the building was awaiting imminent demolition and therefore had not been maintained for months. Although still home to a few families, the slabs looked empty and unloved, while the central landscaped hill was completely overgrown. For some of the inhabitants, it seemed that the lack of maintenance was above all the main reason for Robin Hood Garden's demolition. In an interview with Jessie Brennan, the former care-taker of Robin Hood Gardens Wayne Alison argues that when Robin Hood Gardens was first built

"it was looked after because there were people put in place to make sure it was looked after. You wouldn't have me as a caretaker going around cutting the bushes. There were gardeners. You had painters and decorators. You had electricians and plumbers. It was all done in-house. That's gone. (...) Robin Hood Gardens is a prime example of what happens when things are not looked after as they should be." (Brennan 2015)

Financial viability

Though this criterion seems irrelevant to the building in itself, the financial reasons behind its imminent demolition are not. In 2013 a strapped-for-cash Tower Hamlets sold the entire estate to Swan Housing Association which immediately absorbed it as part of the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Scheme. 252 socially rented dwellings will now be demolished to make way for 1575 apartments of which 35% (551 apartments) are to be 'affordable' for those on low salaries or social benefits. Due to the recent affordable rent programme, housing associations have been able to set 'social' rents at 80% of market value, something which in London is not affordable. Some current tenants will be decanted to other council homes across the Borough, while others who have lived on the estate for at least twelve months, before the Compulsory Purchase Order was issued in 2015, have reached agreements with Swan Housing Association stating that they will become "assured tenants" (form of tenancy offered by Housing Associations that guarantee a secure tenure for life) with a right to buy (Brennan 2015). Although regarding the question of financial viability, it is undeniable that this regenerated site will generate more profit, the issue remains, for whom?

"You know who Lutfur Rahman is? He's the mayor of Tower Hamlets. He sells it on the billboard: I'm building new homes, more homes in Tower Hamlets. But they're not social housing. He's selling to everyone that he is building more new homes which he is. But who's it for? Who is it for? (...) It's men with money, or wanting to make money, that's what dictates it ultimately, Canary Wharf dictates East London now." Abdul Kamal , former resident of Robin Hood Gardens. (Brennan 2015)

Satisfaction of inhabitants

In her book Regeneration! Jessie Brennan carries out extensive interviews with several members of the Robin Hood Gardens community. In her many talks, former residents often mentioned that above all else, what was being torn apart with the demolition of the estate was the community inside it. All forced to "decant", former ties with neighbours are now broken. Although many residents had mixed feelings about the architecture of the building - some saying the decks were great means to interact with neighbours while others

saying the building was daunting - they all agreed that with time, the building had become a part of them and on a social level had succeeded in creating a coherent society.

Architectural quality
Robin Hood Gardens resonates with contradiction in line with that of social housing in the post war years. Seeking to set itself apart from modern architecture in Britain, the Smithson's New Brutalism came – as Reyner Banham put it – a "brickbat in the publics' face"(Brennan 2015). On one hand Robin Hood Gardens rejects everything else, it is radical, harsh and overpowering, almost arrogant in its boldness, yet on the other it promotes an exceedingly social agenda. It strives to make an impression on the city - "un monument au même titre qu'une église au Moyen Age" (Gagneux 1975) - not only representing housing, but a socialist dream of an egalitarian society. Robin Hood Gardens proposes a substitute for individual housing, a collective enterprise for the welfare state, and sets itself apart from English tradition, while simultaneously succeeding in celebrating the core social value of community, representative of post war Britain - seeking to redefine the relationship between architecture and society.

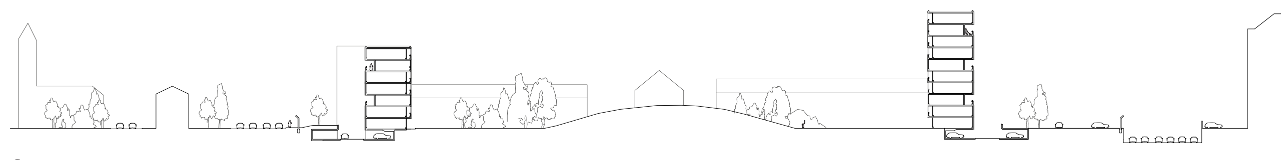
Many efforts, mainly by the 20th Century Society - an association that fights for the protection of modernist buildings- have gone into getting Robin Hood Gardens listed by English Heritage. The campaign was unsuccessful and pointed to the fact that post war housing schemes were failing to be recognized as objects of cultural value. In 2017 however, the Victoria and Albert Museum, purchased a segment of the building to be exhibited as a "significant example of the Brutalist movement in architecture" granting it the recognition it had always sought from English Heritage. Though the estate has visibly failed as a functioning building in our current neo-liberal society, Robin Hood Gardens remains a strong metaphor of a social endeavour to redefine the relationship between architecture and society.

"They (the Smithsons) possess a sensibility and an understanding of architecture as a history of social and cultural change; but above all, they have a total commitment to architecture as a way of life. This is the way in which architecture will continue to challenge as well as reflect the aspirations of a way of life" (Eisenman 1972)

Tower Hamlets, 1950

Aerial view of Robin Hood Gardens

Site plan of Robin Hood Gardens



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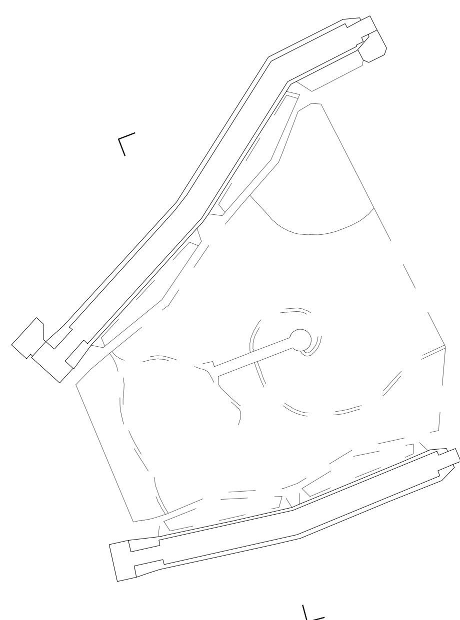
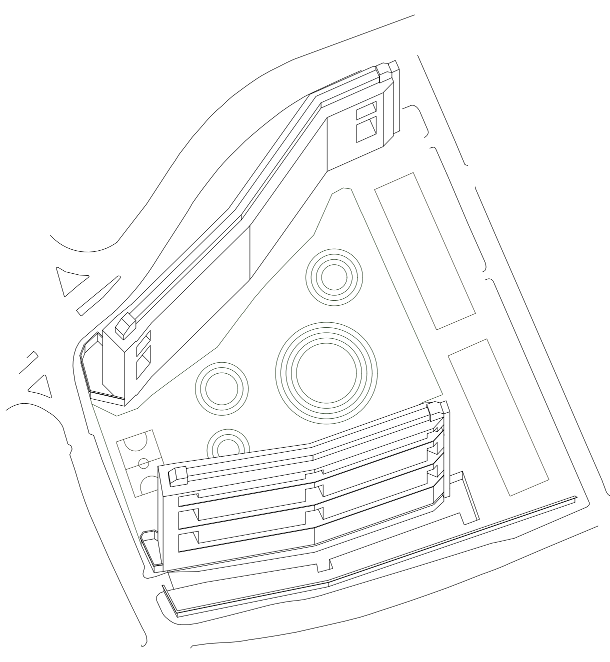


Plan of scheme



Diagrmmatic axonometry

*Fig 46**

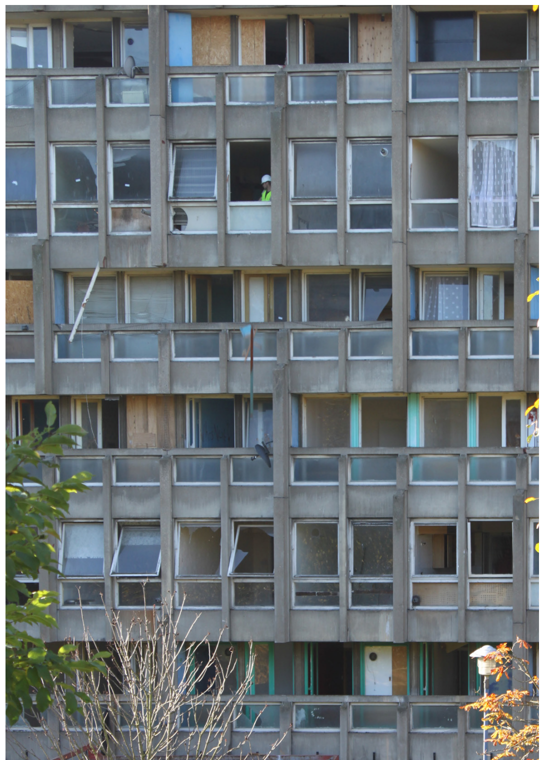


*Fig 47**

Fig 48*

Fig 49*

Fig 46*
Exterior facade

Fig 47*
Interior facade

Fig 48*
Flat enterance

Fig 49*
View onto lost maintenance cupboard on 5th floor access deck

Southwyck House

Introverted Monument

*Fig 51**

Introverted Monument
Project: Southwyck House
Architect: Lambeth Architect's Department led by Magda Borowiecka
Borough: Lambeth
Status: Not listed
Dwellings: 176
N° of residents: 580
GA: 3610 m2
Denstiy: 0.16 pers/m2

History

Southwyck House was commissioned by the Borough of Lambeth as part of the Somerlyton Estate in 1968 under the direction of Magda Borowiecka, member of the council's in-house architect's department. Overseen by Ted Hollamby, director of architecture, planning and development for Lambeth, the estate was planned at the same time as the South Cross Route, part of a network of high speed roads intended to relieve traffic congestion in the inner most part of London. This southern section of what was known as the 'London Motorway Box' (the innermost of a series of four motorway rings) was designed as a six-lane dual carriageway due to cut through to Clapham Junction, Stockwell, Brixton and Peckham. The project was confronted with strong opposition from local residents of the areas concerned, fearing that this road would be detrimental to them as a community and a political campaign called 'Homes Before Roads' was set up. As a consequence, the project was dropped ('Southern Cross Route' 2017).

Page 94
*Fig 50**
Southwyck Houses' monumental front facade and stair core
*Fig 51**
Diagram situating Southwyk House

Commonly known as the 'barrier block', Southwyck House was designed to protect the rest of the Somerlyton Estate from the noise and pollution that would be radiated from this motorway. This large scale infrastructural project left unrealised, Southwyck House remains as a left-over relic, its daunting silhouette looming over the Brixton skyline.

This estate has been source of controversy since the day of its conception. Approved by John Major, vice chairman of Lambeth council and, ironically future prime minister, Southwyck House was dubbed a *"monument to the failed history of socialist planning"* by the Major himself (Meikle and Wintour 1995). The estate has suffered a lot of antisocial behaviour since tenants moved in ranging from drug abuse, drug trafficking and burglary. After the Brixton riots broke out, £5 million were spent in an attempt to make the block more secure. Both corner entrances were rebuilt to resemble eastern European checkpoints that included a flat for the concierge as well as extra doors with heightened security and CCTV surveillance cameras (Southwyck TRA 2011).

Site
Southwyck House runs parallel to Coldharbour Lane. Turning its back to the main road, the block acts as a protective arm to the rest of the Somerlyton Estate, shielding it from noise and cutting it off visually. The site is framed by Somerlyton Road to the west and Moorland Road to the east and in reference to the *Communities And Open Space Survey* drawn up in 1943 for the London Development Plan, is part of the social community of Brixton. Despite the failure of the South Cross Route project, the plot remains surrounded by a network of primary roads and railways, making it nonetheless an area suffering from sound pollution.

Brief
As mentioned previously the main requirement for this building was to act as a protective barrier for the rest of the Somerlyton Estate. It therefore sets itself apart from the rest of the construction as a long tall wall rising to ten storeys while the rest of the estate is a repetitive grid of low rise maisonettes subdivided into flats. Although not much is recorded about the previous residents living on the plot before the construction of the estate, the block consisting of 176 dwellings, is mainly made up of two and three bedroom dwellings suggesting that residents are mainly small families.

A lot less is recorded with regards to this scheme as to the intentions of the architect and planners when designing it in comparison to projects like Alexandra Road or Robin Hood Gardens. As the 1:5000 plan suggests, the primary nature of this building is to be a protective wall for the rest of the estate from the surrounding triangle of transport networks.
The long, bare brick fortress runs along Coldharbour Lane, turning its back to the road, its jagged façade stepping outwards in a ziggurat composition, designed as a sound proof barrier for noise to be refracted off. Small turret-like windows pierce this façade, giving it a medieval air – a closed fortress designed to protect its inhabitants. As the fortress turns the corner at each side of the plot, the building steps down to the height of neighbouring houses across the street. The building is separated from the road by a strip of green space and parking is provided on a raised podium at the foot of Southwyck House. Flat entrances and garages sit next to one another on this side of the façade, implying that cars and residents are ironically treated with the same organisational importance.

Southwyck House is subdivided into six segments connected by concrete stair cores that act as joints between the angled slabs. These cores lead to two raised semi-private "streets", one on the third floor and one on the seventh floor, that run along the building and act as entry points to the apartments. Ground floor dwellings can be accessed from the parking side of the block or from their

Fig 52
Southyck House under construction

Fig 53
Scene from resident-made film "Ringing"

Fig 52

Fig 53

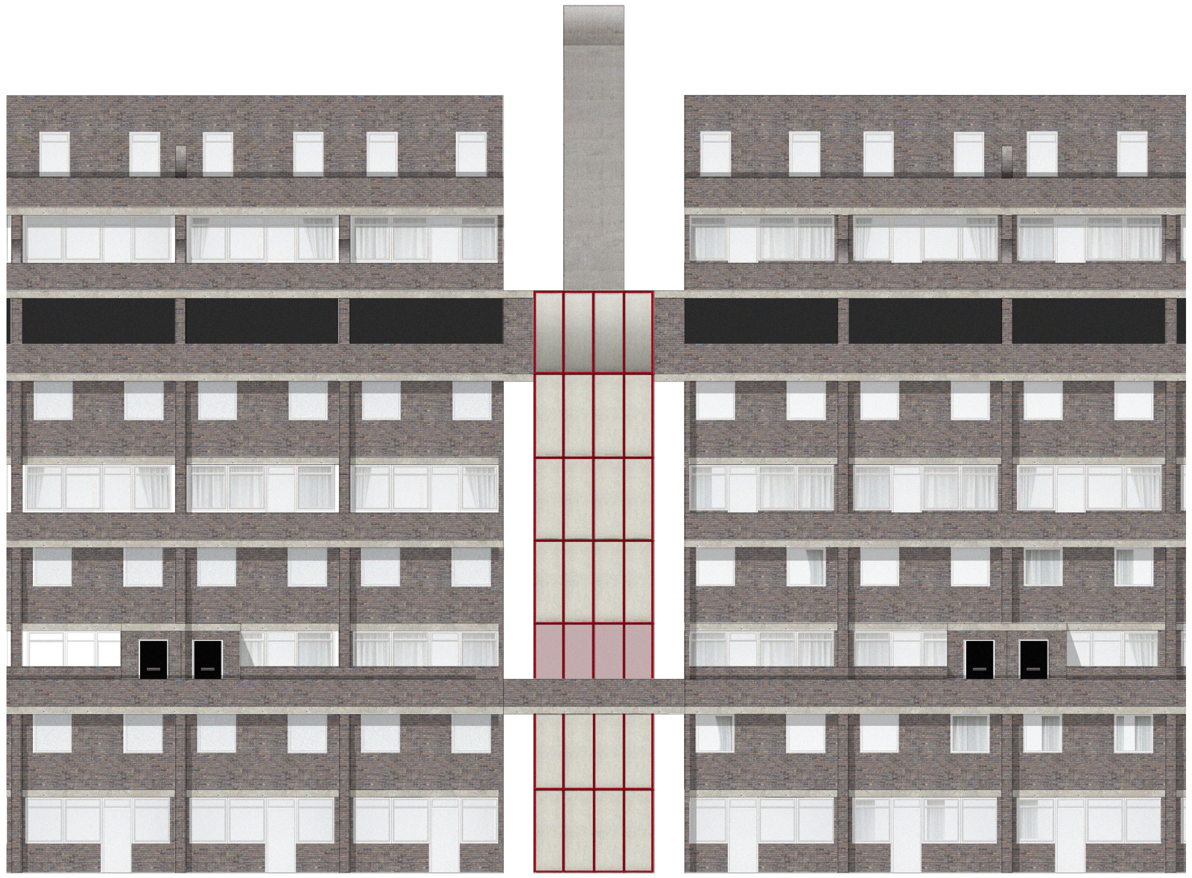
back gardens as the interior façade elevation shows. A paved, narrow road, intended for cars, runs along the interior façade between Southwyck House's ground floor back gardens and the lower maisonettes directly opposite (see 1:1000 section). Due to the proximity of this narrow road and of neighbouring dwellings the front gardens are surrounded by two metre brick walls allowing no visual contact whatsoever with neighbours. In addition to this, the scheme provides no communal space for all residents of the barrier block to access. Common circulation spaces therefore become the only place of interaction for immediate neighbours.

Entirely made of dark brick supported by rough concrete structure visible en facade this brutalist construction reflects the architectural currents of its time. Its materiality as well as its stark façade suggest a brutal honesty and roughness that quite accurately depict the cultural atmosphere of the period – although to the annoyance of its residents, was often confused with Brixton Prison. This front ziggurat barrier has become through its bare monumentality, a point of reference within the community, and a symbol of the state of social housing in London in the eighties. On the inner side a strict grid of brick columns and concrete floor slabs subdivide the façade in a way that the interior organisation of the block is understood.

Looking at photos from the time of construction and comparing them to those taken during the site visit, it is obvious that the nature of the building has somewhat been modified and that the initial intentions of the architect with regards to this building may not have been respected. This is primarily obvious when looking at the revamped circulation spaces at the corners of the block. These radically set themselves apart from the others, resembling, as mentioned before, eastern European checkpoint architecture, not in keeping with existing materials or architectural language. Large ventilation pipes have also since the late nineties been added to the "interior" façade while a large metal fence now stands opposite the back gardens.
The heightened security of the entrance points as well as the added metal gates add a feeling of foreboding and "estateness" to Southwyck House that it may not have had before despite the brutal nature of its exterior façade. These added elements stand out, as if to warn new comers of the dangers they might face upon entry.

<u>Assessment</u>

Degree of integration into urban fabric
The barrier block as well as the rest of the estate bares no relation to it surrounding urban fabric, consisting primarily of Victorian terraced housing



Facade Elevation

arranged along streets. Its' main objective being of a protective nature, Southwyck House feels more inward looking, with the ambition of sheltering the rest of the estate. This aspect therefore suggests that the project seeks to close itself off from the city completely rather than contribute to it, which is why, in my view, it does very little at an urban scale to contribute to its surroundings.

Quality of green space
The green space offered by the proposal is minimal and acts as a buffer between the road and the building rather than a place for recreation. Muddled with a car wash and parking spaces, and due to its direct proximity to Coldharbour Lane, the space remains unused by residents or the surrounding community.

Level of current maintenance
When visiting the building, it was difficult to access communal areas due to the tight security around the estate which as a result made it hard to assess in what condition it currently was. Walking along the public areas around the building however, it seemed to be well maintained and clean, if not a bit empty. Due to all indications of high security - grates on traffic lights and windows, high metal fences and CCTV cameras - that resemble those of a prison, the building reflected that "air of estateness" mentioned previously.
Southwyck House, being notorious for anti-social behaviour in the mid 1980s and immediately denigrated by higher echelons of society as a "grey, sullen wasteland, set apart from the rest of the community robbing people of ambition and self-respect", was doomed from the outset to be marked with the stigma of "the sink estate"(Meikle and Wintour 1995). This was the beginning of a vicious cycle – as more money was poured into the renovation and heightened security of the estate, the more it became stigmatized resulting in a group of residents feeling socially cut off from their community and wider society. More than just a question of maintenance – although this was a huge problem in the nineties - there was a lack of effort from the outset to integrate the estate into the existing society which has had damning effects regarding the social cohesion of the estate today.

Financial viability
In reaction to the housing crisis and the shortage of accommodation in the borough, Lambeth council has set up Homes For Lambeth a group of private companies that are wholly owned by the council with the objective of building homes for market rent, intermediate rent and council rent. Profit made from property development would go into the maintenance and upkeep of existing estates as well as fund the construction of new ones. By starting a private company, Lambeth Council can act as a property developer with a

social agenda, and does not need to rely on funding from the government (Lambeth Council n.d.). Southwyck House a council owned property and almost entirely socially rented would typically benefit from any profit made by Homes For Lambeth, and can therefore be deemed as financially viable.

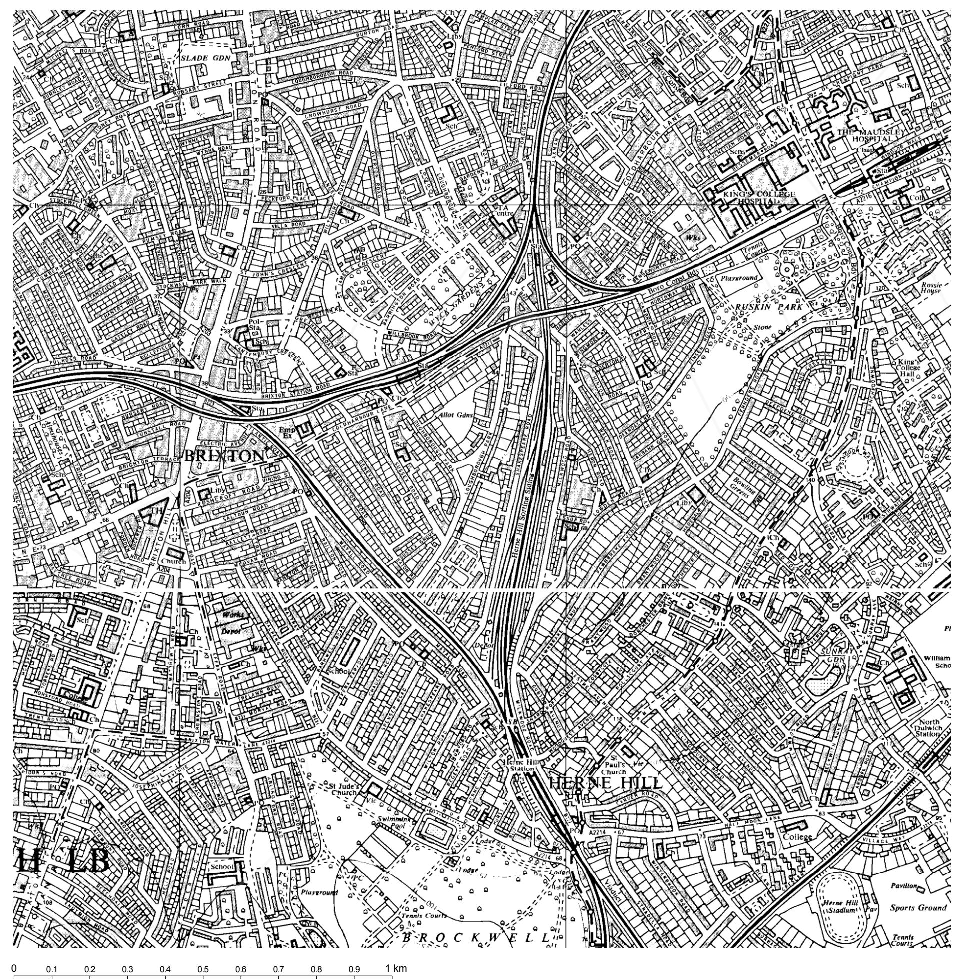
Satisfaction of inhabitants

Somerlyton Road on the east side of the Brixton barrier block is one of the most well-known streets for drug trafficking in South London, and is classified as one of the top 10 per cent most deprived areas in the country" (Slingsby 2016). Though Southwyck House has a Tenants and Residents Association, it has struggled to represent the diversity of inhabitants and generate pride in their community. This however has shown indications of changing as Lambeth Council have launched new support for the association by helping fund communal activities, such as classes, art projects and gardening projects to take place on the estate. In 2016, the twenty minute film *Ringing* was produced on the estate by young residents themselves with the support of *Positive View* a charity set up to help the most deprived youths living in council housing in England and promote youth empowerment (Slingsby 2016). The film documented life on the estate and generated interest around it, resulting in a new-found pride in the existing community and area. Although, this may not suffice to succeed in turning around the social situation of Southwyck House and the Somerlyton Estate, these types of efforts to generate pride in the community are essential and have had positive effects so far.

Architectural quality

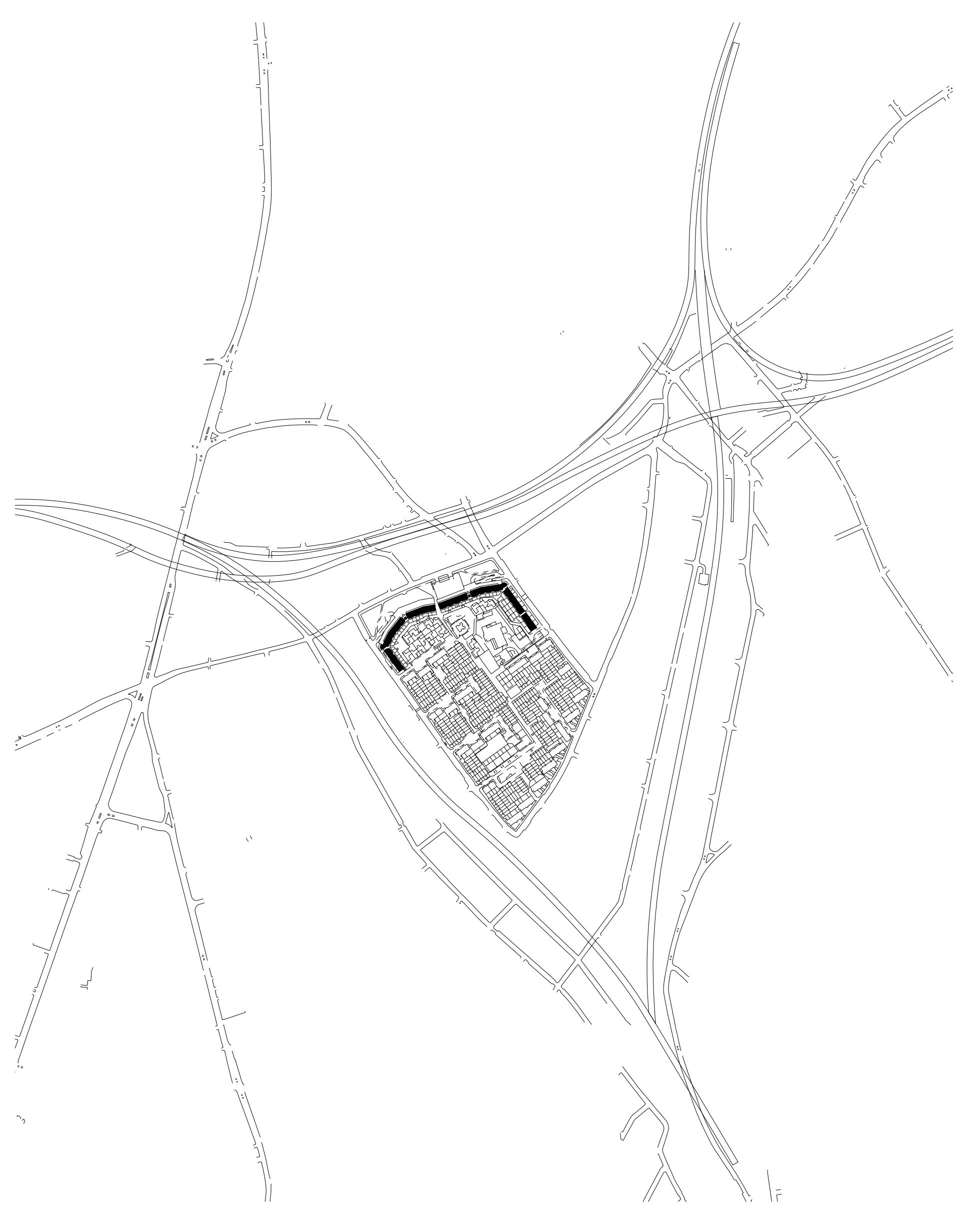
Standing as a relic to an unrealised project, and subject to many modifications over the past thirty years, there are many architectural decisions of Southwyck House that seem to lack consistency and seem to make less sense today, than they may have done if the South Cross Route had been completed. The horizontal megastructure, initially conceived to turn its back on traffic, has in fact privileged the car by inviting it in to the estate, providing parking around it and setting up a car wash service at its doorstep. The lack of green space as a result of this offers no relief to local residents from the head to toe brick jungle of the Somerlyton Estate.

The power of Southwyck House's architecture is in the political statement it makes through its harsh front facade, cutting itself off from the outside world that shunned it from the very moment it was built, the estate turns inward on itself. Although this may not have anything to do with the success of the building, it sends a powerful message to the city regarding a tormented history of social housing in the UK. Is it beautiful? Debateable. Is it powerful? Certainly.

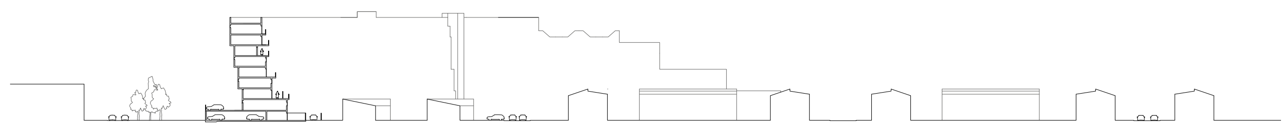


Lambeth, 1950

Aerial view of Southwyck House



Site plan of Southwyck House



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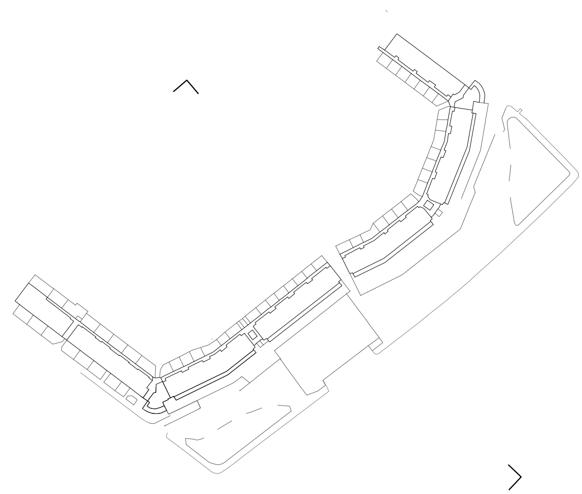
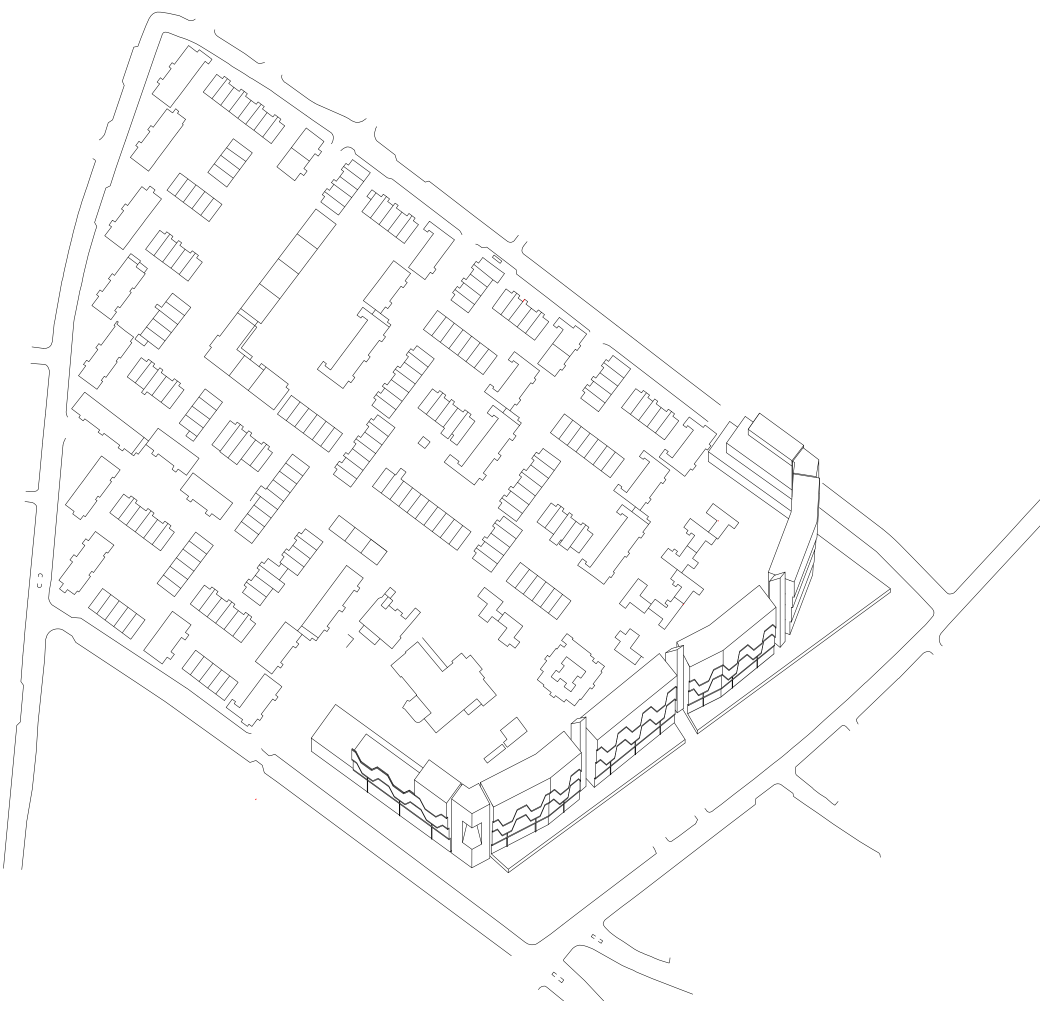


Plan of scheme



Diagrmmatic axonometry

Fig 54*

*Fig 54**
Southwyck House exterior facade with car wash infront

*Fig 55**
Surveillance cameras watch over Southwyck House

*Fig 56**
Entrances to garages and homes on the exterior side of Southwyck House facade

*Fig 57**
Zoom onto stair core

*Fig 58**
Overview of exterior ziggurat facade

*Fig 59**
View onto the more open interior facade from street

*Fig 55**

*Fig 56**

*Fig 57**

*Fig 58**

*Fig 59**

Dawson Heights

Fragmented Castle

*Fig 61**

Architect: Kate Macintosh
Year of completion: 1972
Borough: Southwark
Status: Not listed
Dwellings: 298 dwellings
Estimated number of residents: 913
GA: 4152m2
Density : 0.22pers/m2

History

Dawson Heights was commissioned by Southwark Council under the direction of chief architect and planner Frank Hayes who awarded the responsibility of designing the estate to 26 year old Kate Macintosh. In the same line of thought as Neave Brown, Macintosh was critical of the point blocks being built at the time, arguing that they were unrelated to their surrounding urban grain. She was also opposed to the anonymous grid of the facades of many of the new schemes being built by the LCC and campaigned for more heterogeneity (Municipal Dreams 2014).

Page 112
Fig 60 Volumetric facade of Dawson Heights*

Fig 61 Diagram situating Dawson Heights*

The site, a hilltop in Dulwich overlooking the whole of South London, was previously occupied by an old refuse dump and a ring of interwar houses that had become uninhabitable due to the instability of the hill and was in the mid 1960s compulsorily purchased with the objective of constructing new council owned housing on the plot.

Site

Dawson Heights is comprised of two stepping blocks that sit on Dawson's Hill, overlooking a central public green space and looming over the very quiet and residential area of Dulwich and Nunhead. Surrounded by a network of green pockets not to mention two large parks: Dulwich Park and Peckham Rye Park, Dawson Heights finds itself in the centre of a Nature Reserve run by Dawson's Hill Trust, a charity striving to maintain the areas diversity of wildlife and landscape. In reference to the Communities And Open Space Survey drawn up in 1943 for the London Development Plan, Dawson Heights is part of the social community of East Dulwich, which is separated from others by a "green belt" of parks and cemeteries.

Brief

The project brief on this site was simple: decent council housing, to rehouse people that were still living in conditions that weren't up to modern British standards. It was essential to Macintosh that

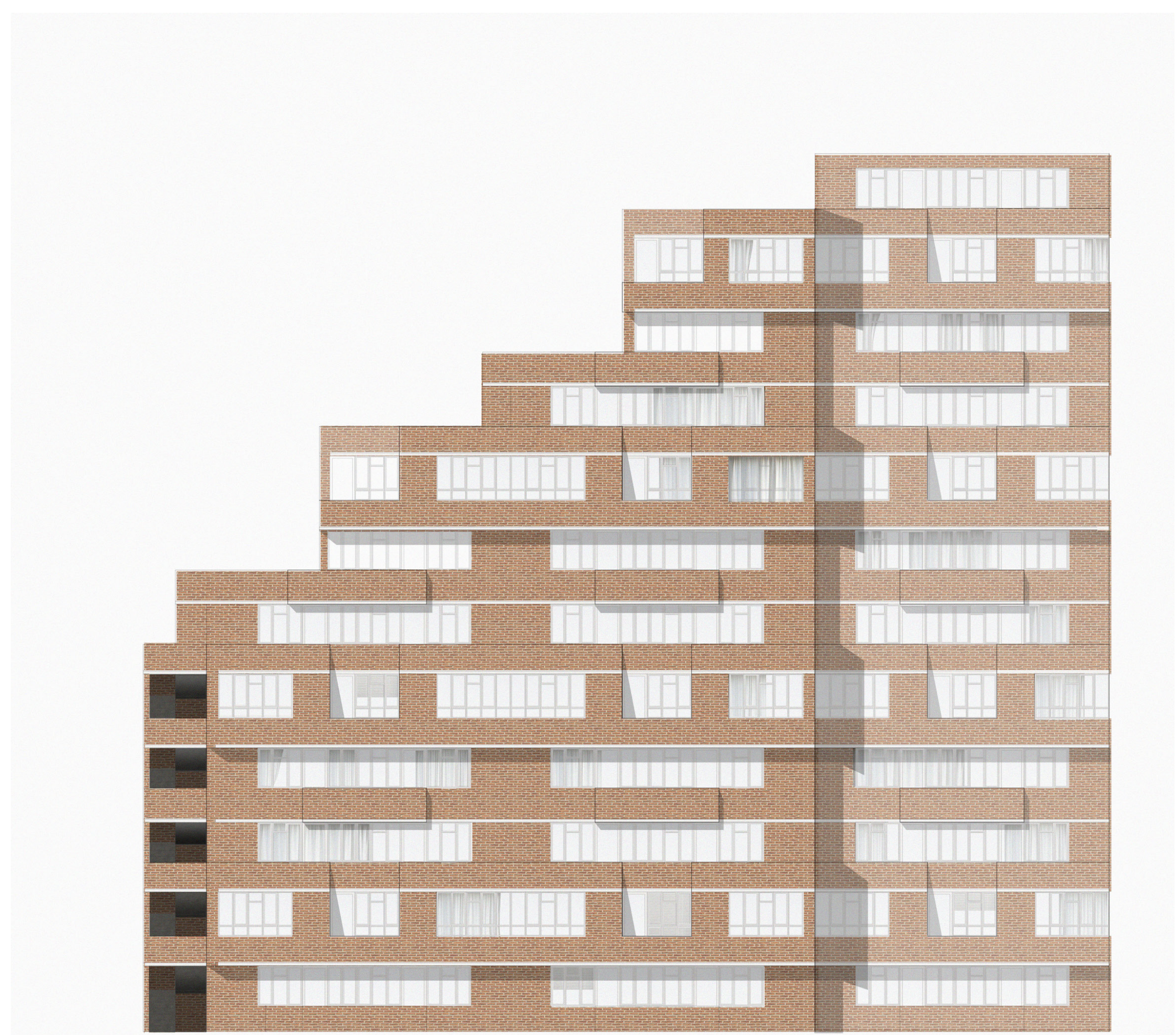
"if large block were to be accepted and loved as a new way of living, they must try

to replicate the best characteristics of the terraced street; that families of different sizes and age groups should intermingle, as their needs and strengths would be diverse and complimentary" (Moore 2015)

The factor of diversity of residents, was a core value of this housing block and informed the complicated organisation of varying flat typologies.
Of the 296 dwellings, there were to be 112 one bedroom flats, 75 two bedroom flats, 81 three bedroom flats and 28 four bedroom flats which reflects this ambition of diversity (Municipal Dreams 2014).

Scheme
Two blocks sit on Dawson's Hill facing each other on stabilised terrain. Following the contour lines of the hill, these blocks stand on flat ground and embrace the hill like two arms. Each block steps up gradually, starting at four storeys and culminating at ten floors off the ground. Unlike Sheffield's Park Hill, a project which Macintosh greatly admired, Dawson Heights accentuates the hill it stands on rather than hiding it by levelling the heights of the building to seem like they are on flat ground (Municipal Dreams 2014). As the 1:5000 selective reading site plan shows, the northern block stands as a continuation of the terraced housing on Overhill Road, shifting back block by block to openly welcome the public onto the green. The southern slab mirrors the shape of its counterpart and together they form a pocket that creates a link of public open spaces between the old cemetery and Dulwich park. The fracturing of the slabs into a sequence of stepped fragments subdivides the building into smaller parts recalling, in plan, the regular rhythm of the Victorian terraced streets neighbouring the site. Both blocks are oriented in the same way, with distribution to flats on the northern facades. On the opposite side of each block, semi-private 'streets in the sky' every three floors distribute to upper and lower flats similarly to Robin Hood Gardens. Two thirds of the dwellings offer views in both directions, and an offset in positioning of the slabs with regards to one another means that they do not get in the way of each other's' views and sunlight. Every flat comes with a private balcony, a complicated task to achieve at the time, as Labour MP and Housing minister Richard Crossman was at the time fighting to cut down on *"the extravagance of local authorities"*. This was achieved, by making the balconies an integral part of the fire escape route, by installing removable glass panels to neighbouring balconies requiring their inclusion on safety grounds (Municipal Dreams 2014).

The slabs are made of traditional London clay brick which further enhances this notion of fragmentation and *"avoided the foreboding monolithic appearance and introduced a human scale to a monumental social scheme"* (Municipal Dreams 2014). The complex composition of split level dwellings and balconies



Facade Elevation

is reflected by the facade of brick volumes jutting out creating strong shadows across the slab, while a similar treatment to all elements makes it difficult to make out what is balcony and what is wall. Horizontal lines across the whole building remind the viewer where storeys start and end.

Assessment

Degree of integration into urban fabric

By subdividing the megastructure into blocks that follow the rhythm of existing snaking terraced housing streets and using the urban form of the slabs to invite the public into a well maintained green space, Dawson Heights adds value to the area in as much that it creates a new public piece of the city that the surrounding community can become a part of. The stepping of the building, lowering itself to relate to surrounding residential homes demonstrates a will to dialogue with an existing urban fabric while simultaneously rising to become a monument to social housing in South London – a castle on top of a hill.

Quality of green space

The green link offered by Dawson Heights, between the cemetery and the Dulwhich park provides a direct relation between the two that had not previously existed. Not only physical, this connection when standing at the summit of Dawson's Hill, between the two slabs is visual. This green space acts as a safe recreational area for children of the neighbourhood, due to the nature of "natural surveillance" possible from the two arms overlooking the green. It does therefore contribute to the social cohesion of the residents as well as to the wider community of East Dulwhich.

Level of current maintenance

By 1989 the state of Dawson Heights had deteriorated and tenants sought an alternative landlord to run the maintenance of the building. This came at an opportune moment, as the Conservative party had just a year previously launched Tenants Choice as part of the 1988 Housing Act. This was intended to *"open up local authority housing to competition and better management practices"* (Municipal Dreams 2014). Samuel Lewis Housing Trust who took over management of the estate, were, as a result of this, granted large funds by the government to encourage the arrangement. Badly managed, and not tending to the maintenance needs of the estates it was running SLH was turned into Southern Housing Group, who still manages the estate today. This was by far the best maintained estate visited with regards to cleanliness and upkeep.

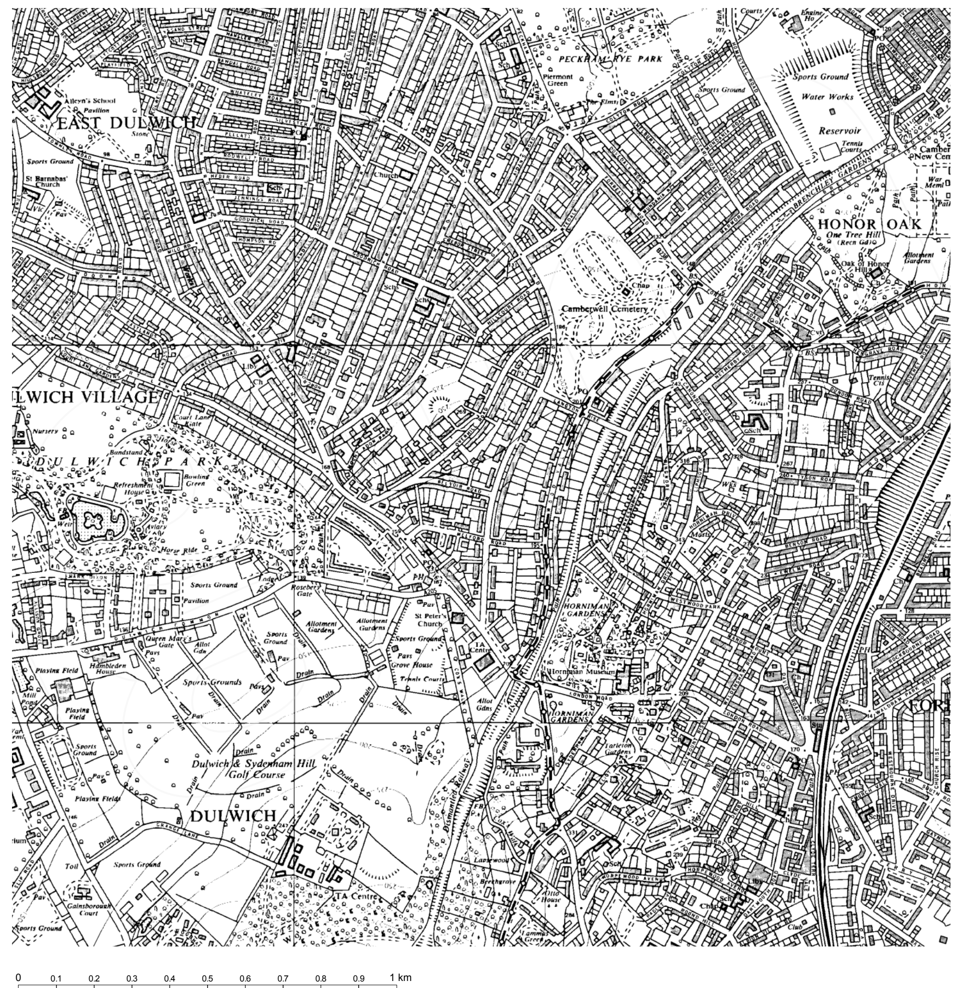
Financial viability

The scheme is now approximately one third owner occupied and managed

by Southern Housing Group, a charitable housing association. Southern Housing Group has two subsidiaries – Southern Home Ownership Ltd which provides, as the non-charitable arm of the company, low cost homes and intermediate ownership and Southern Space Ltd which develops homes for outright sale which will act as part of the subsidy for the former.
Apart from rent and sales generated from Southern Space Ltd, Southern Housing Group use taxpayers money in the form of grants handed out by the government. On top of this it borrows money from funders and partners to continue developing new schemes in an effort of maintaining a constant income. As long as Southern Housing Group runs correctly and manages its finances, Dawson Heights will remain maintained as one of the schemes under the umbrella of the Southern Home Ownership branch.

Satisfaction of inhabitants
Has the project succeeded in creating a valid and coherent society?
In Tom Cordell's Utopia London, a film focusing on very specific buildings built in the post war period to depict the architectural and political atmosphere of the time, he interviews a few residents of Dawson Heights, one of whom – Deirdre Shaw – compares it to a "historic almhouse" stating: "*you have a community, you have gardens around it and you have your cells"* further explaining that the presence of a common room and shop on the estate allows for meeting spaces between neighbours while the building still offered you the possibility to feel private.
Others were just as complimentary. Although impossible to judge the satisfaction of inhabitants from one person, the calmness of the estate and pristine upkeep are clear indicators that the building in itself has succeeded in generating a coherent society within its walls.

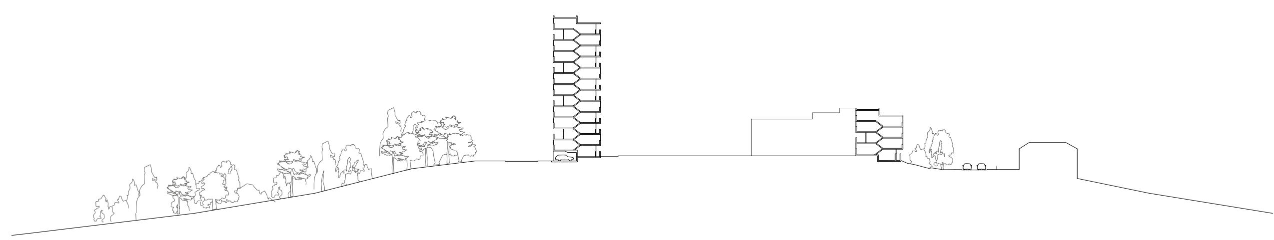
Architectural quality
The very British picturesque nature of the site, completely surrounded by green space, perched on top of a hill that offers panoramic views of London puts Dawson Heights in a privileged position with regards to its surroundings. Although the context as well as the affluent nature of the surrounding community clearly contributes to the success of the estate, the building itself emphasizes and brings to light the social ambitions of the architect. While avoiding a strong repetitive grid of windows and balconies, the complex organisation of brick blocks and windows makes sure every dwelling is treated in the same manner. The use of traditional London clay brick makes the estate, though modern and imposing, friendly and in keeping with values of cockney London. The strength of this building lies in the union of the ambitious socialist dream and the picturesque nature of British construction and way of life.



Southwark, 1950

Aerial view of Dawson Heights

Site plan of Dawson Heights



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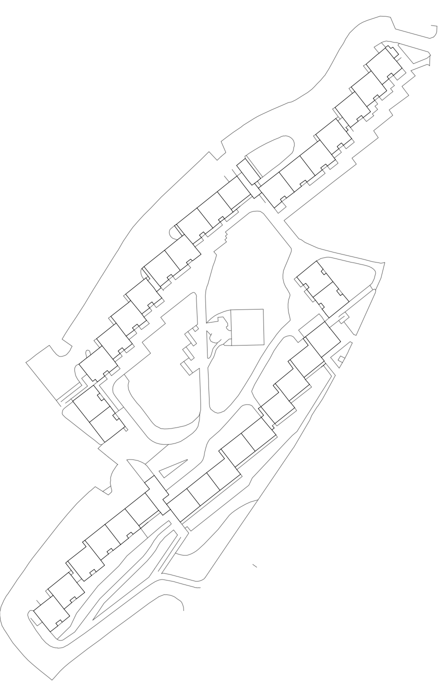
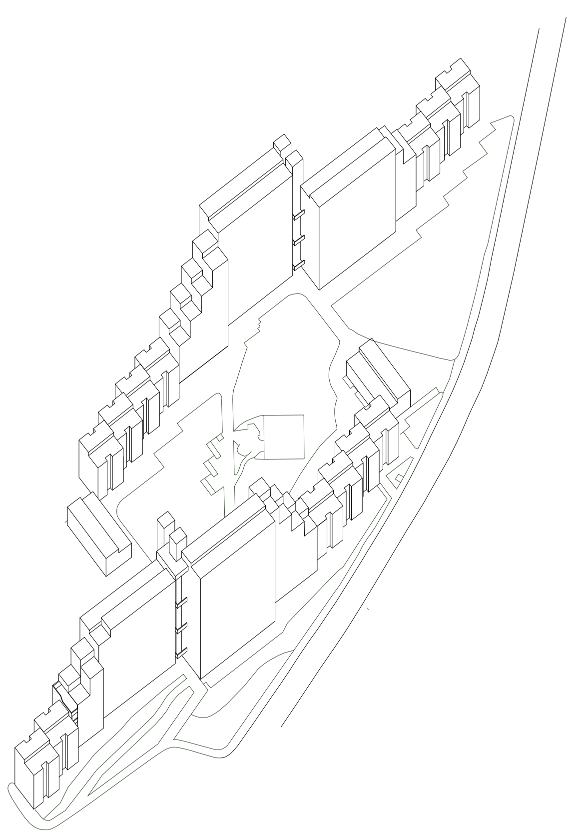


Plan of scheme



Diagrmmatic axonometry

*Fig 62**

*Fig 63**

*Fig 62**
Dawson Height stair core and fire escape exit

*Fig 63**
Cat bathing and washing out to dry at Dawson Heights

*Fig 64**
Central green space surrounded by brick arms

*Fig 65**
Monumental stair core resembling form of castle turret

*Fig 66**
View onto first floor 'decks' and entrance doors

*Fig 64**

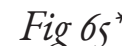


*Fig 65**

*Fig 66**

Part *three*

Architecture with a social agenda

How can architecture re-instate the values of the welfare state in 21st century London?

I will discuss what remains of the post war utopian vision today, basing my argument on the historical background (Part I) in parallel with the analytical study in Part II. Why and how have things changed? And what have we learnt from the evolution of government funded housing? Drawing on this discussion I will seek to underline what I believe are the key values of social housing built in the post war period.

Although the history of post war social housing is riddled with contradictions, there remains one general consensus: the necessity to offer decent housing to the entire population. From the decentralisation of overpopulated districts with the construction of New Towns intended to engender new mixed societies, to 'streets in the sky' intended to encourage informal moments of encounter, architects focused primarily on proposing solutions that would achieve social cohesion, and in this way resulting in architecture that was truly social. This sense that community was to be prioritised above all else has today disappeared as the social ineptitude of local boroughs like Southwark and developments like *One the Elephant* have demonstrated through failing to integrate existing communities and avoiding social responsibilities to maximise profit.

Today it is important to question how architecture can express a social agenda. As the analysis of the second part of this dissertation revealed, there are many factors that contribute to the success and failure of an estate. Though some relate to social or political factors, change in legislation and poor management, the success or failure of these estates was in part determined by their design. Using a strict set of criteria to assess these buildings was an objective method to attempt to determine a relative success (or failure) of the buildings with regards to certain qualities which I deemed important. My aim was not however to judge whether an estate was 'good' or 'bad' but to understand what qualities contributed to or hindered the development of coherent society within its walls.

The question of urban integration, revealed that Alexandra Road and Dawson Heights, the two estates that sought to create a physical relationship with their context while echoing their respective existing urban fabrics, were the most successful in this respect as they are constantly occupied by residents and members of the public alike. The other two find themselves amidst less defined, less affluent, urban structures, making the element of integration more complex. While Robin Hood Gardens seeks other methods to relate to the urban context, Southwyck house cuts itself off completely. The same is to be said with regards to the provision of green space. While both Alexandra Road and Dawson Heights seek to offer green space to the neighbouring community, Robin Hood Gardens maintains it as a secret garden for the residents and Southwyck House provides none.

While all estates were 'clean' and more or less maintained, Alexandra Road and Dawson Heights gave off an atmosphere of care and domesticity whereas Southwyck house reflected an 'air of estateness'. This in some respect echoed the degree of satisfaction of the residents with regards to their estate, a criterion otherwise quite hard to assess. Due to the imminent demolition of Robin

Hood Gardens, it looked like it had been completely abandoned (although a few remaining families still lived there).

All estates were managed by external groups, be it the Resident's Associations of Alexandra Road, the private housing association of Dawson Heights or the private development company set up by the council in the case of Southwyck House, which illustrated just how little control local authorities had over the life of these estates anymore. The case of Lambeth does however demonstrate the desire of some boroughs to find creative financial solutions to fulfil their social duties with regards to housing provision.

Throughout the study there were several 'architectural qualities' that revealed themselves that I believe have been reflective of post war social housing and have revealed the potential of architecture to be both social *and* political.

Protection

Firstly, the most unmistakable feature of these estates was their desire to protect. While all examples sought to create a protective interior environment, a "stress-free zone" as the Smithsons called it, sheltered from the hectic pressures of the outside world, some strove to maintain strong relationships with their surroundings. In Alexandra Road and Dawson Heights this was by creating an entirely public central that invited the wider community to come into their midst. This openness led to a sense of pride reflected in the careful maintenance of the domestic realm as well as the public street and landscape. Having a knock-on effect, the more people move through the space, the more the estate was connected to the exterior world, the more residents tended to their homes, which were effectively on show.

Robin Hood Gardens, surrounded by four traffic arteries resembles a castle surrounded by a moat and relates to its context in a different way than Alexandra Road and Dawson Heights. Rather than 'inviting in' the estate seeks to create a visual connection between residents and their district. Though the central landscape remains a semi private safe haven, the decks allow residents to look 'outwards' over the London toward other landmarks.

Of the four case studies, Southwyck House was the estate that cut itself off the most from its surrounding, in an effort to shield the lower estate from external noise. This inward facing architectural form, contributed strongly, in my opinion, to the degree of separation between the residents and their surrounding palpable when walking around the estate. Folding into itself, the 'barrier block' becomes a physical divide between the 'us' and the 'them'.

Overall, it felt that the element of protection was essential to a flourishing estate, however, taken too far could become the source of segregation from the

outside world. Overall, it seemed that the most successful estates endeavoured to be protective but not enclosed, maintaining a relationship (physical or visual) with their surroundings.

Scale

The question of scale, like that of protection seemed to be crucial. Though all were evidently large-scale constructions, some appeared monumental while simultaneously establishing an immediate relationship with the much-reduced scale of the individual, relating to a more intimate and domestic realm. To me Alexandra Road was by far the most successful example of this as massive concrete beams cascaded down the building to eventually morph in to hand rails which in turn were transformed into urban furniture. The provision of the 'pedestrian street' also contributed to a domestic feeling these megastructures could convey. In Alexandra Road, this was in the form of a central red brick path, that established a proximity between the domestic realm and the public space. The nature of the stepped back terraced housing on either side stops the structure from towering over the central space, avoiding all feeling of foreboding. At Robin Hood Gardens, the raised decks were a way of absorbing the street and offering it to a community of households as a place of encounter and daily routine. This also demonstrated the ambition of negotiating the relationship between the large megastructure and the reduced scale of human interaction. At Dawson Heights, it is the fragmentation of the building that allows the megastructure to feel like it has been subdivided and is in fact an assemblage of smaller individual volumes. The use of warm yellow brick as opposed to grey concrete, though maybe a more phenomenological factor, may also contribute to the "friendly" feeling it reflects. Again, Souwthyck House lacks this careful articulation between the large scale and the small. Privileging the car on both sides of the building, the individual is caught between a tall brick wall, a paved road and a metal fence, imposing an immediate feeling of intimidation. In contradiction with its strong protective façade, the building almost seems to reject its residents.

The most successful buildings with regards to scale were those that entered into dialogue with their urban context while simultaneously interacting with the individual. Treating all scales with the same attention, therefore seems fundamental.

Britishness

All four case studies can be considered as monuments to British social housing in their own way. Alexandra Road reflects a Victorian tradition of the house on the street with a garden intricately linked to a British way of life. Reflecting the picturesque nature of the home and garden, the estate reinterprets it in a

Modern way. Similarly, Dawson Heights' use of traditional brick and its strong relation to nature reflects core values of the English 'being' and seek to be in keeping with the quintessential British characteristic of 'friendliness'. The other two examples represent a whole other side of British housing that relate to the tougher way of life of the working class and socialist ideals of the post war welfare state represented (and imposed) by post war architecture.
To me, Robin Hood Gardens stands as a monument to British modernism and boldness, which arose with the counter culture of the 1960s, through its roughness as a whole. It's brutal nature as a whole, stands as symbol of the (top-down) socialist dream of an egalitarian society. Southwyck House however, represents, in my view, an even more recent aspect of Britishness, that I would even define as "London-ness". It stands a physical symbol of an underprivileged youth, that despite itself reveals a pride of 'living on the estate' not dissimilar to the pride of the working-class man in 20th century Britain. This pride is reflected in modern pop culture with the rise of musical genres such as Grime (musical genre, born 'on the estate', that emerged in London in the early 2000s, mixing Caribbean musical influences like dancehall and reggae with fast paced electronic music and rap) and the emergence of the 'hood aesthetic' with protagonists like Stormzy and Skepta, world-renowned Grime artists, shooting music videos on council estates.

The inherently British character of all these estates underlines the importance of relating to tradition, though this can, as we have seen, be achieved in many different ways.

Cultural Recognition

The question of recognition is one that is important to discuss especially with regards to Alexandra Road and Robin Hood Gardens, both defining examples of British social housing, well known in architectural circles. Although Alexandra Road was in effect written off as a failure at the time of completion being deemed too brutal, it has in the past five years gained the recognition it has always sought. The success of the scheme is undeniable and is no doubt further enhanced by its listed status. This official recognition as an exceptional example of British housing, has a strong impact on the residents – all of a sudden, the place they live in has value that they may not have seen in it before making it desirable not as social housing but as a place to live for anybody.
For Robin Hood Gardens however, the story ended very differently. Although always recognized by architects, it failed to make an impact on the cultural judges of English Heritage. Does this mean that Alexandra Road is better than Robin Hood Gardens? This question underlines the power of the cultural élite of British academia, that can decide which building has value and which one doesn't, marking the enormous influence these middle-class associations have

on the survival of post war housing schemes around Britain and in turn on the people that live in them. Although Robin Hood Gardens failed to be listed, it gained 'official' recognition as 'good architecture' when the V&A decided to buy a chunk of it and exhibit it in central London. This ironic fate of Robin Hood Gardens, demolished to then be posthumously dug up and exhibited as a relic is the perfect metaphor for the failed welfare state, over shadowed by a neo-liberal society. The lack of cultural recognition given to many post war buildings especially with regards to social housing, has demonstrated the reluctance of the British cultural *élite* to accept the post war period as an important time for architecture as well as for society.

Conclusion

The vision of social housing as a right and not an asset has all but disappeared today at the policy level. As a vast majority of all existing council owned housing stock has been transferred to charitable, private housing associations, the role of providing accommodation for those in need has been passed off to the private sector. Many reasons for the failure of the egalitarian welfare dream can be advanced: the lack of maintenance provided by councils for the building, the constant see-sawing in policy as each government sought to push their own agendas forward making it impossible to establish one clear, coherent system, the constant budget cuts to local authorities, leaving them strapped-for-cash, unable to carry out their social duties or the subsidising of these private housing associations in the first place intended as a support for councils but ending up as their replacement. Its final hour however, arrived with the election of Margaret Thatcher. Many may argue that the Right to Buy allowed working class families to become home-owners in what was the largest sell off of council stock to date – though for the unlucky few to live on doomed housing estates this was a poisoned gift. The clause, however, established a solid breach between those who couldn't afford their council flats despite the major discounts, and the rest. Herein lies the fundamental break down of the welfare state with regards to social housing. From a system that endeavoured to support the population as a whole, it became one that strove to provide the conditions for upward mobility, without the strong safety net element in social housing. The social endeavour had now shifted from government led action to private associations, shattering the core ideology of Bevan's welfare state.

The post war years were a time when British idealism, ambition and hope were limitless if not utopian. Architecture, art and music sought to break free from the norm, setting itself apart from Europe and the rest of the world. Post war social housing wasn't any different. A state much in need of qualified workforce, hired young architects straight out of university, encouraging

them to experiment and come up with new ideas. This resulted in a flourish of creativity, displayed at the Festival of Britain, which has since been choked off by the substantial introduction of strict rules and regulations and brought an end to productive cooperation between architects and local authorities. Like Alex, the protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange*, London is in a straitjacket, unable to move but witness to its own demise. Dictated by developers with free rein on the city, local authorities have succumbed to financial pressures flattening entire estates and contributing to the 'social cleansing' of the communities they once pledged to support. Meanwhile, constrained by the overwhelming number of rules, regulations, acts and reports, introduced to guarantee the safety of all, an entire generation of architects seems to have retreated from the issue, forgetting the agency of political architecture. The current atmosphere of distrust between local planning departments and architects does not make matters better. In 1979, 49% of architects worked for the public sector, today this number has been reduced to 0.7% (Wainwright 2017). This statistic as well as demonstrating the lack of housing built by local authority, goes to show just how far the dislocation between architects, local authorities and social tenants has come – a hard fact of which the tragedy at Grenfell Tower is dark reminder. Architect turned planner, Finn Williams has tried to change this however, with the launching of a not-for-profit social enterprise backed by the Mayor of London, Public Practice, a platform set up with the aim of encouraging young designers to work for the public sector. The enterprise sets up links between architects, engineers and local government in an effort to break down the stigma around "working for the council" - revered as second rate - and repair damaged relations between the industries.

With a return to an entirely government funded housing policy unimaginable due to general lowering of taxes and already stretched finances, not to mention an imminent divorce bill from Europe, it is essential, now more than ever, to understand how these core values of community and social integration reflected through post war architecture can inform the way we build social housing today. The four architects studied as part of the previous analysis have all addressed these issues in their own ways with varying degrees of success. Using their experience as precedent and given the current social and political situation in the UK, how can architects design adequate social housing for 21st century London? This is the question I will endeavour to respond to in the practical part of my Master's dissertation.

*Fig 67**

*Fig 68**

*Fig 67**
Oakshott Court from outside

*Fig 68**
"Interior" courtyard at Oakshott Court

*Fig 69**
Oakshott Court - Typical "Camden" style stepped back terrace housing giving onto a pedestrian street

*Fig 70**
Branch Hill Estate - Typical "Camden" style stepped back terrace housing and bricked pedestrian walkway

*Fig 69**

*Fig 70**

*Fig 71**

*Fig 72**

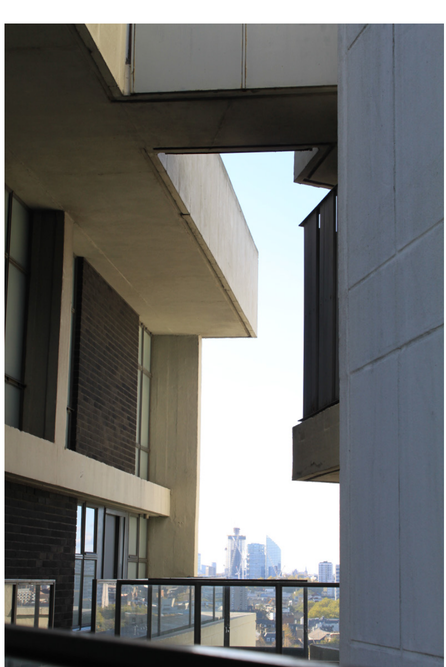


*Fig 73**

*Fig 71**
Keeling House surrounded by a tall protective fence

*Fig 72**
Looking up at Keeling House between two "arms" to the central circulation core

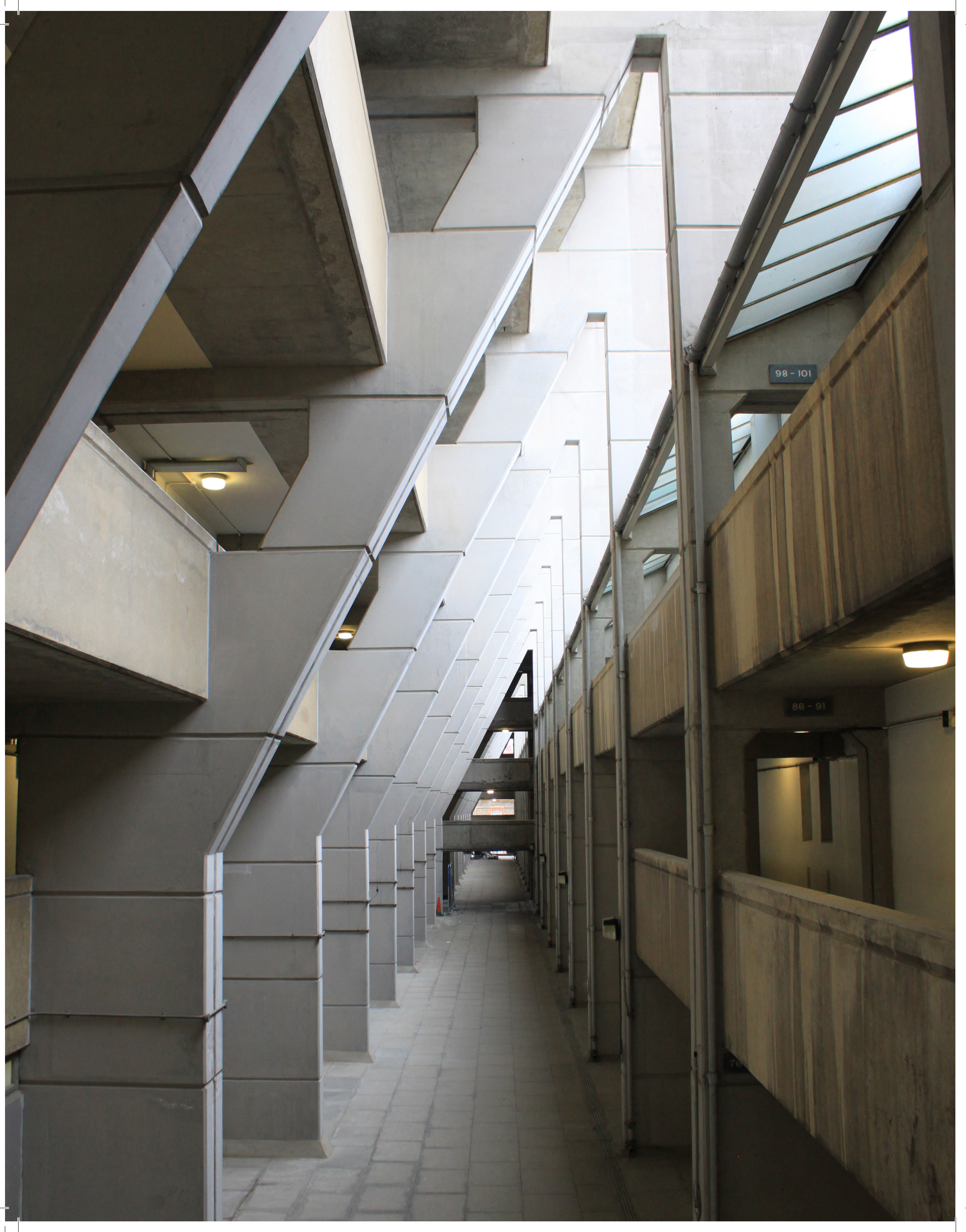
*Fig 73**
Looking up at Keeling House between two "arms" to the central circulation core

Fig 74*

*Fig 74**
Cotton Garden Estate balconies

*Fig 75**
Cotton Garden Estate - twin blocks facing each other

Fig 75*


98 - 101
86 - 91

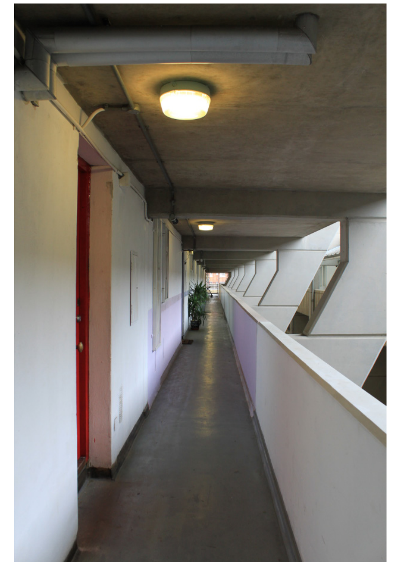


*Fig 77**

*Fig 78**

*Fig 79**

*Fig 80**

Fig 76 (left) Brunswick Estate's §intenral concrete structure*

Fig 77 Hallway distributing to flats 01*

Fig 78 Hallway distributing to flats 02*

Fig 79 Hallway distributing to flats 03*

Fig 80 Hallway distributing to flats 04*

*Fig 81**

*Fig 82**

*Fig 81**
Ashington House entrance

*Fig 82**
Lambeth Towers facade

*Fig 83**

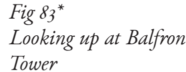


*Fig 83**
Looking up at Balfron Tower

*Fig 84**
Balfron Tower service core entrance awaiting renovation

*Fig 85**
Balfron Tower distribution hallways between service core and flats

Fig 86 (right)*
Balfron Tower seen from Robin Hood Gardens

*Fig 85**

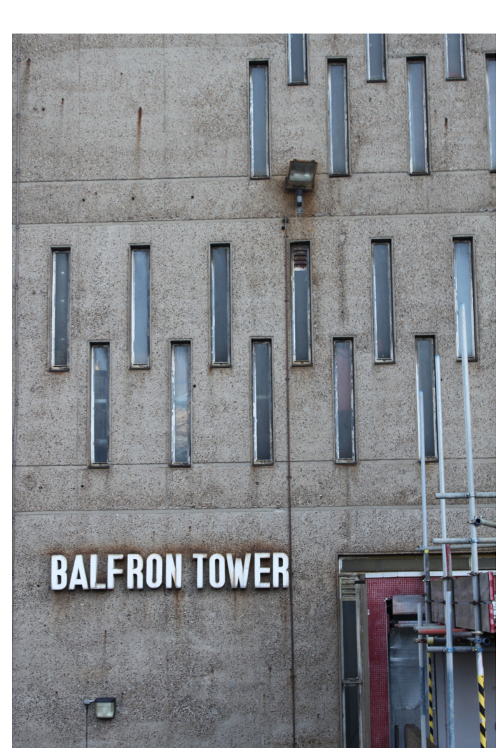


*Fig 84**

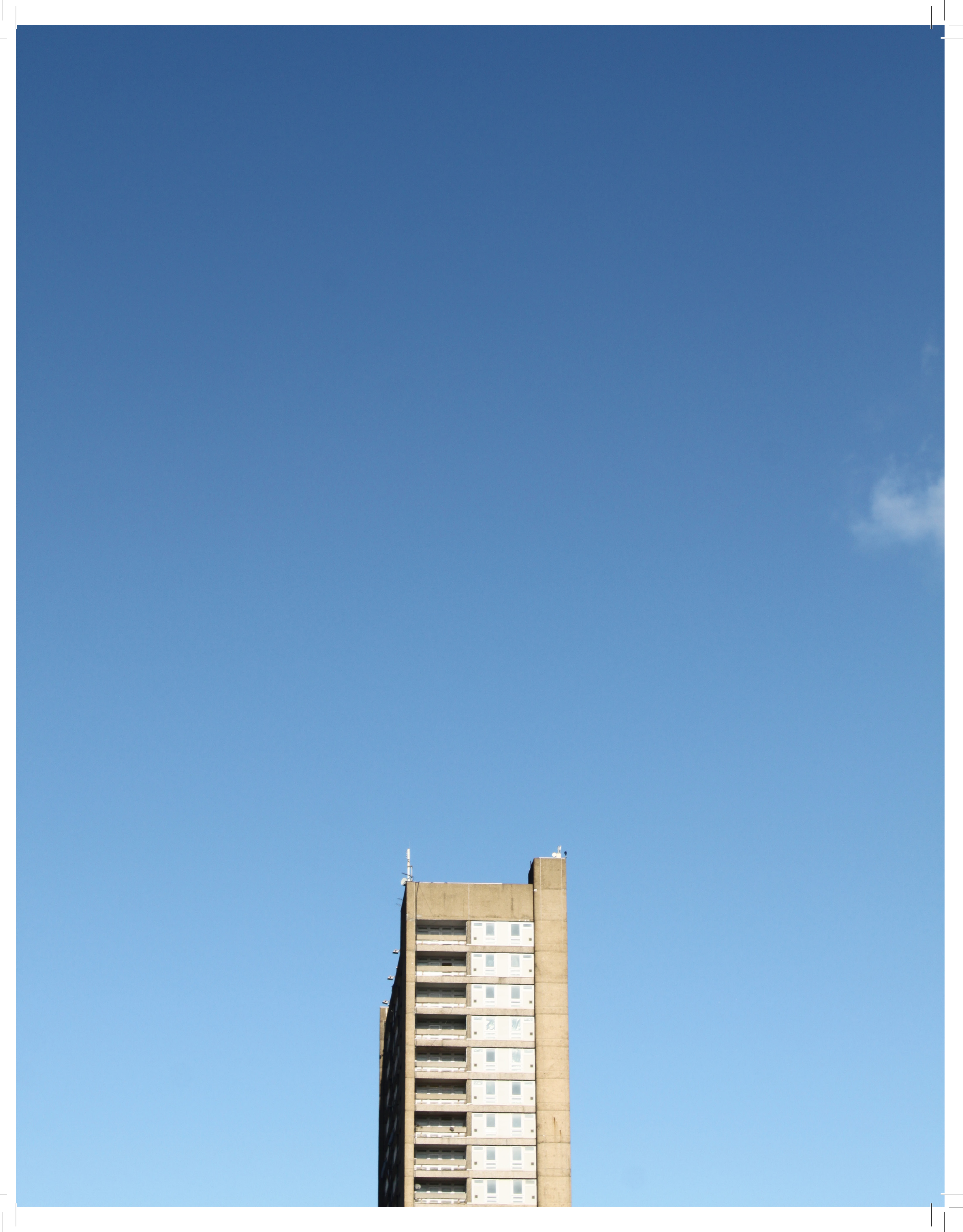


*Fig 87**

*Fig 88**

*Fig 87**
Looking onto Broadwater Farm's iconic mural with the mised use estate looming in the background

*Fig 88**
Broadwater Farm: view of container like terraces

*Fig 89**

*Fig 90**

*Fig 89**
Aylesbury Estate, mixed use development seen from neighbouring Burgess Park

*Fig 90**
Aylesbury Estate facade with all curtains drawn

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Iconography

All * images have all been taken by myself, Charlotte Prins, in October 2017 in London.

Fig 1
Ernö Goldfinger, *London in the World.* Infographic
Source: Carter, E. J., and Ernö Goldfinger. 1945. *The County of London Plan Explained by E. J. Carter and Ernö Goldfinger*. London:Penguin Books Limited.

Fig 2
Arthur Ling and D. K Johnson, *Social and Functional Analysis Map.* Map
Source: Forshaw, J.H., and Patrick Abercrombie. 1943. *County of London Plan*. London: Macmillan and Co. Limited.

Fig 3
Unknown, *South Bank Exhibition, Festival of Britain 1951, From the river Thames*. Postcard
Source:http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/london-2012-festival/8915062/London-2012-Festival-Britains-greatest-celebrations.html?image=5

Fig 4
Aya Sekine, *Berthold Lubetkin,* Photograph
Source: https://www.studionicholson.com/blogs/features/berthold-lubetkins-london-by-aya-sekine

Fig 5
A + P Smithson, *Urban re-identification grid*. Collage
Source: Jos Bosman, Christine Boyer, Zeynep Celik, Ben Highmore, and Tom Avermaete. 2006. *Team 10, 1953-81. In Search of a Utopia of the Present.* Rotterdam: Netherland Architecture Institute.

Fig 6
Nigel Henderson, *Hunstanton School.* Photograph
Source:http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/new-brutalist-image

Fig 7
Ernö Goldfinger, *Ronan Point disaster*. Photograph
Source: Warburton, Nigel. 2004. Ernö Goldfinger - *The Life of an Architect.* Oxon: Routledge.

Fig 8
Stanley Kubrick, *Alex and his droogs on the Thamesmeade Estate*. Screenshot.
Source: Kubrick, Stanley. 1971, *A Clockwork Orange*. Feature film

Fig 9
Unknown, *Margaret Thatcher after she handed over a copy of the deeds to council house buyer James Patterson and his wife Maureen.* Photograph.
Source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/11536646/Will-right-to-buy-win-over-the-working-classes.html

Fig 10
Unknown, *Brixton riots*. Photograph.
Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-13015934

Fig 11
Peter Henshaw, *Grenfell Tower disaster.* Photograph.
Source: http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/news/unions-issue-fire-safety-guidance-for-school-leaders-in-wake-of-grenfell-tower-tragedy/

Fig 28
Patrick Abercrombie, *Communities and Open Space Survey.* Map
Source: Forshaw, J.H., and Patrick Abercrombie. 1943. *County of London Plan*.

London: Macmillan and Co. Limited.

Fig 32
Unknown, Alexandra Road Park in 1983.
Photograph.
Source: https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/tag/camden/

Fig 33
RIBA collections, *Alexandra Road Estate*.
Photograph.
Source: https://www.archdaily.com/880986/riba-criticizes-uk-governments-housing-promise-it-just-wont-meet-the-scale-of-investment-needed/59d4fc23b22e38efb10002bc-riba-criticizes-uk-governments-housing-promise-it-just-wont-meet-the-scale-of-investment-needed-photo

Fig 34
Martin Charles, *Alexandra Road Estate.*
Photograph.
Source: Swenarton, Mark. 2017. *Cook's Camden. The Making of Modern Housing. London*: Lund Humphries.

Fig 42
Sandra Lousada. Smithson Family Collection.
Robin Hood Gardens 1972, Photograph
Source: https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2014/02/04/robin-hood-gardens-poplar-an-exemplar-a-demonstration-of-a-more-enjoyable-way-of-living/

Fig 43
A+P Smithson, *Diagram of visual connections.*
Sketch.
Source: Smithson, Alison, and Peter Smithson. 2001. *The Charged Void: Architcture*. New York: The Monacelli Press.

Fig 44
A + P Smithson, *Robin Hood Gardens.*
Photograph
Source: Smithson, Alison, and Peter Smithson. 2001. *The Charged Void: Architcture*. New York: The Monacelli Press.

Fig 52
Unknown, *Southwyck House under construction.* Photograph.
Source: http://www.urban75.org/brixton/features/barrier.html

Fig 51
Endz2Endz, *Ringing*. Screenshot.
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d28K89eTQEI&feature=youtu.be

I would like to thank:

Elena Cogato-Lanza for being so readily available and having the patience to guide me through my work

Patrick Giromini for his *many* hours of suppoprt, encouragement and for his equally as numourous book loans

Dad for having spent long hours re-reading, editing and discussing social housing with me

Mum for putting up with months of *"post war social housing this..post war social housing that"*