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Rented Worlds:
Bedsits, Boarding Houses and Multiple Occupancy
Homes in Postwar London, 1945-1963

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The work presented in this thesis is solely the work of the author, Alistair Cartwright.

Abstract

This thesis explores the history of a series of overlooked yet thoroughly commonplace domestic spaces, through an interdisciplinary approach combining visual culture and archival research.

Having once housed the overwhelming majority of people in Britain, private rented accommodation entered a period of decline that accelerated after the Second World War. Yet so large was the nineteenth century inheritance embodied by the private landlord that such dwellings still housed more than any other tenure category well into the 1950s. The way people experienced these changes varied greatly. Factors of race, class and gender were refracted through the geography of the city, as the concentration within London of surviving 'residues' of private renting magnified their social significance.

Often referred to simply as 'rented rooms', such housing encompassed a variety of different types, from working-class lodging houses and multiple occupancy homes, to middle-class boarding houses and residential hotels. Together they provided the setting for a whole host of 'social problems', including issues of public safety and the need to overcome the Victorian legacy of 'squalor'; the disassembling effects upon families and communities of 'social disorganisation'; the dubitable standing of the rentier class during a period of national reconstruction; and fears over ghettoization and the challenges that Commonwealth immigration posed to Britain's cultural identity.

A declining private rental sector formed the connecting matrix for these distinctive postwar problems. The regulatory endeavours of the welfare state sought to penetrate these spaces precisely because of their seeming obscurity. At the same time, the ruinous state of London's rented worlds sheltered forms of life that would not have been possible elsewhere, while also promising opportunities to property speculators. Three chosen themes, centred on fire safety, loneliness and landlordism, shed light on how these issues were contested from multiple angles by municipal government, social investigators, developers, and tenants themselves.

The thesis argues that the centrality of the housing question to the development of the postwar welfare state – insofar as this went beyond the reconstruction of the built environment to encompass the regulation of domestic life – took its bearings in significant part from the overlooked spaces of London's 'rented rooms'. State regulation ran up against questions of ownership and urban capital, as the Conservative vision of a 'property owning democracy' sought to unpick the legacy of rent control, while the same period witnessed the rise of gentrification amidst Labour policies that curtailed the rights of property.

Grasping how the changing status of property meshes with the politics of domestic and urban space opens up a rich field of materials – including popular films, architectural exhibits, cartoons, maps, valuation lists and testimonies from rent tribunals – that can deepen our understanding of the postwar period.

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Introduction: Questions for The Rented World

Questions for the Rented World

'Scene: A room in a large house. A door down right. A gas-fire down left. A gas-stove and sink, up left. A window up centre. A table and chairs, centre. A rocking-chair, left centre. The foot of a double-bed protrudes from alcove, up right.'¹ Here we are on the scene of what will be the main focus of this thesis. The opening stage directions from Harold Pinter's one-act play *The Room* outline the bare material limits of a space. We can list them, as Pinter does: a 'large house'; within the house a somewhat awkwardly shaped room; within the room a few pieces of nondescript furniture; some basic cooking facilities, and at least one source of natural light, heat, running water. This sparse scenography, first interpreted for the stage in 1957 (Figure 0.1), declines to give its audience any sense of architectural style. The construction of the set reduces the walls to an outline, a transparent cuboidal frame formed out of thin metal strips. 'The room' tends towards what Henri Lefebvre termed 'abstract space': a euclidean volume precisely measurable, repeatable, and devoid of social content; a container for an 'inventory of things', or, the existential equivalent, for a series of isolated subjects confronting an indifferent world.²



¹ Harold Pinter, 'The Room', in Harold Pinter, *Harold Pinter Plays: One* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), 99-126, p. 101. *The Room* was first performed at the University of Bristol Drama Studio on 15 May 1957.

² Henri Lefebvre, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 50-1, 116 and 352-3.

Fig. 0.1 – Stage set from Harold Pinter’s play, *The Room*, University of Bristol Drama Studio (1957). University of Bristol Theatre Collection, BDD/P/414/5.

And yet there is enough to infer that this is in fact a particular space. Or better, that it represents quite particularly, a space that was generic to the twentieth century city, in Britain and elsewhere. Far from an abstract space, the room, in this interpretation, embodies a mode of ‘spatial practice’.³ Life’s daily activity webs its way between these familiar objects. The mere presence of gas-stove, sink and bed sums up the life world (or one of them) of the ‘rented room’: the bedsit, lodging house, or subdivided house in ‘multiple occupation’. The differences and overlaps between these types of domestic space will be outlined shortly, suffice it to say that they are all varieties of private rented housing, which, taken as an overarching category, represented in Britain up to the time of Pinter’s play, the single most typical way in which people housed themselves. ‘The room’ as it would have appeared to audiences in the late 1950s and early ’60s was a space so deeply ingrained in the popular imagination as to almost pass under the radar of conscious awareness. This is partly why Pinter can reduce the play’s setting to a list of objects, absenting the kind of adjectival anchors that John Osborne uses when describing a similar room at the beginning of *Look Back in Anger* (1956): ‘small low’ windows, a dressing table made of ‘dark oak’, a ‘sturdy’ dining table, two ‘shabby’ leather armchairs, etc.⁴

Like the snatches of dialogue in Pinter’s plays, the room is a space of habit and repetition; a space in which rumour, assumption and omission have a greater impetus than positive action of a kinetic or communicative kind. Yet as a result, it is also a space that is constantly dissolving into the murk of what Lefebvre called ‘representational spaces’.⁵ In *The Room*, the gloom that surrounds the stage materialises this other kind of space. Overstepping its traditional confinement to backstage areas, this shadowy space presses in on the stage itself, becoming visible through the transparent frame. The mystery of *The Room* unfolds within this darkness. Unexpected visitors come and go. One of the main characters must journey into the bleak winter streets to deliver a package (to whom, containing what?).

³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴ John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, in John Osborne, *John Osborne Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 1-95, p. 5.

⁵ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 38-9.

Everyone wants to know, and thinks they do know, where the landlord ought to be found (at least he might clear matters up). And living in the basement of the house, it is said that there is someone who has a special, and (until the play's final unravelling) undisclosed importance for the two main characters. It is this pushing of narrative significance out-of-scene and out-of-view that generates the strange feeling that *the* room could be one of dozens, hundreds, thousands, tessellating throughout the house and extending into the darkness beyond. This room, in its existence somewhere along a spectrum of visibilities from the overexposed to the obscure, is the seed of what I will refer to as postwar London's 'rented worlds'.

This is the nexus of relations that this thesis sets out to explore. Broadly speaking, it will ask three questions: How were postwar London's rented rooms constructed as a space of 'social problems' through visual and other forms of cultural production? How did the welfare state regulate or intervene within these spaces? And finally, how did people's lived experience confirm, contradict or actively resist the supposedly problematic nature of the rented worlds that formed part of their everyday lives? I opened this Introduction with an analysis of *The Room* because I see it as delineating three dimensions of space – originally identified by Henri Lefebvre – which together have the potential to open up these three questions. The questions themselves could be summarised under the headings of 'representation', 'regulation' and 'lived experience'. Each spatial dimension presents a different but interlocking means of exploring these questions. I want to briefly outline these three dimensions of space before returning to the problematic nature of the room and its worlds.

1. Dimensions of Space: From Rooms to Worlds

The first spatial dimension, *abstract space*, is dominated by quantitative and geometric conceptions. It aligns with instrumental modes of spatial intervention, whether of a constructive, destructive, legalistic or commercial kind. On the urban scale, this is the space of planning and development, of slum clearance, compulsory purchase, contractual exchange, property boundaries, land assembly operations and institutional authority.

Abstract space preconditions these activities and guides their results. Of course, no space is ever purely abstract. Planners and developers may talk of 'decanting' residents – as if space were a vessel and social life a liquid prone to evaporation – but a form of environmental

determinism seemingly opposed to this way of thinking has proven just as influential among the spatial professions. Patrick Abercrombie and George Forshaw, for example, were determined to break what they saw as the negative linkage between urban sprawl and congestion on the one hand, and social segregation, atomisation, disorder and waste on the other.⁶ However, this recognition of a connection between space and social practice remains largely one-way: space determines practice. Practice meanwhile struggles to alter space except infinitesimally and unconsciously.

This brings us to the second dimension of space: the space that forms the constantly refreshed and reinscribed pattern of everyday life; the space which is neither a vessel nor simply a 'medium' but can only be understood through *spatial practice*. Spatial practice traces paths, creates zones of intensity and dispersion, generates velocities and obstructions. A motorway would be a different kind of space with no cars on it. A crowd creates space through its congregation of bodies. A home has its hallowed and neglected parts, including those parts that are maintained through the often invisible, usually female labour of cleaning, arranging, gathering and storing.⁷ Indeed domestic space can be seen as the concentrated centre of spatial practice within capitalist modernity. Łukasz Stanek has shown how for Lefebvre, beginning with his lesser known sociological work of the 1940s-60s but also informing his later theoretical projects, 'dwelling' constitutes the 'paradigmatic practice of the production of space'.⁸ Through dwelling, people appropriate a space, convert it into 'an oeuvre'. In Lefebvre's thinking, this appropriative practice is dialectical. Not only does it take place 'in the midst of constraints', but the practice itself is susceptible to appropriation, to being plugged back into a regime of privatisation and an ever more microscopically programmed form of urban design or urban 'science'.⁹ Spatial practice encompasses this dialectic, amounting to what Stanek calls a 'creative and expressive negotiation between spatial affordances and cultural significations'.¹⁰

⁶ Prepared for the London County Council by JH Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie, *County of London Plan* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1943).

⁷ Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 152-3. See Part 1, Section 5 for further discussion of these ideas.

⁸ Łukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. xiv.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. ix and 84.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Finally there are 'representational spaces'. Photography, cinema, journalism, literature and music help conjure these spaces of the imagination. Textual, sonic and visual 'media' play a decisive role in fashioning the mental images of space that people carry about with them in their daily lives. As such, representational forms stretch and compress the spaces perceived within spatial practice, so influencing this practice itself. The influence of representation extends to the work of planners, developers and other instrumental powers who set to work on the built environment. Representational spaces infiltrate the realms of abstract space and spatial practice, not only through mental images but also via decorative or atmospheric embellishments within material reality – printed surfaces, lighting effects etc. – which in certain cases may subordinate the underlying structure.

Indeed, all three types of space interact dialectically. Representational spaces compose the ideological backdrop of decisions taken by the hegemon of abstract space, but the latter are also in the business of producing representations – paper plans and discursive propositions which underwrite anticipated profits as much as visions of the ideal city. Likewise with spatial practice; representational spaces filter our daily perceptions, but through practice we also assert our own spatial imaginings. Finally, as Lefebvre observed, there exists a tendency in late capitalism for spatial practice to become ever more strictly plotted according to the planned itineraries of urban reality.¹¹ This is what Richard Hornsey calls 'spatial citizenship', in the context of the County of London Plan of 1943 and similar efforts to reorganize the circulation of bodies within the city.¹²

And yet a dialectical reaction to a more rigid spatial protocol is that the outliers of this new regime have a numerically disproportionate potential to disturb the established order. This is the significance of the 'spivs' and criminalised queer men whose 'zigzag' paths through the city Hornsey traces;¹³ the demobbed soldiers and 'zoot suiters' that Lynda Nead posits as unexpected harbingers of change emerging from the ambiguous cultural interregnum of postwar Britain;¹⁴ the 'teddy boys' and a certain fraction among their high society

¹¹ Lefebvre, p. 38.

¹² Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 105.

¹³ Ibid. For more on the figure of the 'spiv' see Part 3, Section 2.

¹⁴ Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (New Haven: Yale, 2017), pp. 35 and 190-2.

counterparts who sought pleasure in what Frank Mort identifies as the liminal frontier of London's 'underworlds' and 'overworlds';¹⁵ and the children playing in the ruins of bombsites, who herald, as Ben Highmore argues, both restorative self-development and a threat to the normal order.¹⁶ Blackmarketeers, queer sociability, commonwealth immigrants, and urban youth were all freighted with a problematic significance that was spatial as well as symbolic.

The three varieties of space described above suggest a multidimensional approach to the questions posed by this thesis; an approach that sifts the granular structure of the everyday without underplaying the most powerful forces shaping it externally; an approach that recognises the importance of representational forms, not just as reflections or mediations of social reality, but as decisive manifestations within that reality.¹⁷ Space is what ties these dimensions together. The space of London's rented rooms provides the setting for many key social problems of the postwar period – from questions of public safety and private responsibility, to fears over ghettoisation and the changing nature of 'community', to the need to make the declining inner city fit for business and the dubitable standing of the rentier class during a period of national reconstruction.

These are some of the main 'problems' this thesis deals with. But London's rented rooms were not merely a passive backdrop for these issues; they were themselves the issue. Intervening in these problems meant determining how a major shift in property relations – namely, the decline of private rented housing – should be managed. To take only the issue of public safety versus private responsibility, which Part 1 of this thesis looks at in the context of fire safety, one quickly confronts a number of questions that connect property and the regulation of problematic social subjects. Was the answer simply to demolish and rebuild all those thousands of homes in subdivided and often unsafe terraced housing, or could they be incorporated into programmes of 'urban renewal' through public sector takeover ('municipalisation'), state-aided improvement, or indeed via a new wave of 'gentrification'?¹⁸ If council housing was the alternative, could universalist values be extended across society,

¹⁵ Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs* (New Haven: Yale, 2010), pp. 86-88 and 46.

¹⁶ Ben Highmore, 'Playgrounds and Bombsites: Postwar Britain's Ruined Landscapes', *Cultural Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (November 2013), 323-336.

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), pp. 95-100..

¹⁸ Jim Yelling, 'Public Policy, Urban Renewal and Property Ownership, 1945-55', *Urban History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (May 1995), 48-62.

or were some people – according to a racist and racialised view of domestic space – fundamentally different in their habits and ways of life?¹⁹ Alternatively, would the ‘affluent society’, with its virtues of private responsibility, dislodge the ideological underpinnings of the postwar welfare state?²⁰ Who would find themselves left behind by the new ‘property owning democracy’? And who would bear the costs of the contradictory effects of a modernising overhaul of the built environment, as slum clearance and speculation accelerated neighbourhood decline?²¹ Throughout this thesis, it will be found that the changing nature of property relations – considered as a relationship of ‘belonging’ that is ‘held up’ in space²² – intertwined with inequalities of class, race and gender.

In answering such questions, my method will navigate the three dimensions of space already outlined: abstract space, spatial practice and representational spaces. Often, representational spaces will act as the entrypoint, as I consider how London’s rented rooms were constructed in the imagination as a space of social problems. Within this context I examine major public exhibitions, popular films, press photography, graphical ephemera, sociological writings, literary fiction, etc. Through myriad associations, the room grows into a ‘world’, a space no longer bounded by four walls.

I then seek to show how the welfare state, understood as a fusion of capital on the one hand, and the state as the regulator of ‘the people’s’ interests on the other, intervened within these spaces. The building of new houses and the demolition of old ones (whether through local councils or the encouragement of private developers) is the most prominent form of intervention, and the one historians of the welfare state and housing specialists have paid most attention to.²³ However, this thesis will stress other modes of regulatory action. In doing so, I focus on the hinge point between abstract space – where plans are drawn up and rationalised environments constructed – and spatial practice, where the welfare state obtains

¹⁹ On universalism and its shortcomings see Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (London: John Murray, 2014), pp. 160-9. See also Section 1 of this Introduction below.

²⁰ See Part 1, Section 2.

²¹ See Part 1, Section 4.

²² Sarah Keenan, ‘Subversive Property: Reshaping Malleable Spaces of Belonging’, *Social and Legal Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, 423-439, p. 426.

²³ See for example Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) and Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete and Dirk Van Den Heuvel, *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Michael Harloe, *The People’s Home* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State*, 2nd edn. (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 241-244.

a more intimate level of contact with its subjects, for example through the work of visiting social workers, which I look at in Part 2.

Finally, I am concerned to show how everyday practice enacted various forms of contestation and resistance, as well as self-regulation and mutual support, in and through space. One of my claims on this point is that spatial practice could develop into political resistance. Borrowing from the title of Peter Fryer's classic account of black British history, I sometimes refer to this as 'staying power':²⁴ the power to keep living, to repair and adapt, to cultivate unofficial forms of mutualism and solidarity, to organise *around* and *within* the institutions of the welfare state, to remain in place, to uphold a claim of belonging against all odds. It is therefore through practice as well as representation that the room becomes a world: a life-world of expansive possibilities.

The rest of this Introduction will show how London's rented rooms came to be regarded as part of a 'declining' form of housing, tied to the transitional spaces of the inner city. Section 2 maps out this condition empirically, while interrogating the dominant story of 'decline' and marginality. Noting how the housing studies literature has tended to ignore the experience of private renting in the transformational period of the late '40s to early '60s, I argue that a false projection of abstract space has led to a teleological view of how housing and the welfare state developed.

Section 3 then takes up the cultural image of decline through a handful of closely related representational spaces, including the bombsite, the basement club, and the smog bound streets of the postwar city. Recent cultural histories have gravitated towards these spaces in surprising ways. I return here to the work of Richard Hornsey, Lynda Nead, Ben Highmore, Frank Mort and others, with the aim of unravelling the image of decline from within. Section 3 goes on to argue that the regulatory endeavours of the welfare state sought to penetrate these spaces precisely because of their relative obscurity. At the same time, the ruinous state of London's rented worlds gave shelter to forms of life that would not have been possible elsewhere.

²⁴ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, third edn. (London: Pluto, 2018).

Moving away from ideas of ruin and decline, Section 4 puts forward the idea of the 'zone of transition', drawn from the work of Ruth Glass, as a way of understanding the dynamic, contradictory nature of London's rented worlds. I consider some of the main forces shaping these spaces, including inner city redevelopment and capital withdrawal. This involves bridging the gap between the domestic and the urban, a scale-shift performed by this thesis at multiple points. Taking Glass's insights as a starting point, London's rented worlds can be thought of as spaces where the contradictory forces of capital collide, fuelling social problems that resonate on a national scale and which the welfare state was forced to confront on a daily basis.

Section 5 then situates my approach to notions of regulation and contestation in relation to the historiography of the welfare state. While this literature forms an essential background to any history of postwar British culture and society, much of it suffers fundamental blind-sides in terms of its conception of the state's relationship, or in many cases virtual non-relationship, to capitalism as an overarching system. Identifying a more fruitful approach in the work of Claus Offe, I argue that this has often led to a one-dimensional understanding of the role of the welfare state with respect to housing and urbanisation. Finally, I outline how the three Parts of the thesis are structured.

2. Paradoxes of Decline

The phrase 'rented rooms' is adapted from contemporary parlance as a catch-all term for bedsits, boarding houses, residential hotels, lodging houses and multiple occupancy homes. The term bedsit suggests a relatively self-contained form of accommodation, often with a sink or even a modest kitchen *en suite*. The distinguishing feature of a boarding house, on the other hand, was its common dining room. The same often applied to residential hotels, which were in many cases identical to boarding houses in all but name (and possibly reputation). Both were generally more salubrious establishments than lodging houses, which provided little in the way of services or amenities. Finally, at the far end of the spectrum, there were multiple occupancy homes, where whole families often inhabited one or two rooms. A more precise definition of these different categories will be given in the subsequent Parts of this Thesis. However, it should be noted that in reality no strict division existed

between them. A property in multiple occupation, for example, could contain self-contained bedsits aimed at single people alongside collections of rooms inhabited by families.

In practice, people would talk about 'unfurnished rooms', 'furnished rooms', 'bed-sitting rooms', 'single rooms', homes consisting of 'one or two rooms', or simply 'rooms'. Hence a letter from the British Legion sent in January 1947 on behalf of an ex-serviceman's family evicted from their 'two-roomed home' in Barnet appealed to members of local churches known to have 'available rooms'.²⁵ Later in our period, it was not surprising to find a landlord complaining about the biased nature of rent tribunals refer to his property as 'my rooms'.²⁶ Meanwhile the author of the Rowntree Trust's 1965 report on *English Housing Trends* described how 'the first stage of a household's (independent) housing history' is often spent in 'small ill-equipped "rooms" and "converted flats"'.²⁷ The vocabulary of 'rented rooms' suffused everyday life as well as commercial and official discourse. Turn to the back of a local newspaper and one would usually find several pages of property listings, the large majority of them 'rooms' to rent of one kind or another.²⁸

The ubiquity of this terminology reflected an experience that was widespread yet problematic: namely, that for most people, for at least some part of their lives, home meant a room, or two, or if you were lucky three, in somebody else's house.²⁹ It is this sense of being not-quite-at-home, of *being home*, but in a space that does not add up to the conventional idea of *the home* – this gap, in other words, between the home as an enclosed territory under the possession of an individual or a family, and the idea of property as abstract divisible space – that Pinter's 'Room' trades on for some of its most disquieting effects. Here, in the margins of property and home, all kinds of problematic social relations emerge;

²⁵ 'House-This-Family Plea in Sermon', *Daily Express* (13 Jan 1947) p. 3.

²⁶ 'Give Landlords Better Deal He Demands', *Kensington Post* (c. 1959), press clipping in 'West London Rent Tribunal: Press Cuttings' (1959-60), National Archives (henceforth NA) BL 8/31. The same article also spoke simply of 'rented rooms'.

²⁷ JB Cullingworth, *English Housing Trends: A Report on the Rowntree Trust Housing Study* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1965), p. 3.

²⁸ 'Flatlet', 'bed-sitting room' and simply 'room' – usually abbreviated to 'rm.' – are some of the most common terms used in residential property listings from the period.

²⁹ One of the main studies that Milner Holland based his official report on found that 46% of all private lettings had just one bedroom, 32% had two bedrooms and only 22% three or more. PG Gray and Jean Todd, 'Privately Rented Accommodation in London: A Report on Inquiries made in December 1964 and June 1964 for the Committee on Housing in Greater London', 299-410, in Committee on Housing in Greater London, Edward Milner Holland chair., *Report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London* (Cmd. 2605) (London: HMSO, 1965), pp. 306-7. Henceforth, '*Milner Holland Report*'.

'problems' that encompass issues of race and immigration, class and community, gender and the nature of the family, personal responsibility and the public sphere.

Today, upwards of 20% of households in Britain live in private rented accommodation.³⁰ To reconstruct the lifeworld of a time, say in 1947, when 57% of households rented privately, requires an act of imagination but hardly a leap of faith.³¹ The postwar period is within living memory, and, from the historian's point of view, supplied by a vast mass of archival material. Moreover, in simple numerical terms the 'rented worlds' of postwar Britain and the present are converging. Since the early 2000s, private renting has been increasing steadily (although it is still dwarfed by the roughly 64% of households classed as owner occupiers).³² Driven by a range of factors including the sell-off of public housing, the increasing unaffordability of homeownership, and the return of big capital to the inner city, this gradual upward trend shows no sign of slowing.³³ By contrast, in the postwar period, private rented housing was declining rapidly. The days of 1914 when 90% of the population rented privately – 'from the Gorbals of Glasgow to Mayfair' – were long gone.³⁴ Once a near universal experience, that 90% was shorn down to something over half the population at the end of the Second World War, and just over a quarter by the early 1960s.³⁵ In 1966 only 21% of British households rented privately.³⁶ It is precisely this headline story of 'decline' that set the tone for contemporary representations of the social problems harboured by the rented worlds of the postwar metropolis. Paradoxically, this same narrative of decline has until recently tended to divert historians' attentions away from this phenomena to the apparently more bountiful plains of public housing on the one hand, and homeownership on the other.

³⁰ Calculated from Office for National Statistics, 'People in households by housing tenure and combined economic activity status of household members: Table 1' (4 March 2020) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/workingandworklesshouseholdstablepeopleinhouseholdsbyhousingtenureandcombinedeconomicactivitystatusofhouseholdmembers>> [accessed 6 September 2020].

³¹ PG Gray, *The British Household* (London: Central Office of Information, 1949), p. 18. Gray's data for households renting from someone other than a council would have included small numbers of people living in charitable housing.

³² See the summary report by Shelter and the Resolution Foundation, *Housing in Transition: Understanding the Dynamics of Tenure Change* (2012) <<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2012/06/Housing-in-Transition-Understanding-the-dynamics-of-tenure-change.pdf>> [accessed 10 January 2020].

³³ Anna Minton, *Big Capital: Who Is London for?* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 102.

³⁴ Hamnett and Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits: Flat Break-up and the Decline of Private Renting* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1988), p. 10.

³⁵ David Eversley, 'Landlords' Slow Farewell', *New Society*, Vol. 31, No. 641 (16 January 1975), 119-121, p. 119.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The twenty years after the Second World War saw a massive public housing drive conducted through local authorities and New Town development corporations.³⁷ At the same time, mortgage finance for working class families was expanded from its modest start in the 1930s, enabling many to buy their own homes for the first time.³⁸ Private renting was thus squeezed from two sides. The 'squeeze' was ideological as well as material. On the one side, there was the promise of high quality council housing offering modern amenities, generous space standards (at least initially), and carefully planned 'mixed communities'.³⁹ Championed at first by Labour, the postwar public housing offer was expanded numerically by the Conservatives in the early 1950s, despite the sacrifice of many of its initial cross-class, universalist values.⁴⁰ On the other side, there was the dream of owning one's own home. Thanks to direct and indirect government subsidies bolstering the lending power of building societies already flush with investment from small savers, homeownership became a real possibility for many, though by no means all, working class households.⁴¹ As council waiting lists grew into the thousands, speculative suburban developments offered an alternative escape route (for those who could afford it) from the run-down inner city.⁴² And although many of the new generation of homeowners were simply taking out long-leases on ageing rental properties, there was no denying the appeal of being rid of the hated influence of the landlord.⁴³ Indeed, this was one of the underlying factors which led Labour revisionists such as Hugh Gaitskell, Anthony Crosland and Douglas Jay to ultimately accept the fundamentals of the Conservatives' 'property owning democracy'.⁴⁴ Both these provisions together, public housing and subsidised homeownership – the one operating through the

³⁷ Harloe, *The People's Home?*, pp. 280-3; Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945*, third edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 254 and 257-262.

³⁸ Peter Scott, 'Marketing Mass Home Ownership and The Creation of The Modern Working-Class Consumer in Inter-War Britain', *Business History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 2008), 4–25, p. 6; Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, pp. 50-1 and 89.

³⁹ Selina Todd, *The People*, pp. 160-9 and Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, p. 71. On the aspirational standards of early postwar council housing see Alison Ravetz, 'Housing the People', in Jim Fyrth ed., *Labour's Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain 1945-51* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 146-162, p. 154-57.

⁴⁰ Harriet Jones, "'This is Magnificent!': 300,000 Houses a Year and the Tory Revival after 1945", *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2000), 99-121.

⁴¹ On subsidies see Stephen Merrett, *Owner Occupation in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 29-30 and Hamnett and Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits*, pp. 52-4. On building society investments see Peter Saunders, *A Nation of Home Owners* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 24.

⁴² Keith G. Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 15.

⁴³ On transfers of property from private rental to owner occupation see Merrett, *Owner Occupation*, pp. 134-5. On attitudes towards the landlord see John Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-War Experience* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 181 and Eversley, 'Slow Farewell', *New Society*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ Ben Jackson, 'Property-Owning Democracy: A Short History', in Martin O'Neil and Thad Williamson, *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 50-69, pp.59-61.

partial decommodification of housing, the other through a carefully managed form of 'asset-based welfare' – constituted a central (albeit unstable) pillar of the welfare state.⁴⁵

For the built environment, the implications were clear to see. Between 1938 and 1960, around 700,000 houses in Britain were demolished or otherwise withdrawn from residential use.⁴⁶ After accelerating in the second half of the 1950s, slum clearance plateaued out at an astonishing rate of 60,000 houses demolished each year in England and Wales. Within Greater London alone, just over 45,000 houses were demolished in the period 1955-64.⁴⁷ What was being demolished were above all private rented dwellings. In their place rose council blocks, offices, shopping centres and motorway flyovers.⁴⁸ Alternatively, where the planners and developers didn't prevail, families and individuals eager to secure a home of their own turned those houses escaping the wrecking ball into small but multitudinous patches of private ownership. Between 1938 and 1960, 1.6 million private lettings were sold to owner occupiers.⁴⁹

In this way, London's rented rooms were converted from paragons of urban decline and clusters of problematic activity into the transparent gridwork of an abstract space; a space that proposed only a one-way relationship with practice and remained haunted by prior images of modernity (the Victorian past of unplanned urban expansion). There is no doubt that slum clearance was sometimes heartily welcomed by residents themselves.⁵⁰ The chance to move into a brand new council house represented a definite improvement in many people's lives. My point, however, is to highlight the contradictions of this process, contradictions which stem from the fetishisation of the different dimensions of space: from the reduction of spatial practice to a problematic activity, or else the disavowal of the representational element, the necessary dream-space, within modernising visions of the

⁴⁵ John Doling and Richard Ronald, 'Home Ownership and Asset-Based Welfare', *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 165-172.

⁴⁶ John Allen and Linda McDowell, *Landlords and Property: Social Relations in the Private Rented Sector* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 18 and Saunders, *Nation of Home Owners*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Jim Yelling, 'The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955-85', *Urban History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2000), 234-254, pp. 231 and 236.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁹ Saunders, *Nation of Homeowners*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Selina Todd, 'Phoenix Rising: Working-Class Life and urban Reconstruction, c. 1945-1967', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 2015): 679-702.

future; or, in the extreme, the prioritisation of land values as the accumulation and slotting together of so many units of abstract space.

The undeniable decline of private renting during the postwar period has led to it being marginalised in the housing studies literature. In some cases, a fixation on the apparent inevitability of the process, as opposed to its actuality, has amounted to a teleological view of how housing has developed over time. Peter Malpass, for example, has explained this history in terms of 'market modernisation', the implication being that as the housing market evolves, mortgage financed homeownership will become the most effective mechanism for meeting the housing needs of the vast majority.⁵¹ The problem with this argument is that it turns medium-term trends contingent on politics into a fetishised image of stability and contentment. This image of the market is conditioned by an image of the 'ideal' home that obscures the complexity of social life cutting across it. Within this image, the consumers that the market gradually shuffles into the correct position represent so many autonomous households. While the house is indeed much more than a commodity according to this view, the exchange process remains foundational: commodity and consumer form a marriage that grows and evolves towards a harmony which the perpetual motion of the market can only improve. It is an image that seems far more questionable after the 2008 subprime crash than it did twenty years ago.

Where private renting has featured in the historiography of British housing policy, this has often been in terms of the history of slum clearance.⁵² The many rented worlds of postwar London and other cities are reduced in this way to the passive surface of inscription of planners and developers. Either one confronts an abstract space in waiting, a future *tabula rasa* or grid of abstract potentialities (differentials between actual and anticipated values, or 'rent gaps', as Neil Smith called them).⁵³ Or the market itself is treated as an image, one whose captivating power stems from a particular kind of representational space.

⁵¹ Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, pp. 24-5. For another version of this argument see Peter Saunders, *A Nation of Home Owners* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990). For counter-arguments see Chris Hamnett and Bill Randolph, *Winners and Losers: Homeownership in Britain* (London: UCL Press, 1999).

⁵² See the work of Jim Yelling for example, an important empirical source for this thesis but nonetheless a problematic one. Jim Yelling, 'Incidence of Slum Clearance', *Urban History*; and Jim Yelling, 'Expensive land, subsidies and mixed development in London, 1943-56', *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1994), 139-152.

⁵³ Neil Smith, 'Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (1979), 538-548.

And yet the fact is that private renting remained the single largest tenure category in Britain until the mid to late 1950s.⁵⁴ In London, this was the case well into the 1960s, with 44% of Greater London households renting privately in 1960,⁵⁵ and 64% of inner London households in 1961.⁵⁶ As Chris Hamnett and Bill Randolph have put it in one of the few studies to focus on this experience, 'Central and inner London constituted an island of private renting in a sea of owner occupation.'⁵⁷ The decline of private rented housing was decidedly protracted. Other historical studies to recognise this include John Allen and Linda McDowell's work on landlord-tenant relations in the 1940s-70s, Michael Harloe's comparison of private renting in the US and Europe, and David McCrone's study of landlordism in Edinburgh.⁵⁸

The fate of London's rented rooms was not only protracted. It was also sharply contested and uneven. Recent work in political and urban history has begun to shed light on this process. As Peter Weiler has demonstrated, the initial Conservative acceptance of the need to expand the state's role in housing was undergirded by a more basic decision to work towards the restoration of market principles.⁵⁹ It was concerning the private rental sector that the erosion of a broad consensus on housing came to a head most spectacularly. Admittedly, increases in council rents provoked militant resistance in St Pancras, but this remained localised and was undercut by a generally cautious approach on the part of the government.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, as John Davis has highlighted, the so-called 'Pilgrim case' of 1954 scandalised the Conservatives for the bureaucratic treatment of their own natural

⁵⁴ Figures vary depending on a) whether one is looking at the whole of Britain or the nations considered separately, and b) whether one records numbers of households or dwellings. All the available tabulations, however, put the turning point sometime after 1955 and sometime before 1960. See Lowe, *Welfare State since 1945*, p. 263; Eversely, 'Slow Farewell', *New Society*, p. 119; Cullingworth, *English Housing Trends*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ As against 38% owning their own home and 18% in council housing. PG Gray and R Russell, *The Housing Situation in 1960: An Inquiry Covering England and Wales Carried out for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government* (London: Central Office of Information, 1962), p. 25.

⁵⁶ Hamnett and Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits*, p. 36. Inner London is defined as what was until 1965 the County of London, i.e. the area lying within the administrative boundaries of the LCC.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Allen and McDowell, *Landlords and Property*; Michael Harloe, *Private Rented Housing in the United States and Europe* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985); David McCrone, *Property and Power in a City: the Sociological Significance of Landlordism* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

⁵⁹ Peter Weiler, 'The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives' "Grand Design for Housing", 1951-64', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2000), 122-150.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 128-30 and Dave Burn, *Rent Strike: St Pancras 1960* (London: Pluto, 1972).

constituency of owner occupiers.⁶¹ Nevertheless the government managed to defuse the crisis quickly and without any painful changes to their overall programme.⁶²

The same cannot be said of the attempt, in 1957, to lift rent controls from hundreds of thousands of private rental properties. Rents in affected houses doubled or in some cases even tripled, leading to widespread evictions and harassment.⁶³ The exposure of one landlord who took advantage of the situation has led to the coining of a term that remains with us today: 'Rachmanism', referring to the slum landlord Peter Rachman who operated in and around North Kensington in the 1950s. Davis has emphasised the molliating efforts of the establishment in dealing with the aftermath of the Rachman scandal.⁶⁴ But there can be no denying the fact that the political opposition provoked by this moment played a big role in ending thirteen years of Conservative government at the 1964 election.⁶⁵ As Phil Child has shown, Labour's short-lived policy of 'municipalisation' (whereby councils would buy out private landlords) helped polarise the debate, despite only ever being accepted as a temporary measure.⁶⁶ Outside Parliament, Camilla Schofield and Ben Jones have demonstrated how the 'New Left' used the issue of private renting as a springboard for their campaigns.⁶⁷ On all these counts the decline of the private rented sector was one of the most sharply contested of all social questions, across housing policy and beyond.

We have seen how the decline of private renting was a contested process; it was also highly uneven, affecting some people more than others. Part of what made government interventions within postwar Britain's rented worlds contentious was the extent to which questions of property and domestic space grew entangled with questions of 'race' and immigration. Thus we see how the tendency towards the abstraction and fetishisation of space within postwar capitalism was answered by a countervailing tendency – towards the personalisation of spatial problems, and the racialisation of space itself. Davis has drawn

⁶¹ John Davis, 'Macmillan's Martyr: the Pilgrim Case, the 'Land Grab' and the Tory Housing Drive, 1951–9', *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (April 2008), 125–146.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶³ John Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2001), 69–92, pp. 71 and 77.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–7.

⁶⁵ Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy*, pp. 25–9.

⁶⁶ Phil Child, 'Landlordism, Rent Regulation and the Labour Party in mid-twentieth century Britain, 1950–64', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2018), 79–103, pp. 95 and 97.

⁶⁷ Camilla Schofield and Ben Jones, "'Whatever Community Is, This Is Not It': Notting Hill and the Reconstruction of "Race" in Britain after 1958', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 58 (January 2019), 142–173.

attention to this nexus of social 'problems' in the context of Rachmanism, while Chris Waters has addressed it more generally.⁶⁸ The same could be said about other 'problematic' households – single mothers, 'delinquent' children and the 'problem' families they belonged to, the working poor, and older people on low incomes – all of whom were pushed towards, or confined within, private rented housing. Social historians including Pat Starkey and Selina Todd have explored these issues in depth, but without highlighting the role of property relations and the interaction between urban and domestic space.⁶⁹ With council rents and residency rules excluding both poorer workers and new arrivals,⁷⁰ and building societies refusing to lend to unmarried women, as well as operating an unofficial 'colour bar',⁷¹ those groups shut out of the benefits of the postwar housing drive had to build their lives within the vast, semi-subterranean world of London's (and other cities') rented rooms.

Two years after the end of the Second World War, private rented properties still housed the vast majority of working class people in Britain.⁷² By the early 1960s, the picture was much more mixed. Although private renting continued to weigh more heavily towards the lower end of the income scale, skilled manual and non-professional clerical workers were probably just as likely to own their own homes or to be in the process of buying.⁷³ Private renting, in other words, developed into a more and more residual category. In the early '60s, unfurnished private lets accommodated around half of all households in England on very low incomes.⁷⁴ As noted by the official investigation chaired by Sir Milner Holland in the wake of the Rachman scandal, private rented households in Greater London 'included markedly high

⁶⁸ Davis, 'Rents and Race', *Twentieth Century British History*; Chris Waters, 'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (April 1997), 207-238.

⁶⁹ Pat Starkey, 'The Feckless Mother: Women, Poverty and Social Workers in Wartime and Post-War England', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2000), 539-557; Selina Todd, 'Family Welfare and Social Work in Post-War England, c.1948-c.1970', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 129, No. 537 (April 2014), 362-387; Abigail Wills, 'Delinquency, Masculinity and Citizenship in England 1950-70', *Past and Present*, Vol. 187, No. 1 (May 2005), 157-185.

⁷⁰ On residency rules see Clare Ungerson, *Moving Home: A Study of the Redevelopment Process in the London Boroughs* (London: Bell and Sons, 1971), p. 31.

⁷¹ Merrett, *Owner Occupation*, p. 93; Susan Smith, *The Politics of "Race" and Residence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), pp. 88-9.

⁷² PG Gray, *The British Household* (London: Central Office of Information, 1949), p. 18. Among social classes I, II, and III, 71%, 59% and 64% of households lived in private rented housing.

⁷³ Cullingworth, *English Housing Trends*, p. 32. Among skilled manual workers and foremen, 34% rented privately while 39% were owner occupiers; among unskilled manual workers 41% rented privately while 26% were owner occupiers; and among clerical workers not classed as professionals, 31% rented privately while 50% were owner occupiers.

⁷⁴ Cullingworth, *English Housing Trends*, p. 27. Very low incomes being in this case heads of household earning £5 per week or less, equal to 37% of the national average. The picture is different among the small (but politically and culturally important) sub-sector of furnished rental properties.

proportions of single people, very young families, old people, newcomers to the area, unskilled workers and the very poor'.⁷⁵

At the same time, it would be an error to suppose that London's rented rooms were the preserve of an underclass. Across every type of property that Milner Holland surveyed there were significant proportions of heads of households with incomes above the national average.⁷⁶ Within private lets it was therefore not uncommon to find clerical workers, bohemians, the children of the middle classes, and even the odd professor or middle manager (especially in the more salubrious boarding houses of North London, for example).⁷⁷ What's more, London in the 1950s and '60 witnessed the very beginnings of what we now know as gentrification – the term coined in 1964 by the pioneering urban studies scholar Ruth Glass.⁷⁸ Some of the same terraces that landlords and property traders were subdividing or re-letting in order to extract inflated rents from the most marginalised in society were just as likely to be converted to self-contained flats and maisonettes for middle-class owner occupiers.

There is more to say about this process (see Section 4 below). What needs stressing for the moment is the remarkable degree of flux, both within the structure of tenure categories and household distribution, that inner city London witnessed during the twenty years after the Second World War. This mixed and changing social composition made its presence felt within films, photography, plays, novels, maps and exhibitions. It is this highly uneven, transitional state of affairs that this thesis aims to grasp.

⁷⁵ *Milner Holland Report*, p. 151.

⁷⁶ National average calculated at £13.11s per week. See Gregory Clark, 'What Were the British Earnings and Prices Then? (New Series)', *MeasuringWorth* (2020) <<https://www.measuringworth.com/datasets/ukenncpi/>> [accessed 17 January 2020]. Figures for heads of households earning £15 or more (net) range from over 15% in rent-controlled, multiple occupancy homes (likely to be among the poorest), to over 48% in uncontrolled, furnished, singly-occupied, purpose-built flats (likely, given the number of 'service' or 'mansion' flats in this category, to be among the wealthiest). *Milner Holland Report*, p. 312.

⁷⁷ Part 2 of the thesis deals in depth with this mixing of classes in boarding house life.

⁷⁸ Ruth Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), xiii-xlii, p. xviii.

3. Living (in) Ruins

What did it mean to live in a space of 'decline'? Having situated postwar London's rented rooms within a downward trajectory that was protracted, contested and uneven, I want to turn to a less empirical register. The present section will suggest some ways of thinking about these rooms and their worlds as 'representational spaces'. In order to do so, I will briefly present some of the most insightful interdisciplinary studies of the historical conjuncture this thesis deals with. Work by Lynda Nead, Ben Highmore, Frank Mort, Richard Hornsey and Clair Wills has attended to the moods, atmospheres and rhythms of London and other British cities after the Second World War. This thesis will not focus explicitly on this 'affective' dimension (for want of a better description).⁷⁹ However, the tropes these scholars identify, tend, I will suggest, to coalesce in surprising ways around the rented worlds of the postwar metropolis.

London's rented worlds can be seen to dwell within the smog bound atmosphere of postwar Britain that Lynda Nead uncovers, with its phantasmagorical, as well as physically deleterious, effects.⁸⁰ Focusing on the space of rented rooms invites us to imagine the lives of families whose homes were located under the grey-spots of smoke control areas; or the life of the loner living in 'digs', the victim of 'social disorganisation', whose melancholy is deepened, made more enticing and more deadly by smog.⁸¹

The same rooms also thread their way among the bombsites of the period. Ben Highmore has shown how bombsites and other pieces of waste-ground stoke a polyvalent imaginary that veers between the healing power of permissive play and the corrosive influence of delinquent youth.⁸² The rented rooms that encircle these spaces flicker between an image of the 'inexhaustible reservoir' from which society's marginals 'flood out', and, on the contrary, the regulating presence of 'eyes on the street' overlooking this *defacto* non-street.⁸³ If the

⁷⁹ Ben Highmore, *Cultural Feelings: Mood, Mediation and Cultural Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p. 2.

⁸⁰ Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke*, pp. 19-20 and 26-7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32 and 49-50. On 'social disorganisation' see Part 2 of this thesis.

⁸² Ben Highmore, 'Playgrounds and Bombsites', *Cultural Politics*.

⁸³ Walter Benjamin and Asja Lasis, 'Naples', in Walter Benjamin, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 163-173, pp. 165-6. I am indebted to Graeme Gilloch's discussion of the 'Naples' essay in his book *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), pp. 21-36; Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 45.

1949 Ealing Comedy, *Passport to Pimlico*, directed by Henry Cornelius, represents the latter situation (Figure 0.2), then Roy Ward Baker's 1961 race relations drama *Flame in the Streets* (Figure 0.3) typifies the former.



Fig. 0.2 – *Passport to Pimlico* (dir. Henry Cornelius, 1949)



Fig. 0.3 – *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961)

Bombsites constitute a kind of ruin; they offer a portal to past traumas, as well as future hopes and anxieties. Following Nead's interpretation, smog – the actual substance and its

cultural analogues – can also be thought of as a ruinous material. Through smog bound atmospheres in fiction and official discourse, the Victorian past leaked back into the modern world of postwar reconstruction.⁸⁴ This concept of ‘ruin’ can be extended to London’s rented rooms. In Pinter’s play, for example, the house that contains the room is steadily revealed to be a ruinous object – a rambling, porous, amputated structure stranded in a semi-wasteland of depopulated streets. It is not only a physical ruin but a place where ordinary senses of time and space break down. Take the following exchange between Rose, one of the room’s tenants, and Mr Kidd, the man we are led to suppose is the landlord.

Rose: Well, Mr Kidd, I must say this is a very nice room. It’s a very comfortable room.

Mr Kidd: Best room in the house.

Rose: It must get a bit damp downstairs.

Mr Kidd: Not as bad as upstairs.

Rose: What about downstairs?

Mr Kidd: Eh?

Rose: What about downstairs?

Mr Kidd: What about it?

Rose: Must get a bit damp.

Mr Kidd: A bit. Not as bad as upstairs though.

Rose: Why’s that?

Mr Kidd: The rain comes in.

Pause

Rose: Anyone live up there?

Mr Kidd: Up there? There was. Gone now.

Rose: How many floors you got in this house?

Mr Kidd: Floors. (*He laughs*). Ah, we had a good few of them in the old days.

Rose: How many have you got now?

Mr Kidd: Well, to tell you the truth, I don’t count them now.

Rose: Oh.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Lynda Nead, *Tiger in the Smoke*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ Pinter, ‘The Room’, in Harold Pinter, *Harold Pinter Plays: One*, p. 108.

The landlord who doesn't know how many floors there are in his house: in this disconcerting combination of a kind of deranged trench-humour of the everyday, and the eerie impression that we stand on the threshold of an object that is fundamentally unknowable, there lies the key to the feeling that surrounds the room. The dimensions of the house become infinite, yet full of holes. Darkness, partitions behind partitions, locked doors on landings, render parts of the building impassable.⁸⁶ Through the self-undermining movement of the dialogue seemingly trivial assumptions fall apart. In the end, the very contiguity of space and time seems unverifiable.

But if the house containing the room is indeed a ruin, it is a special kind of ruin, a living ruin. As Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis discovered in the labyrinthine streets of Naples, dilapidation and new adaptations merge into one another perpetually.⁸⁷ Old and new interpenetrate, like the ambiguous public-private areas of landings and stairwells. What's more, people continue to live within this ruin. The characters go about their lives in the room as if nothing unusual had happened: tea is poured, bacon and eggs served, magazines read, the weather commented on, the armchair offered to visitors who stay a moment and then leave again.⁸⁸ A stubborn ordinariness persists in full view of everything that is strange and disturbing. It is precisely this persistence of ordinary life that Clair Wills discovers in the lodging house literature of Jewish, Irish, Caribbean, and working-class writers, including Harold Pinter and Alexander Baron.⁸⁹ Delving deeper into the language of these writers, Wills discovers that a rich vernacular culture exists within the lodging house. The life that continues to dwell within the ruins, despite its damaged or partial condition, need not be reduced to repetition and absurdity. The postwar city's rented worlds invite the gaze of the regulator to penetrate their obscurity. Yet they also shelter forms of life that would be impossible elsewhere.

⁸⁶ See the monologue by Mrs Sands in which she describes entering the house for the first time. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸⁷ Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis, 'Naples', in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 163-173, pp. 165-6. I am indebted to Graeme Gilloch's discussion of the 'Naples' essay in his book *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), pp. 25-28.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 101-3 and 112-6.

⁸⁹ Clair Wills, 'Digs and Lodging Houses: Literature, Ruins and Survival in Postwar Britain', *Éire-Ireland*, Vol. 52, No.s 3 and 4 (Autumn/Winter 2017), 57-74.

As Wills suggests, this ‘unspoken analogy’ between marginalised peoples and ruined spaces cuts to the heart of commonsense understandings of home, belonging, nation and ‘race’.⁹⁰ In *The Room*, as in later plays by Pinter where the effect is pushed to greater extremes, the pitter-patter exchanges and diversionary reminiscences carry the vernacular to the point of estrangement.⁹¹ The longer a speaker continues, the more they cast themselves adrift, pulled along by their own wayward colloquialisms. ‘Ordinary’ speech – native language – is shown to be itself alien, foreign, strange. At the heart of the native is the foreign. At the heart of the ordinary is the stranger. Mr Kidd’s monologue which follows the exchange quoted above reveals that his mother was a ‘Jewess’.⁹² Rose, we are led to believe, is the daughter of a black man, Riley, who pleads with her to ‘come home’.⁹³ Must we conclude that this room is not her *real* home? Pinter does not resolve the question but instead terminates it violently, through the murder of Riley.⁹⁴

If Wills focuses on immigrant communities within London’s rented worlds, then Richard Hornsey and Frank Mort shift the focus to sexuality.⁹⁵ Idealised images of ‘home’ are again upset, as these scholars highlight a queer presence within the city. The spaces Hornsey and Mort focus on are somewhat different to the semi-ruined, subdivided terraces that encircle London’s bombsites, or disappear within the smog. As well as the house in multiple occupation with its ethnically mixed community, there are rented worlds that embody alternative forms of domesticity, such as the upper-class service flat within a mansion block, or middle-class bachelor pad in a self-contained terraced conversion, as well as the cosmopolitan space of the basement club. Rather than ruinous spaces of survival, these locations are where London’s ‘underworlds’ and ‘overworlds’ come together.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹¹ Peter Davison, ‘The Music Hall Monologue and *The Caretaker*’, in Michael Scott ed., *Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, The Homecoming* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 120-124.

⁹² Pinter, ‘The Room’, in Harold Pinter, *Harold Pinter Plays: One*, pp. 108-9.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 124. But even this remains unclear: is Riley simply a messenger sent by Rose’s father, or is he himself her father? Is he lying, or delusional?

⁹⁴ The sudden, violent ending is a feature of several of Pinter’s early plays. See Harold Pinter, ‘The Birthday Party’ in *Harold Pinter Plays: One* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), 17-97 and Harold Pinter, *The Caretaker* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1971).

⁹⁵ Hornsey, *The Spiv and The Architect*; Mort, *Capital Affairs*. In Mort’s work, ‘race’ and racism in the postwar capital are understood as inherently gendered and sexualised.

⁹⁶ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 46.

Both Mort and Hornsey are interested in how queer life in postwar Britain was understood through its transgression of class boundaries.⁹⁷ Rented rooms of a higher class status facilitated these encounters. Hornsey, for example, draws attention to the media's focus on the West End flats of middle and upper-class gay men, the site of the supposed corruption of young 'guardsmen' and borstal boys.⁹⁸ In Mort's analysis, 'blues clubs' operating out of the basement rooms of rented apartments in Notting Hill are shown to play a similar role as a space sexual experimentation.⁹⁹

My focus is more on 'race', class and gender than sexuality. However, both Hornsey's and Mort's attention to specific locations in London will be informative for the approach taken in this thesis. While Nead has shown how something as apparently vague as 'atmosphere' can be amenable to rigorous historical analysis, Hornsey's work brings a comparable deftness of analysis to rhythms of movement within the city.¹⁰⁰ Mort similarly has drawn attention to the circuits among high and low society that link together spaces such as Soho and Notting Hill, arguing that these and other spaces gave scope to a form of 'policy making in miniature'.¹⁰¹

Within this thesis, I build on this existing work. I do so through an interdisciplinary approach that combines visual and inter-textual interpretation, with close attention to local geographies and social history. While my approach is similar in many respects to the forms of cultural history just discussed, I also work quite deliberately towards a foregrounding of lived experience. The latter is not divorced from representation but in practice has often struggled to bypass it, or has subsisted beneath it. While my analysis often begins with representation, I am trying, at all times, to reach an understanding of spatial practice – an understanding that does not fetishise the latter as a source of resistance (clearly it is often powerless in the face of major reworkings of abstract space), let alone as a comforting reminder that at the granular level 'life goes on', but, rather, one that integrates practice, representation and abstraction within a dialectical comprehension of social space. This concern with the social production of space has guided my choice of sources. As well as popular films, exhibitions,

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 3 and 90 and Hornsey, *The Spiv and The Architect*, p. 94.

⁹⁸ See also his commentary on the boarding house in *The Lavender Hill Mob* (dir. Charles Crichton, 1951). Hornsey, *The Spiv and The Architect*, pp. 98-101 and 86.

⁹⁹ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, pp. 290 and 311.

¹⁰⁰ Ben Highmore, review, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain*, by Lynda Nead, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (2018), 661-2, p. 662.

¹⁰¹ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 8.

press photography, and contemporary sociological classics, I also examine the administrative records of institutions such as the London County Council, the Association for Psychiatric Social Workers, and various London rent tribunals. These offer an insight into how the welfare state sought to regulate the city's rented worlds. At the same time, they disclose the hinge point between abstract space and spatial practice. In them, we can detect the recalcitrance of everyday life pushing at the margins of regulatory authority.

4. Transition Zones

The previous section unpacked the concept of 'decline' through an analysis of its representational analogue, in the form of 'ruined' spaces in the postwar city. In doing so, it outlined the interdisciplinary approach this thesis will take. I now want to consider some of the main spatial forces shaping postwar London's rented worlds. This involves a shift of terminology, from ideas of ruin and decline, to thinking about transition and contradiction. It also involves a shift of scale: from the domestic to the urban.

In her introduction to the essay collection *London: Aspects of Change*, published in 1964, Ruth Glass draws the reader's attention to what she called 'zones of transition'.¹⁰² As in the lodging house itself, these were areas, according to Glass, where disparate groups of people lived side by side: families who couldn't afford local authority rents, commonwealth immigrants, clerical and manual workers who needed to be near the city centre for work, students, sex workers and 'delinquents'.¹⁰³ According to Glass, these transition zones hovered on the edge of official awareness, usually only entering the public sphere through various 'unsavoury' media: crime statistics, fascist leaflets, 'complaints before rent tribunals', NSPCC reports, as well as news items on 'witch rites, ghost hunts, visits from Martians and take-over bids'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change*, p. xxi.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. xx-xxi.

The 'structure of feeling'¹⁰⁵ that emerges from this list of people and information sources is one of danger, dissipation and obscure moments of reassembly. The closeness to the 'ruins' described in the previous section is palpable. But Glass does not see these spaces as representing only decay and decline. She also recognises their living quality. It is for this reason that she judges the term 'slum' to be anachronistic.¹⁰⁶ The zone of transition or 'twilight zone' is her alternative, adapted from Chicago school sociology and used to express the shifting, contradictory qualities of this space.¹⁰⁷ A remarkable descriptive passage captures something of its mood as well as the deeper dynamics flowing through it:

From Kensintgon to King's Cross early on a June morning the sights and sounds of London just awakening have a novel clarity. The roads of Georgian and Victorian houses converted into flats are still packed with parked cars; the Espresso bars are still locked up; the new under-pass (or rather bottleneck) at Hyde Park Corner is still empty; the tall Hilton Hotel at Park Lane, recently finished stands out clumsily; Marble Arch and Grosvenor Square, now deserted, where the American eagle is so conspicuous, are a reminder of days of international crisis, of protest demonstrations of bewilderment and fear. In this region of 'high rise' office blocks, apartment houses, genteel shop windows and an occasional supermarket, prosperity is freshly painted on: there is an air of expectancy. But all that is left far behind already in the peeling plaster zone of Euston, where the monotony of narrow back streets, grimy and dreary, is only rarely interrupted by a once-Italian cafe or a more recent Indian restaurant; and then again by glimpses of a remarkable "vertical feature" – the Post Office tower off Tottenham Court Road.¹⁰⁸

There is more richness of detail here than I can do justice to in this Introduction. What this paragraph captures, however, beyond the 'shimmering chaos of London', is the contradictory dynamic of the zone of transition.¹⁰⁹ It is telling that Glass chooses early morning as the

¹⁰⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), pp. 128-135.

¹⁰⁶ Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change*, p. xxi.

¹⁰⁷ For use of the term by Chicago school writers see Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Roderick McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1925).

¹⁰⁸ Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change*, p. xiii..

¹⁰⁹ Sam Johnson-Schlee, 'What Would Ruth Glass Do? *London: Aspects of Change* as a Critique of Urban Epistemologies', *City*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 97-106, p. 101.

moment to seize her 'dialectical image' of the city.¹¹⁰ At this point in the day, the cars sit parked outside their owners' gentrifying houses and the underpass has not yet transformed into a bottleneck. Nearby, Eero Saarinen's new American Embassy stands as a silent monument to American power, the chants of protestors only a memory. The shops and cafés, presumably of both the 'genteel' and 'grimy' kind, are still locked up. This image of the city about to wake up holds the push and pull of countervailing forces in a temporary stasis, allowing us to see, in a snapshot, what might otherwise appear to be pure chaos. The zone of transition – straddling the 'peeling plaster zone' and the streets where 'prosperity is freshly painted on' – is the space where these forces collide.

What are these countervailing forces? Writing in the early 1960s, Glass discerned the dynamic of uneven development that Marxist geographers including David Harvey, Neil Smith and Doreen Massey would theorise fifteen to twenty years later.¹¹¹ Within the zone of transition one could see 'change and stagnation exist side by side', as redevelopment in one part of the city led to adjacent areas becoming 'hemmed in' and 'left to decay'.¹¹² Redevelopment, in other words, goes hand in hand with 'de-development', as the withdrawal of capital from one area or aspect of the built environment enables more profitable reinvestment in another.

Normally this analysis has been understood in terms of Glass's prescient diagnosis of gentrification.¹¹³ But the dynamic Glass identified should be seen in a wider frame. Returning to the image of London half-asleep, one has the impression that the city is a machine running on idle, ready to come alive at any moment. Movement and dynamic power exist in tension with inertia. The haze of half-remembered dreams hangs over the alertness of new

¹¹⁰ The relevant passages from Benjamin's Theses 'On the Concept of History' and related texts, including the 'paralipomena' to the Theses - from which I draw the phrase 'dialectical image' - are quoted at length in Michael Löwy, trans. Chris Turner, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History"* (London: Verso, 2016), pp. 40-44.

¹¹¹ Neil Smith, 'Toward a Theory of Gentrification', *Journal of the American Planning Association*; Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, second edn. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), originally published 1984; David Harvey, 'The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation: A Reconstruction of the Marxian Theory', in David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 237-266, this essay originally published 1975; Doreen Massey and Alejandrina Catalano, *Capital and Land: Landownership by Capital in Great Britain* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), see especially pp. 153-60.

¹¹² Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change*, pp. xx and xxv. Part 1, Section 4 explores the implications of Glass' hypothesis in more detail.

¹¹³ See Sam Johnson-Schlee, 'What Would Ruth Glass Do?', *City*, for a summary of how Glass' work has been received within gentrification studies.

enterprise. Mention of the underpass suggests the flood of traffic that will soon engulf the city. Elsewhere, the Hilton Hotel and the American embassy stand out awkwardly, or brazenly, as signs of London's growing importance as a node of international finance, tourism, and diplomatic or military power projection. These elements represent what one might call the centripetal forces of the city; the magnetic effects of urban agglomeration, or what David Harvey has characterised as the concentration of productive activity and the reduction of circulation costs in response to successive moments of crisis.¹¹⁴ But all that can change just a few streets away. In the dilapidated back-streets around Euston, Glass observed the polarity of the magnet going into reverse; centripetal forces become centrifugal ones, and new investment is withheld or actively withdrawn. The exception is the recent Indian restaurant, a newcomer finding its niche in a space evacuated by larger players.

This coupling of 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces, or what Neil Smith called the 'see-saw' movement of uneven development, has profound implications for how we understand capitalism's fundamental spatial dynamic.¹¹⁵ The process can be thought of in terms of its dual effects on production and 'realisation' (meaning distribution and consumption).

In the first place, the concentration of productive activity entails the redeployment – or destruction – of an existing surplus, in other words the withdrawal of capital from particular areas. In the postwar period this involved the rebalancing (or unbalancing) of production away from heavy industries in the North towards newer, 'lighter' ones in the Midlands and the South, accelerating a tendency begun in the 1920s. Spurred on by new trunk roads converging on the capital and later by the construction of Heathrow Airport, London's suburbs and satellite towns exerted a powerful gravitational pull on everything from electrical engineering to car manufacturing and pharmaceuticals.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile the Blitz pushed industry out of the capital's core, sparking an exodus that was deliberately pursued by town planners and exacerbated by the speculative boom in office developments.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Harvey, 'The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation', in Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*, p. 241.

¹¹⁵ Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, 3rd edn. (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 149.

¹¹⁶ This tendency was most marked in the 1930s, when suburban London captured the bulk of the new industries. In the postwar period, manufacturing in the capital as a whole still grew in absolute terms, thanks again to suburban industry, but at a slower rate than the national average. Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London: Vintage, 2008), pp. 188-9 and 198.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 40 and 196; Oliver Marriot, *The Property Boom* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967).

Secondly, in order to actually sell the goods and services it produces, capital must constantly expand its markets.¹¹⁸ As in almost every other period, this expansion had a strong international dimension. It hinged in the postwar period on maintaining exports and materials supplies with the Commonwealth and former Empire, as well as attempting to establish new trade relations with Europe.¹¹⁹ But the postwar expansion of markets also entailed the fostering of new needs and desires as part of an 'affluent', home-owning society, centred on the suburbs and increasingly facilitated by motorisation.¹²⁰

Both sets of processes – centred on production, on the one side, and distribution and consumption, on the other – cast a long shadow over London's rented worlds. The redevelopment of the inner city for office and retail space, for example, was closely bound up with the fate of London's private rented housing, leveraging the potential value between relatively undercapitalised residential areas and soaring potential ground rents.¹²¹ Meanwhile, as a growing consumer society oriented itself towards the suburban homeowner, the same goods would find their way into a Victorian landscape of terraced houses ill-adapted for the purpose. As I demonstrate in Part 1, this exacerbated problems to do with safety in the home.

London's rented worlds were the shadows, in effect, of shifts in production, inner city redevelopment, homeownership, suburbanisation, and Britain's changing place in global power relations. Through the idea of the zone of transition we can grasp these rented worlds as the embodiment of a contradictory dynamic, a dynamic that includes both shadow and act: both the streets of peeling plaster and those where wealth is freshly painted on; both the impact of new motorway infrastructure and the fate of rooming house districts clustered around nineteenth-century railway termini; both the imperial ambitions of a new breed of property developer and the changing character of the city's most cosmopolitan districts.

¹¹⁸ Harvey, 'The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation', in Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*, pp. 241-2.

¹¹⁹ Tom Ling, *The British State since 1945: an Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

¹²⁰ Mark Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the USA* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 2 and 28. Again, this process was already well underway during the first half of the century, with London tripling in surface area between 1900 and 1939. In terms of suburbanisation, the postwar period was largely one of consolidation. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 28 and 34.

¹²¹ In analyse this dynamic in Part 1, Section 4.

By thinking in such terms, this thesis will highlight the resonance that particular areas of London had on a national scale. Multiple shifts in scale – from ‘rooms’ to ‘worlds’, from the domestic to the urban, from the local to the national – form an integral part of my approach. Broadly speaking, I will argue that London’s rented worlds constituted pockets of activity where the contradictory forces of uneven capitalist development crashed head-on into one another. This dynamic produced the material conditions that underpinned the numerous social ‘problems’ associated with these spaces in the representational realm.

5. Regulating the Rented World

If London’s rented worlds were constructed as problematic spaces, then it fell to the welfare state to deal with these problems. Section 2 already touched on how the welfare state responded to the postwar housing question – through a massive expansion of council housing and subsidised homeownership, accompanied by slum clearance and the planned reconstruction of bomb-damaged city centres. However, this was only one aspect of the response. I argue in this thesis that the welfare state was also closely involved in the management of the declining private rental sector and the social problems seen to concentrate there. Through a range of state institutions as well as officially sanctioned non-state agencies, operating at both local and national level, the welfare state obtained a much more intimate level of contact with its subjects than through physical acts of reconstruction alone, as important as these were. In this manner, the welfare state was also forced to confront, or placate, the irregularities of capital much more directly than it would have done otherwise.

There is a vast literature on the welfare state that I don’t intend to summarise here. Instead, I want to highlight some of the sources that have informed my approach as defined above. My main theoretical point of orientation is the work of Claus Offe.¹²² Working within the basic tenets of Marxism but arriving at his own heterodox position, Offe argues that at a certain point in the history of capitalist development something approximating the welfare state becomes necessary for capitalism’s own survival. This is the era of monopoly capital, of a

¹²² Claus Offe, trans. John Keane, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1984).

handful of very large firms controlling distribution and prices (even if smaller firms survive to a surprising degree), within an ever more interconnected system.¹²³ It is also, not coincidentally, the era of mass trade unionism and an ever more formally legitimated relationship between the labour movement bureaucracy (if not labour itself) and central government.¹²⁴ Within this context, the state acts as an essential mediator between the interests of capital and labour, maintaining a stable environment for accumulation by both regulating capital and underwriting or directly providing for the costs of labour's reproduction.

Within Offe's model, this two-sided process takes the form of the welfare state's 'political-administrative' core providing certain regulatory inputs to the 'economic system' on the one side, and the 'normative' system, the sphere of social reproduction, everyday life, the family and the cultural norms deriving from it, on the other.¹²⁵ In relation to the 'economic system', the welfare state takes responsibility for certain key pieces of infrastructure that would otherwise prove too costly for any individual firm, or insufficiently attractive due their collective nature. Less tangible but just as important, the welfare state also provides a coherent legal framework for, amongst other things, the standardisation of components and security of contracts. It also supports or directly executes new research and development, an increasingly important aspect of advanced economies and one that connects to the welfare state's other role – supporting the functioning of the so-called 'normative' sphere. The latter is achieved by providing certain key services and 'benefits' that are often tied, as Virginia Noble and Elizabeth Wilson stress, to the maintenance of the male-headed nuclear family: healthcare, education, housing, social work, unemployment insurance, family allowances etc.¹²⁶ Insofar as the political-administrative core fulfils this function, it guarantees an approximation of the socially determined necessities of life. In fact, it helps set the level of those necessities depending on one's relationship to the workplace and the family. The welfare state in this way cultivates a relatively healthy, educated workforce, while at the same time upholding the primacy and relative independence of the family as both reproductive unit and ideological construct.

¹²³ Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, 2nd edn. (New York: International Publishers, 1963), pp. 342-8.

¹²⁴ See for example Jim Phillips, *The Great Alliance: Economic Recovery and the Problems of Power 1945-1951* (London: Pluto Press, 1996) on the relationship between the first postwar Labour government and the TGWU (Transport and General Workers' Union) in the context of unofficial dockworkers' strikes.

¹²⁵ Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, pp. 52-3.

¹²⁶ Virginia Noble, *Inside the Welfare State: Foundations of Policy and Practice in Post-War Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock, 1977).

Some have claimed that Britain lacked the necessary degree of corporatism to achieve a real compact of capital and labour in the interests of modernisation, and that the new institutions and agencies delivering welfare were grafted onto an unreformed core based around the civil service.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the general direction of travel is clear and several other scholars have put forward arguments that support Offe's framework.¹²⁸ Broadly speaking, this position views the state as mediating (if not directly 'reflecting') the needs of capital at a given moment in history.¹²⁹

Where Offe's theory opens up some more unusual insights is in its insistence on the contradictory nature of the welfare state. The stress on contradiction is implicit in his two-sided mode. Offe argues that the welfare state seeks to prevent the disorder and conflict generated in either the 'economic' or 'normative' sphere spilling over into the other. Such 'cross-system' translations, from the 'economic' to the 'normative' or *vice versa*, represent moments when capitalism's alienating and disruptive nature become unavoidable. Nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation abounded in such effects, whether in terms of overcrowding, the pollution of air and water, piecework and sweated labour in the home itself, or the separation of families by the dreaded workhouse.¹³⁰ In more recent times one could point to scandals around specific materials or products that enter the home (asbestos, for instance), and the growing awareness of ecological destruction as undermining the very basis of life's reproductive capacities.

Crucially in Offe's model, this is a dialectical and contingent process. The constant revolutionising of production may or may not translate immediately into effects in the normative sphere. Likewise, damaging effects observed in the latter may or may not be traced back to the movements of capital. Indeed, the welfare state seeks to insulate these two spheres from one another. But insofar as it plays the role of mediator, it also absorbs the

¹²⁷ Ling, *British State since 1945*, pp. 27-9 and 39-42.

¹²⁸ Ian Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State* (London: Macmillan, 1979); James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1973); Nancy Fraser, 'Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism', in Tithi Bhattacharya ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto, 2017), 41-60, pp. 43-5.

¹²⁹ Christopher Pierson, 'New Theories of State and Civil Society: Recent Developments in Post-Marxist Analysis of the State', *Sociology*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (November 1984), 563-571, p. 565.

¹³⁰ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Planning and Design*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 22; Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution*, 3rd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 47 and 61-5.

problems of both. The contradictory and crisis ridden nature of capitalism as such is reproduced in a 'second order', at the level of the welfare state itself.¹³¹ The welfare state, the manager of crises, becomes itself the object of crisis. This is what Offe calls the 'crisis of crisis management'.¹³²

This dialectical approach gives Offe's theory its explanatory power in concrete historical situations such as the one I deal with in this thesis. Whereas most historians of the British welfare state treat social policy as evolving on a more or less independent trajectory, one that relates the state to its citizen-subjects but essentially pushes capital into the deep background, I aim in this thesis to integrate these different 'spheres'.¹³³ This ought to be an essential goal of any account of the welfare state. It is all too easy to restrict the analysis to the regulatory inputs that the welfare state delivers to citizens, subjects, workers and families, simply because these are the most visible and hotly debated features of the system. One hears far less in the media, for example, about the regulatory services delivered to capital. And yet to push capital into the background as many historians do essentially submits to the ideological structure of the welfare state itself: the attempt to keep the regulation of the productive sphere separate from that of the reproductive one; to prevent 'cross-system' translations. For a study of private rented housing in postwar London, this separation becomes untenable as soon as one considers the role of landlords, developers, building societies, and financial investors. The more the private rented sector enters a state of decline, the more it becomes the privileged field of speculation and predatory practices. And the more that urban and financial capital are drawn into the rented world in this way, the more capitalism's damaging effects as a whole are laid bare within everyday life.

My use of Offe's 'crisis model' of the welfare state has historiographical implications. In following the trajectory of social policy, too often historians have relegated the shaping influence of contestation to the welfare state's nineteenth century origins.¹³⁴ To some extent

¹³¹ Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, p. 51.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 35 and 48.

¹³³ Fraser, *Evolution of the British Welfare State*; Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain Since 1945*; Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State*; Glen O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain: The Paradoxes of Progress, 1951-1973* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* In fairness, of the three authors cited above, Pat Thane does examine a wider range of actors outside of the 'political-administrative core', from trade unions to think tanks and professional associations. However, there is little mention of capital as such in her account of the postwar period, and pressure 'from below' is restricted to the labour movement bureaucracy. See Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State*, pp. 213-246.

this is understandable. It was then that factory work cut short the life of whole generations, and the uncontrolled growth of cities led to cholera epidemics that threatened the middle classes. It was also then that Chartism, the formation of the trade unions, and revolution in Europe pushed establishment reformers to enact legislation that would lay the foundations of the modern welfare state. Britain after the Second World War exhibited a generally greater degree of political stability (at least domestically), but this two-sided contestation did not stop in 1945. The disruptive impact of capital and resistance from ordinary people continued throughout the postwar period.

Many now acknowledge the heavy dose of mythology in the idea of the postwar consensus, but there is still work to be done carrying this understanding into the roots of social life.¹³⁵ In attempting to do so, one begins to grasp the spatial dimension of the welfare state's contested development. For despite its attempts to placate people, the welfare state also opens up new channels for resistance. As Nancy Fraser has argued from a socialist-feminist perspective, the welfare state itself becomes the object of struggle.¹³⁶ New potential collective agents are called into being by the very institutions of the welfare state (the claimant, the dependent, the tenant in a rent controlled property or council accommodation). At the same time, conflicts as well as alliances grow up between welfare workers and welfare 'clients'. Both the home and the public sphere – the latter reconstituted by new institutions, the former receiving greater official attention – gain in importance as arenas of struggle. This notion of new collective agents chimes with Manuel Castells' conception of urban resistance in his famous *The City and the Grassroots*. It also dovetails with Lefebvre's notion of the 'right to the city'.¹³⁷ The welfare state can be seen as the historic form of the state during a period when capital increasingly switches to the 'secondary' (i.e. urban) circuit of investment, and a struggle over the urban commons takes centre stage. Reviewing Offe's analysis, some have argued that the postwar welfare state therefore represents a fundamental break with earlier incarnations of capitalist society, including a fundamental

¹³⁵ Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah eds., *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945-64* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

¹³⁶ Nancy Fraser, 'Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late-Capitalist Political Culture', in Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism* (London: Verso, 2013), 54-82.

¹³⁷ Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983); Henry Lefebvre, 'The Right to the City', in Henri Lefebvre, ed. and trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 147-159.

downgrading of the importance of class.¹³⁸ I think this claim goes too far. On the historical evidence, it is hardly plausible to characterise the postwar period as one of radical rupture with the past.¹³⁹ Nor can it be said that class loses its significance.¹⁴⁰ For similar reasons, we also need to caveat the overly sanguine view expressed by Offe himself regarding the necessity and hence durability of the welfare state. According to Offe, 'the sudden disappearance of the welfare state would leave the system in a state of exploding conflict and anarchy'.¹⁴¹ Tempering this view, we can say instead that the welfare state represents the form taken by the crisis tendencies of capitalism and the resistance born within them at a given historical moment.

* * *

This thesis is organised in three Parts, consisting of four to five Sections each. The three Parts deal with three different 'social problems'. I consider how each problem was constructed through representation, how the welfare state sought to regulate or intervene in these problems, and how everyday spatial practices responded in turn.

Part 1 deals with issues of public safety and private responsibility in the context of fire safety. The postwar period saw an alarming rise in the number of house fires, which particularly affected multiple occupancy homes. I begin with representations of the fire-threatened home by examining a series of displays mounted by the London County Council (LCC) at the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1958-63. As a celebration of home-centred consumption, the Ideal Home Exhibition provides the occasion for exploring the relationship between the so-called 'property owning democracy' and the space of London's rented rooms. I argue that the idea of individual self-regulation, which was at the heart of this new vision of semi-privatised welfare, proved incompatible with the socially complex space of multiple occupancy housing. By way of contrast, I also examine the LCC's efforts to tackle fire safety issues through a programme of inspection that embraced this complex social reality. Shifting to the urban

¹³⁸ Christian Joppke, 'The Crisis of the Welfare State, Collective Consumption and the Rise of New Social Actors', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32 (1987), 237-260, pp. 244-5.

¹³⁹ Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State*, pp. 246-9.

¹⁴⁰ Selina Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2008), 501-518.

¹⁴¹ Claus Offe, 'Some Contradictions of the Modern Welfare State', in Christopher Pierson and Francis Castles eds., *The Welfare State Reader*, 2nd Edn. (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 66-75, p. 71.

scale, I then demonstrate how processes of uneven development actively redistributed risks onto the most vulnerable households, posing a fundamental challenge to the welfare state. Part 1 closes by looking at forms of spatial practice within the home that resisted both reductive views of slum housing and the precarity induced by uneven development.

Part 2 deals with problems of loneliness and social isolation, and the larger, related question of community. Loneliness and isolation were treated to varying degrees as pathological experiences in the postwar city. An important expression of this pathologising view was in the growing area of psychosocial studies addressing mental health in the city. Part 2 begins by looking in detail at one of these studies: Peter Sainsbury's work on suicide in London, published in 1955.¹⁴² Through its adaptation of the nineteenth-century concept of *anomie*, Sainsbury's study serves to recontextualise the postwar debate on the nature of community found in sociological classics by Michael Young and Peter Willmott and others.¹⁴³ Looking closely at the geography of 'rooming house' districts that Sainsbury draws attention to, I show how a variant of the 'zone of transition' haunted the supposedly traditional spaces of community. I then demonstrate how a psychosocial understanding of the urban environment fed into the work of social workers who were tasked with intervening in problems related to loneliness and isolation. Part 2 closes by asking what forms of alternative community existed in the supposedly fragmented spaces of the rented world. I argue that in films and novels from the period, such as Lynne Reid Banks' *The L-Shaped Room* (adapted to film by Bryan Forbes, 1962), we see emerging temporary alliances among disparate groups of people including single working women, aspiring artists, pensioners and migrants.¹⁴⁴

The third and final Part of the thesis examines the experience of private renting from the side of the landlord. Especially in the immediate postwar years, landlords came to symbolise the 'profiteers' who threatened to undermine the foundations of national reconstruction. Part 3 demonstrates the basis of the figure of the 'grasping landlord', while also seeking to go beyond it. I begin with the image of the 'little old landlady' in films such as *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick, 1955). In these fictional representations, the figure of the

¹⁴² Peter Sainsbury, *Suicide in London: an Ecological Study* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1955).

¹⁴³ Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

¹⁴⁴ Lynne Reid Banks, *The L-Shaped Room* (London: Vintage, 2004), originally 1960.

landlady was wedded to the decrepit or outmoded spaces she inhabited. I then consider the figure of the immigrant landlord, and especially the black landlord. As an emergent actor in the postwar property system, the immigrant landlord played an important role in the organisation of private rented housing. At the same time, he was the focus of all kinds racist fears and attacks. Part 3 looks at these questions through the contrasting lenses of the sociology of postwar race relations and the testimony given by the pages of the *West Indian Gazette*. Through these examples, I argue for a new understanding of how the entrepreneurial culture that immigrant landlords were a part of intertwined with radical, anti-colonial politics.

While our understanding of landlordism in the postwar period needs nuancing, it also has to be acknowledged that the construction of the landlord as a figure of 'popular loathing' was itself a popular activity. Against this background, Part 3 examines the rent tribunals established by the postwar Labour government in 1946. I consider how these new institutions acted as forums for the voicing of tenants' grievances. Part 3 closes by considering the figure of the developer, who was rapidly eclipsing the importance of the landlord. Public awareness of developers like Jack Cotton provided an important way of making sense of the huge changes taking place within the postwar property system. I argue that media narratives surrounding developers like Cotton provided a powerful yet ultimately mystificatory personification of abstract space – a space alienated from the realm of lived experience.

Part 1: The Hearth and the Inferno

Introduction

On a Sunday morning in February 1959, a four-year-old named Adeola Ornitiri fell against the oil stove her family used to heat their Paddington flat.¹⁴⁵ The appliance toppled over, spilling burning paraffin across the floor where she and her three siblings were playing. Her mother bundled them out of the room and into the hallway, then ran upstairs to get a bucket of water. But the flames spread too fast, and the blazing staircase cut her off as she came back down. Her husband managed to get through the fire and together they made it to an adjoining third-floor rooftop. Mrs Ornitiri gripped her husband's arms as he lowered her over the edge. He let go, and she dropped twenty-five feet to neighbors who were waiting to catch her. Then Mr Ornitiri jumped, shattering his heel upon landing.

Another neighbor, Fred Reardon, grabbed Adeola and the other children and carried them to safety. It was Fred's daughter-in-law, Rose Reardon, who comforted the children in her home nearby.

The rising fire trapped another couple in their second-floor flat. Gerald Lionel climbed out of the window and hung from the sill. Once he had steadied himself on the frame below, his pregnant wife Martina used his body as a ladder to climb down. Gerald's brother was on the top floor. Firefighters managed to rescue him, but he suffered severe burns. Sixty-year-old Anne Ferris was also saved, but not without serious injuries. The firefighters, however, couldn't reach a young woman named Josephine Albert. She died, most likely from smoke inhalation.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s you could read stories like this almost every week in the *Kensington Post*, the local newspaper covering the west London areas of Kensington, Paddington and Fulham. 1959 posted the highest ever fire losses in financial terms since records began.¹⁴⁶ While politicians and the national media tended to focus on the series of very large industrial fires that did the most to inflate these figures, the heavy toll was also

¹⁴⁵ 'Couple Jump 25 feet to Safety, Husband is Human Ladder', *Kensington Post* (20 February 1959), p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ 'The Growing Cost of Loss by Fire', *the Guardian* (4 April 1960), p. 9.

reflected in growing numbers of domestic fires. Not surprisingly, it was fires in people's homes that inflicted the most harm in terms of injuries and lives lost.¹⁴⁷

It's worth recollecting some of these incidents. Taken together they suggest not only the sheer number of house fires during this period, but also the repetitious nature of their circumstances. Earlier that same winter, Janet Workman, a student from Nigeria, made a narrow escape from her flat in Ladbroke Grove with the help of a local electrician who braved the flames with his ladder.¹⁴⁸ As with the Paddington fire that killed Josephine Albert, an oil heater was thought to be the cause. That was mid-December 1958. A few weeks later and half a mile away, flames gutted a basement room where several people were living on Ledbury road. 'Bursting windows' attracted the attention of a passerby, who warned everyone inside.¹⁴⁹ On the 20th of February 1959, carbon monoxide from a fire that had built up slowly under the floorboards of seventy six year-old Edward Peren's second-floor flat in Holland Park proved fatal. The London Electricity board ruled out faulty wiring, claiming an electrical fire would have been more intense.¹⁵⁰ That same week, eighty year old Mary Williams died from burns sustained while struggling to warm her home in West Kensington.¹⁵¹ Nearing the end of the cold winter months, burns from an electric heater killed Louisa Cann of Mirabel Road, Fulham, at the age of ninety three.¹⁵²

Summer brought some respite to the spate of deadly fires, most of them contained within a two-mile radius in North Kensington. Some of the worst was still to come, however. On the 2nd of October 1959, another basement fire killed two toddlers, Sheriff and Freda Sesay. At the inquest that followed, the Coroner quizzed the children's father about his movements that day. 'These two children were shut up in these premises for certainly two hours – and a great deal longer I suspect – without provision for anyone looking after them.' A verdict of accidental death was recorded but not without a final sermon on the parents' moral

¹⁴⁷ Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and Fire Offices' Committee Joint Fire Research, *United Kingdom Fire Statistics 1962: Statistical Analysis of Reports of Fires Attended by Fire Brigades in the United Kingdom during 1962* (London: HMSO, 1962), pp. 1 and 8.

¹⁴⁸ "'Drain-Pipe" Rescuer Saves Four', *Kensington Post* (19 December 1958), p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ 'Basement Flat Blazes', *Kensington Post* (30 January 1959), p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ 'Fire Began under Floorboards', *Kensington Post* (20 February 1959), p. 1.

¹⁵¹ 'Woman Died Trying to Get Warm', *Kensington Post* (27 February 1959), p. 1.

¹⁵² 'Woman of 93 Died After Fire', *Kensington Post* (27 March 1959), p. 1.

condition: 'I would have thought that at a time like this you would have been in a more grief-stricken state of mind'.¹⁵³

Several things stand out from the record. Most of these fires took place in multiple occupancy homes. Many also involved portable heating appliances, especially oil heaters. Those who died or suffered injuries were often very young, elderly, or from immigrant families. In almost all cases they were living in *de facto* conditions of housing poverty. And in many cases, neighbours – white and black – risked their own lives to save others. Fires cut a path through London's communities that was far from indiscriminate, and those communities, in their complexity and their difference, responded as best they could, in order to save, survive and build anew.

Despite these consistencies, journalists, technical experts, and legal authorities were reluctant to recognise the systemic nature of the problem. Many officials and commentators – not without important exceptions – helped construct a narrative based on random, disparate incidents, casting doubt on the causative nature of poor quality housing and domestic equipment, or even blaming the victims themselves. News reports on these accidents often trivialised them. Most of the time an individual house fire would have gained only one or two column inches in the local press. One gets the impression that editors used them as the pre-digital equivalent of clickbait, often studded across the lower halves of front pages, as if serving as uncanny footnotes to headlines announcing the latest commercial redevelopment or housing project. So why focus on these “minor” tragedies? I hope to show that they only appear minor when scattered from each other, when unplugged from the dynamics of the property system, and when peeled away from the regulatory frameworks that sought to manage them.

In this first of three Parts of the thesis, I want to situate these fires in a wider context concerning the welfare state's capacity to manage or underwrite the risks entailed by capitalist production and consumption, and within that, the property system's tendency to introduce irreconcilable contradictions amidst a relationship of 'social balance'.¹⁵⁴ In a period

¹⁵³ 'Babies Die in Basement Blaze', *Kensington Post* (2 October 1959), p. 1 and 'Coroner Rebukes Father of Babies Who Died in Fire', *Kensington Post* (9 October 1959), p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, fortieth anniversary edn. (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 187-192. See Section 3 for further discussion.

of major restructuring to London's built environment, universalist ideals and regulatory regimes were tested to breaking point by the growing risks, or 'diswelfares' – to use the term coined by the postwar social policy thinker, Richard Titmuss – that urban capital actively generated and redistributed onto the most vulnerable in society.¹⁵⁵ House fires in the late 1950s and early '60s were symptomatic of profound shifts shaking the property system; transformations that threatened the postwar consensus and left governmental actors scrambling for meaningful remedies.

This reasoning has political and historiographical implications for our understanding of the transformation of the space of the home during the postwar period. It focuses our attention on the decisive juncture of the mid to late 1950s, as urban development took a quickly more aggressive turn and government housing policy shifted towards a more market oriented vision. Now that the 'crude shortage' had been overcome, the Conservative government pushed for council housing to become a residual rather than a universal provision, intended for those who fell through the cracks of the new 'property-owning democracy'.¹⁵⁶ While the government promoted homeownership through a package of tax relief for buyers and deregulation for private enterprise, owning one's home remained a distant prospect for most families.¹⁵⁷ Reluctant to expand council housing for political and budgetary reasons, the Conservatives' answer was to try and revive the beleaguered private rental sector.¹⁵⁸ The landlord lobby framed the problem of underinvestment in their stock in terms of the detrimental impact of rent controls and the high cost of repairs; the government tended to agree. The result was the 1957 Rent Act, which removed rent controls in their entirety for all properties valued at more than £40, and permitted increases of twice gross annual value for lower rated properties where occupied, or again, removed controls altogether upon vacancy.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Richard Titmuss, 'Universalism versus Selection' in Christopher Pierson and Francis Castles eds., *The Welfare State Reader*, second edn. (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 44.

¹⁵⁶ See Michael Harloe, *The People's Home* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 281.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Saunders, *A Nation of Homeowners* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990). See Chapter 4 'A Property-Ownning Democracy', pp. 204-262 and Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 83.

¹⁵⁸ Jim Yelling, 'Public Policy, Urban Renewal and Property Ownership, 1945-55', *Urban History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (May 1995), 48-62, p. 55.

¹⁵⁹ *Rent Act 1957* (5 and 6 Eliz 2, c. 25) (London: HMSO). I discuss the 1957 Act further in Section 4. For a summary of the changes it brought about see John Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2001), 69-92, p. 75.

Interlocking with these policy changes were a number of developments on the market side. Key among them was the continued expansion of mortgage finance for owner occupiers, which not only fuelled speculative building in the suburbs but also transferred very large numbers of private rental properties out of that sector and into the hands of both developers and individual homeowners.¹⁶⁰ These sectoral transfers encouraged a form of early-onset gentrification in the 'transition zones' of inner cities, aided partly by government grants supporting rehabilitation.¹⁶¹ Finally, we should note that housing was by no means insulated from other groupings of urban capital. As I discuss in Section 4, the 1950s-'60s boom in commercial property accelerated capital withdrawal from private rented homes.¹⁶²

These combined developments reshaped British cities. Their impact was felt especially in London. In order to fully understand these changes, however, we have to descend to the level of the home itself. As well as changes visible on the street – new office blocks rising from bombsites, the demolition of terraces marked down for slum clearance, the stepping up of high-rise council flats, and the re-plastering of ageing Victorian facades – important changes were taking place behind the facades of existing houses. For the moment I want to highlight just two of these changes: the subdivision of terraced houses into single rooms with shared facilities, and the opposite process, flat conversion, which sometimes involved knocking through party walls to produce larger, fully self-contained flats.¹⁶³ The former process could be achieved in theory without any alteration to the built fabric of a house; all that was necessary was to cram more people into the same building, with whole families often occupying single rooms, as was the case with some of the victims of house fires recounted above.

In practice though, changes in occupation almost inevitably led to changes in the spatial form of the home: partitions added within rooms, or shared landings appropriated for private use, for example. As I demonstrate in Sections 4 and 5, the double existence of the rented room as both an abstract space – a grid of potential values measured in fungible,

¹⁶⁰ Saunders, *Nation of Homeowners*, p. 28.

¹⁶¹ Jim Yelling, 'The Development of Residential Urban Renewal Policies in England: Planning for Modernization in the 1960s', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1999), 1–18 and Stephen Merrett, *Owner Occupation in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 31. See also the report by Counter Information Services, *The Recurrent Crisis of London: Anti-report on the Property Developers* (London: Counter Information Services, 1973), pp. 40-2.

¹⁶² Oliver Marriott, *The Property Boom* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967).

¹⁶³ Counter Information Services, *The Recurrent Crisis of London*, p. 42.

exchangeable units – and a sphere of concrete spatial practices, thus gave rise to a contradiction that expressed itself in incremental adaptations as well as more formal conversion processes. These informal changes – which everyday spatial practices both reflected and resisted – existed side by side with wholesale redevelopment. The latter re-drew the boundaries of neighbourhoods, carving out new enclaves of wealth or compressing and screening off existing areas of ‘decay’.

As discussed in the thesis Introduction, the need to manage a ‘declining’ private rented sector became a vexed issue in postwar Britain. In the present Part, I focus specifically on multiple occupancy homes, a type of housing where the ‘social problems’ associated with London’s rented rooms were at their most acute. Fire safety can be seen as another issue that became deeply spatialized. As a social problem, it involved a number of different, contesting actors: Landlords who let their properties fall into disrepair, property traders who encouraged subdivision through byzantine remortgaging schemes, housing inspectors who sought to control these irregularities, statisticians who revealed (or failed to reveal) the consistent patterns behind accidents, fire brigades at the front line of a growing emergency, and developers who took advantage of depressed inner city land values – all were implicated by a problem whose urgency should have been undeniable.

This several-sided contestation produced a basic discontinuity in the space of London’s rented rooms. Subdivision and overcrowding created a discrepancy between the exterior appearance and the perceived interior life of a house. The single rented room became, to misappropriate Richard Hoggart, ‘a burrow deeply away from the world’.¹⁶⁴ But shared spaces such as staircases and landings also defied easy definition, as the ‘privacy gradient’ associated with the bourgeois home lost its footing.¹⁶⁵ Growing fire risks brought these spatial discontinuities into focus. The dense, obscure home harboured hidden hazards. Potential accidents lay waiting in the smallest of details: a length of trailing flex, an ill-placed plug socket, a mirror above a fireplace, an oil stove, or a broken lightbulb. Fires exposed these hazards by tracing the path of least resistance through a building.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 34. I discuss this further in Section 5.

¹⁶⁵ Julia Twigg, ‘The Spatial Ordering of Care: Public and Private in Bathing Support at Home’, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1999), 381-400.

In marked contrast to the dramas of the blitz twenty years earlier, news stories of house fires were rarely accompanied by photographs of the events themselves (testament to the relatively thin spread of portable cameras). The decisive moment is missing. We have to look instead at sources such as safety exhibitions organised by municipal government, maps and graphs issued by technical authorities like the Fire Protection Association (FPA), and photographs that appeared in different contexts, for example in the work of urban sociologists.¹⁶⁶ These sources compose an alternative archive of the representational spaces associated with London's rented rooms. Together, they add up to an image of the 'un-ideal home'. I argue in Section 1 that this 'un-ideal home' forms an imaginative baseline against which other ideals of home are measured. The fifth and final Section also considers films, oral history and autobiographical writing. Altogether I take these various streams of visual and textual production as integral to the spatial production of the multiple occupancy home.

My entry-point in Section 1 is exemplary in this respect: a highly charged representational space which condenses some of the key themes of the thesis as a whole. By analysing a series of fire safety displays that the London County Council (LCC) mounted at the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition between 1958 and 1963, it seeks to understand how domestic ideals and their opposite were dialectically entwined. I consider how the LCC displays simultaneously exposed and obscured the reality of multiple occupancy home. Section 1 examines the different ways of visualising and navigating space encouraged by the displays, while Section 2 considers the context of their reception. Through these displays, London's rented rooms emerge as a space of both decline and rapid change, a space of uneven development and contradiction.

The dates of the LCC displays coincide with a number of important political events which establish the time-frame of this Part. 1958 was the year the 1957 Rent Act came into effect, leading to hundreds of thousands of tenants being forced out of their homes as decontrolled rents rose by up to four times current value.¹⁶⁷ The Act was arguably one of the most

¹⁶⁶ The FPA was originally founded by the British Insurance Association; its postwar membership included major industrial concerns. 'Company History', *The Fire Protection Association* <<http://www.thefpa.co.uk/about/company-background/company-history.html>> [accessed 6 September]. See also 'The Association: Change of Name', *FPA Journal*, no. 52 (January-April 1961), 5-6.

¹⁶⁷ By autumn 1959 an estimated half a million dwellings across the country had been decontrolled by landlords obtaining 'vacant possession'. Alan G.V. Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman: The Origins of the Rent Act, 1957', *The*

controversial pieces of postwar legislation, and its aftermath in the scandal surrounding the slum landlord Peter Rachman helped bring an end to thirteen years of Conservative government. 1958-63 therefore represents a period of intense contestation over the issue of private rented housing – a phase that would not be repeated, partly because of Labour’s success in getting political control of the issue a few years later,¹⁶⁸ and partly because from this point on the private rented sector would dwindle to a truly marginal category, even in inner city areas.¹⁶⁹ 1963 marks a heuristic end-point for all these reasons.

Section 3 develops this periodisation by highlighting the growing national concern about fire risks, spurred on by a series of large industrial fires in 1959. Here I set the scene in terms of wider debates about ‘affluence’ and the risks it entailed. Although house fires were increasingly understood as a national problem worthy of systematic treatment, a widespread ‘home safety culture’ based on individual responsibility generally subsumed the issue.

Section 4 then demonstrates how the property system actively generated and redistributed these risks. Taking North Kensington as a case study area, I look at the dynamics that led to overcrowding and worsening disrepair. Section 4 argues for an understanding of these dynamics in terms of the interaction between the property market and the planning system, or, more fundamentally, between capital and the state.

Finally, Section 5 follows these material transformations from the level of the neighbourhood or district into the home itself. In doing so, it considers how people actively engaged the resulting risks by looking at a range of everyday spatial practices in multiple occupancy housing.

Historical Journal (2002), vol. 45, no. 4, 843-868, p. 861 and Keith G. Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 19. Reports around 1960 were of rents rising 50-200%, according to Banting.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 30 and 63-5.

¹⁶⁹ By the early to mid 1960s both owner occupancy and social housing were outstripping the private rental sector as the majority forms of tenure. Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain Since 1945*, 3rd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 263. See Table 9.4.

1. The Un-ideal Home



Fig. 1.1 — LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition (1959). LCC Collection, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) SC/PHL/02/0946. Note the sheer curtain at the back, wafting across what appears to be a slide projected image.

White linen and fresh candles adorn the dinner table, while up above a chandelier shines brightly in the darkness (Figure 1.1). Around these various signs of domestic splendour the unity of an ideal coalesces only to be rudely shattered by its opposite. The charred timbers that jut out across the interior draw the eye up and back towards a wall that has apparently been blasted open to reveal the world outside.

When I first saw this image I couldn't help thinking of the opening sequence from the 1941 box office hit *Dangerous Moonlight*, in which the two main characters meet in the bomb damaged ruins of a Warsaw mansion (Figure 1.2). Other images from the same period come

to mind, in particular Cecil Beaton's photographs of blitzed-out London shopping precincts.¹⁷⁰ I want to come back to this comparison, because the historical misidentification implicit in it reveals something important about the temporality of the materials dealt with in this thesis. In fact, Figure 1.1 represents part of a fire safety display created by the London County Council (LCC) Architect's Department at the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition in 1959.

With its origins in the early twentieth century, the Ideal Home Exhibition had become one of the largest public spectacles in postwar Britain. At its height in the 1950s, over a million visitors flocked to London to take part in the Exhibition's celebration of domestic comfort, modernity and consumerism.¹⁷¹ The LCC display meanwhile was conceived at a time when the Council was increasingly preoccupied with issues of fire safety, particularly in relation to multiple occupancy homes in identified 'high risk' areas, including Soho, North Kensington and Brixton.¹⁷² This ambitious installation, one of six that the Council produced each year between 1958 and 1963, condenses, in a highly wrought spatial construction, a certain ideal of home and its opposite: the home as a repository of desire, host to a dreamworld of consumption, versus the home made uninhabitable, ravaged by hostile outside forces.



Fig. 1.2 – still from *Dangerous Moonlight* (dir. Brian Desmond Hurt, 1941).

¹⁷⁰ See Mark B. Pohl, 'The Appreciation of Ruins in Blitz-Era London', *London Journal*, 30 (2005), 1-24.

¹⁷¹ Deborah Sugg Ryan, *The Ideal Home through The Twentieth Century* (London: Hazar Publishing, 1997), p. 17.

¹⁷² Town Planning Committee Report no. 2, 20 May 1957, in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1957, p. 319, LCC Collection, LMA LCCU1740. Henceforth 'TPCR 1957'. See also Town Planning Committee Report no. 2, 12 June to 25 Sept 1961, in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1961, p. 570, LCC collection, LMA LCCU1744. Henceforth 'TPCR 1961'.

The LCC displays came at a time when house fires were growing at an alarming rate, something that was ignored by most politicians at the time despite technical authorities such as the Fire Protection Association (FPA) raising concerns.¹⁷³ The yearly average for residential fires over the period 1959-62 was up 30% compared to 1950-58 according to official statistics.¹⁷⁴ The attendant risks were extremely uneven, with multiple occupancy homes – often overcrowded and illegally subdivided – affected far more than others, a trend confirmed scientifically only several years later.¹⁷⁵ Despite the lack of scientific data making the link between fire risks and multiple occupancy homes, the LCC highlighted several areas of ‘Special Fire and Escape Hazard’, including parts of Kensington where, since the war ‘Many of the squares and terrace[d] houses have been converted to multiple occupation either as flats, maisonettes or single-room lettings.’ In nearby Paddington the LCC noted large numbers of older properties up to six storeys high that had been illegally converted to multiple occupation,¹⁷⁶ while the area around Brixton Market gave ‘indications of an area of dense multiple occupation in tall and obsolete Victorian terraces’.¹⁷⁷

The LCC fire safety displays existed simultaneously within two divergent contexts. While the Ideal Home Exhibition championed a vision of what Deborah Ryan has called ‘suburban modernity’,¹⁷⁸ the LCC’s regulatory efforts focused on areas of multiple occupancy housing in inner city London where fire risks were greatest. Victims of house fires were among the casualties of the postwar consensus. Their representation introduced a disturbing presence at the Ideal Home Exhibition, albeit in a muffled or distorted fashion.

¹⁷³ See for example ‘Wastage by Fire: The Costs in Lives and Money’, *Fire Protection Association Journal*, 55 (April 1962), 162-5.

¹⁷⁴ Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and Fire Offices’ Committee Joint Fire Research, United Kingdom Fire Statistics 1962: Statistical Analysis of Reports of Fires Attended by Fire Brigades in the United Kingdom during 1962 (London: HMSO, 1962), pp. 1 and 8. Henceforth ‘DSIR and FOC, UK Fire Statistics’.

¹⁷⁵ SE Chandler, ‘The Incidence of Residential Fires in London - the Effect of Housing and Other Social Factors’, *Building Research Establishment*, Information Paper 20/79 (Boreham Wood, 1979). See also SE Chandler, A Chapman and SJ Hollington, ‘Fire Incidence, Housing and Social Conditions - The Urban Situation in Britain’, *Fire Prevention*, no. 172 (September 1984), 15-20. See Section 2 for further discussion.

¹⁷⁶ Appendix A from a report by the Superintending Architect titled ‘Means of Escape in Case of Fire - Inspection of Buildings’, 5 Jan 1956, p. 3, GPME.

¹⁷⁷ Report by the Superintending Architect titled ‘Areas of Inadequate Means of Escape in Case of Fire’, 31 May 1956, p. 2, GPME.

¹⁷⁸ Deborah S Ryan, ‘The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition and Suburban Modernity, 1908-1951’ (PhD diss., University of East London, 1995).

How does this history affect, or not affect, one's reading of an image like Figure 1.1? There is a tremendous tension between stillness and explosive (or implosive) force in this image. Each element appears frozen at the moment of catastrophe, arrested mid-flight, or in the fractions of a second before it gets turned upside down. In this frozen moment, an image of domestic splendour is caught at the point of being reduced to rubble and ruin. What Walter Benjamin referred to as 'the immense forces of "atmosphere" concealed within [...] the outmoded' are thus 'brought to the point of explosion.'¹⁷⁹ According to this Benjaminian view of history, it is on the cusp of obsolescence that objects as well as places – 'grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them' – can be plucked up, turned in the hand, and recognised as either components in a machinery designed to crush and normalise, or as the seeds of an emancipatory rupture.

The photograph from the LCC's fire safety display of 1959 bears more than a merely superficial resemblance, in this respect, to representations of bombsites from the Second World War. Both seize an artefact of the recent past as it disappears into the pile of historical debris accumulated in the name of progress (Figure 1.3). But if designers and filmmakers often transformed the traumatic space of the bombsite into a symbol of hope, capturing the popular idea of a new, more equitable society rising phoenix-like from the ashes of the old,¹⁸⁰ then the LCC fire safety displays seem to represent the inverse proposition: a future that brings new ruins hurtling towards the present. The latter is in a sense the more fully Benjaminian of these two ways of conceptualising the historical process; the one that most fully embraces negation.

¹⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', in Walter Benjamin, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, 177-192, pp. 181-2.

¹⁸⁰ Ben Highmore, 'Streets in the Air: Alison and Peter Smithson's Doorstep Philosophy', in *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern: Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, ed. by Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman, eds., (New Haven: Yale, 2010), 79-102; Stuart Sillars, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 50; Selina Todd, 'Phoenix Rising: Working-Class Life and Urban Reconstruction, c. 1945–1967', *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (July 2015), 679–702, pp. 692-3.



Fig. 1.3 – ‘Your Britain... Fight for it Now’. Abram Games, Army Bureau of Current Affairs (1942).

But to the extent that the photograph of the LCC’s 1959 fire safety display (Figure 1.1) suggests this notion of a ‘dialectical image’, it becomes difficult to see in it anything like the daily reality of multiple occupancy homes, let alone the kind of structural processes associated with risks of fire. Indeed, only one display in the series (from 1960) presents a direct image of the home in multiple occupation (Figure 1.4). And yet such processes and realities were indeed among the LCC’s concerns in creating this display. To understand the connection between these two realms demands that we work through a series of mediations, discovering not only how abstract space and spatial practice gain cultural expression in representational spaces, but also how the latter, in turn, shape historical experience.

I’ve dwelt so far on a particular image. In the analysis that follows I treat this image as a kind of touchstone. But of course this is only one image, one particular, static view of a complex three-dimensional space, which is itself only one in a series of such spaces. In order to really understand this distinctive representational space – to grasp it as a space and not merely an image – I want to situate it within the overall experience of the Ideal Home Exhibition. What follows is a speculative reconstruction of how visitors would have encountered the LCC displays of 1958-63.



Fig. 1.4 – ‘Just Ordinary London Homes’. The diagrams on the lower part of the wall show sections of houses in multiple occupation. LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition (1960). LCC Collection, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) SC/PHL/02/0946.

Hidden away on the top floor of Kensington Olympia’s vast exhibition space, the LCC fire safety display of 1959 (Figure 1.1) occupied what could be seen as the summit of the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition; the last place visitors were likely to visit but in a sense one of the most important too. It was a position the Council was to take up again in later years.¹⁸¹ To get there, visitors first had to find their way among the collection of life-size suburban villas by private developers known collectively as ‘the Village’.¹⁸² Visitors were free to explore the fully furnished interiors, while developers also drew attention to less visible features, particularly heating systems.¹⁸³ After a host of stands in the Grand Hall dedicated to household services and consumer durables (Figure 1.5) – where the stress lay on safety as

¹⁸¹ See for example Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (March 1960), pp. 201-3, AAD/1990/9/27, Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum. Henceforth ‘IHE 1960’. See also Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (March 1963), p. 207, AAD/1990/9/30, Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum. Henceforth ‘IHE 1963’.

¹⁸² Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (March 1959), p. 59, AAD/1990/9/26, Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum. Henceforth ‘IHE 1959’.

¹⁸³ The 1962 offering by a company called Berg, for example, was conceived as ‘a complete guide to heating under one roof’, showcasing under floor electric systems, ‘ducted warm air’, oil-filled radiators and more. Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (March 1962), pp. 76-7, Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1990/9/29, V&A Museum. Henceforth ‘IHE 1962’.

much as ‘elegance and efficiency’¹⁸⁴ – a rest lounge on the gallery level invited a pause before the final ascent.¹⁸⁵

It was only here that visitors would have finally encountered the LCC’s fire safety display (Figure 1.6).¹⁸⁶ Sitting low and rectangular like a modernist pavilion, its undecorated entablature inscribed ‘London County Council - Fire Precautions’, the display’s exterior presents the upstanding public face of the LCC, right down to the crest above the two attendants’ chairs. A photographic diorama introduces a more playful element, but the choice of subject, a gleaming fire engine with uniformed officers, remains basically coherent within this projection of sober officialdom and proud civic responsibility. As far as the exterior goes, the impression given does not depart radically from the previous year’s offering, which consisted mostly of framed images and leaflets at the customary attendant’s desk (Figure 1.7). Sobriety, responsibility, duty, expertise: these appear to be the chief values embodied in the display, values that were echoed by surrounding stands, such as those by the Townswomen’s Guild, the Automobile Association and the RAF.¹⁸⁷

If these somewhat disparate neighbours delimited the edges of the domestic realm by suggesting notions of civic (or even military) responsibility, they were not, on another level, at odds with the kind of society imagined by the Ideal Home Exhibition. The conception of home that ruled at the Exhibition both promoted the fantasy of an infinitely varied, proliferating consumption, and, at the same time, contained that fantasy within the limits of responsible behaviour. In Deborah Sugg Ryan’s words, the Exhibition was conceived partly as a ‘three-dimensional advice manual’, with experts on hand to demonstrate the latest domestic equipment.¹⁸⁸ Consumption, in other words, was always responsible consumption. This blurring of the line between educational and commercial displays was decidedly gendered, playing to the perceived ‘feminine’ interests of the *Daily Mail*’s readership.¹⁸⁹ In

¹⁸⁴ British Pathé, ‘Ideal Home Exhibition’ (1959) <<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/ideal-home-exhibition-13/query/ideal+home+exhibition>> [accessed 20 October 1959]. That year Dimplex showcased portable infrared heaters and wall-mounted ‘shockproof and steamproof’ models for the bathroom, while Charles Portway and Son displayed their ‘Portway Minor Oil Convector, a portable form of heat for that chilly corner’, alongside powerful oil fired boilers, for example. IHE 1959, pp. 37 and 41.

¹⁸⁵ Ryan, *The Ideal Home*, p. 115 and pp. 120-22.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-3.

¹⁸⁷ See for example IHE 1959, p. 202 and Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (March 1961), p. 212, AAD/1990/9/28, Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum.

¹⁸⁸ Ryan, ‘Ideal Home Exhibition and Suburban Modernity’, p. 75.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

the LCC display as it appeared on first encounter an apparent circumvention of these interests (the heroic image of the male firefighter) turns out, on stepping inside the display, to be a redoubling of them – but now in an inverse, parallel universe, where every positive domestic value is answered by its nightmarish equivalent.



Fig. 1.5 — The Grand Hall, Ideal Home Exhibition (1959). AAD/1990/9/72 59/107, Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum.



Fig. 1.6 — Exterior of LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition (1959). LCC Collection, LMA SC/PHL/02/0946.



Fig. 1.7 — LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition (1958). LCC Collection, LMA SC/PHL/02/0946

The display's exterior draws a clear boundary around the realm of the home. At the same time, the photographic diorama plus the set-back porch and string curtain invite viewers to penetrate the facade, to cross over the threshold. What is at stake here is precisely a transgression of the delimitation between home and not-home, between the public and the private, the civic and the domestic; hence a throwing into play of a third term. It is this third term that one can call the 'un-ideal home'. The un-ideal home in this sense is not simply the absence of home or its complementary opposite (the civic, the public etc), but home's profanation, its upside-down mirror image.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that such images of the 'un-ideal home' were wholly exceptional, or without precedent. Ironically enough, the Ideal Home Exhibition has consistently traded in visualisations of un-ideal homes. The 1922 Exhibition, for example, featured a replica of a Lanarkshire miner's cottage with a real miner and his family on site to answer questions.¹⁹⁰ In 1954, the Exhibition enlisted the skills of Ealing Studios to reproduce 'the cumulative effects of age' in a Ministry of Housing flat conversion project.¹⁹¹ Telling as to the change in attitudes about what to do with poor quality housing, the 1968 Ideal Home

¹⁹⁰ Ryan, *The Ideal Home*, pp. 44-5. A similar exhibition from 1931, *New Homes for Old*, featured a 'Chamber of Horrors' with giant models of vermin and insects, alongside a replica slum dwelling and waxwork inhabitants. Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 27.

¹⁹¹ IHE 1959, p. 53.

Exhibition featured another 'slum', this time in the form of two elevations in a section of terraced housing, the right hand side all peeling plaster, smashed windows and lopsided chimney pots, the left hand version restored to its former whitewashed glory (Figure 1.8).¹⁹² In all these cases, the fetishistic application of a stage designer's brush to faux-peeling plaster and crumbling brickwork created a simulacra of the 'slum'. Here, in an entirely literal way, was the dialectical relation of the ideal and the un-ideal home: the slum as the necessary condition for its opposite.

Displays like these offered an illustrative counterpoint to the ideal home, a tangible baseline which progress could be measured from. They suggested the humble origins which betterment could emerge from, or served as warnings about what the home risked becoming without adequate emotional or financial investment.¹⁹³ The essentialist link between a poetics of fire and the representational space of the home proved fertile ground for reimagining this dialectic of the ideal home and its opposite.¹⁹⁴ In the imagination of the un-ideal home, the hearth – that 'shrine' of 'every Englishman[s]' sorrows, joys and meditations', according to the Registrar General in 1851,¹⁹⁵ and still the natural centre of the working-class home according to Richard Hoggart a century later¹⁹⁶ – comes to symbolise a powerful, autopoietic growth, which uncontrolled has the potential to engulf the very thing it gives birth to. The question then emerges, to what extent did the LCC fire safety displays simply slot into these pre-existing tropes?

¹⁹² Ryan, *The Ideal Home*, p. 141.

¹⁹³ On this point see Tony Chapman, 'Stage Sets for Ideal Lives', *New Statesman*, vol. 8, no. 347 (4 July 1995).

¹⁹⁴ Gaston Bachelard, trans. Maria Jolas, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 72.

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p. 178.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 33-4.



Fig. 1.8 — Ideal Home Exhibition (1968), showing how slum housing can be refurbished.

Ideal Home Exhibition photograph album, March 1968, Vol. 1, AAD/1990/9/88 68/221, Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum.

We can return to the first impression given by the ‘facade’ (Figure 1.6). From the beginning, the display is conceived not as a self-sufficient unit, a model house within a model ‘village’, still less a ‘stand’ under whose banner salespeople or experts demonstrate an object, but rather as an assemblage, a series of articulations or junctures. Each juncture posits a threshold, a passage from one perception, or intensity, to the next. The first of these perceptions or intensities is simply the difference between inside and outside. And yet the dramatisation of the threshold (by means of the diorama and the porch) spills over into the interior itself. Once inside, the dining table veiled by the lattice of charred timbers might well have been the first thing to catch visitors’ attention; the arrangement has the appearance of a photographic set-piece, a carefully orchestrated point-of-view. But no sooner does this one image strike the eye (an eye one can imagine would be slowly adjusting to the darkened interior), than other junctures, other thresholds, impinge on the capsuled singularity of this first impression. One wall supports a smoke blackened mantelpiece, while another, as if partially eaten away by flames, reveals tins of paint or other presumably flammable liquid (Figure 1.9). Further inside, a doorway discloses a brightly lit annex with other hazards on show (Figure 1.10).



Fig. 1.9 — LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition, 1959. LCC collection, LMA SC/PHL/02/0946.



Fig. 1.10 — LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition, 1959. LCC collection, LMA SC/PHL/02/0946.

In passing through the diorama and into the darkened interior – shifting focus from the set-piece of the dining table to the various piercings of the interior wall – the space shifts from dark to light, from planar to three-dimensional and back again (from facade to enveloping interior to orchestrated viewpoint), but equally from the perspective taken all-in-one-gulp to the individual object or detail considered as a piece of quasi-forensic evidence. Such scale shifts would form the basis of the LCC's 1961 display, which used extreme closeups and lighted panels set at irregular angles to create the impression that isolated pictorial details were popping out into three-dimensions; as if the photographed objects, in the moment of danger, were returning to their former tangible selves (Figure 1.11 and Figure 1.12). Although in many ways more conservative, both displays establish an oscillation between wildly different scales and intensities.



Fig. 1.11 — LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition (1961). Black and white photograph, LCC collection, LMA SC/PHL/02/0946.



Fig. 1.12 — Detail from LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition (1961). Black and white photograph, LCC collection, LMA SC/PHL/02/0946.

The LCC fire safety displays at their most creative work, I want to suggest, through a kind of contrapuntal orchestration of space. It is an embodied form of representational space that both rivets the viewer to the spot and throws them into orbit; a kind of seeing in a state of alarm. The displays could not be more different in this sense from the mode of responsible consumption that the Ideal Home Exhibition championed from its earliest days. Compare the phenomenal experience I have tried to tease out above to the following account (or rather proposal) by the journalist Milicent Goodford, writing in 1908 on ‘How the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition at Olympia appears to the feminine mind’:

Watch a typical woman, the mother of a young family obviously, as she tours the Great Hall and walks up the wide streets, criticising, approving or disapproving according as the fancy pleases her or not. Her first exclamation as she enters is always, “beautifully tidy, well arranged – a place for everything and everything in its place.” [...] As she journeys she views everything from one point only, her own personal one: “Is that particular idea or article suitable to be imported into my home?”¹⁹⁷

Gender is clearly central to how the visitor navigates representational space. The measured, discerning gaze belongs to the consumer-as-homemaker. This way of perceiving and

¹⁹⁷ Ryan, *Ideal Home Exhibition and Suburban Modernity*, pp. 78-9.

navigating continued to inform conceptions of the Exhibition's 'ideal visitor' in the 1950s and '60s. Promotional competitions run by the *Daily Mail* counterposed the frivolous to the practical by asking visitors to decide what elements would contribute most to an ideal home: 'House decorated throughout by [a] famous interior designer' or 'air-conditioned rooms for even temperature all the year'.¹⁹⁸ In a similar vein, celebrity visitors including pop stars and royalty demonstrated that wealth need not compromise good domestic sense.¹⁹⁹ In a clear test of this principle, the *Mail* ran a feature on a visiting couple who had just won £75,000 in the pools. Despite their new wealth, '£12-a-week lorry driver' Gordon clung on to his modest aspirations: "A three-bedroomed bungalow that is compact, easy to clean, and close to Brighton".²⁰⁰ After admiring some of the show homes, Gordon's wife Judy then specified the details: 'her bathroom would have washable wallpaper and a combined dressing-table and wash-basin [...] Her chairs would be covered in nylon fur like those in one of the living-rooms she saw.' The ideal viewer in these examples exercises her 'feminine' judgement in full accountability to a 'masculine' control over the household budget. The object of desire, irrespective of a new found affluence, remains the suburban modernity that characterised the Ideal Home Exhibition in the first half of the twentieth century.

But this is far from the whole story. Beneath the solid suburban ideal, there is a sense that the hyper-commodification brought by an affluent society threatens the normative values of the ideal home. The energy and rhythm of this emerging representational space comes through clearly in a piece about another celebrity visitor, the 'Rock n' Roll' singer Colin Hicks, and his fiancé Yvonne:

"It's a serious business getting married. We have to start thinking of our own home. We are looking for a house, not a flat" [...] [Hicks] found the bedroom suite he wanted on the Nathan stand in the Grand Hall. [...] "That's it [...] I've always wanted one of those, I saw it in a film once. Let's have it in tawny walnut." [...] As teenagers crowded around for his autograph he bought a new gadget, like an icing bag which forces out biscuit mixture in fancy shape[s]. Then Yvonne wanted a sewing machine

¹⁹⁸ 'This is the week you can win a £5000 house', *Daily Mail* (9 March 1959), p. 10. This and all subsequent references to the *Daily Mail* are from the Daily Mail Historical Archive, 1896-2004.

¹⁹⁹ Patricia Keiran, 'A Royal Problem Solved', *Daily Mail* (15 March 1962), p. 6; Patricia Keighran, 'The Princess Royal Inspects the Gadgets', *Daily Mail* (19 March 1957), p. 3.

²⁰⁰ Patricia Keighran, "We want a house, say "blue blood" winners', *Daily Mail* (6 March 1959), p. 12.

but could not get near the demonstration model because Colin insisted on trying out all the intricate stitches. Stitching away at top speed, he said: "Keep away darling, you're ruining my button-holes." She retorted: "You'd better go to the children's section and try out the toy trains."²⁰¹

The pace is completely different to the measured pursuit of Millicent Goodford's 'typical woman'. The viewer speeds on from one impression to another, from one object to the next. In the process there is a deliberate camping of what was once called 'scientific home management', played out here through the reversal of gender roles.²⁰² The 'serious business' of setting up home is strained to the limit. In the age of the so-called affluent society, and at the dawning of a 'permissive' one,²⁰³ visitors to the Ideal Home Exhibition, particularly women, were increasingly asked to balance two impossible ideals: the older one of responsible consumption led by domestic expertise, and a new demand – to give in to abundance, to richness of colour and detail,²⁰⁴ to frivolity and tongue-in-cheek fun; to not be, as one *Daily Mail* article put it, that 'bleak thin-lipped woman' of the Victorian, or depression-era, or austerity-era past.²⁰⁵

The LCC fire safety displays summon, I want to suggest, a nightmare vision of what happens when this balancing act falls apart. They dictate a way of perceiving and navigating space that resembles nothing less than a darkened, inverted version of the carousel of impressions described by *Daily Mail* journalists in their attempts to wed the suburban ideal of home to the quintessence of novelty, of new wealth and new social possibilities. The LCC displays generate a dialectical mirroring of these impressions as they threaten to spin out of control. The fantasy world of the Ideal Home Exhibition – which includes the un-ideal home, but only ever as a simulacrum of the 'slum' – explodes into fragments, as the increasingly commodified space of the home is reduced to bare materiality.

²⁰¹ Patricia Keighran, 'Biscuits take the fancy of Colin and bride-to-be', *Daily Mail* (9 March 1959), p. 10.

²⁰² Ryan, *Ideal Home Exhibition and Suburban Modernity*, p. 101.

²⁰³ See Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven: Yale, 2010).

²⁰⁴ Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Postwar Britain* (New Haven: Yale, 2017), pp. 139-143.

²⁰⁵ Anne Tenant, 'A Black Ceiling? Don't Say No Until You've Seen It' *Daily Mail* (13 March 1957), p. 10.

If the success of the Ideal Home Exhibition rested on its ability to create an apparently seamless, totalising vision, with the home its prismatic centre, then the LCC displays at their most elaborate work, by contrast, through agglomerations of light, surface and texture – piling up lattices of material, layering fabrics, wallpapers, wires and projected light, or else pulling surfaces apart, opening up holes and partings. Nowhere was this more clear than in the display from 1963, where the labyrinthine interior becomes deliberately disorienting and visitors are confronted with dense walls of scarcely recognisable material, as if the innards of the simulated building had burst open (Figure 1.13 and Figure 1.14).

The Ideal Home Exhibition presented, under one roof, every conceivable good to fill the home as well as the homes themselves in multiple sizes and styles. This nesting of worlds within worlds forms a particularly immersive kind of representational space, one whose strength lay in its ability to incorporate seemingly disparate propositions. It is according to this logic that the Exhibition reproduced the surface appearance of working-class housing within a sanitised and illusionistically seamless space. At the same time (in the various show homes) the concealment of water pipes, ventilation ducts and electrical wires hid any technical functionality backstage. What Reyner Banham would later call the ‘architecture of the well-tempered environment’, referring to the importance of services like central heating and air conditioning in the design of modern buildings, here functioned as a means of assuring the total illusionism of these spaces.²⁰⁶ The LCC displays stand in direct contrast to this seamless appearance.

Francesca Hughes has argued that paralleling modern architecture’s fetishisation of precision, there is such a thing as an ‘architecture of error’ – an architecture of the gap, the flaw, the hazard and the accident.²⁰⁷ The LCC displays provide a striking example of this subversive counter-tradition. There was a lightweight illusionism that came apart at the seams. If there was a criticality to the LCC displays, it was to be found among these splaying seams: in the puncturing of walls and ceilings; in the flickering of projected light; and in the dialectical resonance struck between a pristine dining table and its fire-wrecked surroundings.

²⁰⁶ Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* (London: Architectural Press, 1984).

²⁰⁷ Francesca Hughes, *The Architecture of Error: Matter, Measure and the Misadventures of Precision* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2014).



Fig. 1.13 — LCC fire safety display, Ideal Home Exhibition, 1963. LCC Collection, LMA
SC/PHL/02/0946



Fig. 1.14 — LCC fire safety stand, Ideal Home Exhibition (1963). LCC Collection, LMA
SC/PHL/02/0946

2. The Regulatory Subject

The previous section analysed the representational space of the un-ideal home. We need to ask *who* these representations were for; who they spoke *about*, and who they spoke *to*. In the late '50s and early '60s it was well known that women, young children and people over sixty five were more at risk of being injured or killed due to accidents in the home, including fires and burns.²⁰⁸ Technical authorities such as the FPA clearly understood these uneven risks.²⁰⁹ Politicians, however, often failed to act on this understanding. Even less clearly articulated were risks associated with housing inequalities. The official annual report of UK fire statistics, for example, failed to distinguish multiple occupancy homes as a separate category.²¹⁰ In fact, the first social scientific studies to investigate this connection did not appear until the 1970s and '80s.²¹¹ These studies also seem to have been the first to link fire risks to social class. Comparing data for domestic fires across London, Birmingham and Newcastle, the authors of a 1984 study found significant correlations with class, unemployment, and, in an inverse relationship, owner occupation. In London, factors related to multiple occupancy housing specifically, such as the proportion of shared houses, population density, lack of basic amenities, and levels of private renting, were closely linked to the incidence of fires.²¹²

These uneven risks delineated a specific geography, one that reinforces the tension between the LCC fire safety displays (concerned with an inner city problem) and their immediate surroundings at the Ideal Home Exhibition (dedicated to a vision of suburban modernity). A Building Research Establishment information paper from 1979 showed how the distribution of domestic fires in London reproduced the classic concentric arrangement of mid-twentieth century urban inequality, with a small central core free of serious risks, ringed by a badly affected inner city area (generally worse in the East than the West), and the

²⁰⁸ DSIR and FOC, *UK Fire Statistics 1963* (London: HMSO, 1963), p. 2. Types of housing were grouped into two categories: 'Flats and Maisonettes' and simply 'houses'.

²⁰⁹ 'Fire Hazards in the Home', *FPA Journal*, 52 (January-April 1961), 8-17.

²¹⁰ See for example DSIR and FOC, *UK Fire Statistics 1960* (London: HMSO, 1961), p. 28.

²¹¹ SE Chandler, 'The Incidence of Residential Fires in London - the Effect of Housing and Other Social Factors', *Building Research Establishment*, Information Paper 20/79 (Boreham Wood, 1979); and Chandler et. al., 'Fire Incidence, Housing and Social Conditions', *Fire Prevention*.

²¹² Chandler et. al., 'Fire Incidence, Housing and Social Conditions', *Fire Prevention*, p. 18.

problem diminishing towards the suburbs. Based on 1972 data, this distribution probably does not exactly mirror the situation ten years earlier but it's not unreasonable to treat it as indicative.²¹³ The results may appear obvious in hindsight, yet in the '50s and '60s they were belied by the kind of elisions in the official data mentioned above.

Despite such silences, the LCC was one governmental body that did show some critical awareness of the issue. Driven by growing numbers of fires in London, the Architects' department of the Council made a first attempt to gauge the extent of the problem in 1956, subsequently identifying several 'high-risk' areas, including Brixton, Stepney, parts of Islington and North Kensington.²¹⁴ In the LCC's estimation, multiple occupancy homes experienced some of the greatest risks of fires. Although no official or scholarly studies existed proving the link between fire risks and social class, it was undeniable that the majority of tenants in these properties were among the least well-off in London. According to the 1963 survey that formed the basis of the Milner Holland Committee's report on Housing in Greater London, over 56% of multiple occupancy tenants earned well below the national average, while 25% earned less than half of this.²¹⁵ Meanwhile, only 23% earned more than the national average. Only among higher rated properties (not subject to rent control) did this trend diminish.²¹⁶

London replicated the deprivation seen throughout private rented housing.²¹⁷ The accelerating decline of the sector after the Second World War transformed what was once *the* mainstream tenure category into an increasingly residual one. I explore this phenomenon

²¹³ Chandler, 'Incidence of Residential Fires in London', *Building Research Establishment*, p. 1. Given that significant numbers of multiple occupancy houses would in fact have been demolished under slum clearance programmes in the intervening period, we can suppose that some of the 'high risk' zones identified by Chandler would, if anything, have experienced a greater incidence of domestic fires.

²¹⁴ Between 1958 and 1962, the number of fires recorded in the County of London (excluding chimney fires) rose from 9,139 to 13,330. 1958 figures from the Fire Brigade Committee Report, 1 October - 31 March 1958, in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1959, p. 232, LCC Collection, LMA LCCU1742. 1962 figures from the Fire Brigade Committee Report, 1 October 1962 - 31 March 1963, in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1959, p. 322, LCC Collection, LMA LCCU1746.

²¹⁵ For average incomes during this period see Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945*, fourth edn. (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 88. Accommodation in multiple occupation here is defined as a letting consisting of part of a house or flat. PG Gray and Jean Todd, 'Privately Rented Accommodation in London: A Report on Inquiries made in December 1964 and June 1964 for the Committee on Housing in Greater London', in Committee on Housing in Greater London, Edward Milner Holland chair., *Report of The Committee on Housing in Greater London* (Cmd. 2605) (London: HMSO, 1965), 299-410, p. 312. Henceforth, '*Milner Holland Report*'.

²¹⁶ Ibid. These properties would have included boarding houses, some which catered to more middle class residents. See Terri Mullholland, *British Boarding Houses in Interwar Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), especially pp. 35 and 59-62.

²¹⁷ *Milner Holland Report*, p. 151.

further in Section 4. Suffice it to say that by the early '60s, unfurnished private lets accommodated around half of all households in England on very low incomes.²¹⁸ Multiple occupancy homes, where these inequalities were most acute, may have been marginalised but they were not insignificant. Within the capital, such properties accounted for a majority of private lets,²¹⁹ at a time when over 40% of Greater London households rented privately.²²⁰ It was these households that the LCC displays addressed at the level of their substantive content.

The attendant inequalities moreover gained a geographical expression. This was not only a matter of inner city versus suburb, but of deep social and economic divides between neighbouring districts, including, and indeed especially, in the very borough where the Ideal Home Exhibition took place. As the LCC discovered through its own sampling of local fire brigade data, the incidence of domestic fires in North Kensington stood at 3.94 per 10,000 people versus 0.79 in South Kensington.²²¹ Just beyond the illusionistic space of the Ideal Home Exhibition, the realities of urban inequality were raging. The Exhibition's idealised vision of suburban modernity effectively screened these inequalities from view. The LCC fire safety displays were a disturbing presence within this immediate environment.

The LCC clearly condemned such 'high risk' areas of multiple occupancy housing as dangerous relics. Yet in briefings and updates on the inspection programme, LCC officers avoided the sometimes demonising language of nineteenth century public health discourse (the word 'slum' does not appear in the documents), choosing instead to focus on the material fabric of buildings. Circling around the same themes a year later, Council members drew attention to 'the division of old houses for multiple occupation by flimsy partitions of an inflammable nature'.²²² Despite the statistical uncertainties, a 1959 report was confident enough to assert that 'change[s] in use [...] since the War [have] been so great that

²¹⁸ JB Cullingworth, *English Housing Trends: A Report on the Rowntree Trust Housing Study* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1965), p. 27. Very low incomes in this case being heads of household earning £5 per week or less.

²¹⁹ 59% of all private lettings in what was defined as the 'London Conurbation' consisted of 'parts of houses or flats'. Gray and Todd, 'Privately Rented Accommodation in London', in *Milner Holland Report*, p. 306.

²²⁰ 44% of Greater London households rented privately in 1960; in inner London the proportion was 64% in 1961. PG Gray and R Russell, *The Housing Situation in 1960: An Inquiry Covering England and Wales Carried out for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government* (London: Central Office of Information, 1962), p. 25; Hamnett and Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits*, p. 36.

²²¹ Joint report by the Fire Brigade Committee and Health Committee titled 'Incidence of Fires Originating from Oil-Heaters' dated 1 and 7 November 1961, found in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1961, LMA, LCCU1744, p. 724, LCC collection.

²²² TPCR 1957.

numerous buildings exist today which must be considered as death-traps.²²³ The LCC's 'experimental' High Fire Risk inspection programme began in the summer of 1957. Towards the end of 1961, the inspection team had visited almost 12,000 properties, conducting thousands of building surveys, making on the spot drawings that diagrammed existing conditions, and stipulating numerous small changes to be made by landlords.²²⁴

Coming at the time of the lifting of rent controls in 1958, and at the height of the commercial property boom a couple of years later, the inspection programme, directed by a Labour dominated body during a long period of Conservative government, must surely have carried a certain political charge.²²⁵ Indeed, one of its most strident advocates was Labour LCC member for North Kensington, Donald Chesworth, who was doggedly pursuing the slum landlord Peter Rachman, long before the latter's name became public currency thanks to the Profumo scandal of 1963.²²⁶ The inspection programme was of course a top-down affair. Yet it can also be seen in the light of more grassroots efforts; for instance (to give another North Kensington example), the Saint Stephen's Gardens Tenants Association rent strike, which successfully forced landlords to carry out repairs.²²⁷ To what extent the regulatory efforts of municipal government responded to pressure from below is a question that remains to be answered. Undeniable though is that the LCC's High Fire Risk inspection programme represented one element of a more general shift in the political consensus towards rehabilitation (rather than demolition) of existing properties, perhaps the most radical expression of which was Labour's short-lived policy of municipalisation.²²⁸

I want to suggest that the LCC fire safety displays can be seen as attempts to work through the spatial-material problems that inspectors were encountering on their visits to areas like North Kensington. In the LCC's own understanding, there was a feedback relationship

²²³ Joint report by the Superintending Architect and others, 11 June 1959, p. 4, GPME.

²²⁴ TPCR 1957 and TPCR 1962.

²²⁵ Marriott, *The Property Boom*. On the 1957 Rent Act (implemented in 1958) and rent decontrol, see Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman: The Origins of the Rent Act, 1957', *The Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), 869-98.

²²⁶ 'Means of Escape in Case of Fire - Dwellings', 28 March 1961, in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1961, p. 203, LMA LCCU1744; and 'Fire Risk in Buildings in North Kensington - Survey', 17 December 1963, in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1963, p. 810, LMA LCCU1746. See also Michael Abdul Malik, *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968), pp. 97-100.

²²⁷ Tom Vague, *Rachman: An Absolute Beginner's Guide* (London: London Psychogeography, 2010), p. 17; and Shirley Green, *Rachman* (London: Michael Joseph, 1979), p. 139.

²²⁸ Jim Yelling, 'The Development of Residential Urban Renewal Policies in England: Planning for Modernization in the 1960s', *Planning Perspectives*, 14 (1999), 1-18. On municipalisation (i.e. taking private rented properties into public ownership) see Child, 'Landlordism, Rent Regulation and the Labour Party', *Twentieth Century British History*.

between the two streams of work.²²⁹ The displays inscribed in condensed form all the signs of hazardous multiple occupancy housing that experience had drawn from a vast catalogue of real life examples: 'flimsy partitions', spaces made labyrinthine by subdivision, tangled wiring, tins of flammable liquids in overstuffed cupboards, portable heating appliances, etc.

Yet if the displays grappled with these issues in however distorted or muffled a form, the audience they faced at the Ideal Home Exhibition embodied a quite different subject, one whose identity was increasingly bound up with that of the homeowner. As an economic phenomenon, homeownership had already touched the more prosperous end of Britain's working class in the 1930s, thanks to a range of measures including government subsidies and collaboration between building societies and developers. But it was in the postwar period that this trend really took off.²³⁰ Although discriminatory lending practices continued to exclude single women, black families, and those on low incomes, by the early 1960s skilled manual workers were just as likely to be home owners (or in the process of buying) as they were renters.²³¹

During the early years of the Ideal Home Exhibition, however, homeownership appeared as something of a specialist interest in the *Daily Mail*. The actual purchase of a home was most often mentioned in passing. The paper's editors tended to extract financial and administrative details regarding homeownership to the back pages, lavishing attention instead on furnishings, architecture, and labour-saving devices.²³² An article from 1934, which set out to explain a novel means of financing, stated: 'There is a natural hesitancy on the part of the man, the existence of whose household depends entirely on his earnings, to accept the responsibility of a mortgage if his home will be unprotected in the event of his death.'²³³ This was perfectly reflective of the reality of working-class (and to some extent even middle-class) homeownership in the pre-1945 period. As Peter Scott has argued, taking on substantial debts was anathema to both the bitter experience of working class

²²⁹ Joint report by the Superintending Architect and Medical Officer of Health titled 'Means of Escape in Case of Fire and Safety in the Home Publicity at Ideal Home Exhibition, 1961', 5 September 1960, p. 1, GPME.

²³⁰ Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, pp. 49-55 and Stephen Merrett, *Owner Occupation in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 28-30.

²³¹ Cullingworth, *English Housing Trends*, p. 32.

²³² See for example 'Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition', *Daily Mail* (13 March 1929), p. 4 and 'The King's House', *Daily Mail* (21 March 1935), p. 19.

²³³ 'Home Ownership by means of Assurance,' *Daily Mail* (11 April 1934), p. 20.

survival and traditional notions of respectability.²³⁴ The Ideal Home Exhibition could be seen as part of the sustained marketing assault that aimed to break down this resistance, supplementing as it did the rather pious discussions by guest columnists from the building society movement with a funfair atmosphere that allowed people to imagine owning their own home – even if they could not yet do so in reality.²³⁵

This tendency only grew over the next twenty years. Homeownership moved centre-stage and the practicalities of house purchase were promoted from the back pages of the *Mail* to a central theme of the Ideal Home Exhibition itself. The 'New Elizabethans', the paper proclaimed in 1952 (alluding to the country's new Queen), are 'house-proud' and 'house-hungry'.²³⁶ Or as the designer of one of the 'Extendible houses' at the 1963 Exhibition put it, what young, aspirational couples 'ideally' want is 'a house which can be built for about £1,500 and an easy mortgage. And for that sort of money they are prepared to accept any principle of building.'²³⁷ Now that such a house fell 'within the price-range of a man earning £800 a year' (at or around the national average) there was far less reason for the Exhibition's organisers to be discreet about such things as mortgages, insurance terms, plot values and building costs.²³⁸

The potential class base of the Exhibition had broadened: from a middle-class audience fearful at their loss of status (the so-called 'new poor' of the interwar period), to a decidedly aspirational one that bridged the middle classes and better off sections of the working class.²³⁹ The latter included people like Sales Clerk Kenneth Williamson and his wife Margaret from Luton, the millionth visitors to the Exhibition in 1959.²⁴⁰ Or Mr and Mrs Blake from Streatham, deliberating over how to spend a £20 wedding gift on kitchenware.²⁴¹ Or

²³⁴ Peter Scott, 'Marketing Mass Home Ownership and The Creation of The Modern Working-Class Consumer in Inter-War Britain', *Business History*, 50 (January 2008), 4–25, pp. 10–12.

²³⁵ See for example Andrew Stewart [Managing Director of the Huddersfield Building Society], 'This Great Service', *Daily Mail* (7 June 1933), p. 6; 'Home-Ownership Parley', *Daily Mail* (7 November 1932), p. 9; 'Home Buying Boom', *Daily Mail* (25 October 1932), p. 3.

²³⁶ John Hall, 'In Economy Village', *Daily Mail* (26 Feb. 1952), p. 6.

²³⁷ Vincent Mulchrone, 'The House that Multiplies by Two', *Daily Mail* (15 November 1963), p. 10. See similarly Peter Whaley, 'An answer to that problem: Baby or car?', *Daily Mail* (9 August 1963), p. 3.

²³⁸ Halden Williams and Sylvia Duncan, 'Beating the Ups and Downs of building', *Daily Mail* (5 March 1963), p. 10.

²³⁹ On the 'new poor' see Ryan, 'Ideal Home Exhibition and Suburban Modernity', p. 83.

²⁴⁰ Patricia Keighran, 'A Couple Walk in to a £100 Spree', *Daily Mail* (25 March 1959), p. 5.

²⁴¹ Patricia Keighran, 'It's Open! And the Enthusiasts are Rolling in', *Daily Mail* (6 March 1957), p. 3.

indeed the pools winning couple (mentioned in Section 1) in which the husband was still referred to as a '£12-a-week lorry driver'.

But with this incorporation of an aspirational working-class audience came new contradictions too. What were once strictly 'class-others' – to be put on display as examples of the poor housing conditions that persisted among certain parts of the population – now posed serious questions for the Exhibition's meaning and purpose. I believe the LCC displays should be understood in this light. Fire safety was an issue of the working poor. It represented the worst of the problems of private rented housing – until very recently the dominant tenure among working people – which suburban homeowners and house buyers were struggling to escape. It was also an issue that affected women far more than men, and again, in this sense, it struck at the heart of what the Ideal Home Exhibition was all about.

But these contradictions did not stem simply from a broadening of the Exhibition's base. It was not only that homeownership had become more affordable. Rather, it had become an ideological pillar of the dominant Conservative interpretation of the postwar consensus, in the form of the so-called 'property owning democracy'. Coined by the Conservative MP Noel Skelton in the 1920s and later championed by Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan and others, this combination of small-holding individual ownership and democratic participation became central to the reforming wing of postwar British Conservatism.²⁴² As a policy paper by the Conservative Research Department put it in 1953, property was 'the historical basis of liberty and status' as well as an 'educative and stabilising force'.²⁴³ Homeownership, along with company pensions, insurance schemes and other forms of 'asset-based welfare', came to be seen as an essential means of giving people 'a real stake in the country', in a way that could temper the volatility of electoral democracy in its raw state.²⁴⁴

Homeownership occupied a central position within this interpretation of the postwar welfare state. The homeowner in his turn was enmeshed by various forms of state, financial and

²⁴² Amit Ron, 'Visions of Democracy in "Property-Owning Democracy": Skelton to Rawls and Beyond', *History of Political Thought*, 29 (Spring 2008), 168-187, pp. 170-80.

²⁴³ Quoted in Aled Davies, "'Right to Buy": The Development of a Conservative Housing Policy, 1945-1980', *Contemporary British History*, 17 (December 2013), 421-444, p. 424.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. See also John Doling and Richard Ronald, 'Home Ownership and Asset-based Welfare', *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 25 (2010), 165-173.

commercial expertise. He became, in effect, the subject of the welfare state's regulatory endeavours. As the Ideal Home Exhibition's 1962 'Where to Live' guide emphasised,

those who are fortunate enough to be buying their houses in these welfare days of the 1960s benefit from advantages which previous generations had no opportunity of experiencing. From the very moment of setting about the purchase of a house until the last furnishing has been installed they are able to call upon expert guidance and advice ranging from terms and conditions of purchase to the tiniest detail of decor.²⁴⁵

The first 'Where to Live' guide was published as part of the Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue in 1960. It talked visitors through every step of the house buying process from choosing 'the right builder', to the value of a 'balanced community', to the process of saving for a mortgage, to the task of 'regulating properly' one's bills and utilities.²⁴⁶ Rather than a straightforwardly individualistic, liberal market ideology, or, on the other hand, a narrowly hierarchical, paternalistic conservatism, it was this fusion of public and private virtues – centred on the homeowner – that the Ideal Home Exhibition of the mid-twentieth century most strongly endorsed. Under one roof was every conceivable good to fill the home; plus the homes themselves in multiple sizes and styles; plus the utilities needed to make those homes livable (represented by bodies like the Gas Council and the Electrical Development Association); plus the financial services to make them attainable (building societies, insurance firms etc.).²⁴⁷

Such pronouncements and protocols at one level simply reincarnated the old paradigm of responsible consumption, a way of perceiving and navigating space that was at risk of breaking down under the influence of a new, affluent culture. But they also counterposed two forms of regulation: one based on institutions inculcating in individuals a responsibility for their own domain, which would represent nothing less than a 'stake in the country' (most clearly in the form of homeownership); the other based on the state intervening directly in private affairs, imposing conditions and defaults on private property at a national and local

²⁴⁵ IHE 1962, p. 99.

²⁴⁶ IHE 1960, p. 100.

²⁴⁷ Building societies and insurers frequently marketed their services at the Exhibition. In 1958 the LCC's fire safety display was next door to the Halifax building society. Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue, March 1958, p. 102, V&A archives AAD/1990/9/25.

level. If the Ideal Home Exhibition's heightened accent on homeownership represented the first of these two interpretations of what the regulatory activity of the welfare state ought to mean, the LCC's high fire risk inspection programme aligned with the second. In the late '50s and early '60s, these two interpretations existed in a state of contradictory unity.

At the representational level, the price paid for this contradiction is the scrambling of the communicative efficacy of the LCC displays (Figure 1.15). Somewhere *en route* to their actual audience (the visitor to the Ideal Home Exhibition), the precise meaning of the displays is lost. Graphical and lexical clarity get bogged down in sheer materiality, to the same extent that the displays' authors lose the confidence to speak in the name of a people united by a single purpose. An LCC leaflet from 1957 anticipates these contradictions (Figure 1.16). Grim headlines pile up like unread letters beside a staircase rendered nearly unrecognisable by fire damage. In a similar vein, the LCC fire safety displays seem to turn their backs on the artistic heritage of Abram Games (Figure 1.3).²⁴⁸ It is as if the designers of these installations can't escape their source material; fail or refuse to transcend it. Traces of the reality of multiple occupancy housing persist as stubborn reminders of an inequality that the exhibition environment as a whole simply cannot acknowledge.



²⁴⁸ Paul Rennie, *Modern British Posters: Art, Design and Communication* (London: Black Dog, 2010) and Alan Peat, 'A Phoenix from the Ashes: Post-war British Design', in Alan Peat et al., *Austerity to Affluence* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1997), 7-10, pp. 7-8.

Fig. 1.15 — LCC fire safety stand, Ideal Home Exhibition (1963). LCC Collection, LMA SC/PHL/02/0946.



Fig. 1.16 – LCC fire safety leaflet distributed across schools (1957). LCC Collection, LMA LCC/FB/GEN/10/013.

3. Home Safety Culture

The previous section identified two kinds of regulation: a form of interventionist regulation based on inspection and enforcement, which embedded itself in the materiality of its object and revolved around a specific subject exposed to uneven risks; and a mode of universal self-regulation central to the project of a property-owning democracy, spanning the procedures of building societies, insurance firms, utility companies, and civil society organisations.

Firmly on the side of the latter was what I call ‘home safety culture’. The present Section explores this burgeoning form of self-regulation in the context of mounting fire risks during the 1950s and ’60s. Public concerns about safety in the home of course pre-date the 1950s

by many years, something that's especially true when it comes to fire hazards.²⁴⁹ It was, however, only in the twentieth century that domestic accidents such as trips, falls, burns and shocks were disengaged from public safety concerns like sanitary reform and building control and treated as a special category of harm.²⁵⁰ After the Second World War, home safety came into its own, as government and campaigners dedicated greater resources to the issue, culminating in the Home Safety Act of 1961.²⁵¹ While new materials in industry threatened a spiraling number of expensive conflagrations, fires in the home that damaged people more than property tended to be framed in the self-regulatory terms of 'home safety culture'. Multiple occupancy homes, due to their ambiguous shared spaces, posed a particularly difficult problem in this respect.

One of the most telling occasions in the development of this self-regulatory approach was the National Fire Protection Conference in 1960.²⁵² Described by its organiser, the FPA, as the largest gathering of its kind since the war, the conference attracted over 800 representatives from industry, insurance firms, academia, fire brigades, and local and central government. The Home Secretary, Rab Butler, set the tone in the opening keynote speech, insisting that the recent 'seriously high losses [...] must be bracketed with the crime wave and death by traffic as three of the major enemies we have to fight.'²⁵³ Continuing this recycling of wartime rhetoric, Butler spoke of 'the two main weapons in the battle against fire' – legislation and persuasion.²⁵⁴ About the former he was full of praise for the new Factories Act, but the better part of his speech was dedicated to the second, to 'persuasion'. What stands in the way, the Home Secretary asked, of people taking simple precautions for the

²⁴⁹ Anna Milford, *London in Flames: the Capital's History through its Fires* (West Wickham: Comerford and Miller, 1998), p. 12; C.C. Knowles and P.H. Pitt, 'The History of Building Regulation in London 1189-1972' (London: Architectural Press, 1972), pp. 6-7.

²⁵⁰ Joel Tarr and Mark Tebeau chart this history in the US context. They point out that texts on household management had been concerned with domestic accidents as early as the 1840s, but at that point, these accidents were not regarded as preventable; there was no 'safety' culture surrounding them. Joel Tarr and Mark Tebeau, 'Housewives as Home Safety Managers: The Changing Perception of the Home as a Place of Hazard and Risk, 1870-1940', in Roger Cooter and Bill Luckin eds., *Accidents in History* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 196-233. Important milestones indicate a similar trajectory in the British context. In the 1920s, consumer safety entered the Home Office's remit, and in 1932 the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) established a Home Safety Committee. Home Office, *Appraisal Report: Home Office 1953-2016* (London: Home Office, 2016), p. 77 and Judith Green, *Risk and Misfortune: The Social Construction of Accidents* (London: UCL, 1997), p. 101.

²⁵¹ Following a government grant for the purpose in 1948, RoSPA increasingly prioritised safety at home. In 1956 MPs established an all-party Parliamentary group on the topic. 'History of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents', *Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents* <Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents> [accessed 10 January 2018].

²⁵² Covered in *the Guardian* as 'Fire as Great a Danger as Crime', *the Guardian* (27 February 1960), p. 3.

²⁵³ 'The National Fire Protection Conference', *FPA Journal*, no. 50 (July 1960), 294-309, *Ibid.*, p. 297

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 298. On postwar housing as a 'war job' see Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, p. 72.

protection of 'our children, of our homes and of our businesses?' '[T]houghtlessness and ignorance' were the immediate reasons, common human failings which arose from 'a disinclination to believe that anything could ever happen to us – that is, to oneself'. The immediate response hinged on the need to cultivate a sense of personal exposure, hence personal responsibility.²⁵⁵ This focus on personal responsibility was endemic in home safety culture. Speaking in her role as Honorary Secretary of the Parliamentary Home Safety Committee, the Ulster Unionist MP Patricia McLaughlin insinuated that postwar society, whether in terms of private comforts, public welfare, or the loosening of moral values, was eroding people's sense of responsibility.²⁵⁶ McLaughlin illustrated her point with a description of the slovenly home as a dangerous home, embodied in the figures of 'Mr. Mopp and Mrs. Mopp who are far too easily satisfied with the trailing flex and all the hazards [...] which make the expression "Home Sweet Home" about the most cynical one we have in our language.'²⁵⁷

Politicians and commentators foregrounded ideas of personal responsibility. At the same time, they could not help but be aware of wider social forces. What made personal responsibility so hard to achieve, and yet also so important, was often supposed to be a breakdown of social solidarity of one kind or another. In the workplace this could be due to the alienating and exhausting nature of modern industry.²⁵⁸ Likewise in the home, McLaughlin noted how inconveniences and inadequacies in the domestic environment tended to cultivate a careless attitude within families. Giving the example of a room's single electrical plug, awkwardly positioned near the fireplace, McLaughlin asked her audience to 'Look around today [...] you will find far too many easy-going designs are allowed to be built – far too many blocks of flats and new houses where, I believe, safety has been the last factor to be thought of'.²⁵⁹ It was an ironic and perhaps not unintentionally critical remark, given the Conservative government's cuts to space standards in council housing.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ 'The National Fire Protection Conference', *FPA Journal*, p. 299.

²⁵⁶ According to McLaughlin, 'far too many people today expect somebody else to take responsibility for them'. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁵⁸ 'Carelessness', *FPA Journal*, no. 61 (October 1963), 180-5, p. 180.

²⁵⁹ 'The National Fire Protection Conference', *FPA Journal*, *Ibid.*, p. 307.

²⁶⁰ The average size of a three-bedroom council house dropped 15% between 1949 and 1959. Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, p. 84. The private sector was also turning out many houses which critics condemned as inadequate, despite an undeniable rise in general housing standards. The 1961 Parker Morris report bemoaned the quality of new houses, 'which not only are too small to provide adequately for family life but also are too small to hold the possessions in which so much of the new affluence is expressed.' Quoted in Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945*, third edn., p. 263.

This connection between environmental conditions and personal responsibility was particularly clear in the case of multiple occupancy buildings, something the FPA highlighted on at least one occasion. In an article that was mostly about multiple business premises in single buildings, but could easily apply to housing, the FPA reasoned that carelessness in such properties was a self-reinforcing phenomenon that tended to spread from tenant to tenant. '[T]he careful tenant [...] may be imperilled by his careless neighbour and when he finds that his own efforts are bedevilled by carefree methods in the storey above or below there is a danger that he in turn will allow his fire precautions to grow slack.'²⁶¹ The article went on to highlight how common areas were particularly susceptible to neglect: 'escape stairs may fall into disrepair [...] vital escape doorways, passageways and stairs may be obstructed by stores or rubbish. One tenant may keep blocked a doorway which is essential to another's escape.'²⁶² Fire safety in this interpretation became a lens for scanning and zooming in on certain interior spaces. Multiple occupancy's special contribution to the safety debate was to articulate a connection between responsibility, property and space. Safety conscious design was valuable but in itself not enough. As the FPA said about oil stoves, those famously dangerous objects which had just come under new manufacturing regulations: 'Even with the highest standards of construction, however, a portable paraffin heater in the hands of a careless or thoughtless user can still be a likely cause of fire.'²⁶³ If the unique territorial possession of one's immediate environment provided the ultimate guarantee of personal responsibility, something expressed most directly by individual property ownership, then multiple occupation introduced many hazardous complications into that relationship. The creeping neglect that spread through multiple occupancy buildings risked unravelling any 'co-ordinated [safety] policy'.²⁶⁴

In Section 5, I return to the ambiguous shared spaces of the multiple occupancy home. What I want to highlight here is the tension between personal and collective responsibility, and between ideas of personal 'carefulness' and external determination. Amid widespread concerns about growing fire risks, a moralistic view of the domestic subject persisted in

²⁶¹ 'Multiple Tenancies', *FPA Journal*, no. 44 (January 1959), 8-11, p. 8.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁶³ 'Portable Paraffin Heaters', *FPA Journal*, no. 58 (January 1963), 12-15, p. 15.

²⁶⁴ 'Multiple Tenancies', *FPA Journal*, pp. 10-11.

uneasy combination with a heightened focus on new technologies and products. How exactly did home safety culture absorb this tension?

Roger Cooter and Bill Luckin have argued that the official treatment of domestic accidents tends to defy the 'neo-collectivist' spirit of certain foundational pillars of the welfare state, including workmen's compensation and national insurance.²⁶⁵ Accidents in the home are naturalised to an unusual degree, hence rendered politically neutral. My argument below is that in the context of postwar Britain, home safety culture secured this 'naturalisation' in two ways: on the one hand, by individualising the subject of the accident, and on the other, by reifying the material and spatial situation in which the accident took place, substituting the appliance – the commodity – for the home as such. While several historians recently have placed the accident at the heart of the welfare state, arguing, as Tom Crook and Mike Esbester do, that we should see accidents as disruptive yet integral aspects of progress, rather than as mere 'teething problems', my aim here is to show how these contradictions that centred on the domestic accident were in fact spatialised.²⁶⁶

Individualising moralism was particularly strong in the case of home safety culture. The home was regarded as one of the main sources of careless behaviour, yet potentially also an exemplary space, where good habits cultivated through education might be carried into the workplace and the wider world.²⁶⁷ Invoking the unsafe home as a slovenly home echoed contemporary discourses about delinquency and 'problem families', said to have their roots in the maladaptations of domestic life.²⁶⁸ Fire risks could even be linked directly to problems of delinquent youth via the alarming numbers of fires caused by children getting hold of matches and cigarettes, alongside the separate rise in incidents of 'malicious ignition' (i.e. arson).²⁶⁹

²⁶⁵ Roger Cooter and Bill Luckin, 'Accidents in History: An Introduction', in Cooter and Luckin eds., *Accidents in History*, 1-16, p. 7.

²⁶⁶ Tom Crook and Mike Esbester, 'Risk and the History of Governing Modern Britain, c. 1800-2000', in Tom Crook and Mike Esbester eds., *Governing Risks in Modern Britain: Danger, Safety and Accidents, c. 1800-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1-26, pp. 4-7.

²⁶⁷ See Patricia McLaughlin's speech already cited, 'The National Fire Protection Conference', *FPA Journal*, p. 308.

²⁶⁸ Pat Starkey, 'The Feckless Mother: Women, Poverty and Social Workers in Wartime and Post-War England', *Women's History Review*, vol. 9, no. 3 (September 2000), 539-557; Selina Todd, 'Family Welfare and Social Work in Post-War England, c.1948-c.1970', *English Historical Review*, vol. 129, no. 537 (April 2014), 362-387; Abigail Wills, 'Delinquency, Masculinity and Citizenship in England 1950-70', *Past and Present*, vol. 187, no. 1 (May 2005), 157-185.

²⁶⁹ DSIR and FOC Joint Fire Research, *United Kingdom Fire Statistics 1961*, p. 1.

At one level these anxious discourses about the home were nothing new. Home safety culture inherited the nineteenth century discourse about the moral and physical degeneration of the slums.²⁷⁰ William Beveridge still listed 'squalor' as one of the 'five giants' that the welfare state had to slay.²⁷¹ But the risk of accidents in the home, if not replacing squalor, certainly shaped it in a new way. In the postwar period, the unfit, inadequate, squalid home often meant less a dirt and disease ridden place than a cramped, awkward, cluttered, badly wired, poorly heated, hazardous home; a domestic environment at odds with the new products and lifestyles it was meant to contain. The latter sense never displaced the former (witness the continuing practice of chemically sanitising new council tenants' furniture, for example).²⁷² But if the accident prone home took up the mantle of squalor, this only makes sense if we understand that the meaning of squalor itself had changed. Squalor was increasingly associated not with deprivation but with affluence, or rather with the uneven and contradictory effects of affluence. Fire safety proved a perfect lens for demonstrating this.

Following a series of very large industrial fires in 1959, including one at an aircraft factory that destroyed £3.7 million worth of equipment, there was growing awareness of how new technologies brought new risks.²⁷³ As a certain GH Schram from the Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society put it in *the Guardian*, the chemicals industry, plastics industry and others 'have in recent years provided the market with new products often under proprietary names, the hazards of which are not always appreciated'.²⁷⁴ Schram had in mind new materials with exotic sounding names, 'ranging from "new metals" like zirconium and titanium to less common chemicals like metal hybrids, sulphur monochloride, organic peroxides, phosphors pentasulphide, isopropylamine, and tolyene diisocyanide to mention only a few.' The FPA produced detailed analyses of how such materials behaved. It also highlighted novel domestic products like rubber kitchen tile adhesive and aerosol propelled 'hair lacquer'.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁰ From the wide literature on this subject, see for example Anthony Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (London: Transaction Publications, 2002) and Sarah Wise, *The Blackest Streets: the Life and Death of a Victorian Slum* (London: Vintage, 2009).

²⁷¹ Nicholas Timmins, *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State* (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

²⁷² Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 117.

²⁷³ 'Growing Cost of Loss by Fire', *Guardian*, p. 9.

²⁷⁴ GH Schram, 'Reducing the Nation's Fire Bill: 1 - Precautions with New Materials', *the Guardian* (9 January 1962), p. 12.

²⁷⁵ 'Dangerous Substances in the Home', *FPA Journal*, no. 57 (October 1962), 264-7, pp. 266-7.

New technical developments and their accompanying risks were present in the home as well as the workplace. It was, moreover, not only the radically new which increased fire risks; the spread of existing materials and technologies could have the same effect. *The Guardian* pointed out that while roughly only one in every ten million electrical appliances was in some way the direct cause of fire, the sheer uptake of these goods by consumers meant that at the current rate the number of electrical fires would double by 1975.²⁷⁶ The official annual report of UK fire statistics similarly reckoned that the growing number of fires caused by children was connected to ‘the greater use of paper wrappings, cardboard cartons and packets’, resulting in ‘larger accumulations and more frequent burning of rubbish’.²⁷⁷

Increased fire risks were linked to the economic buoyancy of an affluent society. To dramatize the point, the FPA produced a graph plotting changes in Gross National Product alongside the number of indoor fires (Figure 1.17).

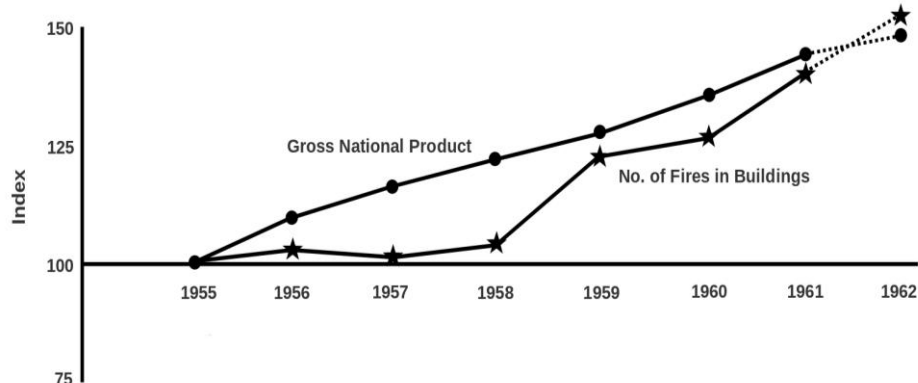


Fig. 1.17 – A graph produced by the FPA showing GNP and indoor fires rising together. ‘A Study of Large Fires’, *FPA Journal*, no. 59 (April 1963), 60-67, p. 62. Graph redrawn from original.

What might look like an obvious correlation – more stuff equals more fires – wasn’t always the case, nor would it be forever after. To give an example well known to urban historians: while the Great Fire of London marked the beginning of a period of major conflagrations (caused by the influx of new imperial goods combined with rapid urbanisation), later on,

²⁷⁶ ‘Growing Cost of Loss by Fire’, *Guardian*, p. 9.

²⁷⁷ DSIR and FOC Joint Fire Research, *United Kingdom Fire Statistics 1961: Statistical Analysis of Reports of Fires Attended by Fire Brigades in the United Kingdom during 1961* (London: HMSO, 1962), p. 1.

particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, the spread of brick construction and the impact of building regulations and more generous lot sizes led to a so called 'fire gap'; accelerating urbanisation pulled away from longstanding patterns of major fires.²⁷⁸ In other words, we are dealing in the postwar period with the beginnings of a quite specific phenomenon, in which several factors come together, to do with the development of new materials and technologies, the spread of household commodities, and the way these interacted with changing forms of housing, urbanisation and regulation.

The FPA's graph comparing rising GNP and increasing numbers of fires testifies to the urgency of this moment. It was, I would argue, no mere illustration of economic 'fact', but part of an emerging, highly contradictory discourse about the risks entailed by an 'affluent' society. I'd like to suggest that we read the FPA's data and related commentary as a semi-conscious formulation of what the prominent postwar economist John Kenneth Galbraith called the 'social balance'. According to Galbraith, imbalances between the various interlinked sectors of production inevitably led to 'bottlenecks and shortages, speculative hoarding [...] and sharply increasing costs'.²⁷⁹ There also had to be balance on the consumption side of the economy:

If we are to consume more automobiles, we must have more gasoline. There must be more insurance as well as more space on which to operate them. Beyond a certain point, more and better food appears to mean increased need for medical services.²⁸⁰

The vital role of public services, welfare provision and state infrastructure becomes clear at this point. Extra cars don't just need more petrol to run on; they need more people to maintain the roads, more traffic lights and safety codes to keep people from getting hurt, more education to help them understand the new rules, and more hospitals to care for people when the regulations prove inadequate. The imbalance between public and private

²⁷⁸ The classic paper on the urban 'fire gap' is Lionel Frost and Eric Jones, 'The Fire Gap and the Greater Durability of Nineteenth Century Cities', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1989), 333-347.

²⁷⁹ Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, p. 188.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

sectors had led, in Galbraith's opinion, to a situation of 'private opulence and public squalor'.²⁸¹

Fire 'waste', as it was known by commentators and technicians at the time, symbolised an acute version of Galbraith's 'public squalor'. This waste extended beyond immediate financial losses to include wider social costs. As an expert from the Joint Fire Research Organisation (JFRO) explained,²⁸²

When we think of fire waste we think of burned-out factories and houses to the extent of about £25 millions per annum. To this must be added the loss due to the interruption of production until the people thrown out of work can be reabsorbed into the industrial pattern. As humanitarians we may think of the 700 people who lose their lives by burning in the United Kingdom, and the 125,000 who at this moment have spent an average of 45 days in hospital, many of whom are marked physically and psychologically for life as a result of burns. [...] We must consider in addition the cost of maintaining fire brigades and of providing adequate fire protection in buildings, and in this way the total investment in fire probably comes to somewhere between £50 millions and £100 millions per annum.²⁸³

Where the author departed from Galbraith was in his perception of where exactly the 'social balance' lay. Rather than seeing cities and countryside laid waste by unbalanced private production/consumption, and hence an urgent need for greater public expenditure, the present moment was in his view rather closer to the hovering middle ground: 'Too little expenditure on fire protection is being penny wise and pound foolish – on the other hand, over protection is wasteful.'²⁸⁴ Here the notion of social balance became, rather than a fulcrum for raising up the public good, a form of total social accountancy.

²⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 190-1 and 187-8.

²⁸² The JFRO was established in 1946 by the Government's Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) and the Fire Officers Committee (FOC), the latter representing insurance firms and other private interests. A joint public-private board was appointed to oversee its running. Full responsibility for the JFRO passed to the Ministry of technology in 1965. SB Hamilton, *A Short History of the Structural Fire Protection of Buildings Particularly in England*, National Building Studies, Special Report No. 27 (London: HSMO, 1958), p. 52; 'Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and Fire Offices' Committee: Joint Fire Research Organisation: Registered Files (F Series)', Catalogue Description, National Archives, DSIR 48 <<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6380>> [accessed 9 September 2020].

²⁸³ Mr D Lawson from the Fire Research Station quoted in 'Growing Cost of Loss by Fire', *Guardian* (4 April 1960), p. 9.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

Richard Titmuss, a key thinker on social policy and a contemporary of Galbraith, formulated a critique of this logic that is still relevant today. Titmuss recognised that many welfare measures were designed to meet not universal needs but ‘identified disservices caused by society’ (for example injury and sudden unemployment), or ‘unmerited handicaps’ (here Titmuss cited the language barriers faced by recent migrants).²⁸⁵ Even where services *were* universal (the NHS for example), part of their underlying logic involved the untraceability of ‘multiple causalit[ies]’, hence the impossibility of assigning costs to any one party.

[F]or many consumers the services used are not essentially benefits or increments to welfare at all; they represent partial compensation [...] [for] social insecurities which are the product of a rapidly changing industrial-urban society. They are part of the price we pay to some people for bearing part of the costs of other people’s progress; the obsolescence of skills [...] accidents [...] urban blight and slum clearance [...] They are the socially caused *diswelfares*; the losses involved in aggregate welfare gains.²⁸⁶

What’s interesting is how the FPA graph replicates the *form* of this reasoning while suppressing its concrete implications, in terms of a plea for social justice. In fact the graph implies that as time progresses, risks become more and more ‘universal’; they become more and more a problem for society as a whole. This projected future is also the moment when the sheer magnitude of risk submerges differences of locality, the moment when time trumps space; the moment when the so-called ‘risk society’, the society born of new, unpredictable, global hazards, as Ulrich Beck claimed, levels the hierarchies of class society.²⁸⁷ Missing is any recognition of where the balance falls, or the ultimate source of these costs; in other words, of capitalism as a dynamic yet unstable system, inextricably bound up in its advanced stages with the managerial and social-support functions of the welfare state.

²⁸⁵ Titmuss, ‘Universalism versus Selection’, p. 42.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 44. My italics.

²⁸⁷ Ulrich Beck, trans. Mark Ritter, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992), pp. 23, 36 and 44. Beck had in mind risks such as those stemming from nuclear accidents and environmental pollution.

The kind of balancing equations that the JFRO spokesperson proposed were therefore spurious on several levels. As Claus Offe argued, the relationship between capitalism and the welfare state adds up to a contradictory co-dependence:²⁸⁸ 'The contradiction is that while capitalism cannot coexist [in complete harmony] with the welfare state, neither can it exist without the welfare state', at least not without serious political and economic upheaval.²⁸⁹ Fire safety regulations, for example, reduce the social costs of unchecked urbanisation. But they also provide the framework for the standardisation of components in both the building industry and household consumer goods, smoothing the way for a greater quantity and range of output and thus increasing the sheer volume and variety of potential risk factors. While the former aspect of fire safety regulation dates to at least the medieval period, the latter is a feature of the development of the modern welfare state, beginning with private initiatives in materials testing in the second half of the nineteenth century and eventually being absorbed into national institutions like the JFRO in the course of the 1940s-60s. What becomes clear in the postwar period is that the social balance is an equation with no rational or consensual solution.²⁹⁰

To the extent that domestic accidents within home safety culture took up the position of 'squalor', this squalor was itself altered. It was squalor as the flipside to affluence, squalor as supposedly universal, squalor as an almost inevitable byproduct of packaging, cars, washing machines and GNP. Fire risks as they were represented in home safety culture offer a prime example of the contradictions of the welfare state. In truth, these risks were in no way universal. As we have seen, they were deeply spatialised; concentrated within specific domestic environments and specific urban areas. Home safety culture's misapprehension of this conjuncture leads to a particular phenomenology of the accident, itself dependent on a reduction of the home to a purely abstract space. Within home safety culture, accidents (like diseases according to the idea of 'miasma') could emerge anywhere. It was precisely the home's familiarity that put people off guard. But unlike the epidemic's excess of connectivity, the accident showed a disconcerting deficit on this front. Accidents were accidental because

²⁸⁸ Claus Offe, trans. John Keane, 'Some Contradictions of the Welfare State', in Claus Offe, ed. and trans. John Keane, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1984), 147-161, p. 153.

²⁸⁹ Claus Offe, "Crises of Crisis Management": Some Elements of a Political Crisis Theory', John Keane trans., in *ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁹⁰ SB Hamilton, *A Short History of the Structural Fire Protection of Buildings Particularly in England*, National Building Studies, Special Report No. 27 (London: HSMO, 1958), pp. 25-6, 38, 40-1; C.C. Knowles and P.H. Pitt, 'The History of Building Regulation in London 1189-1972' (London: Architectural Press, 1972), pp. 7 and 107.

they were disconnected. Their chain of cause and effect appeared to terminate under their own rapid dissipation of energy, leading experts on a quest for singular, causative objects.²⁹¹ The realm of the accident in this view appears as a series of discreet hazards, each enclosed by its own pocket of abstract space.

It is not surprising then to find that official UK fire statistics from the period supply reams of data on appliances but very little on housing types.²⁹² Nothing demonstrates this better, however, than those ubiquitous films of men in white (or often beige) coats testing various products for quality and safety on behalf of quasi-governmental organisations such as the JFRO and the Electrical Development Association (EDA). In one such film from 1958, we see two men in lab coats laying strips of flannel onto two electric heaters. One heater is fitted with a guard, the other not (Figure 1.18). A simple test with a simple result: the flannel on the unguarded heater bursts into flames. The camera in these films does not just document the test; it stages the experiment and captures the results.²⁹³ The camera forms part of the test apparatus along with other pieces of equipment – thermometers, scales, strain gauges, pyrometers. The filmed test situation creates a new, abstract assemblage, which substitutes for the contingent environment of the home.²⁹⁴ In a film from the JFRO's fire research station in Boreham Wood, the camera pans between the different parts of the apparatus, beginning with a burning stack of wooden batons, which stands in as a rough model of a multi-storey building (Figure 1.19). Here, the domestic environment shrinks down to an absurd substitute, while the test apparatus expands to fill a whole warehouse.

²⁹¹ Ray Ranson, 'Accidents at Home: The Modern Epidemic', in Roger Burridge and David Ormandy eds., *Unhealthy Housing: Research, Remedies and Reform* (London: E and FN Spon, 1993), 223-243, p. 234.

²⁹² See for example 'The ten most important known sources of ignition of fires in buildings', DSIR et al., *United Kingdom Fire Statistics 1963*, p. 14.

²⁹³ Timothy Boon, *Films of Fact: A History of Science in Documentary Films and Television* (London: Wallflower, 2008), pp. 218-9.

²⁹⁴ See similarly the numerous product safety and efficiency tests conducted by the recently formed Consumers' Association (established in 1957) under the leadership of Michael Young, published in *Which?* magazine. For example, 'Electric Convector Heaters', *Which?*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1958), 4-7.



Fig. 1.18 – Still from British Pathé newsreel, *Testing Domestic Appliances, AKA Electric Gadgets* (1958). Test carried out by the EDA. <<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/testing-domestic-appliances-aka-electric-gadgets/query/fire>> [accessed 11 January 2018].

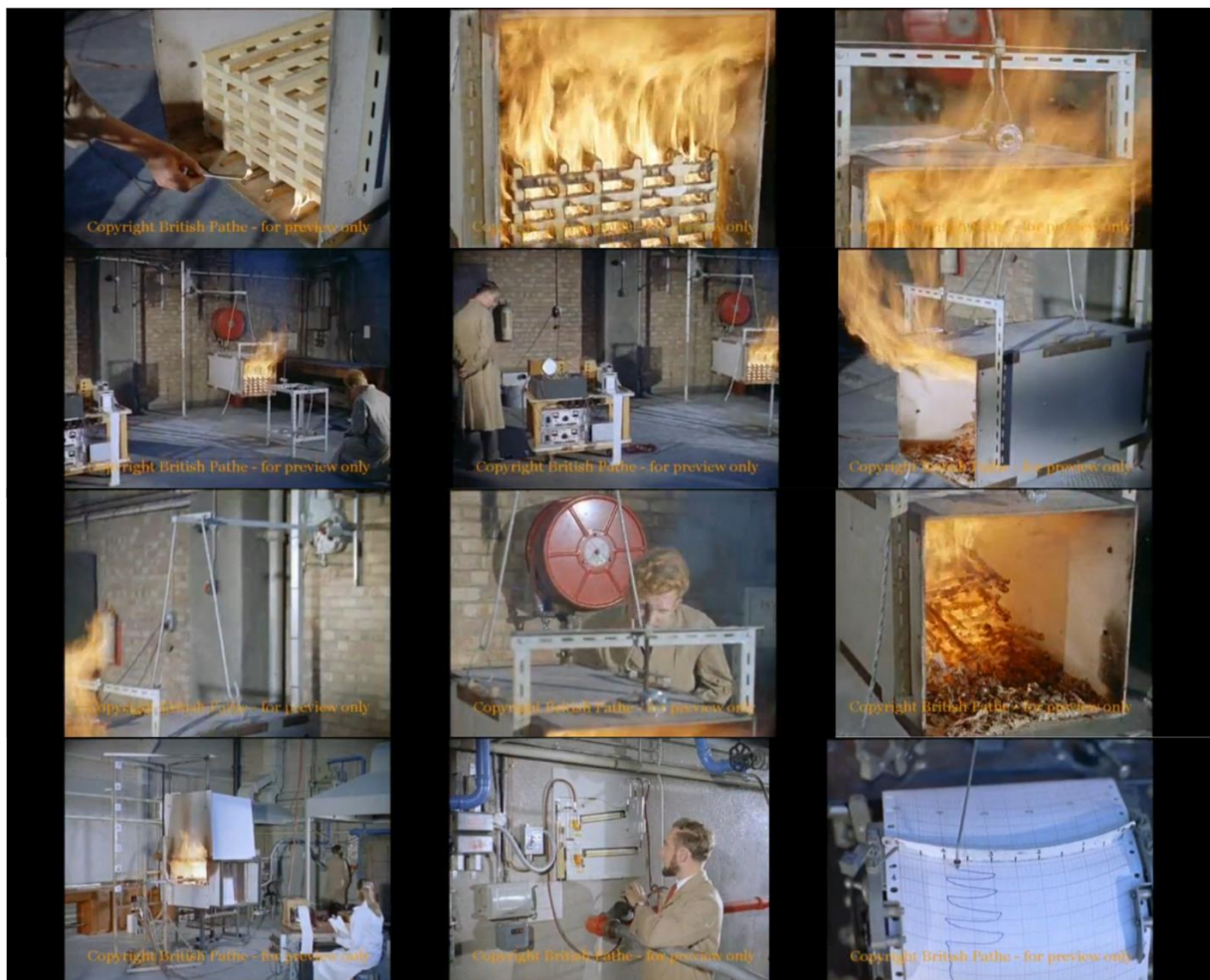


Fig. 1.19 – Testing how fire behaves in a multistorey building at the JFRO’s Fire Research Station. Stills from British Pathé newsreel, *Fire Research* (1961)

<<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/fire-research/query/fire>> [accessed 11 January 2018].

With these films from ‘the heyday of deference to the scientific expert’, an absolute faith in science’s ability to regulate discrete objects contrasts with a highly anxious attitude towards people’s ability to regulate themselves.²⁹⁵ Home safety culture paired the kind of self-regulatory instruction that has been seen as a hallmark of the risk society with an uncritically ‘scientific’ focus on regulatory objects.²⁹⁶ In doing so it abstracted away from the social and material contingencies of domestic space, contingencies that were vital to the safety of multiple occupancy homes. What this prominent self-regulatory framework seemed incapable of dealing with was the way in which a home assembles a variety of spaces, relations, practices and objects. In contrast to the abstract space of the test situation and the fetishised smoothness of the show homes at the Ideal Home Exhibition, multiple occupancy and its representational analogues blows the joints between the components of the home wide open.

The LCC’s high fire risk inspection programme can be seen as a rare exception in this context. In not only identifying specific risks but also assigning causative responsibility for them, the programme went beyond the universalist-selective dichotomy criticised by Titmuss.²⁹⁷ It engaged, in a somewhat Sisyphean mode, with the architectural minutiae of multiple occupancy homes and enforced changes on landlords and building owners. Politically, the programme can be seen in light of Labour’s short-lived policy of municipalisation.²⁹⁸ In its willingness to infringe on private property rights, municipalisation represented – all too briefly, for the policy did not survive the transition from opposition to government – perhaps the most radical moment in Labour’s housing outlook since the 100% development tax of 1947.²⁹⁹ This is not the place to give a full account of municipalisation

²⁹⁵ John Durant, ‘Once the Men in White Coats Held the Promise of a Better Future’, in Jane Franklin ed., *The Politics of Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), p. 71.

²⁹⁶ Deborah Lupton, *Risk* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 90.

²⁹⁷ Titmuss, ‘Universalism versus Selection’, p. 44.

²⁹⁸ Municipalisation was abandoned as an official Labour policy in 1961. Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy*, pp. 34 and 39.

²⁹⁹ For criticisms of municipalisation see John Black and David Stafford, *Housing Policy and Finance* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 117.

and related policies. I simply want to point out that the interventionist spirit of the LCC's high fire risk inspection programme bore a political relation to these wider developments. In a more hegemonic framework, the programme's insistence on improving existing properties reflected a growing recognition of the value of rehabilitation over slum clearance.³⁰⁰ But whereas the Conservative government channelled the benefits of rehabilitation to owner occupiers via improvement grants and, inadvertently, via the rent increases afforded by the 1957 Rent Act, here the Labour dominated LCC focused on basic but essential alterations to multiple occupancy housing, making houses safe for existing tenants.³⁰¹

All of this stands in some contrast to the contradictory and often moralising approach of home safety culture. The high fire risk inspection programme was a strange hybrid of bureaucratic, political, architectural and public health practices. It involved such diverse actions as protracted negotiations with landlords, tracking down absent owners, sketching proposed alterations, and suggesting fittings and materials for minor changes: a rising hinge to make a door self-closing, prefabricated wall-board for a fire-break at the head of a staircase, a fixed ladder to reach an escape hatch to the roof, and so on.³⁰² Amid the banalities of hinges, handrails, ladders and plasterboard, we find an attention to multiple occupancy housing that goes beyond the inflated images of the un-ideal home. It is exactly here, in the realm of spatial practice, quite apart from comprehensive redevelopment plans and discourses on the state of 'the slums', that we sometimes have to look for the welfare state's involvement in private rented housing.

So far I have considered how governmental actors approached fire risks in multiple occupancy housing. In the next Section I want to explain where those risks actually came

³⁰⁰ Yelling, 'Public Policy, Urban Renewal and Property Ownership', *Urban History*.

³⁰¹ Improvement grants were introduced by Labour under the 1949 Housing Act, signalling the party's reluctant conversion to the idea of offering public assistance to landlords to repair and make good their properties. The grants did not, however, represent a significant draw on public resources until the 1954 Housing Repairs and Rents Act, which made it easier for purchasers of older properties to get financial assistance for the installation of basic amenities and upgrades. In other words, the 1954 Act explicitly linked the question of repairs to individual homeownership. From a few thousand grants awarded annually, the average jumped to over 40,000 per year in the second half of the 1950s, the vast majority of these going to owner occupiers. Under the impact of the 1959 House Purchase and Housing Act, which further eased the application criteria, numbers of grants approached the 100,000 mark in the mid 1960s. Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, p. 89 and Merrett, *Owner Occupation in Britain*, pp. 31-2.

³⁰² Some of these suggested physical alterations are outlined in the LCC's 1957 pamphlet 'Escape from Fire', LMA LCC/FB/GEN/10/013. On negotiations with landlords see Joint report by the Superintending Architect and others dated 11 June 1959 found in the Town Planning Committee's General Papers on Means of Escape in Case of Fire 1956-62, LMA LCC/CL/TP/01/100, p. 3, LCC collection. As far as I can tell, sketches by inspectors from the programme do not survive.

from; what or who generated them, and why. To answer these questions, I turn to a geographically bounded case study: the location of so many of the fires recounted in the Introduction to the present Part – North Kensington.

4. The Geography of Risk

Figure 1.20 shows every domestic fire plus accidents involving burn injuries recorded by the *Kensington Post* between 1958 and 1963, within a 2.7 kilometre radius of Notting Hill Gate.³⁰³ The numbered points occasionally used in the following analysis refer to the detailed version of this map in Appendix 1.

This map represents, in a sense, a naive approach, not dissimilar to how Charles Booth colour coded individual houses in his study of poverty in London at the turn of the century. It is not a neutral approach; Booth's map famously categorised certain areas as 'lowest class, vicious, semi-criminal'.³⁰⁴ But in the case of domestic fires, I think this approach does something interesting, and not only because it helps overcome certain elisions in the official data. The way news stories about house fires locate each incident on a specific street serves to individualise the accident, to contain it within the home. The map in Figure 1.20 uses this information against its original purpose, suggesting a spatial dynamic that connects stories that were never meant to be connected. The result is not a complete picture, merely a suggestive one.³⁰⁵ How did spatial changes at the district or neighbourhood level shape the risk factors surrounding fires?

³⁰³ This circular area is chosen to encompass both South and North Kensington. The Junction of Pembridge Road and Holland Park Avenue/Bayswater Road marks its centre. The new Hammersmith Flyover sits on its south western edge, and the corner of Knightsbridge/Sloane Street on its south eastern edge. On its northern edge is the LCC Carlton Vale housing estate. Roughly the mid-point of the relevant street has been used for each fire or accident; where several fires or accidents took place on the same street, points have been adequately spaced so as not to overlap. Fires in abandoned and derelict houses, incidents of arson, and fires in residential buildings that aren't houses, e.g. hotels and nursing homes, have been excluded.

³⁰⁴ Simon Foxell, *Mapping London: Making Sense of the City* (London: Blackdog, 2007), pp. 75-6.

³⁰⁵ I take inspiration from the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, which produced a number of powerful maps dramatising the impact of racism on everything from car accidents to rat bites. See Dennis Wood with John Fels and John Krygier, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), p. 116.

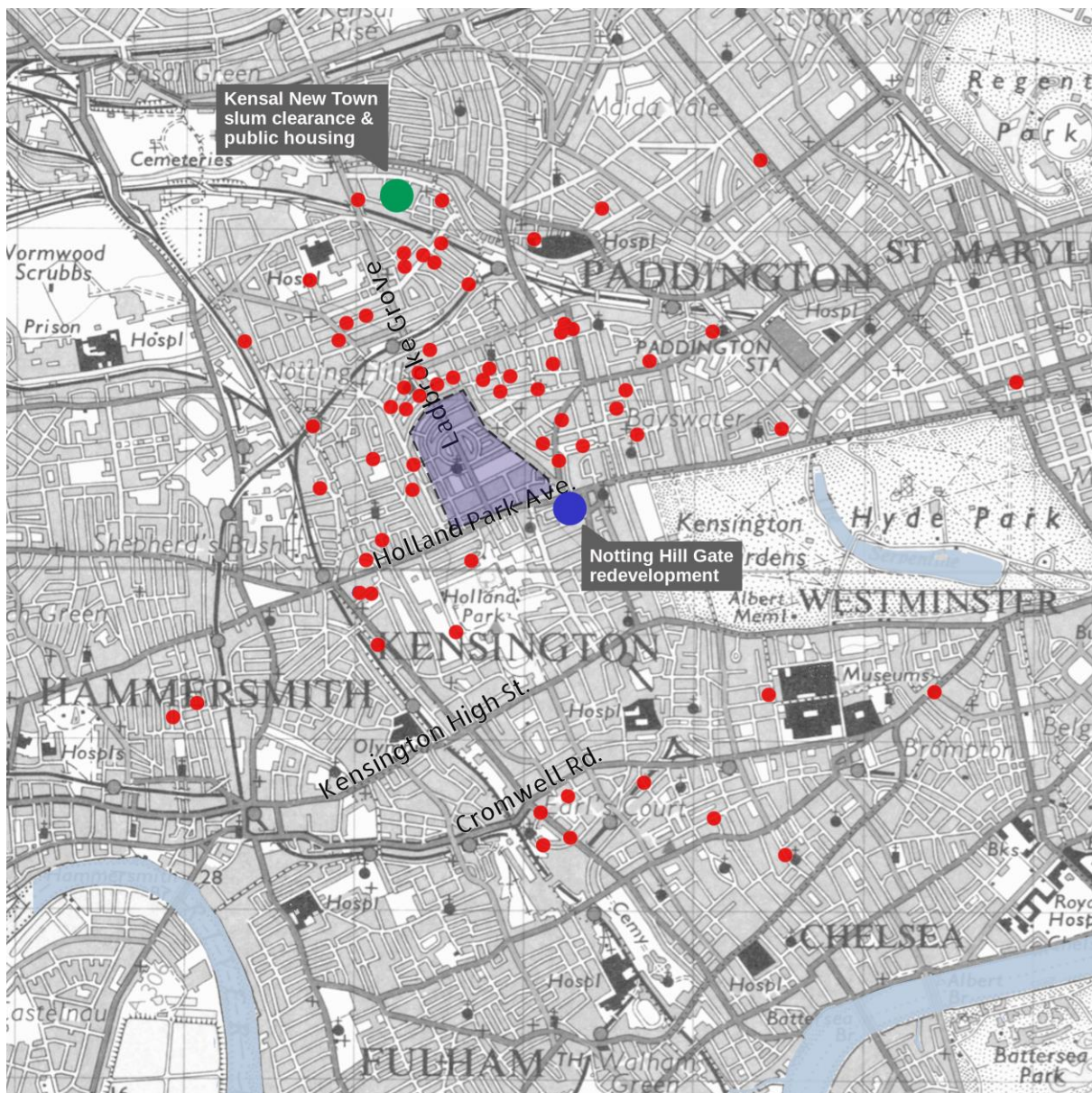


Fig. 1.20 – Domestic fires recorded in the Kensington Post 1958-63 within a 2.7km radius of Notting Hill Gate. The map also shows two of the largest new developments, plus the historic boundaries of the Ladbroke estate (c. 1800) shaded in purple. Map by Alistair Cartwright. Base layer from Ordnance Survey sheet 160 London NW (1958), available from *National Library of Scotland* <<http://maps.nls.uk/view/91577131>> [accessed 20 October 2017].

51 out of 67 domestic fires took place north of Holland Park Avenue/Bayswater Road. The concentration of fires in the North of the borough is of a piece with the hazards of multiple occupancy housing dealt with by the LCC. It also mirrors the inequality between North and South Kensington generally. While other parts of London were worse affected than Kensington as a whole, the discrepancy between the latter's northern and southern halves was far ahead of other comparably 'high risk' boroughs when broken down into constituent

parts. A report from 1961 calculated 3.94 fires per 10,000 people in North Kensington, versus 0.79 in South Kensington. In Paddington, the figures for north and south were 3.13 and 2.87, while Islington, divided into north, south and east, also showed a more even spread: 2.88, 2.96 and 1.88 respectively.³⁰⁶

So far, so grimly familiar. But a closer look reveals some important nuances. Around the southern end of Ladbroke Grove lies a relatively fire-free pocket (shaded purple in Figure 1.20). As Ladbroke Grove rises towards a hill, the twisting bye-law streets of Notting Dale fan out into a handful of crescents whose atmosphere of secluded luxury also feels a world away from the bustle of Portobello Rd. The grandeur of these streets owe their existence to the speculative development of the Ladbroke Estate beginning in the 1820s, one of the earliest developments in the race to establish the first bourgeois enclave west of the great parks.³⁰⁷ In the postwar period, the district valuer's surveys of the semi-detached mansions and four-storey stuccoed terraces in the area show that many of these properties were occupied as whole houses, with relatively few let off in single rooms.³⁰⁸ What's most interesting, however, is just how closely the different patches of the North Kensington quilt jam up against each other. A narrow belt dotted very densely with red points rings the purple shaded area in Figure 1.20. Within this belt, there were at least six fires in 1961 alone.

It was these surprising transitions as much the run down state of the area that attracted social investigators to North Kensington in the wake of the 1958 riots. One of these was Pearl Jephcott, a sociologist whose keen sense for the materiality of everyday life led her to describe the damaging effects of house fires. Her 1962-63 investigation – commissioned by the Mayor of Kensington and supported by a range of organisations including the LCC, Kensington Housing Trust and the Save the Children Fund – noted how two out of the twenty multiple occupancy properties in her sample experienced fires during the study's six

³⁰⁶ Joint report by the Fire Brigade Committee and Health Committee titled 'Incidence of Fires Originating from Oil-Heaters' dated 1 and 7 November 1961 found in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1961, p. 724, LCC Collection, LMA LCCU1744.

³⁰⁷ 'The Ladbroke estate: The 1860s onwards', in *Survey of London: Volume 37, Northern Kensington*, ed. FHW Sheppard (London, 1973), pp. 235-251, para. 17 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/pp235-251>> [accessed 1 October 2017]. See also Simon Jenkins, *Landlords to London: The Story of a Capital and its Growth* (London: Constable and Company, 1975), p. 93.

³⁰⁸ On Lansdowne Rd, Lansdowne Crescent and Stanley Crescent 27 houses contained parts let in rooms, compared to 69 on Kensington Park Road. I refer here to the 1963 valuation list. Brief descriptions of the relevant properties are found in the District 1 volume for 1963 in the Royal Borough of Kensington's Local Studies Library. See respectively pp. 219-228, 213-217, 754-756. For Kensington Park Road see the District 2 volume for the same year, pp. 600-614.

month contact period.³⁰⁹ The twenty months researching what would become her book, *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill*, saw three fatal fires, claiming the lives of five children.³¹⁰ Jephcott highlighted the decrepit conditions and *ad hoc* substitutes that led to these tragedies: the shortage of electricity points and widespread presence of gas fires and oil heaters, the poor state of electrical fittings where they did exist, the lack of storage space, and 'the extent to which clothes have to be hung on doors or kept in the piled-up suitcases of the migrants' homes'.³¹¹

As Eileen Younghusband (author of the influential Younghusband report on social workers) framed the issue in the book's preface, some of these conditions bore all the traits of Dickensian squalor.³¹² A closer reading of Jephcott's text, however, reveals a more complex picture. Many houses in fact appeared quite 'decent'.³¹³ The homes Jephcott visited had been looked after 'remarkably tidily'; very few smelt 'sour' or even 'mildly unpleasant'.³¹⁴ Rather than an outright 'slum', Jephcott built up a picture of a shifting, dislocated area undergoing changes that were both visible and subterranean. Poverty and discrimination dogged Notting Hill, but as a long time centre of various migrant communities – joined recently by Caribbean and Irish settlement – the area was not lacking a certain appeal.³¹⁵ Nowhere was this clearer than in Jephcott's description of Portobello Road, the famous market street running north-south just east of Ladbroke Grove:

Saris and sandals, the Sikh's white turban and black beard, the carefully careless headscarf of the Nigerian and the goffered guimp of the Italian nun lend a (slightly seedy) exoticism to the area. At one end of Portobello Road the American tourist haggles over his purchase from a stall displaying antique silver; at the other end the

³⁰⁹ Pearl Jephcott, *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 6.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46 and 49.

³¹² 'Eileen Younghusband, 'Foreword', in Pearl Jephcott, *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 11-15, p. 13. See also Helen McCarthy, 'Pearl Jephcott and the Politics of Gender, Class and Race in Post-war Britain', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 5 (2019), 779-793, p. 785.

³¹³ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, p. 25.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³¹⁵ In the late 1920s Notting Hill attracted a growing Jewish community. See 'The Portobello and St. Quintin estates', in *Survey of London: Volume 37, Northern Kensington*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London, 1973), pp. 298-332, para. 16 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/pp298-332>> [accessed 27 September 2017]. On West Indian and especially Trinidadian settlement in Notting Hill see White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p. 136. On postwar Irish settlement in Kensington, Paddington and Hammersmith see John Jackson, 'The Irish', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), 293-308, pp. 301-2.

pensioner fumbles through an old clothes barrow. Habits and menages are as bizarre as costumes and accents. Teddy boys hail taxis with assurance; a dignitary of some eastern church, purple cassocked, conducts his daily services in his council flat; an elderly refugee lady from Shanghai fights a losing battle with her smooth-tongued tenants from Cork. Cosmopolitanism on this scale means that even the officials to whom it causes so much extra labour and anxiety agree that the place is oddly stimulating.³¹⁶

Here, in the heart of North Kensington, people from distant parts of the world and almost equally distant classes of society create an uneasy alloy. This incongruous mix of peoples was Sikh, Nigerian, Italian, American, English, Chinese and Irish. It spanned market traders, nuns, inter-continental tourists, teenagers whose pay packets afforded them taxis, refugees who were also landladies, tenants who extorted those same landladies (rather than the other way round), and, not to forget, the anxious soul of the administrator or investigator herself. More than diversity, what Portobello Road represented for Jephcott was contradiction, displacement, the reversal of familiar roles, and a profound sense of disjuncture. In the terms of the pioneering urban studies scholar Ruth Glass, Notting Hill was not a 'slum' but a 'zone of transition', or 'twilight zone', where disparate groups and individuals jammed together: working class families who couldn't afford local authority rents, service workers who needed to be near the city centre, immigrants, students, sex workers and 'delinquents'; a 'conglomeration of groups who move, so to speak, on separate tracks, even if they do meet occasionally at a station.'³¹⁷ Portobello Road, in Jephcott's description, was exactly such a meeting point – a platform of restless contiguity and interchange.

At one level, it was entirely predictable that Jephcott alighted on this particular street (Walt Disney's *Mary Poppins*, which dedicated a song to the famous street, was released the same year). But the choice of Portobello Road also allowed the writer to detect less visible dynamics. Disney clichés notwithstanding, it was geographically precise too. A few months after the wave of racist violence that swept North Kensington in September 1958, thirty eight residents from the southern end of Portobello Road petitioned Kensington Council to have

³¹⁶ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, p. 26.

³¹⁷ Ruth Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), xlii-xliii, pp. xxi and xxii.

the name of their stretch of the street changed to 'Kensington Park Terrace', claiming the 'quiet and pleasant [...] old world characteristics' of the residential south felt 'geographically disconnected' from the bustle of the street market.³¹⁸ The petitioners wanted to disassociate themselves from the memory of the riots:

The name of Portobello Road has, during the recent disturbances, acquired even more notoriety than before which [sic.] involves unsavoury characteristics with which the residents of the southern section of Portobello Road are not and have no wish to be associated with.³¹⁹

According to the *Kensington Post*, the petitioners worried that the value of their property might drop. One Mrs. Moss explained, 'A better class of people has been coming into this part of the road recently.'³²⁰ A flurry of counter-responses followed, as market traders attacked the snobbish attitude of the Portobello Road secessionists, and Kensington Labour councillors confronted their Conservative counterparts for allowing the petition to get as far as a referral to the LCC.³²¹

Early signs of what we now know as gentrification (a term coined by Glass) here took an unusually class – and race – conscious form. In fact, the first signs of what's often understood as the creeping return of the middle classes to the inner city had showed themselves in Kensington as early as 1953, when the local press observed 'workmen's cottages' being transformed into 'bijou residences' in nearby Campden Hill.³²² The art historian William Gaunt, who wrote a nostalgic jaunt through Kensington's Victorian past, noticed similar changes in 1957: 'It is perhaps in the little backwaters that one notices [the] transformation most emphatically. In Pembroke Place [near Holland Park], for instance, in the centre of which a neat plantation is a symbol of the continuing redesign around it.'³²³ Like Jephcott, Gaunt picked out Portobello Road as abounding in sharp shifts of stylistic and atmospheric gear:

³¹⁸ "'Class War" Comes to Portobello Rd.', *Kensington Post* (2 January 1959), p. 1.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid. and 'Are they all snobs at "the porto"?', *Kensington Post* (23 January 1959), p. 5.

³²² Quoted in Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 107.

³²³ William Gaunt, *Kensington* (London: BT Batsford, 1957), p. 143.

One turns from the busy corner where Pembridge Road meets Notting Hill [Gate] into the quiet beginning of the long Portobello Road past a terrace of two-storey cottages, placidly and even charmingly Victorian, to find at a week-end the liveliest of street markets in progress. [...] it would seem as if every nation and race has converged on this open-air bazaar in the Portobello Road; crew-cropped Americans with camera slung over shoulder, Indian women in robes of crimson and gold, French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, West Indian... as well as Londoners and other English folk including young men with a variety of beard and young women with a variety of slacks who, if they are not art students, look the part.³²⁴

How should we understand these impressions of North Kensington in a state of transition, alongside the catalogue of disrepair, overcrowding, and discrimination given in Jephcott's study, of which house fires were an emblem? Issues to do with race and class coincide here with a growing awareness of sections of society that seem to flaunt traditional morality. Frank Mort has argued that 'troubled areas' like North Kensington effectively concentrated and amplified various amorphous anxieties associated with the birth of the 'permissive society'.³²⁵ Issues of race and class were effectively spatialised. The very nature of these issues – the changing nature of Britishness, the rising confidence of working-class youth, the threat of racial conflict, and the 'rediscovery' of poverty (which in reality was not confined to only the elderly and the unemployed) – became entwined with specific locales within the capital.³²⁶

This dialectic of spatial scales extended beyond national problems to encompass global political priorities. As Dennis Dean has demonstrated, up until the late '50s, the desire among both Labour and Conservative governments to project an image of a strong and inclusive Commonwealth largely overrode concerns about a growing 'alien' presence within the metropole; a presence deemed threatening to those left behind by the gains of postwar

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 139.

³²⁵ Mort, *Capital Affairs*. See especially pp. 45-7 in connection with North Kensington.

³²⁶ On the 'rediscovery of poverty' see Selina Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2008), 501-518, pp. 506-7.

affluence.³²⁷ The Home Office apparatus together with a few senior politicians and a segment of reactionaries on the backbenches had long warned about the ‘menace’ of black neighbourhoods.³²⁸ But it was only when the dreams of the Commonwealth succumbed to the messy realities of decolonisation, that the question of race/racism, and its essential links with questions of class, collapsed back into the microgeographies of a few ‘troubled areas’. The cosmopolitanism that Jephcott sensed on Portobello Road, while still evident in the early ‘60s, transformed into a volatile mixture that might at any moment detonate the already damaged edifice of Britain’s imperial ambitions.

A number of scholars have analysed these dynamics, if not articulating them in exactly these spatial terms.³²⁹ We know much less, however, about how the spatialisation of race and class interacted with the dynamics of an equally volatile property system. Places like North Kensington gained an importance out of all proportion to their actual size, but they were not only wells of accumulating social problems. These ‘troubled areas’ were also ‘zones of transition’, where movements of capital re-drew the spatial composition of the built environment.

It’s worth returning to what Ruth Glass had to say about these zones.³³⁰ Noticing how shifts between neighbourhoods were becoming sharper in the postwar period, Glass characterised London circa 1960 as a place where ‘change and stagnation exist side by side’.³³¹ The two processes were interlinked. Redevelopment went hand in hand with adjacent areas becoming ‘hemmed in’. ‘[R]emaining pockets of blight’ became denser, as areas not ‘ripe’ for investment were ‘left to decay’. Areas that fell between these polarised fates, especially near major transport hubs, tended to become ‘lodging-house districts’.³³² This dialectical

³²⁷ DW Dean, ‘Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s: The Problems of Constraint’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (March 1992), 171-194, pp. 182, 189 and 192. On the Labour government’s similarly cautious approach to immigration in the 1940s see DW Dean, ‘Coping with colonial immigration, the cold war and colonial policy: The labour government and black communities in Great Britain 1945–51’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1987), 305-334.

³²⁸ Dean, ‘Problems of Constraint’, pp. 176, 180 and 191-2.

³²⁹ See for example Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi, ‘The 1951-55 Conservative Government and the Racialisation of Black Immigration’, in Winston James and Clive Harris eds., *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain* (London: Verso, 1993), 55-71; Susan Smith, *The Politics of “Race” and Residence: Citizenship, Segregation and White Supremacy in Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989).

³³⁰ Recordings from the seminar ‘How Ruth Glass Shaped the Way We Approach Our Cities’, *UCL Urban Laboratory* (January 2015) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/urbanlab/news/ruth-glass-seminar>> [accessed 29 September 2017] provide an excellent contextualisation of Glass’s work. See especially Phil Cohen’s contribution.

³³¹ Glass, ‘Introduction’, in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *Aspects of Change*, p. xxv.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. xx.

movement of urban capital forms the crux of several striking observations that Glass goes on to make. It underlies the (at the time relatively gradual) 'upgrad[ing]' of once 'shabby', multiple-occupancy properties in North Kensington, Islington and Paddington.³³³ And we only have to turn to the work of a close contemporary to note the flip-side to this process of social elevation. In the north west corner of Notting Dale, Pearl Jephcott described an area 'cut off' by the Grand Union Canal on one side and the main Paddington railway line on the other:

Houses are in poor repair, front steps are cracked, and chunks of plaster are missing. Paintwork is piebald and peeling [...] Railings have rusted off, front walls have crumbled, and the privet has grown wild. [...] The telephone boxes are notoriously out of order, batches of grimy milk bottles stand about front steps, and the clutter of dustbins [...] appear to be perennially overflowing.³³⁴

Just half a mile from Portobello Road, the environment suddenly became repellent, prompting a reversion to the vocabulary of a past era: 'the cheerless bye-law streets [...] are those of any nineteenth-century urban slum'. Rather than the exotic lure of a multicultural market dotted with hints of middle class wealth, stalls selling 'depressingly second-hand clothes, shoes, gloves, etc.' dominated these streets.³³⁵

There was a racialised aspect to this difference between Notting Hill and Notting Dale. As Mort highlights, these two ambiguously defined areas provided a geographical substrate for discourses on race and racism.³³⁶ If Notting Hill evidenced a new kind of cosmopolitanism, Caribbean led rather than European, then Notting Dale was marked by the way its working-class, mainly white community appeared, under the pressure of competition for scarce housing and other resources, to be turning in on itself – and turning against anyone outside its narrow borders. According to an idea that gained importance from the late 1950s, it was housing experiences above all that manifested racial hostility *and* racial particularity.³³⁷ The way people lived their domestic lives made otherness apparent. Proximity to this other way

³³³ Ibid., pp. xviii-xix.

³³⁴ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, p. 26.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, pp. 107-9.

³³⁷ Carter, Harris and Joshi, 'Racialisation of Black Immigration', in James and Harris eds., *Inside Babylon*. See also Susan Smith, *The Politics of "Race" and Residence*, pp. 109-122.

of living forced insecure white workers to the point of racism. Occasionally falling into this logic, Jephcott couched her discussion of North Kensington in the racialised terms of a migrant population unmoored from stable family life.³³⁸

But to really understand these phenomena, we have to look beyond the cultural discourses that Mort and others draw attention to, as important as these are.³³⁹ The real forces of instability in these 'twilight' areas of the city – as Ruth Glass understood – had little to do with racialised notions of cultural difference. They were instead the products of an ever restless property system. More than discourse, what shaped neighbourhood differentiation was capital.

In North Kensington, the 'upgrading' and 'downgrading' of the built environment were inextricably linked. As Neil Smith has argued, inner city depression dents the pyramid of urban land values, whose growing incline otherwise tends to hamper accumulation; de-development necessarily precedes redevelopment.³⁴⁰ Before developing this analysis, I want to briefly outline the theoretical background to my argument. According to Smith's classic theory, capital withdrawal runs down neighbourhoods, opening up a 'rent gap' between actual values and the potential value speculators expect to get.³⁴¹ Property traders look for areas they think they can 'flip' over in this way, turning undesirable neighborhoods into desirable ones. Crucially, this dynamic plays out in concrete terms that exist beyond the abstract plane of fungible units of space and exchange value. The differential movement of capital displaces risks from one area to another, creating peaks and troughs in the landscape that register in social-material terms as well as property values. Capital works like an earthmover in what Mike Davis (with reference to house fires in Los Angeles) calls 'the ecology of fear'.³⁴²

³³⁸ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, pp. 54-6.

³³⁹ In addition to Frank Mort, see Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963", *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2 (April 1997), 207-238.

³⁴⁰ Neil Smith, 'Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (1979), 538-548, pp. 541-4.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (London: PocaDor, 1999), especially pp. 112-130.

House fires including deliberate acts of arson feature prominently in the symptomatology of capital withdrawal.³⁴³ These incidents are, however, not only symptoms but concrete conjunctures, social-material attributes fixed in space for a definite period. To outline a risk-area is to carve out an enclave of uniquely beneficial or detrimental qualities: in Sarah Keenan's terms, a relationship of belonging between subjects, objects and qualities 'held up' in space.³⁴⁴ These qualities and objects include, in this case, overcrowding and disrepair, the presence of subdividing partitions and the absence of escape routes, all of which were linked in space to black and working-class subjects. Whereas for the subjects in question this conjuncture forms part of the daily struggle of existence, for capital, it possesses a dual identity. This is the case not only in the sense that the situation presents itself as both risk and opportunity, but more fundamentally in the sense that an essentially relational manifestation of space must be suddenly converted into an absolute one, a fixed and neatly bounded territory from which the troublesome subjects-objects-qualities will be swiftly expelled.³⁴⁵ The spatialisation of these conjunctures contributes to the differentiation of neighbourhoods, re-drawing the map to form the patchwork of urban submarkets that capital moves its investments between like pieces on a chess board. The end result enables the extraction of what David Harvey calls 'class-monopoly rent', or the capture of value from the urban commons.³⁴⁶

As Harvey explains, cities, like ecosystems, contain huge amounts of untapped value locked up in their slowly accumulating social and physical infrastructure. At first, no one person or company may own much of this value. Instead, it belongs to the commons: it is the value of community, the value of public amenities, and the value of centuries of adjustments to the built environment. To capture this value, property traders and developers need to carve out a zone that has unique and exclusive attributes, where they can exercise a monopoly. This

³⁴³ Daniel Kerr, 'Who Burned Cleveland, Ohio? The Forgotten Fires of the 1970s', in Greg Bankoff, Uwe Lübken and Jordan Sands eds., *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 332-352.

³⁴⁴ Sarah Keenan, 'Subversive Property: Reshaping Malleable Spaces of Belonging', *Social and Legal Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2010), 423-440.

³⁴⁵ Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, second edn. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 2 and 95. See also, Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 163 and 234-5. It is worth noting that Smith derives his historicisation of 'absolute space' from Newtonian science, which regards space as separate and prior to matter, rather than from the city states of ancient civilizations, as in Lefebvre, which nonetheless evolved a similar dualism by positioning the monumental centre of power as essentially different from its surroundings.

³⁴⁶ David Harvey, 'Class-Monopoly Rent, Finance Capital and the Urban Revolution', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3-4 (1974) 239-255, pp. 242-3. See also David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 89-113.

returns us to the 'see-saw' motion of capital that Smith saw as a hallmark of uneven development (discussed in the thesis Introduction).³⁴⁷ Traders and developers accomplish the extraction of class monopoly rent by disinvesting and reinvesting – running down some areas, building up others; forcing some people out, pulling others in. Comparative value is thus created between neighborhoods. An exclusive part of town becomes exclusive when it compares favorably to the run-down area nearby. Capital moving between such areas generates the windfall profits that speculators hunt for. The carving out of portions of absolute space, whether of a risk-ridden or risk-free kind, leads, once again, to the dissolution of concrete space into abstract space and the agglomeration of spatialised units of exchange value.

Smith and Harvey's theory of uneven development, which systematises Ruth Glass's original insights, offers a powerful tool for understanding the changes taking place in North Kensington in the postwar period. Nineteenth-century development laid down the broad north-south division that was so marked in Kensington, as well as creating pockets of exclusivity such as the Ladbroke Estate (see the purple shaded area in Figure 1.20). The competitive, patchwork development of the northern half of the borough led to overproduction and the rapid 'slumification' of certain streets and squares, which could not, in any case, outdo the state-sponsored bonanza of development to the south, which took place following the Great Exhibition of 1851.³⁴⁸ In the postwar period, a range of forces sought to exploit the break-up of these existing neighbourhood patterns.³⁴⁹ Returning to our map (see Appendix 1 for a detailed version), it is clear that the early gentrifiers of Portobello Road were a minor symptom of redevelopment schemes pressing in on North Kensington from all sides.

From the south, numerous private developments approached Holland Park Avenue. These developments clustered around the major road widening plus office, retail and residential scheme at Notting Hill Gate, spearheaded by the LCC in collaboration with two firms

³⁴⁷ Smith, *Uneven Development*, p. 149.

³⁴⁸ Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Vintage, 2008), pp. 85-89 and Jenkins, *Landlords to London*, p. 91.

³⁴⁹ I draw here on Soja's concept of urban restructuring. Edward Soja, 'Urban and Regional Debates: The First Round', in Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 94-117.

controlled by the developer Jack Cotton (Figure 1.21).³⁵⁰ The £2.5 million scheme, which between 1957 and 1962 swept away the old congested high street, represents a classic example of the symbiosis (or parasitism, depending on how you see it) that exists between public works and private developments. In other well known cases, the LCC relied heavily on private land-assembly operations, permitting developers to bypass plot-ratio rules in exchange for the necessary acreage for its highway schemes: a straight swap conducted in the terms of abstract space above all else.³⁵¹ Notting Hill Gate saw another version of this exchange, with the LCC recouping part of its costs by leasing to Cotton the surplus land from its traffic scheme.

The redevelopment of Notting Hill Gate set the scene for other private developments encroaching on North Kensington from the south. It did so by acting on a scale that was only possible through the consolidatory efforts of the welfare state's planning apparatus. With the inclusion of upmarket private flats as well as commercial space, Cotton's scheme effectively captured value from two adjacent sources: the newly improved transport offer and the already gentrifying parts of Portobello Road, Campden Hill, and the crescents of the former Ladbroke Estate. As Neil Smith argues, these liminal zones, the edges of the city's 'troubled areas', often prove the most attractive for speculators because they strike a balance between promising a dramatic uplift in value and the plausibility of realising that value:

Developers do not just plunge into the heart of slum opportunity, but tend to take it piece by piece. Rugged pioneersmanship is tempered by financial caution.

Developers have a vivid block-by-block sense of where the frontier lies. They move in from the outskirts [...] They "pioneer" first on the gold coast between safe neighbourhoods on one side where property values are high and the disinvested slums on the other where opportunity is higher. Successive beachheads and defensible borders are established on the frontier.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ 'The village centres around St. Mary Abbots church and Notting Hill Gate', in FHW Sheppard ed., *Survey of London: Volume 37, Northern Kensington* (London: London County Council, 1973), 25-41, paragraphs 83-4, *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/pp25-41>> [accessed 30 July 2020].

³⁵¹ Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London: Vintage, 2008), pp. 501.

³⁵² Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 23.

Projects clustered around Notting Hill Gate included plans for a nine-storey block of luxury flats and the redevelopment of the Gaumont Cinema as shops and offices.³⁵³ Similar private developments advanced from the east across Bayswater, including a block of 'semi-luxury' flats and various offices.³⁵⁴



Fig. 1.21 – Notting Hill Gate, looking west (c. 1963). The tall block of flats, although it might resemble public housing, is part of the private development carried out by Jack Cotton. Photographer unknown, from Dave Walker, 'Redevelopment: Notting Hill Gate 1958-60', *The Library Time Machine* (30 June 2016) <<https://rbkclocalstudies.wordpress.com/2016/06/30/redevelopment-notting-hill-gate-1958-60/>> [accessed 30 July 2020].

Redevelopment of the southern and eastern fringes of the North Kensington fire zone had direct as well as indirect effects on the area's housing. Redevelopment displaced tenants through demolition and constricted the area available for working-class accommodation. But it also encouraged investment to be withheld in anticipation of new opportunities, disincentivising repairs in properties thought to have only a short remaining life. The Church

³⁵³ See the blue points numbered 6 and 12 in Appendix 1.

³⁵⁴ Appendix 1, blue points numbered 9 and 4.

Commissioner's office block on Eastbourne Terrace provides a prime example of this process.³⁵⁵ In what became a famed success story of the postwar office boom, one of the great estates teamed up with one of the new breed of developers to turn a tract of declining private rental housing into a £5.8 million profit (Figure 1.22).³⁵⁶ Whether or not such projects led directly to evictions, they had the effect of de-capitalising existing ground rents and pushing up potential ones. In the context of the long-term decline of Britain's private rental market, this 'rent gap' took the form of vacant possession values (i.e. the value a house could be sold for without sitting tenants) rising far above existing rental incomes.³⁵⁷ This added to the pressure on residential landlords to sell their properties, or, if they could not sell, for example if tenants had been guaranteed a period of security by the local rent tribunal, to cut back on maintenance costs.³⁵⁸

The first successful investments in a previously untapped area like Bayswater send a signal to other speculators. A self-reinforcing dynamic then takes hold, and if the process is allowed to gather momentum, the result will be a property boom, as happened in the 1950s when soaring land values led to overnight fortunes of tens of millions. What remains to be explained is the reverse process, de-capitalisation or capital withdrawal. With private renting in decline since the early twentieth century, landlords, including ground landlords, had every incentive to divest from the sector. The commercial property boom provided one of several alternative investment streams for extracted funds, as the Church Commissioners found in their collaboration with the developer Max Rayne.

³⁵⁵ Appendix 1, blue point numbered 4.

³⁵⁶ Marriott, *Property Boom*, pp. 82 and 85.

³⁵⁷ Hamnett and Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits*, pp. 71-2.

³⁵⁸ On the capitalisation of ground rents see Smith, 'Toward a Theory of Gentrification', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, pp. 543-5.



Fig. 1.22 – Eastbourne Terrace office development, Paddington, a kilometre east of the North Kensington fire zone (1959). Photograph by Henk Snoek, Royal Institute of British Architects picture library, RIBA11477.

However, the process of capital withdrawal was not necessarily straightforward. 99 year leases (even if they only had only a few years left to run), secure tenancies, and mortgage lenders' 'redlining' policies, could all block potential exit routes from an unprofitable investment.³⁵⁹ Capital withdrawal became extremely fraught in these circumstances. Outright destruction of property to claim insurance costs, including systematic arson, represents perhaps the most extreme method of withdrawal.³⁶⁰ Pre-empting the sclerotic outbursts of urban restructuring witnessed in US cities at the close of the postwar consensus, North Kensington in the 1950s and '60s experienced, on a smaller scale, an equally violent yet apparently unmotivated rash of fires.

Where leaseholders and ground landlords found themselves locked into undesirable properties, one option was to resort to the help of an intermediary. The slum landlord Peter

³⁵⁹ On discriminatory lending practices see Susan Smith, *The Politics of "Race" and Residence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), pp. 88-9.

³⁶⁰ Kerr, 'Who Burned Cleveland, Ohio?', in Bankoff, Lübken and Sands eds., *Flammable Cities*.

Rachman played this role handily. By buying up tail-end leases, for example from the Charecrofts estate in Shepherd's Bush, and then subdividing and re-mortgaging the individual units with loosely regulated lenders (using the rent 'sweated' from the expiring properties to pay off the interest), Rachman provided existing leaseholders with a helpful exit strategy.³⁶¹ The resulting overcrowding and disrepair – a concrete result of the spatial abstraction involved in Rachman's subdivision process – heaped up fire risks in multiple occupancy housing. It is no surprise that Rachman's properties are represented among the streets worst affected by fires in North Kensington.³⁶²

Rachman's methods represented one side of the see-saw pattern of uneven development. The tipping point came with two deregulatory moves by the Conservative government in the early '50s: the removal of Labour's development taxes in 1953 and the lifting of wartime building licenses in 1954.³⁶³ Together these measures helped trigger the commercial property boom. The state thus played a key role in accelerating uneven development. The other crucial piece of deregulatory state action was the partial decontrol of Rents in 1957, which made it easier for landlords to evict tenants. These deregulatory moves should not be seen simply as attempts to roll back the welfare state, for they were also central to the Conservative strategy of pivoting to a system of asset-based welfare; that is, a version of the welfare state consonant with the idea of a property owning democracy.

In Kensington, less than a year since the Rent Act had come into effect, 97 people had applied to the council for emergency accommodation following eviction notices. 153 were registered as unable to find anywhere else to live.³⁶⁴ Many more were probably affected. Based on returns from the 28 Metropolitan boroughs, the LCC estimated in May 1958 that 10,000 people in London, or over 350 per borough, would likely be evicted as a result of rent increases.³⁶⁵ This stream of displaced tenants in any case added to the pools of overcrowded housing in North Kensington. The Rent Act also failed in its intention to address the growing repairs backlog. Rather than encouraging landlords to use increased

³⁶¹ Shirley Green, *Rachman*, pp. 83-6. For locations, see Appendix 1, red points numbered 13, 19 and 48.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁶³ Marriott, *Property Boom*, p. 1.

³⁶⁴ '97 Tenants Rent Act Victims', *Kensington Post* (18 July 1958), p. 1.

³⁶⁵ Response to question by Lady Pepler dated 20 May 1958 found in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1958, LMA, LCCU1741, p. 333.

income to repair properties, rent hikes simply became another way to force out tenants before putting a house up for sale.³⁶⁶

The most valuable sites vacated along the south-eastern edges of the North Kensington fire zone were taken up by private developers. To the north and the west, a different story was unfolding. Led by the LCC, several large slum clearance schemes focused on the area known as Notting Dale that was 'hemmed in' between the railway lines, the canal and, from 1962, the Westway. Kensal New Town was the most famous, but there were other major schemes at the northern end of Portobello Road, extending in a loose arc all the way up to Maida Vale.³⁶⁷

The programme of slum clearance and rehousing in postwar Britain partially decommodified a particular sector of the private market – more so perhaps than any other branch of the welfare state bar universal healthcare.³⁶⁸ And yet the effects, with respect to the property system's overarching dynamic, were distinctly contradictory. In the first place, landlords and building owners were naturally reluctant to spend money on repairs if they knew their property was about to be knocked down, and so designating an area for slum clearance often hastened decline. On the other hand, new council housing and 'ancillary schemes' like schools and open spaces could so improve an area previously regarded as a lost cause that private developers were prompted to move in quickly afterwards.³⁶⁹ These contradictory effects amounted to yet a further iteration of the dialectic of disinvestment and reinvestment, which Kensington and Paddington, according to Ruth Glass, exhibited starkly.³⁷⁰ Slum clearance not only displaced more people than it could rehouse in the medium or even long term – leaving an 'overspill' in the Kensal New Town scheme of 143 families – it also prepared the ground for further accumulation.³⁷¹

³⁶⁶ Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman', *The Historical Journal*, p. 861.

³⁶⁷ Appendix 1, green points numbered 1, 7 and 9.

³⁶⁸ On decommodification and the welfare state see Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 37. The vagaries of postwar slum clearance have generated a fairly voluminous literature that I don't intend to recap here. For a historical overview see John English, Ruth Madigan and Peter Norman, *Slum Clearance* (London: Croom Helm, 1979) and Jim Yelling, 'The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955-85', *Urban History*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2000), 234-54.

³⁶⁹ Clare Ungerson, *Moving Home* (London: Bell and Sons, 1971), pp. 35-9.

³⁷⁰ Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *Aspects of Change*, p. xviii.

³⁷¹ 'Kensington Will Have to Rehouse 3,000', *Kensington Post* (11 Nov 1960), p. 1. More generally on this point see

Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing, 1945-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 80-1.

It is easy to see the ambivalences of such a project in a borough where the council waiting list remained stubbornly over the 2,000 mark.³⁷² What needs to be stressed, however, is the structurally discriminatory nature of these policies. Like many local boroughs, Kensington operated fairly stringent rehousing policies, so that only long-term residents of several years qualified for rehousing.³⁷³ The cut-off date for rehousing at the Kensal New Town scheme – a joint project with the LCC – was four to five years prior to the anticipated completion date; anyone moving into the area after that time would not be rehoused.³⁷⁴ These rehousing qualifications naturally excluded recent migrants.³⁷⁵ Such exclusions had an even greater impact in areas of high internal mobility like North Kensington, where the housing experience of black tenants involved moving from house to house to seek better conditions, or as a result of eviction.³⁷⁶

In effect, private rented tenants in North Kensington were being squeezed from two sides. Commercial development pressed in on North Kensington from the south and the east, while slum clearance schemes affected the north and the west. This led to more and more displaced people seeking accommodation in an increasingly constricted area. Soaring potential ground rents incentivised landlords to evict tenants or under-maintain their properties. The causes of fires in multiple occupancy homes must be sought in the combined results of overcrowding and disrepair stemming from this dynamic. House fires were not merely an inadvertent by-product of capitalist development, a socially produced 'diswelfare', as Richard Titmuss put it, but an expression of the necessary preconditions of continued accumulation in the property system. Uneven development must, by its nature, actively produce diswelfares. In order for redevelopment to proceed, there must first be de-development, inner city depression, capital withdrawal and so on. In order for urban restructuring to take place, first the fluid border zones of existing urban submarkets must

³⁷² According to local Labour councillors in March 1959, not one family on the waiting list had been rehoused in two and a half years. In June 1959 the waiting list stood at 2,549; a year later it was 2,273. 'Labour lambast Borough council housing policy', *Kensington Post* (27 March 1959), p. 6; 'Police Called to Town Hall Inquiry: Objector Accuses Council of "Grab" Tactics', *Kensington Post* (25 September 1959), p. 3; 'Listening Post', *Kensington Post* (14 October 1960), p. 1.

³⁷³ Kensington's rules were actually less strict than others. Southwark Council, for example, would only rehouse furnished tenants if they had lived in an area for three years prior to clearance plans being announced. Their forward acquisition policy meant that such announcements could take place up to seven years in advance of work starting on new housing. In the most unfortunate cases, tenants would have had to have lived in an area for ten years to qualify for rehousing. See Ungerson, *Moving Home*, p. 38.

³⁷⁴ 'Overcrowding: Warning by Council', *Kensington Post* (10 Jan 1958), p. 1 and 'Looking Down on the Kensal New Town', *Kensington Post* (20 Nov 1959), p. 1.

³⁷⁵ Susan Smith, *Politics of "Race" and Residence*, pp. 52 and 93.

³⁷⁶ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, pp. 56 and 93-4.

dessicate and rigidify. In order to break, the structure must become brittle. In order to carve out new areas of class monopoly rent, existing quarters must be compressed, densified, subdivided.

5. At Home with The Accidental

From the level of the district or neighbourhood we descend to that of the house and the home. How were the effects of urban restructuring inscribed on the domestic interior? The risk of fire spreading from house to house was no longer particularly serious, yet the urban restructuring examined in Section 4 led to mounting fire risks *within* multiple occupancy homes.³⁷⁷ This shift forces us to consider units smaller than the house as such. In multiple occupancy properties, a home as recognised by statutory bodies like rent tribunals (as I explore further in Part 3 of this thesis), might formally have been reduced to a single room, or a handful of rooms. But its lived reality did not necessarily align with these parameters. Ill-defined common areas such as landings, hallways and staircases meant the boundaries of the home-as-lived fell outside its legal or quasi-legal confines.

Somewhere amongst these overlapping spaces there is a question of agency. Overcrowding compromised basic amenities as well as vital privacy. But still we ought to ask: what use did people make of these compromised spaces within the tactics of everyday life? What resources of communality came together there – on the landing, in the hallway, or on the staircase? And moving in the opposite direction, back inside the home considered as a single room, were there not ways in which people multiplied the capacity of domestic space to support life's functions, themselves choosing to densify and subdivide their homes? What was the architecture, or perhaps better, the geography, of a single room? Here we have to think about objects like furniture, but also internal climates and atmospheres, as well as the more or less demarcated pathways traced by habits and actions. This is the realm of spatial practice. Ben Highmore has spoken about how central heating changes the geography of

³⁷⁷ 'Quarterly Notes: Statutory Control of Fire', *FPA Journal*, no. 45 (April 1959), 51. The FPA noted how for centuries statutory fire precautions 'have controlled only the risk of fire-spread between buildings.' Some relatively recent exceptions included the London Building Acts and a few other local authority Bye-Laws.

the home, but what could this mean in the case of multiple occupancy homes that lacked many of the hardwired, plumbed-in services of modern housing?³⁷⁸

Multiple occupancy households always engaged an element of risk when answering these questions. Improvised heating solutions were evidently linked to the risk of fire. But tenants never experienced these risks in an entirely passive way. I want to complicate the picture built up in the previous Sections of risk as something imposed from the outside. Risks are actively generated by movements of capital, but they are also actively engaged by individual and collective subjects. In the arguments that follow, I turn to a number of unofficial sources, including documentary photographs, oral histories, autobiographical writing and feature films. These various forms of visual and textual representation are of course no more unmediated repositories of domestic reality than administrative sources. Each entails different formal constraints and possibilities, different subject positions and power relations. In mediating everyday domestic life, textual and visual media highlight the element of conscious reflection and tactical intent inherent in that life.³⁷⁹

I begin with an image from Pearl Jephcott's book (Figure 1.23). The photograph – one of eleven in the book taken by someone called Tom Stephens – seems to confirm the author's description of cramped and cluttered rooms, with clothing and bedding draped about, and pieces of furniture almost butting up against each other. The photograph richly documents the material conditions of multiple occupancy homes, while avoiding any depiction of the people who actually live in this space. But it is also a strangely abstract image. Objects appear cropped and flattened, almost to the point of illegibility, as though the camera itself had internalised the forces of compression bearing in on the room. The diamond patterned wallpaper wraps around the photograph's notional horizon, enclosing a shallow space unmarked by either points of brilliance or heavy shadows. The corner of the room, its deepest point, barely registers. Black trousers, white pillows, a white blouse and other items of clothing in the foreground break up this monotonous field of grays. The wooden clothes rack leans forward slightly, barring the viewer's access to the back of the room.

³⁷⁸ Ben Highmore, *The Great Indoors: At Home in the Modern British House* (London: Profile Books, 2014), p. 35.

³⁷⁹ Consumption studies scholars have spoken of the 'lay theoretical constructions' contained in diary writing. See Jenny Rinkinen, Mikko Jalas and Elizabeth Shove, 'Object Relations in Accounts of Everyday Life', *Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 5, 870-885, p. 882.



Fig. 1.23 – One of eleven uncaptioned photographs by Tom Stevens from the centre-fold inserts in Pearl Jephcott's Book, *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).

The purpose of this photograph is at one level straightforward. It confirms the impression of a cramped, awkward, hazardous space as described in the text; it gives the text a texture, fills out its materiality. What spirit was it taken in? My description above suggests a different outlook to the photographs of migrants living in slum conditions that appeared in newspapers and magazines like *Picture Post* throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s. Paul Gilroy has suggested that these images carried an argument regarding the appalling housing conditions experienced by black tenants that words alone could not.³⁸⁰ The dinginess and overcrowding they showed was irrefutable. Equally though – and contrary to the appeal that journalists made to white liberal audiences – they might, for anyone inclined to believe such things, be taken as a sign that this was how the racialised other *chose* to live. Bert Hardy's 1949 photograph for *Picture Post*, for example, of Mrs Johnson and her grandchildren in an unlocated single room, works its ambiguous power through depth of field (Figure 1.24). This is completely opposite to the flattening and partitioning of space seen in the photograph from Jephcott's book. The almost baroque composition of bodies, tracing an arc from the

³⁸⁰ Paul Gilroy, *Black Britain: a Photographic History* (London: Saqi, 2007), pp. 89 and 94.

foreground to the background and returning again to the foreground, dramatises a certain idea of overcrowding. As Lynda Nead has noted in connection with other *Picture Post* reports, the incontrovertibility of this situation seems to reduce the article's title – 'Is there a British Colour Bar?' – to a merely rhetorical question.³⁸¹

But testifying to the harsh reality of overcrowded housing is not all this photograph does. Strong elements of light and shadow give objects and figures a solidity that seems inseparable from their narrative potential: the thickness of the grandmother's forearm and the sureness of her gesture; the little boy perched on the bed, who crosses his legs and folds his arms like any London commuter; the beaming features of the girl kneeling at the back of the room; the simple wooden cot that looks almost like a vegetable crate; the old fashioned dressing table (a family heirloom, or part of the package in this 'furnished room'?); and, the ultimate sign of destitution, the dampness peeling the paper away from the walls. It is at once a deeply humanistic and yet problematically voyeuristic image, which speaks of the photographer's power to enter the home and reveal both the depths of poverty and the fullness of everyday life hidden there. The depiction of objects and bodies shows a kind of self-consciously earthy familiarity, an atmosphere not totally dissimilar to the one conjured by Richard Hoggart in his description of a universalised working-class home, based, ostensibly, on his own childhood. As in Hoggart's text, the home in Hardy's photograph is 'a burrow deeply away from the outside world', a place 'muddled and sprawling', 'unsophisticated and unconscious' where 'magnificently expressive', care-worn faces have a 'fineness without artificial light' that defies any notion of glamour or heroism.³⁸² This abortive transposition of a certain structure feeling associated with British working-class life across 'the colour bar' is itself a significant, never-quite-realised achievement.³⁸³ But unlike Hoggart's domestic scene there is little comfort let alone 'respectability' in the room that Hardy depicts. The photograph is undeniably an image of 'squalor'. The impression of unrelenting poverty threatens to drown out any humanistic warmth while simultaneously lending the image its power.

³⁸¹ Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke*, p. 165.

³⁸² Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, pp. 34, 37 and 44.

³⁸³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), pp. 128-135.



Fig. 1.24 – Photograph by Bert Hardy in Robert Kee, ‘Is there a British Colour Bar?’, *Picture Post*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (1 July 1949), 24. No location given.

When we turn back to the photograph in Jephcott’s book (Figure 1.23), we find the gloomy atmosphere of Hardy’s photograph has lifted somewhat. Possible testament to the gains won by black British communities in the thirteen to fourteen years separating the two images we are no longer exactly in the realm of ‘squalor’. As far as the image itself is concerned, this must remain partly conjecture; we don’t know whether the room belonged to a white or a black household. Jephcott’s study dealt with both white and black tenants, and this is just one of several unknowns introduced by the lack of figures. Yet despite its relative abstraction, the image is not entirely lacking in narrative supports. The photograph in Jephcott’s book exists nose-to-nose with the material world of the single room, and it is the material itself rather than the investigator’s or the photographer’s humanistic, or voyeuristic, gaze that slowly imposes on the viewer an understanding of the lived experience of this space.

Take the hanging clothes in the foreground: they are not strewn about, but draped, carefully, hung out to air. The bedding too is carefully folded. The wooden frame which the clothes hang from is in fact a fold-up bed. Someone has folded it up and leant it against a small table or dresser that we can just about see beneath the pillows. Now the bed doubles as a clothes rail. By the rightward fall of the faint shadows we know there is a window letting daylight into

the room from the left. It might be morning, or midday, or afternoon, but in any case not evening or nighttime. Importantly, there is not the kind of apparent indifference to the outside world seen in Hardy's photograph; this room-home is not a 'burrow' hidden away from the world. The changing cycles of the day matter and are marked in the arrangement of objects. Behind the fold-up bed, to the left, there is another table, topped by a wipe-down plastic cover. Like everything else it looks spotless. The fruit bowl on the table is stocked high. The wallpaper meanwhile isn't peeling. Perhaps the tenants of this room put it up themselves, as one of the Notting Hill residents interviewed by Mike Phillips recalled:

I remember the first time, I think it was 1964, I put up some wallpaper in a place. It was ivy leaf design climbing up on a white paper and the landlord come in and see it. He said, "Did you do that?" I said, "yes". I decorated seven houses for that man. You understand? Just because it looked bright. And that was the first time I realised that we was moving away from that dirt and dinginess.³⁸⁴

The 'bright' wallpaper marks time as well as space. This minimal alteration to the domestic environment suggests – within a precarious, transitional space – another kind of transition, a slight gap, a breathing space, the possibility of a turning point in one man's life away from dirt and dinginess towards something better. The wallpaper in this case connects to the interviewee's practical skill and aesthetic eye.

Perhaps not all of this applies to the room photographed in Jephcott's book. There are too many unknowns. Nor is this to say that the kind of power dynamics involved in Hardy's photograph are somehow absent. When Jephcott asked if her photographer, Tom Stephens, could take a picture, did the tenant take a minute to wipe down the table and neaten up the pile of bedding? What role do shame or pride play in a relationship like that? How does the encounter decode and recode ideas like cleanliness and respectability? Part 2 of this thesis ('Lonely Londoners') deals with some of these questions. For current purposes they hint at how the engagement between investigator-photographer and tenant-subject gets displaced onto the objects and materials of the room itself. The material inscription of everyday spatial practice replaces the rhetoric of gestures and gazes.

³⁸⁴ Mike Phillips, *Notting Hill in the Sixties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p. 75.

But the important thing to emphasise, I think, is the evident care and even joy that has gone into the room, and which the photograph reveals almost against its own intentions. I say ‘against its own intentions’ partly because the blandness of the photograph, so lacking in Bert Hardy’s compositional flair, acts as a pretty effective disguise for these impressions. The grayscale tone contributes to this masking effect. Compare it for example to the following interior shot from the 1961 film *Flame in the Streets*, directed by Roy Ward Baker, and note again the wallpaper and the wipe-down tablecloth, all in light colours (Figure 1.25).



Fig. 1.25 – Still from *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961), showing one half of the single room where Gabe and Judy Gomez live.

Adapted from the play *Hot Summer Night* by Ted Willis,³⁸⁵ *Flame in the Streets* centres on two black and white couples and the hostility they draw from the community of the North London transition zone where the film is set.³⁸⁶ Gabe Gomez, a self-effacing trade unionist, is partnered to Judy, pictured above. Kathie Palmer, the daughter of the white shop steward at Gabe’s workplace, is meanwhile secretly dating Peter Lincoln, a supply teacher from Jamaica and Gabe’s neighbour within the same multiple occupancy property. *Flame in the Streets* was shot in the wake of the Notting Hill riots, and the tense political atmosphere of those times, as much as Baker’s taut direction, imprints itself on the film. Heated debates in

³⁸⁵ Ted Willis, *Hot Summer Night* (London: Samuel French, 1959).

³⁸⁶ Some reviewers identified the film’s location as Camden Town. See ‘The Colour Bar’, *Guardian* (24 June 1961), p. 5. The original play was set in Wapping. Willis, *Hot Summer Night*, title page.

Parliament about the introduction of strict immigration controls also hung over its release.³⁸⁷

The film – one of the first to deal seriously with race relations issues – plays the brightness of domestic interiors against the muddy, noirish atmosphere of the streets. In Gabe and Judy Gomez' room (Figure 1.24), the decoration has a pronounced, even strenuous cheerfulness. The bunting, the floral lampshade, the checked tablecloth and the pastel wallpaper jostle for attention in one of Baker's typically constricted spaces.³⁸⁸ In this case, however, that constriction expresses less a spiritual exertion, as in some of the director's other films, than a national one: can the British character with its values of civility and tolerance cope with the shock of the colonial other arriving in its heartlands? And what does that shock say about the far from ancient pedigree of those values, and the fragility of the consensus supposedly based on them?³⁸⁹ As Nead has argued, colour film in the 1950s and '60s (and colour in magazines and adverts) was inseparable from questions of race. Technicolour was only ever a breath away from 'colour bar'. Colour was brash, exotic, tempting and dangerous. It burst upon the grayscale world of austerity Britain.³⁹⁰ The use of colour in *Flame in the Streets* can indeed be brash but it also attempts to reassure; it is defensive as well as intrusive. The bunting and table cloth in Gabe and Judy Gomez' room seem almost like a barricade erected against a hostile world outside. And in the film, that world – the street – is indeed hostile. It is a place where gangs of teddy boys roam, where people tell you to 'move on' from where you don't belong, and where it is always cold and dark.

By contrast, the open door in the photograph from Jephcott's book (Figure 1.23) creates – as Roland Barthes might have put it – a small puncture in the photographic surface.³⁹¹ Would it be going too far to say that the outside world seeps in through that opening? The atmosphere is fragile, precarious, transitional, risky, but not entirely hostile. But aside from these important atmospheric dimensions, the image shows the elements of a spatial

³⁸⁷ On the film's context see Kevin Foster, 'New Faces, Old Fears: Migrants, Asylum Seekers and British Identity', *Third Text*, vol. 20, no. 6 (November 2006), 683-91, p. 684. What would become the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962 was first discussed in Parliament that year.

³⁸⁸ Dave Kerr, 'A Steady Hand: General-Purpose Pro Roy Ward Baker Was British Cinema's Consummate Invisible Man', *Film Comment*, vol. 48, no. 5 (September-October 2012), 14-15.

³⁸⁹ Chris Waters argues that this relatively new sense of national belonging was constructed as an alternative to the heroic, aggressive image of adventuring imperial power. Dating from the interwar period, it was strengthened during the Second World War and the confrontation with Nazism. Waters "'Dark Strangers" in Our Midst', *Journal of British Studies*, pp. 219-20.

³⁹⁰ Nead, *Tiger in the Smoke*, p. 133. See also Nead's discussion of the 1959 Basil Dearden film *Sapphire*, p. 178.

³⁹¹ Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

practice. The bed is folded and propped against the dressing table. Between the dining table with the fruit bowl and the palisade created by the now upright bed frame, a sort of corridor is created. The space has been subdivided. Behind the bed – in the foreground of the image – other objects are stacked, stored, put out of sight, or at least out of mind.

As well as the bedding there is a suitcase (the photograph crops out most of it, so that only a small corner is visible). We know from Michael McMillan and others that suitcases like this, also known as 'grips', far from being simply clutter or potential fire hazards, as in Jephcott's description, held an important place in migrant homes, often containing treasured belongings such as bibles, photographs, vinyl records, and family mementos.³⁹² McMillan brings together a range of oral testimony as well objects that speak to important, often neglected aspects of specifically British-Caribbean domestic life. While some of these collected insights are highly specific, others surely have a wider application. I know from the difference between my own privately rented flat and that of my mother – who moved to London from Mauritius in 1967 – that suitcases have different meanings for the two of us. When they aren't on the move, suitcases are bulky, awkward items. They take up much needed space. In the flat where I live with my partner, suitcases are stacked on top of the cupboard and filled with objects that we consider basically redundant but can't, for one reason or another, get rid of. For my mother, suitcases have a different role. They contain not redundant but special items, especially her best clothes, folded on wire hangers and wrapped in dry-cleaners' plastic. The suitcases' contents are provisions for an imagined future, when the best clothes will be brought out, as well a memento of the past, for example a dress from a relative's wedding. Storing, removing from sight, cordoning off, putting away, closing the cupboard door or the suitcase lid – these actions structure space and time.

The photograph from Jephcott's book hints at how actions like this are especially important for people living in cramped conditions. For some first generation British migrants, suitcases created not just a space within a space, but symbolically a home within a home. The portable and lockable nature of suitcases is essential to this function. From a symbol of passage, the suitcase becomes a treasure chest. Yet it retains its link to forced as well as voluntary movement. Part of its imagined security lies precisely in the ability to get up and

³⁹² Michael McMillan ed., *The Front Room: Migrant Aesthetics in the Home* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009), p. 5.

leave with one's most precious belongings in tow – a meaning reinforced in areas of high internal mobility like North Kensington, where the threat of eviction hovered daily. The photograph in Jephcott's book 'backgrounds' such features; the suitcase is barely visible, the fold-up bed is almost illegible.³⁹³ In this way, the photograph reproduces the *potentiality* of domestic hazards, ensuring they reside everywhere and nowhere in the field of the everyday.

Photographers working in different contexts have done the opposite, foregrounding the physically and symbolically active character of everyday practice. Consider the photograph below by Michael Stroud, taken in 1962 for the *Daily Express* but not actually used in the paper (Figure 1.26). In the story that occasioned the photograph, a young woman, Carmen Bryan, narrowly avoided deportation under the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, after a debate in the House of Commons and something of a media sensation forced the Home Secretary to intervene on the grounds that a minor shoplifting offence didn't warrant such draconian treatment.³⁹⁴ The image shows Carmen's fiancé, Leslie Walker, in his Kilburn flat on the day of the couple's marriage. The suitcases on top of the cupboard serve as a reminder of both Leslie and Carmen's accumulated personal history – a token of how they have arrived at their life in this room, with its polished bent-ply veneer cupboard and matching bed – while at the same time suggesting their still precarious situation, their 'deportability' in the eyes of the state. Leslie Walker himself stands with an attaché case in one hand, further complicating this impression. The case both completes the formal posing and suggests its owner's mobility, less as an eternal migrant and more as a self-confident urbanite. Altogether the image speaks of a complex mixture of astute poise and disarmed vulnerability.

³⁹³ This idea of 'backgrounding' comes from Greg Noble, 'Comfortable and Relaxed: Furnishing the Home and the Nation', *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (April 2002), 53-66.

³⁹⁴ Robin Parkin, 'Carmen and Her Leslie', *Daily Mirror*, 23 July 1962, p. 15 and 'Carmen, the Girl the MPs Saved, Is Married', *Daily Express* (31 July 1962), p. 6.



Fig. 1.26 – Photograph by Michael Stroud showing Leslie Walker on the day he is about to marry Carmen Bryan, recently saved from deportation. Photograph from *Getty Images* <<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/license/3136262>> [accessed 14 January 2018].

Suitcases often contained valuables and mementos. Other types of partitioning practice were about providing a sense of containment for subjects rather than objects, screening the body and offering temporary walls for the imagination. Among the oral histories collected by Michael McMillan about postwar migrant homes, community organiser Norma Walker recalls how her family used to hang a blanket to divide the space of their single room, creating in this way a ‘front room’ and a ‘bedroom’.³⁹⁵ This temporary bedroom space ensured a minimal threshold of personal privacy.³⁹⁶ One of the other photographs in Jephcott’s book evidences another screening device: a folding screen with a metal frame (Figure 1.27). Iris Marion Young has argued that the cultivation of privacy between members of a household

³⁹⁵ McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 26.

³⁹⁶ One of the first ‘improvements’ noted by Rebekah Lee in her study of home improvements in Apartheid era Cape Town was the hanging of curtains in place of the doors that state provided ‘shells’ were lacking. This was followed later by the installation of permanent doors, multiple extensions into the surrounding yard area and rearrangements of internal walls. Rebekah Lee, ‘Reconstructing “Home” in Apartheid Cape Town: African Women and the Process of Settlement’, *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, (September 2005), 611-630, p. 617.

through everyday practice is vital to mental wellbeing and a sense of agency.³⁹⁷ Partitioning devices of one kind or another played an important part in multiple occupancy homes.

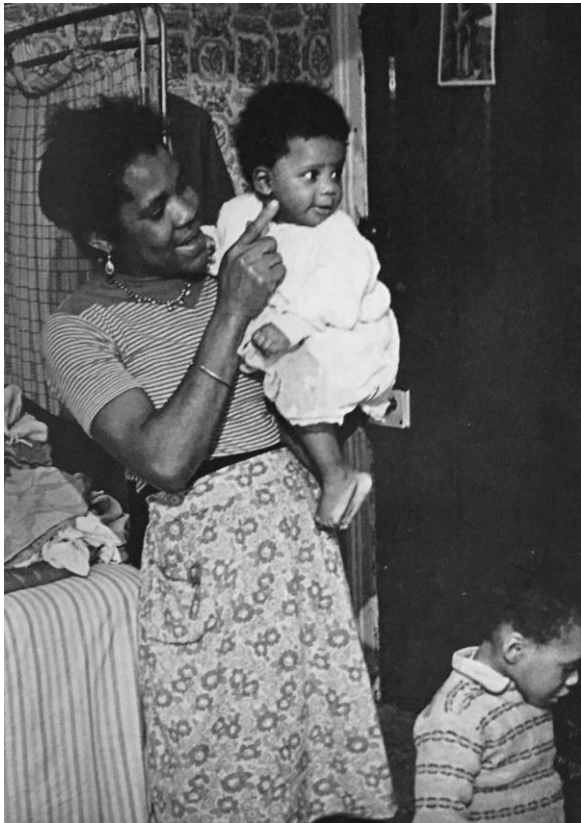


Fig. 1.27 – Uncaptioned photograph by Tom Stevens from Pearl Jephcott, *A Troubled Area* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964). Note the folding screen in the background.

Figure 1.27 breaks with the tendency of most of the photographs in Jephcott's book to either not show people at all, or to show them obliquely, at a distance, in motion or half-obscured. Here the *mise-en-scène* is candid rather than distanced. We see a mother and her child in a private moment of delight, the little boy in the lower part of the photograph unusually cropped. The apparent casualness is altogether different to Bert Hardy's photograph. Supplying an accidental meta-commentary, the folding screen in the background reminds us of the staging underpinning this apparent effortlessness: the screen has been drawn back, pushed behind the figures, reduced to the clutter of the background. The space is again shallow and somewhat difficult to read. The photograph declines to show us the 'geography'

³⁹⁷ Iris Marion Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', in Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 123-154, p. 152. For a recent sociological view see Caroline Barratt and Gill Green, 'Making a House a Home: Using Visual Ethnography to Explore Issues of Identity and Well-Being in the Experience of Creating a Home Amongst HMO Tenants', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (February 2017), 1-18.

of the room, reducing it to a token object in the background. By way of comparison, take this still from *Flame in the Streets*, where the room's geography is amply laid out for the viewer (Figure 1.28).



Fig. 1.28 – The geography of the single room. Still from *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961).

The still shows the moment Kathie Palmer mistakenly enters one of several rooms in the multiple occupancy property where she is searching for her lover, Peter Lincoln. Within this single room – captured in a single cinematic moment – the panoply of life's activities are laid out like separate dishes on a table: clothes drying on the grate of the fire in the bottom left, more laundry hanging from a line on the ceiling, a woman bathing a baby in a tin bath, another woman doing the ironing on the dining table, the stove in the far corner, a big wrought-iron bed and behind it a man playing a double bass. Everything has its place. The room has its geography. It is a complex image because although at one level it merely confirms the expected overcrowding of the black, multiple occupancy household – which the film has already briefed us on via the racist outburst of Kathie's mother ('You don't know how they live, like animals, 6, 8, 10 to a room!') – in other ways it refuses these stereotypes. The room is not 'squalid', despite its small size. Colour plays a role again, as does music. In a dramatic reverse-shot cut from Kathie on the landing, about to enter, to Kathie opening the door, viewed face-on from within the interior, the room re-frames the protagonist. Kathie

becomes a surrogate of the investigator who goes from house to house and room to room, and the viewer's identification with her is for a moment undone.

Montage produces this surprising alienation effect in a way that remains beyond the reach of either photography or theatre. Compare this with the set for the original play by Ted Willis (Figure 1.29). The play restricts its scenography to the Palmers' family home, rather than the multiple occupancy property where Peter Lincoln and Gabe and Judy Gomez live. The set presents the Palmers' house in cross-section, giving audiences a synoptic view of the different spaces where the narrative unfolds. The respectable working-class home with its yard forms a microcosm of the play's world. The space is holistic rather than fragmented.



Fig. 1.29 – Stage set for *Hot Summer Night*. Ted Willis, *Hot Summer Night* (London: Samuel French, 1959), facing p. 2. Photograph by Angus McBean.

Yet in its eagerness to display what I am calling the geography of the room, the film, like the play, strips away any possibility of concealment. The shot in Figure 1.28 is from the back of the room, as if one wall has been removed like a doll's house. By momentarily displacing Kathie's perspective, screening devices such as the table which conceals the baby's bath and the hanging laundry which blocks potential sight-lines, are rendered null and void. The viewer is positioned deep within the room. Activities tucked away in corners, such as the man practising his comically large instrument at the foot of the bed, are brought close to us.

What this demonstrates, I think, is that there is no easy position for the camera to take. Visualisations of the un-ideal home are always problematic. But by reading across multiple

sources, we can strive for a critical understanding of these usually hidden interior spaces – without naively privileging visibility as such. A critical reading of the photographs from Jephcott's book reminds us that as well as the 'flimsy partitions' erected by landlords that the LCC warned about, tenants had their own ways of subdividing space, maximising its practical and symbolic usefulness and creating thresholds of privacy. These partitioning practices engaged an element of risk; they involved taking risks on, increasing potential dangers in one area to make real gains in another. All this of course took place in conditions not of tenants' own choosing, often amid severe hardships. Nonetheless, there is a continuum stretching from the simplest alterations such as hanging a blanket, to more permanent changes such as papering a wall or acquiring of a prize piece of furniture (a folding bed, a radiogram, or a matching bedroom suite). This continuum speaks of multiple occupancy tenants' investment in their homes, and the desire to make these spaces into something stable and hospitable.

These everyday spatial practices have to be seen, I would argue, alongside other, more ambitious housing strategies in the private rental sector. Here I cite one of the best documented ones: the blues clubs that sprung up in migrant households in North Kensington in the 1950s and '60s. These informal, mostly illegal venues, set up usually in the basement or ground floor rooms of multiple occupancy properties, were in many ways direct extensions of the space-intensifying practices discussed above. A Bluespot radiogram (hence the 'blues' in the name) was usually the heart of these intermittent institutions. A piece of domestic equipment didn't just double its function in this case, but became the centrepiece of a semi-public space. Setting up a club meant clearing furniture away to make space for dancing. A bar might be improvised out of a table across a doorway. In other cases, club organisers built their own furniture or redecorated extensively.³⁹⁸ Blues clubs transformed the amenities and appearance of the domestic environment, creating places of black safety and cosmopolitan sociability.³⁹⁹

Cecil Gutzmore argues that the blues clubs represented a 'private', relatively non-political moment in Black London culture, prior to the militancy of the late 1960s and 1970s. This

³⁹⁸ The various features of blues clubs described above are from Abdul Malik, *Michael de Freitas to Michael X*, p. 72, Phillips, *Notting Hill in the Sixties*, p. 71, McMillan, *The Front Room*, pp. 36-7 and Green, *Rachman*, p. 93.

³⁹⁹ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, pp. 290 and 311.

suggests their continuity with everyday spatial practices, but it also downplays their significance, including how they evolved into political organising centres like the famous Mangrove restaurant.⁴⁰⁰ But if these spaces were at one level private and defensive, their misappropriation of the domestic sphere was surely part of their *offensive* value in the eyes of both municipal officials as well as racist thugs.⁴⁰¹ In any case, if the clubs were 'defensive', they mounted a more than purely symbolic defence. On the third night of the Notting Hill riots, a large group barricaded itself in numbers 6 and 9 Blenheim Crescent, the latter also known as Totobags cafe, or, 'the Fortress'. Bottles and other objects rained down on gangs of rioting teddy boys attempting to cross the gauntlet marking the shifting line between Notting Dale and Notting Hill.⁴⁰²

Figure 1.30 shows a photograph by Charlie Phillips of the site of another blues club, presumably the victim of one of the many petrol bomb attacks that took place on black households throughout the 1950s and '60s.⁴⁰³ Phillips moved to London from Jamaica in 1956, aged about 12, and, as a young boy, began taking photographs soon after, later working for magazines including *Vogue*, *Life* and *Harper's Bazaar*.⁴⁰⁴ For Phillips, having a camera, and developing his growing skills as a photographer, worked as a line of credit in the semi-underground world of the blues clubs. In an interview he describes bribing bouncers with the promise of a portrait.⁴⁰⁵ Figure 1.30 is therefore a photograph by an insider, a young initiate, looking now from the outside onto a scene of destruction. The photograph collaborates with the graffiti (spray painted onto the building after the fire that destroyed it) to commemorate the life that existed in this place. Both photograph and graffiti mark the building out as not just any generic rental property, but a place with a specific meaning for the community that inhabited and transformed this space. The gaping black

⁴⁰⁰ Cecil Gutzmore, 'Carnival, the State and the Black Masses in the United Kingdom', in Winston James and Clive Harris eds., *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain* (London: Verso, 1993), 207-229, p. 214.

⁴⁰¹ Regarding LCC efforts to close down blues clubs see for example agenda item no. 4 dated 17 November 1959 titled 'Clubs in North Kensington - Planning Permission Lacking', in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1959, p. 733, LCC Collection, LMA LCCU1742.

⁴⁰² Laurence Turner et. al., 'Bombs in Race Riot', *Daily Mail* (2 September 1958), 1 and 7.

⁴⁰³ See for example 'Petrol "bomb" thrown at house in london', *Daily Mail* (17 August 1954), p. 1; 'Bomb Flung Into House: Three Hurt', *Daily Mail* (8 September 1958), p. 1; 'Fire Bomb Thrown at West Indian Family', *Daily Mail* (19 June 1963), p. 9; 'Letter box "bomb"' (26 November 1968), p. 5; 'Fire-Bomb Terror in the Night', *Daily Mirror* (15 June 1959), p. 19; 'Twins on "Petrol Bomb" Charge', *Daily Mirror* (1 October 1963), p. 6; 'Petrol "Bombs" Explode as Six Watch TV', *Daily Mirror* (30 September 1963), p. 12.

⁴⁰⁴ For brief a brief biography of Charlie Phillips see 'Notting Hill Couple', V&A <<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1225389/notting-hill-couple-photograph-phillips-charlie/>> [accessed 3 August 2020] and 'Charlie Phillips', Tate <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/charlie-phillips-10634>> [accessed 3 August 2020].

⁴⁰⁵ 'Interview with Charlie Phillips' (2013), Black Cultural Archives Oral/3/3, 3.1.

windows stand as haunting reminders of the absent life within, while the stark white lettering insists on the house's continued significance.



Fig. 1.30 – Untitled photograph by Charlie Phillips, in Mike Phillips, *Notting Hill in the Sixties* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p. 14. Photograph undated but probably around 1960.

So far I have dealt with practices of subdivision and partitioning. Heating practices were another important way of altering the space (and time) of multiple occupancy homes. I use the phrase ‘heating practices’ to highlight, following Elizabeth Shove, the diverse ways in which tenants incorporate domestic technologies into strategies of everyday life.⁴⁰⁶ There is now a growing literature on how consumers interact with objects in the home, but the experience of multiple occupancy tenants has largely escaped attention.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organisation of Normality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 15. See also David Nye, ‘Consumption of Energy’, in Frank Trentmann ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 307-325, p. 308.

⁴⁰⁷ Rinkinen, Jalas and Shove, ‘Object Relations in Accounts of Everyday Life’. In another study, Shove and her collaborator Martin Hand make the deliberate choice of excluding all tenure categories except owner occupiers. No explanation is given of the class implications of this move. See Martin Hand and Elizabeth Shove, ‘Condensing Practices: Ways of Living with a Freezer’, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2007), 79-104.

Given that multiple occupancy households did not have access to central heating, what alternative heating practices did they adopt or invent, and what risks did they engage in the process? Another photograph from Jephcott's book (Figure 1.31) shows a small oil stove on a landing, next to what looks like a cooker. Once again, the image materialises the text's argument about hazardous conditions in multiple occupancy homes.⁴⁰⁸

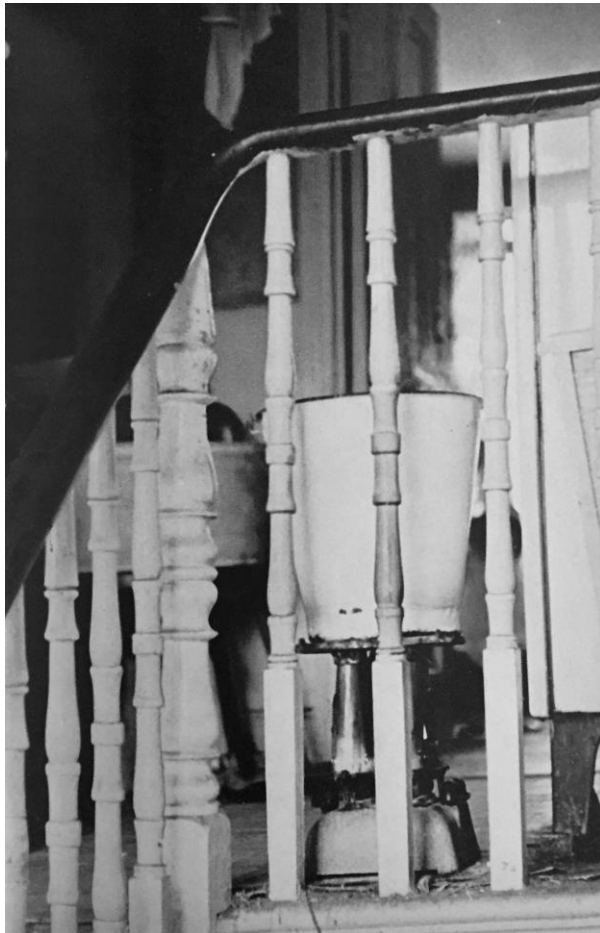


Fig. 1.31 – Photograph from Pearl Jephcott's book, *A Troubled Area* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), showing a small oil stove on a landing.

We have to brush this photograph against the grain to tease out the everyday practices evidenced by it. Organisations that were instrumental in home safety culture like the FPA regarded shared spaces such as staircases, hallways and landings as sites of danger.⁴⁰⁹ Leaving an oil stove where it might be knocked over by people coming and going was hardly

⁴⁰⁸ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, p. 105.

⁴⁰⁹ 'Escape from Fire in Dwelling Houses', *FPA Journal*, no. 39 (October 1957), 150-2, p. 150 and 'Electricity as a Cause of Fire', *FPA Journal*, no. 53 (July 1961), 166-9, p. 167 in which the FPA pointed to the unfortunate habit of installing switch gear in cupboards under the stairs, where the accumulation of dust and stored 'junk' increased the risk of fire.

sensible, surely. But there were in fact good reasons for doing so. The metal pail on top of the stove shows that the appliance is being used as a kettle rather than a space heater. Perhaps the water in the pail is being warmed for a bath; or someone might have put it on the boil for cooking. Apart from well known fire hazards, oil heaters also produced huge amounts of condensation, roughly in a one-to-one ratio with the amount of paraffin consumed – reason enough to move the object out to the landing.⁴¹⁰

Improvised kitchens like this speak volumes about the lack of basic amenities in multiple occupancy homes. But the presence of the oil heater also hints at how tenants made the most of threshold areas like landings. Rather than neglected or inanimate areas within the house, these spaces could be storage areas, meeting places, sites for children's games and more. The carefully observed production design in *Flame in the Streets* plays on the adaptability of these spaces in a number of scenes. When Kathie first enters the house where she is searching for Peter, she is confronted with a bicycle, two well stuffed canvas sacks, and a pram (Figure 1.32). The gloomy atmosphere perfectly reflects her unfamiliarity with this intense *use* of space. The middle-class hallway's standard paraphernalia – a stand to leave your hat on the way in, a mirror to check your appearance on the way out, possibly some pot plants – have been replaced with items of a wholly practical kind. In another scene we see children playing on the stairs (Figure 1.33), and one of the film's key dialogues, between Kathie and Judy Gomez, happens on the upstairs landing.

For multiple occupancy properties, the landing could also be one of the warmest areas of the house. In his childhood autobiography about growing up in North Kensington, Alan Johnson recalls how in his home on Southam Street, the stove on the landing was one of three main sources of heat. Warmth was 'limited to a radius of about three feet' around the stove on the landing and the coal fire in the main room; or it was to be found under the covers, hugging an old earthenware hot water bottle that his mother transferred from bed to bed.⁴¹¹ Heating practices like this are a recurrent theme in Johnson's text. More than any visual detail, these felt practices give the home a geography; they lodge space in memory and mould the amorphous background of domestic life. Before central heating, houses always had their

⁴¹⁰ On the calculations of one public health specialist, oil stoves were the worst heating method in terms of condensation. AG Day, 'Condensation in Dwellings and Domestic Heating Systems', *Royal Society of Health Journal*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (January/February 1968), 17-20, p. 18.

⁴¹¹ Alan Johnson, *This Boy: A Memoir of a Childhood*, second edn. (London: Corgi, 2014), p. 36.

warm and cold areas; as Ben Highmore wonderfully observes, the hallway in middle-class homes was a particularly inhospitable climate for the semi-private telephone calls that took place there.⁴¹² But in the multiple occupancy home this climatic geography was often reversed, landings being a place of warmth and sociability.



Fig. 1.32 – Still from *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961), showing Kathie Palmer entering the hallway of the multiple occupancy house where she is looking for her lover, Peter Lincoln.



Fig. 1.33 – Still from *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961). Children playing on the steps as Gabe Gomez returns home from work.

⁴¹² Highmore, *Great Indoors*, p. 30.

Returning to Jephcott's oil heater, we might wonder what became of the appliance when it returned to its rightful or wrongful place within the room itself. In one of the book's important set pieces, an oil heater stands in as a substitute hearth:

The clothes are dried round and cooking pans and pails of water are balanced precariously on these oil stoves. [...] The writer watched two of them [young children] busy at one such stove which stood within a foot of a floppy bedstead and of the baby in his cot. They were dropping bits of paper into the top of the stove to see the pretty light.⁴¹³

For the social investigator this is a scene of danger, perhaps of recklessness. But it is also an image of warmth and aesthetic delight. Steve Pope, the longtime editor of *The Voice* newspaper, remembers how as a child, the sight of the oil heater was a comforting one, associated with rich sensorial experiences: the smell of paraffin, the sight of the flame, and the feel of the heat, wafting up from the vents and radiating out of the metal drum.⁴¹⁴ People were well aware of the dangers of oil stoves, but apart from being cheap, they had strong symbolic associations.

The oil stove offered a mobile focal point for family life, as well a basic source of heat. It could be moved from one end of a room to another depending on the rhythm of the day, creating different atmospheres within a single space. Like the radiogram, it was one of several key objects that helped sustain migrant families' senses of personal integrity and self-respect; their sense of differentiation from an undifferentiated 'squalor'. Its output of heat formed a baseline of comfort hovering above absolute poverty, enabling other forms, other atmospheres – like music and guests' voices – to join the fray. The warm centre of the oil stove helped initiate a change in the structure of domestic feeling that extended outwards, beyond the house and into the city. The passage quoted earlier from one of Mike Phillips' interviewees continues in this vein:

⁴¹³ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, p. 49.

⁴¹⁴ 'I liked the paraffin heater because it wasn't as mysterious as central heating - you could see what was going on, see the fire, feel the heat and smell burnt paraffin oil, which was reassuring.' Steve Pope quoted in Michael McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 34.

That was the first time I realised that we was moving away from that dirt and dinginess. You know, you're living with a paraffin heater and you're going out, you're walking down the road like you're still alright.⁴¹⁵

This is not to deny the dangers surrounding these appliances. It is, however, to oppose the morally loaded and potentially racialised discourse of home safety culture. In Jephcott's reasoning, lack of familiarity with the British climate put migrant households at greater risk when using heating appliances. At one level this may well have been true, but it became highly problematic when couched in the language of civilizational adaptation. Reckoning (falsely) that most had come from a rural background, Jephcott supposed that Caribbean migrants were unaccustomed to urban life. 'Back home, too, rubbish disappears from view when thrown into the bush, and the torrential rains are a cleansing agent'; migrants therefore still had 'to learn the ropes of metropolitan living.'⁴¹⁶ In a somewhat more measured tone, the LCC cited 'the influx of workers from warmer climates overseas' as one of the reasons for the spike in fires caused by oil heaters.⁴¹⁷

The decision to engage with risks in this way should not be seen as backward, nor simply the inevitable result of external pressures. Affective qualities join with issues of cost, budgetary control and routine. Not only were oil stoves relatively inexpensive in terms of the cost of the actual appliance, they were among the very cheapest types of heating on a unit output basis too. Studies showed that only oil-fired boilers, or cast iron stoves or boilers running on coke or anthracite, could generate the same output of useful heat for less money. Oil stoves even outperformed the temperamental gas boilers of the day. Condensation notwithstanding, they were far more efficient on this measure than electric heaters or gas fires.⁴¹⁸ A decent oil stove could heat a typical living room in a terraced house morning and evening during winter for about five shillings and three pence per week.⁴¹⁹ Oil heaters were

⁴¹⁵ Phillips, *Notting Hill in the Sixties*, p. 75.

⁴¹⁶ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, p. 84.

⁴¹⁷ Joint report by the Fire Brigade Committee and Health Committee titled 'Incidence of Fires Originating from Oil-Heaters' dated 1 and 7 November 1961, in LCC Minutes of Proceedings 1961, p. 723, LCC Collection, LMA, LCCU1744.

⁴¹⁸ See the table in 'Comparative Heating Costs', *Which? Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January 1960), 3-7, p. 5.

⁴¹⁹ *Which?* Estimated that an oil heater burning 0.5 pints of paraffin per hour could maintain a 15 by 12 foot living room in a typical brick-built two storey house at a temperature of 18 degrees centigrade. Based on 1 gallon of paraffin at 2 shillings, or 3 pence per pint, running the heater for 6 hours each day gives a weekly cost of 5 shillings and 3 pence. 'Oil Heaters', *Which? Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 5 (Autumn 1958), 4-8, p. 4.

eminently affordable. The fact that paraffin could be bought in relatively small quantities was also important. At two shillings a gallon this further reduced any up-front costs.⁴²⁰

Similar in this way to many working-class savings strategies, oil heaters helped structure time as well as space, allowing people to gain a degree of intuitive and calculated control over life's daily necessities. Oil heaters should be seen in a broader context of everyday responses to technological and financial transformations in the postwar home. Researchers working on energy consumption practices have shown, for example, how council tenants in the 1950s and '60s avoided using the underfloor electric heating promoted by suppliers and housing authorities, preferring their own portable appliances. Part of tenants' quarrels with built-in systems had to do with the regular bills which made it harder to spread costs over the working week.⁴²¹ This issue extended to multiple occupancy housing too, where the switch from penny-in-the-slot meters could add to financial pressures on households. Alan Johnson recalls how the switch from coin-operated meters to regular bills brought his family to the point of destitution, with the housing trust they rented from cutting off their gas and electricity during the 'Big Freeze' of 1963. While billed gas and electricity might be cut off for late payment, paraffin could be bought cheaply by the gallon and coal could be scavenged in the streets. Johnson's mother, Lily, supplemented their small weekly purchase of coal by following lorries on their way to deliveries at 'the big houses in Holland Park', collecting the fallen pieces in an old pram, a task that later passed from mother to son.⁴²²

In Johnson's text this anecdote not only illustrates the harshness of the poverty that he grew up in, but also celebrates the resilience of his mother as a working-class woman. The story links back in this way to working-class tactics and traditions with longer histories. The 'petty fiddles' and 'pilfering' that were customarily regarded by dockers, factory hands and lorry drivers as supplements to meagre wages – especially during wartime rationing and the spread of the so-called 'grey market' – continued throughout the 1950s and '60s with various means of bypassing the tyranny of energy bills.⁴²³ Meters were frequently robbed and in North Kensington there were stories of people cutting bits of lino from the floor to substitute

⁴²⁰ 'Comparative Heating Costs', *Which?*, p. 5.

⁴²¹ Anna Carlsson-Hyslop, 'Past Management of Energy Demand: Promotion and Adoption of Electrical Heating in Britain 1945-1964', *Environment and History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (February 2016), 75-103.

⁴²² Johnson, *This Boy*, pp. 15 and 175 and 199.

⁴²³ Mark Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 56-8.

for coins.⁴²⁴ Where electricity was billed to the landlord, Jephcott notes tenants installing forbidden electric heaters on the quiet.⁴²⁵ Uses of portable heating appliances in multiple occupancy homes could, in various ways, represent valuable charged-time stolen back from landlords.

Multiple occupancy households had recourse to a wide range of what I have called partitioning and heating practices. These practices exposed tenants to risks of accident and injury, but they also reshaped, extended and intensified the geography of the home. They acted on both space and time, partitioning rooms to create areas of privacy, activating dormant spaces like the landing, creating distinctions between day-uses and night-uses, spreading energy costs pint-by-pint or lump-by-lump, or slowly accumulating a valuable resource through pilfering and scavenging. Together these acts constitute the 'staying power' of tenants in multiple occupancy homes.⁴²⁶

This understanding of the relationship between spatial practice and the politics of property resonates with recent scholarship that seeks to move beyond the idea of property as a set of rights embodied in a person or an object. Sarah Keenan in this vein theorises property as a relationship of belonging 'held up' in space.⁴²⁷ According to Keenan, the habitual 'settling' of bodies in space 'moulds' space around them; this produces relationships of exclusion as well as inclusion but it also gives space a 'subversive' potential.⁴²⁸ Nicholas Blomley similarly argues that spatial and material practices re-draw – or reinforce – the boundaries of property.⁴²⁹ Daily acts lay down durable or performative markers that may, in certain contexts, stand as much more tangible, significant and 'real' boundaries than abstract legal ones. In different ways then, spatial practice builds up a sense of belonging which can act as a counterweight to the dissolving effects of abstract space.

⁴²⁴ Mark Olden, *Murder in Notting Hill* (London: Zero, 2011), p. 11.

⁴²⁵ Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*, p. 47.

⁴²⁶ I am adapting this term from the title of Peter Fryer's classic history of black people in Britain, *Staying Power* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

⁴²⁷ Sarah Keenan, 'Subversive Property'.

⁴²⁸ Keenan, 'Subversive Property', pp. 433-4. See also Greg Noble, 'Accumulating Being', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2004), 233-256, p. 238. Noble argues that domestic environments 'sediment our experiences and relationships as embodied history, as something to reabsorb in the inhabited spaces of everyday practice'.

⁴²⁹ Nicholas Blomley, 'The Boundaries of Property: Complexity, Relationality, and Spatiality', *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2016).

Certainly neither political struggle nor working-class life can be reduced to such practices. But as Selina Todd has argued, we need more histories that bridge the gap between these two areas of experience, between the ordinary and the extraordinary.⁴³⁰ The everyday spatial practices examined here constitute the preconditions for political struggle. They help people survive and, more than that, thrive, so that the force of life and the living web of social relations might be mustered to initiate struggle. To neglect such practices is to make the error that feminist scholars have warned against for decades now.⁴³¹ In the case of postwar London, we can say, furthermore, that to survive and thrive, to continue to reside, to refuse to leave, to show this level of 'staying power' when so many propertied interests want you gone, is indeed a political act – not sufficient, but necessary.

Conclusion

The First Part of this thesis has focused on a single 'social problem', showing how in the postwar period fire risks were closely connected to London's private rented housing. The representation of this problem framed the multiple occupancy home as a dangerous, cluttered, haphazard space.

The 'problem' became a matter of national concern, despite the marginalised nature of those households most exposed to it. As we saw in Sections 1-3, this happened partly because of the problem's remarkable growth in statistical terms, partly because it offered a means of reimagining older tropes of the 'un-ideal home', and partly because it connected to the rise of an 'affluent' society. At stake was a contradiction between the decaying fabric of the urban and domestic environment on the one hand, and the sleek new world of appliances, office blocks, shopping centres and motorway flyovers on the other. This contradiction, however, was not merely about the shock of the new versus the inheritance of the old. What made it so fraught, as Section 3 demonstrated, was rather the way in which the new itself seemed to accelerate the decay that it aimed to conquer. New wealth produced harmful 'diswelfares' within the social body, which the welfare state then had to regulate or compensate for.

⁴³⁰ Selina Todd, 'Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century', *Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 489-508, p. 497.

⁴³¹ Bell Hooks, 'Homeplace: A Site of Resistance', in Bell Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, 2nd edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 41-50.

It was in London that this contradiction was sharpest. As I argued in Section 4, the patterns of growth and decay seen in transition zones like North Kensington stem fundamentally from capitalism's spatial logic of uneven development. The first Part of this thesis has tracked that logic from the domestic interior to the city district, with Sections 4 and 5 in particular attempting to bridge these different scales. Capital withdrawal within the redevelopment process led to disrepair and overcrowding. At the same time, the mismatch between new technologies and materials entering the home, and the ageing physical and social infrastructure of the home itself, created a dangerous situation full of risks for the least well off in society.

This new and contradictory reality posed challenges for representation. Official bodies such as the LCC Architect's Department and the Fire Protection Association took care not to reduce the hazardous home to the squalid home, even if they inherited, to varying extents, the patronising and fearful attitude of nineteenth-century social investigators. And yet as I argued in Section 1, the same organisations struggled to give clear expression to the space of multiple occupancy homes. Images of the Blitz and its aftermath haunted the imagination of designers and administrators alike, overlaying representations of the Victorian slum. Both proved inadequate to the problem at hand. A material confusion reigned in place of established tropes. That materiality, however, must be seen in the context of attempts to work through the actual conditions that LCC inspectors were encountering in places like North Kensington, Islington, Stepney and Brixton. Representations of the un-ideal home shifted in this way from presenting a simulacrum of how the 'other' lived, to condensing and refracting – in however confused or kaleidoscopic a form – a material situation that was recognised as bound up with matters of property.

There was a subtle relationship between representation and regulation. Representation framed the social problems that the welfare state reacted upon, and indeed was built around. Regulation, in turn, uncovered new objects, qualities and relations that representation then had to mediate or synthesise. The LCC high fire risk inspection programme is a signal example of how the welfare state sought to regulate the rented world. The programme's intervention aimed at the problematic space of the multiple occupancy home, a social-

material conjuncture that encompassed the architectural details of informal housing as well as property relations pertaining to building ownership and landlordism.

Parts 2 and 3 of this thesis will further explore issues around landlords, subdivision and regulation. What the present Part has demonstrated is that an interventionist mode of regulation focused on the social-material space of the home was paralleled by, in fact undermined by, a form of self-regulation centred on the homeowner as citizen; the subject of the so-called property owning democracy. This was the argument put forward in Sections 2-3. And yet the form of self-regulation described there, backed as it was by numerous forms of official and quasi-official support, must be seen as exhibiting a contradiction at the very heart of the welfare state, rather than a merely peripheral departure.

Mass homeownership and the property owning democracy provided the ideological background for home safety culture's focus on personal responsibility. This was one half of the home safety culture equation – its regulatory subject. The other half was the commodity, the household appliance as regulatory object. In its focus on the latter, home safety culture reduced the space of the home to an abstract fragment. This dualistic, reified form of regulation was incapable of grasping the complex social-material reality of multiple occupancy homes.

A certain idea of abstract space thus accompanied the reification of the domestic environment. The same basic principle determined the extraction of value from the decaying urban scene that formed the geographical substrate of such risks and hazards. Section 4 took North Kensington as a case study area, showing how fire risks were bound up with the postwar redevelopment process. As I argued there, the carving out of enclaves of 'class monopoly rent' involved outlining zones of relative risk and opportunity. The border zones of the area where house fires were concentrated in North Kensington aligned closely with the presence of new private developments. Concrete social space – where different objects, qualities and subjects come together in a determinate yet fluid arrangement – was thus solidified as absolute space, a notionally fixed zone of wealth or deprivation, of relatively high or low value, precisely in anticipation of this fixed entity being broken up and repackaged as various agglomerations of abstract space, i.e. as parcellised fragments of the urban rental surface.

Here we see the double (or triple) character of space under capitalism. On the one hand, space is a concrete social-material relation. On the other hand, it is an abstract field or grid, an infinitely divisible, exchangeable, extendable expanse. In other words: spatial practice on the one hand, abstract space on the other, and representational space somewhere in between. The welfare state mediates these two aspects of space, ensuring, with the help of representation, that the contradictions between them never reach the point of explosion. This balancing act is always problematic, always contradictory. The dual role of the LCC in facilitating speculative redevelopment while simultaneously emolliating the damage done by it is a case in point.

Sections 1-4 considered the regulation of urban capital on the one side and of the domestic environment – the sphere of everyday spatial practice – on the other. Section 5 looked at those practices in their own right. My approach in this final section was through representation, but the aim has always been to discover something about lived experience. By interrogating photographs, films, plays, oral histories and biographical texts, Section 5 showed how people make home in unhomely circumstances. Not only that, but I hope to have suggested how the tenants of the rented world created their own forms of ‘staying power’, acting in defiance of precarious housing conditions.

This view agrees with several recent attempts to theorise property as relational, material and deeply spatial, including work by Sarah Keenan and Nicholas Blomley.⁴³² Where I depart from this work is in its overarching incrementalism. While it is true that everyday practices shape the space around them, such practices take place in spatial conditions not of their own choosing. The relationship of belonging built up slowly through day-to-day experience can be, and frequently is, swept away by the forces of capital. Everyday spatial practice builds up its relationship of belonging in the gap between one round of accumulation and another. It is therefore always living on borrowed time; it exists in a space of discontinuity, a discontinuity inherent to the nature of space under capitalism.

⁴³² Keenan, ‘Subversive Property’; Blomley, ‘Boundaries of Property’.

Part 2: Lonely Londoners

Introduction

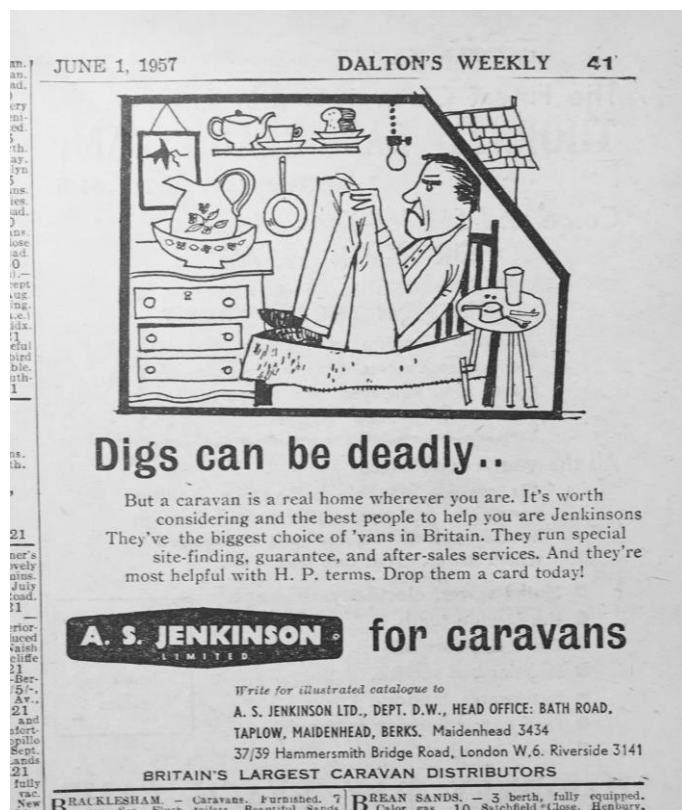


Fig. 2.1 — Advert in the property listings newspaper, *Dalton's Weekly*, 1 June 1957, p. 41.

Throughout the summer of 1957 a series of adverts appeared in the property listings newspaper *Dalton's Weekly* showing, in cartoon form, a young to middle-aged man in cardigan and shirt-sleeves sitting on his comically small bed, hunched up under the eaves of an attic room. Squeezed into the tiny room were the well-known signs of the bedsit or lodging house: a cracked mirror, a crooked side table, a dish and jug for washing one's face, meagre supplies of food on the shelf, a bare light bulb dangling from the ceiling (Figure 2.1). The cartoon reduces the rented room to a flat pictorial cell, a space whose very abstraction renders its role as a container for an 'inventory of things' essentially absurd.⁴³³ The cell-like nature of the room, equated with the frame of a comic strip, suggests a seriality whose ordered logic is constantly at risk of breaking apart under the pressure of its unruly contents. Equally absurd was the juxtaposition with the type of advertising copy that surrounded the image:

⁴³³ Henri Lefebvre, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 50.

An active property company requires to purchase singles and blocks of houses for investment. Also vacant or part vacant houses. Any condition. Any London district...

*Are you requiring capital? Your freehold factory or shop property can be purchased at to-day's big prices.*⁴³⁴

The cartoon's by-line claimed to supply the solution to this steadily inflating property market:⁴³⁵ caravans by AS Jenkinson, available on hire-purchase with 'site-finding' service from the same company. It was while scanning pages of adverts like these that one of Samuel Selvon's characters in *Moses Ascending*, 'Sir Galahad', might have come across the 'Digs can be deadly' cartoon.

He was reading *Dalton's Weekly*, as was his wont, looking for new jobs; roaming through bedsitter land; picking out secondhand miscellany he need and could afford; musing on the lonely hearts column to see if any desperate rich white woman seeks black companion with a view to matrimony; and speculating when he come to the properties-for-sale page, buying houses and renovating them to sell and make big profit.⁴³⁶

One could always dream. Indeed, dreams such as these – involving a retreat into the room of one's mind – could be essential to survival in the city, even if they might also trap you in a prison of isolation and habituation. Selvon's earlier novel of 1956, *The Lonely Londoners*, ends with the juxtaposition of two key experiences of modernity: the room in isolation, and the street with its real or hallucinatory multitude. 'One night of any night', the book's main character Moses finds himself alone after 'the boys', his friends and compatriots from Trinidad and Jamaica, have availed themselves of his usual Sunday morning hospitality.

⁴³⁴ *Dalton's Weekly* (8 June 1957), p. 50.

⁴³⁵ House prices in 1954 reached their lowest level since 1947. Government and industry leaders expected prices to keep falling as the housing shortage eased; instead they would double over the next 30 years, with a sharp spike in 1962-4. Jim Yelling, 'The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955-85', *Urban History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2000), 234-254, p. 248.

⁴³⁶ Sam Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 1. *Moses Ascending* was originally published in 1975 but picks up with the lives of characters introduced in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, first published in 1956.

Moses thinks to himself he should make a joke of it: 'You coming to church Sunday?' But then something seems to pull him down like an undertow:

Sometimes, after they gone, he hear the voices ringing in his ear, and sometimes tears come to his eyes and he don't know why really, if is homesickness or if is just that life in general beginning to get too hard. [...] Lock up in that small room, with London and life on the outside, he used to lay there on the bed, thinking how to stop all of this crap, how to put a spoke in the wheel, to make things different.⁴³⁷

Memories of all the days that have passed in this space carry him back in imagination to the friends he has ministered to so often there. Selvon summons their voices in a fitful stream of free indirect speech, where the recitation of names – like faces rising into the light, then sinking into darkness again – appears more important than the internally voiced content itself.⁴³⁸ This stream of names and faces deposits Moses a page later ('One night of any night') on Chelsea Embankment. Watching the lights reflected in the water, the multitude comes back to him again, stronger this time, as 'a great restless, swaying movement [...] As if he could see the black faces bobbing up and down in the millions of white [...] everybody hustling along the Strand, the spades jostling in the crowd, bewildered, hopeless.'⁴³⁹ In this final passage, the loneliness of the rented room becomes commensurate with a plunge into the multitude on the streets.

These thoughts and feelings are at one level specific to migrant experience in postwar London: specific to an alienation structured through racism, to the especially bad housing conditions experienced by migrants, to the dilemma which sets off Moses' train of thought (should he save up the money to go back to Trinidad, or do the prizes of the metropole wait just around the corner?), and to the almost exclusively male solidarity that binds together the characters in Selvon's early work.⁴⁴⁰ At the same time, the ending of *The Lonely Londoners* elaborates what has been a constant theme of modernity since the late eighteenth century: loneliness transmuted from a special yet necessary state of religious or scholarly seclusion

⁴³⁷ Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 136.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138-9.

⁴⁴⁰ Selvon subverts this situation in *The Housing Lark* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965) where women run rings around their hopeless male co-lodgers.

(or, similarly marked, but in a negative fashion, denoting banishment or exile), into a supposedly universal affliction, characterised by a dynamic, double-edged quality.⁴⁴¹

Countless artists, writers, and works of popular culture have elected this double-edgedness as the defining quality of the modern metropolis. Modern city life is seen to be infinitely richer than its antecedents, and yet far more impersonal, ruled by an 'unrelenting hardness'.⁴⁴² The 'hammer of these [modern life's] uninterrupted shocks' prevents the formation of stable 'mental organisation', giving rise to what Emile Durkheim described as the condition of the 'neuropath'.⁴⁴³ The best known representations of this modern loneliness, or 'anomie', tend to focus on images of the street, as well as spaces like cafés and bars. But variations of the rented room – from the apartment house to the room in lodgings – formed an equally important, parallel space, as Mathew Taunton has argued.⁴⁴⁴ It was from such rooms that the artist or writer observed the crowd, and into such rooms that the male protagonist of modernity retreated to soothe his 'spleen'.⁴⁴⁵ Equally, it was within this space, or on its threshold, that female authors observed the formation of a new interiority, a new world of bourgeois domestic privacy, as well as a new spectacle of commerce taking place outside their windows.⁴⁴⁶

According to this view there exists a dialectic between the physical isolation of the rented room, with its imagined or wished for spiritual communion, and the actuality of the 'lonely crowd', where the massing together of bodies goes hand in hand with psychological alienation. The isolation of the interior can be seen as the necessary spatial complement to the street. Rented rooms compose the walled-off space created by the carving out of new thoroughfares.⁴⁴⁷ Equally, they preserve a space of retreat and observation, preparing the spiritual ground for the enjoyment or cognition of the street-bound multitude. In order to fully

⁴⁴¹ Bernardo Marin Diniz Aires Ferreira, "'Should I also make a garden out of the desert?': A case against invisible hermits", *Ekphrasis*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 22-39, p. 37.

⁴⁴² Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *The People, Place and Space Reader*, Setha Low et al. eds. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 223-6, p. 223.

⁴⁴³ Emile Durkheim, trans. John Spaulding and George Simpson, ed. George Simpson, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 15 and 69.

⁴⁴⁴ Matthew Taunton, *Fictions of the City: Class, Culture and Mass Housing in London and Paris* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁴⁴⁵ 'Les Foules', Charles Baudelaire, ed. Max Milner, *Le Spleen de Paris* (Paris: Lettres Françaises, 1979), 84-6, p. 85. See also *ibid.*, pp. 127, 62, 209.

⁴⁴⁶ Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', *Vision and Difference*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2003), 70-127.

⁴⁴⁷ Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, pp. 22 and 30.

grasp the experience of the modern city with its spectacle, its anonymity, and beyond that, its immense collective power, we need to delve deeper into the experience of these rented rooms.

For all its ephemerality, the advert in *Dalton's Weekly* represents a particular moment in this dialectic. Its use of the frame as an isolating unit – possibly borrowed from Mel Calman's one-panel cartoons from around the same time (Figure 2.2) – is on one level generic to the experience of modernity. It represents, in this sense, a pure abstract space; one that recalls the distributive logic of the grid. At the same time, with its overly literal drawing and cluttered typography, it is thoroughly immersed in the rented worlds of postwar Britain.

But if the advert's reference to a concrete world of spatial practice succeeds only in eliciting a nod of recognition, in Calman's cartoons, the recitation of the very same kinds of details – lightbulb, alarm clock, single bed, toaster, electrical extension – carries an unmistakable echo of the lifeworld being depicted. An involuntary pathos rings out from these images (Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3). This feeling is perhaps nothing less than the potentiality of a new kind of community locked up within the multitude. In Calman's cartoon, it expresses itself through graphical tropes as well as verbal ones: the neuropathic hand of the cartoonist, who, virtually unknown to his editors as well as his audience, must file his copy on time each week; and the acerbic humour that turns in on itself ('I think I'll ring the office and say I'm dead', 'some of my best friends are acquaintances', etc).⁴⁴⁸ These phrases and graphicisms are echoes of a world. They resemble the shaky but insistent traces left by a form of spatial practice under threat of extinction: the lost souls 'roaming across bedsitter land'.

⁴⁴⁸ Mel Calman, *Bed-sit* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963). Pages unnumbered.

Returning now to *The Lonely Londoners*, one notes the difference in tone. The sadness is more turbulent, the humour more expansive. But Selvon also immerses himself in the spatial practices of the rented world. This double condition – torn between the virtuality of a transcendent multitude (embodied in the book's chorus like effects) and the grim reality of London's rented rooms – is brought home by the episode that comes just before the elegiac ending described above. In this penultimate scene, the impoverished Cap, one of Moses' circle, tries to catch a seagull on his windowsill in the hope of cooking it for dinner. Pitiful, banal, disturbing and surreal, the story at first remains contained within Cap's single room, before reaching a point of mania in several pages of unpunctuated prose that seem to capture its narrator's (Moses') deteriorating state of mind.⁴⁴⁹ Loneliness struggles to break out of the four walls that contain it, risking madness in the process.

In the novels, films, cartoons, journalism, policy discourse, and social-scientific studies of postwar London, the classic modern theme of loneliness gains a particular inflection. Loneliness in the modern, double-edged sense was, I argue, one of several 'social problems' centred on the space of London's rented rooms. Part 1 of this thesis dealt with another cluster of problems to do with physical safety in the multiple occupancy home. Here, I intend to focus on the psychological condition harboured by boarding houses, residential hotels, lodging houses, and bedsits.

These various housing types do not conform to strict categories, however certain features mark them out as characteristic of the postwar period. Boarding houses and small hotels were often listed together in local guides.⁴⁵⁰ Both were also subject to similar licensing laws.⁴⁵¹ Guests at these premises could expect to receive two meals a day in a common dining room (the 'board' in boarding houses refers to a shared table). The term guests, however, may be misleading, as many stayed for extended periods of months, years or even decades – as Section 2 will demonstrate. Although generally more likely to accommodate

⁴⁴⁹ Selvon, *Lonely Londoners*, pp. 130-135.

⁴⁵⁰ See for example *Small Hotels and Boarding Houses in London* (London: British Travel and Holidays Association, 1963).

⁴⁵¹ See Keith Jempson 'The Licensing Act, 1961: I', *Police Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (November-December 1961), 419-432, pp. 420-1; and for earlier legislation Frank Aubrey Brown, *Licensing Act, 1953, for The Man on The Beat* (London: Police Review Publishing Company, 1958) and James Paterson, *The Licensing Acts* (London: Butterworth and Co., 1949).

middle-class residents compared to the kinds of multiple occupancy properties dealt with in Part 1, boarding houses and residential hotels were still seen as relatively down-at-heel establishments; a hallmark of the 'shabby genteel'.⁴⁵² Lodging houses, or rooming houses, on the other hand, did not normally serve meals, though in other respects they were similar to boarding houses, especially the less salubrious kind. The distinction between a lodging or rooming house and a multiple occupancy property of the kind that LCC safety inspectors were most concerned with was only a matter of degree. But generally the term seems to have implied a more self-contained form of accommodation, with rooms for individuals rather than large families. The generic term *bedsit*, meanwhile, could be simply an alternative to 'rented room', but again it implied a relatively self-contained dwelling, with a sink and possibly cooking facilities *en suite*.⁴⁵³ With the question of loneliness we confront a problem opposite to the one dealt with in Part 1. There, the problem related to multiple occupancy tenants' lack of privacy; here the issue appears to be *too much* privacy.

The problem of loneliness in postwar Britain can be seen as the shadow to more prominent questions about the changing nature of 'community': questions to do with how working-class people took on the mantle of 'the people', and how Commonwealth immigration changed what it meant to be British. As I've tried to demonstrate in the preceding paragraphs, modern loneliness is a dialectical concept encompassing both isolation and what I have referred to as 'multitude'.⁴⁵⁴ If modern loneliness arises from a breakdown of traditional community, it also entails the coming into existence of new potential communities. In postwar Britain, the question of community rather than loneliness as such dominated party politics and social policy, and their close relationship with social-scientific and cultural studies.⁴⁵⁵ Community, as it were, overdetermined loneliness. As a result, loneliness appeared as a minority issue within the general discussion. This marginalisation of loneliness (which didn't necessarily make it less concerning) was consistent with the marginalisation of postwar London's rented

⁴⁵² Terri Mullholland, *British Boarding Houses in Interwar Women's Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 59 and 62.

⁴⁵³ Bedsits were increasingly viewed as spaces that could or ought to be *designed*; a modern, technical and aesthetic solution to the challenge of solo-living, and particularly the life of the bachelor. See Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and The Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2010), pp. 216-227.

⁴⁵⁴ I use the term 'multitude' to express something broader than 'crowds'. The crowd represents one particular rhythmic convulsion of the multitude, a moment of assembly drawn from a deeper pool of social being. See Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 205-6. Multitude also suggests a collectivity less homogenous than the 'mass'.

⁴⁵⁵ John Lawrence 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class": A Re-analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London*', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2016), 567-593, p. 571.

worlds. In focusing on experiences that have been pushed to the margins, my aim is not only to 'rediscover' something neglected, but to restore the dialectic that animates these two terms, community and isolation.

To understand the minor it makes sense to consider the major, i.e. 'community'. In the 1950s and '60s a number of influential studies were published on the changes taking place in working-class communities. These fed into what became a fractious debate on the social democratic Left, as questions started to be raised about whether demographic and cultural changes were eroding the Labour Party's traditional base.⁴⁵⁶ Most famous among these studies was Peter Willmott and Michael Young's investigation of kinship in East London. Willmott and Young painted a counter-image to the pathologising view of working-class communities as fragmented and dysfunctional. The authors claimed that: 'Bethnal Greeners are not lonely people: whenever they go for a walk in the street, for a drink in the pub, or for a row on the lake in Victoria Park, they know the faces in the crowd.'⁴⁵⁷ The flipside to this view was the idea that a more 'affluent' style of working-class life – signalled most clearly by relocation from close-knit inner city neighbourhoods to new estates in the suburbs – resulted in a loss of community feeling, making people more isolated and individualistic.⁴⁵⁸

Willmott and Young's argument had a clear spatial dimension. The geographical transformation they pointed to had ramifications at the domestic and neighbourhood level. In the switch from inner city to suburb, part of what was apparently lost was the intimate flux between street and home. The suburban home, whether flat-block or cottage estate, appeared to close in on itself, just as the street lost its definition, melting into that vague expanse of greenery, driveways and shopping centres that the architectural critic Ian Nairn called 'subtopia'.⁴⁵⁹ This image of suburban alienation – one that Nairn summed up with the

⁴⁵⁶ For example Leo Kuper ed., *Living in Towns: Selected Research Papers in Urban Sociology* (London: Cresset Press, 1953); Margaret Stacey, *Tradition and Change: a Study of Banbury* (London: OUP, 1960); John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968-9), 3 vols.; and Mark Abrams, *Must Labour Lose?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960). For the Labour Party response see for example Hugh Gaitskell's 1959 Party conference speech in which he questioned whether Labour could survive the coming of 'the car, the telly, the washing machine and the fridge'. Quoted in Stuart Hall, 'The Uses of Literacy and the Cultural Turn', in Sue Owens ed., *Richard Hoggart and Cultural Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 20-32, p. 28.

⁴⁵⁷ Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 92.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., especially pp. 107-108.

⁴⁵⁹ Ian Nairn, *Outrage* (London: Architectural Press, 1956). Published as a reprint of the June 1955 special issue of *Architectural Review*. For similar descriptions of 'subtopia' see Willmott and Young, *Family and Kinship*, p. 97.

two-word caption 'Anywhere-Nowhere' (Figure 2.4) – had an imaginative hold on postwar policy makers. It gave form to amorphous anxieties as well as concrete problems of economic planning.⁴⁶⁰



Fig. 2.4 — 'Anywhere-Nowhere'. Ian Nairn, *Your England Revisited* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p. 19.

Many influential critics at the time tended to adopt a dichotomous view of the 'traditional' urban neighbourhood versus the alienated (but increasingly normalised) suburb.⁴⁶¹ Not only did they idealise working-class communities, they also relegated inner city loneliness to a minor problem. Where this didn't simply result in the issue being neglected, it effectively shifted the pathologisation usually associated with 'problem families' onto the bedsit dweller; the single, especially female worker, the migrant, the widowed pensioner, and the 'juvenile

⁴⁶⁰ On some of these planning dilemmas see Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-75* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

⁴⁶¹ For Wilmot and Young see Lawrence 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class"', *The Historical Journal*. More generally see Mark Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the USA* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 5-8.

delinquent'.⁴⁶² In 1950 the Bishop of Croydon blamed the postwar crime wave on feelings of 'loneliness, [...] inferiority, frustration, and lack of purpose'.⁴⁶³ A 1956 *Picture Post* article described the lonely existence of a young woman who had come to London to seek adventure, asking 'why is loneliness a city disease?'⁴⁶⁴ An image from the accompanying photo-essay by Bert Hardy depicted the woman, modelled by the journalist Katherine Whitehorn, hunched up by a coal-burning stove with a cooking pot on top and her laundry drying nearby (Figure 5). Once again, the 'disease' of loneliness was seen to incubate within the enclosing walls of the rented room.



Fig. 2.5 — 'The Picture that Tells the Whole Story'. Photograph by Bert Hardy in Victor Anant, 'Big City Loneliness', *Picture Post* (3 March 1956), 12-14, p. 14.

An important expression of this pathologising view of loneliness came in the growing number of studies oriented towards the 'psychosocial' – a term that dates to the development of academic sociology and psychology in the 1890s, but which gained a much greater prominence in the 1930s-50s, thanks partly to the welfare state's new stress on what Rhodri

⁴⁶² Pat Starkey, 'The Feckless Mother: Women, Poverty and Social Workers in Wartime and Post-War England', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2000), 539-557; Selina Todd, 'Family Welfare and Social Work in Post-War England', c.1948-c.1970', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 129, No. 537 (2014), 362-387.

⁴⁶³ David Hughes, 'The Spivs', in Michael Sissons and Philip French eds., *Age of Austerity 1945-51* (London: Penguin, 1963), 86-105, p. 102.

⁴⁶⁴ Victor Anant, 'Big City Loneliness', *Picture Post* (3 March 1956), 12-14. I owe this reference to Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke* (New Haven: Yale, 2017), p. 290.

Hayward calls 'psychological reconstruction'.⁴⁶⁵ Willmott and Young themselves were influenced by this development, though others took its insights further.⁴⁶⁶ In Section 1, I look in detail at one of these studies: Peter Sainsbury's work on suicide in London, published in 1955.⁴⁶⁷ Sainsbury's work helps to re-contextualise Willmott and Young's spatial imaginary by shifting the focus from London's traditional working-class neighbourhoods to its 'rooming house districts'. Section 1 looks at the London geographies that Sainsbury drew attention to, asking in what sense these variants of the 'zone of transition' represent a map of loneliness in the city. Sainsbury continued to pathologise these 'marginal' spaces, but by reading his work against the grain, we can discern the outlines of a geography of loneliness.

Section 2 then zooms in on two of the areas that Sainsbury highlights, delving into the urban history that saw them turn from affluent areas into something more ambiguous. By uncovering the historical-material geography of North London's 'rooming house districts', I interrogate the notion – widespread in postwar urban sociology and virtually synonymous with the term 'isolation' – of 'social disorganisation'. Drawing on electoral registers and postal directories, I test Sainsbury's geography of loneliness against the empirical reality of how boarding houses and residential hotels were distributed and occupied. Sainsbury's work offers a starting point for understanding the nature of loneliness in London's rented worlds. I argue, however, that if we want to understand the loneliness and sorrow – as well as the promise and hope – channeled by authors like Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and Patrick Hamilton, rather than social *disorganisation* we should think in terms of *over-organisation*, in the Durkheimian sense; the rigidity of social mores and the persistence of inequality.⁴⁶⁸

Section 3 then turns to the question of regulation. I examine how the welfare state enlisted visiting social workers as part of its intervention in the closed worlds of London's rented rooms. In particular, I consider the work of psychiatric social workers and mental welfare officers, showing how the same psychosocial perspective that influenced Peter Sainsbury also shaped the regulatory work of those appointed by the state to tackle the psychological, relational and practical problems arising from 'social disorganisation'.

⁴⁶⁵ Rhodri Hayward, 'The Invention of the Psychosocial', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (December 2012), 3-12, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁶ Lawrence, 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class"', *Historical Journal*, p. 581.

⁴⁶⁷ Peter Sainsbury, *Suicide in London: an Ecological Study* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1955).

⁴⁶⁸ George Simpson, 'Introduction', in Durkheim, *Suicide*, p. 15.

After the disturbances of the Second World War, an overriding commitment to reconstructing the family drove this regulatory activity.⁴⁶⁹ This was reflected in the mainstream of urban sociology and cultural criticism, which saw community as an extension of the family. Wilmott and Young's study announced this much in its title.⁴⁷⁰ Conversely, the problem of loneliness was seen as belonging to the family. Social work therefore sought in the domestic sphere both the cause and cure for the maladaptations and breakdowns of the individual. And yet there existed another strain of thinking and practice that went beyond the family. By acting as 'catalysts' within the machinery of the welfare state and as 'mediums' between inner and outer worlds, those welfare workers imbued with a psychosocial perspective on reality – as well as a practical determination to try and change that reality – could, in the best cases, begin the difficult process of stitching together the fragments of a broken world, animating once more the dialectic of isolation and community.

The fourth and final Section turns from state regulation to the 'staying power' of those individuals living within the walls of London's rented worlds. I close by looking at the film and novel, *The L-Shaped Room*, written by Lynne Reid Banks in 1960 and adapted to the screen by director Bryan Forbes in 1962. Pivoting between close readings and archival materials, Section 4 shows how social isolation took on a specifically racialised form. I ground the analysis in the material and spatial reality of London's rented rooms, showing how the extraction of rent through processes of subdivision helped produce otherness.

At the same time, the gathering together of disparate individuals gave scope to previously unimagined forms of community. In *The L-Shaped Room* and other films from the period, we see emerging strange, temporary alliances – between single working women, aspiring artists, pensioners and migrants. Section 4 asks whether they add up to a new vision of community.

⁴⁶⁹ Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 15-17 and Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), pp. 35-6 and 60-1.

⁴⁷⁰ For similar arguments see Raymond Firth ed., *Two Studies of Kinship in London* (London: Athlone Press, 1956).

1. Psychosocial Environment and Social Disorganisation

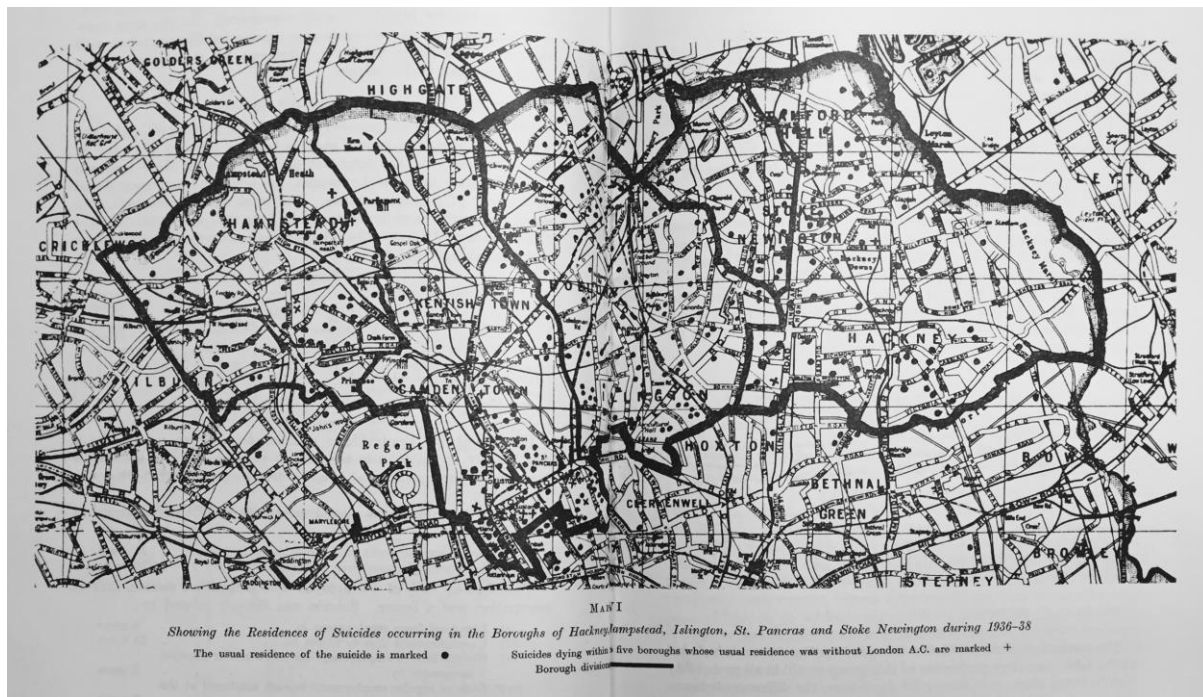


Fig. 2.6 — Suicide in five north London boroughs. Map from Peter Sainsbury, *Suicide in London: An Ecological Study* (1955).

Camden Town, Euston Road, Stamford Hill, Hackney Marshes; the familiar place names indicate a map of north London, covering the Metropolitan Boroughs of Hampstead, St Pancras, Islington, Stoke Newington and Hackney. But even these are almost lost in the web of streets, together with the thin, cursive lines of railways. Looking closer brings a multitude of black points into focus, scattered in careless handfuls here and there. If one of the main functions of a map is to orient the reader within a space, this, it has to be said, is a poor example. As with a photograph whose authentic casualness brings with it a commensurate degree of ambiguity, this tangled, knotted, granular image depends on a caption to pin down its meaning: those black points are suicides, and the map shows their final resting place.

The map just described (Figure 2.6) comes from Peter Sainsbury's 1955 book, *Suicide in London: An Ecological Study*. It was one of several that Sainsbury used to argue that in 'socially disorganised neighbourhood[s]', with their abundance of boarding houses, hotels and 'lodging houses letting single furnished rooms', a restless mobility 'hinders the formation of stable communities, [...] promotes loneliness and weakens the ethical beliefs by means of

which an individual finds meaning and satisfaction in his life'.⁴⁷¹ According to Sainsbury, this pattern of 'disorganisation', which seemed to repeat itself across both rich and poor boroughs, impacted the socially mobile professional and 'intermediate' classes more than tradition bound working-class communities. '[S]ocial disorganisation, not poverty' was the 'paramount' factor in suicide.⁴⁷²

There are reasons to question this view, not least being Sainsbury's own observation that higher suicide rates existed among people who risked dropping off the very bottom of the social ladder, and that unemployment contributed significantly too.⁴⁷³ A more fundamental question concerns how poverty is defined. The version of 'absolute' poverty that Sainsbury worked with – drawn as it was from pre-war standards – would soon be deconstructed to devastating effect by Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend in their study *The Poor and the Poorest*.⁴⁷⁴ For the moment, I simply want to emphasise the strangeness and ambiguity of Sainsbury's map.

Sainsbury's north London map formed part of a case study that sought to verify his book's claims regarding social disorganisation and its class-independent nature. I want to suggest, however, that the flow of the argument gains more substance if we reverse it. To posit 'loneliness', 'isolation', lack of community and so on as social factors that tend to increase the suicide rate is hardly groundbreaking. But to mobilise suicide (as an extreme expression of these things) in order to describe the contours of a new landscape, is, while also problematic, potentially much more significant.

Sainsbury was writing at a time when attempted suicide was still a criminal offence. In 1950, for example, a young Polish woman living in Oldham was deported back to Germany for having tried and failed to take her own life.⁴⁷⁵ Such cruel and unusual punishment was rare, however. Already by 1936 the Metropolitan police were only enacting proceedings in about

⁴⁷¹ Peter Sainsbury, *Suicide in London: an Ecological Study* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1955), pp. 13-14 and 23.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19 and 55.

⁴⁷⁴ Brian Abel Smith and Peter Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest: A New Analysis of the Ministry of Labour's Family Expenditure Surveys of 1953-4 and 1960* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1965).

⁴⁷⁵ Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Postwar Britain* (London: Penguin, 2017), pp. 36-7.

10% of attempted suicide cases.⁴⁷⁶ For those unfortunate enough to enter the legal system in this way, the courts did sometimes deliver a prison sentence, but they might equally recommend a period of psychiatric treatment.⁴⁷⁷ Coroners, meanwhile, often gave a verdict of ‘unsound mind’ when examining the motives of suspected suicides.⁴⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the *morality* of the issue, as much as its social or psychological causes, was still very much up for debate. If suicide were legalised, what would that say about the values of a society in the throes of modernisation?⁴⁷⁹ Sociological or psychological knowledge was still some way from displacing old-fashioned Christian morals. This transitional moment, between a moral order and a scientific one, defines the context of suicide as a social problem, itself understood to be an extreme expression of loneliness and social isolation.

Around the time Sainsbury was writing, suicide rates were rising steadily, with an increase in attempts in London of over 26% in 1948.⁴⁸⁰ There existed a notable ‘greater tendency to suicide by youths’ in the early 1950s. Among older men in the capital, the Metropolitan Police found the rates ‘ominously rising’.⁴⁸¹ These postwar increases, however, had to be seen against a relative decrease during the war: ‘some queer reaction of the mind to the far greater tragedies of the Blitzkrieg’, as London’s Police Commissioner put it.⁴⁸² In the analysis of the Met, the postwar climate of depression that pushed some Londoners to the brink of despair really marked a return to the psychological baseline of the 1930s. Still, there were exceptions to this, including women over 65, among whom suicide rates had reached their highest recorded levels. The general trend remained worrying.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁶ London Metropolitan Police, ‘Suicides and attempted suicides: numbers recorded annually and analysis of motives and methods used, 1933-54’, untitled memo from the Secretary to the Commissioner dated 3 June 1936, recto, National Archives MEPO 2/6955. All references to material from the National Archives will be abbreviated ‘NA’; references to the London Metropolitan Police will be abbreviated ‘Met Police’.

⁴⁷⁷ See for example the case of Daniel Cronin, apprehended but not arrested after jumping from Hungerford Bridge in 1927; arrested, discharged, then re-arrested to be sentenced to three months in prison for drinking carbolic acid in 1930; removed to Neington Institution then certified by the Justices in Lunacy in 1934 after drinking disinfectant; and finally admitted to Netherne hospital under a voluntary treatment scheme in 1953 after a fourth attempt on his own life. Met Police, ‘Daniel Cronin: Fourth Attempted Suicide’, untitled report addressed to the Chief Inspector by Inspector Rogers of Kenley station dated 10 June 1953, pp. 1-2, NA MEPO 3/720.

⁴⁷⁸ See for example ‘Clutched Dead Wife’s Photo as He Died’, *North London Press* (12 March 1948), p. 1; ‘Attempted Suicide - Died Five Days Later: “Delayed Gas Poisoning”’, *North London Press* (26 March 1948), p. 3; ‘“Melancholy” Student Kills Himself’, *North London Press* (4 June 1948), p. 7.

⁴⁷⁹ For an excellent all-round discussion of these issues see Mark Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

⁴⁸⁰ Met Police, ‘Suicides and attempted suicides: numbers recorded annually and analysis of motives and methods used, 1933-54’, untitled memo from the Commissioner to the Secretary dated 12 October 1949, recto, NA MEPO 2/6955.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, report titled *Suicides and Attempted Suicides in the Metropolitan Police District in 1951*, pp. 2 and 4.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, untitled memo from the Commissioner to the Secretary dated 12 June 1941, recto.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, report titled *Suicides and Attempted Suicides in the Metropolitan Police District in 1951*, p. 2.

Sainsbury's north London map needs to be seen in this context. Working with the most recent available data, Sainsbury studied coroner's reports from 1936-8. His study therefore only indirectly addresses the postwar period. Its contemporary relevance was due partly to the fact that suicide rates had returned to 1930s levels. But his use of local geographic examples gave his work greater immediacy. Sainsbury's 'ecology' of the city helped dramatise the extent of a social problem while also removing it from the realm of individual moral judgement. The map assisted in this project by turning the extreme closure of suicide – a final entombment⁴⁸⁴ – into a multitude of points; a swarm, a swirl, a scattering of seed that fell 'where fortune hurl[ed] it' to sprout into a barren forest.

That last image comes from Canto thirteen of Dante's *Inferno*, which I cannot help feeling this map inadvertently replicates. Part of the punishment of the suicides, who are guilty in the eyes of God for having cast away the gift of life and of the body, is to be scattered in the Seventh Circle with an equal lack of care, only to germinate 'like seed of spelt' into the gnarled, contorted form of a thorn tree, the branches of which are set upon by harpies, causing agony to the souls 'with[in] these knots [...] made incorporate'.⁴⁸⁵ The knotted form of streets and railways in Figure 2.5 substitutes for that of the thorn trees to produce an ironic echo of the great poet of Christian damnation.

But if Sainsbury's map transfigures the 409 coroner's cases which make up his north London sample into a modern-day underworld, then it must be stressed that what continues to haunt us is not the tree, which in Dante's allegory cries out in anguish, but the forest. *Contra* Dante, this tangled multitude does not remain obscure, meaningless, or fatalistically determined. Sainsbury's application of the tools of modern social science, especially as developed by Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and others associated with the Chicago School of urban sociology, demonstrate how the forest can be parsed.⁴⁸⁶ The scattering of points, landing where fortune hurls them, do in fact form a meaningful pattern. In the *Inferno*, Dante urges the individual who has taken their own life to tell their story, so that he can transmit it

⁴⁸⁴ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 3rd edn. (London: Verso, 2010), p. 47. This image comes from Berman's discussion of the attempted suicide of Goethe's Faust.

⁴⁸⁵ Dante Alighieri, trans. James Romanes Sibbald, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: The Inferno*, ebook (Project Gutenberg, 2012), p. 177.

⁴⁸⁶ Sainsbury, *Suicide in London*, p. 13.

to the world of the living. Sainsbury's study affords no such grace; converting coroner's cases to geographic plot-points, it strips individuals of all narrative underpinning. But while deliberately avoiding conscious and unconscious depths within the individual psyche, psychodynamic nuances reassert themselves at the level of the city itself. The canopy of the forest *below* protrudes into the world *above*, forcing itself up into the living urban environment like a sapling through the cracks in a paving slab. The plane where these two realms meet describes the areas most affected by feelings of loneliness and despair. Thus a subtlety of individual human feeling is exchanged for a more nuanced and psychologised understanding of the urban realm itself.

Sainsbury was not the only postwar scientist or planner to seek a psychosocial description of the city. In a paper from 1962, Arthur Leslie Banks, former principal medical officer at the Ministry of Health and an important figure in the early planning stages of the NHS, wrote of 'the awakening in this country that there was [beyond the physical and the biological] a third component' in the control of 'physical and moral ill-health', namely 'the *social or psychosocial environment*'.⁴⁸⁷ Banks, like many of his colleagues, displayed an acute awareness of the social and political upheaval animating this new 'psychosocial' understanding, which was closely linked to social policy's renewed mission in improving the human condition.⁴⁸⁸ In Banks's narrative, it was centralised planning and population management in the event of total war that spurred this understanding, culminating after the Second World War in the development of 'a comprehensive range of social legislation' covering individuals from birth until death.⁴⁸⁹ The psychiatrist WS Maclay, who filled Banks's post at the Ministry of Health some years later, described a similar lineage: from the mid-nineteenth century's physical confrontation with conditions of 'filth, squalor and misery', to the deployment later in the century of more subtle social policy mechanisms centred on school medical services, maternal health, child welfare etc. According to Maclay, this turn 'from the premises to the person' heralded 'the era of social medicine'. Now it was the turn of the twentieth century to build on those achievements, with the realisation that 'mental hygiene is just as vital as

⁴⁸⁷ Arthur Leslie Banks, 'Environment: Physical and Social Aspects', *Medicine, Science and Law*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (January 1962), 78-86, pp. 81-2. Emphasis in original. On Banks' wartime public health work with evacuees and involvement in the early NHS, see 'Lives of the Fellows: Arthur Leslie Banks', *Royal College of Physicians* <<http://munksroll.rcplondon.ac.uk/Biography/Details/221>> [accessed 28 August 2018].

⁴⁸⁸ Hayward, 'Invention of the psychosocial', p. 8; Edgar Jones, "'The gut war': Functional somatic disorders in the UK during the Second World War", *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (2012), 30-48.

⁴⁸⁹ Banks, 'Environment', p. 82.

environmental and personal hygiene'.⁴⁹⁰ Thus a new psychosocial conception of the person and the environment was linked to the birth of the postwar welfare state.

Recent historians of medicine have broadly confirmed this periodisation, while moderating its somewhat teleological progression.⁴⁹¹ Scholars have paid far less attention, however, to the specifically spatial implications of this psychosocial conjuncture.⁴⁹² For the purposes of thinking through ideas of isolation and community, what matters most is the creation of a certain plane of intervention – a plane slipped in between the individual and their environment, between the realm of mind, *cogito*, individual responsibility, and that of one's physical surroundings, infrastructure, housing, air quality etc. It was on this plane, within this intra-dimensional space, that suicide could be thought of as a 'distress signal' sent from the individual to the social environment, a form of 'social communication' rather than a mortal sin, or in any case a personal failing.⁴⁹³ While suicide conceived in this way was nothing less than a 'catastrophic indicator' and therefore difficult to generalise from,⁴⁹⁴ other, milder signals within the social environment, such as public order offences referred by police to mental health services, have also been conceptualised in similar terms: 'For the referral to take place, individual problems must have been communicated to the social field [...] there is an upset in the internal balance of forces in the individual, which is closely related to disturbances in the field of forces by which he is surrounded.'⁴⁹⁵

It was also within this novel psychosocial space that 'community' and its opposite, 'social disorganisation', or more simply, 'isolation', became key terms in the postwar period; two major sources of psychological support or psychological collapse. Sainsbury's use of these terms represented one instance of an increasingly common currency. A study on 'The

⁴⁹⁰ WS Maclay, 'Trends in the British Mental Health Service', in Hugh Freeman and James Farndale eds., *Trends in the Mental Health Services: A Symposium of Original and Reprinted Papers* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1963), 3-11, p. 3.

⁴⁹¹ Kathleen Haack and Ekkehardt Kumbier, 'History of Social Psychiatry', *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (November 2012), 492-496, p. 492.

⁴⁹² For a notable exception, but in the US context, see Edmund Ramsden, 'Rats, Stress and the Built Environment', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (December 2012), 123-147.

⁴⁹³ This notion of (attempted) suicide as 'social communication' has since been overtaken by social-affective and neurochemical interpretations. In 1950s Britain, however, it was novel. Chris Millard, 'Reinventing Intention: "Self-Harm" and the "Cry for Help" in Postwar Britain', *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (November 2012), 503-507, p. 504.

⁴⁹⁴ Gary Evans, Nancy Wells, Hoi-Yan Erica Chan and Heidi Saltzman, 'Housing Quality and Mental Health', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 68, No. 3, (2000) 526-30, p. 526. The authors point to the overreliance on 'catastrophic indicators' such as psychiatric case openings.

⁴⁹⁵ ACP Sims and RL Symonds, 'Psychiatric Referrals from the Police', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 127, No. 2 (August 1975), 171-8, p. 171.

Offender and the Mental Health Act' (referring to the Act of 1959) spoke of the 'deteriorating and socially disorganised sector of London' which its sample drew from.⁴⁹⁶ Another study conducted under supervision by senior staff at the Maudsley Hospital, where Sainsbury's work originated, prefaced its examination of the transient world of London's common lodging houses and rest centres with the general remark that 'disorganised communit[ies]' tended to show higher rates of mental illness.⁴⁹⁷

'Social disorganisation' in this usage could easily serve as a byword for poverty, criminality, dilapidation and ill health. More discriminating writers, however, used it to signify an environmental condition which might well intersect and interact with the traditional 'slum', but was somehow independent of it. This 'third component', to use Arthur Leslie Banks's phrase, went beyond the physical and the sanitary, without yet being wholly immaterial. Thus Banks observed that the flipside to the progressive conquest of physical dangers in the environment was that 'spiritual beliefs tend to wither', as material temptations become 'almost irresistible' and authority grows more 'remote'. According to Banks, this led to the paradox that beyond a certain point material improvements to the urban environment might actually create new forms of social and psychological distress.⁴⁹⁸ There is an echo here of the kind of reasoning deployed by John Kenneth Galbraith and Richard Titmuss in their ideas of 'social balance' and socially produced 'diswelfares' (see Part 1). A similar logic ran throughout a government sponsored study of 'unattached' youth from 1965. Mary Morse, who produced the final published version, was keen to highlight that the problem was not due to lack of material opportunities. Her subjects were a mixture of working-class and middle-class youth with apparently plenty of spare change in their pockets. The problem with these young people was that they were, quite literally, *disorganised*; they did not belong to any organised group, forming instead a 'nebulous [...] crowd' comprising students, bohemians, factory workers, and teenagers still in school. Here, as with Sainsbury, isolation dissolved class.⁴⁹⁹ Also similar to Sainsbury's work was the way Morse focused on certain

⁴⁹⁶ SF McCabe, HR Rollin and ND Walker, 'The Offender and the Mental Health Act', *Medicine, Science and the Law*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (October 1964), 231-244, p. 231.

⁴⁹⁷ J Stuart Whiteley [MB, DPM, Registrar, Warlingham Park Hospital, Surrey], "'Down and Out in London": Mental Illness in the Lower Social Groups', *Lancet*, Vol. 269, No. 6890 (17 September 1955), 608-10, p. 608.

⁴⁹⁸ Banks, 'Environment', p. 83.

⁴⁹⁹ Mary Morse, *The Unattached* (London: Penguin, 1965), pp. 19-21.

spaces, notably cafés and bedsits. It was here that 'disorganised' young people were found to pass their time, outside the reach of legitimate leisure pursuits.⁵⁰⁰

At one level, complaints of the tenor of Banks and Morse sound yet another version of establishment anxiety regarding the waning of authority – charges laid partly at the door of the welfare state, partly at that of an expanding consumer culture, and partly at that of legislative liberalisation.⁵⁰¹ Yet below this headline political discourse lay a new way of thinking about the city. It revolved around the production of a whole symptomatology of the city, based not on the spread of infectious diseases, or simple notions of the glittering citadel versus the abyssal slum, of 'black' streets and 'black' areas, but rather on a division of the city into overlapping psychosocial zones. These zones were seen as independent of their inhabitants. Thus Sainsbury asserted the 'special characteristics of the population of each zone' which 'persist quite independently of the populations flowing through it'. In areas dominated by hotels and boarding houses the effect was supposed to be particularly powerful: 'Even the most exemplary abscond with the silver, get drunk, or behave with an unaccustomed lack of restraint. The impersonality and detachment of hotel life induce in the habitual resident either an irksome loneliness or cynicism and disillusionment'.⁵⁰²

What (or where) were the origins of this way of thinking about the city? One of the clearest parallels with Sainsbury's 1955 study lay outside Britain, in Robert Faris and H Warren Dunham's work on psychosis in 1930s Chicago. Like Sainsbury, they claimed to discern a symptomatology of the city that was distinct from the normal, concentrically ordered hierarchy of class divisions.⁵⁰³ This extension of the detached, highly deterministic 'ecological technique' of Park and Burgess to the inner recesses of the mind added up, I would argue, to nothing less than a supreme paradox. Because in arguing for the independent nature of urban zones – independent, that is, of their temporary tenants – the aim was precisely to avoid such a dangerously deterministic proximity between the character

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 16-17, 22 and 110.

⁵⁰¹ Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, 'Introduction: The Uses and Abuses of Affluence', in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton eds., *An Affluent Society? Britain's Post-War "Golden Age" Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 1-14; Martin Francis, 'The Labour Party: Modernisation and the Politics of Constraint', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters eds., *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-64* (London: Rivers Oram, 1999), 152-170.

⁵⁰² Sainsbury, *Suicide in London*, p. 13.

⁵⁰³ Robert EL Faris and H Warren Dunham, *Mental Disorders in Urban Areas: An Ecological Study of Schizophrenia and Other Psychoses*, 2nd edn. (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1965), p. 63. Originally 1939.

of persons and the character of cities, or city areas: 'Each zone, however, retains its characteristics, whether its inhabitants be native-born white, foreign-born, or Negro. [...] The location of each of these [zones] is determined ecologically [...] They maintain their characteristics in spite of the flow of various racial and national groups through them and invariably impress their effects on each of these groups.'⁵⁰⁴

As Mitchell Duneier has argued, the motivating context for this mode of thinking was the desperate attempt by white institutions of state and capital in the northern metropolises, together with white middle-class homeowners, to halt the advance of black neighbourhoods; in other words, to maintain a *de facto* spatial segregation while rejecting the formal segregation of the American South.⁵⁰⁵ Biological racism was suppressed ideologically, but it re-emerged at the level of the city itself in a kind of socio-spatial Darwinism. 'Unplanned forces' within the city were said to compete with each other, predate upon one another, before eventually settling into a series of ecological niches.⁵⁰⁶

Insofar as one dealt with complex psychological phenomena, these too rebounded on the city itself. The resulting fusion transformed the city into a kind of giant neurological network, underpinned by a fixed yet immensely complex system. It was the layered interaction of different components of this fixed system that produced the dynamism of the city and its symptoms – but only ever as epiphenomena, electrical flashes upon a grid of neurons, with its convoluted folds and submerged, specialised centres.

Although questions of class rather than race were foremost to his mind, we can nevertheless see how Sainsbury learnt from this historical moment of urban theory. Akin to the division of the psyche into *ego* and *Id*, Sainsbury split London into two main centres: Westminster and the City; the centre of political power, and the centre of commercial and industrial coordination. From the middle ages onwards, there developed adjacent to the City the 'gargantuan slums of the present day'.⁵⁰⁷ Although 'bleak and grim', Industrialisation helped maintain a sense of social purpose that stood in contrast to 'the more erratic world of the

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁰⁵ Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), pp. 47-50 and 60-3.

⁵⁰⁶ Faris and Dunham, *Mental Disorders in Urban Areas*, p. 21

⁵⁰⁷ Sainsbury, *Suicide in London*, p. 68.

court and government'. By the time of the postwar period, this had led to a division between 'the restless, meretricious West End, and the settled East End where the Cockney, the hereditary Londoner, lives by the commerce of his port and City.'⁵⁰⁸

Sainsbury's psychosocial geography affords an alternative view of the East End. No longer a *terra incognita*, an 'abyss' of deprivation and criminality, the East End is seen as a source of stability.⁵⁰⁹ Sainsbury here agrees with Wilmott and Young. In exchange for his reformed image of the 'settled Cockney', however, Sainsbury located another troublesome area rising to the north of the city. It was a land where 'dormitory' suburbs for the middle classes rubbed up against the 'disreputable streets' of working-class tenements; a place that sheltered 'substantial foreign-born element[s]' as well as 'degraded, semi-criminal' enclaves; a district 'peppered' with factories and bisected by railway lines; and a zone dominated by 'boarding houses and small hotels', that clustered in almost implausible numbers around the main railway stations.⁵¹⁰

As Sainsbury himself recognised, this was another iteration of the 'zone of transition', a concept drawn from Park and Burgess and soon to be overhauled by Ruth Glass.⁵¹¹ It was by taking suicide as an index of 'loneliness' and 'social disorganisation' that Sainsbury was able to open up this geography. Another map (Figure 2.7) shows the distribution of suicide rates across the County of London, grouped by upper, middle (second and third) and lower quartiles. A gray swathe cuts the city in half, skewing the classic East-West division on a diagonal axis. This area of relatively *low* suicide rates hooks itself around the outer west London boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, then sweeps upwards from middle-class Wandsworth in the south-west to working-class Hackney in the north-east, taking in Stepney and Bethnal Green on the way. Bunched towards the north and north-west are the high rate boroughs: Kensington, Paddington, Westminster, Hampstead, St Pancras and others. Another of Sainsbury's maps corroborates this pattern, showing the overlap between suicide

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ See for example Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: Isbister & Co., 1903) and Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London: 1st Series: Poverty* (New York: Augustus Kelly, 1969), originally 1889-91.

⁵¹⁰ Sainsbury, *Suicide in London*, pp. 47-9.

⁵¹¹ Sainsbury used the term 'zone in transition'. Ibid., p. 49.

rates and the 'percentage of people living alone' in each borough (Figure 2.8). Here, as close as one could appear to get, was a map of Loneliness in postwar London.



Fig. 2.7 — Suicide rates in London boroughs, map from Peter Sainsbury, *Suicide in London: an Ecological Study* (1955)

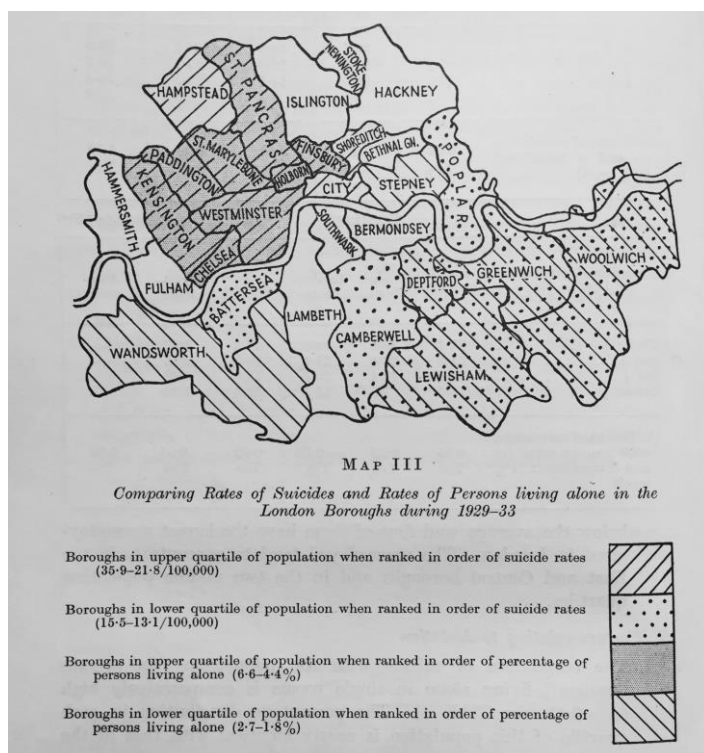


Fig. 2.8 — Suicide rates and percentages of people living alone in London boroughs, map from Peter Sainsbury, *Suicide in London: an Ecological Study* (1955).

I want to delve deeper into the north London geography highlighted by these maps. Section 2 will focus on the adjacent boroughs of St Pancras and Hampstead, where so many of the boarding houses and hotels that Sainsbury identified as sources of loneliness were concentrated. My contention is that Sainsbury's psychosocial conception of the city – evidence of a more general intellectual innovation – drew on a historically and materially determined geography, a distinct variant of the zone of transition. The psychosocial city drew its conceptual power from this specific spatial situation, a situation whose composition, character and ideological atmosphere had everything to do with changing property relations in the wake of the Second World War.

2. Mobility and Stability in a Service District

Figure 2.9 shows the location of boarding houses, hotels and guest houses across North London postcodes in 1948, as listed in the main postal directory of the day, Kelly's *Post Office London Directory*.⁵¹² The overwhelming majority are concentrated in just two relatively small areas: first, around the southernmost tip of St Pancras near Euston station (and to a lesser extent King's Cross), spilling over into Bloomsbury in the neighbouring Borough of Holborn; second, around Fitzjohn's Avenue in Hampstead, within an area bounded to the east and west by two main roads running north out of London (Finchley Road and Haverstock Hill), and to the south by the London-Midland railway as it swings past Chalk Farm. These two areas correspond remarkably closely to Sainsbury's observations about the clustering of suicides in Hampstead and St Pancras.

⁵¹² *Kelly's Post Office London Directory* (1948), London Metropolitan Archives MF356. Four establishments excluded due to insufficient information. All references to London Metropolitan Archives henceforth abbreviated 'LMA'.

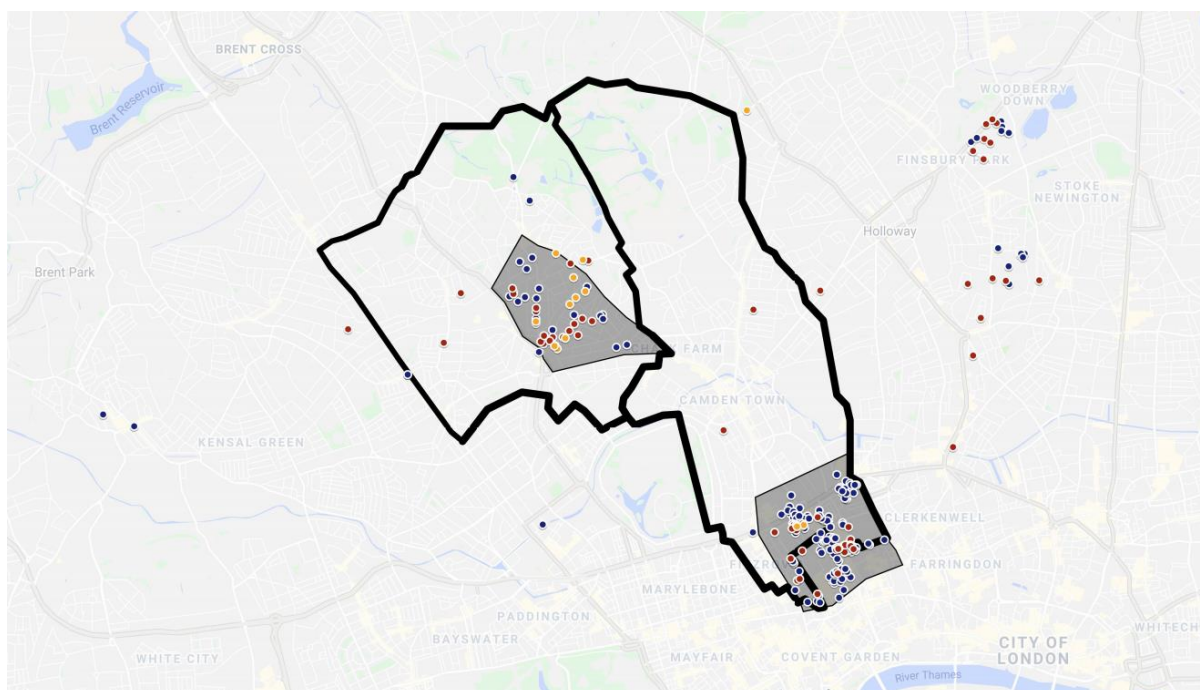


Fig. 2.9 — Map showing 68 Boarding Houses (red), 173 hotels (blue), 15 guest houses (yellow) in the Metropolitan Boroughs of St Pancras (right) and Hampstead (left) in 1948. All establishments have been mapped that fall within a North London postcode, defined as postcodes beginning 'N', NW', or 'WC1'. Information from Kelly's *Post Office London Directory*, London Metropolitan Archives MF356. See Appendix 2 for enlarged version.

As commercial publications, postal directories do not provide comprehensive information. But if we take these lists as representative of at least the more established boarding houses and residential hotels,⁵¹³ then what emerges are two distinct areas, where a large number of houses on most if not all streets were given over to boarding houses and hotel accommodation of one kind or another.⁵¹⁴ Figure 2.9 captures a freeze-frame of what Sainsbury's 'rooming house' districts actually looked like. The picture, with its clustering of related businesses, looks more like that of a classic specialised trading district rather than one of 'social disorganisation'. I want to argue that these two quarters – Euston-Bloomsbury and Hampstead's Fitzjohn's neighbourhood – were in fact marked by a distinct *over-organisation*: a coagulation of functions, relations and physical structures that became a barrier to progress.

⁵¹³ A 1935 guide for boarding house proprietors noted the high attrition rate characteristic of the business, lamenting how the amateurish nature of the industry amounted to a 'system of purchase, failure, panic and sale'. SWW, *Hotel and Boarding House Management for Small Establishments* (London: Blandford Press, 1935), p. 26.

⁵¹⁴ Along the 200m stretch of Bernard Street (WC1), for example, there were 10 hotels and 6 boarding houses. Coram street (WC1), a slightly shorter street, numbered 11 hotels. Kelly's *Post Office London Directory* (1948), LMA MF356, pp. 1952 and 2285-6.

To be clear, I am not arguing that this 'over-organisation' caused people to become suicidal, any more than I believe that social 'disorganisation' constitutes an adequate explanatory framework. Rather, my contention is that the new landscape of meaning evidenced by Peter Sainsbury only becomes possible by seizing on actual material aspects of the city, themselves the result of historical transformations. If Sainsbury tends to reify those aspects of the city that confirm his distinctive mythology of London's rented rooms, my aim here is to restore them to their full historical-material reality.

In order to do this, I supplement the map shown in Figure 2.9 with information drawn from the 1939 Register, together with electoral registers from the 1940s and '50s. Compiled for rationing purposes, the 1939 Register provides the best fully accessible source on individual residency patterns for the period.⁵¹⁵ Annual electoral registers are somewhat less reliable, but still useful if treated with caution.⁵¹⁶ In areas of high mobility, one would expect the snapshot offered by electoral registers to best represent the *least mobile* section of the population.⁵¹⁷ In other words, they would under-represent the overall population of high mobility areas, especially among younger people and immigrant communities, while excluding altogether 'aliens' (non-commonwealth immigrants) and others without the right to vote.⁵¹⁸ In the analysis that follows, I focus on two streets: Cartwright Gardens (WC1) and Fitzjohn's Avenue (NW3).

⁵¹⁵ 1911 is the last Census fully open to the public. The 1939 Register is also particularly valuable as the 1941 Census was destroyed by bomb damage.

⁵¹⁶ Kate Foster, 'The Electoral Register as a Sampling Frame', *Survey Methodology Bulletin*, Vol. 33 (July 1993), 1-7. Incompleteness (i.e. under-representation) rather than inaccuracy – in the form of registrations at the wrong address, or double registrations – would appear to be the main issue.

⁵¹⁷ Two postwar studies on the reliability of electoral registers both unfortunately exclude boarding houses, and hotels. One of these studies (from 1950) shows evidence that people who moved house soon after the qualification date (within seven months) accounted for a third of people eligible to vote but not registered. Conversely, Kate Foster's study from 1993, showed that those moving *before* the qualification date (within six months) were still likely to end up being recorded on the register at their correct place of address (82% of those moving within six months before the qualification date, versus 94% for non-movers). I.e. electoral registers present an indicative snapshot for a relatively short period around the qualification date, which is why I refer to qualification dates rather than publication dates in my use of them here. PG Gray, T Corlett and Pamela Frankland, *The Register of Electors as a Sampling Frame* (London: Central Office of Information, 1950), p. 9 and Foster, 'The Electoral Register as a Sampling Frame', *Survey Methodology Bulletin*, p. 5. See also PG Gray and Frances Gee, *Electoral Registration for Parliamentary Elections: an Enquiry Made for the Home Office* (London: Central Office of Information, May 1967), pp. 10-13.

⁵¹⁸ Recent studies have shown that electoral registers are considerably less reliable in the case of BAME constituents. These tendencies may however be slightly offset by the fact that electoral registers from the postwar period were generally more reliable than later ones from the 1980s onwards. Apart from higher participation in elections generally, the regular use of door-to-door canvassing to follow up registration forms may account for this greater reliability. Overall, electoral registers give an incomplete but relatively accurate picture of residency patterns. See the report by the Electoral Commission, *The Completeness and Accuracy of Electoral Registers in Great Britain* (2010), pp. 2 and 23.

I begin with the history of the Euston-Bloomsbury district. The concentration of hotels and boarding houses there developed in relation to the growth of the railways. It was the construction of Euston Station in 1837 by the Midland Railway company that first established the area as a hotel district. Competitors to the Midland's own Euston Hotel (built the following year) soon followed, including the plethora of small hotels and boarding houses to the south.⁵¹⁹ By the postwar period, one finds among these establishments a complex web of interconnections based on the exchange of services: hotel kitchens supplying railway dining cars; rail companies organising coach transport for hotels; boarding houses accommodating railway staff, as well as the army of maids, cooks and secretaries that lived alongside the more fleeting traffic in businessmen, tourists and students.⁵²⁰ Accommodation was further integrated with the railways due to the fact that the railway companies were themselves major landlords.⁵²¹ Figure 2.10 shows one such area of railway owned property, just south of Euston station.

⁵¹⁹ Jack Simmons, 'Railways, Hotels, and Tourism in Great Britain 1839-1914' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 19, no. 2 (April 1984), 201-22, pp. 204-7 and Oliver Carter, *An Illustrated History of British Railway Hotels 1838-1983* (St Michael's, Lancs: Silver Link, 1990), pp. 8-9.

⁵²⁰ On catering arrangements see for example British Transport Commission and the British Railway Board, London Midland and Scottish Railway Company, 'Euston station reconstruction: board papers and correspondence, 1955-60', Extract from the Minutes of the Hotels and Catering Committee of the 24th Approved by the Board of the 25th July 1935, NA AN 109/982. All subsequent references to British Transport Commission abbreviated BTC; references to British Railways Board abbreviated BRB; references to the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company abbreviated LMS. Regarding private bus services between St Pancras station and the Euston Hotel see *ibid.*, Extract from the Minutes of the Hotels and Catering Committee of the 17th Approved by the Board of the 18th April 1935, NA AN 109/982.

⁵²¹ By 1945 British railway companies owned an estimated fifty thousand houses, with an annual rental income close to £3.5 million, plus £10 million worth of hotel investments. Labour Research Department, *Railways for the Nation* (London: Labour Research Department, 1945), p. 11. The £3.5 million figure is from 1938.

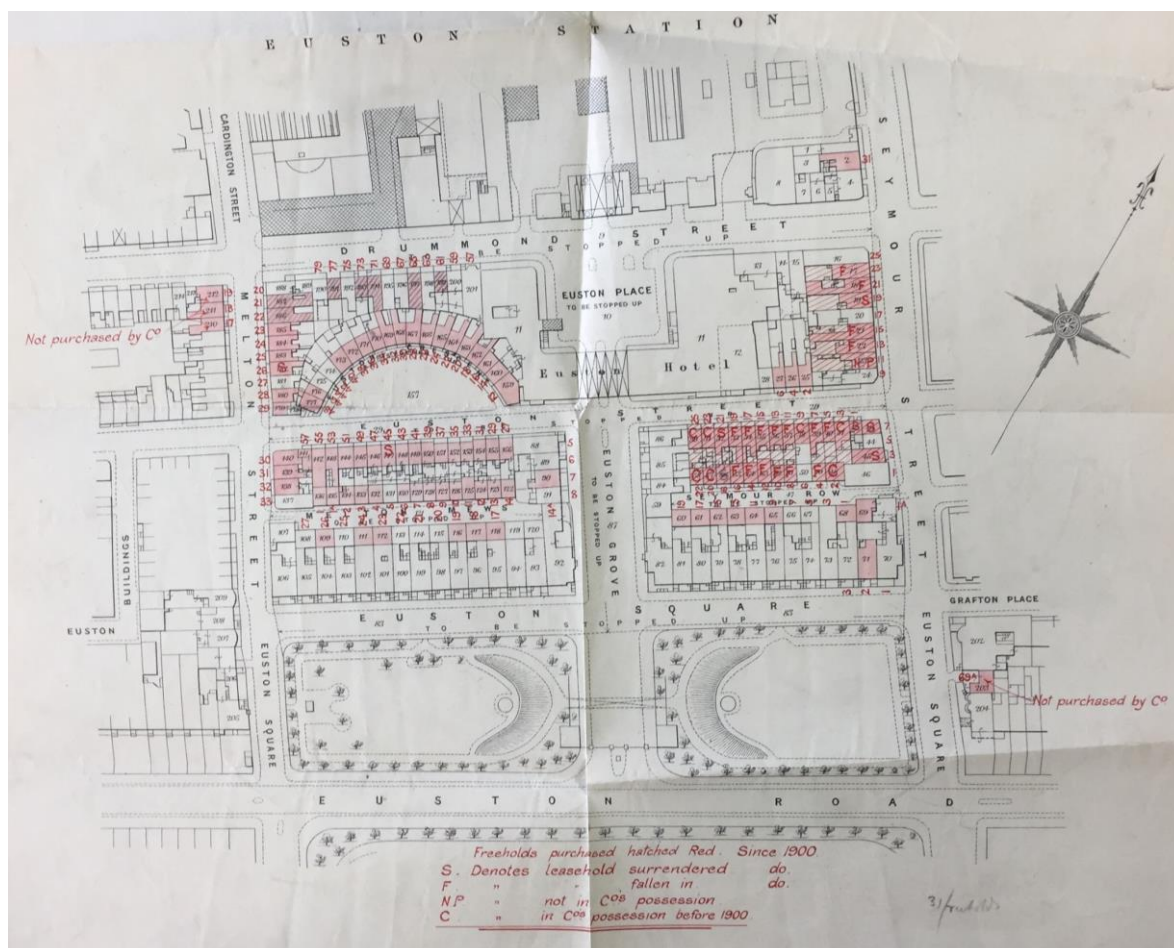


Fig. 2.10 — London and North Western Railway, map of Euston Grove and surrounding area (1900). ‘Euston Hotel extension: purchase by London and North Western Railway of houses; rehousing displaced tenants’ (1913-14), National Archives HLG 1/58/3. See Appendix 3 for enlarged version. Properties purchased by the company that same year are marked with hatch lines. Only a handful are shown as being outside of the company’s possession (see those marked ‘NP’ or ‘Not purchased by co.’).

As one might expect, boarding houses and small hotels in the Euston-Bloomsbury area were generally less exclusive than in Hampstead, accommodating low paid service workers alongside professionals and junior white collar workers. According to the 1939 Register, residents at 51-53 Cartwright Gardens, later known as the Hotel Cambria, included a waitress, hotel porter, trade union officer, journalist, architect and ‘bank official’.⁵²² At number 56, Rosa Cotti, the hotel manager, lived with her husband Paolo, who worked as a fish cook, alongside five others including an optician, a law student and a woman of ‘private means’.⁵²³

⁵²² 1939 Register, schedule 30, *Find My Past* <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/1939register>> [accessed 15 September 2018].

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, schedule 27.

The Terminus hotel at numbers 46-47 accommodated a similarly diverse set of guests, with students lodging alongside professors and nurses alongside chartered accountants.⁵²⁴

A remarkable mix of classes lived side by side in these establishments, which is not to say that residents were by any means totally disparate. Some establishments ended up specialising in certain trades. At numbers 26 and 8 Euston Square, almost all the residents were railway staff, most of them employed in station tea rooms and buffets.⁵²⁵ While number 5 Burton Place, a boarding house run by Annie Smith on the corner of Cartwright Gardens, was home in 1939 to three retired and one current Metropolitan Police officer, as well as three civil servants.⁵²⁶

Far from social disorganisation, what we see in the southern part of St Pancras, and the northern tip of Holborn, is a highly integrated service district. I'd like to suggest that this area can be thought of as a large scale, geographically distributed, *service machine*. In the same way that grand hotels like the Euston were architectural assemblages dedicated to service, so the whole district centred on Euston and Bloomsbury performed a similar function.⁵²⁷ As well as acting as centralising nodes of service activity, the railway companies imposed a unifying aesthetic stamp on the area, most famously with the Doric Arch that bridged Euston Grove.⁵²⁸ The three-block deep phalanx of railway owned property centred on Euston Grove (Figure 2.10) hid the grimier, technological side of the railway machine to the north, while also bolting itself on to the self-assured symmetries of Bloomsbury to the south. The proliferation of boarding houses and small hotels meanwhile took over the ordered squares of what remained of the Duke of Bedford's estate.⁵²⁹

How this concentration of boarding houses came to exist involves a tale of decline familiar across the great estates – a tale less insalubrious yet far more richly ironic than the one

⁵²⁴ Ibid., schedule 41.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., schedule number unknown. Due to lockdown conditions I have not been able to verify the schedule number for this particular reference.

⁵²⁶ Out of a total of ten residents at the time. Ibid., schedule 108.

⁵²⁷ Herbert Lachmayer, Christian Gargerle and Géza Hajós, trans. Pamela Johnston, 'The Grand Hotel', *AA Files*, no. 22 (Autumn 1991), 33-41; Lisa Pfueller Davidson, 'Early Twentieth Century Hotel Architects and the Origins of Standardisation', *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Vol. 25 (2005), 72-103.

⁵²⁸ BTC and BRB, LMS, 'Euston station reconstruction: board papers and correspondence, 1955-60', Euston Station Modernisation: Second Draft Report, p. 3, included within Notes of Meeting held at Euston on Friday, 10 April 1959, NA AN 109/982.

⁵²⁹ By 1902 critics were describing Bloomsbury as 'a city of cheap boarding houses'. Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn. (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 16.

seen in Part 1 of this thesis. For if the Bedford office's management techniques safeguarded Bloomsbury's exemplary Georgian architecture, the eventual inheritors of these properties would turn out to be exactly the kinds of 'temporary' accommodation the estate wanted to exclude.⁵³⁰ In a sense, the estate was a victim of its own success at fighting off the 'lodging house dry rot' that so badly affected neighbouring areas.⁵³¹ Already in the 1830s, the hushed, genteel atmosphere of Gower Street led one critic to describe it as 'a street which scarcely exhibits any signs of its being an inhabited place. [...] The stranger, in passing along this street, feels an emotion of melancholy come over him, caused by its dullness and unbroken monotony.'⁵³²

The managers of the Bedford estate won the initial gambit of uneven development. But they were unprepared for the larger political storm that would eventually decimate their holdings. The very stasis that estate managers strived for left their properties vulnerable to wholesale appropriation later on. Two waves of anti-landowner action struck during the twentieth century, first in 1910, with land duties enacted by the Lloyd George government, and then after the Second World War, with Labour's 100% development tax and new compulsory purchase powers – the latter used to secure another chunk of the estate for the University of London in 1945-51.⁵³³ With the Bedford estates as a whole reduced by a factor of ten, Bloomsbury's well-preserved squares and terraces, no longer viable as bourgeois housing, came to be occupied mainly by boarding houses, small hotels, university accommodation and converted offices.⁵³⁴ The rigidification of space, pursued with a conscious determination to resist capitalism's inherent dissolving tendencies, accomplished, in the end, the formal misalignment of abstract space and spatial practice.

A parallel story can be told about the Hampstead concentration of boarding houses and small hotels. In both cases uneven development resulted in characteristics opposite to those

⁵³⁰ Donald Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries*, 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale, 1982), pp. 162-8. Originally published 1964.

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 175. The phrase 'lodging house dry rot' is attributed to the Steward of the Bedford Estate, describing Gower Street in the 1870s.

⁵³² Olsen, *Town Planning*, p. 175.

⁵³³ 'The Bedford Estate: The Sale of the Estate', in *Survey of London: Volume 36, Covent Garden*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London, 1970), pp. 48-52. British History Online <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol36/pp48-52>> [accessed 10 September 2018], paragraph 11; Oliver Marriott, *The Property Boom* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967), p. 94; History of the Bloomsbury Estate', *Bedford Estates* <<http://www.bedfordestates.com/the-estate/history/>> [accessed 10 September 2018].

⁵³⁴ Guy Shrubsole, 'Who Owns Central London', *Who Owns England* (28 October 2017) <<https://whoownsengland.org/2017/10/28/who-owns-central-london/>> [accessed 10 September 2018].

seen in North Kensington: rather than mobility and rapid redevelopment, a remarkable stasis. Hampstead, it should be noted, was never a suburb in the modern sense of an offshoot from the city but rather embodied a special kind of resistance to urban incorporation.⁵³⁵ When the development of the Maryon Wilson estate – into what would become the Fitzjohn's neighbourhood (highlighted in Figure 2.9) – finally got underway in 1876, it was pitched in distinctly anti-urban terms.⁵³⁶ Rather than the managed squares of Bloomsbury, or the close-packed terraces of Kensington, the neo-gothic and Arts and Crafts style 'castles' along Fitzjohn's Avenue appealed to what FML Thompson in history of the borough called: 'the demand of new generations of the moderately well-to-do who were sentenced by their limited means to be permanent town-dwellers'.⁵³⁷ Hampstead and the Fitzjohn's neighbourhood were isolated by design. London inevitably swallowed the area, but without ever really digesting it.⁵³⁸

In the 1870s-80s the unique offering of the Fitzjohn's neighbourhood was, against predictions, very successful in securing buyers from the upper middle classes, even attracting industrialists and company directors.⁵³⁹ But like the Bedford estate, this elite part of London was caught on the backfoot by a combination of progressive legislation and the general upheaval in market conditions caused by the First World War. As an editorial in the main bulletin of the property industry, the *Estates Gazette*, put it in 1930:

The last fifteen years have disturbed many bases; some prices have soared while others have fallen, and in each instance the process has often been bewildering. [...] The war shook everything, but [...] both before and since that upheaval there has been a mass of legislation' leaving property owners 'numbed and "comatose".⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁵ FML Thompson, *Hampstead: Building a Borough 1650-1964* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 132-166. As a reporter on the state of the housing market put it in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1922: 'Hampstead is not a garden suburb [...] It is a settled place. It has had time to consolidate itself.' 'The Revelations of a House Hunter - No. 3', *Pall Mall Gazette* (12 July 1922), p. 7. No named author given.

⁵³⁶ Thompson, *Hampstead*, p. 321.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵³⁸ Around 1800 Hampstead's density was comparable to other soon-to-be ex-villages, such as Paddington, Battersea, Lewisham and Camberwell. By 1900, however, all those areas had overtaken Hampstead by several degrees of magnitude. Thompson, *Hampstead*, pp. 44-5.

⁵³⁹ John Richardson, *Hampstead One Thousand: AD 986-1986*, (London: Historical Publications, 1985), p. 86.

⁵⁴⁰ 'Occasional Notes', *Estates Gazette*, Vol. 115, No. 3367 (4 Jan 1930), 17, p. 17. No named author given. "Comatose" is a quote from one Mr. Hollis in a speech to the Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' institute.

It was in these conditions that large houses around Fitzjohn's avenue started appearing on the resale market.⁵⁴¹ Yet it would soon become apparent that these eclectic, outsized semis were over-capitalised in all the wrong ways. Technical improvements and deskilling in the construction industry put pressure on the real value of houses built just thirty years ago. The ability of the newly ascendant building societies to set the terms for housebuilders – and the government's Tudor Walters standards – accelerated this downward trend.⁵⁴² These combined shifts in production, finance and legislation gave birth to the 'mansion flat' (or 'service flat') as a more socially appropriate residence for upper middle-class professionals.⁵⁴³ These upmarket rentals offered all the conveniences and none of the burdens of Hampstead properties with multiple reception rooms going for quite astronomical sums by the 1920s.⁵⁴⁴

The spread of boarding houses and hotels in the Fitzjohn's neighbourhood during the interwar period can be seen as filling a void left by would-be individual purchasers, *and* as a form of incomplete adaptation to the new model suggested by the mansion flat. Where original owners struggled to sell these expensive, outdated houses, entrepreneurial or institutional buyers provided an alternative to slashing prices or hanging on for another decade.⁵⁴⁵ By 1948, boarding houses and small hotels formed an integral part of the Fitzjohn's neighbourhood (Figure 2.9). By the early 1960s, Hampstead appears to have been well known for this. A guide to *Small Hotels and Boarding Houses* published by the British Travel and Holidays Association listed 26 establishments in north west London, of which over half were in the NW3 postcode (encompassing central Hampstead and parts of Primrose Hill).⁵⁴⁶ Specialisation and concentration of a particular type of service-oriented

⁵⁴¹ A search of several local newspapers covering Hampstead – the *Hendon and Finchley Times*, the *Barnet Press* and *Norwood News* – and two papers specialising in property – the *Globe* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* – yields 11 adverts for house sales on Fitzjohn's Avenue during the period 1910-30. Only two adverts for property on Fitzjohn's Avenue show up in the same papers during the rest of the '30s and both of these were for converted or purpose-built flats rather than whole houses.

⁵⁴² Peter Scott, 'Marketing Mass Home Ownership and The Creation of The Modern Working-Class Consumer in Inter-War Britain', *Business History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 2008), 4–25, pp. 6 and 10.

⁵⁴³ Chris Hamnett and Bill Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits: Flat Break-Up and The Decline of Private Renting* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 20-22.

⁵⁴⁴ 'Revelations of a House Hunter', *Pall Mall Gazette*, p. 7.

⁵⁴⁵ John Richardson gives the example of 'Romney's house on Holly Bush Hill, owned by architect Clough Williams Ellis, [which] failed to reach its reserve price of £12,500 in 1931 and only got to £7500.' Richardson, *Hampstead One Thousand*, p. 120.

⁵⁴⁶ *Small Hotels and Boarding Houses in London* (London: British Travel and Holidays Association, 1963), pp. 18-23.

accommodation – rather than ‘social disorganisation’ – dominated Hampstead’s Fitzjohn’s neighbourhood.

One might expect the class character of this neighbourhood to have declined during the conversion to boarding house style accommodation. But in several establishments, that doesn’t appear to have been the case. Take the Melbourne Court Residential Hotel at number 17 Fitzjohn’s Avenue, where according to the 1939 Register most of the clientele were unambiguously upper middle class. Among them were a retired bank manager, an advertising sales manager, a lawyer, the owner of a beauty salon, and three residents of ‘private means’.⁵⁴⁷ The Grew Hotel at 43-5 Fitzjohn’s Avenue similarly catered for the upper middle classes. Its eighteen residents included a surgeon, a foreign correspondent, a draughtsman with the Admiralty, plus four others with private incomes.⁵⁴⁸

The historical irony of these examples lies in the fact that an unchanging class of people inherited a changed landscape. Upheavals within the framework of abstract space altered the actuality but not the agents of spatial practice. The situation is roughly the inverse of Euston-Bloomsbury, where a well-preserved district passed into the hands of the very people it sought to keep out. The same bank managers, lawyers, physicians and journalists who flocked to Hampstead at the end of the nineteenth century continued to squat within the ruins of their class fathers’ and grandfathers’ (and in some cases mothers’ and grandmothers’) former demi-villas.

In Hampstead’s premier boarding house district, change appeared incomplete and maladapted. The boarding house or residential hotel, often run as a family business with live-in maids and cooks, was halfway between a mansion flat and a traditional servant-keeping household, and yet as luxurious as neither.⁵⁴⁹ It was therefore halfway between two meanings of ‘service’ – the one operating through labour intensive routine, the other through commodified, on-demand conveniences.⁵⁵⁰ If an area like this was in a sense ‘stagnant’, to

⁵⁴⁷ 1939 Register, schedule 111, *Find My Past*.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, schedule 220.

⁵⁴⁹ Many boarding houses made strenuous efforts to maintain the decorum of a bourgeois family household. Terri Mullholland, *British Boarding Houses in Interwar Women’s Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 35-7.

⁵⁵⁰ Of the 26 establishments listed in the north west London section of the British Travel and Holidays Association’s guide to *Small Hotels and Boarding Houses in London*, 5 offered telephones and 4 had TVs but

use Ruth Glass' vocabulary, it was not, in another sense, 'decaying'.⁵⁵¹ Space and the visible signs of time were here stultified, stiffened, overdetermined; overall a little too well preserved.

This sense of social 'over-organisation', crystallised in the urban fabric, is all the more striking when compared to the recent upheaval undergone by London's boarding houses and hotels during and immediately after the Second World War. Following the raft of emergency defence regulations, hundreds of hotels were requisitioned by different government departments.⁵⁵² By the summer of 1943, at least 1,752 hotels and boarding houses had been taken over.⁵⁵³ Across London, local authorities were said to hold 57,000 properties of all kinds on requisition, accommodating 91,000 families.⁵⁵⁴ In the Euston-Bloomsbury area, requisitioned hotels included the National, the Cora, the Grafton, the Ivanhoe, and the Thackeray Hotel.⁵⁵⁵ These were mainly larger establishments, but smaller premises such as the White Hall Hotel on Montague street and numbers 3, 4 and 5 Brunswick Square were also taken over. In Hampstead, the council as well as the Air Ministry requisitioned a number of Victorian mansions along the northern edge of Hampstead Heath, including Athlone House, which subsequently passed into the hands of the NHS.⁵⁵⁶ However this was on a smaller scale than Euston-Bloomsbury or other parts of London, and mostly Hampstead seems to have escaped requisitioning.⁵⁵⁷

only 5 had central heating. See pp. 18-23. Compare this to mansion flats in the 1930s, which included garages, roof gardens, gymnasias etc. Hamnett and Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits*, p. 23.

⁵⁵¹ Ruth Glass, 'Introduction', Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), xiii-xlii, p. xxv.

⁵⁵² Don Watson, *Squatting in Britain: Housing, Politics and Direct Action, 1945-1955* (London: Merlin, 2016), p. 37.

⁵⁵³ 'Requisitioned hotel and boarding house accommodation. War-time hostel and hutment accommodation, etc.', NA LAB 30/39. Figures collated from the following reports: Hotels and Boarding Houses Requisitioned by the Ministry of Works with Reference to Catering Wages Commission's Letter of 24th July 1943 para 2 (1) and (2); Hotels and Boarding Houses Requisitioned by the Air Ministry [...], Hotels and Boarding Houses Requisitioned by the War Office [...]; Hotels and Boarding Houses Requisitioned by the Admiralty [...].

⁵⁵⁴ 'Nation of New Homes', *Daily Record* (19 September 1946), p. 1.

⁵⁵⁵ See the list under Region 5 in Hotels and Boarding Houses Requisitioned by the Ministry of Works with Reference to Catering Wages Commission's Letter of 24th July 1943 para 2 (1) and (2), 'Requisitioned hotel and boarding house accommodation. War-time hostel and hutment accommodation, etc.', NA LAB 30/39.

⁵⁵⁶ Richard Webber and Roger Burrows, 'Life in an Alpha Territory', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 15 (November 2016), 3139-3154, p. 3145; TFT Baker, Diane Bolton and Patricia Croot, 'Hampstead: Belsize', in CR Elrington ed., *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 9, Hampstead, Paddington* (London: Victoria County History, 1989), 51-60, paragraph 35, *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol9/pp51-60>> [accessed 9 August 2020]; Dan Carrier, 'How Athlone Helped Defeat Hitler', *Camden New Journal* (25 June 2009) <http://www.thecnj.com/camden/2009/062509/news062509_11.html> [accessed 9 August 2020].

⁵⁵⁷ I have not yet found any evidence of hotels and boarding houses being requisitioned in Hampstead. See 'Requisitioned hotel and boarding house accommodation. War-time hostel and hutment accommodation, etc.', NA LAB 30/39.

Requisitioning affected property relations unevenly. Higher class areas stood a better chance of escaping government control.⁵⁵⁸ But for mixed areas like Euston-Bloomsbury, the policy brought a flood of movement and change to this usually sedate area. During the war, Bloomsbury was said to have a 'transit camp' atmosphere.⁵⁵⁹ Hundreds of refugees from Gibraltar were billeted in hotels on Great Russell St. The Palace Hotel on Bloomsbury Street housed the offices of relief organisations working with exiles from Europe, and Canadian troops were stationed in several hotels close to Euston station.⁵⁶⁰ As an emergency measure, requisitioning had a short life-span built into it. But in the immediate aftermath of the war, residents, activists (many associated with the Communist Party) and a number of local councils challenged the temporary and limited nature of the policy.⁵⁶¹ In September 1946, around 1,500 people occupied several high-class hotels and apartment blocks in central London, including the Ivanhoe Hotel in Bloomsbury.⁵⁶² The so-called 'luxury-squats' raised the political stakes of an already militant housing movement, which earlier that year had seen mass squatting involving tens of thousands of people occupying empty army camps. Although short lived, the London actions effectively contrasted the housing conditions of the rich and the poor, and helped force onto the agenda fundamental questions about the legacy of wartime emergency measures and the rights of property.⁵⁶³ How swiftly should requisitioned buildings be handed back to their owners? Might there be cases where alternative, public uses should be considered? As a result of questions like these, at least one large hotel in Mayfair was converted to council housing.⁵⁶⁴

Requisitioning and mass occupations shattered the image of the hotel as an insulated world-in-itself, a self-sufficient service machine, as class privileges and the rights of property were partially subordinated to national priorities.⁵⁶⁵ Radical spatial practice had a dialectical

⁵⁵⁸ The Minister of Health at the time, Henry Willink, suggested that owners in higher class areas managed to arrange hasty sales or fictitious tenancies for properties that were liable to be taken over. Samuel Burgum, 'From Grenfell Tower to the Home Front: Unsettling Property Norms Using a Genealogical Approach', *Antipode*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2019), 458-477, p. 468.

⁵⁵⁹ Richard Tames, *Bloomsbury Past: A Visual History* (London: Historical Publications, 1993), p. 135.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶¹ Watson, *Squatting in Britain*, pp. 37 and 40-1.

⁵⁶² Watson, *Squatting in Britain*, p. 104.

⁵⁶³ The day after the squatters were evicted, Aneurin Bevan announced that he would aim to complete 30,000 council houses by Christmas. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵⁶⁴ See the very revealing case of the St. Regis Hotel on Cork Street, eventually handed over to Westminster Council to convert into housing. Air Ministry and Successors: Civil Aviation, 'St Regis Hotel, London: use as offices by British Overseas Airways Corporation on de-requisitioning by Air Ministry also use by proposed International Civil Aviation Club', 1946-7, NA BT 217/553.

⁵⁶⁵ Randi Saloman, 'Arnold Bennett's Hotels', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring 2012), 1-25, p. 9; Lachmayer et al., 'The Grand Hotel', p. 34. Alan Sinfield describes a similar experience in his analysis of

relationship with regulatory activity. In a certain moment after the Second World War, the two came together to rewrite the functioning of the Euston-Bloomsbury service district, overhauling the atmosphere of melancholy seclusion that Bloomsbury was known for.

And yet this period of turmoil – when all that was solid seemed suddenly to ‘melt into air’ – turned out, in many ways, to be only a passing storm.⁵⁶⁶ The socialist-leaning gossip columnist Hannen Swaffer wrote in December 1946 that ‘Bloomsbury even today, looks very much as it must have done in the days of Dickens’, even if ‘[h]ere and there, modern buildings destroy its sedate neatness.’⁵⁶⁷ Postwar reconstruction did not leave the area totally untouched, as for example at the new Tybalds Close Estate near Lamb’s Conduit Street.⁵⁶⁸ But the core of the Euston-Bloomsbury service district was remarkably stable throughout the postwar period.

This is evident in terms of residency patterns. 45 out of 62 of those registered in boarding houses or hotels on Cartwright Gardens in Autumn 1950 (thirteen establishments in total) were, according to electoral registers, living at the same address a year earlier.⁵⁶⁹ More surprising still, the very same individuals (all 45 of them) were still resident at the same address by Autumn 1958.⁵⁷⁰ This cohort of long term residents – spanning almost a decade and possibly longer – would have formed a sizable part of the street’s fluctuating population.⁵⁷¹ The pattern is consistent with the fact that Holborn in 1946 was estimated to have the highest average age of residents and the smallest average household size compared to other boroughs across the country.⁵⁷² Something similar can be seen in

Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and the setting of a country house overrun during wartime by army personnel. See Alan Sinfeld, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 13.

⁵⁶⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore, *Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 6; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 3rd edn. (London: Verso, 2010).

⁵⁶⁷ Hannen Swaffer, ‘There’s Holly at No. 48’, *Daily Record* (23 Dec 1946), p. 2

⁵⁶⁸ ‘Building the Tybalds Close Estate’ *A London Inheritance* (9 September 2018)

<<https://alondoninheritance.com/thebombedcity/tybalds-close-estate/>> [accessed 8 August 2020].

⁵⁶⁹ The rough date, Autumn 1950, refers to the qualifying date rather than the publication date of the register. Register of Parliamentary and Local Government Electors, Registration Area St Pancras, 1951 (qualifying date 20 November 1950), Ward N, District 8, p. 3, British Library BL.H.68. Ward, District and Page references for electoral registers will subsequently be abbreviated as follows: e.g. for the register just cited, N/8, p. 3. For the previous year’s register see Register of Parliamentary and Local Government Electors, Registration Area St Pancras, 1950 (qualifying date 20 November 1949), N/8, pp. 3-4, British Library BL.H.68.

⁵⁷⁰ Register of Parliamentary and Local Government Electors, Registration Area St Pancras, 1959 (qualifying date 10 October 1958), N/8, p. 3, British Library BL.H.68.

⁵⁷¹ Note that some establishments simply don’t appear in the register of a given year, presumably because no long term residents lived there.

⁵⁷² Alexander Block, *Estimating Housing Needs* (London: Architectural Press, 1946), quoted in ‘900,000 Will Set Up Homes’, *Daily Record* (12 Jan 1946), p. 3.

Hampstead. On Fitzjohn's Avenue, 69 out of 131 of those registered in boarding houses and hotels in 1950 (across 8 establishments) had been living at the same address for a year or more, and of these, at least 12 were still there by Autumn 1958.⁵⁷³ The true number of long term residents in boarding houses and hotels on Fitzjohn's avenue may have been considerably greater.⁵⁷⁴

Based on electoral registers, these figures likely underestimate the number of short-term residents. Nevertheless, they show that long-term residence in boarding houses and small hotels was very much part of ordinary life in postwar London. Within service districts such as the ones looked at here, there was clearly the potential to form stable communities, even on a conventional understanding of what 'community' might mean. This undermines the received image of the rooming house district as a place of restless mobility and *anomie*. On the contrary, rooming house districts like Euston-Bloomsbury and Hampstead's Fitzjohn's neighbourhood could be places of remarkable, even overweening stability. I want to suggest that rather than social disorganisation, we should think in terms of *over-organisation*: the stubbornly engrained nature of existing spatial practices and the rigidity of social mores that went with this.

It was this sense of 'stupefaction, of gas-fire drunkenness', of drowning in 'an orgy of *ennui*' that Patrick Hamilton captured in his novel of 1947, *The Slaves of Solitude*.⁵⁷⁵ For Miss Roach, Hamilton's main character, *ennui* rather than *anomie* is the signal atmosphere of the boarding house; a sense of being cut off from the living forces of the world, from politics, from social upheaval, from meaningful action. All who live there are caught in the eternal 'petty boarding-house lassitude'.⁵⁷⁶ The novel is set during wartime in a boarding house known as *The Rosamund Tearooms*, where Miss Roach finds the daily interactions with her fellow lodgers tiresome and overbearing. The arrival next-door of two American Lieutenants provides some relief and she ends up having a relationship with one of them. Her best

⁵⁷³ Register of Parliamentary and Local Government Electors, Hampstead Electoral Division of the County of London, 1950 (qualifying date 20 November 1949), A/1, pp. 9-10, G/1, pp. 7-9 and H/2, p. 21, British Library BL.H.68; Register of Parliamentary and Local Government Electors, Hampstead Electoral Division of the County of London, 1951 (qualifying date 20 November 1950), A/1, p. 10, G/1, pp. 7-9 and H/2, pp. 21-22, British Library BL.H.68; Register of Parliamentary and Local Government Electors, Hampstead Electoral Division of the County of London, 1959 (qualifying date 10 October 1958), A/1, p. 9 and H/2, pp. 22-23, British Library BL.H.68.

⁵⁷⁴ A number of relevant pages are missing from the 1959 register for Hampstead (qualifying date 10 October 1958). See *ibid*.

⁵⁷⁵ Patrick Hamilton, *The Slaves of Solitude* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2006), p. 29. Originally 1947.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*. 320.

friend, for a time, is a German woman named Vicki. Through the character of Miss Roach, Hamilton suggests that any life worth living lies outside the enclosed world of the boarding house; or else involves a crossing-over, an infiltration and a subtle unhinging of this world itself, as outside, foreign elements are brought within it.

Hamilton's withering humour, however, leaves little hope of redemption. Vicki turns out to be a cynical manipulator, the Lieutenant a drunk, and the reader is led to the foregone conclusion that the boarding house is a place of misery. One can take pleasure in the sticky end met by Mr Thwaites, the resident bully and suspected fascist sympathiser, but the friendship struck up in the final episode between Miss Roach and the unassuming Mr Prest, a retired music hall artist, comes too late to be more than symbolic. In Section 4, I explore these kinds of surprising alliances further, showing how the boarding house or lodging house became, for other authors, a container for a new vision of community.

In Hamilton's novel there is no possibility of change except through escape. In reality, reluctant adaptation rather than complete stasis may have been the rule. While many establishments in Hampstead catered almost exclusively to the upper middle classes, some welcomed a more eclectic mix of guests. At Mrs Blyth's boarding house – number 11 Fitzjohn's Avenue – there lived Gunther Rosenberg, a bank clerk; Gabriel Guttkind, a photographer; Erwin Guttkind, architect; Stefanie Marbach, nurse; Karel Rindskopf, a bookkeeper in a glass works; and Elizabeth Sheppard-Jones, one of three shorthand typists.⁵⁷⁷ The names point to the possible central European background of several of the residents, while the roster of occupations suggests a greater range of incomes. Other establishments illustrate the same link between emigrant or exile status and a more fluid class composition. At number 13, later known as the 'Brooklyn Hotel', Margit and Beorich Fried, a language teacher and a lawyer, were refugees living alongside a colour print engraver, a chartered surveyor, a law student and a civil servant.⁵⁷⁸

For the Trinidadian poet and broadcaster George Lamming, the presence of 'central European immigrants' as well as 'Indian and African students, Canadians, Australians, [and]

⁵⁷⁷ 1939 Register, schedule 108, *Find My Past*.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109. The 1939 Register recorded refugee status and in some cases nationality.

South Africans' made Hampstead a 'tolerable refuge', the home of intellectuals 'both foreign and native'.⁵⁷⁹ But if Lamming's comparison of staid Hampstead with cosmopolitan Port-of-Spain appears incongruous – a kind of waking dream that haunts the streets at times when 'the sound of typewriters, in the early hours of the morning are as frequent as rain' – that fragile vision was also bound up with what the author called 'the middle-aged resignation of England'.⁵⁸⁰ Lack of purpose masked by politeness might allow space for the migrant and their dreams. But it could also be unbearably elitist, cut-off from the urgent issues of the world – as another Hampstead exile, Bulgarian-born Elias Canetti found. It was thus on the fringes of literary parties in Hampstead during and after the Blitz that Canetti learnt to diagnose '[t]he Worst of England'; 'life as a remote-controlled mummy'.⁵⁸¹ The 'comatose' state of the property-owning classes opened the door ajar to lower middle-class newcomers, including those from the Caribbean and Central Europe. Boarding houses and small hotels were an integral part of this. Yet the emulation of servant keeping households effectively interiorised this new life, closed it away, out of public sight. Canetti's bohemian Hampstead was a bohemia of house parties, not cafés or pubs. And the sound of typewriters that Lamming found so soothing came from spaces hidden within those Hampstead boarding houses. In Lamming's text, the sound appears to drift into the street disembodied, and whether it emanates from the fingertips of shorthand typists, foreign correspondents, or poets remains unknown.

After the changes brought by requisitioning, and despite the accumulated impact of anti-landowner legislation, a period of relative stasis once again gripped the service districts of Euston-Bloomsbury and Hampstead. What caused this? At one level, both areas simply embodied the slow-moving nature of reconstruction – a situation not helped by materials shortages and exacerbated by the Labour Government's emphasis on export production and rearmament.⁵⁸² But more specific factors also had a role to play, and it is here that confluences of power within the city and the determining influence of class really become apparent.

⁵⁷⁹ George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 2nd edn. (London: Allison and Busby, 1984), p. 91.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 91 and 27.

⁵⁸¹ Elias Canetti, *Party in The Blitz: the English Years*, trans. Michael Hofmann (London: Harvill, 2005), p. 48.

⁵⁸² Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 68-9.

I noted earlier how some owners managed to avoid requisitioning in Hampstead. The inactivity of the local council also placed considerable obstructions in the way of change. Before merging into the new Camden council in 1965, the metropolitan borough of Hampstead was dominated by Conservative candidates who were reluctant to provide 'welfare on the rates'. By 1961, Hampstead had managed to house just 8.1% of its residents in local authority accommodation, compared to 20.4% of households in neighbouring St Pancras.⁵⁸³

Euston-Bloomsbury meanwhile straddled St Pancras – which experienced a tumultuous few years of radical left government but otherwise tended to swing between mainstream Labour and Conservative control – and the solidly Conservative Holborn. That the new Camden council inherited around two thirds of its housing stock from St Pancras is testament to the latter's relative success in building council housing.⁵⁸⁴ However, given their proximity to central London, residents in Euston-Bloomsbury had to contend with the delaying tactics of much larger players in the postwar property system. Three stand out: the University of London (UoL), the railways, and private developers.

As we saw earlier, UoL had been handed a sizable part of the Bedford estate after the war, however university elites resisted expansion in the immediate postwar period.⁵⁸⁵ Within Whitehall itself, a clear consensus regarding Britain's skills deficit was slow to cohere.⁵⁸⁶ It therefore took until 1959 for UoL to put together a serious plan for expansion.⁵⁸⁷ A similar dynamic can be observed in the case of the newly nationalised railways. Interest payments on British Transport Stock – issued to compensate former shareholders – weighed heavily on the railways, which as private entities had suffered from decades of underinvestment.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸³ Paul Watt, *The Dynamics of Social Class and Housing: A Study of Local Authority Tenants in the London Borough of Camden* (unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College London, 2001), p. 117.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Jean Bocock et al., 'American Influence on British Higher Education: Science, Technology, and The Problem of University Expansion, 1945-1963', *Minerva*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2003), p. 327-346, pp. 333 and 340; Desmond King and Victoria Nash, 'Continuity of Ideas and the Politics of Higher Education Expansion in Britain from Robbins to Dearing', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2001), 185-207, p. 190; Malcolm Tight, 'Widening Participation: A Post-War Scorecard', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 211-226 (September 2012), pp. 216-7.

⁵⁸⁶ This was despite the recommendations of two official committees on the subject in 1945 and 1946. Bocock et al., 'American Influence on British Higher Education', *Minerva*, pp. 333 and 340.

⁵⁸⁷ Katharina Borsi and Chris Schulte, 'Universities and the City: from Islands of Knowledge to Districts of Innovation', *Journal of Architecture*, Vol. 23, Nos. 7-8, (2018) 1143-1180, pp. 1151-3.

⁵⁸⁸ Charles Loft, 'Reappraisal and Reshaping: Government and the Railway Problem 1951-64', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2001), 71-92, p. 72; Gerald Crompton, 'The Railway Companies and the

The decision in 1952-3 to remove road haulage from the purview of the British Transport Commission (BTC, the organisation established to oversee nationalised transport systems) forced the railways to compete with a rapidly expanding young industry, piling on further pressure.⁵⁸⁹ Private interests and poor governance crippled BTC financially. As a result, modernisation projects such as the redevelopment of Euston station were pushed back by several years.⁵⁹⁰ By the 1950s, Euston-Bloomsbury's ageing railway hotels had become indicative of British 'decline'. The Euston Hotel that BTC inherited – with its clientele of retiring 'dowagers' and its botched structure now posing a physical obstruction to the station's redevelopment – was seen as an ironic symbol of the barriers to progress that Britain faced.⁵⁹¹

Finally, we should look to the role of property developers. Developers like Joe Levy would utterly transform the area in the 1970s, but in the meantime they had every reason to proceed cautiously. Levy's patching together of small plots of land throughout the 1960s for his planned Euston Centre required secrecy in order to keep prices low.⁵⁹² On the residential front, conditions for profitable inner city development had to wait until the Conservative government lifted rent controls in 1957. The developer Alec Colman had no qualms admitting this when he put forward his first plans for what would eventually become the Brunswick centre.⁵⁹³

The relative stability of boarding house life can be read as a sign of an area landlocked in time, retarded from the progress that the postwar settlement promised. The archeology of property relations presented here supports this alternative reading of the meaning of the *ennui* – the 'stupefaction', the 'gas-fire drunkenness' – of boarding house life in postwar London. Maybe Sainsbury was right; the streets of places like Euston, Bloomsbury and Hampstead *were* haunted by a melancholy atmosphere. But the cause of this atmosphere was not quite as Sainsbury thought. Examining the historical geography of these areas

Nationalisation Issue', in Robert Millward and John Singleton eds., *The Political Economy of Nationalisation in Britain, 1920-50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116-143, p. 129

⁵⁸⁹ Loft, 'Government and the Railway Problem', p. 73.

⁵⁹⁰ BTC and BRB, 'Euston station reconstruction: board papers and correspondence, 1955-60', NA AN 109/982.

⁵⁹¹ See also William Hickey, 'One Last Lunch - Before the Hotel of Memories Closes Down', *Daily Express* (13 May 1963), p. 3.

⁵⁹² Nick Wates, *The Battle for Tolmers Sq* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 44-5.

⁵⁹³ Mark Swenarton, 'Politics, Property and Planning: Building the Brunswick, 1958-74', *Town Planning Review* (2013), Vol. 84, No. 2, 197-226, p. 202. At the insistence of the LCC, the development was renegotiated as a public-private partnership providing homes for Camden Council.

reveals a different kind of isolation: isolation not so much as the disparate, the scattered (Dante's grains of spelt, Durkheim's *anomie*), but rather as the involuted, the stuck, the delayed; time out of joint, loose and flailing; space welded shut, glued down inflexibly in its place.

Marshall Berman wrote that the 'pathos of bourgeois monuments is that their material strength and solidity actually count for nothing and carry no weight at all [...] they are blown away like frail reeds by the very forces of capitalist development that they celebrate.'⁵⁹⁴ The history of the service districts of North London points to a kind of pathos almost the inverse of the one Berman describes; the pathos of structures that refuse to melt, that instead freeze up and enter a state of *rigor mortis*, as life drains away leaving only a shell. This special kind of pathos is in fact a central feature of capitalist urbanisation, just as much as the 'melting' vision described so vividly by Berman. As David Harvey explains:

Capital represents itself in the form of a physical landscape created in its own image [...] The geographical landscape which results is the crowning glory of past capitalist development. But at the same time it expresses the power of dead labour over living labour and as such it imprisons and inhibits the accumulation process within a set of specific physical constraints. [...] Capitalist development has therefore to negotiate a knife-edge path between preserving the exchange values of past capital investments [...] and destroying the value of these investments in order to open up fresh room for accumulation.⁵⁹⁵

It is usually only during (or immediately after) moments of economic crisis and war that the value locked up in these physical structures can be radically devalued and swept aside.⁵⁹⁶ For those monuments of the past that survive wars and economic upheaval, a slower burning kind of crisis often awaits them: a crisis of decline. The history of London's 'rooming house' districts, or service districts, as I have called them, exemplifies this inverted but equally contradictory situation.

⁵⁹⁴ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid*, p. 99.

⁵⁹⁵ David Harvey, 'The Urban Process Under Capitalism: a Framework for Analysis', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1-3 (March - December 1978), 101-131, p. 124.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. In this connection, see also Harvey's comments on the fate of the railways in Britain. Ibid., p. 122.

Section 1 showed how a psychosocial approach to urban pathologies constructed the rented world as a space of loneliness, while Section 2 located the resulting 'representational space' in a specific historical and material geography. Property relations, or the ruptures and reifications of abstract space, overdetermined this geography. In the following section, I want to consider one of the key ways that the welfare state intervened in these spaces, seeking to correct the psychological 'diswelfares' produced by capitalism's inevitable evacuation of certain areas. Section 3 looks in this light at the regulatory efforts of visiting social workers.

3. A Reliable Medium



Fig. 2.11 – *The Man Upstairs* (dir. by Don Chaffey, 1958)



Fig. 2.12 – Still from *The Man Upstairs* (dir. Don Chaffey, 1958)



Fig. 2.13 – Still from *The Man Upstairs* (dir. Don Chaffey, 1958)

He puts his ear to the door and listens. This is the basic gesture of the mediator – the mental welfare officer in this case – who has been called in to retrieve the person who paces restlessly about the room on the other side (Figure 2.11, Figure 2.12 and Figure 2.13). Unable to leave for fear of what the outside world might do to them, or what they might do to it, the one behind the door must find some way of reconnecting with the world that has withdrawn from them so vertiginously. This, at least potentially, is what the figure who positions himself, or herself, with varying degrees of professional, scientific, legal and moral authority on the outer limit of the locked room represents: a bridge across the chasm of an original trauma, or a thread to stitch together the fragments of a shattered world.

The Man Upstairs (dir. Don Chaffey, 1958) is a minor classic of postwar British melodrama.⁵⁹⁷ Starring Richard Attenborough as the mentally disturbed tenant who causes a commotion with his neighbours and accidentally injures a police officer, the plot hinges on the various ways in which the police, the mental welfare officer, and the residents of the house themselves, try to secure the exit of the main character – on the one side by force, on the other by persuasion. Critics at the time commended the film's 'stark' realism (the 88 minute drama playing out in 'real time' on screen), as well as the generously fleshed-out

⁵⁹⁷ Alun Falconer won a BAFTA for the film's screenplay.

personalities that emerge from the ‘disturbed antheap’ of a ‘decaying Victorian house somewhere in Chelsea’.⁵⁹⁸ At first glance, *The Man Upstairs* slots neatly into the genre of postwar problem films, many of them set within the run-down spaces of London lodging houses: films like *Sapphire*, *Pool of London*, *The October Man*, and *Flame in the Streets*.⁵⁹⁹ If *Flame in the Streets*, as we saw in Part 1, treats race and racism as the main problems harboured by the capital’s rented rooms, then *The Man Upstairs* focuses on the mental distress caused by social isolation. The fourth and final Section of Part 2 will consider how race and social isolation interact, and the representation of alternative forms of community emerging from this context. In the present Section, I want to examine the nature of official interventions within this space. Specifically, I want to think about forms of regulation that saw the problem of isolation through a psychosocial lens. These modes of intervention, I will argue, navigate or compose a specific kind of space – a space that exists between inner and outer worlds; or to use Lefebvre’s terms, between representational space and spatial practice. Historians of social work and mental health have largely passed over this spatial dimension.⁶⁰⁰ And yet it reveals a great deal not only about postwar London’s rented rooms, but also about the changing nature of the welfare state.

The Man Upstairs, with its curious focus on the role of the mental welfare officer, offers an entry point into these issues. Though little commented on at the time, it is precisely this aspect of the film that suggests something more complex is going on than in the usual run of social problem films. Who is this figure with the firm but gentle voice, the tie and the duffle coat, who presses his ear to the door? Who is it that not only communicates with the suffering individual, but also occupies a mediating position between the repressive elements of the state – in the form of the police and the army (drafted in during the film’s finale) – and the wider community, represented in microcosm by the residents of the lodging house? Like many British films of the 1950s, *The Man Upstairs* frames its ‘problem’ initially as a form of

⁵⁹⁸ ‘A British Film Thriller with a Difference’, *The Times* (6 October 1958), p. 3 and AH Weiler, ‘Screen: British Import; “The Man Upstairs” Arrives at Paris’, *New York Times* (11 August 1959) <<https://www.nytimes.com/1959/08/11/archives/screen-british-import-the-man-upstairs-arrives-at-paris.html?searchResultPosition=231>> [accessed 10 August 2020].

⁵⁹⁹ John Hill, ‘The British “Social Problem” Film: “Violent Playground” and “Sapphire”’, *Screen*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jan-Feb 1985), 34–49.

⁶⁰⁰ See for example John Harris, ‘State Social Work and Social Citizenship in Britain: From Clientelism to Consumerism’, *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 29, No. 6 (December 1999), 915–937; Catherine McDonald, John Harris and Richard Wintersteen, ‘Contingent on Context? Social Work and the State in Australia, Britain and the USA’, *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (March 2003), 191–208; Pat Starkey, ‘Can the Piper Call the Tune? Innovation and Experiment with Deprived Families in Britain, 1940–1980s’, *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (July 2002), 573–587.

criminal behaviour; crime is the denouement of a problem, a deviation from the norm, that remains latent within the population. The problems of isolation and social disorganisation are a police matter. Where the film departs from this formula is in the introduction of a fourth element that throws the classic triad of problem, population, and police into a more complex prism of relations. The film becomes an allegory of the welfare state seen as a totalising yet contradictory system of regulation. I want to suggest that it is no coincidence that the rented room provides the practical and representational crossing point for this prismatic set of relations.

The job title 'mental welfare officer' may or may not have been familiar to postwar audiences. Clearly however, there must have been a degree of assumed knowledge about the function of social services based on visiting the homes of would-be 'patients' or 'clients'.⁶⁰¹ As TH Marshall pointed out, social workers of varying kinds came to play a central part in welfare delivery in postwar Britain.⁶⁰² Their roles multiplied and expanded during the twenty years after the Second World War. In the mental health field this was marked by the 1946 National Health Service Act and the 1959 Mental Health Act.⁶⁰³ Some personnel were co-opted from charitable organisations, which had increased their profile during the war.⁶⁰⁴ Some, such as health visitors, evolved from the supervision of childcare and maternal health in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰⁵ While others, informed by psychotherapy, were relatively recent inventions, for example psychiatric social workers.⁶⁰⁶ As the different types of visiting social worker multiplied, so did competing ideas about what their purpose ought to be. Even within the limited sphere of those concerned directly with psychosocial experience there was a divergence of both ideas and practices. I want to take some time to sketch out these

⁶⁰¹ Both terms were used in the 1950s and '60s, though 'client' became more generally acceptable and was widespread by the 1970s. Hugh McLaughlin, 'What's in a Name: "Client", "Patient", "Customer", "Consumer", "Expert by Experience", "Service User" - What's Next?', *The British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (2009), 1101-1117, p. 1103.

⁶⁰² Robert Pinker, 'T.H. Marshall', in Vic George and Robert Page eds., *Modern Thinkers on Welfare* (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995), 102-118, p. 109.

⁶⁰³ Hugh Freeman, 'Local Authority Services', in Freeman and James Farndale eds., *Trends in the Mental Health Services*, 318-333, p. 318. The 1959 Mental Health Act further empowered local authorities to provide community care and presaged a drastic reduction in psychiatric hospital beds in the early '60s. See Millard, 'Reinventing Intention', *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, p. 503 and Vicky Long, '"Often there is a Good Deal to be Done, But Socially Rather Than Medically": The Psychiatric Social Worker as Social Therapist, 1945-70', *Medical History*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (2011), 223-239, p. 235.

⁶⁰⁴ Starkey, 'Innovation and Experiment with Deprived Families in Britain', *British Journal of Social Work*.

⁶⁰⁵ Cheryl Adams, 'The History of Health Visiting', *Nursing in Practice* (27 November 2012) <<https://www.nursinginpractice.com/history-health-visiting>> [accessed 31 March 2020].

⁶⁰⁶ Noel Timms, *Psychiatric Social Work in Great Britain, 1939-1962* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). Timms traces the origins of PSWs to the early 1930s, with the first specialist course of training established at the LSE in 1929.

differences, focusing on Mental Welfare Officers and Psychiatric Social Workers. Doing so will prepare the ground for a consideration of the spatial dimensions inherent in this emerging form of regulatory activity.

At one extreme, contemporaries in the 1950s and '60s likened some mental welfare officers (MWOs) to 'psychiatric police', who saw their job as removing the mentally ill from the community and were often feared as such.⁶⁰⁷ Others in the profession defended the practical experience associated with compulsory admissions to mental hospitals, while still others argued that MWOs needed to reorient their knowledge towards the kind of therapeutically and sociologically rooted training undergone by psychiatric social workers (PSWs).⁶⁰⁸ PSWs for their part encompassed an even more polymorphous range of skills and activities. At one level, PSWs delivered a form of 'psychiatric first aid'.⁶⁰⁹ Alternatively, and in a more sustained manner, they could be seen as providing a kind of psychiatric 'prophylactic' that delayed or averted the need for more drastic intervention.⁶¹⁰ The enthusiasm for the latest psychoanalytic theories, particularly from the school of British Object Relations, was palpable to at least some in the profession.⁶¹¹ Yet opinions that resisted the increasing penetration of psychoanalysis into the social services were also influential. According to the sociologist Barbara Wooton, a colleague of Richard Titmuss at the London School of Economics, the social worker should function rather as a form of 'lubrication' within the 'engine' of the welfare state.⁶¹² The PSW's role in this sense was administrative more than therapeutic, coordinating between GP surgeries, housing officers, psychiatrists, national

⁶⁰⁷ Sheena Rolph, Dorothy Atkinson and Jan Walmsley, "A Pair of Stout Shoes and an Umbrella": The Role of the Mental Welfare Officer in Delivering Community Care in East Anglia, 1946-70', *The British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (April 2003), 339-359, p. 355.

⁶⁰⁸ Mental Health Workers Association, Memorandum on 'problems arising out of the present shortage of trained social workers in the mental health services' (August 1948), Association of Psychiatric Social Workers Collection, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.378/APSW/P/20/4/23a. Subsequent references will be abbreviated as follows: MHWA (Mental Health Workers Association), APSW (Association of Psychiatric Social Workers); MRC (Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick). See also RC Wright, 'A Challenge to Social Work Education', *Mental Health*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter 1961), Society of Mental Welfare Officers Collection, MRC MSS.378/SMWO/MW/4/1/2, 129-132. Subsequent records will be abbreviated 'SMWO' (Society of Mental Welfare Officers). Wright was a lecturer in Mental Health at the LSE and Chair of the APSW in 1958-60.

⁶⁰⁹ APSW Community Care Group, 'Report of the Working Party on the Functions of the Psychiatric Social Worker in the Adult Field', p. 3, APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APSW/P/13/3/19. Undated but probably c. 1955-7. The Working Party was doubtful about whether PSWs should take the lead in cases of 'psychiatric emergency'. Ibid., p. 11. However, PSWs' own accounts seem to indicate that such responsibility was not in fact uncommon. See later in the present Section.

⁶¹⁰ Duncan Macmillan, 'Community Mental Health Services and the Mental Hospital', in Hugh Freeman and James Farndale eds., *Trends in the Mental Health Services: A Symposium of Original and Reprinted Papers* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1963), 226-237, p. 237.

⁶¹¹ See testimony of 'DD' in APSW, 'What I Valued about Being a PSW: A Compilation of Contributions from Members of the Reunion Group...' (April 2011), p. 1, APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APS/X/1.

⁶¹² Barbara Wooton quoted in John Harris, 'State Social Work and Social Citizenship', p. 917.

assistance boards etc. MWOs could play a similar role informally. As recent histories have shown, some went to great lengths to bring about concrete changes in their clients' environments, acting as 'catalysts' within local authority housing departments.⁶¹³ For Clare Winnicott, another influential figure at the LSE, the social worker should aim to be a 'reliable medium' for the client, occupying the space between inner and outer worlds.⁶¹⁴ Catalysts, lubrication, mediums; I will have to come back to these words, suffice it to say that the in-betweenness of the social worker raises questions about the nature of community and its apparent opposite, isolation.

What this emerging form of regulation involved then was a form of mutual readjustment between society and the individual. As a career leaflet from the Association of Psychiatric Social Workers put it around 1961: 'Psychiatric social work is a branch of social case work which is concerned with helping disturbed people and society adapt themselves to one another'.⁶¹⁵ Or to quote *The Man Upstairs*: 'Society has to be protected against some kind of people', but, 'some kind of people have to be protected from society'.⁶¹⁶ It was a balancing act that was inherently unstable. Hence the range of competing definitions and variability of practices. The MWO or PSW of the late '40s to early '60s anticipated the radicalism of many social workers a decade or two later: those who thought that deviancy should not be quelled to fit the needs of society, but rather that society itself should change in order to undo the stigmas and inequalities that created deviancy in the first place.⁶¹⁷

And yet these increasingly important agents of the welfare state were also bound to the Victorian past; not only to the purely repressive function of 'psychiatric police' and the alarmist notion of the 'psychiatric emergency',⁶¹⁸ but also to the patrician influence of older forms of welfare and charity work that bolstered normative relations in the family, with particularly oppressive effects for women. Most of those who articulated the psychosocial

⁶¹³ Rolph et al., 'Role of the Mental Welfare Officer', p. 347. See also regarding PSWs, Long, 'The Psychiatric Social Worker as Social Therapist'.

⁶¹⁴ Clare Winnicott, 'Casework Technique in the Child Care Services' (originally 1955), in Joel Kanter ed., *Face to Face with Children: The Life and Work of Clare Winnicott* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 202-226, p. 209.

⁶¹⁵ 'A Career as a Psychiatric Social Worker' (c. 1961), APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APSW/P/16/4/14.

⁶¹⁶ The first statement is from Mr Pollen, the busy-body who calls the police. The second is the reply given by Mrs Barnes, the working-class housewife who turns out to be the hero of the day.

⁶¹⁷ Long, 'Psychiatric Social Worker as Social Therapist', *Medical History*, pp. 235-6.

⁶¹⁸ APSW Community Care Group, 'Report of the Working Party on the Functions of the Psychiatric Social Worker in the Adult Field', p. 11, APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APSW/P/13/3/19. See further HL Miles, JB Loudon and K Rawnsley, 'Attitudes and Practices of Mental Welfare Officers', *Public Health*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (November 1961), 32-47, pp. 38, 40 and 46.

approach to social services still saw the isolated individual, the deviant locked in his room, as part of a family – even if it was the ‘synthetic family’ of the lodging house.⁶¹⁹ Conversely, they regarded community as an extension of the family, rather than a parallel or subsuming structure.⁶²⁰ Adjustment worked on the psyche and society but it aimed at the family. The family was both the container and the destination of this mutual readjustment. No matter how delirious, paranoid, or depressed the individual, no matter how far he or she had retreated into the mental prison of a locked room, isolation or social disorganisation always and already belonged to the family. As the physician superintendent of Shenley Hospital put it in an article in the official journal of the National Association of Mental Health:

A qualified psychiatric social worker has the ability to treat a patient’s social problem as a part of a family problem. Her training is such that she can invade a household and treat the total situation, and you will appreciate that in activities of that kind she may undertake duties which a parish priest might well regard as being properly within his province.⁶²¹

I have tried to show both the proliferation of different types of social workers and the range of pronouncements that vied to articulate the nature of their activity in the psychosocial field. One thing they all had in common was a focus on the space of the home. As the statement above reveals, this was closely tied to a conception of individual mental disturbance as a flight from community that nevertheless belonged to the family. Social work, mental health, community care, all lined up in this way with the postwar belief in the family as a site and medium of reconstruction. The priority of the family drew attention towards the home. The latter was seen as both cause and cure.

It is easy to underestimate the sheer numbers of personnel willing and able to enter the home in this way. In 1956, for example, the Ministry of Health recorded that the number of visits paid by psychiatrists to patients’ homes rose from 11,229 the previous year to

⁶¹⁹ JE Westmoreland MBE, ‘The Mental Welfare Officer’, *The Mental Welfare Officer* (Spring 1964) 29-41, APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/SMWO/MW/3/1/1.

⁶²⁰ ‘[T]he community is an extension of the family. This is self-evident when we consider that the first community that any individual knows is himself and his mother – a miniature community bound together first by a physical union and then by ties of affection.’ JH Khan, ‘Community Responsibilities for Mental Health’, in Freeman and James Farndale eds., *Trends in the Mental Health Services*, 238-50, p. 238.

⁶²¹ Otto Fitzgerald, ‘The Hospitals as Part of the Mental Health Service’, *Mental Health*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 1957), 84-9, pp. 84-5, SMWO Collection, MRC, MSS.378/SMWO/MW/4/1/5.

18,416.⁶²² For the relatively tiny number of PSWs and MWOs, the increase in home visiting meant relentless workloads.⁶²³ In 1958, the LCC's 16 MWOs dealt with on average 438 referrals each, 317 of them leading to hospital admissions.⁶²⁴ Outside of the mental health field, the proliferation of home-visiting functions was perhaps even greater. In a remarkable study of the experience of slum clearance – focusing on the 'twilight' moment between declaration and demolition – Clare Ungerson found that most residents received visits from at least four different types of official, often several times by each one.⁶²⁵

This focus on the space of the home establishes an historical continuity from the nineteenth century health visitor to the highly qualified PSW, and a lateral connection between the MWO, district nurses, occupational therapists, housing officers and many more.⁶²⁶ A transformation in the mental health field that has often been narrated in terms of deinstitutionalisation⁶²⁷ (i.e. the emptying out of the great 'carceral' system of asylums) emerges then in the light of a more generalised tendency towards domestication; a tendency that filters down through the long years of development of the welfare state to reach a point of concentration that saturates not only officialdom and the professions, but indeed large swathes of postwar culture.

This, as it were, is the argument for continuity. It chimes with Jacques Donzelot's thesis that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the rise of new powers for policing families; the state came into the home, and the institutions born in the previous three centuries – the hospital, the asylum, the workhouse, the prison – would become the launch pad for a newly intimate mode of control.⁶²⁸ In a less Foucauldian register, this argument also resonates with

⁶²² 'The Mental Health Services in 1956', *Mental Health*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Spring 1958), 61-4, p. 62, SMWO Collection, MRC, MSS.378/SMWO/MW/4/1/5.

⁶²³ In 1944 there were 257 qualified PSWs. By the end of the 1950s that had increased to 521, still a tiny number. Figures from Long, 'Psychiatric Social Worker as Social Therapist', *Medical History*, pp. 226 and Nesta Roberts, 'Care of Mental Patients', *Guardian* (12 June 1959), p. 10.

⁶²⁴ Miles et al., 'Attitudes and Practices of Mental Welfare Officers', p. 35. Not all cases would have involved visiting patients' or clients' homes, however the testimony of PSWs and MWOs, as we will see, suggests that this was indeed a dominant feature of their day-to-day experience.

⁶²⁵ Clare Ungerson, *Moving Home: A Study in the Redevelopment Process in Two London Boroughs* (London: Bell and Sons, 1971), pp. 12-13. Ungerson conducted her study around 1967.

⁶²⁶ APSW Community Care Group, 'Report of the Working Party on the Functions of the Psychiatric Social Worker in the Adult Field', p. 4, APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APSW/P/13/3/19.

⁶²⁷ Eric Engstrom, 'History of Psychiatry and its Institutions', *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (November 2012), 486-491, p. 486.

⁶²⁸ Jacques Donzelot, trans. Robert Hurley, *The Policing of Families* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997). For the earlier development see Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965).

recent histories highlighting types of 'community care' that pre-date the reforms of the postwar period.⁶²⁹ But is there not also a sense in which the postwar attention to the home really does represent a break with the past? Is the Foucauldian view of the welfare state not a little too static and undialectical? Wasn't the idea of social workers acting as 'catalysts', 'lubrication', or 'mediums' between inner and outer worlds not a step beyond the right of appointed figures to 'invade' the home? To answer these questions we have to descend to the level of the home, and beyond that to the level of the rented room. In following the welfare worker into the home, what appears to be a unitary space breaks up into a complex of thresholds, passageways, chambers and channels of communication.

In January 1963, the recently launched, centre-left magazine *New Society* published a 'day-in-the-life' style report on a London-based psychiatric social worker named 'Miss Quilt'.⁶³⁰ The report, written by Jo Parfitt Klein, opens with a stark attack on the family home in rented accommodation as a space of social isolation. This is, however, an attack put in parentheses, clearly bracketed as the voice of a disturbed client awaiting the moderating influence of the social worker:

"This is like a prison, this is" said Mrs Cooper, a pale redhead with intent, faintly mocking eyes. She stared across the kitchen at Miss Quilt, who merely took another sip of tea. "I've told him I shan't stay with him: he knows that. Get a job I shall, go out, have some freedom. No husband to watch you all the time, telling you what you can do."⁶³¹

The article gives the 'history' of this unfortunate individual – a 'paranoiac' with a difficult childhood, now married with a son to a West Indian man – before showing how the infinitely patient Miss Quilt, 'listening, expounding different ways of interpreting these incidents', leads her client onto more 'neutral ground'. As the day goes on, the cases thread together like a chain of sorrows; casualties of bad marriages, unwanted children, childhood trauma, unemployment, the inadequacies of the benefits system and sheer loneliness. There is

⁶²⁹ Rolph et al., 'Role of the Mental Welfare Officer', p. 343-4.

⁶³⁰ Jo Parfitt Klein, 'A Day in Social Work: II – A Psychiatric Social Worker', *New Society*, No. 18 (31 January 1963), press clipping without page number, APSW Collection, MRC MSS.378/APSW/P/14/4/108.

⁶³¹ Ibid. All the quotes below regarding Miss Quilt and her clients are from the same article.

Maureen, the young woman with a 'tired voice and watery eyes' who seems 'pathetically pleased to see Miss Quilt'. There is the 'highly intelligent schizophrenic youth', recently discharged from hospital, 'now sitting at home all day in a locked cell of apathy'. And there is Mrs Brown, an older woman with dementia living alone but resistant to the idea of going into care. For each one, Miss Quilt the PSW acts as a 'gentle but tenacious persuader', interpreting and re-grounding them, offering sympathy and seeking solutions, acting as the 'lubricant' or 'catalyst' of various branches of the welfare state – with a phone call here and a referral there – but also pushing back, steering the problem and its answer within the limits of the family.

The report probably downplays the therapeutic aspect of psychiatric social work.⁶³² In general, however, this would seem to be a fairly accurate picture of the day-to-day activities of someone working in such a role. The role of the visiting welfare worker in buttressing some of the most oppressive features of the family is plain to see. The advice to Mrs Cooper is *not* to go out and find a job, to stay with her husband, and, it is implied, to give in to his desires for sex. It seems no coincidence that three out of four clients mentioned in the report are women. But what stands out as much as this focus on women and the family is the setting. Miss Quilt relays the psychiatrist's diagnosis of paranoia as she and the journalist 'panted [*sic*] up three flights of stairs' to reach the top floor flat of Mrs Cooper, somewhere in south east London. The exchange that follows takes place across the kitchen table. Maureen's problems (the young woman with 'watery eyes') are similarly laid bare in a space that glories in the humdrum details of the domestic: 'more tea was poured out, and with it her worries.' Finally, the PSW arrives 'on a dark strip of landing outside the locked door of Mrs Brown's room.' When no one answers, she fetches a 'hefty meat skewer' from the 'tiny scullery' off the landing to bang on the door. Mrs Brown emerges having just got out of bed, her feet 'paper white on the dark linoleum'.

Only in Mrs Brown's case is it made explicit that readers are being given a glimpse of London's rented rooms. But this does seem to be the kind of space that the article implies by its themes and tone. It is, on one level, a thoroughly ordinary space, familiar and intimate.

⁶³² Clearly it left some in the profession questioning the emphasis on practical 'holding operations'. APSW, Press Cuttings, 'What Social Workers Do', *New Society* (14 February 1963), APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APSW/P/14/4/110.

And yet this space also has the atmosphere of somewhere on the edge of society, a place unspecified and therefore – to outsiders excepting certain specialist visitors – lost. Ordinarity here nags like a bad night's sleep. The days and nights blend into one another. The promises of modernisation – bright open spaces, elevators, self-contained kitchens – have yet to catch up with this space, and the institutions of the welfare state struggle to connect.

What does it mean to do the discursive and practical work of the psychiatric social worker in this kind of setting? The work of PSWs, and to an extent MWOs, transferred some of the knowledge and procedures associated with psychoanalysis into the setting of the urban, working-class household. Theorists and practitioners associated with British Object Relations such as John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott – who privileged the subject's relationship with external 'objects' (initially the infant's relationship with its mother) over the psyche's inner 'drives' – were highly influential for PSWs, as well as for the emerging fields of child development and marriage guidance.⁶³³ Winnicott himself taught on the mental health course at the LSE that many social workers qualified through, alongside his wife Clare Winnicott (Clare Britton) who later became Director of Child Care Studies at the Home Office.⁶³⁴ Discussing this same moment, Lynda Nead has contrasted the streamlined, modernistic setting of psychoanalytically-grounded institutions such as marriage guidance clinics, with the cluttered, sexless domesticity that was still associated in popular culture with the image of the working-class housewife.⁶³⁵ The confluence of theory and practice in this case was spatialised via the creation of a parallel setting, a space clearly demarcated and insulated from ordinary life's material baggage. There was, however, another form of spatialisation going on. For the diffusion of psychoanalytic knowledge across the social work field entailed a shift in the kinds of spaces where the interpretive and discursive work of analysis normally took place. Psychoanalysis moved, as it were, from the couch to the kitchen table.

⁶³³ Jill Savage Scharff, 'The British Object Relations Theorists: Fairbairn, Winnicott, Blain, Guntrip, Sutherland, and Bowlby', in Martin Bergmann ed., *Understanding Dissidence and Controversy in the History of Psychoanalysis* (Chevy Chase: Institutional Psychotherapy Institute E-Books, 2004), 297-338, pp. 299-300.

⁶³⁴ Joel Kanter, 'Clare and Donald Winnicott: Play, Holding and the Transitional Participant', *goodenoughcaring.com* (15 June 2009) <<https://goodenoughcaring.com/the-journal/clare-and-donald-winnicott-play-holding-and-the-transitional-participant/>> [accessed 10 April 2020].

⁶³⁵ Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke*, p. 332.

This penetration of psychoanalytically inspired practice into the working-class home clearly had a repressive dimension. As some within the profession saw it, a grasp of the basic principles of analysis allowed the social worker to interpret the 'true' needs that lay behind their client's immediate problems. Beneath the complaints about bad housing conditions, unemployment, or a controlling or unfaithful husband, the trained PSW could recognise 'unconscious emotional reactions' and 'imperfect personal integration'.⁶³⁶ Rather than a 'catalyst', the social worker in this case acted as a gatekeeper, discouraging practical interventions.

And yet this very willingness to engage at an interpretive level – to be more than simply a source of moralising advice or charitable assistance – effectively admitted the complaint into the official sphere. Complaints about everyday life and its injustices became increasingly audible. A growing part of the social workers' role was to tease out these complaints, these 'problems', encouraging the client to elaborate on them, to consider them in the round, to recognise unconscious blockages. Whether the end result was obstruction, diversion or some attempt at action depended on the contested nature of the work. The author of an article from mid 1950s on 'The Caseworker's Task in Meeting the Client's Inner and Outer Needs' could, on the one hand, flatly state that the 'real disharmony' of overcrowded housing consisted of 'unconscious emotional reactions', and yet at the same time attempt to move her client from a position of suppressed 'grumbles' to one of greater willingness to openly confront her situation:⁶³⁷

The repressive instinct gains the upper hand in this example. But consider the following case, which although outside of our period suggests how the kinds of thinking taking shape in the 1950s foreshadowed the '60s radicalism of community-oriented, activist forms of social work:

Mrs Chester, or we could call her Mrs Lindsey or Mrs Crawley, is not just another "marital", she is not just a chronic anxiety state, she is not just a thyroidectomy, a hysterectomy or a twice post-leucotomy; she is a woman who for perhaps four years

⁶³⁶ AM Laquer, 'The Caseworker's Task in Meeting the Client's Inner and Outer Needs', in APSW ed., *Relationship in Casework: Papers Reprinted from British Journal of Psychiatric Social Work and Boundaries of Casework* (London: APSW, 1964), 39-44, pp. 40 and 42, APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APSW/P/16/4/16.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., pp. 40-1.

stayed at home in a state of apparent hopelessness and withdrawal, when the community mental health service record was almost blank, presumably because she was not upsetting society; a woman who broke out from this situation to a point where her house was a nightly blaze of light, and beyond midnight she would be singing as she hoovered and did her washing and scraped and polished, on a diet of one bottle of sherry, one bottle whisky and social amytal grains nine, which she had saved up. She is not just any one of these things but some combination of them all, a whole person.⁶³⁸

The 'problem' in this example takes the form of a classic case of isolation leading to psychological breakdown. The setting and the drama resemble *The Man Upstairs* almost to a tee – except of course that the person at the centre of it all is a woman. And yet the moment when Mrs Chester, or Mrs Lindsey or Mrs Crawley, '[breaks] out from this situation to a point where her house [is] a nightly blaze of light' is understood as a *necessary* confrontation with a world that up to this point has refused to acknowledge her as a 'whole person'. 'Madness' comes to be understood as the mind's – and the body's – protest against the madness of the world; a cry of refusal in the face of a world based on the atomising logics of medical psychiatry on the one hand and the rented world on the other. Loneliness and isolation are understood as the 'diswelfares' exacted by this world (to use the term coined by Richard Titmuss that we encountered in Part 1). I want to suggest that such an understanding only becomes possible on the basis of intimate contact with the space of the home, and specifically with the material reality and everyday experience of the postwar city's rented worlds; a contact, in short, with the kinds of spatial practice embedded in these worlds.

Claire Winnicott's phrase 'a reliable medium' gains new significance in this context. Extrapolating from the theoretical framework that she developed from her work with evacuated children during the Second World War, we might say that the welfare worker who seeks to become a reliable medium 'attempt[s] to bridge the gap between the external world

⁶³⁸ Keith Jones, 'Does the Social Worker have a Role in Relation to Drug Therapy', in APSW, *New Developments in Psychiatry and the Implications for the Social Worker*, pamphlet, (London: APSW, c. 1969), 34-6, p. 34, APSW Collection, MRC, MSS.378/APSW/P/16/4/19.

and his [the whole person's] feelings about it and in doing so will enter his inner world too.'⁶³⁹ Winnicott distinguishes this special kind of relationship from that of the psychotherapist. The social worker

can never become entirely the subjective object which the psychotherapist becomes; she is bound to external reality because she is part and parcel of the real world, and often is responsible for maintaining that world. [...] she [the social worker] is in touch with a total situation representing a totality of experience. [...] We make links between places and events and bridge gaps between people which they [the client] are unable to bridge for themselves. As we talk about real people and real happenings, feelings about them soon become evident and before we know where we are we have entered the inner world of the individual, and so we bridge another gap, that between fact and fantasy.'⁶⁴⁰

The work of the 'reliable medium' is fundamentally spatial. She 'bridges' places, people, events and inner worlds. She 'gather[s]' together the 'threads' of a world unravelling.⁶⁴¹ She repairs the link between representational space and spatial practices.

Clare Winnicott's concept of the reliable medium represents perhaps the most complete and beautiful statement that we have of the never-fulfilled promise held out by the postwar fusion of psychoanalytic theory, radical social practice, and institutional commitment to the welfare of the large majority. It was the welfare state's response to the alienating experience of London's rented worlds that disclosed this promise most forcibly. Loneliness and social isolation as problems belonging to the family were the psychological diswelfares of these worlds. But they also contained the seed of a possible wholeness, a 'totality of experience' to be realised at the level of the collective.

Having examined how the welfare state intervened in problems of isolation and social disorganisation, I consider in the final Section of Part 2 how the maladapted, subdivided

⁶³⁹ Clare Winnicott, 'Face to Face with Children' (originally 1963) in Kanter ed., *Face to Face with Children*, 227-247, pp. 233.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid. and Donald Winnicott and Clare Britton, 'The Problem of Homeless Children' (originally 1944), in Kanter ed., *Face to Face with Children*, 147-164, p. 152.

spaces of London lodging houses both alienated tenants from one another and brought them into unusual proximity, opening the way for the imagination of new kinds of community. While Section 3 considered the regulatory activity of the welfare state, Section 4 focuses on the nature of spatial practice. As in Part 1, I look to the representational spaces conjured by films (and also novels) for an entrypoint to exploring this everyday realm. Within the analysis, I cross-reference the fictional rented worlds of postwar British melodrama with archival materials centred on local valuation lists.

4. Community and Isolation between the Walls

Lynne Reid Banks's 1960 novel *The L-Shaped Room* is a book built on descriptions of rented rooms. In Banks's novel, the rooms provide not only the setting but in some ways the motive force of the story. They have as much character in themselves as the people who live in them. However, the L-shaped room of the title is conceived from the beginning as a relational process, a way of sectioning and organising space, rather than a singular object or subject. Banks describes not the room as such but its architectural elements, the partition walls that divide the room internally:

There were two rooms under the sloping roof, which had once been one biggish square one. ... It had been divided by the simple process of putting up two partitional walls set at right-angles. This resulted in a small square room and a small L-shaped room along two sides of it, which was mine. The square room which had been stolen, as it were, from the main area, had a little window up near the ceiling ... The partitions didn't look very thick. I leaned over, and knocked on the nearest one, to test it, and immediately someone on the other side knocked back. I snatched my knuckles away as if the wall had been red hot.⁶⁴²

In the passage above, the main character, Jane, has just arrived in her bedsit in Fulham. Forced out of her family home when her father hears of her unexpected pregnancy, Jane chooses this (at the time) run-down part of West London, because, in the narrator's words,

⁶⁴² Lynne Reid Banks, *The L-Shaped Room* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 41

'in some small way I wanted to punish myself ... to bury myself in this alien world ... feeling that I and the other inhabitants ... would scarcely speak the same language, and that they would all remain unknown to me except as closed doors to pass, or occasional footsteps or voices through walls'.⁶⁴³ Here is a young woman of middle-class parents working in low-paid catering and secretarial jobs, suddenly plunged into the world of 'big city loneliness', the world of bedsits and lodging houses. As I will argue, this 'alien world' was a key site of contestation in the evolving cultural and racial landscape of postwar Britain.

Banks's novel was retold for the screen by director Bryan Forbes two years after its publication, and was one of a string of literary and cinematic portrayals of London's rented worlds. This award-winning film, which enjoyed critical acclaim and commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic, is characteristic of a number of British productions from the late 1940s to the early 1960s which set their narratives of social dislocation within these spaces.⁶⁴⁴ Works such as Laura del Rivo's *The Furnished Room* (1961), which became *West 11* directed by Michael Winner (1963), and Ted Willis' 1958 play *Hot Summer Night*, adapted by Roy Ward Baker as *Flame in the Streets* (1961),⁶⁴⁵ depict a space distinct from the one inhabited by the working-class heroes of British New Wave cinema and the theatre of the so-called Angry Young Men;⁶⁴⁶ a space that lies parallel, in other words, to the world of 'community' that Wilmott and Young and others sought to document.⁶⁴⁷ While these films emphasise themes of illicit sexuality and criminality, what really distinguishes them, I believe, is a particular spatial patterning and material texture. Rather than the kitchen sinks, laundry lines, doorsteps, dockyards and smoking chimneys of the East End or Northern factory town, we are led into a world of shadowy staircases, public telephones in the hallway, landlords' notices in windows, and, crucially, walls that are always too thin (Figure 2.14, Figure 2.15 and Figure 2.16).

⁶⁴³ Ibid., pp. 36 and 38.

⁶⁴⁴ Columbia Films acquired the distribution rights to *The L-Shaped Room* from Romulus Films, earning around \$1 million in cinema rentals (Top Rental Features, 1964). 'Top Rental Features of 1963', *Variety* (8 January 1964), p. 71.

⁶⁴⁵ Laura del-Rivo, *The Furnished Room* (London: Pan Books, 1963), originally 1962. On Willis' play see 'Hot Summer Night (1959)', *BFI Screenonline* <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1134115/index.html>> [accessed 2 December 2018].

⁶⁴⁶ See for example Shelagh Delaney's 1958 play *A Taste of Honey* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), and the film adaptation directed by Tony Richardson in 1961. See also Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (London: WH Allen, 1958), adapted to film by Karel Reisz in 1960.

⁶⁴⁷ Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (London: John Murray, 2015), pp. 236-51 and John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-63* (London: BFI, 1986).



Fig. 2.14 – Still from *Pool of London* (dir. Basil Dearden, 1951).

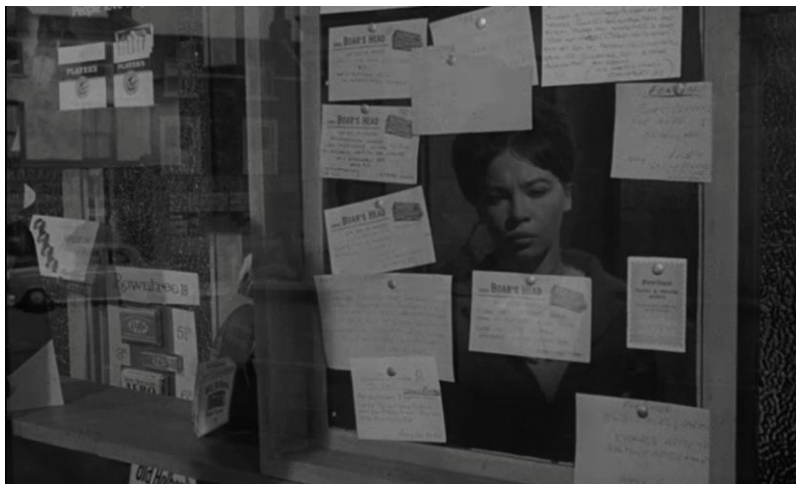


Fig. 2.15 – Still from *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962).



Fig. 2.16 – Still from *The October Man* (dir. Roy Ward Baker 1947).

In what follows, I consider the starring role played by partition walls in *The L-Shaped Room*, showing how these ubiquitous but overlooked elements served to exploit and alienate tenants, while simultaneously assembling them into previously unseen groupings. It is no surprise that such a ubiquitous architectural element has been neglected in historical studies.⁶⁴⁸ The western idealisation of ‘home’ as a container for the model middle-class nuclear family has tended to eclipse other ways of ‘making home’. Consequently, the materiality and changeability of homes has been obscured and the role of partition walls reduced to near-invisible background elements. The envelope of domestic space is reduced to a facade, while the interior becomes, as Walter Benjamin put it, the soft inner lining on which are inscribed all the traces of bourgeois property and patriarchal dominance.⁶⁴⁹ And yet the films and archival materials examined in this final Section represent an experience that defined modernity: the atomisation of space in housing and other social institutions, through rationalising or profit-driven processes of subdivision. The partition wall therefore becomes a token of the vast, elusive world of postwar lodging houses; a world that in its isolation and alienation of the lodger — and, I will argue, in its role as a harbinger of unforeseen forms of conviviality and community — goes to the heart of city life in the twentieth century.

But processes of subdivision were not only key to the experience of modernity in the classical sense. They were also closely bound up with questions of race. In the fictional rented worlds of postwar British films and novels, we can read how race and isolation intersected, and from there, some of what was specific to the loneliness of black Londoners. Lodging house dramas of the period have been discussed by film historians within the context of the postwar ‘social problem film’ — seen alternately as confronting difficult social issues, including racism, or reflecting the ingrained social conservatism of a society reluctantly emerging from postwar austerity into the affluence and ‘permissiveness’ of the

⁶⁴⁸ For a notable exception, see Rebekah Lee, ‘Reconstructing Home in Apartheid Cape Town: African Women and the Process of Settlement’, *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (September 2005), 611-630.

⁶⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, trans. Harry Zohn, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 169. Benjamin famously pays little attention to the patriarchal dimension of the bourgeois interior. For a critique see Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p. 69.

1960s.⁶⁵⁰ Little attention has been paid, however, to how these films construct domestic space materially. It is this aspect that I want to focus on here, offering a close reading of how both film and novel demarcate racial otherness through the device of the partition wall. In doing so, the *L-Shaped Room* holds up a mirror to the politics of race, immigration, housing and urbanisation.

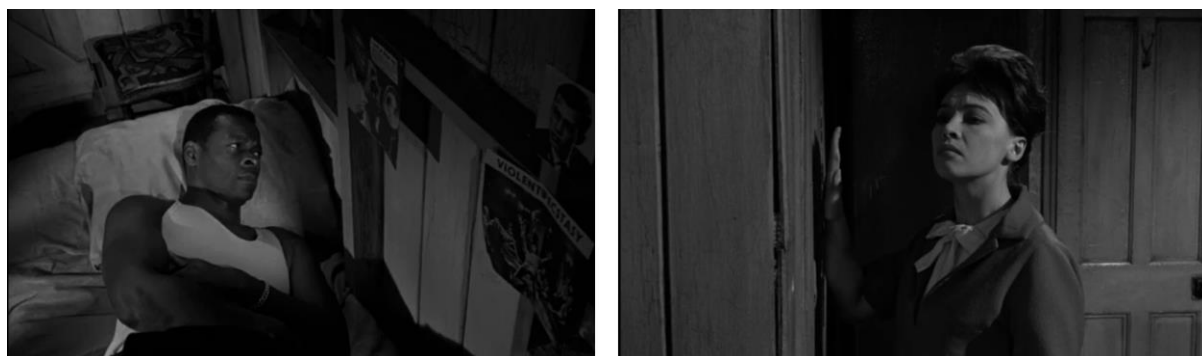


Fig. 2.17 – Stills from *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962).

Walls can be seen as the most elementary units of built space. After all, what are buildings, and especially houses, without walls? Walls shelter the body and the self.⁶⁵¹ Acting as both barriers and interfaces, they mediate public and private realms. Yet as Samuel Selvon knew, in meeting these social and existential criteria, walls can also trap and isolate the subjects they contain. The two images juxtaposed above (Figure 2.17) are from the film adaptation of *The L-shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962). Together they form a kind of interrupted shot-reverse shot. They are two sides of the same wall. Yet the film's editing does not connect them in any immediate sense. Rather, like a tunnel that starts in one location and burrows underground to emerge in another, the two spaces remain discontinuous (Figure 2.18 and Figure 2.19). The threshold of Johnny's room (seen on the left in Figure 2.17) is traversable through sound, vision, and — in the book — smell.⁶⁵² But it is never the setting of the story, unlike all the other tenant's rooms. Johnny's room is an elsewhere that could be as distant as another postcode, or even another country; and yet it is *right there*, so close one could almost touch it.

⁶⁵⁰ Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939–1948* (London: Routledge, 1989). Mica Nava, 'Thinking Internationally: Gender and Racial Others in Postwar Britain', *Third Text*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (2006), 671–82.

⁶⁵¹ There is a phenomenological literature on this subject which I don't intend to pursue. See for example Gaston Bachelard, trans. Maria Jolas, *The Phenomenology of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

⁶⁵² Banks, *The L-Shaped Room*, pp. 31, 51 and 60.



Fig. 2.18 – Still from *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962).



Fig. 2.19 – Still from *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962).

This discontinuous linkage electrifies the wall. In both Banks' novel and the film adaptation, this close-farness, or far-closeness, is clearly racialised. Descriptions early on in the book drive home the horror of racial otherness made proximate. And again the wall plays an important role:

I sat frozen, staring at the wall, half-expecting someone to burst through it like a circus lion through a paper hoop ... I felt a shiver of nervousness as the clear, hollow sound emphasized the thinness of the barrier. Suddenly the knocking changed. It was on glass this time, near the ceiling. I looked up and saw, in the little window, a huge black face.⁶⁵³

The thought of someone, or something, bursting through the wall renders it uncanny; the wall's superficial smoothness conceals all manner of horrors.⁶⁵⁴ What the book does with words, the film does with close-ups, unusual angles, and rapid pans (Figure 2.20).



Fig. 2.20 – Stills from *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962).

The wall brings things together and keeps them apart. It produces otherness through the spectacle of proximate separation. Was this not the role of the old ghetto wall in 16th-century Venice and Rome? It was a key function, too, of those invisible walls created by racially discriminatory planning laws and redlining credit practices throughout the twentieth century, particularly in northern cities in the US during the 1930s,⁶⁵⁵ as well as in British colonies continuing into the twentieth century.⁶⁵⁶ In all cases, a vicious circular logic played itself out. As Mitchell Duneier has written: 'Isolation from mainstream society, as well as the decrepitude caused by overcrowding, produced notorious conditions ... that could gradually be invoked to rationalize ... more extreme isolation'.⁶⁵⁷ Isolation hides 'the other' away while simultaneously making them an object of morbid fascination.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., p. 41

⁶⁵⁴ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny* (Cambridge MA: MIT press, 1992), pp. 29-30 and 43.

⁶⁵⁵ Devin Rutan and Michael Glass, 'The Lingering Effects of Neighbourhood Appraisal: Evaluating Redlining's Legacy in Pittsburg', *Professional Geographer*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (July 2018), 339-349.

⁶⁵⁶ Ambe Njoh, 'The Segregated City in British and French Colonial Africa', *Race and Class*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2008), 87-95.

⁶⁵⁷ Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), p. 11.

The rented room can be seen as an emblem of isolation both in the classic modernist sense and in this specifically racialised sense. Race, I will argue, becomes the touchstone — the polariser and accelerator — of a general economic drive towards subdivision in private rented housing. And yet in terms of popular culture, no sooner does race occupy this position, than the polarisation thus established, akin to a one-way mirror or semi-permeable membrane, starts to be applied to all manner of other ‘social problems’. It is the same principle of ‘proximate separation’ which sets the stage for the mental breakdown of Richard Attenborough’s character, Peter Watson, in *The Man Upstairs*, as we saw in Section 3.

In other films of the period, gender, class, sexuality and age all play a role in the spatial organisation of the rented world. The way these identities and categories intersect warrants further attention. For now, however, I want simply to note the fractured, polarised nature of the spaces depicted in *The L-Shaped Room* and similar films of the period. Playing with the different ways in which sound and light penetrate space, these films splinter the perceptual integrity of the rented room into several discontinuous tracks or layers. But rather than simply an effect of cinematic representation, this discontinuity at the heart of the rented world derives from the material fabric of the wall itself.

In the case of *The L-Shaped Room*, the wall that defines the room is no ordinary wall. It exists halfway between the imposing stone walls of the early modern ghetto and the invisible walls of discriminatory institutional practices (such as redlining). In the novel, the partition wall is constructed from a material ‘somewhat thicker than ordinary hardboard’.⁶⁵⁸ In the film it consists of wooden slats and plasterboard, with timber studding on the reverse side. Like the stone wall that encloses a whole district, the partition is tangible; it asks to be *touched*, to be tested with fingers, palms or knuckles. Nonetheless, this special kind of wall has a surreptitious relationship to the realm of the visible. Instead of encircling buildings, it hides behind their facades. It divides and encloses space deep within the interior. Yet if we are familiar with interior walls being constructed like a sandwich, rendered on both sides with the filling tucked away in the middle, this wall is again different. It is asymmetrical. The fact that the studs are unclad on Johnny’s side gives his room a paradoxical status. He lives inside a

⁶⁵⁸ Banks, *The L-Shaped Room*, p. 41.

structure whose ostensible, 'public' function is to offer an illusion of smoothness and continuity to the world 'outside' (except this public exterior is now *inside* the house).

Johnny's room — the other side of the L-shaped room — appears more like a cabin or shack than the interior of a terraced house. This rusticated appearance brings us back to questions of race and their intersection with issues of class, gender and sexuality. In highly abbreviated form, the shack-like appearance of Johnny's room recalls the outward appearance of the traditional Caribbean two-room cottage, built from wood on a single-floor plan 'with a hip-roof and small gallery in the front'.⁶⁵⁹ But as Karen Fog Olwig has made clear, this 'traditional' dwelling type is fully entwined with colonial history. Its form derives from a mixture of two 'creolised' kinds of housing: the initially self-built homes erected on abandoned plantations in the post-slavery era⁶⁶⁰ and what Stuart Hall has described as the lower middle-class 'gingerbread' style family house, with porches and balustrades on three sides together with an outdoor kitchen, found, for example, near Spanish Town in Jamaica.⁶⁶¹ It is only by conflating these different housing types that a singular image of home can be produced. Transported to the interior of a terraced house in London, this distinctly 'raced' image of home leaves its inhabitant never quite 'at home'.

The materiality of Johnny's room, especially the rough and ready quality of the partition wall, testifies to the enduring absence of any authentic image of home in public representations of Britain's colonies. At events such as the 1924 British Empire Exhibition and, in the postwar period, the Ideal Home Exhibition, the colonies were represented solely as places of production and distribution, sites where raw materials were extracted and manufactured goods sold.⁶⁶² Representations of labouring black bodies and iridescent heaps of produce rarely extended to depict domestic life. Where images of home did appear, as in the 'House in the Sun' display at the 1962 Ideal Home Exhibition, they formed part of a fantasy

⁶⁵⁹ Karen Fog Olwig, 'Travelling Makes a Home: Mobility and Identity Among West Indians', in Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey eds., *Ideal Homes? Social Change and Domestic Life* (London: Routledge, 1999), 73-83, p. 74.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁶¹ Stuart Hall, 'The "West Indian" Front Room', in Michael McMillan, *The Front Room: Migrant Aesthetics in the Home*, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009), 17-23, p. 18.

⁶⁶² Deborah Ryan, *The Ideal Home through the Twentieth Century* (London: Hazar Publishing, 1997), pp. 13 and 17; Felicity Barnes, 'Bringing Another Empire Alive? The Empire Marketing Board and the Construction of Dominion Identity, 1926-33', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2014), 61-85. See also David Meredith, 'Imperial Images: The Empire Marketing Board, 1926-32', *History Today*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (1987), 30-7.

projection onto the *terra nullius* of colonial wilderness.⁶⁶³ Surrounded by lush vegetation, this tropical-modernist Caribbean version of the ideal home was reserved for would-be colonial staff, businessmen and tourists.⁶⁶⁴ While the biological racism of the late nineteenth century had largely given way to something more subtle in the postwar period, representations of colonial domestic space such as this reveal how structures of racism and imperialism endured in Britain.⁶⁶⁵

The materiality of the partition wall which plays such a key role in *The L-Shaped Room* speaks of this legacy. The wall is a paradoxical structure not only because it inscribes a public-private divide within the domestic interior itself, but because it evokes, like a mirage, the absent term of an imperialist construct of home and not-home. The other side of the L-shaped room is an 'image of home' that evokes the 'double consciousness' of its inhabitant, a displaced identity borne of empire.⁶⁶⁶ In the film, Johnny's backstage existence is gently subverted through his practice of using the horizontal studs as shelves or rails (Figure 2.17 and Figure 2.19). In these brief snatches of his interior life, we see cut-outs of jazz musicians and what appears to be a reproduction of an abstract painting, as well as other items propped up against or hanging from the timbers. These details transform the partition wall into a gallery of mementos and talismans, keys to past memories and future dreams. The partition wall, artefact of an incomplete or un-ideal domesticity, recalls that hallowed domestic surface, the mantelpiece.

But the bohemian lifestyle suggested by the constellation of images and objects found on Johnny's wall is quite unlike that of the traditional family home with its mantelpiece. The world of the jazz club, which we encounter later in the film, tiptoes into the home via these small signifiers. We are reminded of the blues clubs that sprung up across North Kensington and other parts of London during the 1950s and '60s.⁶⁶⁷ Set up usually without licenses in the basement rooms of people's homes, the clubs marked out an archipelago of black safety

⁶⁶³ Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham NC: Duke, 2018), pp. 93-5.

⁶⁶⁴ Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue (1962), p. 6., Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, AAD/1990/9/29.

⁶⁶⁵ Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (April 1997), 207-238.

⁶⁶⁶ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁶⁶⁷ See Part 1, Section 4 for discussion.

and cosmopolitan conviviality. Acting as meeting places for the 'overworlds' and 'underworlds' of London, they attracted an unlikely mix of high society outcasts, gay men, working class jazz fans, white middle-class bohemians, American GIs, and enterprising black impresarios.⁶⁶⁸ The partition wall — viewed from Johnny's side — bears a trace of this volatile mixture.

As we saw in Part 1, blues clubs subverted traditional domestic space and as such became a target for municipal authorities, racist thugs and organised fascists.⁶⁶⁹ But the anxiety the clubs provoked was part of a larger phenomenon. The conservative government of Harold Macmillan, as well as many Labour politicians, took the view that uncomfortable proximity to black migrants' domestic habits 'provoked' popular racism.⁶⁷⁰ Racism, and indeed race itself, was therefore *spatialised* by mobilizing the housing crisis in this way. A complex dynamic connected race, space and housing, as property speculators exploited racial tensions to promote neighbourhood differentiation, while politicians who were pushing for stricter immigration controls leapt on the housing question for their own purposes.⁶⁷¹

The culmination of these developments was the collapse of the commonwealth ideal of universal citizenship and a clampdown on immigration through the Immigration Acts of 1962 and 1968.⁶⁷² In Britain during the late 1940s and early 1950s, 'ghettoisation' was associated in policy makers' minds with the US race problem. By the postwar period, the unpalatable idea that something similar might be developing this side of the Atlantic was not only recognised but actively (albeit surreptitiously) pursued, via local slum clearance policies.⁶⁷³ In effect, policy makers attempted to swap the interior polarisation created by partition walls for a much clearer demarcation of space at the urban level. Racism was an inescapable factor at both these levels.

⁶⁶⁸ Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 290 and 311.

⁶⁶⁹ London County Council (LCC), Minutes of Proceedings (1959), agenda item titled 'Clubs in North Kensington — Planning Permission Lacking', 17 November, p. 733, LMA. See also Mark Olden, *Murder in Notting Hill* (London: Zero, 2011), p. 27.

⁶⁷⁰ Smith, 'Race' and Residence, pp. 116-121 and Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi, 'The 1951-55 Conservative Government and the Racialisation of Black Immigration', in Winston James and Clive Harris eds., *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain* (London: Verso, 1993), 55-71.

⁶⁷¹ John Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2001), 69-92. Davis, I believe, underplays the role of racism in property speculation at this time.

⁶⁷² Paul Gilroy, *Black Britain: a Photographic History* (London: Saqi, 2007), pp. 89 and 94.

⁶⁷³ Susan Smith, *The Politics of 'Race' and Residence*, p. 112 and Clare Ungerson, *Moving Home* (London: Bell and Sons, 1971), pp. 39-40.

So far, I have explored the role of partition walls in cinematic representations of race relations in London during the 1950s and '60s. I want now to examine how that history intersected with the postwar property system. The balance and composition of this system were undergoing profound change. New actors including insurance firms and developers entered the field;⁶⁷⁴ tenure categories were recast via the growth of both public housing and homeownership; and new mechanisms of state and capital began to take effect, from enhanced compulsory purchase powers to a range of new ways of extending and underwriting mortgage finance.⁶⁷⁵ These changes transformed the visual landscape of postwar British cities, as we saw in Part 1. But as well as changes on the street, important transformations were taking place behind the facades of existing houses. The subdivision of properties through partition walls was one of these changes.

In the case of a partition like that in the *L-Shaped Room*, the question of visibility is complicated by the fact that the wall itself exists in a legal grey zone. These seemingly ephemeral structures were unlikely to be submitted for planning permission. Their presence in plans and drawings is therefore limited. To investigate these 'hidden' changes, I turn now to valuation lists, which were compiled every few years by district surveyors in the setting of local property taxes known as 'rates'.⁶⁷⁶ These lists, familiar to property owners wishing to know the history of their own home, represent an untapped source of information regarding how houses were let out.

In the analysis that follows I take North Kensington, and more specifically Notting Hill, as a case study area. Part 1 explored the urban history of this area. Following the Second World War, Notting Hill became known for its growing Caribbean community. This burgeoning cosmopolitanism sat uneasily with the more sedentary working class streets of Notting Dale, as well as the aggressive commercial redevelopment taking place around Notting Hill Gate and neighbouring Paddington.⁶⁷⁷ It is this moment of change which led Ruth Glass to

⁶⁷⁴ Marriott, *The Property Boom*, p. 39 and Hamnett and Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits*, pp. 80-1.

⁶⁷⁵ Doreen Massey and Alejandrina Catalano, *Capital and Land: Landownership by Capital in Great Britain* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), pp. 17-19; Peter Scott, 'Marketing Mass Home Ownership and The Creation of The Modern Working-Class Consumer in Inter-War Britain', *Business History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 2008), 4-25, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁷⁶ Frances Pilmer, *Rating Law and Valuation* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), pp. 178-210.

⁶⁷⁷ Marriott, *The Property Boom*, pp. 82 and 85; Simon Jenkins, *Landlords to London: The Story of a Capital and Its Growth* (London: Constable and Company, 1975), p. 221.

describe Notting Hill not as a 'slum' but a 'zone of transition'.⁶⁷⁸ Focusing on this moment of change, two sets of valuation lists – from 1956 and 1963 – will prove relevant to the analysis. A comparison of several streets in the area shows that while private renting was in general declining, the number of houses containing rented rooms in Notting Hill appears to have increased (Table 1 and Figure 2.21).

Street Names	Number of houses let out wholly or partly as 'rooms'	
	Kensington Valuation Lists 1956	Kensington Valuation Lists 1963
Kensington Park Road	43	47
Ledbury Road	31	30
Clarendon Road	28	52
Blenheim Crescent	11	15
Powis Square	19	20

Table 1 – Number of houses let out wholly or partly as 'rooms' on selected streets in North Kensington (1956 and 1963). Source: Kensington Valuation Lists, districts 1 and 2, 1956 and 1963, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) Local Studies department. 'Rooms', as opposed to 'flats', 'houses' or 'maisonettes', is the term of description used in the Valuation Lists themselves.

⁶⁷⁸ Ruth Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), xiii-xlii, pp. xxi and xxii.

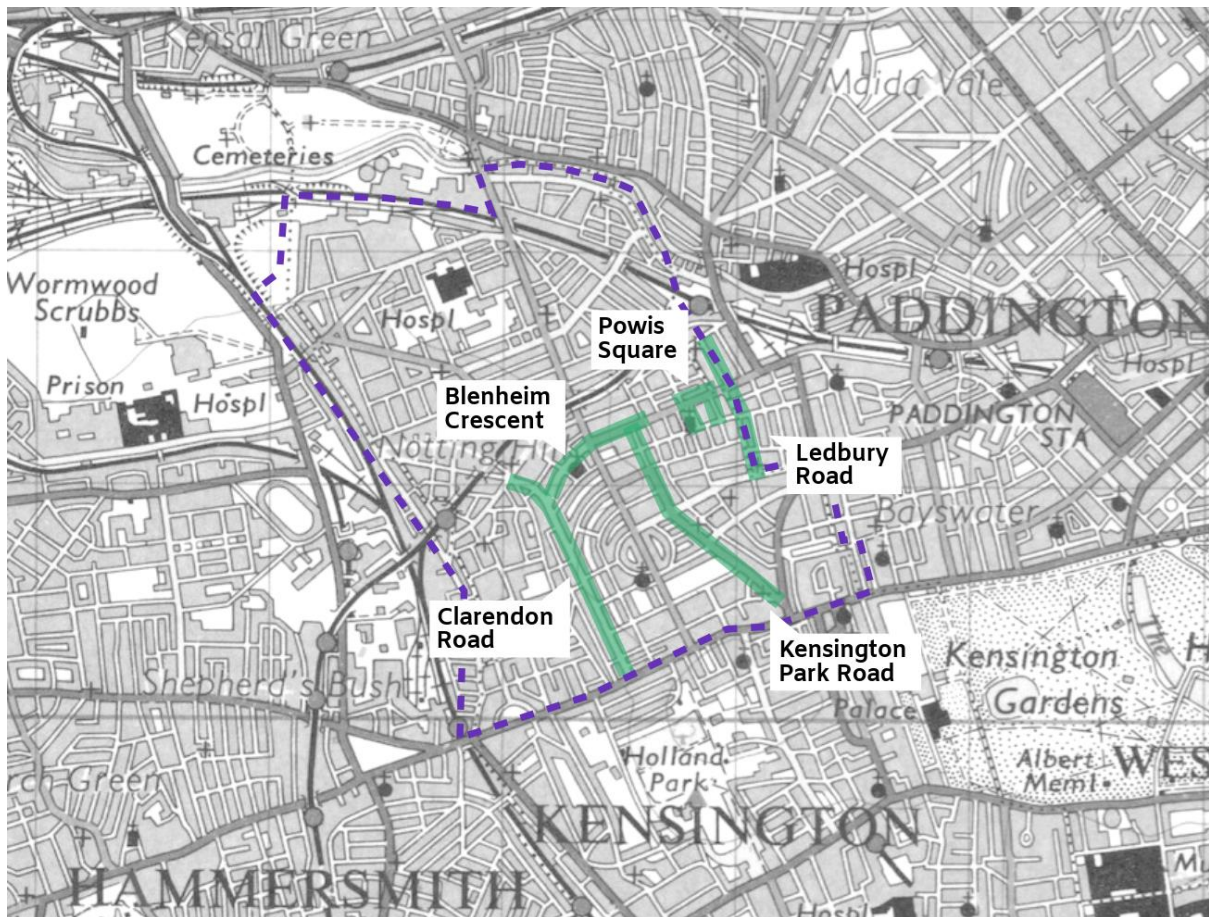


Fig. 2.21 – Map of North Kensington with streets from Table 1 highlighted in green. Map by Alistair Cartwright. The purple dashed line shows the approximate boundaries of North Kensington. Base layer from Ordnance Survey sheet 160 London NW (1958), available from National Library of Scotland <<http://maps.nls.uk/view/91577131>> [last accessed 20 October 2017].

The figures in Table 1 represent a small proportion of properties in the area. Further research is needed. Nevertheless, the pattern seen here corresponds with descriptions of Notting Hill as a ‘zone of transition’, especially when compared to the more ethnically homogeneous population observed by sociologists in Notting Dale.⁶⁷⁹ Southam Street, for example, regarded as one of the hubs of Notting Dale’s working-class community,⁶⁸⁰ featured just two houses with parts let out as rooms, according to both the 1956 and 1963 valuation lists.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁹ Pearl Jephcott, *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. 25-6.

⁶⁸⁰ Stephen Brooke, ‘Revisiting Southam Street: Class, Generation, Gender and Race in the Photography of Roger Mayne’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2014), 453–96.

⁶⁸¹ Valuation lists, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies Department. See the District 2 list from 1956, pp. 615–21, and from 1963, pp. 743–47.

Focusing on the transitional streets of Notting Hill, we can delve a bit deeper. Table 2 compares two pairs of houses that are similar in size, with the same number of storeys, located only a few doors down from each other, with the purpose of showing differences in the value of houses let out as ‘rooms’ or flats versus properties let out as whole houses. Note that at the time valuations were based on estimated rental income (gross of maintenance costs, insurance, etc.), rather than sale value.⁶⁸² Comparison of the top two rows suggests that subdividing a house such as 90 Kensington Park Road to produce something closer to number 84 Kensington Park Road — or simply renting out each room physically unaltered to a separate tenant or group of tenants — could have yielded a 75% increase in annual rental income.⁶⁸³ A similar comparison of numbers 142 to 152 Kensington Park Road (even numbers only), which were all valued as whole houses, and number 140, which was let out as ‘rooms’ on the first, second and ground floors with a self-contained flat in the basement, indicates at least a twofold leap in value. The gains that could be made from subdivision or re-letting were considerable, even before the Conservative government lifted rent controls in 1958.⁶⁸⁴

Kensington Park Rd — house number and description from Kensington Valuation List 1956	Rental Income (‘Gross Value of Hereditament’)
No. 84 ‘Rooms’ on all floors (four storeys plus basement)	£245
No. 90 House and premises (four storeys plus basement)	£140
No. 140 Basement flat plus ‘rooms’ on ground, first and second floors	£180

⁶⁸² Pilmer, *Rating Law*, pp. 178 and 210.

⁶⁸³ Note that in 1956 estimates were based on rent-controlled values as established by the Rent Act 1939. Pilmer, *Rating Law*, p. 208.

⁶⁸⁴ Simmonds, ‘Raising Rachman’, *The Historical Journal* and Keith Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), pp. 14-23.

No.s 142 to 152	£75-90
Houses and premises (three storeys plus basement)	

Table 2 – Comparison of estimated rental incomes for nearby houses on Kensington Park Road (1956). Source: Kensington Valuation List, district 2, 1956, pp. 487--501, RBKC Local Studies department.

The cell-like space of Johnny's room in *The L-Shaped Room* was far from exceptional. Landlords had every incentive to subdivide or re-let their properties, with the result that the spread of rented rooms was a growing phenomenon in certain parts of London. The LCC's concerns about the 'division of old houses for multiple occupation' were echoed in press reports and parliamentary debates which detailed the cramped living conditions and overcrowding faced by private tenants.⁶⁸⁵ *The Times* reported in August 1963, at the height of the scandal surrounding the slum landlord and property trader Peter Rachman, how a 'young girl, close to tears, showed the pitifully small room in which she and her husband had to live. There was no water, except for a cold tap in the backyard down three flights of a dark rickety stairs'.⁶⁸⁶

As the private rented sector declined, letting arrangements fragmented. Data presented in the 1965 report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London (chaired by Milner Holland) found that 78.1% of landlords let only one building as a whole or in parts, and that these landlords accounted for 28% of all lettings.⁶⁸⁷ According to another government report from 1976, in areas of the country where private renting was the dominant tenure category, 36% of residential landlords had just one letting, while 42% had two to four lettings, with each letting usually consisting of just one or two rooms plus shared facilities.⁶⁸⁸ The parcelling out of private rented housing into small to very small units testifies to the long-term inefficiency of the sector, as well as to the increasing predation upon this declining tenure category. The strategy of the infamous landlord Peter Rachman, of buying up tail-end leases and then

⁶⁸⁵ Town Planning Committee Report Number 2 dated 20 May 1957 found in LCC, Minutes of Proceedings (1957), p. 319, LMA LCCU1740, LCC collection.

⁶⁸⁶ Quoted in Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy*, p. 23.

⁶⁸⁷ *Milner Holland Report*, p. 317.

⁶⁸⁸ Michael Harloe, *Private Rented Housing in the United States and Europe* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 111.

subdividing and remortgaging individual rooms or floors with loosely regulated lenders, often under a different company name, exemplifies this tendency.⁶⁸⁹

The archival traces found in valuation lists suggest the broad transformations that affected properties where ‘flimsy partitions’ (as the LCC called them) were most likely to be found.⁶⁹⁰ They reveal the distribution of change and the dynamic at play. While the number of rented rooms increased across Notting Hill, this process was highly uneven and varied dramatically from street to street (Table 1). Ruth Glass noticed something similar in the abrupt changes that she saw across inner city London around this time.⁶⁹¹ The term ‘zone of transition’ originated in Chicago School sociology,⁶⁹² but Glass’s understanding of these zones was more radical, focusing on the fractious dynamics that led ‘change and stagnation [to] exist side by side’.⁶⁹³

It was this dialectical process, whereby isolation – the way certain areas became ‘hemmed in’ – was understood as an active product of the refashioning of urban communities, that led Glass to coin the term ‘gentrification’, anticipating later attempts by Marxist geographers and urban studies scholars to theorise uneven development.⁶⁹⁴ Subdivision could be associated with decay, but also with new influxes of wealth. Side by side with the large number of rented rooms in Notting Hill, that’s exactly what one finds on streets such as Kensington Park Road, where from the late 1950s houses let out in rooms were converted back into single family homes, regaining some of their past Victorian grandeur, or premises licensed as shops and offices were converted into maisonettes for professional couples.⁶⁹⁵

Evidence of these more formal conversions survive in the form of drainage plans submitted to the local authority when requesting permission to run pipes into the public sewer. A pair of plans for 156 Kensington Park Road as it existed in 1959 (Figure 2.22) indicates two bedsits

⁶⁸⁹ Shirley Green, *Rachman* (London: Michael Joseph, 1979), pp. 83-6.

⁶⁹⁰ See Part 1.

⁶⁹¹ Glass, ‘Introduction’, in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change*, pp. xxi and xxii.

⁶⁹² Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Roderick McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1925).

⁶⁹³ Glass, ‘Introduction’, in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change*, pp. xx and xxv.

⁶⁹⁴ David Harvey, ‘Class-Monopoly Rent, Finance Capital and the Urban Revolution’, *Regional Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3-4 (1974) 239-255 and Neil Smith, ‘Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People’, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (1979), 538-548.

⁶⁹⁵ For examples of houses that underwent these sorts of changes, see numbers 26, 120 and 156 Kensington Park Road: Kensington Valuation Lists, District 2, 1956, pp. 487–501, and 1963, pp. 600–14, RBKC Local Studies department.

on the first and second floors, with changes to the plumbing in pink, as well as a new partition wall between the kitchenette and the bathroom. A look at the relevant valuation lists show how this property went from 'house and premises' in 1956 to two maisonettes by the time of the updated list in 1963. The plans from 1959 therefore represent an intermediate phase. Before the house was converted to maisonettes, it was subdivided to produce two bedsits on the upper storeys. Changes like this demonstrate the remarkable degree to which these properties existed in a state of flux, going through a series of conversions from large, single family homes, to bedsits for unattached clerks and service workers, to maisonettes for more affluent residents, often within the space of a decade.

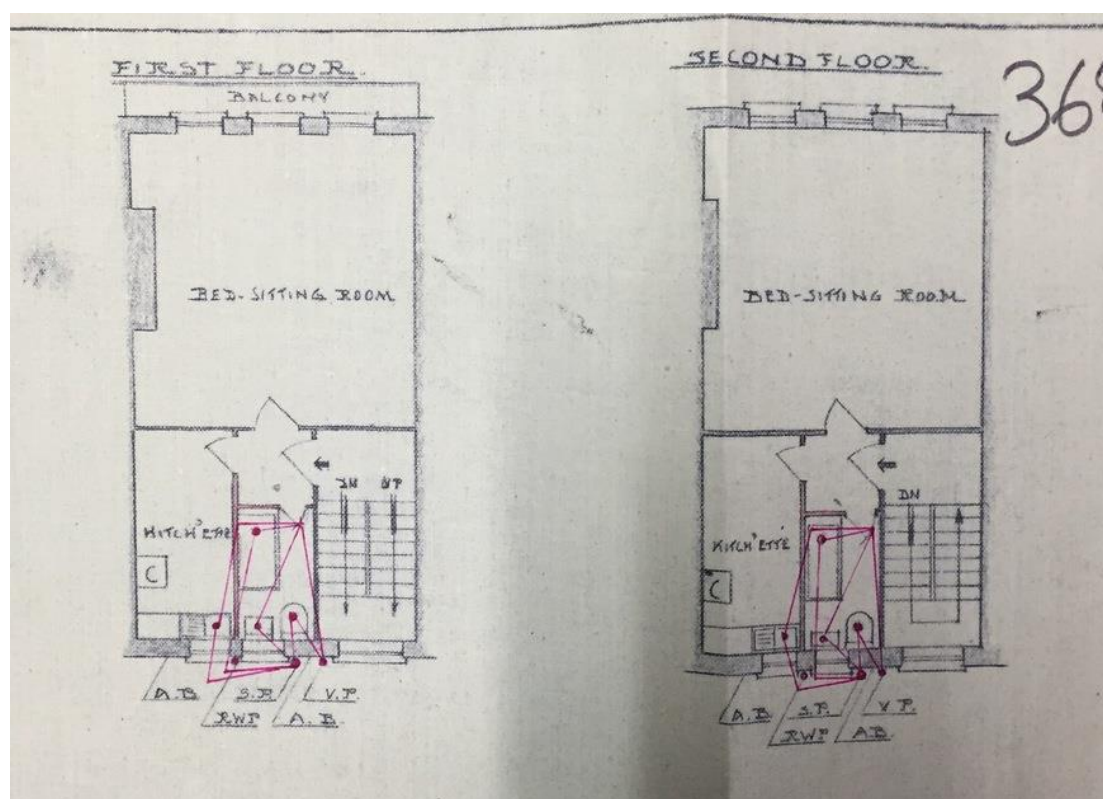


Fig. 2.22 — Drainage plans for 156 Kensington Park Road, first and second floors, 1959. Image courtesy of the RBKC Local Studies department.

Scholars have examined the cultural signifiers and social demographics of early gentrification in 1960s London, but little attention has been paid to the way that incipient gentrification in places like Notting Hill overlapped with processes of subdivision, rent sweating, predatory landlordism and capital withdrawal.⁶⁹⁶ Indeed, these oppositional

⁶⁹⁶ Joe Moran, 'Early Cultures of Gentrification in London, 1955–1980', *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2007), 101–21; Tim Butler and Gary Robson, *London Calling: The Middle Classes and The Remaking of Inner London* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 52–3.

processes of disinvestment and reinvestment form the basis for uneven development, generating the windfall profits that speculators look for when an area previously thought of as undesirable can be 'flipped' into a desirable one.⁶⁹⁷ The house at 156 Kensington Park Road illustrates the rapid, contradictory changes resulting from subdivision in one particularly fractious part of postwar London. This, we might say, is the spatial DNA of the zone of transition.

Within this period of flux and fragmentation, walls were used to divide, isolate, alienate and exploit; to separate people and to corral them together; to reproduce otherness and extract profit. But what does this reveal about how urban and domestic spaces were actually experienced? Subdivision was part of the context for the growing racial tensions that culminated in the 1958 riots and their aftermath. But processes of subdivision also made room for a whole new range of unforeseen alliances. Such alliances were clearly envisaged in postwar films set within the walls of London's rented rooms. Elements of the dynamism and conviviality of Portobello Road described by Pearl Jephcott and others (discussed in Part 1) could also be found – at least within these fictional rented worlds – inside the lodging house itself. Quite apart from the motives of landlords and planners, I'd like to suggest that we consider the ways in which these spaces acted as catalysts for progressive change: breaking down barriers of race, sexuality and class, and thus enriching, and complicating, the moment in which working-class people in postwar Britain, as Selina Todd has argued, assumed the mantle of 'the people'.⁶⁹⁸ Films and other examples from popular visual culture reflected and crystallised this volatile mixing of peoples. The critical value of these works lies not in an idle form of wish fulfilment but in the uneasiness of their mode of expression.

In *The L-Shaped Room* moments of conviviality infiltrate the cellular space of the lodging house: cups of tea offered, meals shared in bedrooms, even Christmas parties in the landlady's flat. Moments like these are clearly part of the sentimentality of both film and novel. At the end of the film Jane returns to her room and can look fondly on it, not so much because her problems have disappeared, but rather because she can recall all the small, irreplaceable intimacies that might otherwise never have befallen her. Moreover, the scenes

⁶⁹⁷ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and The Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 23.

⁶⁹⁸ Selina Todd, *The People*.

in which food and tea are shared among the tenants (Figure 23) do not redeem the racist portrayal of Johnny's character; indeed they sometimes reinforce it.⁶⁹⁹



Fig. 2.23 – Still from *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962).

In a similar way, there is something more than whimsy in the strange awkwardness of the Christmas party with the landlady. The most surprising aspect of the scene is the diverse cast of characters assembled in this room: a lower middle-class ex-typist, a black jazz musician, an aspiring working-class writer, a Hungarian refugee and sex worker, an ex-music hall artist/pensioner. At the same time, the most striking cinematic presentation of this group is also the most gauche, the one that breaks most decisively with conventional film grammar (yet without integrating the result into an alternative experimental language). Recalling the uncomfortable close-ups of Johnny in his room, we see the assembled residents ranged around Jane, peering down into the camera as if viewed from her seated position (Figure 2.24). This is the moment she is about to be rushed to hospital to give birth, and for a second, the group appears transfigured into a bizarre devotional scene. The narrative rationale for the Christmas party sequence — and, I would argue, for the entire film — is the desire to assemble these misfit characters in a single space.

In *The L-Shaped Room* and other lodging house dramas, strange, temporary, powerful alliances emerge (Figure 2.25). The community of the lodging house is pitched as a force

⁶⁹⁹ The novel describes the 'overpowering warm, animal smell' as Johnny offers Jane a cup of tea, a smell she finds 'oddly comforting and reassuring'. Ibid., p. 51.

beyond the state, the only one capable of rescuing individuals from isolation. These images of community are the essential complement to the figure of the working-class hero in better known films and literature of the period.



Fig. 2.24 – Still from *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962).

The L-Shaped Room invites viewers to experience the exotic thrill as well as the vicarious dejection of the ‘alien world’ of the rented room. But there is also something else: the projection, or enactment, of a possible community, for which the lodging house serves as the only plausible container. This gesture of *projecting* or *enacting* community seems bound up with a powerful visual sensibility, a sensibility that is tied to social changes that exercised an increasing force on popular consciousness in the postwar period; changes such as Caribbean and Asian immigration, which grew from a few thousand in the early 1950s to a peak of over 125,000 in 1961;⁷⁰⁰ the growing sense of confidence among working-class people that crystallised in the first round of major welfare measures in 1948;⁷⁰¹ the increased independence of women, who despite the anti-feminist backlash of the 1950s continued to enter employment in large numbers;⁷⁰² and the dawn of the so-called permissive society, hailed by a wave of liberalising social legislation in the late 1950s to early 1960s.⁷⁰³ If the

⁷⁰⁰ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984), pp. 372-373 and Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 235.

⁷⁰¹ Selina Todd, *The People*, pp. 148 and 169.

⁷⁰² Martin Pugh, *Women and The Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999*, second edition (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 284-298.

⁷⁰³ Mark Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

1950s in Britain have often been seen as a quintessentially reactionary decade, then a closer look at the visual culture of the period reveals the cracks in the established order that were already well developed before the explosion of 1960s radicalism.⁷⁰⁴ Partition walls were important fault lines — both physical and imaginary — within this moment.



Fig. 2.25 – Stills from *The Man Upstairs* (dir. Don Chaffey, 1958).

Conclusion

Part 2 of this thesis has demonstrated how loneliness constituted a social problem that was inextricably linked to London's rented worlds. Journalists, sociologists and policy-makers pathologised loneliness. The worrisome concepts of loneliness, isolation and 'social disorganisation' shadowed the more prominent postwar debate on the changing nature of community. Community existed front and centre. It was changing, it was possibly under threat (due to suburbanisation, affluence and immigration among other things), but it was there; one could propose plans to preserve it, adapt or reformulate it. It possessed a definite, even iconic location. In London this was the East End, the place where working people most clearly and most famously became 'the people'. Certainly one could not deny the widespread nature of loneliness, but it subsisted beneath the surface of society. The lonely were many. But who were they, where were they? Somewhere out there, there existed a multitude of the lonely. This unrealised or unrealisable community, this silent, infinite chorus, speaks to the essence of modern loneliness, its dialectical nature, signalling both the erosion

⁷⁰⁴ Nick Thomas, 'Will the Real 1950S Please Stand Up?', *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2008), 227-235.

of community, the peeling off of individuals from one of several organic wholes, and the unification of those same individuals in a larger, hybrid assembly.

The space of loneliness appeared to most commentators to be uncertain and shifting. And yet time and again loneliness linked back to the rented rooms of the big city. For every individual cast adrift one could imagine a room. The very physiognomy of the rented room harboured an atmosphere of loneliness. There were, however, infrequent attempts to pin down this amorphous phenomenon, to give concrete, spatialized form to loneliness. Peter Sainsbury's study of suicide in London was one of these. Sainsbury linked loneliness to the 'rooming house districts' of North London, which fell between the working-class East End and the more solidly middle-class and bourgeois enclaves of West London. As I argued in Section 1, these problematic spaces expressed another variant of the 'zone of transition', the spatial concept that Ruth Glass would radicalise some years later, transforming it into the moving symbol of postwar London.

Suicide as the 'catastrophic indicator' of a wider social phenomenon fulfilled a pragmatic consideration for the researcher. But it might also be counted among the 'unsavoury' media by which the zone of transition entered public consciousness. Sainsbury's mapping of suicide and its social causes – isolation, loneliness, 'social disorganisation' – de-personalised, de-moralised and de-psychologised such unsavoury tales, arriving via coroner's reports and police statistics to pepper the pages of the local press. Rumours, ghost stories, moral sermons and legal pronouncements were thus converted into a landscape. Sainsbury's vision of the city was certainly less dynamic, less tensioned, than the one put forward by Ruth Glass. However, it successfully injected a psychological and atmospheric dimension into the key spatial concept of the zone of transition. In this way, Sainsbury's work was only one of the more interesting instances of a general trend towards the psychosocial in postwar urban sociology. Glass was highly critical of much of this work, believing it had lost the campaigning fervour of the nineteenth century public health reformers.⁷⁰⁵ But in a sense that was the point. As I argued in Section 1, the suppression of the psychological at the personal level forced it to resurface in the actual geography of the city. Loneliness was among the chief problems that prompted this understanding, and

⁷⁰⁵ Ruth Glass, 'Urban Sociology in Great Britain: A Trend Report', in Ruth Glass, *Clichés of Urban Doom* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 27-50, pp. 37-40.

London's rented rooms were its spatial substrate. In the postwar period, the rented world became psychosocial.

But this psychosocial landscape, haunted by atmospheres of melancholy and torpor, ought not in fact to be understood in terms of social disorganisation, or isolation in the conventional sense (the scattering of disparate, uprooted individuals). Rather than social disorganisation, what the historical geography of loneliness in Section 2 reveals is an overly fixed landscape; a concretion of class hierarchies given durable and stubborn expression in the urban fabric, i.e. as property, only reluctantly adapting to the new realities of the postwar period. This fast-stuck landscape of loneliness presented a physical and ideological barrier to technological progress, to progressive redistribution, and to the social-democratic opening up of institutions. The sadness of this landscape as captured by writers like Patrick Hamilton, Elias Canetti and George Lamming derives, I believe, from this blocked or frustrated incarnation of a changing world.

The boarding houses and residential hotels of Euston-Bloomsbury and Hampstead maintained a facade of respectability, while remaining wedded to old routines and an idea of service based on class hierarchies. What must for many working people as well as intellectuals have appeared to be a temporary solution to the dire housing situation after the Second World War, gradually became a permanent arrangement. As Section 2 demonstrated, those who lived in London's 'rooming house' districts, or service districts, did so often for many years. Part of the price, it would seem, of near-full employment, rising real wages, and a better social safety net, was a continuing lack of control over key institutions, including those that determined the provision of housing and the planning of the urban fabric. The relatively unchanging physical and social infrastructures of North London's service districts testifies to this disempowerment in ordinary people's lives. If Sainsbury's notion of underlying spatial structures moulding the moods and attitudes of their temporary inhabitants had any reality, it was surely this.

Social over-organisation of a regressive kind persisted amidst the gains of the welfare state. Nevertheless, there was a distinctive commitment to intervening on a psychosocial level in the closed worlds of London's lodging houses. This of course had a class dimension. The postwar period saw a great increase in the number of welfare workers and officials visiting

the homes of working-class people. Section 3 revealed the contested nature of this regulatory activity, with conceptions across the social work and mental health professions ranging from a form of 'psychiatric police' to therapeutic models that rejected the reductive principles of medicalisation. While in many cases social workers acted as gatekeepers to the wider range of welfare services and amenities, effectively containing 'social problems' within the family, re-attaching the isolated individual to capitalism's basic reproductive unit, an alternative current was already well developed by the late 1950s. Exhibited most clearly by (some but not all) psychiatric social workers (PSWs), this latter tendency advocated the primary responsibility of society to adjust to the individual, rather than the other way round, and in the process offered practical help in claiming access to the benefits of the welfare state. We see in this case how the psychosocial as a field of action opened the path to the much more radical rejection of psychiatric authority in the later 1960s.

Social workers including PSWs continued to view the lodging house as a space of social problems, a view that was echoed in many films and novels of the period. And yet in these same works, we glimpse how London's rented rooms were understood as the seed of new communities; communities of the disparate and the isolated. I argued in Section 4 that this space of potentiality had a contradictory relationship with the 'propertied abstractions' embodied in subdivision.⁷⁰⁶ On the one hand, the profound urban restructuring of postwar London entailed a reconfiguration of space towards greater homogeneity; the reduction of space to a pure rental surface, divisible, summative and exchangeable, within which the practice of 'inhabiting' would be replaced, as Lefebvre put it, by the function of the 'habitat', and distinctively urban qualities by the coordination of flows of money, traffic, information and utilities.⁷⁰⁷ And yet simultaneously, this same restructuring entailed the rapid hybridisation of new transition zones; a more dramatically variegated concatenation of wealth and poverty; a throwing together of disparate classes, occupations, ages and nationalities, and a usurpation of the traditional family home by the 'synthetic family' of the boarding house or lodging house. It is this contradiction that Part 2 of this thesis has attempted to grasp.

⁷⁰⁶ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, pp. 92-3.

⁷⁰⁷ Henri Lefebvre, 'Industrialisation and Urbanisation', in Henri Lefebvre, eds. and trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 65-85, pp. 79 and 83-4; see also in the same volume, Henri Lefebvre, 'Philosophy of the City and Planning Ideology', 97-100.

Part 3: The Landlord and His Doubles

Introduction

'Emperor of the slums'; 'The arch-scurdrel'; 'not only Ali Baba but the 40 thieves as well'; a businessman living in a 'business fool's paradise'.⁷⁰⁸ These were some of the epithets given to the landlord, property trader and estate agent Bertram Waters, who appeared before the Old Bailey in December 1953 on charges of defrauding the War Damage Commission.⁷⁰⁹ Thanks to a series of trials and appeal cases, Waters became notorious for his convoluted business dealings, carried on under various false names and front companies. He was also known to have coerced a number of sitting tenants into purchasing worthless properties, diverting government funds awarded for repairs to his own pockets.

An estate agent by profession, Waters had taken advantage of the post-Blitz compensation scheme to move directly into property ownership. In his black leather gloves, fedora and pin-stripe trousers, he was the very image of the 'grasping landlord' (Figure 3.1).⁷¹⁰ By 1952 his 'empire' of dilapidated houses in South London had netted him close to £95,000 in fraudulent claims.⁷¹¹ Here was the landlord as society's rogue element, an agent of illegitimate acquisitiveness on the threshold of austerity and affluence.



Fig. 3.1 — The landlord Bertram Waters depicted in the *Mirror*. 'Waters Used Court for Blackmail Says a Judge', *Mirror* (16 October 1954), p. 5.

⁷⁰⁸ 'An MP Called Him "Emperor of Slums"', *Mirror* (2 May 1953), p. 5; 'Waters Used Court for Blackmail', *Mirror* (16 October 1954), p. 5; 'Judge Sees "Mr Waters in Disguise"', *Daily Mail* (16 Oct 1954), p. 5.

⁷⁰⁹ The War Damage Commission was established in 1941 to administer compensation claims from property owners whose buildings or land had suffered damage due to enemy action. See the catalogue description for 'War Damage Commission and War Damage Office Records', National Archives IR 33-39.

⁷¹⁰ 'Waters Appeal is Allowed', *Daily Mail* (9 Dec 1953), p. 5.

⁷¹¹ 'I am not Mr Brady, says the man at Old Bailey', *Daily Mail* (24 April 1953), p. 5.

The third and final Part of the thesis examines how London's rented worlds gravitated towards certain property-owning subjects. Whereas Parts 1 and 2 focused on social problems that revolved around the tenant, Part 3 looks at the problem of landlordism itself. In the arguments that follow, I speak about the 'figure' of the landlord, meaning the social role and meaning of the landlord (even where this is mediated through certain prominent individuals). Rather than an idealist conception of property as a 'bundle of rights' inhering in an individual,⁷¹² following Sarah Keenan, we can think of the landlord as existing at the heart of a relationship of belonging between multiple subjects and objects 'held up' in space.⁷¹³ This is what Brenna Bhandar calls the 'identity-property nexus', calling attention to the way that legal and economic mechanisms *produce* the property-owning subject.⁷¹⁴ The landlord becomes both the living symbol of the rented world and the practical arbiter of its day-to-day business, a figure both determining and determined by that world.

We saw in Part 1 how the subject of the 'property-owning democracy' was constructed in opposition to London's rented worlds. At the same time, another category of property-owner, the landlord, fragmented under the pressure of legislative reform as well as popular demands for change. The decline of the landlord mirrored the rise of the homeowner. I want to use the rest of this Introduction to sketch out some of the historical background leading up to this moment.

Landlords have long occupied a problematic position in the history of capitalism. Due to his essentially 'unproductive' role, the landlord's exploitation of tenants has typically been more vulnerable to critique than the industrialist's exploitation of workers, a tendency that can be traced back to the changing social function of the land itself.⁷¹⁵ The conversion of landownership from a system of customs and obligations into the deployment of a fungible, abstract substance of exchange, signaled the moment that the land itself ceased to be the

⁷¹² Nicholas Blomley, 'The Boundaries of Property: Complexity, Relationality, and Spatiality', *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2016), 224-255, p. 226; Sarah Keenan, 'Subversive Property: Reshaping Malleable Spaces of Belonging', *Social and Legal Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (December 2010), 423-440.

⁷¹³ Keenan, 'Subversive Property'.

⁷¹⁴ Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham NC: Duke, 2018), p. 150.

⁷¹⁵ Andro Linklater, *Owning the Earth: The Transforming History of Landownership* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Doreen Massey and Alejandrina Catalano, *Capital and Land: Landownership by Capital in Great Britain* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 39.

basic element of production, and became instead a non-integral yet inescapable 'condition of possibility' within economic life.⁷¹⁶

Residential landlords absorbed some of these social meanings, despite the fact that their consolidation as a social force resulted from the spectacular urbanisation that followed in the wake of industrialisation. Landlords of the kind I deal with here were therefore always already an untimely category: symbolically redundant, yet practically necessary. The 'parasitic' status of the residential landlord derives from this condition. Despite their actual power persisting into the twentieth century and beyond, in legislative terms landowners were increasingly constrained from around 1900 onwards.⁷¹⁷

Lloyd George's budget of 1909 famously contained no fewer than four pieces of anti-landowner legislation, all but one of which were quickly repealed. The decade spanning the Second World War witnessed a continuation of these legislative changes.⁷¹⁸ Nationalisation of mining rights ('surface ownership') in 1938 was followed by the introduction of compulsory purchase powers for local authorities in 1944, and the creation of a Central Land Board to administer development charges in 1947.⁷¹⁹ Parallel with this, but beginning a decade earlier, changes in the provision of working-class housing also got underway; namely, the rise of homeownership and public housing on a mass scale. These were not on the same epochal level as the reorganization of society away from a system of production based on land to one based on industry, but they had important ramifications nonetheless. As a result, the decline of the residential landlord followed that of the landowning class in general, with a lag of perhaps half a century. From symbolically redundant but practically necessary, residential landlords came to occupy an increasingly problematic position; a position that was isolated more and more in social as well as symbolic terms. That said, theirs was a 'Slow Goodbye'.⁷²⁰ For millions of tenants, the influence of the private landlord still loomed large over their lives.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

⁷¹⁷ At the height of Britain's industrial expansion, top landowners actually increased their wealth. The subsequent decline of landed wealth accelerated around 1940. WD Rubinstein, *Men of Property: the Very Wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 196.

⁷¹⁸ Peter Ambrose, *Whatever Happened to Planning?* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 11.

⁷¹⁹ Massey and Catalano, *Capital and Land*, p. 17.

⁷²⁰ David Eversley, 'Landlords' Slow Goodbye', *New Society*, Vol. 31, No. 641 (16 January 1975), 119-121.

What became of the figure of the landlord during this protracted decline? Broadly speaking, I argue that postwar culture channeled landlordism's dwindling energies into three distinct figures, each one representing a different idea of the landlord. We have already encountered one of these: the grasping landlord of the Bertram Waters type. Alongside this, there were two other prominent incarnations: the black landlord and the 'little old landlady'.

In many ways, these multiple figures of the landlord reflected the fragmented state of the private rental market itself. The Committee on Housing in Greater London, chaired by Edward Milner Holland, found that landlords with 100 lettings or more – representing just 0.3% of all landlords (whether companies, trusts or individuals) – controlled a little under one third of the private rental market in Greater London.⁷²¹ In other words, the end of our period sees high levels of concentration in terms of ownership and management by property companies, corporate landlords, certain nationalised industries, and the handful of large individual landlords. But alongside this, a vast number of small, mostly individual landlords continued to act as a major housing provider for private tenants. According to Milner Holland, 43% of private lets were controlled by landlords with fewer than 10 lettings each, and if one includes 'medium' sized landlords with fewer than 50 lettings, the proportion rises to 61%.⁷²² It is these small and medium sized landlords that I focus in in Sections 1-3 below. The fourth and final Section deals with a class of property-owner within Milner Holland's top 0.3%, namely developers. But as Section 4 goes on to explore, these new players in the property system were far less concerned with collecting rents from tenants and much more concerned with the speculative value of the land itself.

The postwar period saw increasing pressure on property owners to quit the field of private rented housing. But those at the bottom end of the scale, who had fewer resources for conversion, fewer opportunities for sale, far less access to finance, and limited knowledge of how the whole property system worked, found it much harder to make an exit. Those at the top meanwhile tended to sell out, or to grow their holdings through specialisation.⁷²³ The

⁷²¹ Committee on Housing in Greater London, Edward Milner Holland chair., *Report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London*, (Cmd. 2605) (London: HMSO, 1965), p. 148. Henceforth '*Milner Holland Report*'.

⁷²² Ibid.

⁷²³ John Short, 'Landlords and the Private Rented Housing Sector: A Case Study', in Martin Boddy ed., *Land, Property and Finance* (Working Paper no. 2), 56-75, p. 73 and *Milner Holland Report*, p. 160.

combined result was concentration among the very top owners and fragmentation among the rest.

Bertram Waters represented one of the ways in which successful residential landlords might choose to specialise. Irrespective of the legality of his dealings, Waters' primary purpose was to buy and sell properties; he was, in other words, a landlord-cum-property-trader, not dissimilar to Peter Rachman.⁷²⁴ Changes in the postwar property system opened up new opportunities for men like Waters and Rachman.⁷²⁵ But theirs was only one niche within a fragmenting system and Waters' infamy should be seen as a symbol of the general attack on landlordism as an institution.

Memories of the days when Labour frontbenchers and the more supportive elements of the press would denounce those 'anti-social' elements of society 'who have got accommodation grossly in excess of their reasonable requirements', would have been fresh in people's minds.⁷²⁶ The reforms of the 1940s fell well short of the nationalisation of the land that the Uthwatt Committee saw as the ideal solution to the problem it was tasked to investigate in 1941, however the ideological tenor of the moment was clear.⁷²⁷ Landlords were routinely lambasted by the *Mirror* as 'monstrous' and 'wicked'.⁷²⁸ Even The *Daily Mail* found it useful to turn the language of anti-landlordism against its main proponents: 'Landlord Bevan has relented', the paper announced in November 1945, celebrating the Minister of Health's decision to cancel his proposed rent increase for 85 families living in a requisitioned block of flats in Earl's Court.⁷²⁹

The landlord as a figure of 'popular loathing' thus proved to be a surprisingly mercurial entity, taking on many different guises in his role as mediator of the impersonal forces of the postwar property system.⁷³⁰ 'You are after the Big Bad Wolves again – the landlords who

⁷²⁴ Shirley Green, *Rachman* (London: Michael Joseph, 1979), p. 46.

⁷²⁵ Chris Hamnett and Bill Randolph, *Cities, Housing and Profits: Flat Break-up and the Decline of Private Renting* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1988), p. 80-1.

⁷²⁶ Aneurin Bevan quoted in *Mirror*, 'Let Your Spare Rooms - Or We'll Take Them' (18 Oct 1945), p. 1; *Mirror*, 'Do You Want a House?' (23 June 1945), p. 2.

⁷²⁷ That is, if there were no political barriers to such a move. Massey and Catalano, *Capital and Land*, pp. 16-17.

⁷²⁸ 'Eviction of Blind Ex-Soldier Was Monstrous and "Criminal"', *Mirror* (12 Nov 1946), p. 4; 'Judge Calls Remarks by Landlord "Wicked"', *Mirror* (14 Nov 1946), p. 1.

⁷²⁹ 'Landlord Bevan', *Daily Mail* (24 Nov 1945), p. 2.

⁷³⁰ I have adapted the term 'popular loathing' from Mark Fisher: 'The roots of any successful struggle will come from people sharing their feelings, especially their feelings of misery and desperation, and together attributing the

charge too much rent', was Mary Ferguson's diagnosis in her 'Home Service' advice column in the *Mirror*, responding to a woman in Surrey who enquired about rent hikes linked to the subdivision of properties.⁷³¹ Wolves, of course, are always plural: they run in a pack. The identity of the landlord as 'Big Other' was attached in this case to an image of multiplicity. Echoing this imagery in his cartoons for the *Evening Standard*, Victor Weisz depicted landlords as sharks, tigers, crocodiles and jubilant bands of civil-war era royalists (Figures 3.2-3.5). These representations of the landlord, like the figure of Bertram Waters, can be seen as metamorphic symbols of the rented world during a period of change and upheaval.



Fig. 3.2 — Cartoon by Victor Weisz, *Evening Standard* (11 August 1960).

sources of these feelings to impersonal structures, albeit impersonal structures mediated by particular figures to which we must attach populist loathing.' Mark Fisher, 'Abandon Hope (Summer Is Coming)', *K-Punk* (11 May 2015) <<http://k-punk.org/abandon-hope-summer-is-coming/>> [accessed 19 June 2019].

⁷³¹ Mary Ferguson, 'Find out if You're Paying Too Much Rent', *Mirror* (27 April 1945), p. 7.



Fig. 3.3 — Cartoon by Victor Weisz, *Evening Standard* (10 July 1957).



Fig. 3.4 — Cartoon by Victor Weisz, *Evening Standard* (28 October 1960).



Fig. 3.5 — Cartoon by Victor Weisz, *Evening Standard* (14 December 1960). The caption in the top left reads: 'Enter Mac's merry men: (landlords, takeover boys, shareholders etc.) Singing: "Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho, up the profits go"'.
Singing: "Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho, up the profits go".

Of course, the condemnation of landlords was not universal. The National Federation of Property Owners (NFPO) made a determined effort to put the case in favour of the 'little people' – the small-scale landlords who were supposedly being denied a reasonable reward for their frugality and prudence.⁷³² More interesting was the way in which the NFPO often made its argument in gendered terms, associating the figure of the 'hard-hit landlord' with that of the widow surviving on income from property which she let either due to sheer necessity, or in a spirit of service to the community.⁷³³ The figure of the 'little old landlady' was one important incarnation of the landlord and his doubles. As John Short has

⁷³² "'X' Means How Many Houses?', *Property Owners Gazette* [official journal of the NFPO], Vol. xviii, No. 208 (November 1945), 125.

⁷³³ John Starr, '100,000 hard-up landlords say: Raise the rents', *Daily Mail* (20 Apr 1950), p. 3.

commented, 'the little old lady image of decent god-fearing people performing a public duty by letting out part of their property' can be seen as the opposite of the 'greedy, unscrupulous landlord'.⁷³⁴ In relation to these two different figures of the landlord, tenants were positioned as either helpless victims or as victimisers themselves.

Section 1 seeks to go beyond these polarised images to understand how the lives of landladies and tenants were often intimately connected at the level of spatial practice. Alongside the work of the NFPO, I examine the image of the landlady in films such as *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick, 1955) and *The Man Upstairs* (dir. Don Chaffey, 1959). Returning to some of the films analysed in Part 2 of this thesis allows me to pursue the theme of decline, exploring how the 'shabby genteel' status of middle-class landladies carried within it certain moral ambiguities that were key to the self-understanding of modernisation.

Drawing on Raymond Williams' terminology, we might say that the 'little old landlady' is a figure that vacillates between the *residual* and the *archaic*.⁷³⁵ The archaic, according to Williams, belongs entirely to the past, even when it is consciously 'revived'. By contrast, the residual refers to elements 'which cannot be expressed or substantially verified' within the dominant culture, but nevertheless possess a substantive reality in certain practices of everyday life; that is, within the realm of spatial practice.⁷³⁶ Rather than simply categorising cultural and political tropes as major or marginal elements in the evolution of a dominant model, the concept of the residual alerts us to the waves of appropriation and re-appropriation that shape the built environment, as well as the persistence of forms of life that subtend that dominance.

If the elderly landlady sits uncomfortably between the residual and the archaic, then the figure of the immigrant landlord – and especially the black landlord – represents the alternative pole in Williams' conceptual schema: the *emergent*, as distinct from the merely *novel*. This is the subject of Section 2. For Williams, the emergent consists of 'new perceptions and practices', that may be 'neglected and excluded' but are still 'active and

⁷³⁴ John Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-War Experience* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 181.

⁷³⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), pp. 121-7.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

pressing'.⁷³⁷ The emergent can therefore be a foretaste of something yet to emerge as a major social force; a significant minority practice or an anticipatory figure within the realm of representation.

Section 2 looks at these questions through the contrasting lenses of the sociology of postwar race relations and the testimony given by the pages of the *West Indian Gazette*, as well as two novels by Samuel Selvon. As an emergent actor in the postwar property system, the immigrant landlord played an important role in determining the future shape of private rented housing in London. At the same time, he was the focus of all kinds of subtly or overtly racist fears and attacks. Through the evidence of the *West Indian Gazette*, I argue for a new understanding of the entrepreneurial culture that immigrant landlords were part of, and how this intertwined with radical, anti-colonial politics.

The stereotyped image of the immigrant landlord can be compared to that of the 'grasping' landlord of the Bertram Waters type; his was another kind of 'rogue' activity. But although the hostility felt towards landlords could easily be turned to reactionary ends, its mainspring, I would argue, lay in the activity of tenants themselves, who took full advantage of the new democratic channels opened up by the welfare state. Indeed, the case of Bertram Waters gives some indication of the new confidence with which tenants challenged their landlords. Sometime in 1952-3, Doris Leyland of Crowhurst Road in Brixton attended an auction where the house she lived in was up for sale. Leyland recognised the successful bidders as part of the 'Waters ring', and it was the action of tenants like herself that helped secure a 12 month prison sentence for Waters in 1953. Refusing to be intimidated by the threat of eviction, Leyland was one of 40 tenants who came together under the lead of a local Methodist Minister in order to expose Waters' operations.⁷³⁸

Against this background, Section 3 examines how the rent tribunals established by the Labour government in 1946 acted as forums for the voicing of tenants' grievances. It was in rent tribunals that tenants contested the role of the landlord on the basis of their lived experience. The construction of figures of popular loathing like Bertram Waters was itself a

⁷³⁷ Ibid., pp. 126-7. Williams gives the example of the early radical press and the emergence of trade unions, both of which were successfully incorporated and institutionalised, but not without capitalism itself having to adapt to them.

⁷³⁸ "Slippery Emperor of the Slums" jailed', *Daily Mail* (2 May 1953), p. 3.

popular activity. Immigrants also participated in this activity, whose main target was not the black landlord but rather the terrible housing conditions that the landlord class as a whole profited from.

Finally, I turn my attention in Section 4 to a figure whose influence came to dominate the postwar property system: this was the developer, a figure embodied by people like Jack Cotton and Joseph Levy (whose projects in Notting Hill and Euston we encountered in Parts 1 and 2). But again, the rise of these new social agents was haunted by, and indeed dependent upon, those problematic variants of the landlord, who, just as they dwindled from scene, seemed to suddenly grasp a new role for themselves: a role in which an unwanted social parasitism was never far away from an indispensable economic function.

1. Little Old Landladies

Though we might struggle to take in all the details at once, still we know, or so it seems, exactly what this image stands for. Like some of the mocked-up interiors created as part of the LCC fire safety displays examined in Part 1, the image below (Figure 3.6) is a recreation of a certain style of domestic life, fashioned by one of the masters of such simulacra, Ealing Studios, for the 1955 film *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick). The neat little figure in the armchair with her brooch and bonnet is of a piece with the furniture, a figure as irrefutable yet absurd as the parrot on its stand, as watchful and yet faded as the photograph above the mantelpiece. Recessed into the clutter of the frame she seems to sit somewhere just beyond the horizon of the immediate past.



Fig. 3.6 — still from *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick, 1955).

The Ladykillers was one of a number of films of the 1940s-60s that played with the figure of the landlady as a recognisable 'type'. Such figures could be sympathetic or loathsome, comical or sincere. The character of Mrs Chalk in *The Lavender Hill Mob* (dir. Charles Crichton, 1951), another Ealing production, typifies the uneventful life of the boarding house where the two would-be bank robbers first meet. *The October Man* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1947), an exercise in what film historian Robert Murphy has characterised as the 'grubby, atmospheric realism' of 1940s crime dramas, presents a more muted version of this dowdy image.⁷³⁹ 'Forty-five, with greying untidy hair' and 'a kind heart', the 'manageress' of the Brockhurst Common residential hotel is the opposite in many ways of the landlady in a later example of the 'social problem film', *The Man Upstairs* (dir. Don Chaffey, 1959);⁷⁴⁰ not even an armed stand-off with the police can disturb the unflinching cynicism with which Mrs Lawrence regards her tenants. *West 11* (dir. Michael Winner, 1963), adapted from Laura del Rivo's novel *The Furnished Room*, offers a more frankly contemptuous, 'lumpen' representation of the scolding landlady, while Kim Novak as Mrs Carlyle Hardwick in *The*

⁷³⁹ Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-1948* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 180.

⁷⁴⁰ Eric Ambler, *The October Man*, final shooting script, p. 10, British Film Institute (BFI) Special Collections, SCR-13426.

Notorious Landlady (dir. Richard Quine, 1962) carries the image in the opposite direction: 'Carly' is the landlady as coy seductress. (See Figures 3.7-3.11 below).

These are just some examples of how landladies were represented in popular British films of the 1940s, '50s and '60s. To the extent that they are easily, even instantly recognisable figures, they would seem to belong more to the realm of the archaic rather than the residual. Each one attempts to revive something that is more or less safely in the past: the Victorian trappings of the landlady and her establishment in *The Ladykillers* or the *Lavender Hill Mob*; the faded glamour of Mrs Lawrence with her sherry glass and embroidered nightgown in the *Man Upstairs*; Carly's maid's bonnet in *The Notorious Landlady*. The landladies in these films provide the keynote to a general backdrop of obsolescence. This is a comedy of contrasts, based on the juxtaposition of that which is so well known that it can be easily dismissed, since it is already on its way out, and the unexpected, the shocking, or the lurid. Hence *The Ladykillers* pits an innocent old woman against the villains who have come to rent a room in her house. The prim interior of the house contrasts with the nefarious activities of the criminals as well as the grimy back streets surrounding the nearby train station where the robbery takes place. In a similar way, Carly's bonnet in *The Notorious Landlady* acts as a foil to her 'natural' sexual appeal, while the oversight of kind-hearted Miss Selby in *The October Man* makes the presence of the murderer all the more unlikely.



Fig. 3.7 — *The Lavender Hill Mob* (dir. Charles Crichton 1951).



Fig. 3.8 — *The October Man* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1947).



Fig. 3.9 — *The Man Upstairs* (dir. Don Chaffey, 1958).



Fig. 3.10 — *West 11* (dir. Michael Winner, 1963).



Fig. 3.11 — *The Notorious Landlady* (dir. Richard Quine, 1962).

I argued in Part 2 that the lodging house or boarding house could act as the container of an emergent image of ‘the people’: a space in which Britain’s new postwar national constitution was worked out; a screen onto which the co-minglings of commonwealth immigrants, single mothers, working-class bohemians, gay men and others were projected. The obsolete status of lodging houses and certain other kinds of private rented housing meant that they could be reclaimed as shelters for these ‘problematic’ harbingers of progress.⁷⁴¹ The lodging or boarding house became a kind of ‘heterotopia’, a space of crisis, passage or suspension, in which the reality of society at large was ‘simultaneously represented, contested and inverted’.⁷⁴² The figure of the landlady personifies these untimely spaces. She is the fixed point around which all the other characters circulate. The landlady’s image acts as a counterpoint to the dramas of postwar migration, sexual ‘permissiveness’ (or its repression), and class mobility.

The proliferation of her image generated mutations of greater or lesser subtlety. The archaism of the ‘little old landlady’ seen in *The Ladykillers* and *The Lavender Hill Mob* could easily flip into the much more ambiguous, ‘residual’ character of Mrs Lawrence in *The Man Upstairs*, or Mrs Hartley, the working-class landlady in *West 11* – characters who still carry a live, social-symbolic charge. The difference between these figures reiterates at one level the typically sexist portrayal of women as either saints or sinners; the maternal or romantic ideal,

⁷⁴¹ Clair Wills, ‘Digs and Lodging Houses: Literature, Ruins and Survival in Postwar Britain’, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 52, no.s 3-4 (Autumn/Winter 2017), 57-74, pp. 58-9.

⁷⁴² Michel Foucault, trans. Jay Miskowicz, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics* (Spring 1986), 23-7, p. 24.

versus the harlot, the temptress, the woman of low repute.⁷⁴³ On the one hand, Landladies were seen as bearers of a traditional morality under threat. Mrs Hartley in *West 11* keeps a watchful eye over the comings and goings of Joe Beckett, the shiftless young man at the centre of the drama. His bringing a girlfriend back to his bedsit is deemed a step too far, and the moment when Mrs Hartley kicks him out marks the beginning of his descent into a life of crime. Popular lodging-house dramas depicted sexual permissiveness, even of a thoroughly heteronormative kind, as a social problem which the landlady felt compelled to police, vainly so since the house she presided over was part of the 'problem'. Indeed, her status as an unmarried woman or widow seemed bound up with the problematic nature of these representational spaces. While seen as a bearer of traditional morals, the landlady was equally an object of suspicion due to her detachment from the family and male heads of household. Her ownership of property was potentially subversive since it guaranteed her independence over and against the dependent status that both the benefits system and building societies continued to enforce on women.⁷⁴⁴ It was this dual sense that *The Notorious Landlady* played on in its depiction of Carly Hardwick.

Where should we look when searching for the roots of this ambiguous figure? To be a landlady was to be involved at some level in a service relationship. As Leonore Davidoff has pointed out, whereas the landlord was 'one who owns property and collects rent', the landlady's role involved 'usually living on the premises, provid[ing] house room and services for cash'.⁷⁴⁵ The role of landlady was a dual one: she was both householder and servant (or at least 'manageress' of a house full of servants).

Apart from providing a room to stay in, landladies might be expected to offer any number of services for their guests and tenants, including mending clothes, emptying chamberpots, stoking fireplaces, storing goods during periods of absence, and running messages in town.⁷⁴⁶ These services extended to the emotional care normally expected of wives and

⁷⁴³ Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), p. 181. See also Pat Thane, *Sinners? Scoundgers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

⁷⁴⁴ Virginia Noble, *Inside the Welfare State: Foundations of Policy and Practice in Post-War Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 58-68.

⁷⁴⁵ Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 161. Davidoff was writing primarily about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 166; Derek Morris and Ken Cozens, 'Mariners Ashore in the Eighteenth Century: The Role of Boarding-House Keepers and Victuallers', *Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. 103, No. 4 (November 2017), 431-449, pp. 440-443.

mothers. In running a 'respectable house', the landlady had a tacit responsibility to keep the 'emotional atmosphere' of her establishment 'on an even keel'; 'to smooth ruffled feelings and to arbitrate between lodgers, servants and her own family'.⁷⁴⁷ Acting as a substitute matriarch or spouse, the landlady was expected to discreetly absorb her guests' problems. This was especially the case with male tenants, for whom she sometimes acted as 'the repository of [personal] secrets'.⁷⁴⁸ Her role was validated to the extent that it drew on supposedly 'natural' feminine skills, both emotional and physical. And yet this very same landlady carried a degree of suspicion in society, since in accommodating strangers she seemed to violate the sanctity of the home as the intimate sphere of the family.

The landlady's role fell within the range of what Davidoff and others have called 'the near universality of a service relationship' in the long nineteenth century.⁷⁴⁹ Up until the Second World War almost all upper and middle-class families relied on paid domestic labour. Conversely, most working-class women would have had some experience working as maids, cooks, governesses etc, to the extent that in the early 1930s, domestic service was still the single largest employer of women.⁷⁵⁰ While the middle and upper classes became habituated to a remarkably high level of personal attention, certain services such as baby-minding also fell within the purview of working-class families, and it was common for men of all classes who had left the parental home but not yet married to pay for female domestic labour. Young men often arranged the latter in the form of lodgings.⁷⁵¹ A young male worker or professional who had recently moved to the city might rely on his landlady for food, laundry, miscellaneous errands and informal emotional support.

The male lodger's payment for these services put him in a position of privilege with respect to his landlady, and yet being a tenant he was also subject to the landlady's rules; it was she who decided whether he could remain under her roof or not. The landlady's class position placed her in a potentially superior relation to her tenants. If being a servant was virtually synonymous with female working-class experience, then the role of landlady presented a calling open to middle-class women. The 'feminine' character of domestic labour again

⁷⁴⁷ Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p. 172.

⁷⁴⁸ Davidoff et al., *The Family Story*, p. 159.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷⁵⁰ Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p. 153.

⁷⁵¹ Davidoff et al., *The Family Story*, p. 158-9.

served to validate the experience of the middle-class landlady, at the same time as her exposure to men of a possibly lower class made these activities socially suspect. The common phrase 'shabby genteel' (encountered in the discussion of boarding houses in Part 2) sums up this contradictory position.⁷⁵² *The Ladykillers* captures this condition visually in the crooked exterior of Mrs Wilberforce's house, which contrasts with the house's immaculate interior. The film replicates the same duality at the level of the interior itself, in the formality of the living room versus the shabbiness of the bedroom that the thieves take as their base of operations (Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.13). The service economy of the long nineteenth century held together a web of contradictory relations; two-way channels of subordination and dependence which the ambiguous figure of the landlady in postwar cinema both reflects and refracts.



Fig. 3.12 — still from *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick, 1955).

⁷⁵² Terri Mullholland, *British Boarding Houses in Interwar Women's Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 59.



Fig. 3.13 — still from *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick, 1955).

What changed between the 1930s and the 1950s? Within a single generation, this ‘near universal’ service relationship was dismantled. The culture of service that underpinned one half of the landlady’s position was stripped of its economic base, as the upheaval of two World Wars and new opportunities in clerical as well as factory work persuaded hundreds of thousands of women to leave domestic service never to return.⁷⁵³ By the 1940s there was no going back to the service economy of the nineteenth century. The figure of the landlady, as well as presiding over a declining form of housing, stubbornly maintained an aura of normality in fulfilling a function that had, in less than the time of her adult life, seemingly become exceptional.

And yet the landlady was surely more than a purely ‘archaic’ figure. Women who occupied the role of landlady in a formal sense – managing a tenancy, collecting rents, and likely providing domestic services – formed a sizeable minority in the postwar period. The Committee on Housing in Greater London found that women accounted for 37% of lettings controlled by individual landlords.⁷⁵⁴ Landladies also tended to be considerably older than their male counterparts (due partly to the fact that many only became property owners after the deaths of their husbands).⁷⁵⁵ More surprisingly, given the multiple barriers to property

⁷⁵³ Martin Pugh, *Women and The Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914-1999*, second edn. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 287-8.

⁷⁵⁴ *Milner Holland Report*, p. 314.

⁷⁵⁵ Table 7, *Ibid.*

ownership that affected them, the proportion of women was just as high if not greater among the wealthier 'extra-mural landlords' as compared to live-in landlords.⁷⁵⁶

Returning to the data contained in post office directories (see Part 2), we find a similar, indeed slightly larger proportion of women listed as boarding house proprietors in North London postcodes: 55% in 1948 and 63% in 1958.⁷⁵⁷ If one includes hotels and guest houses, many of which were listed under a generic name that does not indicate the gender of the proprietor, the proportion is smaller but still significant: 29% and 19% respectively. As before, these figures should be treated with caution, since post office directories tend to record only the more enduring establishments. Indeed, Alison Kay has suggested that information based on post office directories likely *underestimates* the number of female proprietors.⁷⁵⁸ Kay's own study of nineteenth century London lodging houses found that 401 out of 762 listed in the 1851 directory were run by women, equal to just over half. In 1871 the proportion dropped slightly to around 40%.⁷⁵⁹

In other words, what evidence we have suggests that the intervening century between the 1850s and the 1950s saw a slight decline in the proportion (as opposed to the absolute number) of landladies.⁷⁶⁰ But the change was hardly drastic and may in fact have stabilised around the turn of the century. It is this continuity or 'residuality' that is most striking, especially when placed alongside the huge upheavals not only in employment relations (the end of domestic service) but also in housing modernisation and tenure diversification.

The persistence of the landlady as a real, living figure, someone whose own experience had social weight, meant that she could act as a point of orientation for political claims as well as popular films. Some of the most contentious of these claims centred on questions of property ownership. The National Federation of Property Owners (NFPO) was one organisation that leant heavily on the figure of the landlady in its campaigns and general discourse. Founded

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 314-5.

⁷⁵⁷ 38 out of 69 boarding houses in 1948 and 20 out of 32 houses in 1958. These figures are for postcodes beginning with 'N', 'NW' or 'WC1'. *Kelly's Post Office London Directory* (1948), London Metropolitan Archives (henceforth LMA) MF356, pp. 1951-2287 and *Kelly's Post Office London Directory* (1958), London Metropolitan Archives LMA MF384, pp. 2291-2693.

⁷⁵⁸ Alison Kay, 'A Little Enterprise of Her Own: Lodging House Keeping and the Accommodation Business in Nineteenth Century London', *The London Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2003), 41-53, p. 44. Female proprietors are specified in the directories as 'Mrs' or 'Miss'.

⁷⁵⁹ Kay, 'A Little Enterprise of Her Own', *London Journal*, pp. 43-4.

⁷⁶⁰ One would expect the absolute number to decrease along with the general decline of the private rental sector.

in 1888, the NFPO was the largest and longest standing body representing British property owners, with 178 affiliated associations and over 70,000 members, from large titled landowners to solicitors, estate agents and small-scale landlords.⁷⁶¹ While in many ways a late-Victorian institution, the Federation's journal conveyed a new sense of historical purpose in the immediate postwar years. In 1948, the NFPO announced:

Never have the problems of the property-owner been more pressing, more burdensome or more intractable. On every hand the owner, in whatever category his property falls, is harassed by restriction, compulsion, shortages, and oppressive legislation.⁷⁶²

It was in this context that the NFPO sought to counter the unfavourable image of the 'gadgrind class of landlords' that Bertram Waters and later Peter Rachman came to epitomise. The NFPO hoped to replace these figures with that of the small-scale, elderly landlady.⁷⁶³ A 'hardship file' of 'shakily written, neatly typed, bold or imploring letters' gathered by the NFPO in 1950 aimed to 'kill' the 'legend of the "grasping" landlord': Letters from people like the widow of a flight lieutenant in Oxford, whose rental income of 7s 5½d per week was so small that she had to spend the entirety of her modest £70 annual pension on repairs; or the 70 year old widow from Abergavenny, who despite being the owner of six houses, had to satisfy herself last Christmas with a balance of 1s 9d for the quarter;⁷⁶⁴ or the woman left five small houses by her husband, each rented at 10s per week, who before the war had enough to 'get along' but now found herself struggling with 'the roof-high costs of repairs'.⁷⁶⁵ According to the NFPO, these elderly landladies were representative of the many people 'from humble walks of life [...] who, after years of patient service of one form or another, put their savings into some sort of property and who now, as they cannot afford the repairs, are forced to see their assets decaying day by day.'⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶¹ 'Diamond Jubilee', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xxi, No. 232 (February 1948), 17 and Alec Ling (chair of NFPO Executive Committee), 'Federation's Major Problem', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xxii, No. 247 (May 1949), 69-70, p. 69. The *Gazette* was the official journal of the NFPO, known as *Property* from 1949 to 1968. See also Chris Cook, *Sources in British Political History 1900-1951, Volume 1: A Guide to the Archives of Selected Organisations and Societies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1975), p. 168.

⁷⁶² 'Diamond Jubilee', *Property Owners Gazette*, p. 17.

⁷⁶³ 'Municipal Rent Increases', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xxi, No. 238 (August 1948), 128.

⁷⁶⁴ John Starr, '100,000 hard-up landlords', *Daily Mail*, p. 3.

⁷⁶⁵ John Hall, '78,000 landlords cry give us a square deal', *Daily Mail* (28 April 1949), p. 4.

⁷⁶⁶ 'This Great Inequality', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xix, No. 210 (January 1946), 1-2, p. 1.

Some landladies may have experienced genuine hardship. But if Milner Holland's data was representative, they were a small minority.⁷⁶⁷ His Committee found that 'elderly poor widows' accounted for only a small proportion of lettings in Greater London. This situation contrasted with what other studies had found in places like Lancaster, and in general, London landlords – and landladies – were fairly affluent.⁷⁶⁸ The high price of repairs, the limited availability of finance for improvements, and the unfavourable tax position of landlords did not make things easy for small property owners, but, as one member of the House of Lords put it, landlords had generally done well out of the war.⁷⁶⁹ As well as continuing to collect rents while effectively being relieved of any responsibility to make repairs, sale values of houses had doubled, or in some cases more than tripled in the decade from 1939.⁷⁷⁰ Later, of course, the Conservative government would take up the fight on behalf of landlords with the Rent Act of 1957. In the immediate postwar period, however, it would be more accurate to say that the small, often elderly landlady experienced an ambivalent, sometimes precarious position. Her situation was the embodiment of the idea of the 'shabby genteel', the faded grace of the middle-class woman caught in the double binds of patriarchy and petit-bourgeois respectability, who now faced a social-democratic government that deprived her of some of the privileges she once took for granted.

The NFPO was highly critical of the Labour government.⁷⁷¹ But it also sought to align itself with the forces of progress.⁷⁷² In doing so, the NFPO stressed the ordinariness of the landlady's experience. She was one of 'countless little people'.⁷⁷³ The 'grasping landlord' belonged to a past era, according to the NFPO. In fact, the NFPO regarded the term

⁷⁶⁷ *Milner Holland Report*, pp. 314-5. The report found that 60% of extra-mural landlords, by far the larger group, accounting for just under two thirds of all individual landlords, earned over £20 per week net from their rentals, as against 6-14% of live-in landlords earning this amount.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁶⁹ 'Rent Bill Debate in the Lords', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xxii, No. 246 (April 1949), 53.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Lord Packenham citing Inland Revenue figures. See also 'MPs Attack Rent Bill', *Daily Mail* (25 Jan 1949), p. 8.

⁷⁷¹ The NFPO showed its true colours in a 1948 article that extended the organisation's complaints to rationing and food subsidies. 'Is this the Next Step', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xxi, No. 231 (January 1948), 5. On middle-class resentment in the 1940s more generally see Alan Sinfeld, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 44-5.

⁷⁷² Lord Chesham, 'Property and Profit', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xviii, No. 205 (July 1945), 85-6, p. 85. For a brief moment towards the war's end, the property lobby represented by the NFPO struck a contrite pose: they accepted most of the measures contained in the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act as necessary to the task of rebuilding 'war-scarred' cities. WS Russell Thomas, 'A Retrospective View of the Town and Country Planning Act 1944', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xviii, No. 199 (Jan 1945), 3.

⁷⁷³ 'This Great Inequality', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xix, No. 210 (January 1946), 1-2, p. 1.

'landlord' as a misnomer in these postwar days of expanding homeownership.⁷⁷⁴ The landlady, and especially the elderly landlady, functioned as a fitting substitute in these circumstances.

Assembling a coherent political bloc out of the various interests of owner-occupiers, small scale landlords, property traders, builders and developers was by no means guaranteed. Landlords being 'virtually compelled' (in the view of the NFPO) to sell their properties was a spur to the growth of owner occupancy.⁷⁷⁵ The homeowner's gain was often the landlord's loss, something reflected in the NFPO's cautious approach in seeking an alliance with the National Federation of Owner-Occupiers.⁷⁷⁶ The building industry meanwhile struck a much more conciliatory tone in its dealings with the postwar Labour government. Its main representative body, the National Federation of Building Trades Employers (NFBTE), was quite happy to see the supply of building contracts rationed in the difficult first few years after 1945.⁷⁷⁷ This was miles away from the NFPO's bold claims for the powers of private enterprise.⁷⁷⁸ And as Section 4 will demonstrate, developers also possessed different interests to landlords. For the NFPO, the figure of the landlady acted as a cipher for the theoretical unity of these multiple, contradictory agencies.

The multiplication of this figure across many films of the 1940s-60s reflects her dual status as both isolated victim and representative of the property-owning classes. Part 1 demonstrated how, in another context, the 'identity-property nexus', in Bhandar's terms, crystallised around the figure of the homeowner as responsible consumer.⁷⁷⁹ With the figure of the elderly landlady, we witness a distinctive, earlier example of the process whereby legal and economic mechanisms effectively produce subjects, while the latter, in turn, anchor the meanings of these impersonal forces. The *Ladykillers* is again indicative. Mrs Wilberforce's house sits out on its own at the end of the street, like a lucky survivor of a

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ Alec Ling, 'Chairman's Speech to Owner-Occupiers in Conference', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xxii, No. 249 (July 1949), 105. Between 1939 and 1960, an estimated 1.6 million rental properties were transferred to owner occupancy in this way. Peter Saunders, *A Nation of Home Owners* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 28.

⁷⁷⁶ Russell Thomas, 'A Retrospective View', *Property Owners Gazette*.

⁷⁷⁷ 'No Builders' Rings: National Federation President's Assurance', *The Builder*, Vol. 169, no. 5347 (27 Jul 1945), 77; 'Haste and Speed', *The Builder*, Vol. 169, no. 5349 (10 Aug 1945), 102; 'The Building Industry is Efficient', *The Builder*, Vol. 173, no. 5448 (18 July 1947), 57.

⁷⁷⁸ 'The New Government and Housing', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xviii, no. 206 (Aug-Sept 1945), 97-8; 'President's Four-Point Policy', *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xix, no. 215 (June 1946), 85.

⁷⁷⁹ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, p. 150.

bombing raid (Figure 3.14). Mrs Wilberforce and her house appear unique. So it is all the more uncanny when a party of her friends appear at the door, all wearing variations of the same pale grey outfit (Figure 3.15). In place of the numerous legislative measures that assailed the postwar property owner – requisitioning, compulsory purchase, development charges, rent tribunals etc – there is the band of criminals that descends on the house.⁷⁸⁰ These ghoulish characters can be seen as the comic inversion of what one journalist writing in the *Illustrated London News* called ‘the dead and papery eye of officialdom’, which regards the home as only a house, ‘one of millions of others, and in no sense precious or sacred’, a space which it intrudes upon like ‘an invading army’.⁷⁸¹ Opposed to these invading forces is the little old landlady, the bearer of homely values in the absence of the patriarch’s protection.



Fig. 3.14 — still from *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick, 1955).

⁷⁸⁰ On requisitioning see for example ‘Requisitioning: The Federation’s Opinion’, *Property Owners Gazette*, Vol. xviii, No. 207 (October 1945), 109-10, p. 10.

⁷⁸¹ Arthur Bryant, *Illustrated London News*, ‘Our Note Book’ (18 May 1946), 532.



Fig. 3.15 — still from *The Ladykillers* (dir. Alexander Mackendrick, 1955).

The NFPO helped construct an identity-property nexus around the figure of the landlady. I want to argue, however, that it ignored – as did most of the films explored here – a deeper residuality that had to do with the networks of kin, community and friendship that working-class women sustained in the postwar period. In order to understand these relationships, I shift my attention from representational spaces to the realm of spatial practice.

Despite the stories it told of widowed landladies unable to afford repairs, the NFPO remained true to its name, continuing to represent an amalgam of propertied interests against infringements by the welfare state. On the other hand, occupying a position quite distinct from the membership of the NFPO, there existed a relatively small number of tenant-landlords, in other words people subletting part of a house that they themselves rented. The latter were in a much more precarious position.⁷⁸² Who were these low-income landlords, or landladies? The NFPO did not speak for this group.⁷⁸³ To be both tenant and landlord/landlady blurred the neat distinctions that the figures of both the ‘grasping landlord’ and the ‘little old landlady’ depended on. And yet beyond landlords of any formal kind, this dual experience was widespread. It merged into the various forms of postwar house sharing

⁷⁸² According to Milner Holland, 46% of tenant-landlords had a net weekly income of no more than £7 10s, less than the average unskilled wage at the time. Overall, these low-income landlords represented about 20% of lettings controlled by individual landlords. Calculated from Table 8, *Milner Holland Report*, p. 315.

⁷⁸³ Indeed, the NFPO was highly critical of tenants’ subletting practices. ‘We want to expose tenants who have, and are, exploiting their fellow rent-payers by demanding large sums for sublets or tenancies.’ Statement by NFPO quoted by Hall, ‘78,000 landlords’, *Daily Mail*, p. 4.

arrangements and was endemic to a certain kind of working-class experience that parts of London seemed to typify. This was, moreover, an experience that women were at the heart of.

Perhaps the most prominent of these areas was encountered in Part 2: the working-class East End, and more specifically Bethnal Green. It was here, in Bethnal Green, that social researchers such as Michael Young and Peter Willmott cemented the nostalgia for the traditional working-class community, with its close intergenerational ties, its narrow focus on the neighbourhood, and the 'effortless sociability' of its terraced streets.⁷⁸⁴ These studies, mostly carried out under the umbrella of the Institute of Community Studies, have since been criticised for their homogenising portrayal of working-class life.⁷⁸⁵ I want to suggest that the figure of the tenant-landlady reveals the elements of contradiction and mutability that these studies tended to push into the background. While my focus so far has been on the middle-class landlady, I turn now to working-class subletting practices.

The working class matriarch stands at the centre of the image of community developed by Willmott and Young, Peter Townsend and others. Already growing into the eternal figure of 'our mam' by middle age, she is the 'plump woman on the move with her shopping bags', or the woman lost in the 'steady and self-forgetful routine' of housework.⁷⁸⁶ In Richard Hoggart's words, she appears, in the natural environment of home and family, 'splendidly "there"', and despite all the troubles borne within her, is ultimately 'content'.⁷⁸⁷ What this image excludes of course is all those working-class women who were not attached to male heads of household: single mothers, divorcees, spinsters, isolated widows etc, as well as all those who were not, or who refused to be, 'content'.

⁷⁸⁴ Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957); Peter Townsend, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955); Peter Marris, *Widows and Their Families* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958). 'Effortless sociability' is from Josephine Klein, quoted in Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-70* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 202.

⁷⁸⁵ John Lawrence 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class": A Re-analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London*', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2016), 567-593.

⁷⁸⁶ Townsend, *Family Life of Old People*, pp. 13-14 and Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 45.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The role of the landlady often overlapped with these other, unvalidated modes of experience. It is no coincidence, for example, that they came together in the life of Edna Steedman, the mother of Carolyn Steedman and the subject of the latter's riposte to what she saw as the mythologised autobiographies of Richard Hoggart, Jeremy Seabrook and others.⁷⁸⁸ In *Landscape for a Good Woman* Steedman describes how her parents, exiles from a Northern textile town, moved into a rented house in South London in the early 1950s. Soon after, they began taking in lodgers. At first the lodgers were mostly 'Chorus girls' and guests 'they'd met down the Club'. Steedman registers the annoyance she must have felt as a child, especially when she was woken up in the middle of the night as the spare bed was made up in the children's room. But there is also a frisson of excitement in these memories of the theatrical crowd traipsing through the house.⁷⁸⁹ These 'sojourners' in the family, as Davidoff has called them, contribute to the secretive, illicit atmosphere that surrounds Steedman's narrative of her childhood in South London.⁷⁹⁰ Only later does it become clear that the unmarried status of her parents, and the wife and child that her father previously abandoned in Lancashire, might have something to do with this – along with the family's poverty, which Steedman is aware of from an early age.⁷⁹¹

In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, the role of tenant-landlady joins with that of the unmarried mother. In the episode about the lodgers it is clear that Steedman's mother, rather than her father, is responsible for the letting out of rooms. By the mid '50s, Steedman's father himself has virtually taken up the role of lodger, living in the attic and coming back late at night; treating the house 'like a hotel'.⁷⁹² The changing atmosphere of the house registers Steedman's dawning sense of the 'impossibility' of her family life: the 'ambivalent responsibility' of her father; the odd assortment of lodgers, increasingly 'sad, long-term men' rather than the exciting theatrical crowd; and in general the feeling of a life lived on the 'borderlands' of the legal, the normal and the speakable.⁷⁹³

⁷⁸⁸ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986).

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷⁹⁰ Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, 154.

⁷⁹¹ Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 65.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58 and 22.

This sense of life existing on the edges of society gives a new dimension to the entanglement of the landlady with postwar discourses on morality, sexuality and the family. Rather than the bearer of traditional moral values, the landlady becomes herself a figure of borderline acceptability. Perhaps what is more troubling then for the 'dominant culture' is less the dependent status of the single mother, the unmarried woman, the widow etc,⁷⁹⁴ but rather her independence; her rejection of dependency, sympathy, and pity, and along with this, her refusal to be content, her striving for something beyond what state authorities and 'tradition' would allot her. This is Edna Steedman's 'terrifying ability to *get by*'.⁷⁹⁵ It is terrifying because of the self-sacrifice that it involves, but also because, in continuing to 'want', in insisting on life's insufficiency in the here and now, it makes real claims on socially valuable objects and relations: a house of one's own, beautiful clothes, the academic or professional achievement of one's children, and above all, freedom from the condescension of male providers, welfare officers, neighbours and other pillars of respectability.⁷⁹⁶

In Carolyn Steedman's narrative, being a landlady is part of what removes her mother from 'traditional' working class life. It is seen as an isolated, indeed isolating experience. And yet, there is evidence to suggest that the role of tenant-landlady was actually fairly widespread. In his study of old age and family life in Bethnal Green, Peter Townsend found that most of his interviewees aged 60 and over lived with children, other relatives, or guests of some kind.⁷⁹⁷ This far outweighed the number of older people living by themselves. A report by the Nuffield Foundation, one of the major sources for government pensions policy, revealed a similar picture in the boroughs of Wandsworth and St Pancras.⁷⁹⁸ Townsend, moreover, found that three out of five of his interviewees lived in households supported by regular financial contributions from relatives. This included a little under half who received 'board money' (i.e. contributions towards the rent), which was found to be the single most important form of financial support among families.⁷⁹⁹ These relatively small surveys suggest that

⁷⁹⁴ Pat Thane, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints?*, Sarah Harper and Pat Thane, 'The Consolidation of "Old Age" as a Phase of Life, 1945-1965', in Margot Jeffreys ed., *Growing Old in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1989), 43-61, pp. 51-2.

⁷⁹⁵ Steedman, *Landscape*, p. 23.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 2 and 43-4.

⁷⁹⁷ Townsend, *Family Life of Old People*, p. 21.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid. and Nuffield Foundation, *Old People: Report of A Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People* (London: OUP, 1947), p. 46.

⁷⁹⁹ Townsend, *Family Life of Old People*, p. 62.

informal house-sharing arrangements overlapped with the practice of letting out rooms, and that these practices were not uncommon.

Such arrangements could be complex, ranging from regular sums of money to gifts in kind. One widow that Townsend spoke to lived in the same house as her two married daughters. The youngest contributed a regular housekeeping allowance while the eldest paid towards the rent as well as for babysitting. A younger nephew was given a bed in the house four nights a week, for which the boy's mother paid ten shillings plus a certain amount for meals. Other contributions from family members included club subscriptions, clothes and an oil heater.⁸⁰⁰ Elizabeth Roberts has sketched a similar pattern in her oral history of women and their families in the 1940s-60s.⁸⁰¹ Taking in lodgers was one of the 'traditional home-based' economies that survived the postwar changes in technology and employment (unlike dressmaking, for example), and the stories from Roberts's informants show just how important a source of income this could be.⁸⁰² Such practices came out of the ongoing struggle and hardship of working-class life. They were also inherently spatial, regulating domestic life and shaping neighbourhoods over generations. As Peter Marris noted in his study of widows in the East End, through the inheritance of tenancies, multiple generations 'sometimes ramify in a neighbourhood, until a dozen or more of its [the family's] members inhabit the same street.'⁸⁰³

Examples like these show how exchange relations penetrate families and communities.⁸⁰⁴ But they also show how families and communities appropriate supposedly impersonal relationships of exchange, submitting them to forms of 'normative' control.⁸⁰⁵ Examining the figure of the landlady shows how the rental relationship – based fundamentally on the subdivision of abstract space – was modified by everyday spatial practices. It was this 'staying power' that Townsend, Marris, Willmott and Young and others saw at work in Bethnal Green. Thus Townsend noted that one in six of his sample had inherited their

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁰¹ Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-70* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). Roberts' study covers Barrow, Lancaster and Preston.

⁸⁰² Ibid., p. 123.

⁸⁰³ Marris, *Widows*, p. 69.

⁸⁰⁴ Pat Thane, 'Social Histories of Old Age and Aging', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Special Issue (Autumn 2003), 93-111, p. 101.

⁸⁰⁵ Claus Offe, "'Crises of Crisis Management": Elements of a Political Crisis Theory', in Claus Offe, John Keane ed., *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1984), 35-64.

current tenancy from their parents. One sixty year old woman had lived in the same rented house all her life, continuing a relationship with the property that went back three generations: 'My mother died in this room, my father died in this room, and so did my grandmother.'⁸⁰⁶

Women acted as brokers in the process of securing and passing down tenancies through the family. According to Wilmott and Young, it was common practice for women to 'get to know about all impending vacancies', scouring out information from relatives, shopkeepers, estate agents and rent collectors. This process of 'relative "speaking for" relative' formed a 'complex, informal, intimate and chancy network' that submitted the rental relationship to a subtle form of self-regulation.⁸⁰⁷

The role of the tenant-landlady was bound up with these kinds of everyday practice. Recognising this does not mean accepting a mythologised image of 'traditional' working-class communities.⁸⁰⁸ Indeed the weight given to kinship relations suggests the potentially exclusive nature of this particular idea of community. Rather, by replacing the eternal 'Bethnal Green mum' with a more complex figure of working women's experiences, it encourages us to change our image of those communities as a whole. If the landlady was a residual figure in more than the sense exploited by the NFPO, then this had to do with both the ongoing hardship of working-class life, *and* the way in which values of care and mutuality persisted and were given new life.

The tenant-landlady was at the heart of a nexus of intergenerational relations that proved surprisingly adaptable in the face of major social transformations in the postwar period. Suburbanisation, the increase in women's paid employment, extensive state intervention in the domestic sphere, greater affluence and the goods and services it paid for – these things did not lead to the breakup of families and communities.⁸⁰⁹ On the contrary, the residual values and practices vested in the figure of the tenant-landlady were actually bolstered by postwar transformations, including guaranteed state pensions, which (due to their

⁸⁰⁶ Townsend, *Family Life of Old People*, p. 27.

⁸⁰⁷ Willmott and Young, *Family and Kinship*, pp. 23-26.

⁸⁰⁸ Thane, 'Social Histories of Old Age and Aging', *Journal of Social History*, p. 101.

⁸⁰⁹ Pat Thane, 'Intergenerational Support in Modern Britain', in Tindara Addabbo et al. eds., *Gender Inequalities, Households and the Production of Well-Being in Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 109-121.

inadequacy) tended to supplement rather than displace the support given by families.⁸¹⁰ Mutual aid and exchange became more rather than less possible in these circumstances. The tenant-landlady embodied a series of residual values that not only survived but actually thrived in the changing conditions of postwar Britain.

This Section has shown how the property lobby made use of a middle-class version of the 'little old landlady', familiar from popular films of the period, in order to resist the progressive regulation of the rented world. The figure of the landlady became a contested symbol of postwar London's rented worlds. She seemed to embody the problems of protracted decline that I outlined in Part 2. However, beyond this, there existed another reality – a residual but still vital world of practice, at the centre of which stood the working-class tenant-landlady. Spatial practice of a residual kind thus undercut the problematic images and figures of London's rented worlds.

Having examined the figure of the 'little old landlady', Section 2 considers another incarnation of landlordism and its problems: the immigrant and especially the black landlord. As with the landlady, this was a figure who appeared always on the point of splitting, multiplying, dissolving and coalescing.

2. Dark Strangers

What was life like for those excluded from the familiar world of the landlady letting out a single room or managing a boarding house? A student from Liberia interviewed by Alexander Carey recalled his experience at the door of the first landlady he had contacted about a room: 'She opened it, took one look at me, gasped with horror, and slammed the door in my face.'⁸¹¹ Carey's 1956 study exemplified the more invidious side of the landlady's role as a bearer of traditional morals. Resistance to an alleged sexual permissiveness channeled racist feelings, with many landladies said to reproduce the stereotype of the black

⁸¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 110 and 115.

⁸¹¹ AT Carey, *Colonial Students: A Study of the Social Adaptation of Colonial Students in London* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956), p. 52.

male lodger as a 'sexual animal'.⁸¹² Carey found that nearly three quarters of 225 landladies listed by a 'well-known organisation' acting on behalf of the University of London were unwilling to take 'coloured' students.⁸¹³ However, there was nothing to suggest that landlords, rather than landladies, were any less prejudiced. Ruth Glass found that 1 in 6 adverts for furnished accommodation in North Kensington included a specifically 'anti-coloured' tag. A further telephone inquiry showed the true proportion to be much higher: 5 in 6 supposedly neutral advertisers refused to accept Caribbean tenants.⁸¹⁴ A few years later, Milner Holland would provide official confirmation of these varying but in all cases shocking levels of discrimination.⁸¹⁵ Where they were not simply excluded, black tenants often faced a 'colour tax' in the form of higher rents for lower quality housing.⁸¹⁶

In the years after 1948, black Londoners sought out alternative forms of accommodation. The figure of the black landlord must be seen as arising from these conditions of segregation and exploitation. Against the landlady's residuality or archaism, the black landlord was a figure who vacillated, in Raymond Williams' terms, between the truly emergent and the merely novel: an alternative cultural element forced into a position of opposition, or a mere 'facsimile' of existing structures.⁸¹⁷ In providing a temporary solution to the housing problems of fellow immigrants the black landlord was potentially an admired member of the community. His status as a property-owner, however, upended expected power relations and put him at the centre of an alternative, 'underground' urban economy. For this he was reviled and sometimes feared. The present Section examines how the figure of the black landlord loomed larger than life on the urban scene thanks to these clashing and yet inextricable aspects of his character. I begin with a series of images from *Flame in The Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961).

⁸¹² Ibid., p. 64.

⁸¹³ Ibid., p. 57.

⁸¹⁴ Ruth Glass cited in Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 257.

⁸¹⁵ Milner Holland, *Report*, p. 189. According to the Committee's survey of over 1,200 London rental properties, 27% 'clearly barred coloured people and only 6% indicated that coloured tenants would be welcome.'

⁸¹⁶ Carey, *Colonial Students*, pp. 70-1.

⁸¹⁷ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 126.



Fig. 3.16 — Still showing Jubilee the landlord. *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961).



Fig. 3.17 — *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961).

Only a man in his position, of his qualities, could descend those stairs quite like that (Figure 3.16). He is Jubilee, a minor ‘emperor’ of the North London ‘twilight zone’ that provided the setting for the 1961 film *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker).⁸¹⁸ Part 1 of this thesis looked at how the film’s compact interior shots foregrounded issues of visibility, voyeurism, and what I called ‘partitioning practices’ in multiple occupancy homes. It is precisely that interior world that Jubilee the landlord leaves behind, tying the sash on his camel hair coat as he descends the stairs with a swaggering half-skip. The front porch and the rotting steps are his triumphal arch; an exit rather than an entrance to a realm of relative privilege and power. To be an immigrant and also a landlord is to reserve the right to leave the world that

⁸¹⁸ Some reviewers identified the film’s location as Camden Town. See ‘The Colour Bar’, *Guardian* (24 June 1961), p. 5. The original play was set in Wapping. Ted Willis, *Hot Summer Night* (London: Samuel French, 1959), title page.

lies behind the porch. The coat, the tribby, the stripy red and white tie, the ox-blood shoes and the leopard skin seats of his car declare this unashamedly (Figure 3.17).

Jubilee is a side character but he plays a pivotal role in the film's climax, which sees a gang of 'teds' surround him in his car as racial tensions mount on Guy Fawkes night. White racism here gets its revenge on the effrontery of the black landlord; the man who defies the underprivileged standing of his 'race' even at the expense of his own countrymen. Mica Nava has read this scene as merely reproducing racist attitudes.⁸¹⁹ It is certainly true that the film tends to titillate and spectacularise in its representations of the everyday lives of black Londoners. But to claim that this scene in particular legitimises racism when the symbolism – if anything too didactic – is so clearly against the racists, seems far-fetched.⁸²⁰ Nava pays little attention to the film's visuals and in consequence fails to mention Jubilee. In the final scene, however, he becomes a point of orientation for all the other characters in the film. As I will argue, it is the depiction of Jubilee as the archetype of the black landlord that is most problematic within this scene and yet also one of the film's most interesting elements.

Stranded in the eerie distance of Roy Ward Baker's thinly populated long-shots, with the teds on one side and the young black men who have gathered to take a stand on the other, Jubilee is caught in the twilight space of the bombsite or empty lot (Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.19). He is in many ways the very embodiment of the 'zone of transition' encountered in Parts 1 and 2; a figure himself in a state of transition, determined to break away from his roots. It is in this sense that he is truly emergent, carving out a new role for himself, yet simultaneously at risk of lapsing into a pale or exaggerated imitation of his white counterpart – just another exploiter, a novelty and nothing more. 'Community' and what it stands for scatters and reassembles around this supplemental character (Figure 3.20). Visually we are reminded of some of the chorus-like assemblies in films such as *The L-Shaped Room* and *The Man Upstairs* (Part 2, Section 5). The film's violent conclusion shatters the seemingly easy heterogeneity of the neighbourhood before re-establishing a fragile unity at the very end.

⁸¹⁹ Mica Nava, 'Thinking Internationally: Gender and Racial Others in Postwar Britain', *Third Text*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (November 2006), 671-682, p. 678. The film's anxiety laden atmosphere left a number of contemporary critics feeling uneasy. 'Film about Race Prejudice', *The Times* (23 June 1961), p. 2 and David Robinson, 'Frank Realism', *Financial Times* (23 June 1961), p. 20.

⁸²⁰ 'Colour Bar', *Guardian*.



Fig. 3.18 — Still from *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961).



Fig. 3.19 — Still from *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961).



Fig. 3.20 — Still *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961).

It is easy to see why Ted Willis inserted the character of Jubilee into the film adaptation of his play from two years earlier.⁸²¹ The landlord in his flash clothes provides a point of contrast to the working-class respectability of Gomez's character, as well as off-setting the suggestions of radical intellectualism in Peter Lincoln (Sonny Lincoln in the play) – the young teacher from Jamaica whose relationship with the daughter of the white shop steward in Gomez's factory forms the main drama of both film and stage production. Jubilee stands for the world outside the cozy, or claustrophobic, interior which the play confines itself to (see Part 1, Section 5). His clothes are messages that cross back and forth between the 'slum', or 'ghetto', and the West End; between downtown and uptown.

Jubilee's status as a landlord puts him in a particular position with respect to both the 'ghetto' or community and the wider city. But his signal attributes hark on another, parallel tradition. His style, his swagger, his moral ambiguity all recall the endlessly mutating series of hustlers, conmen, 'wideboys' and gangsters that litter the popular imagination of the twentieth century city. These 'corrupted heroes', to use Jonathan Raban's phrase, embody the perverse desires that the city harbours for a particular kind of self-reinvention: a chameleon-like capacity that thrives on social isolation and the enticement of ever-changing fashions and commodities.⁸²² Taking everything the city can give, such characters live out the ordinary citizen's dreams as tantalising nightmares.

In the London of the late 1940s and '50s one figure in particular embodied this corrupted heroism: he was the 'spiv'. Once a specific occupation within organised crime, 'spiv' became a convenient label for the blackmarket dealer who flaunted the restrictions of postwar austerity.⁸²³ Spivs in the 1940s and '50s were the subject of several lurid media sensations that charted a descent from petty fiddles into violence and depravity, often with connotations of a flamboyant masculinity that bordered on camp, or at least implied a suspect detachment from the family.⁸²⁴ But the spiv's appearance in weekly column-fillers, cartoons, and films

⁸²¹ Willis, *Hot Summer Night*.

⁸²² Jonathan Raban, *Soft City* (London: Harvill, 1974), pp. 70-76.

⁸²³ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, pp. 149-50.

⁸²⁴ Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 19-21.

also hints at what was attractive about this oversized personality.⁸²⁵ The spiv seemed to answer a popular desire for dynamism and change after the wartime years of collective sacrifice. His activities – second hand car dealing, blackmarket nylons, stolen ration coupons – were in any case only marginally removed from so many who depended on the postwar ‘greymarket’.⁸²⁶ The journalist David Hughes (writing in 1965) described how the spiv’s persona and, crucially, his appearance, seemed to embody the ‘suppressed energies’ of the nation’s ‘back streets’: ‘lemon-yellow shoes, the full drapes down from shoulders as wide as a yoke, the spectacular tie that resembled a giant tongue poked vulgarly out at life’.⁸²⁷

Jubilee the landlord fits the profile of the postwar ‘spiv’ in at least two respects. Like the spiv he is determined to take what the city can offer and won’t be held back by restrictions and regulations. Also like the spiv, he exhibits his spoils on the surface: his body is a gallery, his clothes artefacts, his whole person a living history of the journey from lowlife to triumph. He resembles one of the immigrant landlords that Sheila Patterson fixated on in her study of 1950s Brixton, men who display their wealth ‘by means of such symbols as gaudy two-toned American cars, expensive and colourful clothes, large radiograms and illuminated cocktail bars’.⁸²⁸ As Richard Hornsey has commented, this clothed-body acts as a temporal condenser or refractor – ‘a gaudy remnant of laissez-faire capitalism that had somehow survived into the bureaucratized age of the postwar welfare state’;⁸²⁹ a kind of ruin, which simultaneously opens up a shortcut to an alternative future.

However, there are ways in which the figure of Jubilee cannot be reconciled with that of the spiv. Whereas the spiv is admired (up to a point) for his individualism, the black landlord is reviled for it. Like so many variations on the hustler and the gangster, the image of the spiv belongs to the wider community precisely because actual spivs appear to have no community whatsoever. As far as the popular imagination is concerned, the spiv only knows other spivs; he doesn’t have family or friends, he has connections. This detachment from the

⁸²⁵ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, pp. 150, 156, 160.

⁸²⁶ Mark Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain, 1939-1955* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 50-8. Roodhouse uses the term ‘greymarket’ to refer to a range of activities, including illicit trading of ration coupons, petty pilfering from workplaces, and various under-the-counter arrangements with shopkeepers.

⁸²⁷ David Hughes, ‘The Spivs’, in Michael Sissons and Philip French eds., *Age of Austerity 1945-51* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 86-105, pp. 105 and 94.

⁸²⁸ Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of A Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (London: Tavistock, 1963), p. 379.

⁸²⁹ Hornsey, *The Architect and The Spiv*, p. 21.

wider community represents a style of life strictly barred to the black landlord, who never ceases to represent 'his people' (even, and perhaps especially, when making a bid for escape). It was precisely this foisting of representative status onto his person that guaranteed his conversion from a landlord who happened not to be white into that definitive yet ambiguous figure – cutting an outline as sharp and voluminous as his suit – the black landlord.

In the 1950s and early '60s stories revolving around black landlords ranked among the most prominent cases of landlord abuse highlighted by newspaper editors.⁸³⁰ According to Milner Holland, the level of attention was out of all proportion to the relatively small number of non-white landlords: 'If the position were to be assessed only by the more sensational stories current during the height of the public outcry [...] it would be natural to reach a facile conclusion that the prime offender was the coloured landlord.'⁸³¹ Yet despite the measured tone of his report, a number of coded references to the 'foreignness' of abusive landlords – 'putting snakes in the bathroom', hanging shrunken heads on a tenant's door – were picked up on by the press.⁸³² Contrary to what John Davis has claimed, Milner Holland and the elite strata that he represented cannot be said to have been particularly successful at deflecting attention away from the problem of the 'coloured landlord'.⁸³³ As other scholars have noted, the report generally confirms the 'social image of landlords as "Rachmans"' without delving very deeply into the variety of their experiences.⁸³⁴

Journalists, sociologists, legal professionals, government officials and others in positions of influence constructed the figure of the black landlord as an emblem of what had supposedly gone wrong with Commonwealth immigration. It was in this spirit of vindication that Judge William Clothier of Lambeth County Court recommended that one solution to the problem of 'coloured people buying houses and turning out white tenants' would be 'to return to Jamaica

⁸³⁰ For example 'Judge Hits out at "Excessive" Rents', *Daily Express* (13 August 1964), p. 8. Liberal broadsheets were not adverse to singling out the black landlord either. See 'Eviction Savoured of Mob Law', *Guardian* (10 July 1963), p. 4 and 'Pakistani Bans Coloured Lodgers', *Guardian* (21 November 1963), p. 5.

⁸³¹ *Milner Holland Report*, p. 190. Landlords born in the West Indies, Pakistan, India and West Africa made up just 6% of all landlords in the report's survey. Calculated from *Ibid.*, p. 315, Table 9.

⁸³² Wills, *Lovers and Strangers*, p. 248.

⁸³³ See for example Peter Whaley, 'Exposed: The Landlords who Live on Fear', *Daily Mail* (12 March 1965), p. 7; John Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 69-92, p. 88. As Davis himself notes, Milner Holland specifically highlighted the 'snakes in the bathroom' and 'shrunken head' examples in the press conference launch of the report. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁸³⁴ McCrone and Elliott, *Property and Power in a City*, p. 105.

anybody guilty of this practice'.⁸³⁵ In an example from the academic field, John Rex, one of the best known sociologists of postwar race relations, drew criticism from the Pakistan High Commission when he claimed that Pakistani immigrants had 'a very bad image – the image of the landlord'.⁸³⁶ Another well-known race relations academic, Sheila Patterson, was more sympathetic to immigrants who had bought their own homes, but she also tended to fixate on the figure of the black landlord. In Patterson's view the 'multiple landlords [...] are probably the only migrants at present in a position to exert influence and even a certain amount of control within the settlement [around Brixton] by means of their possession of a scarce commodity'.⁸³⁷

Patterson's numerous references to these 'multiple landlords' paint a contradictory portrait. Her views reflected not only the ambiguity inherent in the position of the landlord – on the one hand a respectable citizen, taking advantage of the new opportunities for homeownership as everyone was supposed to, on the other hand an exploiter, a rogue, a 'spiv' – but also something of what Patterson saw as the ambiguous character of Brixton itself. Postwar Brixton was unlike either the industrial 'dormitory' quarter of Stepney, which for many years had a presence of Caribbean, African, Chinese and Sylheti sailors, or the bohemian fringe of North Kensington with its 'antisocial, café-society elements', or the wealthier 'suburbs' of Streatham and Dulwich that attracted middle-class professionals from the Caribbean community.⁸³⁸ If North Kensington was a 'zone of transition' in the classic sense delineated by Ruth Glass, then Brixton according to Patterson had the character of what she called an 'incipient "ghetto"'.⁸³⁹ Unlike Tiger Bay in Cardiff in the 1920s and '30s, and unlike Stepney, Brixton did not strike Patterson as a true 'ghetto'; it was somehow more sprawling, more diffuse, a series of loosely concentric orbits centred on the market with only a small core of streets known as 'little Harlem'.⁸⁴⁰

⁸³⁵ 'Jamaican Tells: How I Bought That House', *Daily Express* (2 December 1954), p. 5. In Nottingham, a city that had experienced white riots like the ones in Notting Hill, another Judge took it upon himself to highlight the problem of the 'Indian landlord'. See 'Judge Hits out', *Daily Express*, p. 8.

⁸³⁶ 'Pakistani "Rachman" Tactics Denied', *Guardian* (27 July 1964), p. 2.

⁸³⁷ Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, pp. 368-9.

⁸³⁸ Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, pp. 59, 181 and 294.

⁸³⁹ Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 213.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 213-5.

The term “incipient” ghetto’ is clearly suggestive of the anxieties underlying Patterson’s ethnographic encounter with postwar London’s racial others. The ‘ghetto’, with its semi-criminal, underground economy, is what Brixton might become without action to avert this degeneration, and it should come as no surprise that Patterson was sympathetic towards the restrictive Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962.⁸⁴¹ The figure of the black landlord can be seen as embedded within this racialised geography.

Yet despite this framing, Patterson’s descriptions frequently undercut the image of the black landlord as gangster or ‘spiv’, highlighting what could be thought of as genuinely ‘emergent’ qualities. With the ‘antisocial, café-society elements’ of Notting Hill in mind, she notes that Brixton by contrast had attracted ‘the more stable type of migrant worker’. The black landlord, one of the few candidates for community leadership in this area supposedly lacking ‘durable organizational bonds’, was not among the “wideboys” or the drifters, most of whom find Paddington or Stepney more to their taste’.⁸⁴² On the contrary, landlords in Brixton were at the heart of a close-knit, informal system of support, which provided an alternative to the nuclear family as well as more formal associations like trade unions or political parties. In one such multiple occupancy household, Patterson found that tenants shared childcare responsibilities, cooking, mending, mail-order services and rent collecting duties. Many of these tasks were in fact delegated to one of the female tenants – a widow and single mother, who was remunerated with small payments – but it was the landlord (rather than a landlady) who chose the tenants and set the rules of the house, maintaining the composition of ‘congenial individuals’ as well as a certain social ‘cachet’.⁸⁴³

Rashmi Desai found similar forms of self-organisation based around the multiple occupancy household in his study of Gujarati immigrants. These included not only mutual aid and exchange but also determined forms of avoidance and restraint, as well as co-ownership and self-financing. Immigrant landlords again played a central role, ensuring that kitchens were well supplied with shared equipment, but also overseeing conventions about the use of common facilities, with tenants assigned their own drawers as well as fixed times for

⁸⁴¹ Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 383.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 346-7.

washing and cleaning.⁸⁴⁴ In general, 'Great formality is observed in day-to-day behaviour' especially between Indian and non-Indian tenants, 'which makes it difficult to pick quarrels readily'.⁸⁴⁵ Desai focused on the Midlands but found similar arrangements in London. Would-be landlords embarked on shared ownership schemes and carefully recruited tenants through colleagues, family and friends.⁸⁴⁶ Arrangements like these certainly did not abolish pre-existing inequalities of class and gender but they were a far-cry from the image of the landlord as racketeer. In one example from London, three Gujarati men bought a house together. While the two who were 'tailors by caste' shared the manual work of cleaning and wall-papering, the third, a student preparing for a professional qualification, kept the accounts and delegated any manual jobs to his cousin.⁸⁴⁷

Paralleling the co-ownership schemes that Desai described, Brixton was also home to numerous 'small cooperative savings associations', known as "'partners" associations' or 'pardner hands'.⁸⁴⁸ Members would contribute a weekly amount of up to a few pounds and take it in turns to draw out lump sums. Savings accumulated in this way could help towards the deposit on a house, a car, or other large items. Sheila Patterson provided little detail on these important forms of self-organisation, which formed the premise of Samuel Selvon's novel *The Housing Lark* (1965) and were also noted by Milner Holland, but she did relate them back to traditions and practices that migrants brought with them from the countries they had emigrated from.⁸⁴⁹ In a way that parallels the role of the tenant-landlady, these varying forms of mutualism and self-regulation brought the rental relation under a degree of normative control. Indeed, Milner Holland learnt about schemes that were up to 900 members strong.⁸⁵⁰ These emergent institutions carried significant social weight. Countering the precarity of the private rental market, they were testament to the 'staying power' of migrant communities.

⁸⁴⁴ Rashmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (London: OUP, 1963), p. 41.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-3 and 21.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸⁴⁸ Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 348.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 349; Samuel Selvon, *The Housing Lark* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1965); *Milner Holland Report*, p. 192.

⁸⁵⁰ *Milner Holland Report*, p. 192.

The community oversight of a landlord could clearly exercise an exploitative influence, but it is also important to note how it constituted a form of spatial practice that belies the image of the landlord as 'wideboy' or 'spiv'. If the spiv's love of the quick deal and instant pleasures lead him towards the celebration of novelty for its own sake, then the black landlord was involved in a struggle to carve out a space of emergence in Raymond Williams' sense of the term: a space within the city that would not just be an isolated exception but would actually force the city to adapt to it.⁸⁵¹ His was a different temporal as well as spatial experience to that of the spiv; a long-term gamble wagered on his own future. As a result, Patterson, like other scholars before her, was forced to recognise the dual character of the ghetto as both a space of enclosure and a recognised 'oasis'.⁸⁵²

To tear the figure of the black landlord away from that of the spiv is not to deny that immigrant landlords – like landlords in general – were often justly resented by their tenants. It is, however, to recognise that in order to bring this figure into focus we need a different viewpoint from that of the ethnographic outsider. Rashmi Desai's work begins to move us in this direction. Unlike Patterson and Milner Holland, Desai refused to depict the black landlord as naive, short-sighted or materialistic.⁸⁵³ Milner Holland's description of immigrant house purchasers as the 'natural prey of those who do not scruple to make easy profits' certainly reflected the extreme housing difficulties of postwar London.⁸⁵⁴ Excluded by the majority of white landlords, some turned to homeownership as an alternative, only to find mainstream building societies exercising a more invidious form of discrimination through exceptionally high interest rates.⁸⁵⁵ There was in turn enormous pressure to let out rooms in order to make up these inflated costs. But the idea that immigrants were 'simple and inexperienced', 'ill-advised' and lacking 'sufficient reliable professional help' was also based on an image of the landlord that narrowed and distorted the experience of black Londoners.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 124.

⁸⁵² Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 213. Mitchell Duneier develops this idea of the dual nature of the ghetto. Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, The History of an Idea* (New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 2016).

⁸⁵³ *Milner Holland Report*, p. 392; Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 379-80.

⁸⁵⁴ *Milner Holland Report*, pp. 392.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 193 and 'So You Want to Buy A House? Facts on House Purchase', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (May 1961), p. 8.

⁸⁵⁶ *Milner Holland Report*, pp. 392 and 394.

Around the same time that Sheila Patterson and Milner Holland were writing up their findings, the anti-colonial *West Indian Gazette* was putting forward a quite different model of homeownership and landlordism: one that was thoroughly professionalised, sophisticated in its intentions, and grounded precisely in long experience of the housing difficulties of immigrants. Under the editorship of the communist activist Claudia Jones, the *Gazette* was probably the first commercial black newspaper in Britain.⁸⁵⁷ In June 1961 the *Gazette* published the first of a series of articles promoting a new company being formed with the specific aim of providing mortgages to black applicants.⁸⁵⁸ The company, later registered as 'Integration Mortgage Co. Ltd.', was established as a non-profit enterprise under the leadership of four white and four black directors, among them Britain's first black councillor, Dr David Pitt, and Kenneth Lawton, the 'estate agent with a difference'.⁸⁵⁹

From the beginning, the *West Indian Gazette* linked the Integration Mortgage Company's social entrepreneurship to a wider housing politics, highlighting the 'colour-bar' exercised by conventional lenders and the recent decision by Borough Councils to stop granting their own mortgages. 'What is the answer?' asked the *Gazette*. 'There is obviously only one and that is if nobody else will assist the coloured man to acquire his house he will have to help himself.'⁸⁶⁰ In subsequent promotional pieces the *Gazette* would draw the arguments in favour of the Company in terms of overcrowding and the poor conditions 'wholly inadequate to normal living' of one-room rented accommodation.⁸⁶¹

At the same time, the paper appealed directly to those intending to sublet their properties as well as 'the coloured landlord' moving into multiple property: 'Those who have no immediate use for their savings should put them to the best possible use to help their comrades. The easing of the housing situation amongst the immigrants is in the hands of those who are

⁸⁵⁷ Donald Hinds, 'The West Indian Gazette: Claudia Jones and the Black Press in Britain', *Race and Class*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 88-97, 89-90.

⁸⁵⁸ 'Opportunity for Home Ownership', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 9 (June 1961), p. 3. A partial copy of the *Gazette* covering most issues from the newspaper's publication period from 1958 to 1965 is available on microfilm in the British Library, Mic.B.967.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid. and 'How to Invest in House Purchase Freedom', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (May 1962), p. 8. See also 'Integration Mortgage', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 10 (October 1961), p. 3.

⁸⁶⁰ 'Opportunity for Home Ownership', *West Indian Gazette*, p. 3.

⁸⁶¹ RC Goldsmith, 'Home Ownership Made Easier', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 13 (January 1962), p. 6 and 'How to Invest in House Purchase Freedom', *West Indian Gazette*, p. 8. Goldsmith was Secretary of the Integration Mortgage Company.

already here.⁸⁶² Contrary to some in the property industry who saw immigrants 'pack[ing] their houses' as an expression of their alien 'way of living',⁸⁶³ and in direct contrast to most Building Societies which had virtually stopped lending explicitly to landlords (favouring owner occupiers instead),⁸⁶⁴ the Integration Mortgage Company actively encouraged subletting. Landlords could play a role in helping newcomers onto what Donald Hinds, one of the *Gazette's* regular contributors, called 'the Second Flight' of life in Britain. As Hinds put it: the migrant's journey 'does not end with the arrival in Britain. That is the first flight on the stairs. The second flight starts the migrant on the steps towards his aspirations. That is where the true fight begins; the dawn of the new day promising its hopes and failures.'⁸⁶⁵ It was in this spirit that the *Gazette* profiled individuals like 26-years-old, Jamaican-born Jimmie James, known as the 'goodwill ambassador' at the Olympic Furniture Company on West Green Road and soon to be the director of his own accommodation bureau (Figure 3.21). James was said to demonstrate 'the keen eye for business and commerce which was recognised by his father who gave him a sound education in these fields.'⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶² 'Unrestricted Mortgages', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 12 (December 1961), p. 3. Mention of 'the coloured landlord [who] may wish to purchase another house someday' is in 'Opportunity for Home Ownership', *West Indian Gazette*, p. 3.

⁸⁶³ Letter from AJ Vickers (Deputy City Estates Surveyor, Coventry) included in 'Mortgages for Coloured People', *Estates Gazette*, Vol. 173, No. 4880 (31 Jan 1959), 189.

⁸⁶⁴ Michael Harloe, 'Private Rented Housing in the United States and Europe', (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 103.

⁸⁶⁵ Donald Hinds, 'The Second Flight', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 11 (November 1961), p. 14.

⁸⁶⁶ 'Furniture Dealers...', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 12 (December 1961), p. 12. See also the advert for the Jimmie James Accommodation Bureau, *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 5, No. 1, May 1962, p. 12.

Jimmie James
Welcomes You To
his new shop
OLYMPIC
FURNITURE CO.
 Complete House Furnishers

LET ME BE OF PERSONAL SERVICE TO YOU
 Telephone me TODAY at your convenience at LAT. 1065

★

I have a complete range of very competitive furniture and would appreciate the opportunity to be of service to you.
 I can help you own your own house and help you earn income from it as well.

A special service I can offer you is to pick you up from any part of London in my car, and I can see you in your own home to make your wish come true.

★

**55 WEST GREEN ROAD,
 TOTTENHAM, N.15**

Buses: 41 (passes gate) 149, 259, 127, 279, 76.
 Tube: Seven Sisters Road Station (Main Line from Liverpool Street)

Fig. 3.21 — Advert for Olympic Furniture Company, *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 11 (November 1961), p. 14.

Jimmie James typified the unjaded, upstanding and instantly respectable newcomer. But for the *West Indian Gazette* and the directors of the Integration Mortgage Company the 'second flight' had to be a collective endeavour. It was about marshalling the wealth of the community to help itself. Encouraging in this respect was a recent survey conducted for the black lifestyle magazine *Flamingo*, which claimed that the average income of British-Caribbean households was two thirds above the general UK population. 44% of households reported being able to save some portion of their income, while 17% owned their own home.⁸⁶⁷ These figures may well have been exaggerations (as the *Gazette* acknowledged)

⁸⁶⁷ 'UK Survey on West Indians: Thrifty Group', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 13 (January 1962), p. 3. The sample group these findings were based on was an astonishing 100,000 households.

but they seemed to confirm the emergence of a new black middle class as well as the growing economic weight of the community as a whole.⁸⁶⁸

By February 1962 the Integration Mortgage Company had secured about £3,500 from private investors, received pledges for up to £100,000, granted five mortgages, and could now claim the backing of an unnamed Merchant bank.⁸⁶⁹ The directors were pleased with this early start but it was clear that mustering investment (rather than applicants) was going to be a challenge.⁸⁷⁰ But whatever the fortunes of the Company, the series of promotional articles served an important discursive purpose. They positioned homeownership and small-scale landlordism as part of an entrepreneurial culture that was rooted in certain environments of postwar London, while simultaneously encompassing a global, trans-Atlantic space of connection. Articles and adverts promoting the Integration Mortgage Company followed in the vein of other pieces championing local beauty salons, grocery shops, furniture dealers and travel agents, as well as Caribbean imports like Mount Gay Rum and Red Stripe beer.⁸⁷¹ Celebrations of an immigrant-specific entrepreneurial culture sat alongside trenchant anti-colonial coverage of Apartheid South Africa, the Cuban Revolution, the prospects of West Indian federation, Jomo Kenyatta's imprisonment, and the Civil Rights movement in the US, as well as issues closer to home such as opposition to rent decontrol and the immigration Act of 1962. As Bill Schwarz has argued, all of these things were part of the 'imagined community' that the *Gazette* envisioned;⁸⁷² a community which existed in the back and forth correspondence between the pages of the newspaper and its readers, between the streets of Brixton, Notting Hill and the multiple fronts of anti-colonial struggle worldwide.

And yet there was undoubtedly something unresolved in the support the *Gazette* gave to immigrant landlords: a tension if not a contradiction. The paper's editors were well aware of the negative image of the black landlord, rightly insisting that exploitative landlords, black or

⁸⁶⁸ 'Dr David Pitt Says: WI Contribution Aids Britain', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 10 (October 1961), p. 5.

⁸⁶⁹ 'Merchant Bankers Back Integration Mortgage', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 15 (February 1962), p. 6 and 'Integration Mortgage', *West Indian Gazette*, p. 3.

⁸⁷⁰ 'New Mortgage Company Open for Deposits', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 11 (November 1961), p. 13.

⁸⁷¹ See for example 'Cosmos Beauty Salon', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 4, No. 14 (February 1962), p. 13 and 'Mrs Dein Visits Jamaica', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 5, No. 1, May 1962, p. 5.

⁸⁷² Bill Schwarz, 'Claudia Jones and the West Indian Gazette: Reflections on the Emergence of Post-Colonial Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2003), 264-285, pp. 270-1.

white, 'must be resisted - but as exploiters'. A seemingly unflappable class analysis – 'Exploitation, we will know, is colourless' – served the paper well in this instance, precisely as a means of exposing racist stereotypes.⁸⁷³ But on several occasions the *Gazette* tended to conflate the interests of tenant and landlord, uniting the two positions under a single diasporic identity. The Integration Mortgage Company was an effort to turn tenants into homeowners; not only that, but into homeowners who would rent out their rooms to fellow immigrants, in other words, into landlords.

The tension was there in the way individuals like Jimmie James articulated a politics of respectability that sits awkwardly with other aspects of the *Gazette*'s radicalism. 'Our people who come to Olympic Furniture Co. [...] reflect the sacrifice and saving of many of us who want a better life and future for themselves and their families. [...] We find, in the main, far higher principles and integrity among our West Indian customers. They certainly are very good in meeting their obligations. They are highly selective in their choice.'⁸⁷⁴ The stentorian tone suggests that the editors were ventriloquising an under-acknowledged aspect of their politics through James's person. In the quote above, we recognise something of the discourse of responsible consumption developed by The Ideal Home Exhibition (See Part 1). But for the immigrant in postwar Britain, the pressure to conform was uniquely freighted with hidden penalties and double binds. A failure of manners could be reason enough for a landlady, or landlord, to slam the door in your face; the smell of spiced cooking sufficient to land you an eviction notice. Then again, signs of education and middle class standing could be 'embarrassing' for estate agents, mortgage brokers and others, leading to a polite but unexplained refusal.⁸⁷⁵

The practical costs of conforming, or not conforming, may have been great but they capped a deeper, existential dilemma. To make the 'journey to an illusion' as Donald Hinds called the migratory experience, was to be made acutely aware of how one had been colonised 'back home', at the same time as the metropole, the motherland, the supposed originator of these ingrained structures of feeling, was revealed to be itself a tawdry imitation of the British

⁸⁷³ 'Rachmanism and You', *West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 5, No. 14 (Oct 1963), p. 6.

⁸⁷⁴ 'Furniture Dealers...', *West Indian Gazette*, p. 12

⁸⁷⁵ 'Mortgages for Coloured People', *Estates Gazette*, 189. See the letter by J Clifford who believed that Building Societies should make a clear statement of their lending policies in order to avoid the embarrassment of house agents having to turn down 'well-spoken and educated coloured British subjects'.

ideal.⁸⁷⁶ To become a landlord was both a practical and an existential answer to these problems. At the practical level it meant escaping the rent trap. At the existential level it meant the promise of a new level of self-mastery through the mastery of others. For what better path to self-mastery than, as an advert in the *Gazette* put it, to 'Be Your Own Landlord' (Figure 3.22), to be lord over yourself and others? In *Moses Ascending* (1975), Samuel Selvon renders this condition into an allegory of diasporic consciousness. Moses-as-landlord is the ultimate 'mimic man', freely re-colonising the manners and language of the coloniser in a grotesque carnival of the normal order.⁸⁷⁷ But even before Selvon's work of the 1970s, there were traces of what Moses could become in the figure of Charlie the rent collector in *The Housing Lark* (1965):

It look like Charlie was up with the larks. The man dress up in a smart suit and a flashy tie, and he have on them new kind of shoes what you can't tell if is boots of shoes. And his hair plaster down with coconut oil and lard, to make it look smooth, though here and there a little kink rebelling. [...] Nobody in Brixton didn't like Charlie. Not only because he was a rent collector, but because he had a way as if butter won't melt in his mouth, and all the time you know the man vicious like a snake and only after your money. Once he collect that rent, Charlie would change as if the pound notes had some sort of chemical effect on him as soon as they touch his hand. If he was serious, his face break out in a grin. If he was standing up, he sit down. As if it had two Charlies, Before-Charlie and After-Charlie.⁸⁷⁸

Charlie is more straightforwardly reviled than the later Moses, whose hubristic self-reinvention and eventual downfall at least approximate redemption, perhaps in part because he is not even a landlord: he is only an agent acting on behalf of 'the company'. But even Charlie is not as one-dimensional as he seems. His hair 'rebels', his shoes, or boots, are neither here nor there, and in his very being he is really two people. Later the figure of Charlie the rent collector is echoed in the character of Gallows, the hapless enforcer of

⁸⁷⁶ Donald Hinds, *Journey to an Illusion: The West Indian in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1966), pp. 1-4.

⁸⁷⁷ Bill Schwarz, 'Creolization West One. Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (December 2014), Article 3, p. 5. Schwarz adapts the phrase 'mimic man' from VS Naipaul's novel, *The Mimic Men* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967). On *Moses Ascending* see Maureen Warner-Lewis, 'Samuel Selvon's Linguistic Extravaganza: Moses Ascending', in Martin Zehnder ed., *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2003), 65-76.

⁸⁷⁸ Selvon, *Housing Lark*, p. 16.

contributions to the savings pool with which 'the boys' hope to buy a house together.⁸⁷⁹

Doubles proliferate. Battersby, the main character, fantasises about making money out of the future house. Like Charlie he is enchanted by the image of other, bigger exploiters, dazzled by the glitter of novelty (flash clothes, a car) more than real power. But Battersby's daydreams are also an ideal of sorts: the dream of never having to work again, of being free from the toil that is the immigrant's lot and that recalls, in *Moses Ascending*, the ultimate unfreedom of the slave.⁸⁸⁰ The figure of the black landlord in Selvon's work refracts the different strategies of immigrant life in the postwar metropolis. The doubles that echo around him and live within him reflect the double consciousness of migrant experience.⁸⁸¹



Fig. 3.22 – 'Be Your Own Landlord'. Advert for Argosy Finance & Co. Limited in *The West Indian Gazette*, Vol. 5, No. 10 (May 1963), p. 8.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 54-7.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 7-9 and 45-6; Sam Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Penguin, 2008).

⁸⁸¹ WEB Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ebook; (Project Gutenberg, 2008), p. 7; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 81-3 and pp. 111-112.

How the *West Indian Gazette* shaped the identity of a small but growing black middle class raises larger questions addressed within black studies and race relations scholarship.⁸⁸² But as in Selvon's novels, there can be no simple equation here with what some critics have dubbed 'respectability politics'.⁸⁸³ Rather, the figure of the black landlord, as he emerged in Selvon's work and the pages of the *Gazette*, must be seen as embodying an historical and geographical state of transition; not an 'incipient ghetto' but a moment of incipient creolization. Politically speaking, the *Gazette* and its milieu (including the Conference of Afro-Asian Caribbean Organisations, which the paper initiated to combat the immigration Act of 1962) can be situated between the earlier advocacy efforts of the League of Coloured Peoples in the 1930s and '40s, with its middle-class leadership and roots in Christian liberalism and Pan Africanism, and the later surge in black power politics together with militant workplace struggles and street-based movements in the 1960s-80s.⁸⁸⁴ The *Gazette's* general eschewal of militant action certainly preserved some of the earlier generation's moderation. But if the *Gazette's* fostering of entrepreneurial culture showed a concern with the fortunes of a necessarily small black middle-class, on the other hand, it had to wrestle with the problems of a rapidly growing black working class, larger and more settled than anything seen before the Second World War.⁸⁸⁵ The paper's discourse on the figure of the black landlord must be seen as a response to such homegrown problems.

Section 2 has shown how journalists, academics, judges and others portrayed the black landlord as a rogue figure. The problematic status of London's rented worlds – understood in this case as an 'incipient ghetto' – was bound up with such figures. However, a closer reading of the sociology of postwar race relations reveals a different picture. Through practices that were essentially spatial, black landlords, like working-class tenant-landladies, played an important role in the self-organisation of London's rented worlds. The testimony

⁸⁸² For comparison see Marina Prentoulis, 'The Construction of the Black British Community in *The Voice* and the *New Nation*', *Journalism*, Vol. 13, No. 6, 731-749 and Bart Landry and Kris Marsh, 'The Evolution of the New Black Middle Class', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 37 (2001), 373-394.

⁸⁸³ Frederick C Harris, 'The Rise of Respectability Politics', *Dissent* (Winter 2014) <<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-rise-of-respectability-politics>> [accessed 8 August 2019]. For the coinage of this term see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1993).

⁸⁸⁴ Ambalavaner Sivanandan, *Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1986), pp. 117-122 and Roy Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, 2nd edn. (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 166-171 and 544-5.

⁸⁸⁵ Ramdin, *Making of the Black Working Class*, pp. 544-5.

given by black writers confirms this impression, but it also complicates it. Black landlords were entangled within a diasporic, entrepreneurial culture that was radically anti-colonial in its outlook but ambiguous in terms of class politics. This ambiguity reflected the rapidly changing nature of the black community in the postwar period. It was in this sense that both the black landlord and the rented world were truly emergent elements in society.

So far in Part 3, I have focused on the experience of landlords rather than tenants. In the following section I want to bridge these two aspects of life in London's rented worlds. Section 3 looks at the rent tribunals established in 1946, where tenants and landlords squared off against each other. It was in rent tribunals that tenants contested the role of the landlord on the basis of their lived experience, and where both parties were compelled to negotiate their expectations in a public forum.

3. Landlordism on Trial

'We wish to inform you that we would like to be heard by the Tribunal [and] also represent ourselves.'⁸⁸⁶ Mabel Izzat's letter to the South Middlesex Rent Tribunal was both an appeal for help from an outside authority and an assertion of her ability to speak for herself. The letter described how on 17 September 1966 her husband, Serchell Izzat, had refused to pay the rent until the landlord, Mr Masood, provided them with a rent book.⁸⁸⁷ Withholding the rent seemed to have an effect but it took several days for Masood to produce the rent book, a statutory requirement of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1962, which when they eventually received it, indicated, falsely according to Mrs Izzat, that they were in arrears.⁸⁸⁸ A letter from Mr Izzat describing the condition of the two-bed flat in Richmond added to the couple's grievances: 'I would like to draw your attention to the fact that although the flat is spacious, it is not in a good condition, the roof leaks, everytime it rains heavily the landing is flooded,

⁸⁸⁶ Letter from Mabel Izzat (3 October 1966), in Ministry of Housing and Local Government (henceforth MHLG), Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, National Archives (henceforth NA) HLG 97/1269.

⁸⁸⁷ The pro-forma recording of the tribunal's inspection visit noted the countries of origin of those present: Serchel Izzat, 'Iraqi', Mabel Izzat 'Irish', Mr Massood ('Ind[ian]'). Pro-forma with details of property following inspection (1 November 1966), 106 Palewell Park, London SW14, in MHLG, Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, NA HLG 97/1269.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid. On the requirement to provide a rent book following the terms of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1962 see for example SHAW v. GROOM [1970] Q.B. 504.

also it is terrible damp, we had to buy our own bulbs and plugs [and] also curtains and linen although these are supposed to be supplied.’⁸⁸⁹

These letters give only a partial view of the workings of the tribunal and do not record what took place during the hearing itself. They do, however, testify to an attitude among tenants that contradicts Sheila Patterson’s view that non-white immigrants who raised formal complaints about their living conditions were ‘benumbed with apprehension and understood little or nothing of what was being said to them in legalistic language’.⁸⁹⁰ So far in Part 2, I have considered two variations on the figure of the landlord, both of which nuance the standard image of the ‘grasping landlord’. The present Section shows how tenants resisted landlordism *as an institution*. At the same time, it was on this framing of landlordism as the main problem that rent tribunals ultimately foundered.

Sheila Patterson’s comments about rent tribunals referred specifically to West Indian applicants, who she regarded as mostly ‘simple people’. But the Council on Tribunals, the oversight body created by the Tribunals and Inquiries Act of 1958, expressed similar views. According to the Council, applicants were ‘largely drawn from the poorer and more inarticulate sections of the community. Immigrants of one race or another – West Indians, Pakistanis, Poles, etc. – feature prominently among the tenants [...] and to a somewhat lesser extent among the landlords.’⁸⁹¹ Once again, judgements about the space of the home were racialised. Nevertheless, rent tribunals opened up a space in which the voices of tenants came to the fore. Through the vocalisation of daily complaints and the articulation of a growing sense of working class entitlement, tenants were able to directly contest the power of landlords.

Before examining how tenants made use of rent tribunals, I want to briefly outline the legislative and historical background underpinning these new regulatory forums. Rent tribunals were first adopted in England and Wales following the passage of the Furnished Houses (Rent Control) Act in 1946. Scotland provided the working model, having

⁸⁸⁹ Letter from Serchel Izzat (28 September 1966), in MHLG, Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, NA HLG 97/1269.

⁸⁹⁰ Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 187.

⁸⁹¹ Memorandum on the Replies to a Questionnaire on the Constitution and Working of Rent Tribunals (c. Nov 1961), Appendix A, p. 13, in Council on Tribunals, Rent Tribunals (1961), NA BL 2/152. Subsequent references to this memorandum will be abbreviated as follows: ‘Memorandum on Replies to Questionnaire (1961)’.

implemented its own rent tribunals in 1943. Already in 1919 the Hunter Committee on the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest had mooted, then rejected, some form of 'rent court' in response to the severe housing crisis after the First World War. However, it was the second Ridley Committee in 1945 that accepted the need for a flexible means of producing 'fair rents', recommending rent tribunals as the solution.⁸⁹² Ridley imagined that the tribunals could iron out discrepancies in the tangle of existing rent control legislation, bringing arbitrary variations in rents into gradual alignment. In the event, the tribunals were only adopted for furnished properties, in other words, for precisely those tenancies largely excluded from past legislation.⁸⁹³

The original intention in *not* controlling properties where furniture, board and 'attendance' were part of the rent may have been to bypass middle-class service flats and boarding houses – thought to be in less need of regulation. But in the postwar period, furnished tenancies, while still attracting some middle-class professionals who needed a London *pied-à-terre*, were becoming increasingly common among young workers and families.⁸⁹⁴ The latter made up a significant and growing minority, and were subject to some of the most precarious conditions in the private rented sector.⁸⁹⁵ Their mobility and lack of security contrasted with the experience of older tenants in controlled properties, such as those associated with the tenant-landladies we encountered in Section 1. Like other private renters, many in furnished accommodation took their rooms from small individual landlords. But there were also commercial operators who moved into the furnished sub-sector to avoid the more stringent regulations affecting unfurnished properties.⁸⁹⁶ Peter Rachman was one

⁸⁹² Piers Beirne, *Fair Rent and Legal Fiction: Housing Rent Legislation in a Capitalist Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 128 and Piers Beirne, *Housing Rent and Housing Law in a Capitalist Society: Housing, Housing Finance and the Housing Finance Act*, PhD theses, Durham University. Available at *Durham E-Theses Online* <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/8009/>> [accessed 12 August 2019], p. 105.

⁸⁹³ Richard Sabatino, 'Rent Control Policy in Great Britain', *Land Economics*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (February 1954), 61-64, p. 62 and Wendy Wilson, *A Short History of Rent Control* (London: HMSO, 2017), pp. 4-5. The very first rent control legislation of 1915 and subsequent consolidating and amending legislation in 1920 did not apply to tenancies 'bona fide let at a rent which includes payments in respect of board, attendance, or use of furniture'.

⁸⁹⁴ John Allen and Linda McDowell, *Landlords and Property: Social Relations in the Private Rented Sector* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 24.

⁸⁹⁵ According to the 1961 Census, 9% of all Greater London households were in furnished private lets, compared to 33% unfurnished. But among multiple occupancy households living in one room without their own sink and stove, the proportion of these kinds of furnished properties was 80%. Cited in *Milner Holland Report*, p. 91. From the Committee's own survey data, Milner Holland also found that average rents in furnished properties had increased 39% between 1960 and 1963, compared with 26% in unfurnished properties. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸⁹⁶ Allen and McDowell, *Landlords and Property*, p. 24 and John Black and David Stafford, 'Housing Policy and Finance' (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 67.

landlord who adopted this tactic, embellishing his properties with a few pieces of second-hand furniture in an effort to get around the law.⁸⁹⁷

Furnished properties were therefore in some senses a residuum of a supposed residuum. And yet their numbers were growing, and for many people looking for a place to live, this was in fact the dominant reality. A Londoner in the early 1960s scouring the back pages of newspapers, or newsagents' windows, or estate agents' listings, would probably have found that the vast majority of properties to rent were furnished.⁸⁹⁸ It was these properties that rent tribunals sought to regulate.

In general, rent tribunals acted in favour of tenants. Furnished tenants could apply to their local tribunal to have their rent lowered, and could also gain up to three months security of tenure. In certain limited circumstances, the tribunal could *increase* the rent. In addition, local authorities could also initiate proceedings through the tribunals.⁸⁹⁹ Out of 12,342 cases decided in London between 1946 and the end of January 1949, rents were reduced 8,280 times (67% of the total), approved at their current level in 1,861 cases, and increased in only 158; quite a large number of cases, 2,043, were dismissed.⁹⁰⁰ On average, rents were reduced by just under a third. This was counterbalanced slightly by 986 out of 1,977 cases referred for reconsideration in which the rent was increased.⁹⁰¹ A study of London rent tribunals in 1969 obtained similar figures: rents were reduced 63% of the time, the average amount knocked off the rent being equivalent to just under one-fifth.⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁷ Green, *Rachman*, p. 58.

⁸⁹⁸ The Milner Holland Committee surveyed 1,258 advertisements for accommodation to rent in Willesden, Stoke Newington, Deptford and Poplar. It was found that 97% of lettings for which they were able to obtain information were furnished. *Milner Holland Report*, pp. 94 and 288.

⁸⁹⁹ On an original application, a tribunal could only increase the rent 'to take account of the increased cost of services', but following an application for reconsideration, the rent could be increased 'in light of any change of circumstances'. CWRT, p. 13, in Council on Tribunals, *Rent Tribunals* (1961), NA BL 2/152.

⁹⁰⁰ Table headed 'Furnished Houses (Rent Control) Act 1946, Cases Referred to Tribunals for the First Time: Statement of Position on the 31st January 1949', in MHLG, *Summary of Tribunals Returns: 1949*, NA HLG 101/641.

⁹⁰¹ Out of a total of 1,977 cases. In 135 of these the rent was decreased, the remainder being either approved at their current level or dismissed. Table headed 'Furnished Houses (Rent Control) Act 1946, Cases Referred to Tribunals for Reconsideration: Statement of Position on the 31st January 1949', in MHLG, *Summary of Tribunals Returns: 1949*, NA HLG 101/641.

⁹⁰² Barbara Adams, Jenny Griffin and Sylvia Proudman, *A Study of Rent Tribunal Cases in London: Working Paper no. 68* (London: Centre for Environmental Studies, 1970), pp. 29-30. The study which drew on a random sample of 100 cases was conducted jointly by the Centre for Environmental Studies (CES) and the Government's Department of Environment (DoE).

Tenants recognised the usefulness of the tribunals.⁹⁰³ But in many ways their value lay outside of this basic function of fixing rents, usually in favour of the tenant. In a manner that went beyond what the Ridley Committee had originally imagined, rent tribunals became forums for the voicing of daily complaints. I argue below that tenants used the tribunals to mobilise discursively and practically around the figure of the landlord.

Discussions within the Ministry of Health soon after the 1946 Act had come into operation show a concern that maximum publicity should be given to the tribunals. In a somewhat contradictory manner, it was felt that press coverage of proceedings could both demonstrate the 'impartiality' of the tribunals and act as an effective 'deterrent' against exploitative landlords.⁹⁰⁴ The popular London tabloid, the *Evening News*, wrote directly to Bevan asking for reassurance that its reporters would have access to tribunal hearings. The response from the Minister's Private Secretary was encouraging: 'Mr Bevan [...] is naturally anxious that these hearings should get as much publicity as possible and knows how important a part the press is playing in publicising the operation of the Act.'⁹⁰⁵ Pleased with the initial flurry of stories, the paper claimed that

No administrative action of the post-war period has been more abundantly justified than the setting up of these tribunals. They are performing a great public service and it is to be hoped that aggrieved tenants will seek redress in every case where profiteering is apparent.[...] We believe that there can be created so massive a tide of public censure, thanks to the tribunals that the whole scale of rent charges can be reduced. [...] We urge readers not to be afraid of laying complaints in front of tribunals. It is a public duty. It may not be pleasant, for few of us care to figure in proceedings of such a character, but it is the only way by which this wretched racket can be checked. [...] Those who batten on the needs and difficulties of their fellow-

⁹⁰³ 42 out of 51 tenants interviewed in the CES/DoE study found the 'whole process' easy; 39 said it was worth applying and 33 would apply again if needed for a different tenancy. Two-thirds found the levels of rent fixed to be fair. Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁹⁰⁴ Memorandum on the Operation of Tribunals Established under the Furnished Houses (Rent Control) Act 1946 (27 November 1946), p. 4, in MHLG, Operation of Tribunals: Memorandum, NA HLG 101/640. Subsequent references to this document will be abbreviated as follows: 'Memorandum on Operation of Tribunals (1946), NA HLG 101/640'.

⁹⁰⁵ Letter signed H Summers, Private Secretary, in reply to the Editor of the *Evening News* (13 December 1946), in ibid., NA HLG 101/640.

citizens are social parasites. The public will warmly support every effort to curb their profiteering.⁹⁰⁶

In the description of 'social parasites' there is a touch of the *revanchist* spirit that we saw in the previous Section regarding non-white landlords. This mobilisation of the figure of the grasping landlord must, however, be seen in the relevant context. In 1946, with the economy stricken by material shortages and vulnerable to inflationary speculation, the idea of 'losing the peace' struck a chord with many.⁹⁰⁷ Labour's election platform of the previous year likened the 'profiteers and racketeers' to the 'hard-faced men' who had done well out of the last war. The party's manifesto warned of how a 'short boom period after the war', with untapped savings and gratuities waiting to be spent, 'can make a profiteer's paradise.'⁹⁰⁸ The reactionary conversion of the profiteer as a figure of popular loathing into the racialised image of the black landlord was still some years away; it was only later that Sheila Patterson would identify an apparent overlap between the public sphere of the rent tribunal and the supposedly ghettoised world of the immigrant landlord.

Mobilising the figure of the landlord as 'social parasite' can be seen as part of the theatrics of the rent tribunal. This was about more than just promoting a new regulatory mechanism, although it was certainly that too. The landlord – or landlady – was a stage character who created the stage. There is in this sense an inherent reciprocity between the figure of the landlord and that of the tenant. In the Scottish government's 1947 promotional film *Fair Rent*, (dir. Mary Beale) the scowling landlady embodies the image of the mean-spirited individual who refuses to show sympathy towards her fellow citizens (Figure 3.23). The couple who apply to their local tribunal appear wide-eyed, riven to the spot (Figure 3.24). They resemble the pair of figures that Victor Weisz used as stand-ins for the typical downtrodden tenant in some of his cartoons (see Figure 3). The apparent helplessness of the tenants here is in proportion to the landlord's willingness to take advantage of them. Between them stand the neutral arbiters of the rent tribunal, who inspect the room and its furnishings with the two

⁹⁰⁶ 'Breaking the Rent Racket', *Evening News* (10 October 1946), press clipping, no page number, in *ibid.*, NA HLG 101/640.

⁹⁰⁷ See for example 'Determined Not to Lose the Peace', *Gloucestershire Echo* (24 April 1943), p. 1; 'Vote Early – Vote Labour', *Daily Herald* (5 July 1945), p. 1; 'Celebration Food', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* (6 April 1946), p. 1; 'Labour Backs Marshall Aid Policy', *Coventry Evening Telegraph* (20 May 1948), p. 1.

⁹⁰⁸ Labour Party, *Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation* (1945) <<http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1945/1945-labour-manifesto.shtml>> [accessed 15 August 1945].

parties looking on (Figure 3.25). Although the film was made to encourage people to make use of the tribunals, this casting is not a particularly empowering one. The film emphasises the tenants' lack of confidence, which is framed in a gendered way: the husband wants to apply to the tribunal; the wife is fearful and tries to discourage him. Both are curiously passive characters.



Fig. 3.23 — The landlady. *Fair Rent* (dir. Mary Beale, 1947).



Fig. 3.24 — The tenants. *Fair Rent* (dir. Mary Beale, 1947).



Fig. 3.25 — The tribunal officials. *Fair Rent* (dir. Mary Beale, 1947).

How does this sit with the *Evening News*'s call for tenants to do their 'public duty' by taking up the new 'public service' offered by the rent tribunals? The language – 'public duty', 'public service' – reveals something of a more general tension inherent in the welfare state. To be a recipient of a public service means, at one level, to be dealt with; to be supported, maintained, kept in one's place; to be a beneficiary, a dependent.⁹⁰⁹ On the other hand, for these public services to work, the recipients have to actively engage with them. The recipients must become citizens, in the full sense of the term envisaged by the influential social policy thinker TH Marshall. They must become social-citizens, fully participating in the life of the community.⁹¹⁰ In Marshall's thinking, the postwar welfare state had begun to close the gap between 'civil rights' and 'social rights' by removing, for men at least, the stigma of means testing inherited from the Poor Laws; by nationalising the old philanthropic hospitals and other institutions; and by heralding, in housing especially, the universal appeal to all classes of modern standards, modern design, and modern planning. The society resulting from these innovations would transcend the mere relief of destitution, combining universal

⁹⁰⁹ It should be noted that part of the postwar welfare state's commitment to 'universalism' was to remove the stigma of dependency. This, however, was never complete, as feminist scholars have long pointed out. See Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, 'A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State', *Signs*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Winter 1994), 309-336.

⁹¹⁰ John Stephens, 'The Social Rights of Citizenship', 511-525, in Francis Castles et al. eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 513.

public services with a high degree of civic participation at all levels of society. A community that inculcated a sense of public duty in this way would be one that 'has begun to realise that its culture is an organic unity and its civilization a national heritage', thus re-establishing what Marshall called 'the social rights of citizenship'.⁹¹¹

But if the postwar welfare state had started to mend the rift between civil and social rights, it also deepened another: in the realm of housing policy especially, it began to heighten the contradiction between the rights of property and what Selina Todd has characterised as the growing sense of entitlement working-class people felt to a decent standard of living, to having their basic needs guaranteed, and more than that, to a 'fair share' in society's wealth as well as a fair distribution of necessary collective sacrifices.⁹¹² Marshall intuited this second contradiction but his insistence on the inevitability, indeed the necessity of class society, led him to collapse it into his vision of an organic social unity.⁹¹³ Although this produced a realistic view of planning as an instrument of long-range social policy in the interests of class-cooperation, the results when it came to thinking about rent tribunals were less than satisfying.⁹¹⁴ On the one hand, Marshall regarded tribunals as 'quasi-judicial' bodies offering a remedy to the individual citizen *against* the priorities of the state. On the other hand, they were, in his view, simply another means, along with rent controls and requisitioning, whereby 'the sanctity of contract gives way to the requirements of public policy'.⁹¹⁵ Rent tribunals refused to fit easily into either of the two categories of civil rights or social rights.⁹¹⁶

Marshall's ultimate lack of resolution regarding the nature of rent tribunals – an irresolution echoed in the language of the *Evening News* – calls for another way of understanding them. Such an understanding is already suggested by the theatrics of the tribunal, which are conveyed in a somewhat pallid form by the Scottish Government's promotional film, *Fair Rent*. In the descriptions of tribunal hearings given in the local press as well as in applicants' letters and other supporting documentation, we find again and again that tenants took

⁹¹¹ TH Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 26.

⁹¹² Selina Todd, 'Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century', *Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 489-508, p. 498.

⁹¹³ Robert Pinker, Ch. 6, 'T.H. Marshall', 102-118, in Vic George and Robert Page eds., *Modern Thinkers on Welfare* (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995), p. 106.

⁹¹⁴ Marshall, 'Citizenship and Social Class', *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*, 1-85, pp. 60 and 62.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

advantage of the space opened up by the tribunals to articulate their sense of entitlement to what they regarded as a fair and decent standard of domestic life. Rather than quasi-courts of law designed to uphold the rights of the individual against the state, or an administrative expediency to deal with the obstructive particularities of contracts between consenting parties, rent tribunals should be seen as forums that generated a collective performance on the part of tenants, who used the tribunals as a platform to express their own sense of entitlement. This collective and performative push-back helped create a 'tide of public censure' against landlordism as an institution.

Often this took place through the dramatisation of daily complaints. In one such case, the tenant, Bessie Harowitz, complained to the North London Rent Tribunal that she never had hot water, that there was a leak in the roof and that she had to sleep on a 'lumpy, disgusting, dilapidated mattress'. During the hearing she produced 'some pieces of cast iron wrapped in cotton wool' that had fallen off the grill into her food while cooking.⁹¹⁷ Mr AG Yhapp of Penzance street in North Kensington also used physical props, holding up 'a sheet ripped in several places' as he told the West London Tribunal how he wanted his rent of £1 15s reduced.⁹¹⁸ In another case, a 'girl tenant' who took her case to the West London Tribunal along with eleven others from the same address in Linden Gardens, Notting Hill, described how she had to hide behind the wardrobe when getting dressed as the lace curtains on the window had gone to shreds.⁹¹⁹

By the late 1950s and early '60s, racism became more and more a feature of conflicts between landlords and tenants. Although the extent to which the tribunals took such incidents seriously varied, tenants themselves used the hearings as a forum to call out racial abuse. Selwyn Baptiste, who rented a flat in Barons Court, responded to claims by his landlord Mr R Matlatch that he held 'jazz sessions' in his room. Baptiste described how Matlatch had 'called us Mau Mau and said that people like us should be put out of the country because we are dirty.'⁹²⁰ In this case, the tribunal confirmed the rent at its present level and actually reduced Selwyn Baptiste's security.

⁹¹⁷ 'I'll Pay Removal Costs if You Go', *Kensington Post* (18 September 1959), p. 8.

⁹¹⁸ 'Tenant Brings His Bed-Sheet to Tribunal', *Kensington Post* (4 October 1963), p. 1.

⁹¹⁹ "'I Have to Hide When Changing" Girl Tenant', *Kensington Post* (7 August 1959), p. 3.

⁹²⁰ 'Landlord Called Me Mau Mau', *Kensington Post* (22 February 1963), p. 10.

In other instances, rent tribunal officials were more sympathetic. In an interesting case which came to light when ex-opera singer Maria Egounoff applied to the West London tribunal, the conflict centred not so much on the landlord and tenant, but on the wider forces of the state.⁹²¹ The Police had come to the house after a phone call from Egounoff's landlord and ended up making her sign a statement saying that she would move out in one week's time. Egounoff alleged that one of the officers had made remarks about 'reporting her to the Aliens Office' and that the statement amounted to blackmail. Rebutting the officer's claim that she did not speak English very well, the rent tribunal chairman, William Skinner, received 17 pages of typed correspondence from Egounoff laying out how she had been mistreated. 'We are in London in 1958, not in Nazi Germany', she wrote. The police were forced to admit that they knew little about the relevant housing laws.⁹²² It would not be the last time that the tribunals would come into conflict with the police.⁹²³

Rent tribunals had an ambiguous and sometimes antagonistic standing with respect to other branches of the state. There were parallels in this sense with the psychiatric social workers (PSWs) examined in Part 2; except unlike PSWs, rent tribunals aimed explicitly at introducing a greater degree of democracy into the welfare bureaucracy. In the official memorandum on how the tribunals should function, the Ministry of Health highlighted the value of an 'informal' atmosphere, with no set procedure laid down for chair persons and others to follow.⁹²⁴ Landlord and tenant could appear in person or choose someone else, 'legal or otherwise', to represent them. Each party was to be given the chance to state their case and 'put such questions as they see fit'. Tribunals had no power to administer an oath and no penalties were incurred for false statements.⁹²⁵ Rent Tribunal officials were praised for their ability at putting tenants at ease.⁹²⁶

Space and setting were also crucial factors. Unlike a court of law with its raised platform for the judge, witness box, and designated areas for prosecution and defendant, tribunals took

⁹²¹ 'Police "Usurped" Rent Tribunal's Authority', *Kensington Post* (28 November 1958), p. 3.

⁹²² *Ibid.*

⁹²³ See for example, 'Rent Tribunal Again Criticises Police', *Kensington Post* (5 December 1958), p. 3.

⁹²⁴ Memorandum on Operation of Tribunals (1946), NA HLG 101/640, p. 3.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁶ Typed memo to Mr Gray signed GI Crawford (27 Aug 1947), MHLG, Barking Rent Tribunal: General Representation and Correspondence (1946-58), NA HLG 101/565.

place in a variety of spaces, including town halls, women's institutes, labour exchanges and even rooms in local pubs.⁹²⁷ Indeed, one of the main spaces where tribunal activities happened was in the actual rooms of tenants making a claim. First-hand knowledge of the home was deemed crucial.⁹²⁸ Tribunals produced detailed inventories of conditions, furnishings, services and amenities, as well as rents, insurance costs, bills and mortgages.⁹²⁹ Through the example of rent tribunals, we see how the regulatory apparatus of the welfare state was intimately entangled with the space of the home.

The right of governmental authorities to enter and inspect the home of course has a long history, going back at least as far as the Vagrancy Act of 1824, which gave local justices the right to conduct regular sweeps of common lodging houses.⁹³⁰ But in the case of visits by rent tribunal officials, and in a way that recalls the work of LCC surveyors during the Council's high risk fire inspection programme (see Part 1), it was the landlord and his property more than the tenant and their living habits that were being inspected. In these novel reworkings of the state's relationship to the space of the home, the property relationship itself was put on trial.

The landlord lobby and the wider property industry disliked this mode of 'informal justice', but it clearly encouraged tenants to take the stage.⁹³¹ In certain cases, tenants elaborated their plight to elicit sympathy, fitting into stereotyped roles such as the abandoned wife and hard-working single mother.⁹³² However, the testimony they gave was not simply about performing an image of victimhood. It was also an expression of confidence and entitlement, a way of laying claim to what one thought one deserved. Tenants frequently challenged the assumption that they would be content with the most basic fulfilment of their needs. In a

⁹²⁷ Memorandum on Replies to Questionnaire (1961), p. 7, NA BL 2/152 and 'Busy Year for Rent Tribunal', *Kensington Post* (6 February 1959), p. 4.

⁹²⁸ 'Informal Justice', *Stratford Express* (22 August 1947), no page number, press clipping in MHLG, Barking Rent Tribunal: General Representation and Correspondence (1946-58), NA HLG 101/565.

⁹²⁹ See any number of the cases in MHLG, Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, NA HLG 97.

⁹³⁰ Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 112.

⁹³¹ The NFPO questioned the qualifications of tribunal chairmen, finding their procedures 'uncertain'; the small Justice for Landladies campaign thought there should be 'proper rules of procedure with less informality'; the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors found tribunals 'insufficiently judicial and inconsistent'. Digest of Written and Oral Evidence Submitted to the Franks Committee, pp. 1-3, in Council on Tribunals, *Rent Tribunals* (1961), BL 2/76.

⁹³² See for example 'Landlord is Sorry for Woman Despite Damage to Flat', *South London Press* (15 November 1960), no page number, in West London Rent Tribunal: Press Cuttings (1959-60), Council on Tribunals, Registered Files, NA BL 8/31. Subsequent references to this file will be abbreviated as follows: 'Press Cuttings, Council on Tribunals [... etc.]'

case from 1947, Mrs E Bindoff wrote to the rent tribunal to challenge her landlord's version of events regarding the rooms she rented at his property in Hounslow. As well as complaining about the lack of hot water and other inconveniences, Mrs Bindoff made it clear that she was determined to live how she wanted to, and not let herself be constrained or belittled by her landlord. 'Dear Sir, as I shall be appearing before you at the rent tribunal on July 10th I should like to make things a bit clearer', she began.⁹³³

[H]e [the landlord, Mr Moore] said in his letter to you that I said any makeshift would do, that also is not true as I was out to make myself comfortable not live anyhow as there was not much comfort in either of these rooms [...] Our other pieces of furniture that we have here were for our comfort & not to save us storing them as Mr Moore stated, the rest of our home is in store in Sunbury, we had to take these rooms as we could not get an unfurnished place at the time.⁹³⁴

Mrs Bindoff didn't feel she owed her landlord anything. She already had a 'home', even if it was 'in store', but in the meantime she was going to make the best of the rooms she was paying for, with or without Mr Moore's help. The furnishings became a mark of pride rather than a sign of dilapidation to be inspected by outside authorities. Mrs Bindoff's letter stressed how she had provided her own curtains, utensils and an additional single bed for her husband, which she set up next to the existing one. Without demonising her landlord, the letter suggest that he was presumptive and somewhat lackadaisical.⁹³⁵ Mr Moore, for his part, felt 'entitled' to raise the rent as the rates had increased and he hadn't expected Mrs Bindoff's husband, who was often away for work, to be living with her permanently. The tribunal disagreed. The rent was maintained at its current level and two months security given to the tenants. For Mrs Bindoff who was hoping to have the rent *decreased* this can hardly have been a satisfying outcome. But the proceedings do show how the informality of rent tribunals encouraged tenants' sense of entitlement and their confidence to represent themselves. Crucially, the testimony they gave hinged on descriptions concerning their own lived experience, including their own spatial practices within the home.

⁹³³ Letter to tribunal signed Mrs E Bindoff, p. 1, NA HLG 97/556.

⁹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 3 and 6-7.

The self-representation of tenants' spatial practices was not limited to individuals. In certain cases it became a collective activity. At the Paddington tribunal, Miss P Dinsdale asked for a reduction in the rent, then 'proceeded to tell the tribunal just how capable and handy she was'.⁹³⁶ Having moved in by herself two months ago, she set about stripping and re-hanging the wallpaper and giving all the furniture a fresh coat of white paint. '[A]ll the work she had done deserved some reward, she felt, and this could best be given by decreasing the rent.' Miss Dinsdale rented a small ground-floor room in St Stephens Gardens, North Kensington. That she felt confident to act in the way that she did should not come as a surprise. In the late '50s and early '60s, North Kensington was a hot-bed of tenant activism.⁹³⁷ Under the banner of the Stephens Gardens Tenants Association (SGTA), seven tenants in two neighbouring houses had come together to lodge applications with the tribunal.

The SGTA members complained about the failure of the landlord, Julian de Lisle, to carry out repairs, as well as the presence of 'prostitutes in one of the flats' and a drinking club, quite possibly Caribbean-run, in the basement.⁹³⁸ There was clearly a chauvinistic dimension to the stance taken by the Tenants Association in this case. Objections to 'undesirable' elements that threatened to undermine the respectability of the home could serve both landlords and tenants. But the Association's politics were fluid, and there is evidence to suggest that the group moved quickly towards a more solidly anti-racist position.⁹³⁹ The Secretary of the Association, Tommy Farr, for example, was a well known anti-fascist organiser.⁹⁴⁰ It was Farr who represented the seven tenants at the 'marathon' Paddington rent tribunal hearing. They had already received 7-months security of tenure; now they were asking for a further 3 months as proof of de Lisle's 'good intentions'. De Lisle's legal representative at the tribunal claimed they had 'lost control over the premises'. A rent strike

⁹³⁶ 'Do-it-yourself woman tenant seeks rent cut', no newspaper title, date or page number, in Press Cuttings, Council on Tribunals, Registered Files, NA BL 8/31.

⁹³⁷ On the activities of the St Stephen's Gardens Tenants Association see Green, *Rachman*, pp. 134-9.

⁹³⁸ 'Tenants Must Go For £3000 Repair Work to Be Done', no newspaper title, date or page number, in Press Cuttings, Council on Tribunals, Registered Files, NA BL 8/31 and 'Rent Rebel John Lawrence is Cheered', no newspaper title, date or page number, in *ibid.* According to Shirley Green, the first meeting of the Association was convened in response to noise disturbances caused by 'West Indian' clubs. Green, *Rachman*, p. 136.

⁹³⁹ The Association's logo was a black hand clasping a white hand. *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁰ Tom Vague, *Rachman: An Absolute Beginner's Guide* (Pamphlet, 2010), p. 17. Green in *Rachman*, p. 136. confirms this. According to Vague, Farr was the leader of a group known as the Organisation for the Protection of Coloured People.

had been in operation for several weeks, and on one occasion the rent collector apparently had to be escorted away by police 'for his own safety'.⁹⁴¹

If Dinsdale's behaviour received a sympathetic hearing as part of the image of the 'good' tenant – forward-thinking and self-reliant – versus the 'bad', neglectful landlord, the militant action of the St Stephen's Gardens Tenants Association clearly went a step too far for tribunal officials. Several of the applicants were ejected from the hearing for repeatedly interrupting.⁹⁴² Rent tribunals encouraged tenants to voice their interests, but only up to a certain point. Beyond that point, tribunal chairmen could be as harsh and condescending as any judge.⁹⁴³

Other groups that organised around the rent tribunals included the nearby Powis and Colville Residents' Association, set up after a public meeting in December 1959. The Association, described by activist and author Jan O'Malley as 'decidedly multi-racial', attempted to organise mass applications to the West London Rent Tribunal following news that the landlord, one Peter Rachman, planned to evict the current tenants and convert the houses to unfurnished flats.⁹⁴⁴ Michael de Freitas, a former rent collector turned leading figure of the emerging black power generation, was instrumental in identifying the Rachman-owned houses and canvassing tenants.⁹⁴⁵ Rachman's intimidation tactics caused many of the tenants to withdraw their applications, but according to LCC member for North Kensington Donald Chesworth, all those that remained had their rents reduced, some by more than half. In his unpublished memoir from the early '60s, Chesworth recalled how he and another Labour Party member, Margaret Platt, had pressed Kensington Borough Council to systematically refer cases of excessive rents to the tribunal.⁹⁴⁶ The Conservative-controlled council was naturally reluctant, so Chesworth started to encourage tenants directly through his own informal legal-aid service. A solicitor friend together with a 'panel of barristers'

⁹⁴¹ 'Tenants Must Go For £3000 Repair Work to Be Done' in Press Cuttings, Council on Tribunals, Registered Files, NA BL 8/31 and 'Rent Rebel John Lawrence is Cheered', no newspaper title, date or page number, in *ibid.*

⁹⁴² *Ibid.*

⁹⁴³ See for example, 'Tenant "Told Off" by Tribunal Chairman', *Kilburn Times* [partially illegible] (18 December 1959), no page number, in *ibid.*

⁹⁴⁴ Jan O'Malley quoted in Camilla Schofield and Ben Jones, "'Whatever Community Is, This Is Not It': Notting Hill and the Reconstruction of "Race" in Britain after 1958', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 58 (January 2019), 142-173, p. 159.

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁶ Donald Chesworth, *Anatomy of Notting Hill* (c. 1964), unpublished manuscript, p. 12, Donald Chesworth Papers, Papers Concerning Housing Conditions and Rent Tribunals, 1961, Archives of Queen Mary University of London, DC/1/2/7.

offered their services free of charge. Chesworth also telephoned the daily newspapers, 'suggesting that they would find the proceedings unusually news-worthy'.⁹⁴⁷ It was around this time that the Rachman story hit the national headlines. Not long earlier, Donald Chesworth and others had persuaded the LCC to carry out fire-risk surveys of multiple occupancy houses in the area. All of these events are connected. They form part of the fibre of resistance running through London's rented worlds.

From individual self-help to militant collective action, rent tribunals show how people were not merely passive recipients of welfare. As Nancy Fraser argues, welfare 'clients' actively organise around the institutions of the welfare state.⁹⁴⁸ By seizing the opportunities offered by tribunals, pressure was brought to bear on landlordism as an institution. This was 'social citizenship' in action, but not of the kind that TH Marshall envisaged; instead of reducing class conflict, it intensified it. Rent tribunals facilitated this emergent form of class-based social citizenship by putting property itself on trial. In effect, the Act of 1946 created an informal space of justice that was decidedly not a court (meant to uphold the rights of individuals or contracting parties), but rather a forum where tenants' voices could come to the fore. Tenants articulated their sense of entitlement to decent standards and a fair share in society's wealth. Rent tribunals in turn became embedded within everyday domestic practices as well as mediatized discursive tropes centred on the figure of the landlord. This dialectic between the institutions of the welfare state and everyday practices began to normalise the suspension of the rental relationship. Tenants felt entitled to not pay their full rent in certain circumstances; they felt increasingly entitled to alter spaces they rented but didn't own; and they felt entitled to demand better amenities, furnishings and services.

What was the figure of the landlord that emerged from this process of putting landlordism on trial? The testimony given by tenants often painted the landlord as neglectful, parsimonious, patronising or simply unfair. But these faults rarely added up to an image of the 'grasping landlord'. A figure like Peter Rachman was exceptional. Rent tribunals offered clear advantages to tenants, but the more rent tribunals shone a spotlight on the nature of the rental relationship, the more individual landlords were revealed as being themselves in a

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 15 and 35.

⁹⁴⁸ Nancy Fraser, 'Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture', *Fortunes of Feminism: from State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013), 53-82.

compromised position. Landlords and tenants were often living in close proximity, and on occasion disputes pitted family member against family member, with a father or mother cast as landlord, and a daughter or son as tenant.⁹⁴⁹ Landlords, moreover, were often burdened with heavy mortgage commitments, and in certain cases subject to the strictures of property managers and other agents. Powerful forces that exceeded the landlord's influence thus collided with the petty tyrannies of a relationship that involved multiple forms of dependency.

The case which began this Section demonstrates this clearly. In addition to the dispute over the rent, Mr Masood accused Mr Izzat of beating his wife, a charge the tenants threw straight back at their landlord, claiming it was Masood who was guilty of marital abuse. The relationship was further complicated by Masood's claim that his own family had looked after the Izzats' children for several weeks in their parents' absence.⁹⁵⁰ These painful and deeply personal connections – including instances of possible physical abuse – were underscored by financial dependencies. While Mr Masood was receiving £8 a week in rent, he himself was paying the equivalent of £9 5s on his mortgage, and had been forced to re-mortgage at a higher rate of interest.⁹⁵¹ Discrepancies like these were not uncommon.⁹⁵²

In putting landlordism on trial, it was sometimes the whole landlord-tenant relationship itself that crumbled under examination. The actions of individual landlords were revealed as being overdetermined by larger forces. Mortgage lenders were one of these, but they were not the only ones. It was not uncommon for those who appeared before rent tribunals to be acting as proxies of the real interests in a property. Tribunals were sometimes forced, for example, to deal with property managers rather than landlords themselves.⁹⁵³ In more dubious

⁹⁴⁹ See for example 'A Widow Asks for Protection at Rent Tribunal While Her Children Hear Her Plea', *Daily Mail* (25 October 1946), p. 3. The tenant, Mrs Harland, brought her 5 children to the tribunal; the landlord in this case was her father-in-law.

⁹⁵⁰ Letter from Mr Masood (1 October 1966), p. 1, in MHLG, Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, NA HLG 97/1269; Letter from Mabel Izzat (31 October 1966), in *ibid*; Note by John Bennett, Chairman (4 November 1966), p. 1, in *ibid*.

⁹⁵¹ Note by John Bennett, Chairman (4 November 1966), p. 2, in MHLG, Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, NA HLG 97/1269; Declaration by Lessor (1 Oct 1966), verso, in *ibid*.

⁹⁵² For another example, see Declaration by Lessor (9 June 1966) and Pro-forma with details of property following inspection (29 June 1966) in MHLG, Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, NA HLG 97/1179, regarding a property in Turnham Green.

⁹⁵³ See for example the letter from Pullen and Pain Agencies Ltd, 'Registered in Australia & New Zealand' (16 June 1966), acting on behalf of the landlord of a property in Turnham Green, in MHLG, Rent Tribunals: Representative Registered Files, NA HLG 97/1179. See also the case of Mr Frederick Gibbs, the instigator of a one-man campaign against the West London Rent Tribunal, who appeared at several tribunal hearings in the self-described role of 'manager' of various properties. 'Campaign - Against Rent Tribunals', *West London Observer* (24 July 1959), no page number, in Press Cuttings, Council on Tribunals, Registered Files, NA BL 8/31.

circumstances, landlords like Peter Rachman and Bertram Waters were known to operate through numerous front companies.

One case in 1950 concerning a complicated triangle of letting and subletting at a house in the North West London suburb of Ickenham brought these issues full circle. On 30th November that year, Sergeant Perkins received a notice to quit from Mrs Hall – to his mind, the landlady of the property.⁹⁵⁴ Perkins consulted his solicitors, who applied to the local rent tribunal to protect his tenancy. What Perkins probably didn't know was that his solicitors were also representing a company called Francis Jackson Developments limited. Francis Jackson was in fact the 'head landlord' of the property. In other words, Mrs Hall was herself only a tenant, and sergeant Perkins a subtenant. Acting through the same solicitors, the head landlord then moved to evict the tenant on the grounds that the property had been sublet without consent.⁹⁵⁵

Rent tribunals sometimes had to unpick complicated chains of ownership that went beyond the landlord-tenant relationship. That the head landlord in this case was a developer bears significance. The postwar period saw the rise of developers as a rapidly evolving class of actors that reshaped the property system with profound impacts for private rented housing. their power arose out of the increasing entanglement of insurance firms and banks in the development process. The result was a fully financialised form of developer, operating in very different ways to the builder-speculators or more entrepreneurial ground landlords of the past. Section 4 looks at how these new actors compared to the figure of the landlord; how they ruptured the landlord's traditional domain, how they figured as personalities on the stage of the postwar property system, and how the image of the landlord himself was constructed in relation to these changes.

⁹⁵⁴ Notes on a case in the Court of Appeal, *Francis Jackson Developments Ltd. vs. Hall and Tagg* (10 May 1951), in MHLG, *Operation of Tribunals: Memorandum*, NA HLG 101/640.

⁹⁵⁵ In the event the case escalated to the Court of Appeal where the judge decided that 'in all the circumstances [...] it would not be reasonable to make an order for possession.' *Ibid.*, p. 4.

4. New Masters

In ones and twos the guests file in. A female steward fixes a red carnation in the buttonhole of each one's blazer. Joseph Levy shakes their hands warmly. Occasionally, a small ritual of male braggadocio or affection punctuates the procession. Charles Forte, currently working on the conversion of the Hippodrome into a restaurant and cabaret, makes a joke about the promotional brochure Levy has just handed him. Levy pats Forte on the cheek. David Clore, brother of Charles Clore, industrialist and developer, mock-punches Levy on the chin. Other guests include the Mayors of Westminster and Marylebone, Mr Lane, the Chief Town Planning Officer of the LCC, Mr Cope of the Friends Provident, Mr MacNamara, chairman of the contractors Trollope and Colls, and the cricketers Eric and Alec Bedser. Inside the Criterion banqueting hall, waiters in top hats and red overcoats pour glasses of champagne. Developers, contractors, insurance directors, planners and politicians crowd around models of the latest office blocks and shopping complexes (Figure 3.26 and Figure 3.27).



Fig. 3.26 — Guests of Joseph Levy admire a model of a new planned development on the Strand. *The Changing Face of London* (Pathé newsreels, 1957).



Fig. 3.27 — *The Changing Face of London* (Pathé newsreels, 1957).

The Pathé newsreel this description is drawn from presents Joseph Levy's 35-year career anniversary in an unapologetically celebratory manner. The tone, with its upbeat voiceover and soaring orchestral score, was typical of a certain strand of commentary regarding developers in the mid '50s to early '60s. Levy and his guests were said to be undertaking the enormous responsibility of 'building the new London'.⁹⁵⁶ Three Years later Levy would have further cause for celebration as his company continued to grow on the back of the postwar property boom, with *The Times* describing how this accomplished industry insider, known for his uncanny ability to attract 'future millionaires', was in 'fine form'.⁹⁵⁷ The liberal arts and letters journal, the *Twentieth Century*, profiled one of Levy's guests, Jack Cotton, in equally glowing terms. Cotton possessed 'financial genius'; he had 'the ability to give confidence to nervous money and to take decisions fast and unaided'.⁹⁵⁸ By 1959, Cotton's City Centre Properties was perhaps the fastest growing company in the British property industry, and according to the *Daily Mail*, a welcome beacon of security in a market where there were, admittedly, 'too many spivs'.⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁶ *The Changing Face of London* (Pathé newsreels, 1957).

⁹⁵⁷ 'The Insider', *The Times* (9 December 1960), p. 10.

⁹⁵⁸ John Gale, 'Jack Cotton Explains', Vol. 171 (Summer 1962), 77-82, p. 77.

⁹⁵⁹ Patrick Sergeant, 'Too Many Deals Too Many Spivs', *Daily Mail* (21 September 1959), 10.

The praise heaped on developers during this period, although far from unwavering, stands in sharp contrast to the treatment of landlords. Levy's anniversary party brought together the key players in the postwar property system: developers, contractors, financial institutions, planners and politicians. Landlords were notable for their absence. And yet, there is a sense in which these two figures, developer and landlord, fed off and fueled one another. This was true not just in the sense that developers profited at the expense of landlords, but also, I will argue, in ideologically and representational terms too. Transfers to owner occupation and municipal slum clearance accounted for the largest share of properties lost from the private rented sector,⁹⁶⁰ but from the second half of the 1950s onwards, developers were increasingly alive to the opportunities of inner city redevelopment.⁹⁶¹

The eclipse of the private residential landlord by the developer was, however, paradoxical. As we saw in the case of immigrant landlords in Section 2, the postwar years were not without opportunities for landlords to reinvent themselves. And just as certain types of landlord seized on emergent opportunities borne out of the decline of private rented housing, so a new breed of developer borrowed from the image of gentlemanly decorum once associated with the landed elite.⁹⁶² I argue below that the genuinely new and emergent possibilities of a fully financialised form of development were paired with an archaic stylisation.

Levy's gathering at the Criterion expressed this masquerade in a way that appears curiously guileless to the twenty first century eye, but entirely plausible in the contemporary context. The architectural models (Figure 3.28 and Figure 3.29), with their use of curtain walling and suggestions of white painted concrete, belong to the period of commercial development's embrace of architectural modernism.⁹⁶³ Commentators and historians have since criticised developers like Cotton and Levy for the clunky, profit-dictated architecture they imposed on

⁹⁶⁰ On tenure transfers see Peter Saunders, *A Nation of Home Owners* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 28. On the loss of houses to slum clearance see Jim Yelling, 'The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955-85', *Urban History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2000), 234-254.

⁹⁶¹ From the early 1960s, public-private partnerships with developers were commonly floated as a way of dealing with London's 'twilight' areas. Jim Yelling, 'The Development of Residential Urban Renewal Policies in England: Planning for Modernization in the 1960s', *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1999), 1-18, pp. 4, 10 and 12.

⁹⁶² Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven: Yale, 2010), pp. 56, 70-2, 78-80; Andrew Miles and Mike Savage, 'The Strange Survival of the English Gentleman, 1945-2010', in *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2012), 595-612.

⁹⁶³ Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 258-9.

London's intricate fabric – an aesthetic excretion of the undoubted damage they did to working-class communities.⁹⁶⁴ Yet the attitude behind these structures had little to do with the 'heroic' modernity of a Le Corbusier or Robert Moses, cutting a path through the congested old city. As the Pathé newscaster framed it,

London is both an ancient and a modern metropolis. It has a character which has grown through the long centuries, and it has the urgent needs of today. Meeting those needs without clashing with all that's best in the capital's tradition is a great responsibility. Levy's are conscious of it, and proud of the way they have met the challenge.

It is not surprising then to find that the model of Levy's Strand office block (Figure 28) – with its symmetrical facade and stepped-back penthouse level adding a ceremonial cap to the otherwise purely volumetric composition – retains a touch of the classicism that was still in fashion in the late 1940s.⁹⁶⁵ Surrounded by the gilding and chandeliers of the Criterion restaurant, the models form a strange pairing with their environment. They suggest a logic of contrast and synthesis, contradiction and resolution, and contradiction renewed all over again; a dialectic, in other words, comparable to the one that was so crucial to the Ideal Home Exhibition (examined in Part 1). If the ideal home depended on an image of the un-ideal home, then the developer in the postwar period also found his fate wrapped up with his imaginary other in the form of the landlord. In this final Section, I want to consider how this relationship between developer and landlord was figured in the public personas of people like Jack Cotton.

⁹⁶⁴ Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 50. For the impact on tenants see Nick Wates, *The Battle for Tolmers Square* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).

⁹⁶⁵ Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 256.



Fig. 3.28 — *The Changing Face of London* (Pathé newsreels, 1957).



Fig. 3.29 — *The Changing Face of London* (Pathé newsreels, 1957).

I focus on Jack Cotton as an emblem of postwar redevelopment. Both Cotton and Levy came from fairly ordinary middle-class backgrounds; both went on to be immensely wealthy.⁹⁶⁶ Cotton especially can be seen to have embodied an idealised entrepreneurial arc that distinguished itself from the career of the landlord-as-spiv. Rather than a shortcut from

⁹⁶⁶ Charles Gordon, *The Two Tycoons: A Personal Memoir of Jack Cotton and Charles Clore* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), pp. 28-9; 'Joseph Levy: Property Developer', *The Jewish Lives Project* <<https://www.jewishlivesproject.com/profiles/joseph-levy>> [accessed 31 August 2019].

petty wheeling-and-dealing to petty lordship, from hustling on the streets to being ruler of one's own small dominion, these new men of property rose from comfortable but modest means to become key nodes within a network of power and wealth that touched almost every aspect of society. Such a position demanded the cultivation of a certain personality. The public imagination of Cotton's life, I will argue, forms part of the story that postwar Britain told itself about its own path to modernisation.

The narratives woven around the personalities, business dealings, plans and buildings associated with developers like Cotton, reveal something about how questions of property influenced the development of the postwar welfare state. For while the developer borrowed some of the cultural clothes of the gentleman, part of what distinguished him from the landlord, was his removal from the tenant's sphere of direct experience. The figure of the developer represents a higher order of alienation with respect to the landlord-tenant relationship, a realm that was much less amenable to the 'normativisation' enacted through institutions like rent tribunals, for example. But insofar as developers were alienated from this one sphere of experience, they were also implicated in a much larger, more elevated circuit. Development came to touch the commanding heights of postwar capitalism. This position constitutes a space both more 'public' and more 'secretive' than that of the landlord-tenant relation; a space encompassing what Sara Stevens has called the 'salescraft' of property – a highly visible, high-stakes activity which includes models like those displayed by Levy in 1957, and on the other hand, the necessarily 'hidden' activity of land assembly operations.⁹⁶⁷ How tenants grappled with this new situation points beyond the timeframe of our period but will be touched on briefly at the end of this Section. Roughly then, the narrative follows the rise and fall of Jack Cotton: the beginning of his supposed 'downfall', marked by the hubristic Piccadilly Circus redevelopment scheme, and the implications this had for how developers came to be regarded in the 1960s and beyond.⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁶⁷ Sara Stevens, *Developing Expertise* (New Haven: Yale, 2016), p. 4.

⁹⁶⁸ Gordon, *Two Tycoons*, p. 212.



Fig. 3.30 — Jack Cotton interviewed in his home (Pathé newsreels, 1959).

‘At first sight, if you had to guess his job, you might say “actor”; pink face, sensitive nose and mouth and dark hair that tends to curl; the bow tie is mainly silver, the suit dark blue, the initials JC in pale blue on the white shirt.’⁹⁶⁹ John Gale’s interview with Jack Cotton in a special edition of the *Twentieth Century* dedicated to the themes of planning and development was more than just an exercise in media sycophancy. Gale made little attempt to challenge Cotton’s views – for example on planning regulations (‘Well. Ideas change quicker than legislation’), or the need for more middle-income housing (‘We are purely developers’).⁹⁷⁰ But he also set out to paint a subtle picture of a man of many qualities – qualities that in someone lesser might exist as contradictions.

Cotton’s suite in the Dorchester Hotel where he lived and worked in London was said to be ‘modest, carpeted, unmemorable, the only concessions to tycoonery being a private telephone-switchboard manned by an attractive girl and some fine paintings’. The ‘attractive girl’ and the ‘fine paintings’ – among them a Rembrandt, a Renoir and a Fantin-Latour – were treated as props maintaining Cotton’s aura, part of the same gentlemanly decorum conjured by Joseph Levy in his gathering at the Criterion a few years earlier, in which younger women performing ritualised services for older men were all part of the scenery. Cotton clearly enjoyed his enormous wealth but wore it with elegance. According to financial

⁹⁶⁹ John Gale, ‘Cotton Explains’, *Twentieth Century*, p. 77.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 78 and 82.

journalist Charles Gordon, Cotton's Dorchester suite 'was more like entering an apartment house, with its own liftmen and porters'; it had its own 'discreet entrance' on Park Lane 'which suited the deliberately discreet Mr Cotton'.⁹⁷¹ Gale meanwhile was quick to qualify that the old masters and impressionists were not merely 'something to possess'. On the contrary, it was clear to this interviewer that Cotton cherished them as artefacts of wonder.⁹⁷² Other commentators might have held different opinions on just how 'discreet' Jack Cotton was. Nevertheless, they marvelled at his generosity and apparent lack of concern for money. In February 1959 the *Daily Mail* dubbed Cotton 'the man who came to dinner and left a £100,000 tip'; a reference to his gift to the Royal College of Surgeons to create a Chair in Biochemistry, apparently decided over a brandy and soda night-cap with the College President.⁹⁷³ His attitude, at least at this stage, was apparently not that of the voracious accumulator. Whereas in the case of an infamous landlord like Peter Rachman, excessive consumption was framed as an attribute of a desperate or perverted eroticism, here, any trace of Cotton's sexuality was subsumed within his overall refined comportment.⁹⁷⁴

Architecture too appeared to be a matter of cultural distinction for Cotton. Gale introduced the interview with Cotton talking about 'the buildings in his life'. For him these were matters of upbringing and taste. Cotton grew up in a supposedly ordinary Victorian house but tended to prefer 'the serenity of New Square', Wren's St Bride's and St Mary-Le-Bow, as well as some Georgian and Queen Anne era houses.⁹⁷⁵ This affinity for pre-mass production architecture expressed itself in Cotton's own house in Marlow, a cream coloured, originally Elizabethan riverside villa, which provided the setting for an unusually informal interview in 1959 (Figure 3.30 and Figure 3.31). In the surviving footage, we see Cotton opening the door to his guest and showing him through the house. The atmosphere is warm, intimate, serene. Nothing could be further from a figure like Peter Rachman whose rise from a 'dilapidated house in Bayswater' costing less than £1000, to a £70,000 'mansion' in Hampstead, was accompanied by lavish spending on gifts for his fiancée, Mandy Rice-Davies, including 'three mink jackets, three diamond brooches, two pairs of diamond and

⁹⁷¹ Gordon, *Two Tycoons*, p. 34.

⁹⁷² Gale, 'Cotton Explains', *Twentieth Century*, p. 77.

⁹⁷³ 'How to Give Away Money', *Daily Mail* (21 Feb 1959), p. 6. See also 'Tycoon Gives Medicine £100,000', *Daily Mail* (18 Feb 1959), p. 3.

⁹⁷⁴ Green, *Rachman*, p. 26 and Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 311.

⁹⁷⁵ Gale, 'Cotton Explains', *Twentieth Century*, p. 78.

ruby earrings, a persian lamb jacket, a big gold, diamond and ruby watch bracelet, two diamond rings [...] [and] a Jaguar car'.⁹⁷⁶



Fig. 3.31 — Jack Cotton interviewed in his home (Pathé newsreels, 1959).

For the developer, on the other hand, architecture fitted within a carefully cultivated frame of mind and body. Those who wrote about Cotton conveyed how they were drawn to him by his unique energy and charisma. For Charles Gordon, Cotton had the air of a good-natured 'impresario'.⁹⁷⁷ Interviewing Cotton for his 1962 book *Anatomy of Britain*, Anthony Sampson described him in similar terms: 'He sits talking, drinking and laughing at the long table in his drawing-room, sometimes till two in the morning [...] He exudes the atmosphere, not of a businessman but of an impresario [...] He likes to throw back his head with a chuckle, saying "terrific thing!"'⁹⁷⁸ Again, the difference of appearance, the way the body as much as the mental attitude appeared distinct from a figure like Rachman, with his disconcerting 'baby face', dark glasses, tie-askew, and corpulent figure (doubly absurd pictured in tennis whites) emerges clearly in these texts and images (Figure 3.32 and Figure 3.33). In all these examples, the male body becomes a surface of inscription for the different meanings of property in postwar Britain. Women were routinely objectified in the process, treated as mere instruments of signification. However, it was the homosocial allure of what Frank Mort has

⁹⁷⁶ 'Mandy: My Two Years with Rachman', *Daily Express* (11 July 1963), p. 7.

⁹⁷⁷ Gordon, *Two Tycoons*, pp. 25-6.

⁹⁷⁸ Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), p. 417.

described as 'clubbable masculine solidarity' that brought these meanings home, quite literally through the staging of male bodies in domestic and quasi-domestic settings.⁹⁷⁹

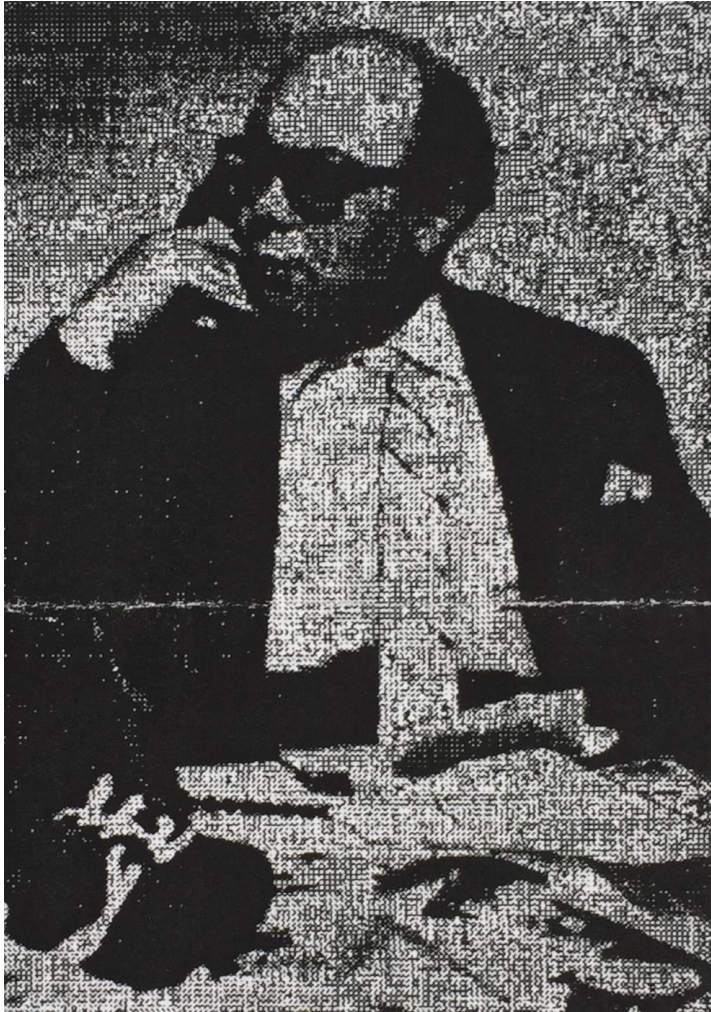
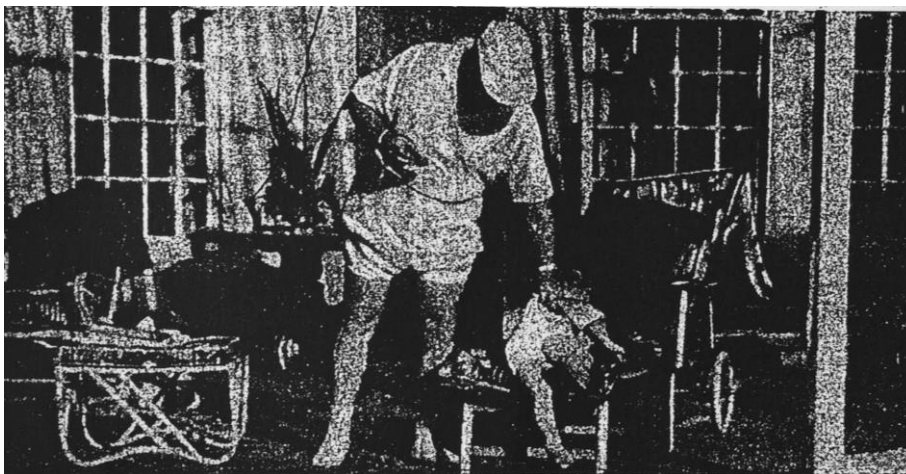


Fig. 3.32 — Peter Rachman on the front cover of the *Daily Mirror*. 'MP's Bid to Smash Britain's "Rachmans"', *Daily Mirror* (17 July 1963), p. 1.



⁹⁷⁹ Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 90.

Fig. 3.33 — Rachman pictured outside his house in Hampstead. ‘Mandy: My Two Years with Rachman’, *Daily Express* (11 July 1963), p. 7.

In the most general terms, the figure of the developer was legitimised in contradistinction to the figure of the landlord. This distinction has deep roots in the history of capitalism, as well as in the housing politics of postwar Britain. Speaking to the press in July 1954 about the Town and Country Planning Bill then making its way through Parliament, Harold Macmillan stated, ‘This Bill is not a charter for the landlord, it is a charter for the developer.’⁹⁸⁰ The Bill, which incorporated the previous year’s abolition of development charges into a more comprehensive planning Act, marked a step-change in the Conservative Party’s break with Labour housing policy.⁹⁸¹ Advancing concretely on the pledge made by the Conservative party’s 1951 manifesto to give greater freedom to the private builder, the Bill of 1954 counterposed the interests of landlords, deemed relatively unimportant if not ‘parasitic’, and those of developers, seen as a driving force in the production and organisation of the built environment.⁹⁸²

Macmillan thus drew upon an imaginative figuration of the developer that was equal and opposite to the figure of the ‘grasping landlord’. As he had already framed it in 1953, ‘the people whom the Government must help are those who do things: the developers, the people who create wealth whether they are humble or exalted’.⁹⁸³ What Macmillan’s statement implied was an idea of the developer as builder, as shaper of the environment and maker of new worlds. No one has described this archetype of the developer better than Marshall Berman in his analysis of the final Act of Goethe’s Faust.⁹⁸⁴ According to Berman, Faust the developer is a man who has realised that the ultimate fulfilment of the Enlightenment spirit of inquiry lies in the willed transformation of the physical, social,

⁹⁸⁰ ‘Developers’ Charter?’, *The Economist*, No. 5786, (17 July 1954), p. 182; House of Commons, *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates: The Official Record* (13 July 1954), Vol. 530, Col. 430 <[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1954-07-13/debates/908aaa54-abdb-4aa3-b7a0-c01b001ee274/TenthSchedule%E2%80%9494\(EnactmentsRepealed\)?highlight=this%20bill%20not%20charter%20landlord%20charter%20developer#contribution-8e611ebd-81c8-4195-995e-fc48ca7b4f1d](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1954-07-13/debates/908aaa54-abdb-4aa3-b7a0-c01b001ee274/TenthSchedule%E2%80%9494(EnactmentsRepealed)?highlight=this%20bill%20not%20charter%20landlord%20charter%20developer#contribution-8e611ebd-81c8-4195-995e-fc48ca7b4f1d)> [accessed 28 August 2020].

⁹⁸¹ John Davis, ‘Macmillan’s Martyr: the Pilgrim Case, the Land Grab and the Tory Housing Drive, 1951-9’, *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 23 (April 2008), 125-146, p. 129.

⁹⁸² Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1951 <<http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1951/1951-conservative-manifesto.shtml>> [accessed 1 September 2019].

⁹⁸³ Quoted in Marriott, *Property Boom*, p. 5.

⁹⁸⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 3rd edn. (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 60-71.

economic and political environment: driving back the sea to reclaim the land, creating a colossal new productive apparatus, founding a new community of free individuals – even at the cost of grinding the labour power of the first pioneers into dust and bulldozing any surviving elements of the old pre-modern way of life.⁹⁸⁵ Through the primal act of building – and indeed demolishing – internal self-development fuses with the outward, all-embracing development of the environment. The developer finally overcomes the dualism of spirit and world.

However, as Berman points out, there are in fact two principal characters in Goethe's epic: Faust the visionary, the director and manager of these heroic works, and Mephistopheles the devil, the pure capitalist on the look-out for immediate gain. The legend of Faust in Goethe's interpretation thus introduces a new dualism in place of the one just conquered. I want to suggest that this dualism corresponds to the historical division between the builder-developer on the one hand and the landlord on the other. What the legend of Faust reveals most clearly is the fractious yet intimate relationship between these two roles. While Faust plans his grand visions, it is Mephistopheles, the devil, who handles all the dirty jobs that are essential to the former's ideas. And of course, it is only by handing over his soul to Mephisto, that Faust gains his power. If the role of Mephisto had to go to anyone, it would surely go to the postwar landlord of the Rachman variety; in other words, to those players in the property system who acted as profit-extractors of last resort, taking on undesirable properties, evicting tenants, and facilitating the whole process of capital withdrawal by major landowners, thus freeing up the scope for investment in more lucrative forms of commercial redevelopment.⁹⁸⁶

As for Faust himself, he exists in many different incarnations among the great planner-developers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people such as Baron Haussmann, Lúcio Costa and Robert Moses, who wielded the powers of capital and state to produce some of the most monumental – and sometimes destructive – public works in modern history.⁹⁸⁷ To what extent do the great developers of postwar London conform to this

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 64-7.

⁹⁸⁶ Green, *Rachman*, p. 53.

⁹⁸⁷ Berman, *All That is Solid*, p. 75 and 151-3; Arturo Almandoz, 'Towards Brasilia and Ciudad Guayana. Development, urbanization and regional planning in Latin America, 1940s–1960s', *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2016), 31– 53, pp. 41-2.

archetype? I would argue that in both his emergent and archaic qualities, a figure like Jack Cotton represents a break with the idea of the developer as builder and planner. What we see emerging in postwar London is a new, fully financialised form of developer, whose interests are thoroughly entangled with those of insurance firms, pension funds and other institutions. And yet to the extent that this figure grows apart from the one-sided view of Faust as the enlightenment man of progress, it also highlights a deeper truth about the Faust legend (according to Berman's interpretation): that is, the inescapable unity of the developer and the landlord. If the figure of Jack Cotton was portrayed in very different terms to the 'grasping landlord', he also crystallised the subsumption of postwar reconstruction by a new form of rentier economy. The paradoxical figure of the postwar developer, straddling the emergent and the archaic, was bound up with this paradox.

In order to grasp this paradox, we need to understand the history of the development process leading up to this point. The role of developers was evolving rapidly, in ways that would not have been easy to predict twenty to thirty years earlier when these new masters of the property system were starting out in their careers. What a developer was, was by no means fixed. If one were to sketch a historical typology of the developer in Britain, one would find that until the mid-twentieth century his role was essentially a mediary one, existing at the intersection of two fields, one belonging to the landlord, the other to the builder. From the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, the primary developers were the traditional landed estates, who exercised great influence over whatever building they permitted on their land via the system of leasehold control.⁹⁸⁸ At the same time, individual entrepreneurs played an important role as middlemen. Some, such as Nicholas Barbon and Thomas Cubitt, achieved fame and wealth on the basis of their business acumen or mastery of the construction process. Indeed, Elizabeth McKellar has argued that prior to the formalisation of leasehold control, men such as Barbon exercised an agency independent of the landed estates, who did little more than provide the land for building.⁹⁸⁹ The birth of the modern developer can therefore be traced back to the very earliest days of capitalist urbanisation in the seventeenth century. However, the direction of travel at this point was towards the

⁹⁸⁸ Donald Olsen, *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries*, 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale, 1982), pp. xvii-xviii and David Cannadine, 'Victorian Cities: How Different?', Vol. 2, No. 4 (January 1977), 457-482, pp. 462-3.

⁹⁸⁹ Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 41-2; Hermione Hobhouse, *Thomas Cubitt: Master Builder* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

specialisation and consolidation of the two functions of landownership/speculation, on the one hand, and building/architecture, on the other. These early developers, moreover, were still operating in a predominantly patchwork manner, assembling land then issuing sub-leases for small plots to multiple builders.⁹⁹⁰ The developer, insofar as he existed at this point, struggled to escape the role of a building gang master working under the patronage of the landed elite.

In the early twentieth century, such figures were overtaken by the expansion of a handful of contractors into major capitalist firms, several of which would become household names. Companies such as Laing, Wates and Costain profited from the boom in speculative suburban housing in the 1920s and '30s.⁹⁹¹ A few, like Costain, became major landlords in their own right.⁹⁹² Insofar as they rented residential property directly to tenants, they were preempted by corporate landlords of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Among the latter, some merely acquired property for letting from the great estates, while others, such as the East End Dwellings Company, actually built housing (often working on the business model of 'charity at 5%'). Whereas the contractor-developers were naturally weighted towards the building side of the process, the primary interest of corporate landlords lay in forming a rental relationship.⁹⁹³ Similar in this sense were companies like Bell Property Trust, which in the interwar period specialised in service flats for white collar professionals.⁹⁹⁴ For companies like Bell, building served landlordism. Across all these examples, it was either the landlord/landowner role, or the work of building that dominated. In other words, development in Britain prior to 1945 was not yet a specialised activity.

Up until this point, the activity of development had balanced on the cusp of landlordism and building. Individuals like Cotton and Levy were carving out an emergent identity for themselves. The individual developers who achieved wealth and fame during the 1950s were protean figures, straddling a range of different images; warding off some (the image of the landlord, for example), while incorporating others (the impresario, the gentleman and the

⁹⁹⁰ McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*, pp. 57-9 and 85; McCrone and Elliott, *Property and Power in a City*, pp. 50-1.

⁹⁹¹ Ambrose, *Whatever Happened to Planning?*, p. 17.

⁹⁹² See for example the case of Dolphin Square built during the 1930s. Terry Gourvish, *Dolphin Square: The History of a Unique Building* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 67 and 95-7.

⁹⁹³ Massey and Catalano, *Capital and Land*, p. 132.

⁹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Whatever Happened to Planning?*, p. 14.

genius). While Jack Cotton distanced his persona from that of the landlord, he also failed to coincide with the image of the postwar 'organisation man'; the consummate professional thoroughly embedded in the corporate structure, who was committed to advancing the organisational weight of his trade.⁹⁹⁵ Cotton was acknowledged as one of the best in his field, yet he cultivated an image of passionate amateurism or natural genius rather than professionalism. To the press he appeared an aesthete, a connoisseur, almost an eccentric in his bow tie.

This misalignment of the figure of the developer with other elite male identities reflected the relatively unprofessionalised state of the industry as a whole. In the United States, the first official representative body for developers, the Urban Land Institute, was founded in 1936.⁹⁹⁶ In Britain, the first such organisation, the Property Council (later renamed the British Property Federation), came into being only in 1963.⁹⁹⁷ Moreover, the Property Council continued to represent both landlords *and* developers. The fledgling organisation found itself vulnerable to critique for precisely this reason, with *The Times* mocking the Council for attempting to 'give the image of the landlord a quick wash-and-brush-up'.⁹⁹⁸ Little wonder that men like Cotton bypassed this nascent attempt at professionalisation. These individual developer-entrepreneurs were therefore not to be confused with international planning and development consultancies like Ravenscroft and Bredero, which brought their 'scientific' expertise as well as their ability to mobilise large sums of public and private capital to the reconstruction of several European city centres.⁹⁹⁹ Instead, they claimed the mantle of entrepreneurial 'genius', while harking back to older ideas of gentlemanly conduct and passionate amateurism.

The seeming paradoxes of a figure like Jack Cotton prompt two related questions. First, what made his existence possible, in social and economic terms? And second, what made it necessary, in terms of the stories told about him and through him? The answer to the first

⁹⁹⁵ Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organisation Man since 1945* (Oxford: OUP, 1994); Sean Nixon, 'Gentlemanly Professionals and Men-about-Town: Occupational Identities Amongst London Advertising Men, 1951–67', *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 377–401.

⁹⁹⁶ Stevens, *Developing Expertise*, p. 5.

⁹⁹⁷ 'British Property Federation BPF', *Designing Buildings Wiki* (21 February 2019) <https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/British_Property_Federation_BPF> [accessed 2 September 2019].

⁹⁹⁸ 'Landlords Fail to Impose an Image', *The Times* (29 November 1963), p. 6.

⁹⁹⁹ Tim Verlaan, 'Producing space: post-war redevelopment as big business, Utrecht and Hannover 1962–1975', *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2019), 415–437,

question lies in the financialisation of the development process, something that was well recognised by the very same commentators who elevated the likes of Cotton, Levy, Charles Clore and Harry Hyams to the status of economic miracle workers, at the same time painting them as swashbuckling opportunists.¹⁰⁰⁰ This, then, was the great open secret of postwar redevelopment.

From 1927 to 1947 annual investments in property by British insurance firms more than doubled.¹⁰⁰¹ This massive injection of funds continued over the next decade, with the market value of property company shares peaking in the early '60s at around £800 million, up from £100 million in 1958.¹⁰⁰² Around the same time, regulatory changes meant that pension funds (especially the large public sector funds) also began to contribute to the boom.¹⁰⁰³ In 1964, property accounted for 21% of total investments by public sector pension funds, compared to 9% in 1961.¹⁰⁰⁴ It was not just the scale of investment but also its nature that had a transformative impact on development. While investment in property by insurance firms can be traced to the late 1600s, in the twentieth century, financial institutions began to seek more direct forms of participation in property development,¹⁰⁰⁵ including via the formation of joint companies for specific projects, a mechanism Jack Cotton was said to have pioneered.¹⁰⁰⁶

The interests of financial institutions and developers in other words began to fuse. Macmillan's removal of development charges in 1953 and other deregulatory moves helped trigger the postwar property boom.¹⁰⁰⁷ But a deeper synergy lay behind it: a convergence of growing forms of 'asset-based welfare' (life insurance, pension funds etc) and the profits to be had from the redevelopment of central and inner city areas. Whereas originally the insurance industry had grown up around short term liabilities associated with fire and maritime risks, the long term capital demands of major redevelopment schemes were ideally

¹⁰⁰⁰ Marriott, *Property Boom*; Gordon, *Two Tycoons*; Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*, pp. 416-8.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ambrose, *Whatever Happened to Planning?*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰² Marriott, *Property Boom*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰³ Shirley Green, *Who Owns London?* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), pp. 163.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Massey and Catalano, *Capital and Land*, p. 118, Table 6.3.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Martin Boddy, 'Investment by Financial Institutions in Commercial Property', in Martin Boddy ed., *Land, Property and Finance (Working Paper no. 2)* (Bristol: University of Bristol, School for Advanced Urban Studies, 1979), 17-34, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Gordon, *Two Tycoons*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Marriott, *Property Boom*, p. 1.

suited to the equally long term liabilities of life insurance.¹⁰⁰⁸ Pension funds operated on a similar timeframe, and the transformation of both from elite forms of bequest to institutions handling the savings of millions can be seen in parallel with the emergence of building societies as pillars of the 'property-owning democracy'.¹⁰⁰⁹

What we see in the figure of Jack Cotton and his ilk is exactly this synergy between financial institutions and property development. From 1956, Cotton formed a series of subsidiaries with insurance firms, most notably with the Pearl Assurance and Legal and General.¹⁰¹⁰ Comparable partnerships were forged between the Prudential Assurance and Land Securities, the biggest property company in Britain, and between Norwich Union and Max Rayne, the developer who initiated the Church into commercial redevelopment.¹⁰¹¹ Among pension funds, some of the largest investors in property included the Post Office, British Telecom, and the National Coal Board, all of which eventually entrusted their property investments to private companies.¹⁰¹² Despite credit restrictions affecting their lending activities in the 1950s, banks continued to provide significant finance to developers, as did the major building contractors.¹⁰¹³ But it was above all the insurance firms and to a slightly lesser extent the pension funds that became the largest property owners by value rather than acreage.¹⁰¹⁴ London, with its surge in white collar jobs, increasing centralisation of corporate headquarters, and inner city areas ripe for redevelopment, was the epicentre of this activity.

Developers like Cotton circulated in a world far removed from that of the landlord and his tenants, a world that was barely formed some twenty to thirty years earlier. Yet reconciling this fully financialised form of development with the idea of the developer as builder, as the 'creator of wealth', as first among those who 'do things', was not easy either. Through his integration with financial institutions, the developer risked his image collapsing back into that of the rentier or 'profiteer'. It was a collapse that not only endangered his own image, but that

¹⁰⁰⁸ Massey and Catalano, *Capital and Land*, 14-5 and 122.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Daniel Defert, "'Popular Life' and Insurance Technology", in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 211-232.

¹⁰¹⁰ Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*, p. 418.

¹⁰¹¹ Green, *Who Owns London?*, pp. 150 and 158.

¹⁰¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 164-9.

¹⁰¹³ See for example Wates, *Battle for Tolmers Sq*, pp. 39 and 45.

¹⁰¹⁴ Green, *Who Owns London?*, pp. 148 and 163.

of the entire postwar consensus, exposing how the property-owning democracy was becoming the 'irresponsible society' that Richard Titmuss would denounce in 1959:¹⁰¹⁵ the society, on the one side, of pension funds, insurance firms, building societies and other large-scale private bureaucracies – arbiters of the public good whose only reason for existing was their mass 'democratic' base, and yet whose decisions were subject to no democratic control whatsoever – and on the other, the society of brash commercialism, advertising, hire-purchase, and an influx of consumer goods for those who could afford it.



Fig. 3.34 — Model of Jack Cotton's proposed development for Piccadilly Circus, October 1959. Reproduced in *Illustrated London News* (28 November 1959), 761.

¹⁰¹⁵ Richard Titmuss, 'The Irresponsible Society', in *Essays on "The Welfare State"*, 3rd edn. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976), 215-243.



Fig. 3.35 — Developer's drawing of the proposed redevelopment of Piccadilly Circus, October 1959. Reproduced in 'Poor Eros', *The Economist*, no. 6062 (31 October 1959), 446.

Given the meteoric rise of the great postwar developers, it is equally striking just how quickly their stars came back down to earth. On the 27th of October 1959, in the same venue chosen by Joseph Levy for his anniversary party two years earlier, Jack Cotton held a press conference to announce his plans to redevelop the northern corner of Piccadilly circus.¹⁰¹⁶ A model and drawing of the thirteen-storey block of offices, shops, restaurants and car park were prominently displayed (Figure 3.34 and Figure 3.35). For Cotton, the scheme represented his chance to make a lasting mark on what he referred to as 'the hub of the commonwealth'.¹⁰¹⁷ Piccadilly would be his legacy, the culmination of his journey from Birmingham estate agent to global developer, and having already secured outline planning consent via a joint company with the insurance firm Legal and General, the press conference proudly declared his triumph.¹⁰¹⁸ The public reaction, however, could hardly have been more hostile. The architectural critic JM Richards described the scheme as 'a crude rectangular

¹⁰¹⁶ Gordon, *Two Tycoons*, p. 37.

¹⁰¹⁷ Jack Cotton interviewed in his home (Pathé newsreels, 1959)
<<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVACWPDDGQIAG3B2THC9ZQU7RQ5P-JACK-COTTON-TA/query/jack+cotton>> [accessed 8 September 2019].

¹⁰¹⁸ Gordon, *Two Tycoons*, pp. 28 and 37. At the time, Cotton's City Centre Properties was involved in several overseas schemes, including in Durban, Cape Town, Port of Spain and Kingston, as well as the Pan Am building in New York, said to be the largest office block in the world. See 'City Centre Properties Limited: Group's Continuing Progress', *Economist*, no. 6062 (31 October 1959), 454.

block rising above a badly proportioned base [...] both [of which] are treated in the most commonplace style.’¹⁰¹⁹ Bernard Levin in *the Spectator* wrote of ‘the Monster of Piccadilly’, while Malcolm MacEwan dubbed it ‘Chewing Gum House’ on national television.¹⁰²⁰

The whole episode – including the backlash from the architectural establishment and the government enquiry which put a stop to the scheme – has been well documented by Bronwen Edwards and David Gilbert in a recent essay.¹⁰²¹ Edwards and Gilbert show how the controversy over Piccadilly threw into relief the imperial nostalgia that inflected debates over civic space and the compromised position of planning authorities. Less well understood is the place that Cotton’s Piccadilly scheme occupied in evolving perceptions of the developer. Perhaps for the first time since the Second World War, the economic calculus of the new developers and the kind of society they stood for were made unavoidably visible. ‘Chewing Gum House’ turned the profit principle of commercial redevelopment inside out: where normally a respectable modernist facade would be thrown over a cuboidal volume designed to squeeze the maximum floor area out of LCC plot-ratio rules, here the facade itself was the primary rental surface, as important as the office space inside. Cotton was banking on advertising revenue being a major part of the scheme’s income, as well as pressing the LCC for greater allowances in terms of floor space.¹⁰²² Indeed, many existing owners already found it more profitable to let exterior walls than the spaces behind them.¹⁰²³ Representational space here collapsed back into abstract space. The representational surface was itself the bearer of the logic of abstraction; or, to put it another way, abstract space here achieved an apotheosis through self-representation, glorying in its own inexorability.

Cotton’s scheme was postmodern architecture *avant-la-lettre* – a decorated shed topped off by a theme-park sized rotating crane (ostensibly to give speedy access to the advertisements below) that made the whole structure look like it was ready to take flight. Newsreel coverage made it clear who the principal actors were, naming PR Cahill, General

¹⁰¹⁹ JM Richards, ‘Piccadilly Circus and All That’, *The Listener*, no. 1601 (3 Dec 1959), 961-2, 961.

¹⁰²⁰ Bronwen Edwards and David Gilbert, “‘Piazzadilly!’: the re-imagining of Piccadilly Circus (1957–72)”, *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 23 (October 2008), 455-478, p. 461.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 461-3.

¹⁰²² *Ibid.*, p. 460-1. In exchange, Cotton would give over some of his land to the Council for their road widening scheme for the Circus.

¹⁰²³ ‘Poor Eros’, *The Economist*, no. 6062 (31 October 1959), 446.

Manager of Legal and General, and Jack Cotton himself as the men 'behind the great project' (Figure 3.36). No architect, no planners were present, only the insurer and the developer presiding over their model like giants. Here was the 'irresponsible society' writ large.

It is not surprising that critics balked at this brash commercialism. But in retrospect we can see how Cotton's Piccadilly scheme also aspired to something of the 'common touch' promised by earlier wartime and postwar visions.¹⁰²⁴ Piccadilly's famous neon advertising hoardings had long been part of the spectacle of the place and even some of Cotton's critics accepted the desirability of incorporating them into the new development.¹⁰²⁵ What Cotton did was to turn them into the *raison d'être* of his scheme. The drawing (Figure 3.35), which has the light-hearted verve of a commercial illustration, conveys this clearly, as does a newsreel shot of the model's light-up facade in action (Figure 3.37). It seems important to acknowledge the element of playful, ironic, anti-architecture in the Jack Cotton-Legal and General scheme, as much as the ruthlessly profit-driven aspect of the development. Looking at the model with Cotton pictured beside it, it is hard not to read the rotating crane as a reference to his signature bow tie.



Fig. 3.36 — Model of Piccadilly redevelopment scheme with General Manager of Legal and General PR Cahill (left) and Jack Cotton (right). 'Piccadilly New Circus' (Pathé Newsreels, 1959).

¹⁰²⁴ See the film *The Common Touch* (dir. John Baxter, 1941), in which the heir to a property tycoon saves an old common lodging house from the rapacious instincts of his second-in-command.

¹⁰²⁵ Richards, 'Piccadilly Circus', *Listener*, p. 961. See also Edwards and Gilbert, 'Piazzadilly!', *Planning Perspectives*, pp. 466 and 474.



Fig. 3.37 — Model of Piccadilly redevelopment scheme. ‘Piccadilly New Circus’ (Pathé Newsreels, 1959).

We will never know of course whether Cotton’s Piccadilly scheme could have been made to deliver ‘for the people’. But rather than reading the controversy surrounding it as an episode in the failure of modernist architecture, or the commercial hijacking of sincere postwar plans, I believe we should see it as part of the narrative that postwar Britain, and postwar London in particular, told itself about its own path to modernisation. Cotton’s failure in this respect was just as necessary as his success. Both were part of the arc of his life as it existed in the public imagination. Piccadilly was the triumphal gesture of a man at the peak of his powers. But it also represented a colossal overstretch, an enormous yet predictable act of hubris. Through such acts, the developer was consecrated, not so much as a hero, but as a living embodiment of the postwar moment, with all its contradictions, sublimations, excesses and compromises. Through such failures as well as successes, the highly alienated, abstract economic processes which constituted the financialisation of development – processes which removed the determining forces of the property system from the sphere of landlord-tenant relations – were converted into narratives of individual conduct, of personal fortitude or weakness, of good or bad character.

Against this background, the gentlemanly comportment of developers like Cotton can be seen as an attitudinal regulator, a way of normalising the new, fully financialised condition of

development: giving tacit acknowledgement to certain deep socio-economic transformations, while maintaining an aura of validity, of geniality and self-assurance, derived from precisely that older regime of property (the regime of landed property) which had to be disavowed. What this added up to was a mythology of capitalist development no less pronounced than the legend of Faust. But rather than building a new world, forging a new society through the most ruthless methods, what this postwar mythology promised was a modernisation without social transformation, a reconstruction of the physical environment that would leave room for both millionaires and the multitude of 'little people'. In place of the privatised bureaucracy of financial institutions was substituted the figure of the developer as 'impresario'.

In 1959 the property boom was in full swing. The Piccadilly controversy did not lead to the final downfall of Jack Cotton, who continued to be feted in the press until the subjection of his company, City Centre Properties, to a hostile takeover.¹⁰²⁶ But it did introduce a new element of scepticism into public perceptions of the development process, reminding people that a Cotton or a Levy was often no better than a Rachman or a Bertram Waters. In the years immediately after the Second World War, the developer was still emerging as a figure distinct from contractors, landowners, estate agents and corporate landlords. The attitude towards developers throughout most of the 1950s was largely favourable. By the mid '60s, however, developers like Harry Hyams and Joseph Levy were attracting the kind of moral outrage previously associated with landlords. Centrepont, developed by Hyams' company Oldham Estates, was completed in 1965 and remained unoccupied for the next five years – a towering symbol of all that was wrong with the property system.¹⁰²⁷ The unveiling in 1964 of Levy's joint venture with the contractor George Wimpey to redevelop a quarter-mile long area north of the Euston Road was met with surprise by commentators and resistance by local residents.¹⁰²⁸ The days of Cotton-esque showmanship had apparently passed. Above all, the main challenge to developers that grew throughout the 1960s and '70s – leading to the Labour Party's endorsement of land nationalisation in 1972, and subsequently, with mixed results, the Community Land Act of 1976 – came not from the architectural profession or liberal commentators, but from organised movements of working-class tenants acting in

¹⁰²⁶ Gordon, *Two Tycoons*, pp. 212-3.

¹⁰²⁷ Peter Weiler, 'Labour and the Land: The Making of the Community Land Act', *Contemporary British History* (2013) Vol. 27, No. 4, 389-420, p. 394.

¹⁰²⁸ 'How to Lay the Foundations for a Secret Skyscraper', *Sunday Times* (16 Aug 1964), p. 4.

concert with a new range of radical movements centred on social and environmental issues.¹⁰²⁹ The roots of these movements lay, in significant part, in the challenge to landlords during the twenty years after the Second World War.¹⁰³⁰

Conclusion

The third and final Part of this thesis set out to examine private rented housing in postwar London from the side of the landlord. Landlords, and landlordism, constituted a 'social problem' as pressing as the problems of urban isolation or safety in the home. To be a landlord was to occupy a dubious, often vilified position, especially in the immediate years after the Second World War, when landlords came to symbolise the 'profiteers' who threatened to undermine the foundations of reconstruction. The attack on landlords should act as a reminder about the ideological tenor of the immediate postwar moment, something that is easy to lose sight of given the necessary, but sometimes one-sided corrective of much of the recent historiography of the period.¹⁰³¹

Working-class tenants, I have argued, were a driving force in terms of how landlordism was exposed in the public domain. Tenants seized on the institutions of the welfare state to give voice to their growing sense of confidence and entitlement. At the same time, the image of the 'grasping landlord' stemmed from a more deep-rooted duality. In this semi-mythic imagery, the landlord stood opposed to the developer-as-builder. The tendency to focus on landlords as the source of so many of society's ills could easily distract from the larger framework of property relations which they ought to be seen within. A focus on landlords

¹⁰²⁹ Wates, *Battle for Tolmers Square*. On the Tolmers Square Tenants Association in the late '50s and early '60s see pp. 34-8; on the range of organisations including Shelter, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and Tolmers Village Association that came together in the early '70s see 106-8; and on direct action centred on community-building, squatting, peace and social justice, and environmental issues see pp. 138-146.

¹⁰³⁰ On the origins of Shelter and the CPAG for example see Keith Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (London: Macmillan, 1979). On the centrality of struggles over private rented housing in the origins of the New Left, see Schofield and Jones, 'Notting Hill and the Reconstruction of "Race" in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*.

¹⁰³¹ See for example Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Alison Ravetz, 'Housing the People', in Alison Ravetz and Jim Fyfe eds., *Labour's Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain 1945-51* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995); Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1991); Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*; Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War, 1945-60* (London: Methuen, 1988).

could, moreover, morph into a reactionary fixation, especially when the figure of the landlord was racialised.

But public imaginings of the figure of the black landlord during this period should also lead us to question the apparently singular and straightforward nature of the landlord. Although corporate and large individual landlords dominated a major part of the private rental market, there were also numerous small landlords, and indeed landladies, some of whom were in a far more precarious position. These numerous small landlords came in many different guises. The landlord in postwar London was in other words a multivalent figure. A way to conceptualise this multivalency is to understand how the figure of the landlord occupied a dynamic and contradictory temporal schema.

An archaic image of the 'little old landlady', for example, cropped up repeatedly in boarding house comedies and melodramas. In these fictional representations, the figure of the landlady was wedded to the decrepit or outmoded spaces she inhabited. But the very recurrence of this figure suggests how, rather than being laid to rest, these 'archaic' spaces haunted the postwar imagination, acting as 'heterotopias' where society's misfits gathered, and as mirrors to so many unresolved questions. The archaic could also be deliberately 'revived' for specific purposes. The way that the National Federation of Property Owners instrumentalised the figure of the landlady as part of its defence of property ownership in general provides one example of this.

Whether haunting the imagination in popular films or revived in the apologetics of the property lobby, the archaic image of the little old landlady nevertheless failed to capture the lived experience of many women who moved between the usually opposed roles of tenant and landlord/landlady. This experience can be described as residual insofar as it was never validated within the 'dominant culture', but was nonetheless a significant, living practice (rather than simply a representational figure). The investment of otherwise circumscribed values of care and mutuality within these 'residues' of experience ensured their persistence in the postwar period. Understanding the residuality of tenant-landladies' experiences helps to unlock a wide array of practices whereby the rental relationship was subjected to what I have called – following Claus Offe's model of the welfare state – 'normative' control.

Analogously, if journalists and popular films stereotyped the figure of the black landlord, reducing his aspirations to mere novelty, then what this tended to obscure were important forms of self-organisation and self-regulation within migrant communities. While this 'normativising' form of self-regulation might include repressive, especially patriarchal dimensions – indeed, the term 'normative' should already suggest this to us – there were also circumstances in which it merged with radical politics of an explicit kind. The role of the black landlord within diasporic, entrepreneurial cultures, and the links between these cultures and anticolonial politics in the 1950s and early '60s, offers one example in this respect. This nexus of entrepreneurial cultures and anticolonial politics was 'emergent' rather than merely novel, in the sense that it created, from an oppositional position, new precedents that postwar welfare-state capitalism was forced to incorporate, if necessary through direct co-option.¹⁰³²

In a parallel fashion, we could also hypothesise about the links between house-sharing practices and tenant activism, including the organisation of rent strikes and other forms of militant action that targeted landlords. Further research is called for here but already we can see how a cultural history of landlordism opens up new avenues for investigation.

Many of the questions dealt with in the preceding four Sections turn on the difference, or tension, between representation and lived experience. If Raymond Williams' terminology continues to be suggestive, I would argue that this is because it captures something of this tension. It suggests a way of grasping how what was once a living practice is reduced to, or distilled into, a figure; how the trace of a living practice may persist beneath a prominent figure; and how such experiences provide a resource for political mobilisation, which may in turn give birth to its own figures.

The final section (Section 4) provides an example of how an individual life might itself become a 'figure'. The public imagining of the lives of developers like Jack Cotton was an important means of making sense of the huge changes taking place within the postwar property system. This latter is what we might call 'normalisation' as against 'normativisation'

¹⁰³² Recent revelations about MI5's covert sponsorship of *Flamingo* magazine provide a quite remarkable illustration of this. Jamie Doward. 'Sex, Ska and Malcolm X: MI6's Covert 1960s Mission to Woo West Indians', *Guardian* (26 January 2019) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/26/west-indians-flamingo-magazine-m6-anti-communist-mission>> [accessed 7 August 2019].

– a powerfully resonant, yet ultimately mystificatory personification of processes that in large part remained abstract, alienated from the realm of lived experience that landlord-tenant relations were embedded in.

To argue that the main transformation of the postwar development process consisted in a process of abstraction or alienation may seem counterintuitive at one level, given that our standard image of postwar reconstruction continues to be based on the idea of physically remaking the built environment. As others have argued, reconstruction must be understood in the broader sense of reconstructing everyday life, the family, class relations, the national and imperial constitution of Britain, and so on.¹⁰³³ What I am arguing here, however, is not that reconstruction in the sense of physically reshaping the built environment was unimportant, but rather that we have to understand the gap between these two aspects of reconstruction, between the abstract and the practical. It was this gap between complex financial transactions and built plans that was so dramatically revealed by the public take-up of Cotton's Piccadilly Circus plans, and that the new social movements of the 1960s and '70s would begin to disclose.

¹⁰³³ Becky Conekin and Frank Mort eds., *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (London: Rivers Oram, 1998).

Conclusion: Answers to The Rented World

Answers to the Rented World

This thesis has explored the social, cultural and political significance of a certain category of domestic space that stood on the cusp of obsolescence. These 'rented rooms' were ubiquitous to the postwar city but have so far remained marginal in contemporary understandings of the period. I have focused on London because that is where so many of these 'rooms' were concentrated. Three questions have structured the historical inquiry undertaken: Firstly, how were postwar London's rented rooms represented as a space of social problems? Secondly, how did the welfare state regulate or intervene in these spaces? And finally, what was the lived experience of rented rooms actually like? How did this experience confirm, contradict or resist the supposedly problematic nature of the 'rented world'?

I want to summarise the answers this thesis has offered in response to these questions, situating my arguments in a broader theoretical perspective. The themes of the original questions ('representation', 'regulation' and 'experience') will serve as convenient headings for gathering together some of the key points developed throughout the three Parts of the thesis.

1. Representation

The space of postwar London's rented rooms represented, in the first place, all that was obscure, cluttered, claustrophobic and backward about the city, and by extension, society. In the context of subsidised mass homeownership and a major public housebuilding drive, these qualities took on a specific meaning. As I argued in Part 1 with reference to the Ideal Home Exhibition, the dilapidated terraced house let out in rooms represented the 'unideal home', the negative baseline that postwar reconstruction ought to be measured from. Films, journalism, novels, plays, sociological studies and exhibitions fleshed out the profile of this inverted ideal of home, creating a highly charged representational space that haunted the public imagination.

The immense social upheaval of the Second World War had brought in tow the promises of the Beveridge and Uthwatt reports (the latter recommending the 'subordination to the public good of the personal interests and wishes of the landowners'), as well as the Labour Party's 1945 election victory on a platform of ensuring the 'hard-faced men' who profited from the last war did not do so again.¹⁰³⁴ Anxieties about the need to overcome the less glorious aspects of Britain's recent past loomed large. London's rented rooms stood as a symbol of this past. It was a symbolism that grew weightier the longer the actual physical structures themselves survived, as the austerity years of the late 1940s and early 1950s ebbed into the affluence and 'permissiveness' of the later part of the decade.

This was the first paradoxical thing about these representational spaces. They gained visibility precisely as something to be overcome. They became a matter of concern just as they were fading into obsolescence. The second paradox was that while inflated into a symbol of the past in this way, the cellular space of the room itself contained a multitude of proscribed or obscure forms of life (some of them 'emergent' rather than 'residual'), signifying all that escaped or risked escaping the public gaze. The more invisible life within these rooms appeared, the more it invited the gaze of the inspector.

This is what Ruth Glass meant when she said that the zone of transition comes to light through various 'unsavoury' media.¹⁰³⁵ I dwelt in Part 1 on a series of examples of such unsavoury media, namely local newspaper reports about house fires in North Kensington. Part 2 furnished another example in the form of the psychosocial preoccupation with loneliness and suicide in London's rooming house districts. These obscure narratives of London's rented worlds are highly fragmentary. Like the sight of a boarded up house in an otherwise pleasant street, they appear as small ruptures in the surface of the city. My approach in this Thesis has been to track such disparate examples as symptomatic of deeper social problems as well as hidden shifts of economy and power.

¹⁰³⁴ Labour Party, *Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation* (1945) <<http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1945/1945-labour-manifesto.shtml>> [accessed 9 July 2020]; on Uthwatt and the manifesto see Clare Griffiths, 'Socialism and the Land Question: Public Ownership and Control in Labour Party Policy, 1918-1950s', in Matthew Croagoe and Paul Readman, *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, 237-256, pp. 249-50.

¹⁰³⁵ Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies ed., *London: Aspects of Change*, pp. xx-xxi.

The images and discourses surrounding these ‘problems’ did not overlap exactly with those of the Victorian slum. Particularly from the 1950s onwards, representations of the problematic nature of London’s rented worlds focused on the collision of new goods, services, opportunities and attitudes with an older world of dilapidated surroundings and ingrained habits, just as much as on the ‘squalor’ of the old world itself. There was never a clean break with the past but the distinction could be seen, for example, in the representation of problems concerning home safety. As I argued in Part 1, what made the home unsafe, particularly the home in rented accommodation, was the infiltration of relatively new technologies and services – including portable space heaters and synthetic materials – into these essentially nineteenth-century structures. The novelties and excesses of production and consumption resulted in specific forms of harm that Richard Titmuss called ‘diswelfares’.¹⁰³⁶ Anxieties around working-class affluence and the erosion of personal responsibility therefore combined with echoes of an older public health discourse.

Urban social investigation in the tradition of Charles Booth or Andrew Mearns continued in the postwar period through the work of academic sociologists such as Pearl Jephcott, Peter Wilmott, Michael Young and Sheila Patterson. Their work has informed all three Parts of this Thesis (Jephcott in connection with North Kensington in Part 1, Wilmott and Young for their ideas of community in the East End in Part 2, and Sheila Patterson concerning racist portrayals of the black landlord in Part 3).¹⁰³⁷ It is indeed striking how London’s rented rooms form the insistent backdrop, if not the primary subject, of this work. And yet as Ruth Glass noted, the campaigning vigour that characterised the nineteenth-century social investigators had largely evaporated from the work of her contemporaries.¹⁰³⁸ Partly that comes down to a much more professionalised context. But if the urban sociology of the postwar period is hedged around by certain recurring doubts – doubts, for example, about the continuing significance of social class and the sustainability of community – then that also has to do

¹⁰³⁶ Richard Titmuss, ‘Universalism versus Selection’, in Christopher Pierson and Francis Castles eds., *The Welfare State Reader*, 2nd edn., (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 44.

¹⁰³⁷ Charles Booth, eds. Albert Fried and Richard Elman, *Charles Booth's London: A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century, Drawn from His "Life and Labour of the People in London"* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London: James Clarke and co., 1883); Pearl Jephcott, *A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964); Peter Wilmott and Michael Young, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge, 1957); Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: a Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (London: Tavistock, 1963).

¹⁰³⁸ Ruth Glass, ‘Urban Sociology in Great Britain: A Trend Report’, *Cliches of Urban Doom and Other Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 27-50. This essay originally published 1955.

with the changing nature of the urban scene itself. This latter reason conditions Jephcott's description of the exciting but also unnerving cosmopolitanism of Notting Hill, which I dwell on in Parts 1 and 2, with its early gentrification and jarring transitions in wealth. The same qualities emerge in Sheila Patterson's account of the 'incipient ghetto' (a racialised name for the 'zone of transition') in 1950s Brixton, where the presence of new cars outside the run-down terraces indicates an emergent social agency as well as possible illicit activity – embodied, as Part 3 went on to argue, in the figure of the black landlord.

Apart from bomb damage, if there was one thing that made the poor neighbourhood of the postwar period visibly different from the poor neighbourhood of fifty years earlier (depending on which part of the city you were looking at), then it was the presence of immigrants from the Commonwealth and former Empire. The problem of London's rented rooms was bound up with the problem of Britain's growing 'colour problem'. This is what I referred to in Parts 1 and 2 as the 'spatialisation of race', meaning, at the most basic level, the association of the 'problem' of race with a certain category of spaces (i.e. London's rented rooms), and, more complexly, the systematic instrumentalisation of that spatial linkage by landlords, developers, mortgage lenders and the state in order to recast the existing pattern of districts and neighbourhoods in the interests of private profit. Going far beyond academic circles, this spatialised nexus of social problems gained wide exposure through popular films and novels, as well as newspapers and magazines.

Representations of this 'problem' drew on earlier traditions that aimed to reveal the hardship of working-class life, for example from the documentary photography of the 1930s.¹⁰³⁹ Part 1 demonstrated this through an analysis of photographs (and films) of the migrant home in a variety of contexts, touching on the work of Bert Hardy, Roy Ward Baker and others. Just as often, however, films and novels depicted the arrival of black immigration as a burst of new life – both alluring and potentially dangerous – within a tired, worn-out environment. Colour served this purpose in striking ways, as Lynda Nead points out.¹⁰⁴⁰ With reference to *The L-Shaped Room* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1962), I showed in Part 2 how filmmakers similarly deployed cinema's powers of montage to reinterpret the London lodging house as an

¹⁰³⁹ Stephen Brooke, 'Revisiting Southam Street: Class, Generation, Gender, and Race in the Photography of Roger Mayne', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (April 2014), 453–496, p. 463–5.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (New Haven: Yale, 2017), pp. 176–197.

intricately racialised space, one that reinscribed the image of otherness, but also invited the possibility of new forms of community that bridged divisions of race, gender, age and class.

None of this is to deny the widespread racism of the period, which focused disproportionately on the coincidence of housing poverty and black immigration within certain London neighbourhoods. Even where it avoided outright demonisation, the depiction of black Londoners was often exoticised and rarely celebratory. But the compulsion felt by white filmmakers such as Roy Ward Baker and novelists including Colin MacInnes and Lynne Reid Banks to grapple with these issues shows how the imaginative space of the home was changing in profound ways;¹⁰⁴¹ ways that were, for these artists, not straightforwardly negative, but demanding of imaginative solutions, hence 'problematic' in another sense.

In the most interesting examples of this work, the space of London's rented rooms was understood as a transitional one. The zone of transition that Ruth Glass spoke of gains its fullest meaning as a place where new flows of people, capital and commodities collide, but equally where new social solidarities become possible. Building on the work of Clair Wills, Ben Highmore, Lynda Nead, Richard Hornsey and others, I have sought to demonstrate this through a close focus on the actual space of London's rented rooms, moving what is usually in the background to the foreground, substantiating my analysis of texts and visual sources through an original approach to previously untapped archival materials such as valuation lists.

The problematic nature of fictional works such as *The L-Shaped Room* ultimately reveals their limitations. Even where such works challenge racism, 'race' remains always a problem. For black Londoners, the spotlighting of everyday life within London's rented rooms took on a quite specific and oppressive meaning when a failure of manners could mean the difference between having a home and being denied one. But the migrant experience also shone its own acerbic light on the city. The declining state of London's private rented accommodation revealed the metropole as the tawdry imitation of an ideal of Britishness

¹⁰⁴¹ *Flame in the Streets* (dir. Roy Ward Baker, 1961), Colin MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, ebook edn. (London: Allison and Busby, 2011), originally 1959; Lynne Reid Banks, *The L-Shaped Room* (London: Vintage, 2004), originally 1960.

projected far and wide in the colonies. As I argued in Part 3 with respect to diasporic cultures and the ambivalent role of immigrant landlords, writers like Samuel Selvon and Donald Hinds found themselves in a unique position to channel the thoughts and feelings of the rented world.¹⁰⁴² It was this 'double consciousness' (seeing oneself being seen as 'other', and thus being made simultaneously aware of one's own colonised status, as well as the vulnerabilities and contradictions of the coloniser) that Selvon captured through his brilliant comedies of lodging house life.¹⁰⁴³ In a way that parallels the political project of the *West Indian Gazette*, Selvon's work reveals the rented worlds of London to be crossing points for diasporic knowledge and experience. Whereas the melodramas of Roy Ward Baker and Lynne Reid Banks project their hypothetical communities into the representational space of London's rented rooms, Selvon's novels, like the pages of the *West Indian Gazette*, make the rented world itself resonate with the force of the multitude.

2. Regulation

If London's rented rooms were represented as a space of social problems, then it fell first and foremost to the welfare state to deal with these problems. This thesis has considered the welfare state as an agglomeration of governmental and officially authorised non-governmental institutions, operating at both the local and national level: institutions ranging from the Ministry of Health, to the London County Council, to the Fire Protection Agency, to the Association of Psychiatric Social Workers, to local rent tribunals. Together these institutions provided a certain minimum level of public services as well as 'benefits', and, at the same time, controlled the parameters within which capital could operate, thus guaranteeing a stable environment for social reproduction on one side and accumulation on the other. In line with this understanding, I use the term 'regulation' to suggest the range of actions undertaken by the welfare state in and around London's rented rooms, insofar as these went beyond slum clearance and rebuilding.

¹⁰⁴² Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), originally 1956; Samuel Selvon, *The Housing Lark* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1965); Samuel Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Penguin, 2008), originally 1975; Donald Hinds, *Journey to an Illusion: The West Indian in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1966).

¹⁰⁴³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

Chief among the welfare state's regulatory responses to the rented world was the right to inspect. As I discussed in Part 2, numerous agents of national and local government were empowered to enter the homes of private individuals, from officials with the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, to district surveyors, to medical officers of health and psychiatric social workers. Such roles can be traced back to nineteenth-century legislation around common lodging houses.¹⁰⁴⁴ The law regarded the working-class dwelling as a place of danger. As was the case with the representational sphere, regulation based on the right to inspect inherited aspects of this nineteenth-century attitude. But it also changed in at least two important ways.

On the one hand, the subject of inspection shifted partly from the tenant to the landlord. Inspectors of various kinds concerned themselves much more with the landlord-tenant relationship than with the criminal or improper behaviour of tenants themselves. The LCC's high fire risk inspection programme, examined in Part 1, is one example of this shift. The physical space of the rented room continued to provide a material basis for assessments; the room as 'world' offered a rich collection of evidence. But it was more and more understood that forces beyond whoever happened to live there shaped this space. As I argued in Part 3, widespread anti-Landlord sentiment after the Second World War steered the work of inspectors, instilling it with a more social, relational remit. But the attention given to the figure of the landlord also limited the welfare state's regulatory efforts. As the landlord-tenant relationship was subsumed by larger forces within the property system, the inspector's job became that much more difficult.

At the same time, the right to inspect increasingly focused on the interior, psychological world of the subject. Part 2 identified a psychosocial turn in public health, which can be traced back to the idea of mental hygiene in the early twentieth century. It was a shift in priorities that accorded with the move away from representations of pure physical squalor. Mental distress and alienation appeared endemic to the rented worlds of the postwar metropolis. Psychiatric social workers (PSWs) and mental welfare officers embodied one attempt to repair the damage done by these psychological 'diswelfares'.¹⁰⁴⁵ Through such

¹⁰⁴⁴ Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 112.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Titmuss, 'Universalism versus Selection', p. 44.

agents and institutions the welfare state obtained a much more intimate level of contact with individuals than it did through physical reconstruction efforts, as important as these were.

Where scholars have paid attention to such intimate functions of the welfare state (and not simply confined their investigations to the ministerial and parliamentary level of governance), the tendency has been to see the welfare state largely as an instrument of control.¹⁰⁴⁶

Grasping the full extent of this repressive dimension is essential, particularly with regard to the buttressing of the most backwards aspects of the family. Indeed, this has been a key feature of both Foucauldian and feminist critiques of the welfare state.¹⁰⁴⁷ I have tried to get the measure of the welfare state's role in enforcing normative gender roles and sexual relations, for example in Part 2 with the discussion of loneliness, community and the family.

At the same time, I believe it is key to understand the welfare state as a contested and dynamic entity, whose contradictions – and hence opportunities for resistance – arise precisely from its entangled, mediary role within capitalism as such. Among scholars working within a more traditional framework of political or social administrative history, it is common to see the welfare state as a product of a long and complicated evolution, and yet rarely is it acknowledged that welfare 'clients' and welfare workers continued to struggle over what the welfare state should be and do beyond 1945.¹⁰⁴⁸ Where the fragility of the postwar consensus has been recognised, the analysis has again been confined largely to the level of top-level policy discussions.¹⁰⁴⁹ On the contrary – and I have argued this in Part 1 regarding the LCC Architect's Department, in Part 2 with respect to psychiatric social workers, and in Part 3 concerning rent tribunals – the postwar welfare state existed in a condition of constant and ongoing contestation at multiple levels. This contestation came, crucially, from both the subjects of the welfare state and from lower level administrators and welfare workers, something Virginia Noble has drawn attention to.¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁴⁶ Virginia Noble, *Inside the Welfare State: Foundations of Policy and Practice in Post-War Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977); Martin Hewitt, 'Biopolitics and Social Policy: Foucault's Account of Welfare', *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1983), 67-84; Jacques Donzelot, trans. Robert Hurley, *The Policing of Families* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, 3rd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State*, 2nd edn. (Harlow: Longman, 1996); Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945*, 3rd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Glen O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain: The Paradoxes of Progress, 1951-1973* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁰⁴⁹ Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah eds., *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945-64* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Noble, *Inside the Welfare State*, pp. 34-43.

Forms of regulation that focus on the psyche are particularly informative in this respect. In significant part, they were about control. The welfare state sought to correct the problem family, as well as the unstable individual who escaped the family's embrace. But at the same time, this turn 'from the premises to the person' entailed a new recognition of the psychological depth of working-class life, as I argued in Part 2 with reference to the work of Clare Winnicott and PSWs more generally.¹⁰⁵¹ Therapeutic skills moved from the couch to the kitchen table. The rented room, that purely conventional, abstract space, came to be regarded as a place of complex anxieties, conflicts and desires. The rented room therefore became a space of analysis and negotiation as much as one of observation and control.

Inspection, or the welfare state directly entering the homes of private individuals, was not the only means of regulation developed during the postwar period. What one might call 'reflexive' modes of regulation, or self-regulation, were just as important. Homeownership ranked as perhaps the most important form of self-regulation encouraged by the postwar welfare state. Building societies and other lenders used financial incentives backed by generous state subsidies, together with expert guidance and sophisticated publicity, to break down working-class reluctance regarding the idea of the mortgage.¹⁰⁵² Taking on debt was recast as responsible behaviour, a form of canny household management. This 'asset based welfare', which also encompassed the growth of private pensions and insurance, competed with the interventionist approach of other branches of the welfare state. By necessity, its appeal aimed at better-off tenants in private renting; new homeowners as much as new council house tenants were recruited from the declining private rental sector.

In Part 1, I argued that the sort of self-regulation implicit in homeownership profoundly influenced other areas of governance, including the promotion and management of safety in the home. The Fire Protection Association and the Joint Fire Research Organisation – semi-official and official organisations respectively – promoted ideas of responsible individual behaviour in the home. They did this despite their own research suggesting that the causes

¹⁰⁵¹ WS Maclay, 'Trends in the British Mental Health Service', in Hugh Freeman and James Farndale eds., *Trends in the Mental Health Services: A Symposium of Original and Reprinted Papers* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1963), 3-11, p. 3; Joel Kantar ed., *Face to Face with Children: The Life and Work of Clare Winnicott*, 2nd edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁰⁵² Peter Scott, 'Marketing Mass Home Ownership and The Creation of The Modern Working-Class Consumer in Inter-War Britain', *Business History*, 50 (January 2008), 4-25, pp. 10-12.

of house fires and other domestic accidents lay in factors related to housing poverty. Other organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents joined these promotional and educational efforts, showing how visual representation could be key to this form of regulation.

As I argued in Part 1, there was a close connection between such reflexive self-regulation and asset-based welfare. The growth of asset-based welfare can in turn be seen as part of the transformation of localised self-help organisations into major financial players in the mortgage market.¹⁰⁵³ This process was fully compatible with state-based welfare. National insurance, after all, implied the redundancy of small-scale cooperative insurance schemes and the neutralisation of the labour movement's demands for negligent employers to face 'unlimited liability' in the courts.¹⁰⁵⁴ And yet the postwar period also saw the emergence of new forms of what could be thought of as 'remutualisation', meaning the return of collective organisation and self-help within and around the institutions of the welfare state. Rent tribunals provide one example of such 'remutualisation'. The Labour government established them as a flexible way to control rents. But going far beyond this, tenants took up these new institutions as forums for voicing their discontent. In some cases, tenants organised collectively to use the tribunals to maximum effect, combining quasi-legal self-representation with other forms of action like rent strikes. The example of rent tribunals shows how the housing gains of the postwar period were only won through a process of continuous contestation and struggle.

Rent tribunals pitted tenant against landlord. Ultimately this proved to be their weakness. The tribunals opened the path to mutual solidarity among tenants and shone a spotlight on exploitative landlords, but they failed to reveal the wider property relations that bracketed the landlord-tenant relationship. Developers, mortgage lenders and institutional investors escaped scrutiny until a series of high profile scandals put the names of Jack Cotton, Joe Levy and others into public circulation. The growing links between developers and financial institutions such as pension funds and insurers highlights one of the great ironies of the

¹⁰⁵³ Peter Craig, 'The House that Jerry Built? Building Societies, the State and the Politics of Owner-Occupation', *Housing Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1986), 87-108.

¹⁰⁵⁴ V Markham Lester, 'The Employers' Liability/Workmen's Compensation Debate of the 1890s Revisited', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (June 2001), 471-495.; François Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 197-210 and in the same volume Daniel Defert, '"Popular Life" and Insurance Technology', 211-233.

postwar years. The very practices of asset-based welfare encouraged by at least one political strand of the welfare state during this period (primarily the Conservative party) led to an amassing of surplus capital that eventually found its long-term 'spatial fix' in the immensely destructive redevelopment of London's inner city.¹⁰⁵⁵ Asset-based welfare fueled development processes that displaced working-class tenants and caused unforeseen diswelfares, which the welfare state itself then had to compensate for. In the regulation of London's declining private rental sector we see how the contradictions of the welfare state – the 'crisis of crisis management', as Claus Offe put it – become spatial.¹⁰⁵⁶ The second degree crisis that Offe talked about plays out in an arena that has been the focus of this thesis: the 'zone of transition'.

3. Experience

The 'zone of transition' moves us away from the idea of the slum as a place of squalor. It does, however, suggest a space of restless energies and shifting populations. This thesis has grappled with that notion. While London's rented worlds were in many cases uncertain and precarious they could also be places of remarkable rootedness, as I demonstrated in Part 2, for example, regarding the rooming house districts of north London, and in Part 3 concerning the role of tenant-landladies in shaping the neighbourhood patterns of the East End.

Areas that exhibited this surprising rootedness owed much of their character to the twin legacies of struggle and regulation conducted over the past fifty years. Rent control, including via the rent tribunals – the product of several waves of rent strikes and mass occupations from 1915 to 1946 – brought a measure of stability to London's rented worlds.¹⁰⁵⁷ Through the Housing Repairs and Rents Act of 1954 and the Rent Act of 1957 the Conservative government began the process of dismantling rent controls, only for a major backlash and electoral defeat in 1964 to lead to the partial reimposition of controls on

¹⁰⁵⁵ Bernd Belina, 'Capitalist Productions of Space and Economic Crisis: David Harvey's Notion of the Spatial Fix', *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (2011), 239-252.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Claus Offe, trans. John Keane, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1984).

¹⁰⁵⁷ On the history of rent strikes from 1915 to the 1960s see Neil Gray, 'Introduction: Rent Unrest: From the 1915 Rent Strikes to Contemporary Housing Struggles', *Rent and Its Discontents: A Century of Housing Struggle* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018), xvii-xxxix.

a new 'flexible' model a year later.¹⁰⁵⁸ Struggles against exploitative landlords like Bertram Waters and Peter Rachman, stoked the outcry against pro-landlord policies like rent decontrol. As I argued in Part 3, rent control and the struggles around it helped partially subordinate the rental relationship to a set of normative, customary relations that could not easily be reduced to the contract between landlord and tenant. We saw this in Part 3, with the role that working-class women played in securing tenancies, and the forms of financial and social support operating within kinship networks and sometimes between neighbours. Practices like this unfolded against the background of a broadly regulated rental market, in which tenants grew accustomed to the possibility of negotiating more favourable terms.

These social practices – which were also spatial practices, in the sense that they shaped neighbourhoods – found another parallel in the house sharing and co-ownership practices of migrants, particularly within the Caribbean and Punjabi diasporas, as explored in Part 3. Practices such as these, by contrast, evolved out of the precarity of the housing situation faced by migrants. Denied the opportunities of new public housing and suburban homeownership, migrant communities in postwar London developed their own strategies of securing a stable home for themselves. In certain cases, these strategies were explicitly political, designed to counter the injustices of the housing system and influenced by anti-colonial politics (see for example the role of the *West Indian Gazette* and the Integration Mortgage Company).

Such practices were reflected in the space of the home. What I have called in Part 1 'partitioning practices' maximised the use of limited domestic space. The room as 'burrow' or 'conventional hole', the space of Pinter's room with which I opened this thesis – in other words an abstract space of property which is also a space of abstract humanity – rarely mirrored the actual experience of London's rented worlds.¹⁰⁵⁹ Tenants displayed a much more complex use and management of space. Everyday spatial practice carved out extra degrees of privacy within the room and restructured the 'privacy gradient' of shared landings,

¹⁰⁵⁸ Keith G. Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy: Britain in the 1960s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 14.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 34; Gaston Bachelard, trans. Maria Jolas, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 27; Harold Pinter, 'The Room', in Harold Pinter, *Harold Pinter Plays: One* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), 99-126, first performed 1957.

corridors and staircases.¹⁰⁶⁰ Rented spaces seen to uphold only a flimsy attachment to property were rewritten in this way as spaces of belonging. Such practices did not only face inwards; they often created temporary public uses within private domestic space. The blues clubs set up in the basements and front rooms of rented accommodation in Notting Hill provide one example of this.

One might question the value of examining these minor facts of everyday life. And yet these everyday spatial practices could reveal something of the psychogeography of the home, the disposition of hallowed and profaned parts, the accumulation, as in the writings of Carolyn Steedman, discussed in Part 3, of knots of anxiety, unspeakable social breaches, and secret desires.¹⁰⁶¹ Such practices could also become distinctly racialised, magnified in their otherness and projected on a national stage by media representations.

Understanding spatial practice moves us beyond the homogenising view of the slum. It shows the determination of tenants to create liveable, dignified environments out of difficult circumstances. This is what I have called 'staying power' and it has clear implications for the politics of property. Spatial practices carve out or accrue a sense of belonging which can act as a counterweight to the dissolving effects of abstract space. Making an argument in favour of belonging is therefore often the first step in resisting displacement.¹⁰⁶² People make such arguments materially as well as discursively. Spatial practice can therefore be a prelude to more explicit forms of political action; it can equally consummate the results of such action.

This understanding of the relationship between spatial practice and the politics of property resonates with recent scholarship that seeks to move beyond the idea of property as a set of rights embodied in a person or an object. Sarah Keenan, in this vein, theorises property as a relationship of belonging 'held up' in space.¹⁰⁶³ Property-owning subjects are embedded in spatially delimited networks involving other subjects, objects, places and institutions. This wider context underwrites the property relation, creating networks of belonging or exclusion.

¹⁰⁶⁰ The phrase 'privacy gradient' is from Julia Twigg, 'The Spatial Ordering of Care: Public and Private in Bathing Support at Home', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1999), 381-400.

¹⁰⁶¹ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986).

¹⁰⁶² See in this connection Carol Rose's well known theorisation of property as a form of 'persuasion', *Property and Persuasion: Essays on the History, Theory and Rhetoric of Ownership* (Boulder: Westview, 1994).

¹⁰⁶³ Sarah Keenan, 'Subversive Property: Reshaping Malleable Spaces of Belonging', *Social and Legal Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2010), 423-439.

Nicholas Blomley similarly argues that spatial and material practices redraw – or reinforce – the boundaries of property.¹⁰⁶⁴ Where I depart from this work, as argued initially in Part 1, is in its overarching incrementalism. Keenan writes,

The more that similar objects and bodies habitually settle in the same space, the more finely that space comes to be shaped to fit them. As time passes, the contours of the space become rigid, forming grooves that funnel similar objects and bodies in the same direction, and unsettling and deflecting objects and bodies that do not fit. Networks of belonging thus become shaped such that some subjects are more likely to become embedded in them than others. This shaping of space over time in the mould of the objects or bodies that are already embedded in it means that property tends to shape the future in the same mould as the past.¹⁰⁶⁵

It seems to me that this incremental perspective, while rightly rejecting the idea of space as a passive surface of inscription, fails to grasp the totalising yet fragmentary nature of space under capitalism. It fails, in other words, to understand the contradictory unity – first seriously explored by Henri Lefebvre – between the abstract and concrete dimensions of space; between form which ‘gives access to contents’ and contents which ‘overflow form’; between urban form as the imagined and imposed existence of a simultaneous ‘whole’, and the social actuality of that urbanity as ‘the encounter and concentration of what exists around, [and] in the environment’, that is, the urban as ‘privileged social site, as [the] *meaning* of productive and consuming activities’.¹⁰⁶⁶

While it is true that everyday spatial practices shape the space around them, such practices take place in spatial conditions not of their own choosing. The relationship of belonging built up slowly through day-to-day experience can be, and frequently is, swept away by the forces of capital. Capital itself may operate incrementally for a time, but such incremental growth or decline functions ultimately as a prelude to more comprehensive re-workings of space. The gradual differentiation of a theoretically homogeneous space through uneven development

¹⁰⁶⁴ Nicholas Blomley, ‘The Boundaries of Property: Complexity, Relationality, and Spatiality’, *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2016).

¹⁰⁶⁵ Keenan, ‘Subversive Property’, pp. 433-4.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Henri Lefebvre, ‘On Urban Form’, in Henri Lefebvre, ed. and trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 133-8, pp. 135 and 137-8. My emphasis.

creates the opportunities as well as the barriers that call for a concerted assault on, and wholesale appropriation of, relatively under-developed or over-developed spaces.¹⁰⁶⁷ Capital at this point operates through abstract plans rather than gradual 'contouring':¹⁰⁶⁸ it divides, assembles, encircles and exchanges; it lays down grids of potentiality. And through this process of abstraction it dissolves existing concrete and lived spaces, including many well worn 'grooves'. 'All that is solid melts into air', even capital itself, previous incarnations of which come to be seen as barriers to further accumulation.¹⁰⁶⁹

But this 'melting vision' represents only one moment in a contradictory dialectic. For the moment that capital puts its plans into effect, the moment that it seeks to capitalise on potential values, at precisely this point, abstract, mobile, 'fictitious' capital becomes real, immovable and concrete. Theoretical grids become fixed in actual space, establishing new channels for spatial practice. The gradual divergence of the latter from its original, more or less fixed circuits is part of what characterises the uneven development of space. As flows of investment dry up, space rigidifies. The monuments of abstraction lose their glamour, but in doing so offer shelter to otherwise marginalised forms of life. Everyday spatial practice builds up its own relationship of belonging in the gap between one round of accumulation and another. Spatial practice is therefore always living on borrowed time; it exists in a space of discontinuity.

Space under capitalism is total but not seamless; it encompasses all aspects of social life but is riven by contradictions (contradictions that go beyond gradations of belonging or exclusion). It is this contradictory totality, approximated by the terms abstract space, spatial practice and representational spaces, that this thesis has tried to grasp in a specific historical moment.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*, 3rd edn. (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), pp. 181-5.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Keenan, 'Subversive Property', p. 434.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore, *Communist Manifesto* (London: 2015), p. 6; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 3rd edn. (London: Verso, 2010); David Harvey, 'The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation: A Reconstruction of the Marxian Theory', in David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 237-266.

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