

ETHIC LOST: BRUTALISM AND THE REGENERATION OF SOCIAL HOUSING
ESTATES IN GREAT BRITAIN

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Between the late 1940s and the 1970s, the New Brutalism attempted to establish an ethical architecture befitting post-World War II Britain. For this reason, it became a popular style for public buildings, including social housing. Brutalist social housing estates were conceived by progressive post-war architects to house Britain's neediest. Through an analysis of the utopian roots of Brutalism and the decline of the style and its ethic in scholarship and popular culture, I analyze the current redevelopment of three seminal Brutalist housing estates and the rediscovery of the Brutalist aesthetic by contemporary scholars and consumers alike. In this thesis, I argue that due to multiple factors, including a housing shortage across Britain, rising real-estate values and a general consumer interest in mid-century design, these estates are undergoing such regenerations. My thesis enhances our understanding of how social and political influences have shaped post-war British social housing up to the present.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The New Brutalism had a powerful and pervasive impact on twentieth-century British architecture. More than that, between the late 1940s and the 1970s, the New Brutalism attempted to establish an ethical architecture befitting post-World War II Britain. For this reason, it became a popular style for public buildings, including social housing. As central figures associated with British Brutalism, Alison and Peter Smithson and their design for Robin Hood Gardens (1966-1972) in Tower Hamlets, London, will figure largely in this narrative. Though they completed relatively few projects, their plans and writings were foundational to the establishment of the New Brutalist ethic and aesthetic.

With the imminent demolition of Robin Hood Gardens and redevelopment facing many Brutalist housing developments today, this thesis examines the role of Brutalist design in contemporary social housing. What accounts for the recent disappearance of Brutalist architecture as a form for low-income social housing in Britain? To answer this question, I begin by discussing the utopian roots of the New Brutalism, particularly with regard to the Smithsons and their plans for two social housing developments: the design collages for Golden Lane (1952) and Robin Hood Gardens. I then discuss the decline of Brutalism in scholarship, popular culture and public policy in the 1970s and 1980s, which, directly and indirectly, contributed to the deterioration of many housing estates throughout the 1990s. Finally, I will analyze the current redevelopment of three seminal Brutalist housing estates and the rediscovery of the Brutalist aesthetic by scholars and

consumers alike, which has in part perpetuated redevelopment and private sale.¹ My thesis, therefore, enhances our understanding of how social and political influences have shaped post-war British public housing from its inception to the present.

Through a discussion of the utopian roots of the New Brutalist movement and the dystopian reality of their current circumstances, I will examine what has become of several Brutalist housing schemes. Robin Hood Gardens, currently slated for demolition to make room for a large-scale redevelopment, will serve as the primary example. Balfron Tower (1967) in Tower Hamlets, London and Park Hill in Sheffield (1957-1961) will serve as examples of regeneration sites where original Brutalist housing is now being rehabilitated. Regeneration has become a popular term meaning the redevelopment of existing social housing estates, which entails demolition or significant rehabilitation, but almost always involves the relocation of current low-income tenants. The regeneration process is often tantamount to gentrification. Both Balfron Tower and Park Hill were granted heritage listing in the 1990s, which has aided in their physical survival, but not in keeping their original purpose as social housing. As will be shown, while heritage listing may protect Brutalist housing developments from the wrecking ball, it does not protect low-income residents from being forced out once these buildings are rehabilitated.

In 1953, Alison and Peter Smithson first used the term “New Brutalism” to describe a house they were designing in Soho, which incorporated concrete, exposed

¹ I want to be clear that this is not a case of direct cause and effect. It would be inaccurate to state that because of a renewed interest in the Brutalist aesthetic, Brutalist housing estates are being redeveloped and privately sold. However, it can be said that the current shortage of housing in Britain, together with a renewed interest in mid-century design has made these properties attractive to developers and buyers alike. This situation is exacerbated by gentrification in many urban areas of the United Kingdom, especially in London boroughs such as Tower Hamlets. In the third section of this thesis, I will provide evidence to support this claim.

brick and rough wood to create an industrial aesthetic.² Throughout the 1950s, the Smithsons were developing their ideas about form, materials and the relationship between people and their environments. In the spring of 1950, the Smithsons won the design competition for Hunstanton School. With its bare concrete walls and exposed plumbing, the building displayed the Smithsons' theories of truth in materials. For many, the Smithsons included, this design epitomized the New Brutalist style.³ The Smithsons further discussed the naming of the movement in their 1973 book *Without Rhetoric*:

Coined on sight of a newspaper paragraph heading which called (by poor translation of Beton Brut?) the Marseilles Unité 'Brutalism in architecture'... 'New,' both because we came after Le Corbusier, and in response to the going literary style of the Architectural Review which—at the start of the 'fifties—was running articles on the New Monumentality, the New Empiricism, the New Sentimentality, and so on.⁴

Here, the Smithsons acknowledge their stylistic debt to Le Corbusier, writing that his Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles “was the nearest thing to what we were looking for,” but differentiate their enterprise by adding “New” to the term created in response to Le Corbusier's work.⁵

In the same year that they applied the term the “New Brutalism” to their house in Soho, the Smithsons presented their “Urban Re-Identification” Grid at the 9th

² See Alex Kitnick, “Introduction,” *October* 136 (Spring 2011), 3. Reyner Banham cites the Swedish architect Hans Apslund with the first use of the term “New Brutalism” in 1950, which he applied to a small house in Uppsala designed by Bengt Edman and Lennart Holm. Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*, (New York: Reinhold Publishing Company, 1996), 10. See also “Apslund” in Jonathan Meades, “The Incredible Hulks: Jonathan Meades' A-Z of Brutalism,” *The Guardian*, 13 February, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/feb/13/jonathan-meades-brutalism-a-z>.

³ Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1973), 6.

⁴ Smithon, *Without Rhetoric*, 2.

⁵ Ibid., 3. It should also be noted that Le Corbusier never applied the term Brutalist to any of his works. See “Cité Radieuse” in Jonathan Meades, “The Incredible Hulks: Jonathan Meades' A-Z of Brutalism,” *The Guardian*, February 13, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/feb/13/jonathan-meades-brutalism-a-z>.

International Conferences of Modern Architecture (CIAM) conference in Aix-en-Provence. The conference in Aix-en-Provence also marked the formation of the group known as Team 10, whose members included the Smithsons, Aldo van Eyck, Jacob Bakema, Georges Candilis, and Shadrach Woods (fig. 1; see Appendix A for all figures).⁶ Team 10 was made up of a younger generation of architects who were generally dissatisfied with the four functions of the Athens Charter: working, living, circulation, recreation.⁷ Many felt that as a planning method, the functional city lacked flexibility and encouraged universality.⁸ Though the Team 10 architects were united in their dissatisfaction with the status quo in the CIAM leadership, the group struggled to create a coherent vision or a unified program, and was often divided among its British and Dutch members.⁹

One of forty grids presented at CIAM 9, the Smithsons' "Urban Re-identification" Grid further emphasized this break with Corbusian planning.¹⁰ Participants were asked to prepare a "Grid of Living" on a standardized panel of 21 x 33 cm.¹¹ In their grid, the Smithsons replaced Le Corbusier's well-known "Dwelling, Work, Recreation, Transportation" from the 1943 publication of Athens Charter with "House, Street, District, City" (fig. 2). The Smithsons' terms imply an interconnectedness between the urban environment and the individual, without limitations placed on what types of

⁶ Annie Predet, *Team 10: An Archival History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

⁷ These functions were originally conceived at CIAM 4 in 1933. *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁹ The last CIAM congress took place in Otterlo in 1959. Team 10 continued to meet until 1981.

¹⁰ Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1930-1960*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 228.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

activities might be done in each particular place.¹² In the accompanying text to their grid, the Smithsons wrote, “Our hierarchy of associations is woven into a modulated continuum representing the true complexity of human association.”¹³ The terms they chose could be substituted with any number of “new equivalents” in post-war society that would help people identify with their environment.¹⁴ They used photographs taken by their friend and frequent collaborator, Nigel Hendersen, of children playing in the streets of the working-class neighborhood Bethnal Green to illustrate the aleatory possibilities of identifying with one’s community (fig. 3).

For the Smithsons, the New Brutalism was about much more than simply rough concrete and exposed plumbing as it is often conceived. As the architects wrote in a 1957 issue of *Architectural Design*, “Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work. Up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical.”¹⁵ In this way, the Brutalist aesthetic was a means to show the materials used and physical labor required to create any structure.¹⁶ The New Brutalism served as a reevaluation of the modernist movement, and included the use of building materials as they were found,

¹² 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*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 92.

¹³ Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 235.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁵ Alison and Peter Smithson, “The New Brutalism,” Reprinted in *October* 136 (Spring 2011), 37.

¹⁶ Kitnick, “Introduction,” 6.

which often resulted in a focus on the surface of the material at hand and methods of mass-production.¹⁷

Reyner Banham was the first architectural historian to write about the movement in his 1955 essay in *Architectural Review*, “The New Brutalism.” For Banham, Brutalist architecture exhibits its basic structure and materials.¹⁸ He wrote of the Smithsons’ design at Hunstanton School, “One can see what Hunstanton is made of, and how it works, and there is not another thing to see except the play of spaces.”¹⁹ The legibility and cohesiveness of the school at Hunstanton “contributes to the building as an image.”²⁰ For a building to be an “image,” according to Banham:

...The building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity, and that the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by the experience of the building in use. Further, that this form should be entirely proper to the functions and materials of the building, in their entirety.²¹

In his final analysis, Banham defines three criteria for Brutalist architecture, including:

1, Memorability as an image; 2, Clear exhibition of Structure; and 3, Valuation of Materials “as found.” Remembering that an Image is what affects the emotions, the structure, in its fullest sense, is the relationship of parts, and that materials “as found” are raw materials.²²

For Reyner Banham, the Smithsons and many other artists and architects in Great Britain, Brutalism was a new way of thinking about form and materials in the post-war world.

The promises of high modernism had ended in the rubble of bomb sites and the devastation suffered during World War II. After surviving this trauma, architects in

¹⁷ Kitnick, “Introduction,” 4.

¹⁸ Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” reprinted in *October* 136 (Spring 2011), 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 28.

Britain sought a way of building to better fit their new reality. For many, Brutalism offered a way forward.

Housing statistics

As much as this thesis is about the development of the Brutalist social housing and the changing popular opinion of Brutalism from the seventies onward, it is also a story of the challenges facing British affordable housing today. The three schemes discussed in this thesis are singular instances within the broader scope of regeneration projects currently taking place all over Great Britain. In the current election cycle, housing has been a priority issue for the electorate. The Tories proposed to bring back Thatcher's Right to Buy plan for housing association tenants, which illustrates the often cyclical nature of policy as politicians search for solutions to today's most pressing issues. For many, the Thatcher policies have contributed to the lack of affordable housing available in the United Kingdom today, as will be discussed further in chapter four of this thesis.

The British national election took place on May 7, 2015. The Conservative Party won an outright majority with Labour losing many votes to the Scottish National Party.²³ In their party manifesto, the Tories promised to build 275,000 new affordable homes by 2020, and create a £1 billion fund for "brownfield sites" to redevelop previously used housing sites.²⁴ The Tories have also proposed to extend the right to buy to housing

²³ Laura Mark, "What might the Tories have in store for architecture?," *Architects' Journal*, May 8, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/what-might-the-tories-have-in-store-for-architecture/8682648.article>.

²⁴ A "brownfield site" is defined as an urban site previously built upon with the potential for redevelopment. Ibid.

association tenants, and will require local authorities to sell their remaining social housing assets to fund new home construction.²⁵

Due to a multitude of factors, including governmental programs such as Right to Buy, demographic changes, economic growth, and alterations in household structure, there is a chronic undersupply of affordable housing available in Great Britain today.²⁶ Social housing is assigned by local governmental authorities on the basis of need, with preference given to those who are homeless, live in overcrowded conditions, or have medical needs.²⁷ Social housing developments are owned by the local town council or by a housing association, though the latter is becoming more common due to limited governmental funding.

In England there are just under four million social housing dwellings, which accounts for 17.3 percent of all housing stock.²⁸ Still, as of July 2014, there were 1.8 million households on the social housing register (waiting list), with near 650,000 of those considered high priority due to overcrowded conditions.²⁹ With market rents rising and property values increasing, especially in London where market rent is often 80 percent of median earnings, the current housing situation in Great Britain is unsustainable.³⁰ While regeneration schemes generally add a net gain of affordable

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Arno Schmickler and Kenneth Sungho Park, "UK Social Housing and Housing Market in England: A Statistical Review and Trends," *LHI Journal* 5:3 (2014), 193.

²⁷ Ibid., 194.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 196.

³⁰ Ibid.

housing to existing developments, to do so they often evict tenants who are on social assistance, forcing them to relocate far away from friends and family, while estates sit empty for long periods waiting for construction to begin.³¹

Literature review

The Smithsons wrote prolifically, and in their 1973 book *Without Rhetoric*, the architects acknowledged their relationship to Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. They name Mies van der Rohe's Lafayette Park (1959) in Detroit as an expression of their desire to reduce urban density and put "the car in its place," separate from human foot traffic.³²

And of the architects at work in our lifetime it has been Mies van der Rohe who has jumped so often and so well into the unknown, in spite of superficial appearances. Our debt to Mies van der Rohe is so great it is difficult to disentangle what are our own thoughts so often have they been the result of insights received from him.³³

They write that their Hunstanton School design was significantly influenced by both Japanese architecture, in the focus on form, and Mies van der Rohe for his "special feeling of materials as luxury."³⁴ Both of these aspects, form and material, were critical to the Smithsons' New Brutalist aesthetic.

According to Reyner Banham in his 1966 book *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*, the ethic of Brutalism was a British invention.³⁵ Whereas Le Corbusier

³¹ See Vice's recent web episode focused on Carpenter's Estate in the Newham borough of London for an excellent overview of the current housing crisis, "The ReGeneration Game," http://www.vice.com/en_uk/video/regeneration-game.

³² Smithson, *Without Rhetoric*, 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁵ Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*, (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1966), 134.

represented the high-style of Brutalism in his Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, the British created a "vernacular brutalism" and contributed "the ethic behind the aesthetic."³⁶

Additionally, Royston Landau's *New Directions in British Architecture*, published in 1968, provides a clear explanation of the division between architects and planners who supported more traditional developments in housing, such as British New Towns, and those who proposed more progressive housing solutions, such as the Smithsons.

Alison and Peter Smithson: A Critical Anthology, edited by Max Risselada, is an important new source containing seminal essays on the Smithsons' work. The anthology includes writings by Simon Smithson, Phillip Johnson, Reyner Banham, Kenneth Frampton, Beatrice Colomina, Peter Eisenmann and Cees Boekraad. In his essay "The Way Back," Cees Boekraad discusses the Smithsons' work in relation to Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles and Mies van der Rohe's design for the Illinois Institute of Technology. Boekraad discusses the influence of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, commissioned by the French government and completed in 1952, on the rise of the Brutalist aesthetic. Though the Smithsons were clearly influenced by this work for their social housings designs, they also reacted against it with the development of their broad exterior corridors in their plans for the Golden Lane Estate (1952). Boekraad describes the influence of Mies van der Rohe's campus for the Illinois Institute of Technology (started 1945) on the Smithsons' design for Hunstanton School (1950-54), but notes differences in the works. He writes,

The difference with Mies Van der Rohe seems to lie in the fact that Hunstanton School attempts to find a typology for a new kind of school: construction, function and form coincide, whereas Mies's aim was geared to keep these as far apart as possible (the 'how' should not be mixed with the 'what'). A second

³⁶ Ibid.

important difference is the attempt by the Smithsons to generate a dialogue with the surroundings.³⁷

Boekraad places the Smithsons' work within the context of the rise of Abstract Expressionism, citing the exhibition of Jackson Pollock's work at the 1950 Venice Biennale, and within the Independent Group, with whom they exhibited in the 1950s.³⁸ As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the expressiveness of Pollock's work was a source of inspiration to the Smithsons in their conception of the Cluster.

Another important recent work is the anthology, *Neo-Avant-Garde and Postmodern: Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, edited by Claire Zimmerman and Mark Crinson and published in 2010. In his essay "Streets in the Air: Alison and Peter Smithson's Doorstep Philosophy," Ben Highmore examines the Smithsons' design submission for the Golden Lane housing project in 1952. By proposing broad, exterior corridors, the Smithsons sought to create spaces for resident interaction and community identity. Highmore also analyzes the Smithsons' innovative combination of popular culture and wartime destruction in their design collages.

Nicolas Bullock's essay in the same collection, "Building the Socialist Dream or Housing the Socialist State? Design versus the Production of Housing in the 1960s," provides excellent background on the prioritizing of social housing by the British government after World War II. He cites the Smithsons' commission for Robin Hood Gardens as part of the progressive housing design program initiated by the Labour Party in the immediate post-war era. According to Bullock, by commissioning the Smithsons,

³⁷ Cees Boekraad, "The Way Back," in *Alison and Peter Smithson: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Max Risselada. (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 2011), 279-280.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

the Greater London Council took a high “design” approach to social housing. This approach emphasized progressive architectural tendencies, while disregarding conventional traditions in the design of housing estates, which were typically formally conventional, functional and inexpensively constructed.³⁹

Lastly, no discussion of demolition in social housing would be complete without mentioning the impact of Pruitt-Igoe in Saint Louis. The demolition of Pruitt-Igoe began in 1972, the same year that Robin Hood Gardens was completed. In her 1991 article, “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,” Katharine Bristol dispels the popular modern myth that the demolition of the public housing project signaled the end of modern architecture, as Charles Jencks asserted in his 1977 *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*. Bristol argues that by conflating the failure of the public housing project with failure in architectural design, critics simultaneously ignore the broader social and economic contexts of racial segregation, poverty, disinvestment and neglected upkeep in the complex, while vaulting the importance of the architectural profession by suggesting that design plays a key role in solving social woes.⁴⁰ This argument can be transferred to the demolition debate over Robin Hood Gardens, where design flaws continue to be cited as contributing factors in the decision to demolish.

³⁹ Nicolas Bullock, “Building the Socialist Dream,” in *Neo-Avant-Garde and Postmodern: Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, eds. Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 324.

⁴⁰ Katharine Bristol, “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,” *Journal of Architectural Education*, 44, no. 3 (May 1991), 163.

CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW BRUTALISM

In 1952, Alison and Peter Smithson submitted a proposal for the Golden Lane Housing Estate to be constructed on a World War II bombsite in London. The photomontages produced for the design competition, reveal many of their philosophical and artistic enterprises, which, for the Smithsons, constituted a break from then current modernist architectural practice. In both of these collages, we see the New Brutalism's "as found" and "making do" ethics aestheticized with a proto-pop art artistic sensibility (figs. 4-5). According to the Smithsons, architects in Britain should take stock of post-war reality and make use of materials at their disposal. The concept of the "as found" in their thinking meant looking to materials and forms in their immediate surroundings as a stimulus for creation.⁴¹ Likewise the notion of the New Brutalism as a "make do" approach comes from the experience of war time scarcity and destruction.⁴²

In figure five, both of these concepts are illustrated in the depiction of the Golden Lane estate drawn in atop the detritus of the existing site. An instance of "making do" can be seen in the man riding his bicycle through the rubble in the middle ground of the collage. For the Smithsons, the bicycle epitomized the hobbies of the working class and was, therefore, an important part of their conception of street life in working-class neighborhoods. They hoped to recreate the spontaneity of these neighborhood streets with their streets in the sky at Golden Lane (fig.6).⁴³

⁴¹ Claude Lichtenstein, and Thomas Schregenerberger, *As Found : The Discovery of the Ordinary*. English ed. (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2001), 11.

⁴² See Ben Highmore, "Rough Poetry: Patio and Pavilion Revisited," *Oxford Art Journal* 29.2, 2006, 271.

⁴³ See Ben Highmore. "Streets in the Air: Alison and Peter Smithson's Doorstep Philosophy," in *Neo-Avant-Garde and Postmodern*, edited by Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman, 87.

The Smithsons' goal, according to Reyner Banham in his 1955 essay "The New Brutalism," was to establish "une architecture autre."⁴⁴ He wrote, "Even if it were true that the Brutalists speak only to one another, the fact that they have stopped speaking to Mansart, to Palladio, and to Alberti would make the New Brutalism... a major contribution to the architecture of today."⁴⁵ In fact, in the years immediately following the Second World War, many people and events both outside and inside architecture influenced the Smithsons, their production and the establishment of the New Brutalism.

On a global level, the United Kingdom was financially exhausted and materially damaged by the war effort. The Smithsons' conception of the "as found" is a result of these conditions. The Smithsons wrote:

Thus the 'as found' was a new way of seeing the ordinary, an openness to how prosaic 'things' could re-energise our inventive activity. A confronting recognition of what the post-war world actually was like. In a society that had nothing (sic). You reached for what there was, previously unthought of things... We were concerned with the seeing of materials for what they were: the woodness of wood; the sandiness of sand.⁴⁶

As is clear in the above, the materiality of Brutalism, with its use of rough concrete and exposed structural systems, is a consequence of post-war conditions of scarcity. From the Smithsons' point of view, the aesthetic of the New Brutalism is very closely related to its ethical foundation.

Furthermore, in the immediate post-war period, Britain's colonial empire was crumbling. In 1947 India gained independence from England and established itself as a

⁴⁴ Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism" *Architectural Review*, December 1955. Reprinted in *October 136*, Spring 2011, 21.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ From Alison and Peter Smithson, "The 'As Found' and the Found" in Claude Lichtenstein, and Thomas Schregener, *As Found : The Discovery of the Ordinary*, 40.

sovereign nation under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. One year later, Britain lost control of Palestine with the end of the Palestine Mandate and the establishment of Israel. In a collage for their Golden Lane project, the Smithsons included Nehru waving from a balcony at right (fig. 5). As the first Prime Minister of an independent and sovereign India, Jawaharlal Nehru was known for his socialist and secular policies. Ben Highmore wrote of Nehru as a source of inspiration to the Smithsons' generation:

It was a socialism minted in in the intense optimism of independence, and it took its belief system not so much from Marx and Lenin as from the idea that technological progress promised unlimited solutions to the desperate needs of the country...For a whole generation of designers, architects, politicians and others the technological, soft-socialism associated with Nehru made him a central figure for social optimism in the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁷

Highmore makes clear the importance of a figure like Nehru to a young generation of architects disillusioned by war and hopeful for a better future. Though the Smithsons incorporated several other recognizable figures in their Golden Lane submissions, the inclusion of Nehru can be understood as representative of the possibilities of a post-war, post-colonial Britain and of their own progressive political views.

On a local level, the Smithsons found inspiration in the work of painters, photographers, and sculptors. Especially important for them were members of the Independent Group, including their frequent collaborators, Nigel Hendersen and Eduardo Paolozzi. The founding of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1946 in London offered a new venue for collaboration and debate amongst artists, writers and architects. In 1950, Hendersen shot his iconic images of street play in the Bethnal Green district of London. Two years later, the Independent Group was established with Paolozzi,

⁴⁷ Ben Highmore. "Streets in the Air: Alison and Peter Smithson's Doorstep Philosophy," 87.

Hendersen and Reyner Banham in attendance at the first meeting at the ICA. In 1953, The Smithsons exhibited with Henderson and Paolozzi in the *Parallel of Life and Art* exhibition at the ICA (fig.7). Reyner Banham later cited this exhibit as “a locus classicus” of the New Brutalist movement.⁴⁸ In the same year, the Smithsons presented the “Urban Re-Identification” Grid at CIAM 9 in Aix-en Provence, and Team 10 was formed by architects including the Smithsons, Aldo van Eyck, Jacob Bakema, and Georges Candilis. Together, Team 10 challenged Le Corbusier’s functionalist city planning which had dominated CIAM since its inception in 1928.⁴⁹ All of these events, on a large and small scale, affected the Smithsons’ conception of the New Brutalism, both as an architecture and as an ethic.

The New Brutalism was, at heart, a utopian movement. The Smithsons’ design entry for the Golden Lane Housing Project competition displays this utopianism in a variety of ways. For example, the architects place the creation of community at its core. They envisioned the corridors of housing estates as places of sociality and the doorstep as the threshold between public and private space.⁵⁰ To encourage the viewer’s identification with the figures populating the housing estate, the Smithsons filled their Golden Lane collages with recognizable celebrities. In figure four, Joe Dimaggio holds Marilyn Monroe’s arm as they walk in the access gallery, while a man plays with a baby near the stairwell (fig. 4). In figure five, the French actor, Gérard Philipe stands in the left

⁴⁸ Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” 21.

⁴⁹ Lichtenstein, *As Found*, 13.

⁵⁰ Highmore, “Streets in the Air: Alison and Peter Smithson’s Doorstep Philosophy,” 84.

foreground with his arms crossed (fig. 5). People are shown scattered throughout the decks in the distance in both collages.

Human habitation was central to the Smithsons' design. Habitation was not only intended for the dwellings, however. Socialization was also a key component in their conception of servant spaces. The British landscape had changed; it was the architect's responsibility to create places of sociality and meaning, or to re-create them, as was the case with the Smithsons' streets in the sky.⁵¹ Such was their utopian sense of professional mission. Nearly ten years later, they were still focused on sociability and inhabitation in their design for Robin Hood Gardens.

In post-war Great Britain, Brutalism became a powerful force in public architecture. Institutions meant to last, such as schools, housing and government buildings were constructed in the Brutalist style. As an architecture with utopian roots, Brutalism signified solidity, honesty, and unpretentiousness—all of the best things public institutions could represent. World War II had left Britain in ruins and, for all of its refinement, high-modernist design had failed to bring about tangible improvements. After the end of World War II, housing was made a top governmental priority in the rebuilding efforts. Many housing initiatives, including the New Towns Act of 1946 and the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, were enacted under Clement Atlee's Labour Party in order to provide much needed housing to the British people. Historian Nicolas Bullock writes, "Shared, too, during the 1950s and 1960s was the view, shaped by the experience of war and reconstruction, that benign 'top-down' intervention by the state would build a

⁵¹ The Smithsons' focus on street life can be seen in their 1953 "Urban Re-Identification Grid" presented at CIAM.

better and fairer society.”⁵² The New Brutalism was, therefore, a program with socialist roots.⁵³ Although massive social initiatives were started by the progressive governments of the late 1940s and early 1950s, reconstruction and housing remained a significant part of national policy, regardless of party, throughout the 1960s.⁵⁴

By 1955 the London County Council (LCC) employed a staff of over 5,000 in the Architects’ Department.⁵⁵ During this time the construction of developments like Alton East and Alton West in southwest London had many praising the effort that the LCC put into housing, winning international acclaim for innovative housing designs.⁵⁶ In 1965 the LCC was converted into the Greater London Council (GLC). The London Government Act of 1963, broke the city of London into smaller, semi-autonomous boroughs, which had the effect of making the council more broad-reaching, but with less power to act on its own.⁵⁷ The change resulted in a significant increase in housing production, which went up 55% from 1964-1967.⁵⁸

According to scholars, a theoretical divide existed in the 1950s and 60s concerning how to best implement housing policies and execute new housing plans. Nicolas Bullock

⁵² Nicolas Bullock, “Building the Socialist Dream or Housing the Socialist State? Design versus the Production of Housing in the 1960s,” 324.

⁵³ Clement Attlee served as British Prime Minister from 1945-1951, and is largely attributed with the expansion of the British welfare state, state-funded housing and many other social reform programs. The increase in capital and authority granted to local councils enabled the design-centric approach adopted by the London County Council in their commissioning of new housing, including that of the Smithsons’ Robin Hood Gardens.

⁵⁴ Bullock, “Building the Socialist Dream,” 322.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁵⁷ Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesis, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 265.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

sees this divide in terms of “pragmatists and idealists,” while Royston Landau discusses the issue as “the Empiricist-Formalist dialectic, represented by the architecture of the New Towns versus the architecture of the Brutalists.”⁵⁹ For Bullock, the division between pragmatists and idealists is illustrated in the commissioning of two very different housing developments by the London County Council: the Ronan Point high-rise (1966-70) and Robin Hood Gardens (1966-72) (figs. 8-9). The Ronan Point building was constructed quickly and cheaply with pre-fabricated panels, and intended to house over 650 families.⁶⁰ The Smithsons’ Robin Hood Gardens, on the other hand, was a lower-density, low-rise development with only 214 apartments, and represented a more idealistic, design-centric approach.

In his *New Directions in British Architecture*, Royston Landau discusses the divide between New Empiricist and New Brutalist design approaches in the rebuilding of post-World War II Britain. From 1945-51, the years immediately following the war, ten “New Towns” were founded in England, with seven in counties surrounding London.⁶¹ These towns were meant to be low-density centers for families, following from the Garden City tradition, with housing often constructed in the Swedish style: brick walls with low-pitched roofs. Landau refers to this model as the “New Empiricist” style for its reference to traditional European forms and to New Brutalism as the “anti-empirical formal

⁵⁹ Bullock, “Building the Socialist Dream,” 324. Landau, *New Directions in British Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 39.

⁶⁰ Ronan Point is best known for its partial collapse in 1968 when a gas explosion killed four people and injured a dozen others, leading many to question the cost of quick and cheap construction.

⁶¹ Royston Landau, *New Directions in British Architecture*, 19.

movement of certain young architects of the fifties...”⁶² Landau writes of the dialectical nature of the debate over how to build in post-war Britain:

The work of the anti-empiricist architects was to draw attention to the conflicting priorities of the two principle positions in the architecture of this period. In the problem tradition of official architecture (derived from the sociological reform traditions of Robert Owen and Ebenezer Howard), the act of creating a physical architecture tended to become only an appendage to the central interest of discovering and defining the problem needs. But the formal tradition (and much of the modern movement) saw the architecture as the object for concern, and the problem only as a matter that needed to be understood as well as possible, and not of a nature to be the central issue.⁶³

In this way, the binary poles that Bullock and Landau set up as major issues in post-war public housing are very similar—on one side, there is a pragmatic need to solve a problem, namely, how to house the many people in need. On the other, there is an artistically creative interest in the building as an opportunity to ease social ills.

Both the suburban “New Towns” of the 1950s and the high-density, low-quality high-rise developments of the 1960s, like Ronan Point, represent a conventional and pragmatic solution to post-war Britain’s housing woes. Designs like Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill in Sheffield can be viewed as creative and holistic approaches to the problem of housing. In developments such as these, requirements placed on the designers by the LCC were not considered reason for lack of innovation, nor for disregarding the needs and lifestyles of future tenants. The housing estate was an opportunity to improve the life of its residents. In this way, the New Brutalism can be understood, at least in its early days, as a utopian reaction against traditional/pragmatic British modes of building and planning.

⁶² Ibid., 23-26.

⁶³ Ibid, 27.

In Britain, the Brutalist aesthetic can be seen as early as 1948 in Denys Lasdun's design of Hallfield Estate for the firm Tecton (fig.10), completed by Lasdun after Tecton's dissolution in 1948.⁶⁴ The style remained in use through 1982 with the completion of the Barbican complex in London (fig. 11). In keeping with this rough time frame, many see Brutalism as part of the natural progression of modern architecture.⁶⁵ While this may be the case, post-war architects like the Smithsons and their fellow members of Team 10, clearly understood their work as a break from the top-down, rationalist planning of the older generation of CIAM. Whatever aesthetic inspiration the Smithsons took from Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, their Cluster City stands in stark contrast to his Ville Radieuse (figs. 12-13). The Smithsons defined "Cluster" as "the search for groupings answering patterns of association, patterns of movement; able to give identity, responsive to place, to topography, to local climate."⁶⁶ Clusters could take the form of diagrams, photographs or large scale building projects, like that of Golden Lane. For the Smithsons, the cluster was a way of breaking free from historically loaded concepts, such as streets, towns and cities.⁶⁷ As Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius wrote of the cluster in *Tower Block*:

Mechanical-functional geometry must be left behind and be replaced with something that is 'complex' and 'vital.' Another word for cluster is 'aggregation' ... Here the Smithsons were influenced by trends completely outside architecture and product design, namely the paintings of Jackson Pollock and Jean Dubuffet...the splashes of paint or the crinkly lines seem totally random, moving freely, above all, they were anti-Cartesian, never straight or symmetrical.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Clement, *Brutalism: Post-war British Architecture*, (Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2011), 114.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁶ Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2005), 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁸ Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 122.

In the Smithsons' Cluster City, the forms are organic and asymmetrical, much like the work of Pollock or Paolozzi. They respond to the shape of topography and existing city surroundings, creating networks like veins running through the human body.

Robin Hood Gardens

In 1961 there were 52,000 people on the London County Council's (LCC) waiting list for housing.⁶⁹ This led the LCC (later GLC) to contract private architects and firms to design new housing developments, in addition to their in-house staff. Alison and Peter Smithson were initially given three small sites for the development of a housing scheme near Manistry Street in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. In 1965, this original site was expanded to include property between Cotton Street and the Blackwall Tunnel in the Poplar district of Tower Hamlets. This site would become Robin Hood Gardens.

The Greater London Council required that the Smithsons' design take into consideration: the zoning of the site to 136 people per acre; the provision of an open space for the residents; and the insulation of the apartments from street noise.⁷⁰ The design features of the Smithsons' plan for Robin Hood Gardens resulted directly from these requirements. The development comprised two serpentine housing blocks divided by a central green space, the "stress-free zone" (fig. 14).⁷¹ As Alexander Clement notes, the serpentine shape of the buildings recalls neo-classical British forms, such as the Royal Crescent (1767-1774) in Bath designed by John Wood the Younger (figs. 15-16).⁷² The

⁶⁹ Alan Powers. "A Critical Narrative" in *Robin Hood Gardens: Re-visions*. (London: RIBA, 2009), 27.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷¹ Smithson, Alison and Peter. "Appendix: Robin Hood Lane- A Housing Scheme for the Greater London Council" in *Ordinariness and Light*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1970, 188.

⁷² Clement, *Brutalism: Post-war British Architecture*, 130.

buildings are ten and seven stories, with the taller east block along the busy Blackwall Tunnel Road. Each apartment block consists of flats and maisonettes of various sizes, with housing for older residents on the ground floor for easy access. At the time of its completion in 1972, the Robin Hood Gardens housing scheme cost £1,845,585.⁷³

Important to the Smithsons' design was that residents have access to the dwellings through decks. These decks served as spaces for resident interaction and provided additional outdoor space. As Alan Powers describes the Smithsons' design:

The front doors of the flats opened onto these decks, and were deliberately set at right angles to the deck, with pairs of doors facing each other across a recessed section...where residents were encouraged to place flower boxes and similar personal objects.⁷⁴

This design feature can be seen as a continuation of the emphasis the architects placed on the threshold in their earlier design for Golden Lane (fig.17). Although the decks faced the noisy Blackwall Tunnel and Cotton Streets, the Smithsons saw these spaces as an opportunity to fulfill their early conceptions of streets, neighborhoods and community identity.

As previously noted, noise reduction was a central component in the Smithsons' design. Since the development was exposed to heavy traffic on three sides, the Smithsons took great care to reduce noise pollution in the dwellings and "stress-free zone," including the construction of a ten foot high acoustic wall along the west side of Robin Hood Gardens on Cotton Street.⁷⁵ The wall features gaps between the concrete pieces to allow pedestrians a view inward or outward. The apartments were designed with

⁷³ Powers, "A Critical Narrative," 30.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷⁵ Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 191.

bedrooms, kitchens and dining areas facing the stress-free zone, while more public spaces, like living rooms and the access galleries faced the street.⁷⁶

In addition to the attention paid to noise reduction, the Smithsons took great care to reduce interactions between pedestrians and automobiles. They created below-ground parking, garages and storage for seventy percent of the residents in what they called a “moat.” This allowed for the ground level of the estate to be automobile free.⁷⁷ Given that they could not do anything to reduce the traffic congestion surrounding the development, the reduction of noise and interaction with vehicles was a primary concern. The Smithsons wrote:

To achieve a calm pool in this particular place, we have played down that idea of ‘linkage’ which was the main theme of the earlier ‘Golden Lane’ studies. In a sense we have replaced an image of the city in which connectedness was stressed, with one in which the survival of the ‘person’ and the ‘thing’ with the ever-changing net is held to be pre-eminent.⁷⁸

An illustration of this point can be seen in the stress-free zone in the center of the two buildings. As they note in B.S. Johnson’s documentary *The Smithsons on Housing*, the architects envisioned mothers watching their children playing there from kitchen windows.⁷⁹ They conceived of this space as a refuge away from the congestion surrounding the development and stress of living in an often chaotic, urban landscape, such as that of east London’s Docklands.

Even within Robin Hood Garden’s industrial setting, the Smithsons thought about how to encourage residents to identify with their surroundings. They considered the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 189-190.

⁷⁷ Powers, “A Critical Narrative,” 30.

⁷⁸ Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light*, 194.

⁷⁹ B.S. Johnson, *The Smithsons on Housing*, 1970. Transcribed in *Robin Hood Gardens: Revisions*, 66-72.

views from the apartments very carefully. The living rooms in the west block face outward toward the east London church, St. Anne's, while the east building's view would necessarily have a more industrial flavor of the East India Dock.⁸⁰ In order to create feelings of connection to this particular place, the Smithsons had to embrace the industrial nature of the neighborhood, as is illustrated in a diagram entitled "Robin Hood Lane. Visual connections of the people to their district" (fig.18).⁸¹ Here the Smithsons show that from the access decks of the east building, residents would look out over a power station and the East India Dock.⁸² The view outward from the stress-free zone would be a more tranquil one—looking toward passing ships on the Thames. Diagrams like this show that, to the extent that it was possible, the Smithsons were carefully considering the integration of Robin Hood Gardens to its surroundings.

Shortly after the first occupants moved in, problems with crime and defacement arose at Robin Hood Gardens. The Smithsons commented on the vandalism in their interview with BS Johnson in 1970 before the housing estate was completed. Peter stated:

At the moment there is a terrific lack of fit between those things which people own, the way people treat things they own, and the way they think about and treat what is in the public area of ownership. This is reflected terribly obviously when you go into any dwelling, any house, in any part of the country, the inside is almost always well kept, well furnished, clean. The outside, particularly in state housing: broken lifts; smashed up glass in entrance halls; all the things we all know about.⁸³

Alison likewise commented that the role of the architect was to think of the possibilities:

⁸⁰ Alison and Peter Smithson, *Ordinariness and Light.*, 193.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸² Before completion of the project, the East India Dock was closed and filled in, and this view was thus significantly altered.

⁸³ Peter Smithson, *The Smithsons on Housing*, transcribed in *Robin Hood Gardens: Revisions*, 2009, 72.

The realities of our working life are going to be traffic, noise, air pollution, vandalism, lack of quality... Although it is not the architect's business to talk about, think about mechanisms for changing the responsibility for housing in order to combat vandalism, it is our duty to speak about it in order to safeguard the architect's dream of what housing could be like.⁸⁴

In spite of the limitations placed on them by the LCC and the constraints of the building site, the Smithsons remained staunch in the defense of their design for Robin Hood Gardens and the role of the architect to provide a vision for living, regardless of how this vision translated into practice.

Whether or not the project was considered a success once occupied, it is clear that the Smithsons' vision for social housing, as seen in both their design for Golden Lane and Robin Hood Gardens, was a radical shift away from earlier modes of planning.

Nonetheless, by the end of the millennium, Robin Hood Gardens had fallen into a state of disrepair. Many of the innovative ideas that illustrated the Smithsons' philosophies on housing and community came to be considered inconveniences and poor design choices. Most of all, underfunding led to a lack of upkeep, while overcrowding pushed the estate beyond its capacity to adequately house its tenants.

From the 1970s onward, many Brutalist housing estates suffered similar fates. Their decline was exacerbated by a then-popular conception of the failed aspirations of Brutalism as both an ethic and an architectural form. Developments such as Robin Hood Gardens and Balfron Tower in the Poplar district of London's Tower Hamlets, as well as Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith's iconic vision of streets in the sky at Park Hill in Sheffield, were borne from the Brutalist's ethical vision for a post-war Britain, but became symbolic of the failure of the British welfare state. An architecture once associated with

⁸⁴ Alison Smithson, *The Smithsons on Housing*, 72.

transparency in public institutions became an architecture onto which many would project dystopian visions of modern life. Brutalism became a symbol of the failure of post-war design, one that justified a return to more traditional British architectural forms.

CHAPTER III

THE DECLINE OF BRITISH BRUTALISM IN SCHOLARSHIP AND MEDIA

As Robin Hood Gardens was under construction, scholarly and public perception of British Brutalism was shifting. In 1966, Reyner Banham published *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* Banham, the person who had announced the arrival of the New Brutalism as a serious architectural movement eleven years earlier, here wrote its epitaph. In the closing pages, entitled “Memoirs of a Survivor,” Banham discusses his seminal essay, “The New Brutalism,” as his own “attempt to father some of my own pet notions on the movement.”⁸⁵ In 1955, Banham was enamored of the possibilities for the movement and the work of architects like the Smithsons.

According to the Smithsons, their architecture represented a “completely new attitude and non-classical aesthetic.”⁸⁶ However, by 1966, Banham announced plainly that the New Brutalism was over:

The recent works of Stirling and Gowan, or the Smithsons, show far less urgency of ethic or aesthetic than in the late fifties. The Smithsons’ Economist building or (more accurately) cluster, since it consists of three buildings on a single podium, is a work of studied restraint. It may offer a vision of a new community structure, but it does so upon the basis of an ancient Greek acropolis plan... Far from being an example of an ‘other’ architecture, this is a craftsmanly exercise within the great tradition.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 134.

⁸⁶ In their brief piece for *Architectural Design* in 1957 entitled, “The New Brutalism,” Alison and Peter Smithson wrote of their Brutalist practice: “From individual buildings, disciplined on the whole by classical aesthetic techniques, we moved on to an examination of the *whole* problem of human associations and the relationship that building and community has to them. From this study has grown a completely new attitude and non-classical aesthetic.” See Alison and Peter Smithson, “The New Brutalism,” reprinted in *October* 136, (Spring 2011), 37.

⁸⁷ Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 134.

Here Banham argues that Brutalism was never able to break free from looking backward (fig. 19). For example, Brutalism sought to deal with modern congestion by separating foot and automobile traffic, but in so doing only recreated earlier pedestrian cities.⁸⁸ It was, therefore, never able to separate from “the mind and body which had always belonged to architecture.”⁸⁹ Ultimately, however, Banham argues that it is better for an architecture to take an ethical stand and fail, than to have never taken one at all. Banham closes his book, writing:

I make no pretense that I was not seduced by the aesthetic of Brutalism, but the lingering tradition of its ethical stand, the persistence of the idea that the relationship of the parts and materials of a building are a working morality—this, for me, is the continuing validity of the New Brutalism.⁹⁰

Though Banham praises the ethic that Brutalism once proclaimed, he regards it as a closed book without the chance for reinvigoration. By 1966, according to Banham, the ethic was a decade dead and the aesthetic was all that remained.⁹¹

If Banham sounded the death knell for British Brutalism in scholarship, by the late 1970s, Brutalism had also become vilified in the media and public opinion more generally. It had earned a reputation as an “ugly” architecture.⁹² The aesthetic came to represent all the failures of government in which it was originally intended to restore faith. In popular culture Brutalism became associated with social ills and government

⁸⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ It is worth noting that the Brutalist style lived on in the Americas for some time after its critical and popular demise in the UK. American Brutalism had the advantage of being unencumbered by ethical origins and remained a popular building style, especially on university campuses, through the early 1980s.

⁹² See Banham “The New Brutalism,” 1955 for more on the potential of an “ugly” architecture, or “anti-beauty.”

overreach. The roots of this anti-Brutalist sentiment are expressed by curator, Michael Kubo in *Clog's* 2013 edition on Brutalism:

The reduction of Brutalism to a stylistic label exclusively associated with concrete coincided with changing attitudes toward the government and the decline of state investment in the public realm. Originally seen to reflect the democratic attitudes of a powerful civic expression – authenticity, honesty, directness, strength- the forceful nature of Brutalist aesthetics eventually came to signify precisely the opposite: hostility, coldness, inhumanity... Brutalism became an all-too-easy pejorative, a term that suggests these buildings were designed with bad intentions.⁹³

This sentiment described by Kubo is clearly echoed in Stanley Kubrick's choice of the Brunel University Lecture Center as the Ludovico Medical Facility in *A Clockwork Orange* (1972; fig. 20). This building was chosen as the site where the anti-hero Alex is treated, in accordance with state orders, with the "Ludovico Technique"— a therapy in which a patient is subjected to violent images for long periods of time in order to create a strong physical aversion to the pain he had previously inflicted upon others (fig. 21).⁹⁴ Kubrick also set some of the film's most iconic scenes near the waterway at the Tavy Bridge in London's Thamesmead Estate (fig. 22).⁹⁵ The choice of setting signals the growing cultural perception of Brutalist architecture as just that: brutal. For Kubrick in *A Clockwork Orange*, the architectural medium is the message.

Another negative depiction of housing in popular culture can be seen in the 1975 dystopian novel, *Highbury* by J.G. Ballard. In the late 1970s, during a period of high

⁹³ Michael Kubo, Chris Grimley and Mark Pasnik. "Brutal" in *CLOG*, edited by Kyle May and Julia Van Den Hout. "Brutalism" *CLOG* (February 2013), 166.

⁹⁴ Though Kubrick's film makes some serious departures from Anthony Burgess' novel, both include this treatment.

⁹⁵ Thamesmead has recently undergone a regeneration scheme with much of the original Brutalist design torn down in favor of new mixed-tenure developments. New rail connections better link south-east London to the center city and Heathrow airport. In 2013, apartments at The Warehouse in Woolrich Arsenal were offered at an entry price of £299,950. See <http://www.homesandproperty.co.uk/property-news/affordable/tavy-bridge-regeneration-thamesmead-estate>.

crime at Trelick Tower, sibling estate to Balfron Tower, the development was rumored to have inspired Ballard.⁹⁶ Though the truth of this claim has not been proven, it is easy to imagine that a thirty-one story high-rise fraught with crime and vandalism might have inspired such a dystopian vision. As can be seen in figure 23, the building selected as the cover image for the 1975 edition of the novel appears to be constructed in the Brutalist style (fig.23).

Highrise tells the story of the mild-mannered Dr. Robert Laing, who slowly gives in to the chaos overtaking his apartment building in London. Floors become divided, with the upper floors representing the wealthiest residents. Distrust among tenants leads to looting, assault and murder, leaving surviving residents without any sense of social responsibility, locked inside the self-contained world of the high-rise. Much like Kubrick's masterful use of architectural setting in *A Clockwork Orange*, in *Highrise* the villain is the building itself. Both the building and the technology within it—humming machinery, stalled elevators and broken air conditioners—turn sinister, encouraging residents to lose their humanity. In the novel Ballard makes clear that the apartment block is filled with expensive flats and residents with varying degrees of affluence, and, therefore, is not intended to depict social housing. Still Ballard's dystopian vision must

⁹⁶ Goldfinger designed Trelick Tower while Balfron Tower was under construction in 1966. It bears a striking resemblance to its sibling building with a detached service tower. *Highrise* was also rumored to be inspired by Erno and Ursula Goldfinger's stint as tenants on the top floor of Balfron Tower. The architect claimed this was a means to prove the livability of his social housing design. See Nigel Warburton, *Erno Goldfinger: The Life of an Architect*, 185. Journalist Oliver Wainwright has pointed out the similarities between the architect's time as a tenant at Balfron and the character of the self-important architect who designed the high-rise and lives in the penthouse apartment in Ballard's novel. See Oliver Wainwright, "Wayne Hemingway's 'pop-up' plan sounds the death knell for the legendary Balfron Tower," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2014/sep/26/wayne-hemingways-pop-up-plan-sounds-the-death-knell-for-the-legendary-balfron-tower>.

have been disconcerting for residents of estates like Trellick Tower and Balfron Tower, and likely hit very close to home during a period of increased crime in housing estates.

Adding to the negative publicity, during the 1980s Prince Charles made headlines for his disparaging remarks about Brutalism and modern architecture in general. In a now infamous speech given at the 150th anniversary of RIBA, a Royal Gala Evening in Hampton Court on May 30, 1984, the Prince of Wales said of the proposed extension to the National Gallery by architect Peter Ahrends:

What, then, are we doing to our capital city now? What have we done to it since the bombing during the war? What are we shortly to do to one of its most famous areas - Trafalgar Square? Instead of designing an extension to the elegant facade of the National Gallery which complements it and continues the concept of columns and domes, it looks as if we may be presented with a kind of municipal fire station, complete with the sort of tower that contains the siren. I would understand better this type of high-tech approach if you demolished the whole of Trafalgar Square and started again with a single architect responsible for the entire layout, but what is proposed is like a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend.⁹⁷

The speech sent shockwaves through the architectural world as the Prince of Wales came down clearly on the side of classical design, architectural homogeneity, and Britain's Georgian roots. The immediate effect was the scrapping of the plan by Ahrends' firm Ahrends Burton and Koralek, while the lingering consequences have been Britain's architectural profession siding with conservation rather than new construction (fig. 24).⁹⁸ The National Gallery extension was later designed in a postmodern style by Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, and was completed in 1991.

⁹⁷ Charles Windsor, Prince of Wales, Speech given 30 May 1984, <http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/media/speeches/speech-hrh-the-prince-of-wales-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-royal-institute-of>.

⁹⁸ For more on the legacy of Prince Charles' interventions into British architecture, see Michael Hammond, "Princely Fallout," *Architects' Journal*, May 27, 2004, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/home/princely-fallout/138329.article>.

The Prince's criticism of modern design did not stop there. In 1987 he spoke to the Corporation of London Planning and Communication Committee at their annual dinner about Richard Rogers' scheme for the redevelopment of Paternoster Square, stating: "You have to give this much to the Luftwaffe, when it knocked down our buildings, it didn't replace them with anything more offensive than rubble."⁹⁹ Though made in jest, the sentiment of the Prince's comment is clear—postwar British architecture looks no better than a pile of rubble.¹⁰⁰ Whether the Prince was aware that post-war British architects were purposefully moving away from traditional British architectural aesthetics to create a more transparent and ethical form is unclear, and in any case, the ethics behind the aesthetics were not discussed by him.

Prince Charles addressed Brutalism specifically in a 2009 letter to the former foreign minister (later prime minister) of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim bin Jaber Al Thani. He wrote, "For the entire duration of my life we have had to witness the destruction of so many parts of London, with one more 'Brutalist' development or another."¹⁰¹ For Prince Charles, Brutalist buildings were not to be considered an authentic part of London. While architects such as Alison and Peter Smithson were attempting to create a new architectural language to meet the realities of post-war Britain, Prince Charles' post-war architectural hopes for the nation apparently remained the same as they

⁹⁹ Alistair Jamieson, "The Prince of Wales on architecture: his ten 'monstrous carbuncles,'" *The Telegraph*, 13 May 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/theroyalfamily/5317802/The-Prince-of-Wales-on-architecture-his-10-monstrous-carbuncles.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Ironically, the mound in the Smithsons' Stress-Free Zone at Robin Hood Gardens is constructed from such rubble.

¹⁰¹ Jacob Reidel, "Ugly" in *Clog*, 127.

had ever been—namely, aesthetically pleasing and classically proportioned, patrician buildings in a neo-Georgian style.

While Prince Charles was giving speeches on the horrors of modern architecture, throughout the 1980s the policies of Margaret Thatcher were impacting British housing in more direct ways. Thatcher, a member of the conservative party, served as Prime Minister from 1979-1990. Early in her tenure as Prime Minister, and still earlier in her role as leader of the opposition from 1975-79, Thatcher made it clear that housing would be a major component of her economic policy. As befitting her conservative politics, Thatcher's policies favored deregulation and privatization, many of which, had the effect of decreasing the number of units available for low-income families in housing estates, such as Robin Hood Gardens. Her policies, especially the Right to Buy Program, were by nature anti-socialist, and implicitly aimed at breaking down the progressive programs of the Greater London Council and the socialist roots of early Brutalist housing design.

As the British electorate became more disillusioned with the socialist policies of the Labour party, conservatives saw offering accessible home ownership as a means to capture the working class vote. Through their Right to Buy Program, hundreds of thousands of council-owned flats were sold off at significant discounts from market rates. Before this, tenants had been purchasing council flats for years. Until the 1970s, however, the right to sell lay in the hands of the councils. With the implementation of Right to Buy in 1978, Thatcher, then leader of the opposition, instituted a major shift in housing policy. Following from several earlier proposals, conservative party member Michael Heseltine, under Thatcher's leadership, submitted a paper outlining the new plan

in June of that year. The proposal included a maximum discount of 50% (later 70% for a council flat) for tenants of council housing.¹⁰²

In the election of 1979, the Tory manifesto included the pledge to give council tenants the opportunity to purchase their homes.¹⁰³ When the Tories won the general election that year, they did just that with the Housing Act of 1980. According to Robin Sellars:

The legislation forced councils to sell, with new powers given to the Secretary of State to intervene on behalf of council tenants if their local authority was refusing to sell. The Housing Act also established a national basis for discounted selling. The discount started at 33% for a council tenant of three years with an additional 1% increase in discount with each subsequent year spent as a council tenant, rising up to a maximum 50%.¹⁰⁴

This path to home ownership proved very popular with the electorate, and led to the private sale of 1.88 million council homes across England, or 37% of the entire housing stock.¹⁰⁵

In the UK, much as in the United States, home ownership is prized as an important accomplishment for middle-class families. Although Thatcher's policies made the dream of home ownership more accessible to the British people, the Right to Buy had the effect of further diminishing available housing stock for low-income tenants, since new affordable housing was not built to supplement that which was sold.¹⁰⁶ A further

¹⁰² Robin Sellars, "The Development of the Right to Buy and the Sale of Council Houses" *Economic Affairs*, March 2007, 56.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Colin Marrs, "Right to Buy Pledge could make Housing Associations Unfundable," *Architects' Journal*, April 15, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/daily-news/right-to-buy-pledge-could-make-housing-associations-unfundable/8681272.article>.

¹⁰⁶ In the 2015 national election, the Tories revived Thatcher's Right to Buy. Their plan would allow 1.3 million Housing Association tenants to buy their homes at a discount capped at £102,700 in London or

effect of Thatcher's shifting of the British economy toward the private sphere was the closure of many architects' departments in local councils, which had been responsible for the construction of most housing estates in the post-war period.¹⁰⁷

The 1960s and 70s are considered a period of prolific building and experimentation in public sector construction from housing to universities. This period ended with the dissolution of the Greater London Council under Thatcher in 1986. While selling council houses under Right to Buy, Thatcher's government was slashing the resources of the councils who had designed and constructed the homes being sold off. Had the capital earned from Right to Buy been reinvested into the construction of new affordable housing, the policy might have had altogether different effect: simultaneously increasing home ownership, while still offering affordable housing available to rent.¹⁰⁸ Further deregulation during the Thatcher years paved the way for the boom in financial services and banking now taking place in Canary Wharf.¹⁰⁹ From the dilapidated galleries of Robin Hood Gardens today, the impacts of Thatcherism are glaringly present: deregulation has led to economic growth in the financial sector and atrophy in public services (figs.25-26).

£77,000 elsewhere in the UK. See Laura Mark, "Tories to bring back right to buy for housing association tenants," *Architects' Journal*, April 14, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/tories-to-bring-back-right-to-buy-for-housing-association-tenants/8681190.article>.

¹⁰⁷ Merlin Fulcher, "The Thatcher Years: Architects Reflect on the Legacy of the Iron Lady," *Architects' Journal*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/daily-news/the-thatcher-years-architects-reflect-on-the-legacy-of-the-iron-lady/8646400.article>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

REGENERATION AT PARK HILL, BALFRON TOWER AND BLACKWALL

REACH

In spite of the bad reputation British Brutalism came to acquire, today it is enjoying a resurgence in scholarship and the media. This year will bring about the first major published survey of British post-war architecture, Elaine Harwood's *Space, Hope, and Brutalism: British Architecture 1945-1972*, to be released by Yale University Press in September 2015. In 2014 the BBC produced a series entitled *Bunkers, Brutalism, and Bloodymindedness: Concrete Poetry* narrated by Jonathan Meades.¹¹⁰ Currently on view at the Tate Britain is an exhibit entitled "New Brutalist Image 1949-1954," which displays photographs by Nigel Henderson, sculptures by Eduard Paolozzi and drawings by the Smithsons. Organizations like DOCOMOMO, which document architecture from the modern era and advocate for its conservation, enjoy record levels of membership. The British Pavilion at last year's Venice Biennale made direct reference to the Smithsons and their design for Robin Hood Gardens--the same building that is currently slated for demolition in London's docklands (figs. 27-28).

This resurgence in scholarly interest has parallels in popular culture as well. Blogs like *Fuck Yeah Brutalism!* bring photos of Brutalist buildings all over the world to the masses. Readership of magazines like *Dwell* further helps to fetishize modern design in contemporary culture. J.G. Ballard's novel *Highrise* is being made into a big-budget movie starring Sienna Miller and Jeremy Irons, though it remains to be seen whether director Ben Wheatley will set the film in a Brutalist building.

¹¹⁰ Bloodymindedness is a reference to Reyner Banham's seminal essay "The New Brutalism."

With all of this Brutalist imagery circulating amongst scholars, architecture buffs and pop culture enthusiasts alike, one wonders, why now? Is it only a matter of time before up and coming architecture and design firms begin designing with rough concrete, untreated wood and heavy lines, as Michael J. Lewis has suggested in “The ‘new’ New Brutalism”?¹¹¹ This is already happening. One thinks of the current trend for restaurants to use varnished particle board, polished to a glossy sheen, as dining tables; the popularity of terms like “up-cycling” on networks like HGTV; the desirability of lofts with exposed brick and ductwork; and the market for scrapped and salvaged industrial materials, which itself has made a booming underground economy for “scrapping” in post-industrial American cities like Detroit.¹¹² In this sense, the Smithson’s notion of the New Brutalism as an architecture of “making do” can clearly be seen throughout our post-great recession aesthetic collective consciousness.

If the 1990s and early 2000s were a technological boom time with the explosion of the internet, the burgeoning of Silicon Valley and the establishment of the Euro, the late 2000s and early 2010s will be remembered as a time of prolonged war in the middle-east, economic recession, the bankruptcy and shrinking of industrial cities, and instability in the Euro Zone. Despite this period of prolonged hardship, we are now in the era of 3D printing and computer-aided design programs, which allow architects to design buildings without ever holding a pencil. Perhaps, borne out of both necessity and nostalgia, there is a desire among many to return to materiality and solidity—something tangible, raw and resourceful. A return to forms that will express what we have been through without

¹¹¹ Michael J. Lewis, "The "new" New Brutalism," *New Criterion* 33, no. 4 (2014): 23.

¹¹² It should be noted, however, that the largest market for post-industrial American scrap materials is China, and not for any sort of Brutalist revival architecture.

pretense—a form that is anti-beautiful.¹¹³ Maybe this explains the desire to return to Brutalism, itself the product of wartime destruction and economic insecurity.

With renewed interest in Brutalism, however, comes the potential for profit. Due to a limited stock of existing buildings, the style is becoming more for the elite than the communities in need that it was originally intended to serve. This is evident in the redevelopment of affordable housing estates such as Park Hill in Sheffield and Balfron Tower in London, as well as in the demolition of the Smithsons' iconic housing development, Robin Hood Gardens.

Park Hill, Sheffield

The Park Hill housing estate was designed by Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith under J.L. Womersley (fig. 29). The development comprises 954 apartments with a density of 192 people per acre, and cost £2, 158, 591 to complete between 1957 and 1960.¹¹⁴ The most notable design feature of the development are the wide access decks, which were in part inspired by the Smithsons' designs for “streets in the sky” in their 1952 entry in the Golden Lane Housing Competition (fig. 30). Lynn and Smith were former students of the Smithsons, who were themselves developing ideas about community identity, street play, and “streets in the sky” throughout the 1950s (fig. 31).¹¹⁵ The architects stated of the Smithsons' influence on their design in 1962:

¹¹³ Reyner Banham wrote of the movement and its interest in an image as “anti-beauty.” See Banham, “The New Brutalism,” reprinted in *October* 136 (Spring 2011), 25.

¹¹⁴ “List Entry Description: Park Hill,” English Heritage, accessed November 5, 2014, http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle_print.aspx?uid=1246881&showMap=1&showText=1.

¹¹⁵ Nicolas Bullock has suggested that the legacy of the Smithsons' ideas on housing, shown in their Golden Lane submission and at Robin Hood Gardens, were successfully applied at Park Hill, and therefore live on through the access decks at the development. See Nicolas Bullock, “Building the Socialist Dream or Housing the Socialist State? Design versus the Production of Housing in the 1960s,” in *Neo-Avant Garde*

The Smithsons' Golden Lane Project used a similar street access to ours, and made the first moves towards their continuity by creating street-corner junctions where refuse chutes would be located, which they likened to the modern equivalent of the village water pump.¹¹⁶

Lynn and Smith's design is not only notable for its wide access decks, but also for its masterful integration into a difficult and uneven landscape, which the architects neutralized through the use of a unified roofline throughout the sprawling complex.

In the 1980s Park Hill began a descent into disrepair as a "sink estate," or council housing suffering from extreme economic depression and high levels of crime. By the late 1990s, however, English Heritage, the organization which lists national landmark properties for protected status, had begun to recognize the value of Brutalism for British architectural history. It granted Park Hill Grade II* property status in 1998. Park Hill remains the largest listed building in all of Europe.¹¹⁷ According to the Listing

Assessment provided by English Heritage on Park Hill:

It is the first built manifestation of a widespread theoretical interest in external access decks as a way of building high without the problems of isolation and expense encountered with point blocks (tower blocks)... The decks were conceived as a way of recreating the community spirit of a traditional slum street, with the benefit of vehicular segregation.¹¹⁸

Long before the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and English Heritage acknowledged the value of Park Hill to British architectural history, architectural historian Reyner Banham wrote: "The moral crusade of Brutalism for a better habitat

and Postmodern: *Post-war Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, edited by Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 327.

¹¹⁶ Quote reprinted in Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*, 132. Originally printed in *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, December 1962.

¹¹⁷ Urban Splash, "Park Hill," <http://www.urbansplash.co.uk/commercial/park-hill>.

¹¹⁸ "Park Hill," List Entry Summary, English Heritage, http://list.historicengland.org.uk/resultsingle_print.aspx?uid=1246881&showMap=1&showText=1.

through built environment probably reaches its culmination at Park Hill.”¹¹⁹ Banham’s recognition of the development as a true implementation of Brutalist ideals, coming closer than any other work of social housing to achieving a Brutalist ethic, is especially significant when one considers the plans for the redevelopment of the estate.

The listing of a building does not necessarily protect it from drastic alteration or even demolition. However, Park Hill’s listed status, along with other factors, helped to encourage its redevelopment. The Manchester-based development firm Urban Splash took over the complex and commissioned architecture firm Hawkins/Brown and Studio Egret West to refurbish the buildings. To date, Phase One of the regeneration has been completed to much critical acclaim-- the project was a finalist for the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize and won a RIBA National Award the same year.

The design is a mixed-use plan with shops and amenities on the ground floor and apartments above. Once completed, two-thirds of the original 954 flats will be offered for private sale. Flats will begin at £90,000.¹²⁰ Decanted residents were given the opportunity to return to the estate once construction is completed, however, the number of families who registered interest in returning has already outnumbered the units that will be available for social rent.¹²¹ Meanwhile Sheffield as a whole is in dire need of affordable housing with 60,000 families on the housing register waiting for homes.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, 132.

¹²⁰ Owen Hatherly, “Regeneration? What’s happening at Sheffield’s Park Hill is class cleansing,” September 28, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/sep/28/sheffield-park-hill-class-cleansing>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

For the refurbishment of Park Hill, the original building was stripped down to its basic underlying structure to allow for the reconfiguration of apartment layouts and a better-insulated exterior skin to be added for energy efficiency (fig. 32).¹²³ The architects replaced brick along the front elevation with brightly colored aluminum panels (fig. 33). The lower levels are for lease as retail and office space. Many apartments were made larger by taking space from the building's iconic, wide corridors. These renovations have drastically changed the appearance and experience of the estate, differing greatly from the original vision set forth by Smith and Lynn.

Upon visiting Park Hill, one notices the stark contrast among the buildings—one bright, shiny and new and the other 3 enormous buildings completely dilapidated and desolate (fig. 34). A visitor to the estate is free to wander, except for the portion that is still under construction. The serpentine forms of the buildings open up to large and usable green spaces peppered throughout the estate (fig. 35). Today, the un-refurbished portions of the estate are nearly abandoned. In the access deck shown in figure 36, one red door indicates life in an otherwise uninhabited hall (fig. 36). The majority of doors and windows in the complex are covered with sheet metal and steel barricades, which indicate to passersby that “everything of value has been removed from this property” (fig. 37).

Construction on the first phase of the redevelopment is completed and flats and offices are beginning to be occupied. Though the information office is now closed, it was clear in peering through the windows of the vacant shop just the kind of hip, urban vibe they were selling at Park Hill. On the couch of the sales office sits a throw pillow with “I love you” scrawled asymmetrically across its front (fig. 38). This is, of course, a

¹²³ David Levitt, *The Housing Design Handbook: A guide for better practice*, New York: Routledge, 2010, 221.

reference to the iconic graffiti tagged on the access bridge from the now refurbished building to the neighboring block, proclaiming “I love you Will u marry me” (fig. 39). This graffiti tag has been even further immortalized: Urban Splash has installed neon lights over the text, making the proclamation visible from the center city at night. From the large design elements of the scheme to these anecdotal details, the designers appeal to the cognoscenti and lay person alike and in the process are likely to attract a young, urban, and affluent customer.

Meanwhile, the other buildings at Park Hill continue to decay. The few lonely residents must feel this contrast most sharply. They are living in the old Park Hill. They hold on to the place in which they have made their home, while a new identity is created for the estate from the outside. Even several years ago when the redevelopment was announced, the possibility of gentrification loomed over the project. Journalist Rowan Moore wrote in a 2011 article in *The Guardian*:

Two-thirds of the original 1,000 council flats will, with the help of public subsidy to the development, now be for private sale. The council says that it's better to have a mixture of tenures than to remake a "ghetto" of council tenants. This follows the current orthodoxy and might be entirely reasonable if the homes were being replaced elsewhere in the city.¹²⁴

Moore's quote underscores the problems which often arise when costly renovations take place in social housing developments and when there is a push to create mixed-use, multi-income developments. This, as Moore makes clear, often lessens the number of units available for low-income residents and leaves many of the people who relied on government subsidized housing with nowhere to live. Today, the project awaits funding for completion and the majority of the estate sits empty.

¹²⁴ Rowan Moore, “Park Hill Estate, Sheffield Review,” *The Guardian*, August 20, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/aug/21/park-hill-sheffield-renovation>.

Balfron Tower, Tower Hamlets, London

Meanwhile, in London, just blocks from Robin Hood Gardens stands Balfron Tower (fig. 40). Balfron Tower was designed by Ernő Goldfinger and constructed from 1965 to 1967. The development, which consists of 136 one and two bedroom apartments and ten maisonettes, was given Grade II listed status in 1996. According to English Heritage's listing for Balfron Tower, its distinctive profile, as well as its well-planned scheme and interior finishings, reveal "Goldfinger as a master in the production of finely textured and long-lasting concrete masses."¹²⁵ The building has a distinctive service tower, with elevators, garbage chutes, and laundry rooms, connected to access halls at every third level.¹²⁶

Since 2008, low-income residents of Balfron Tower have been forced to relocate, while a series of artist residencies and installations have taken place at the estate. The building that embodied the ambitions of the British welfare state and was once seen as a beacon for social housing design will be sold off to the highest bidder, while housing for the former, less-monied tenants is built nearby, literally in the Balfron's long-cast shadow.¹²⁷ In October of 2014, the National Trust opened Apartment 130 to the public for a period of two weeks. For an entrance fee of £12, visitors could see the apartment decorated as it might have looked in 1968.¹²⁸ This is the same apartment where architect,

¹²⁵ English Heritage, "List Entry, Balfron Tower," accessed November 15, 2014, http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle_print.aspx?uid=1334931&showMap=1&showText=1.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Oliver Wainwright, "Wayne Hemingway's 'pop-up' plan sounds the death knell for the legendary Balfron Tower," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2014/sep/26/wayne-hemingways-pop-up-plan-sounds-the-death-knell-for-the-legendary-balfron-tower>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Ernö Goldfinger and his wife, Ursula, lived for two months when the development opened to prove the livability of the social housing estate (fig. 41).¹²⁹ The proceeds of this exhibition will go toward the construction of the previously mentioned low-rise social housing nearby.¹³⁰

In the bedroom of Apartment 130, Beatles memorabilia covers the walls, while mod geometric prints are offset with bright pinks and reds (fig. 42) The kitchen displays a mix of small-scale appliances circa 1960. The pale avocado green accents and aqua Frigidaire would have been popular color choices in 1968, but are also back with full force in today's retro-laden marketplace (fig. 43). The living room combines sleek, mid-century furniture and psychedelic printed throw pillows with a white shag rug thrown over the flooring (fig. 44). Rattan lamps hang from the ceiling, and appear very similar to popular styles sold today by the Swedish furnishing giant, Ikea, (fig. 45). Every item selected was carefully chosen by designer Wayne Hemingway to aestheticize the apartment and appeal to today's buyer. Of course, the design is whimsical and nostalgic, but in light of the impending private sale of the apartments, it seems a timely and calculating business decision and a means to re-brand this Brutalist icon with an image of retro-chic for young professionals.

In short, the refurbishment of Balfron Tower seems an especially blatant capitalization on the recent popularity of the Brutalist aesthetic. As is clear in figures 42-44, the exhibit, which preceded the private sale of the apartments, clearly preys upon the visitor's nostalgia for 1960s-era Britain. If the visitor happens to be a young, hip urbanite, its retro pastiche might appeal to their sense of what it means to live in a British Brutalist

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

high-rise, making the prospect of purchasing a piece of British modernism all the more appealing.

Today, Balfron Tower is nearly empty, except for a few balconies still displaying clothes hung out to dry. The building is fenced off and “keep out” signs are prominently posted (fig. 46). The refurbishment of the estate is led by development firms United House Developments and Londonewcastle. The firm Studio Egret West, who also contributed to the Park Hill regeneration, will serve as lead architects for the project and has been given a £40 million budget by the estate’s owner, housing association and social landlord, Poplar HARCA.¹³¹ The entry for the Balfron Tower regeneration on the United House Development website makes no mention of the private sale of the apartments, nor does it provide a timetable for construction phases (fig. 47).¹³² When renovations are complete, Balfron Towers’ 136 apartments and maisonette homes will be sold entirely to private owners.

The redevelopments at Park Hill and Balfron Tower indicate the desirability of Brutalist buildings today. Balfron tower is located near the business and banking district of Canary Wharf, making the location an attractive one for young professionals working in these districts. Park Hill awaits funding for completion, but it too will undoubtedly see a change in resident demographic once completed.

Brutalist structures that once symbolized a utopian post-war vision of British government are being commodified and sold as a retro aesthetic stripped of their original

¹³¹ Richard Waite, “Studio Egret West set to revamp Balfron Tower, *Architects’ Journal*, December 20, 2013, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/daily-news/studio-egret-west-set-to-revamp-balfron-tower/8657059.article>.

¹³² See www.unitedhousedevopments.net/news/view/joint-venture-created-to-regenerate-balfron-tower.

intent as affordable housing. With low vacancy rates throughout the United Kingdom, and even fewer remaining mid-century Brutalist residential properties, the profit potential is irresistible for investors and development companies. The real cost is paid by the tenants who depend on subsidized rent and have to be rehoused elsewhere-- somewhere less trendy.¹³³ For example, in Tower Hamlets, the private rental sector nearly doubled from 2003-2011, while the percentage of council-owned rentals fell from 28% in 2003 to 12 % in 2011 of total housing (Table 1; see Appendix B for all figures).

The New Brutalism began as an aestheticization of an ethic, made especially clear in the Smithsons' pop-inspired Golden Lane collages. With projects such as Park Hill and Balfron Tower, it has been emptied of its original ethical concerns. The recent rise in the popularity of Brutalism can be understood as a process of aestheticization. It is not one, however, of the ethic Brutalist once represented, but rather of the aura of radical-chic and retro-revivalism still superficially attached to the style.

Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project, Tower Hamlets, London

In the near future, Robin Hood Gardens will be demolished in accordance with plans for the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project. The Blackwall Reach regeneration area is just a few blocks from Balfron Tower, and both can be seen from the platform of the Docklands Light Rail (DLR) line at the Blackwall stop (fig. 48). The Blackwall Reach Regeneration is one of many such projects across London. London, consisting of 32 boroughs and the City, is one of the most expensive and desirable housing markets in the world. Tower Hamlets, the borough in which both Robin Hood Gardens and Balfron

¹³³ None of the developers associated with the regenerations at Park Hill (Urban Splash) or Balfron Tower (Poplar Harca, Londonewcastle and United House Developments) make mention of where decanted tenants have gone or how privatization will affect the makeup of affordable housing available in Sheffield and Tower Hamlets respectively.

Tower are located, is one of the fastest-growing areas in greater London. Its proximity to the booming banking district of Canary Wharf and new, faster than ever connections to the city center with the DLR train have made Tower Hamlets a prime area for regeneration. As a result, private rental rates in the borough have increased significantly, and now represent nearly 50% of the average household income.¹³⁴ Meanwhile, home prices in Tower Hamlets rose by 25 % from July 2013 to July 2014.¹³⁵

In light of the changes coming to Tower Hamlets, an area whose desirability will only increase in the years to come, the low-density development of Robin Hood Gardens practically cries out for a more densely populated scheme. The Compulsory Purchase Order issued by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets for the land in the Blackwall development area makes plain that Tower Hamlets and developing partner Swan Housing Group recognize the potential for growth in the area.¹³⁶ Section 3.15 of the CPO states: “A core element of the development strategy involves seeking to transform the perception of Blackwall Reach to enable people to see the opportunities and benefits of choosing to live in this highly accessible location.” In this statement, it is clear that council leaders and their development partners see the opportunity for a re-branding of the borough.

Housing in the Borough of Tower Hamlets has undergone dramatic change in the last thirty years. The borough has a long tradition of providing social housing to its residents, beginning with the Boundary Estate completed in 1901.¹³⁷ In 1981, 97% of

¹³⁴ Arno Schmickler. “Haves and Have Nots: Housing Markets in a World City,” National Housing Federation, Powerpoint presentation, 25 November, 2014.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Compulsory Purchase Order, 2013.

¹³⁷ Following the allowance of slum clearance in the “Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890,” the Boundary Estate was built by the London County Council in the council area of Bethnal Green. The

affordable homes in Tower Hamlets were owned by the local council, compared with only 11% today.¹³⁸ While incomes in the borough will inevitably rise as young professionals move into the area, a significant number of residents in the area live on less than £10,000 per year.¹³⁹ Today, the majority ethnic population in the Blackwall Reach Regeneration area is Bangladeshi, and Tower Hamlets has the largest Bangladeshi population in greater London (Tables 2-3). Overcrowding is a major concern in social housing in Tower Hamlets, with 9,000 homes on the housing register listed as overcrowded, many requiring an increase of two or more bedrooms.¹⁴⁰ As of 2013, there were 23,400 households in Tower Hamlets on the housing register for new accommodation, with nearly half of these households considered high priority due to homelessness, medical emergencies, or overcrowding.¹⁴¹

Due to many factors - economic depression and lack of funding at the council level - by the early 2000s Robin Hood Gardens had fallen into a state of severe disrepair (fig. 49). In 2006 the London-based group Capita Symonds, at the request of the borough of Tower Hamlets, assessed the possibility of a major refurbishment of the estate.¹⁴² It was subsequently determined by the Council that refurbishment was cost prohibitive, especially since refurbishment would not address issues of overcrowding which are so

development included 23 blocks with 1069 residential units. See <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/search.aspx?cx=008280465879053608327:251xeiiz6ey&cof=FORID:11;NB:1&ie=UTF-8&q=boundary%20estate>.

¹³⁸ London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Compulsory Purchase Order, 2013, Statement of Reasons, 16.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 5.

common on the estate.¹⁴³ In the Compulsory Purchase Order for the land within the regeneration boundaries, the reasoning for the demolition of Robin Hood Gardens is as follows:

Poor original master-planning means that there is a lot of underused space and there is a disconnect between buildings and surrounding public realm and housing amenity land. The Robin Hood Gardens buildings have visually and physically deteriorated due to a combination of poor construction, leading to prohibitive maintenance costs and consequent lack of maintenance, and inherent design deficiencies, which have encouraged anti-social behavior. The homes within the Robin Hood Gardens buildings suffer from poor thermal and acoustic insulation, inadequate refuse disposal and collection facilities and poor quality public open space.¹⁴⁴

From this statement it is clear that the reasoning behind demolition is multiple, beginning with poor design and construction, exacerbated by lack of funding for proper maintenance, ultimately leading to deterioration and even crime. Further, the local council and development partners understood that the low-density scheme of Robin Hood Gardens was an “underuse” of very valuable London real-estate, which will only become more valuable with growth of the Canary Wharf banking and shopping districts in the years to come.¹⁴⁵

Given that Robin Hood Gardens is the only built housing scheme designed by the Smithsons and is, therefore, an historic monument to the Brutalist vision for public architecture, there was significant resistance to the Council’s decision to demolish. The most serious effort to save Robin Hood Gardens was made by the Twentieth Century Society (C20). After plans to demolish were announced in 2007, The C20 Society

¹⁴³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁴⁵ See above quote from London Borough of Tower Hamlets, CPO, 4-5.

mounted a campaign to list Robin Hood Gardens with English Heritage, and thus secure its physical survival. The campaign garnered support from architects and media and culture critics alike. Directly following the announcement of the Blackwall Reach Regeneration project in 2007, the C20 Society applied for the listing of Robin Hood Gardens to English Heritage and the Department of Culture Media and Sport. In May of 2008, English Heritage denied the listing application for Robin Hood Gardens.¹⁴⁶ One stated reason for this was that the access decks at Robin Hood Gardens were not as architecturally significant as those at Park Hill in Sheffield. The C20 Society was able to raise funding for expert legal advice and filed an appeal with English Heritage.¹⁴⁷ In May of 2009, this appeal was rejected and the Certificate of Immunity from Listing was granted to the developers of Blackwall Reach.¹⁴⁸ In July of 2009, an exhibition was held at the Royal Institute of British Architects entitled “Robin Hood Gardens Re-Visions.” A collaboration between the C20 Society and photographer Ioana Marinescu this aimed to raise awareness of the fight to save the development. The momentum for the redevelopment of the site could not be stopped, however. The irrefutably poor condition of the estate and the exorbitantly high cost of refurbishment proved insurmountable.

¹⁴⁶ The former government-appointed Secretary of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Margaret Hodge, was known for her distaste of British post-war architecture. Hodge was appointed during Gordon Brown’s Labour party tenure in 2007, and served as Minister of Culture and Tourism intermittently through 2010. She was well-known during her tenure at the DCMS for her unapologetic disdain for Britain’s concrete architecture and was vocal in her opposition to providing Robin Hood Gardens status as a heritage monument. On Margaret Hodge and her views, see Stephen Bayley, “You want the Brutal truth? Concrete can be beautiful” *The Guardian*, March 2, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/mar/02/architecture.communities>; Matthew Weaver, “Robin Hood Gardens: Iconic or Eyesore?,” *The Guardian*, July 2, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2008/jul/01/robinhoodgardensnotfitfor>; Rowan Moore, “Robin Hood Gardens: Don’t Knock it...Down,” *The Guardian*, December 4, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/dec/05/robin-hood-gardens-east-london>.

¹⁴⁷ Powers, “A Critical Narrative,” 43.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

In early 2015, the Certificate for Immunity from Listing for Robin Hood Gardens, originally issued in 2009, expired. In March, a new application for heritage listing was filed by the Twentieth Century Society. In the filing, the C20 Society cites the misinterpretation of key design elements by English Heritage, including the access galleries.¹⁴⁹ Tower Hamlets, Swan Housing and the Greater London Authority released the following statement:

A thorough heritage impact assessment was carried out as part of the planning application and environmental impact assessment process... We do not believe listing the buildings now would be in the best interests of residents or the wider local community, or in keeping with the changing nature of the place.¹⁵⁰ English Heritage will now review the application and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State, who has the authority to grant or deny heritage listing for Robin Hood Gardens.¹⁵¹ Demolition of Robin Hood Gardens is currently scheduled for late 2016 after planning permission is granted in phase two of the Blackwall Reach Regeneration.¹⁵²

The master plan for the Blackwall Reach development totals about 20 acres (8 hectares) of land and includes residential homes, commercial businesses, a community center, a mosque (to replace one torn down in the redevelopment), a school and car parking.¹⁵³ It will be completed in six phases, to be planned independently from one another, and will be a mixed-use, mixed-tenure development with approximately 1575

¹⁴⁹ Will Hurst, "Shock new bid to save Robin Hood Gardens," *Architects' Journal*, March 17, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/shock-new-bid-to-save-robin-hood-gardens/8680060.article>.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Richard Waite, "Planning Victory for latest phase of Robin Hood Gardens overhaul," *Architects' Journal*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/planning-victory-for-latest-phase-of-robin-hood-gardens-overhaul/8674763.article>.

¹⁵³ London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Compulsory Purchase Order, 9.

new flats (fig. 50). Roughly 43% of these will be affordable housing, with 80 % of that number available for social or affordable rent and the remaining 20 % available for less than market rent.¹⁵⁴ Across the development there will be a mix of three tenures: social rented, intermediate (shared ownership), and private rent. Many of these affordable homes will have three or more bedrooms, which as the Compulsory Purchase order points out, will bring the percentage of affordable housing to 50 % when considered by habitable room.¹⁵⁵

Phase 1A, which comprises replacement homes for the remaining residents at Robin Hood Gardens, is nearing completion. This phase includes two high-rise apartment buildings, 98 new homes altogether, and will also house the community center (fig. 51). A new mosque has been constructed in red brick next to the apartments. This first phase will be entirely affordable housing and fulfills one of the major assurances provided to residents at Robin Hood Gardens. Residents were given the following options: 1) stay in their homes at Robin Hood Gardens until replacement homes were ready in Phase 1A; 2) move to the nearby development of Bow Cross, also owned by Swan Housing Association, and live under comparable rental agreements; 3) move to another affordable housing development by placing their name on the Housing Register (waiting list); or 4) remain a council tenant in Tower Hamlets, but relocate to another unspecified council property in the borough.¹⁵⁶ Tenants who purchased homes in Robin Hood Gardens, mostly under Margaret Thatcher's Right to Buy plan, will be offered "the full market

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 32.

value for their property, plus a 10% Home Loss Payment for owner-occupiers.¹⁵⁷

Homeowners will be able to purchase a “replacement dwelling of a comparable size” elsewhere in the development.¹⁵⁸

The next phase to be completed in the development area is Phase 1B, located just north of the Blackwall DLR line platform. Phase 1B will offer 245 new units, with 203 of those being privately rented.¹⁵⁹ A master plan by Karakusevic Carson Architects of the three buildings in this phase was released in January 2015 (fig. 52).¹⁶⁰ This phase will include retail shops and later a new public square to be completed in Phase 4. Phase 2 and 3 will replace Robin Hood Gardens and be residential, mixed tenure homes in mid-rise (8-12 story) buildings. A new central park area will replace the “Millenium Green” (the Smithson’s stree-free zone).¹⁶¹ A consideration with this phase of the development will be noise reduction. This was also a major concern when the Smithsons were originally commissioned to plan the site as previously discussed. This phase will include 582 homes, with 229 offered at social rent, 50 intermediate, and 313 privately lent units.¹⁶² Phase 4 will include the construction of two residential towers near the DLR line, and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ If the purchase price of a new home in the development exceeds the payment they received for their old dwelling, the council has developed a plan for “shared equity,” where the equity from their old home would go toward the purchasing of a new property. See Tower Hamlets, CPO, 32.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁰ See Richard Waite, “Planning victory for latest phase of Rohin Hood Gardens overhaul,” January 15, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/planning-victory-for-latest-phase-of-robin-hood-gardens-overhaul/8674763.article>.

¹⁶¹ The original “stress-free zone” was purchased by the Millennium Green Trust in 2001 and is now one of such 245 green spaces created in honor of the new millennium, which are funded partially by the National Lottery. The trust does not maintain the area, however, and therefore the Council does minimal maintenance to ensure the space remains useable. See CPO, 6 and 46.

¹⁶² Ibid.

will strive to “integrate the new development with the East India Dock commercial precinct to create a seamless urban grain.”¹⁶³ Phase 4 will consist of 640 units with 217 offered at social rent, 43 intermediate and 380 privately leased.¹⁶⁴

Throughout all phases, individual buildings will have one tenure type grouped together within the structure, rather than being “pepper-potted” or dispersed throughout.¹⁶⁵ According to the Compulsory Purchase Order: “Mixing tenures within the urban grain, but not within buildings, helps management efficiencies by co-locating people with similar lifestyles.”¹⁶⁶ It remains to be seen if this strategy will serve as an efficient management tool or instead a type of social segregation, reminiscent of J.G. Ballard’s vision of economically divided floors in *Highrise*. The estimated total cost of the regeneration project is £368 million and completion of all four phases is estimated after 2022.¹⁶⁷

The data is clear—Tower Hamlets is a borough in need of housing. It is also one of the fastest growing boroughs in the greater London area. Change is coming to Tower Hamlets, particularly in the Poplar district.¹⁶⁸ Investments in infrastructure and transportation are making this growth increasingly more possible. From the access decks of Robin Hood Gardens, tenants look out on the investment banking skyscrapers in

¹⁶³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁶⁸ Tower Hamlets encompasses many smaller districts or areas within its boundaries incorporating a large part of east London. These districts include Poplar, Stepney, Bethnal Green, Spitalfields, among others.

Canary Wharf --their security increasingly threatened by the rapid expansion happening all around them (fig. 53). Just down the street, Balfour Tower is in a holding pattern, waiting to be refurbished and sold when gentrification reaches critical mass. Robin Hood Gardens awaits demolition as a failed Brutalist utopian vision, deeply flawed by the constraints of a difficult site and irreparably damaged by years of under-funding. Meanwhile, the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project moves slowly forward, perhaps with good intentions, but also with an eye toward capital investment and the re-branding of Tower Hamlets.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: *A CLOCKWORK JERUSALEM*

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.
- William Blake, "Jerusalem"

At the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, the British Pavilion recalled the country's history of modernist innovation in social housing, while invoking episodes from British literary and popular culture. The theme in 2014, selected by architect and Biennale director, Rem Koolhaas, was "Absorbing Modernity." Open from June through November, 2014, the British pavilion was entitled *A Clockwork Jerusalem*, both a reference to Stanley Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange* and William Blake's poem *Jerusalem*.¹⁶⁹ The pavilion was curated by Sam Jacob of FAT Architecture and Wouter Vanstiphout of Crimson Architectural Historians.

A Clockwork Jerusalem was an examination of the architectural legacy of British modernism. According to curators Jacob and Vanstiphout:

A Clockwork Jerusalem describes a world where ruins become utopias, where history is written to alter the future, where archaeology and futurism merge, the Picturesque is rebooted as concrete geometry, the pastoral is electrified, where pop culture, history and social ambition fuse into new ways of imagining new national futures. Taking large-scale projects of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s as a point of departure, the exhibition explores the late, last flowering of radical British Modernism: the moment it was at its most socially, politically and architecturally ambitious, but also the moment that witnessed its collapse. It is a period that sees both epic ambition and complete loss of nerve. The grand utopian projects of this time were a highpoint for a vision of society remade through modern architecture.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ The British Council, "A Clockwork Jerusalem opens in Venice," <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.

¹⁷⁰ Sam Jacob and Wouter Vanstiphout. "Venice Biennale 2014: Inside the British Pavilion." *Architect's Journal*, June 4, 2014.

Both the title of the exhibition and Jacob and Vanstiphout's statement above reveal an ambivalence about Britain's architectural past and future. They write: "It is a period that sees both epic ambition and complete loss of nerve."¹⁷¹ With this Jacob and Vanisphout imply that the progressive architects, planners and government officials of the 1950s-70s were ultimately unable to fulfill the radical promise of their program. Shifting public opinion, bolstered by violent images set against Brutalist architecture in the news and popular culture, led to the conservative policies of the 1980s, which dismantled post-war housing initiatives and privatized government investments. The exhibition's title *A Clockwork Jerusalem* speaks directly to this ambivalence: Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* is a dystopian vision of Britain's future, while Blake's poem is a utopian longing for the British homeland.

By the summer of 2013, when the winning concept was announced, rising real-estate values and big-budget regeneration schemes were on the minds of those concerned with social housing. Jacob and Vanstiphout thought of the exhibition as a call to arms, writing, "... We need to release imaginative planning again, to have ideas about our living environment drawn from all corners of society... just as they were in the period we are presenting."¹⁷² This call for imaginative design came at a particularly challenging time for British planning. With working people priced out of the market in London and many others being forcibly relocated from housing estates, it was an appropriate time to revisit

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Sam Jacob and Wouter Vanisphout, "What Now? Building a New Jerusalem," *Architects' Journal*, June 5, 2014, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/home/venice/what-now-building-a-new-jerusalem/8663565.article>.

some of Britain's most socially progressive projects, as a kind of Jerusalem from which to draw new impetus for badly needed solutions.¹⁷³ The use of Brutalist housing to spur this innovation shows that mid-century British design is not only a popular aesthetic for developers and consumers, but it is also a source from which architects themselves draw inspiration. While the message of looking to the post-war period for creative solutions, is a hopeful one, *A Clockwork Jerusalem* warns of how things could go awry through the juxtaposition of the dystopian with the utopian.

As realized in Venice, references to post-war British housing began outside the pavilion with two large concrete cows flanking the entry stairway (fig. 54). These cows, created by the artist Liz Leyh in 1978, became the unofficial mascot for the British New Town development of Milton Keynes.¹⁷⁴ As one walked up the steps of the pavilion, an earth mound could be seen, seven meters wide and one and a half meters high, centered in the doorway. To the left of the entrance, white horses galloped in bright LED lights, referencing both Britain's pastoral heritage and technological future. To the right of the doorway, "A Clockwork Jerusalem" were printed in orange undulating lettering, reminiscent of the psychedelic fonts popular in the 1960s (fig. 55). Directly above the entrance was the classical inscription "Gran Bretagna," which announced Britain's long history of building, but also contrasted with the text and image on either side of the door.

Inside, in the center of the primary exhibition space sat a large, grassy mound, with a bright pink staircase leading up to its peak and down the other sides (fig. 56).

¹⁷³ Despite of the political message conveyed by the imagery and theme of the pavilion, no British government representatives attended the opening on June 5th 2014. See Richard Waite and Will Hurst, "UK Ministers snub British Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2014," *Architects' Journal*, June 5, 2014.

¹⁷⁴ The British Council, "A Clockwork Jerusalem opens in Venice," <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.

According to the British Council, the mound “references thousands of years of British architecture, from ancient burial mounds to the rubble of demolished slums, sculpted into mounds as the central landscape feature of idealistic projects in places such as Arnold Circus and Robin Hood Gardens.”¹⁷⁵ The mound at Robin Hood Gardens resembles the mound from the British Pavilion even more today than it did when it was originally constructed, due to the later addition of a staircase (figs.57-58).¹⁷⁶

On the walls surrounding the mound were images representing Britain’s architectural, literary and visual culture, from William Morris to Archigram.¹⁷⁷ All are presented in shades of blue which morph to pinks as the eye moves downward. Directly behind the mound was the image of a little girl sitting quietly on a grassy hill, taken from a drawing by the Smithson’s original plan for the Manistry Street Estate (figs. 27-28)¹⁷⁸ Behind the girl were large buildings: one high-rise and another in a crescent shape curving toward the viewer and culminating in a pile of ruins, recalling wartime destruction. Centered on this wall, above the little girl, is the eye of William Blake, the poet who declared his desire to make England a new Jerusalem. Blake’s eye is encircled by a cog, a reference to the cog-eyed droogs from Kubrick’s film *A Clockwork Orange*.¹⁷⁹ As seen in figures 59-60, cog-eye imagery has played a major role in the

¹⁷⁵ The British Council, “A Clockwork Jerusalem opens in Venice,” <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.

¹⁷⁶ In the promotional video for the pavilion, curator Sam Jacob is shown walking the grounds at Robin Hood Gardens, clearly demonstrating the significant influence of the estate on British housing in the minds of the curators.

¹⁷⁷ The British Council, “A Clockwork Jerusalem opens in Venice,” <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.

¹⁷⁸ Manistry Street was the original name for the development that would become Robin Hood Gardens.

¹⁷⁹ The British Council, “A Clockwork Jerusalem opens in Venice,” <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.

representation of both Kubrick's film and Anthony Burgess' original novel from the 1970s through today. It has become an iconic image and a shorthand for the classic film and the dystopian vision presented in it.

The rooms around the central space further demonstrated the critical role of housing to British modernism, and by implication to Britain's future. In white lettering against gray walls were titles such as "Utopia of Ruins," "Concrete Picturesque," "Welfare State Baroque" and "The People: Where will they go?" (figs. 61-62). Each of these exhibition rooms displays images and artifacts from British history, including models of the housing estates at Hulme, Thamesmead and Cumbernauld.¹⁸⁰

The 2014 British Pavilion makes clear that British architects and designers see the golden age of British Brutalism as not only the most significant British contribution to modernism, but also as a source of inspiration, encouraging practitioners to push the imaginative limits of British design today. The pavilion also offers a warning through the ambivalent nature of its title and imagery. At stake are two opposing visions: one *Clockwork* and the other *Jerusalem*.

At a time when many Brutalist housing estates are undergoing demolition or privatization through regeneration schemes, these developments remain the touchstone for the British architectural imagination. They represent what is possible. Architects such as Alison and Peter Smithson, Ernö Goldfinger, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith combined a utopian sensibility with a make-do, postwar attitude and a brutalist ethic to create housing for Britain's neediest citizens. For this they are upheld as heroes by social progressives.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

This heroization, however, has not stopped their works from falling prey to market forces and redevelopment.

I have argued that the rise in popularity of Brutalist housing is a symptom of several contributing factors, including a scholarly and pop culture vogue, the current housing crisis and the prevalence of regeneration schemes across England. And yet, with each demolition, private sale, and insensitive redevelopment, Britain moves further away from the imaginative and resourceful social vision set forth by its mid-century architects. By focusing on Britain's tradition of radical design and planning, the 2014 British Pavilion was a clarion call for a reflective pause in the cacophony of regeneration schemes and uninspired development.

The effectiveness of this call remains to be seen. The pavilion was reinstalled at the Architectural Association in London, and opened to the public on May 9, 2015.¹⁸¹ This will undoubtedly enable more Brits to view the exhibit, and thus learn more about the progressive planning of the post-war period. The outcome of the 2015 British national election, however, will make the development of a social housing agenda more difficult with David Cameron and the conservatives back in power for another five years. Their repackaged Right to Buy scheme will lower the affordable housing stock by offering rental tenants the right to buy housing association owned properties, and, consequently, leave housing associations without the assets they will need to borrow against for future construction.

An exhibit of photographs of London housing estates, including Robin Hood Gardens, by six photographers known as the Transition Group took place recently in an

¹⁸¹ See Laura Mark, "Clockwork Jerusalem to open at AA," *Architects' Journal*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/clockwork-jerusalem-to-open-at-aa/8680976.article>.

abandoned shoe shop on Chrisp Street in Poplar.¹⁸² The “pop-up” exhibit, entitled *Estates of Mind*, highlighted the changes undergone by London’s housing estates in the midst of the real-estate boom. One image by photographer Peter Luck encapsulates this transformation (fig. 63). Robin Hood Gardens can be seen in the distance, while a road sign alerts drivers to “changed priorities ahead.”¹⁸³ Meanwhile, as was previously mentioned, a new bid for listing Robin Hood Gardens by the Twentieth Century Society has been submitted to English Heritage as of March 17, 2015, and is currently under review.

Regeneration projects like those at Park Hill and Balfour Tower play on the consumer’s desire for an authentic piece of Britain’s radical architectural history, but ultimately only deliver remnants to those who can afford to buy. The rehabilitated structures are emptied of all original ethical intent, especially in their lack of provision for affordable housing. David Lowenthal wrote in *The Past is a Foreign Country*, “Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed.”¹⁸⁴ These refurbishments are nostalgic for an era of progressive planning, yet the hardship of the population these buildings once housed has been wiped away. The *raison d’être* of post-war social housing has been aestheticized to the brink of oblivion.

Still the physical survival of these buildings remains important to the survival of the Brutalist housing legacy. The demolition of Robin Hood Gardens will mark the complete erasure of the social ethic that Brutalist architecture and the Smithsons once

¹⁸² Will Hurst, “Estates of Mind,” *Architect’s Journal*, May 10, 2015, <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/culture/estates-of-mind/8682546.article?blocktitle=&contentID=0>

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8.

championed. Rehabilitating the buildings would be extremely costly, but destroying them will irrevocably erase an icon of social housing. It seems better to have the rehabilitated structures, however far removed they might be from the original intent of the architect, than to have nothing at all.

One might ask if it is justifiable to privilege the historical importance of a building at a time when so many are in need of housing that is practical and energy efficient. For me, the answer to this question lies in the lack of a cohesive vision for Blackwall Reach. Due to limited funding, each phase is planned and completed independently, and, therefore, the development is missing the comprehensive vision for affordable housing needed in Tower Hamlets. Each phase will have its own identity, and with some phases more heavily populated with social housing tenants than others, Blackwall Reach is at risk of segregating itself. The nature of the phased construction of the development makes it impossible for a comprehensive vision for social housing in Britain to be put forward on the scale that the Smithsons were able to accomplish with Robin Hood Gardens.

From the artistic renderings that have been released for the site, the vision offered at Blackwall Reach is generic (fig. 64). Figure 64 depicts an unspecified phase of the development. In the rendering, people of many ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds lounge in the grass and stroll on paved walkways. The housing behind them appears as an afterthought, while the high-rise office buildings of Canary Wharf loom in the background. This rendering seems to be about reassuring the current and future residents that the new development will be a place where different people can coexist. It

is less about what their housing situation will actually be, and still less concerned with presenting an innovative model for housing at a time when Britain needs it badly.

It is, therefore, justifiable to privilege the historical importance of a building at a time when so many are in need of housing. Looking back to the progressive vision of British post-war housing is precisely what is needed. The Blackwall Reach regeneration is typical of British redevelopment projects today. These projects, Park Hill included, are not started with the funding they need for completion, and this necessarily makes planning problematic. Britain, however, cannot afford generic solutions to specific problems. The message of *A Clockwork Jerusalem*, that looking to the past might offer the inspiration needed for innovative and creative solutions in housing today, is precisely what is needed. The creative, make-do spirit of planners and architects could provide solutions for millions in need to avoid an economically segregated future.

Now is the time to weigh the historical significance of the Brutalist housing legacy. *A Clockwork Jerusalem* was only a start. Though there is much money to be made in redevelopments and regeneration projects like Balfron Tower, Park Hill and Robin Hood Gardens, the price for not looking back is far more costly, both economically and figuratively. The vision of social housing put forth by the architects of the 1950s through the 1970s, commissioned by the Greater London Council, is no longer viable due to a changed political, economic and demographic landscape. The creation of innovative designs for people in dire need of housing, however, is an ethical challenge for today's architects and planners. With government support lacking and the vast majority of social housing commissioned by private housing associations and developers, creativity and

innovation is needed now more than ever to ensure that Britain's neediest can be housed.

Indeed, with an eye to the past, Blake's Jerusalem might still be possible.

APPENDIX A

FIGURES



Figure 1. Members of Team 10 marking the death of CIAM after the Otterlo Conference in 1959. L to R: Peter Smithson, Alison Smithson, John Voelcker, Jacob Bakema, Sandy van Ginkel. Bottom: Aldo van Eyck, Blanche Lemco
Source: Vincent Ligtelijn, editor. *Aldo van Eyck: Works*. Basel: Birkhäuser Publishers, 1999.



Figure 2. Alison and Peter Smithson, Urban Re-Identification Grid, 1953
Source: Roy Kozlovsky, “Urban Play: Intimate Space and Postwar Subjectivity,” in *Intimate Metropolis*, edited by Vittoria Di Palma, Diana Perioton, and Marina Lathouri, (New York: Routledge, 2009): 200.



Figure 3. Nigel Henderson, Photograph of unidentified boy, possibly Jimmie Deachey on Chisenhale Road, c.1950.

Source: Tate online archives, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/tga-201011-3-1-44-1/henderson-photograph-of-unidentified-boy-possibly-jimmie-deachey-on-chisenhale-road>.

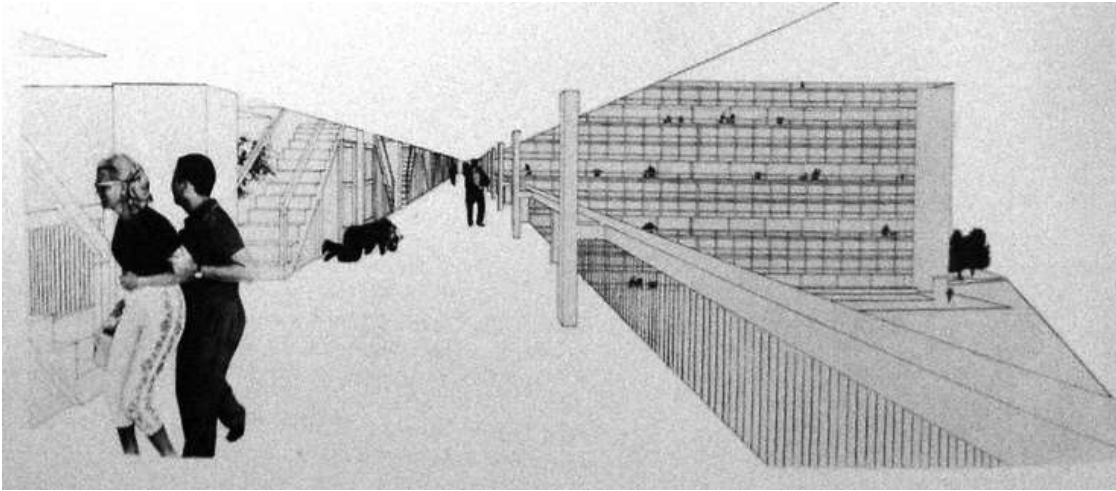


Figure 4. The Smithsons' Design Collage for Golden Lane, 1952-53.
Source: Ben Highmore, "Streets in the Air: Alison and Peter Smithson's Doorstep Philosophy" in *Neo Avant-garde and Postmodern: Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.



Figure 5. Alison and Peter Smithson, Design Collage for Golden Lane, 1952-53.
Source: 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*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, 92.



Figure 6. Nigel Henderson, Photograph of an unidentified boy riding his bicycle, 1953. Bethnal Green, London.

Source: Tate online archive, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/tga-201011-3-1-105-1/henderson-photograph-of-an-unidentified-boy-on-a-bicycle>.



Figure 7. Nigel Henderson, Installation view of *Parallel of Life and Art* Exhibit, 1953.

Source: Tate online archives, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/tga-9211-5-2-79/henderson-photograph-of-installation-view-of-parallel-of-life-and-art-exhibition>.



Figure 8. Ronan Point high-rise after 1968 collapse.
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronan_Point.



Figure 9. Alison and Peter Smithson, Robin Hood Gardens, Tower Hamlets, London.
Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 10. Denys Lasdun for Tecton. Hallfield Estate, London.
Source: Alexander Clement, *Brutalism: Post-war British Architecture*, Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2011, 114.



Figure 11. The Barbican Complex with estate towers, London.
Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 12. The Smithsons' Cluster City drawing, study of street deck complex.
Source: 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*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

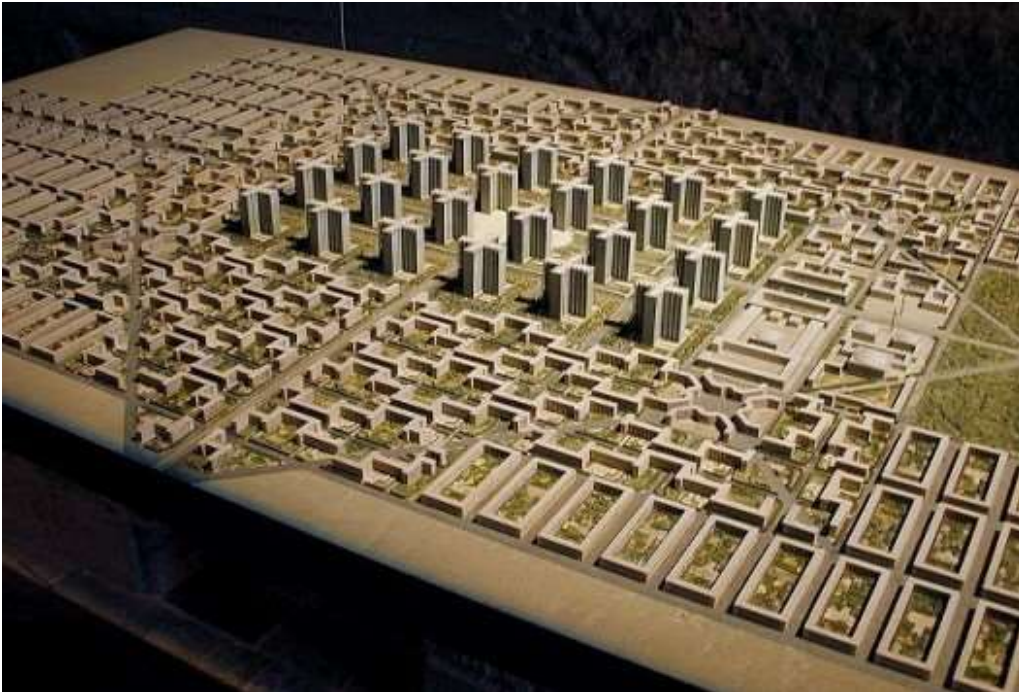


Figure 13. Model of Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, 1935.
Source: Arch Daily, <http://www.archdaily.com/411878/ad-classics-ville-radieuse-le-corbusier/>.



Figure 14. The Stress-Free Zone at Robin Hood Gardens.
Source: Sandra Lousada, 1972 © The Smithson Family Collection.



Figure 15. Curved form of the Royal Crescent, designed by John Wood the Younger, Bath, 1767-1774.
Source: Alexander Clement, *Brutalism: Post-war British Architecture*, Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2011, 114.

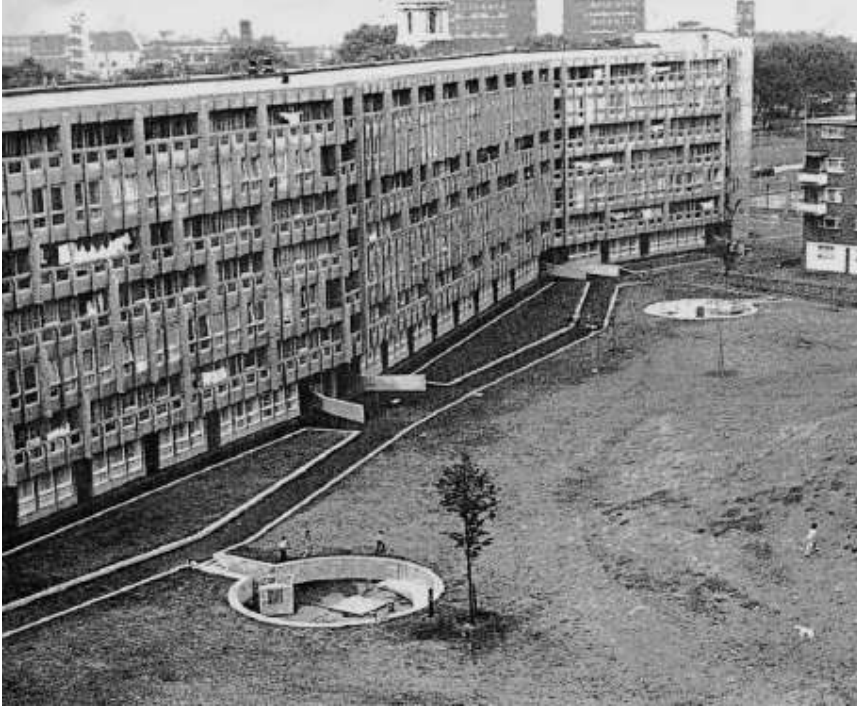


Figure 16. Serpentine form of Robin Hood Gardens, 1966-72.
Source: Powers, Alan, ed. *Robin Hood Gardens: Re-visions*. London: RIBA, 2009.



Figure 17. Entryway to apartment in east block of Robin Hood Gardens.
Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 19. The Smithsons' Economist building platform with Alison and Peter.
Source: Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Urbanism*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2005.



Figure 20. The Ludovico Medical Facility in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971.
Source: <http://www.movie-locations.com/movies/c/clockwork.html#.VVUVAJNr90Y>.



Figure 21. The Ludovico Technique in *A Clockwork Orange*.

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/may/22/clip-joint-mind-control>.



Figure 22. Tavy Bridge area in South Thamesmeade in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971.

Source: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/londons-film-locations-time-for-some-new-ones-1826408.html?action=gallery&ino=5>.



Figure 23. 1975 cover of J.G. Ballard's *Highrise*.

Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/jolly-containers-perpetual-present>.



Figure 24. Peter Ahrends design for the National Gallery extension, 1982.

Source: <http://hyperallergic.com/79263/unbuilt-museums/>.



Figure 25. View from “Millenium Green” at Robin Hood Gardens looking toward Canary Wharf.

Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 26. View from access deck of east block of Robin Hood Gardens.

Photo: Mackenzie Karp

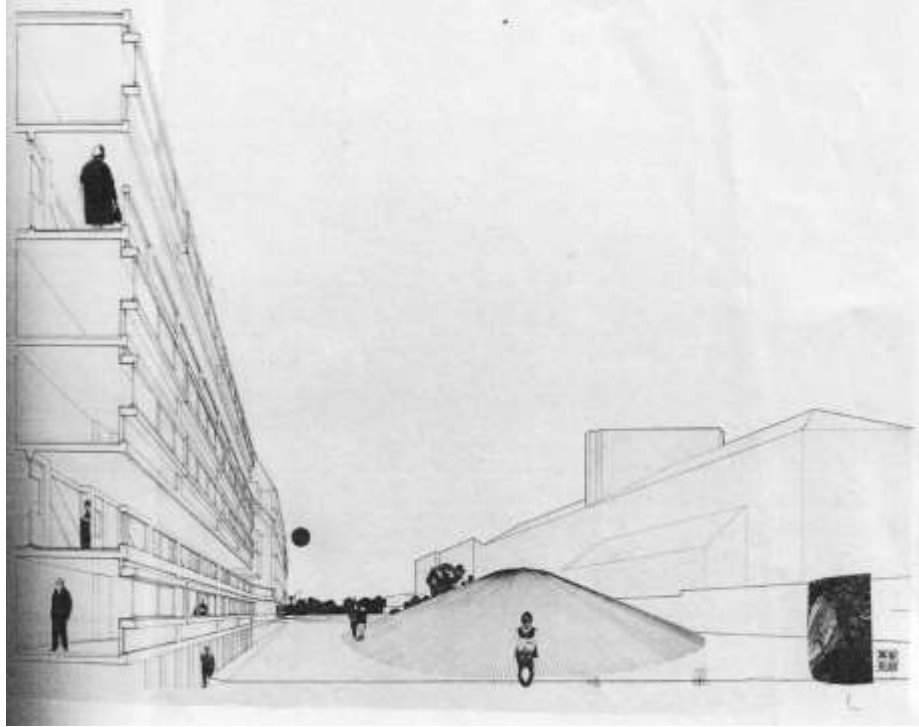


Figure 27. Drawing for Robin Hood Gardens with central mound.
Source: *Robin Hood Gardens: Re-Visions*. London: RIBA, 2009.



Figure 28. “A Clockwork Jerusalem” curated by FAT Architecture and Crimson Architectural Historians, © Cristiano Corte for the British Council, Venice Biennale 2014.
Source: “A Clockwork Jerusalem,”
<http://venicebiennale.britishcouncil.org/timeline/2014>.



Figure 29. Aerial view of Park Hill, 1962.
Source: David Levitt, *The Housing Design Handbook*, New York: Routledge, 2010.

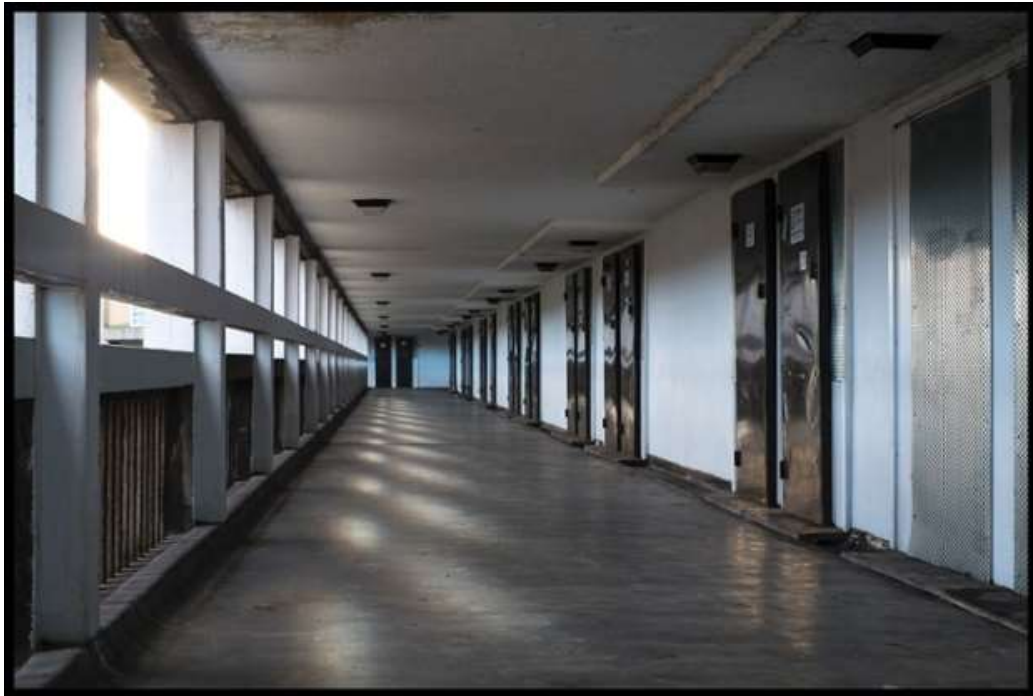


Figure 30. "Streets in the Sky" at Park Hill.
Source: David Sillitoe, "The Utopian Estate that's been Left to Die," *The Guardian*, March 5, 2014.



Figure 31. Alison Smithson on an access deck at Robin Hood Gardens.
Source: *Robin Hood Gardens: Re-Visions*. London: RIBA, 2009.



Figure 32. Park Hill stripped to its structural shell.
Source: David Levitt, *The Housing Design Handbook*, New York: Routledge, 2010.



Figure 33. Renovation at Park Hill by Urban Splash, Phase 1.
Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 34. Old meets new at Park Hill. Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 35. Green Space between blocks at Park Hill. Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 36. Access deck at Park Hill. Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 37. Sheet metal and heavy doors cover entries to empty apartments at Park Hill.
Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 38. "I love you" pillow in now-closed information shop.
Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 39. "I love you. Will u marry me." Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 40. Balfour Tower. Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 41. Ernő Goldfinger in Apartment 130, Balfon Tower.
Source: Oliver Wainwright, "Wayne Hemmingway's 'pop-up' plan sounds the death knell for the legendary Balfon Tower." *The Guardian*, September 26, 2014.



Figure 42. Bedroom in Flat 130.
Source: "Flat 130 in the Balfon Tower – in pictures" *The Guardian*, 26 September, 2014. Photos by David Levene.



Figure 43. Kitchen in Flat 130.
Source: "Flat 130 in the Balfour Tower – in pictures" *The Guardian*, 26 September, 2014. Photos by David Levene.



Figure 44. Living room in Flat 130.
Source: "Flat 130 in the Balfour Tower – in pictures" *The Guardian*, 26 September, 2014. Photos by David Levene.



Figure 45. Ikea BÖJA lamp.

Source: <http://www.ikea.com/us/en/catalog/products/70155036/>.



Figure 46. Fencing with “keep out” signs posted around Balfour Tower.

Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 47. Balloon release to celebrate the redevelopment of Balfour Tower.
Source: United House Developments, “Joint Venture created to regenerate Balfour Tower,” <http://www.unitedhousedevolutions.net/news/view/joint-venture-created-to-regenerate-balfour-tower>.



Figure 48. View of Robin Hood Gardens/Blackwall Reach Regeneration site from Blackwall DLR Platform with Balfour Tower visible behind. Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 49. View of East block from central green space. Photo: Mackenzie Karp

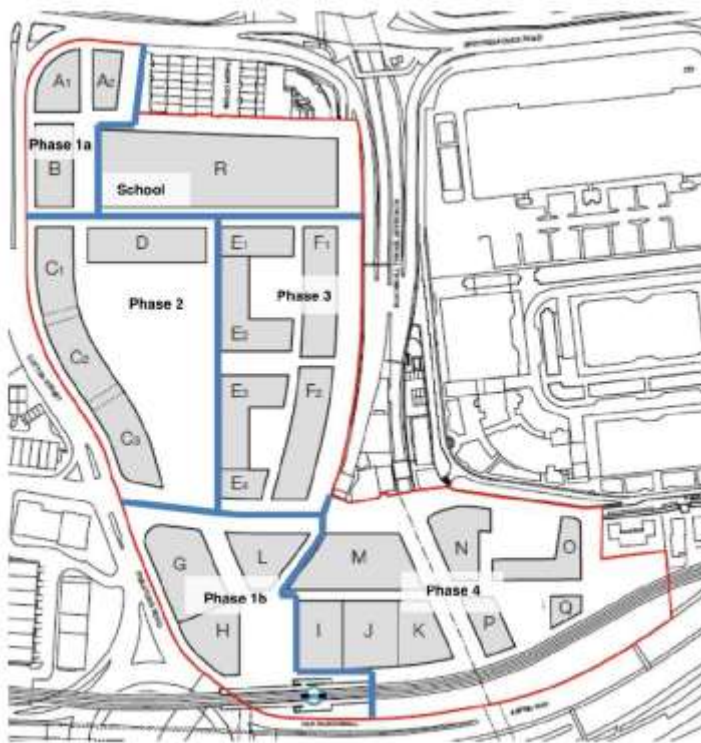


Figure 50. Plan in phases of Blackwall Reach development.
Source: Compulsory Purchase Order, Blackwall Reach, 2013.



Figure 51. Phase 1A, Blackwall Reach. Replacement housing for residents of Robin Hood Gardens. Red brick building in the background is new mosque for the complex. Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 52. Phase 1B of Blackwall Reach, by Karakusevic Carson Architects. Source: Richard Waite, "Planning victory for latest phase of Robin Hood Gardens overhaul." *Architects' Journal*, January 15, 2015. <http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/planning-victory-for-latest-phase-of-robin-hood-gardens-overhaul/8674763.article>.



Figure 53. View from access deck of the east block of Robin Hood Gardens, looking toward Canary Wharf. Photo: Mackenzie Karp



Figure 54. The Milton Keynes cows at the British Pavilion, 2104 Venice Biennale. Source: <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.



Figure 55. Portico of the British Pavilion at the 2014 Venice Biennale.
Source: <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.



Figure 56. Central Mound, British Pavilion, 2014 Venice Biennale.
Source: <http://design.britishcouncil.org/venice-biennale/venice-biennale-2014/>.



Figure 57. Aerial view of Robin Hood Gardens with central mound.
Photo: Alison and Peter Smithson, reproduced in *Robin Hood Gardens: Re-Visions*.
London: RIBA, 2009.



Figure 58. Central mound at Robin Hood Gardens today with staircase.
Photo: Mackenzie Karp

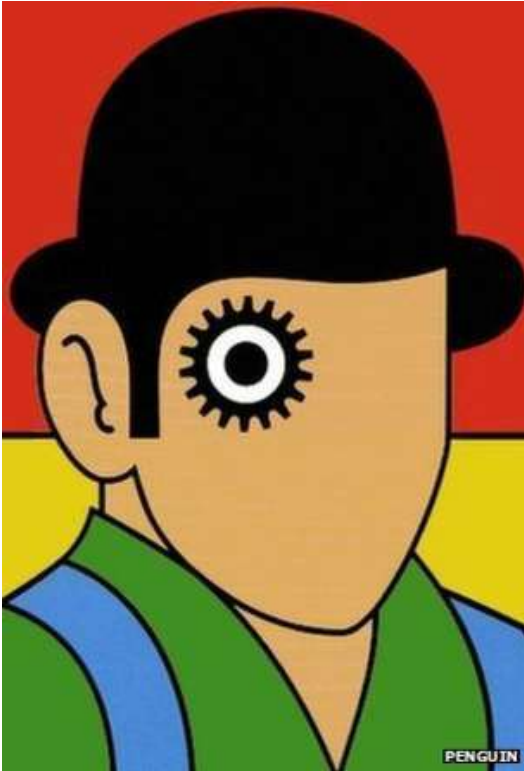


Figure 59. The cover art for Anthony Burgess' 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*, was drawn by the art director of Penguin Books, David Pelham, before the 1972 release of Kubrick's eponymously titled film.

Source: BBC online, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-20913249>.



Figure 60. Artwork for *A Clockwork Orange App* from Random House publishing features Beethoven in a bowler hat with a cog painted over his left eye.

Source: <http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/apps>.



Figure 61. Housing model at the British Pavilion.

Photo: Amy Frearson for *Dezeen*, <http://www.dezeen.com/2014/06/05/british-pavilion-a-clockwork-jerusalem-venice-architecture-biennale-2014/>.



Figure 62. The British Pavilion, 2014 Venice Biennale.

Source: The British Council,

<http://venicebiennale.britishcouncil.org/timeline/2014/image/1272>.



Figure 63. Peter Luck, Robin Hood Gardens in Poplar.
Source: Will Hurst, "Estates of Mind," *Architect's Journal*, May 10, 2015,
<http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/culture/estates-of-mind/8682546.article?blocktitle=&contentID=0>.



Figure 64. Artistic rendering for Blackwall Reach development, Millennium Green.
Source: Blackwall Reach, <http://blackwallreach.co.uk/index.php/design/>.

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Tenure	2003	%	2011	%
Owner occupied	27308	31%	25339	23%
Council owned (<i>Rented</i>)	24200	28%	12500	12%
Registered social landlord (<i>Rented</i>)	17828	20%	26484	24%
Private rented sector	17513	20%	41870	39%
Shared ownership	500	1%	2000	2%
Total	87349		108193	

Table 1. Housing breakdown in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets where Balfron Tower and Robin Hood Gardens are located.

Source: London Borough of Tower Hamlets, “Compulsory Purchase Order,” 16.

	Tower Hamlets		Greater London	
	Number of residents	% total	Number of residents	% total
All ethnic groups	254,200	100	7,900,500	100
White	135,500	53	5,188,400	66
Bangladeshi	75,300	30	188,700	2
Indian	5,500	2	529,900	7
Pakistani	1,600	1	192,100	2
Other Asian	4,600	2	264,700	3
Chinese	8,400	3	115,500	1
Black Caribbean	4,700	2	371,200	5
Black African	7,200	3	509,800	6
Black Other	3,900	2	218,200	3
Other	7,500	3	321,900	4
All BME groups	118,700	47	2,712,100	34

Source: Greater London Authority, 2010 Round Ethnic Group Population Projections.

Table 2. “Population by Ethnic Group, Tower Hamlets and London, 2011.”

Source: Tower Hamlets, “Population- Key Facts: A Demographic Profile of the Tower Hamlets Population,” 15.

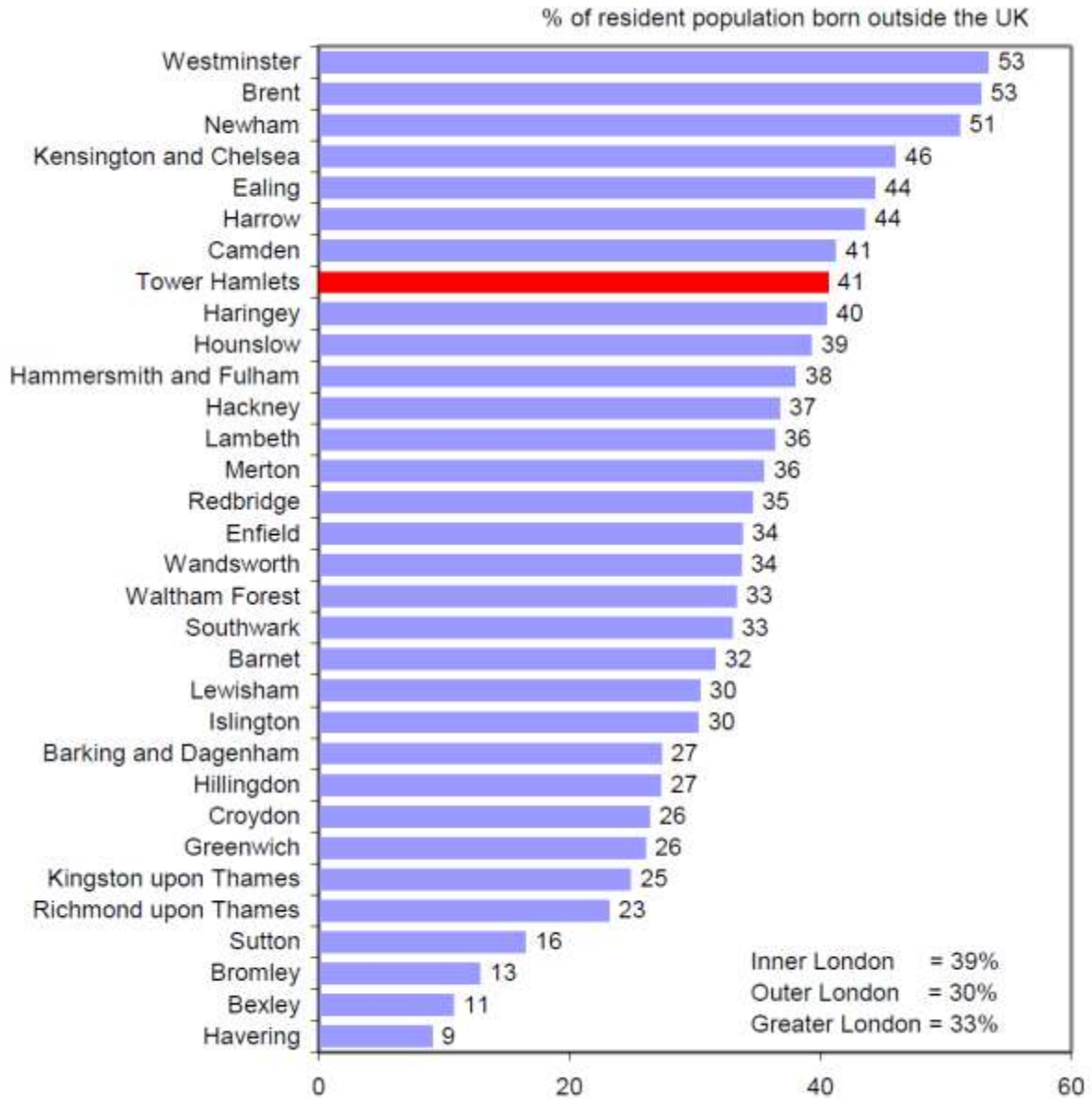


Table 3. Percentage of residents born outside of the UK
 Source: Tower Hamlets, "Population- Key Facts: A Demographic Profile of the Tower Hamlets Population," 16.

APPENDIX C

TERMS

Affordable housing- umbrella term for housing which is rented at social, affordable and intermediate rates.

Affordable rented property- An affordable rented property is rented at rates that may not exceed 80% of market price.

Housing association- a non-governmental, non-profit organization that provides social housing.

Intermediate property- may be sold or rented at prices above social and affordable rent, but below market value.

Regeneration- can be applied to any major redevelopment of an area often associated with deprivation; generally undertaken by private developers with a local public partner or a private registered housing provider.

Rehabilitation- allows for major structural and aesthetic changes to be made to a building, due to the level of dilapidation at the estates prior to regeneration.

Social housing- In the United Kingdom, with the exception of Northern Ireland, social housing includes rental apartments, homes purchased through ownership programs and homes offered as shared ownership.

Social rented property- owned by a local council or a registered social landlord with rental prices set by a national rent regime.

Tenure type- owner occupied, privately rented, rented from a local authority (council-owned), or rented from a housing association (register social landlord).

Source for terms: Gov.uk, <https://www.gov.uk/definitions-of-general-housing-terms>.

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