

HUNTING GHOSTS

70 Years of Pro-regression of Public Housing in England



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Diploma History and Theory Studies
Necromancing the Stone
with William Hutchins Orr

H(a)unting Ghosts.

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Please note that further research will be carried out to revise and extend this essay for the HTS thesis option. Updated versions including picture credits and extended materials will be provided.

Exposé: The Necromancer and the Exorciser

¹ Paul Karakusevic, in *Project Interrupted, Lectures by British Housing Architects*, pp. 12-47. Neave Brown was (formerly) a council architect working for London Borough of Camden architecture department. Brown is the chief architect for Alexandra Road Estate, now a Grade II* listed building. Paul Karakusevic is a student of Neave Brown and is running the practice Karakusevic Carson Architects in London, working on public housing projects and large-scale civic projects in the United Kingdom. This quote is an extract from a conversation between Brown and Karakusevic at the Barbican centre on 23 July 2015.

² Taken from John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams, the Rise and Fall of Council Housing*.

³ See Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost, Architecture and Post-modernism Again*, p. 152. See also Reinhold Martin, "Utopia's Ghost: Postmodernism Reconsidered."

⁴ Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, p. 9. In the architectural discourse that Jencks gave to the end of modern architecture, it is at the exact date and time of 3:32 PM, 15 July 1972, the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe Housing Complex in St Louis that marks the death of modern architecture.

"Neave [Brown], it has taken my practice [Karakusevic Carson Architects] 15 years to build just over 200 homes, whereas in seven years in Camden you managed something close to 700. What were the special conditions to make that possible?"¹

What one is faced here, is the dramatic and drastic tension between the continuity or inheritance of the discipline of architecture, and the inside-out rearrangement of the state of affairs in their entirety and the unprecedented overturn of political economy that serve as the material substrates for the housing projects of Brown and Karakusevic. Brown is a (though former) public-sector architect, architect of various highly publicised British council housing estates, modernist housing specialist. Karakusevic is Brown's student, a private-sector architect, running a practice dedicated to contemporary public housing projects with public-private joint venture. If one is to refer Brown as the weaver of the Municipal Dream² of public housing and the necromancer of béton brut, then Karakusevic should ironically be the one to help to undermine if not to knock down the short-lived remnants of the oft-criticised welfare state and the exorciser of its utopia.

Arguably, the multiplicity of their relations is reflective of a shift in the disciplinary knowledge and material interest of architecture. If the work of the architect as the necromancer of material objects should be put into the historical dustbin of wasteful and exhaustive realm of "styles," just as how modernism had treated its previous epochs of "styles," then by 1980, modernism itself should have already been thought by many to belong to the same dustbin of wayside materials, with its unique hallucinations of the architectural utopia "reduced to historical curiosities if not Faustian nightmares."³ In similar sense, if the role of the architect up until the official death sentence of modern architecture depicted by the famous image of the fall of Pruitt-Igoe by Charles Jencks⁴ that risked as much over-simplification as the communicability it gained, then the architect should have offi-

cially been empowered to take up the refreshingly new enterprise of “post-modernism” since La Strada Novissima⁵ from where one discerns merely pseudo-events, partial-revivals and a cacophony of ad-hoc bricolage or eclectic pastiche.

It is therefore argued that in line with all such paradigmatic shifts (the internal contradictions in periodisation and accountability of which, though, remain partially subject to criticism and are therefore not unchallenged), speculative⁶ and idealistic architectural discipline also features a by no means insignificant historical change from the role of the necromancy of material processes and weaver of utopian ideals to that of the disenchantment of its so-claimed hallucinations of the former, and the subsequent displacement of all previous dream-makings as some sort of historical waste – if one could risk vulgarisation, it is the change from the architect as necromancer to exorciser, indeed. The necromancer brings about the seductive phantasies of the stone-made Fedora of assumptions and phantasy,⁷ only to render physical in concrete the utopian ideals. Public housing could be the emblematic example of the failed utopia par excellence where the exorciser renders visible all the violent contradictions of public housing utopias to liquidate them eternally. “**Architecture or Revolution**,”⁸ as necromancers have claimed, are now too pale and futile to provoke any radical historical change: we are now left with an exorcised world, a stásis devoid of any possibilities for change, disillusion of an autonomous **Architecture**, and the impossibility of a **Revolution**.

It is not merely on the will of their own that the exorciser who deterred almost all the public housing projects not in the possibility of conceiving them as utopian images but also in the ability of financially and politically support such projects. Yet inevitably, during the recent decades Britain witnessed a drastic decline in the profession and an arguable regression of the discipline, and projects of anticipation and conceptualisation by the profession in as recent as a decade, seem not to have vanished off in their entirety but have remained and have transfigured to be transfixed in the traces of material frustration and exhaustion, dereliction and vandalism, devised stigmatisation and acquiesced depression of the concrete utopia: these characteristics are not only descriptive of a spatial condition but a societal symptom that prevailed in the still-standing housing estates in their undeath. Social symptoms should never be expected to emerge and disappear

⁵ It refers to the travelling exhibition at the 1980 Venice Biennale. See Martin, **Utopia's Ghost**, pp. 152-54.

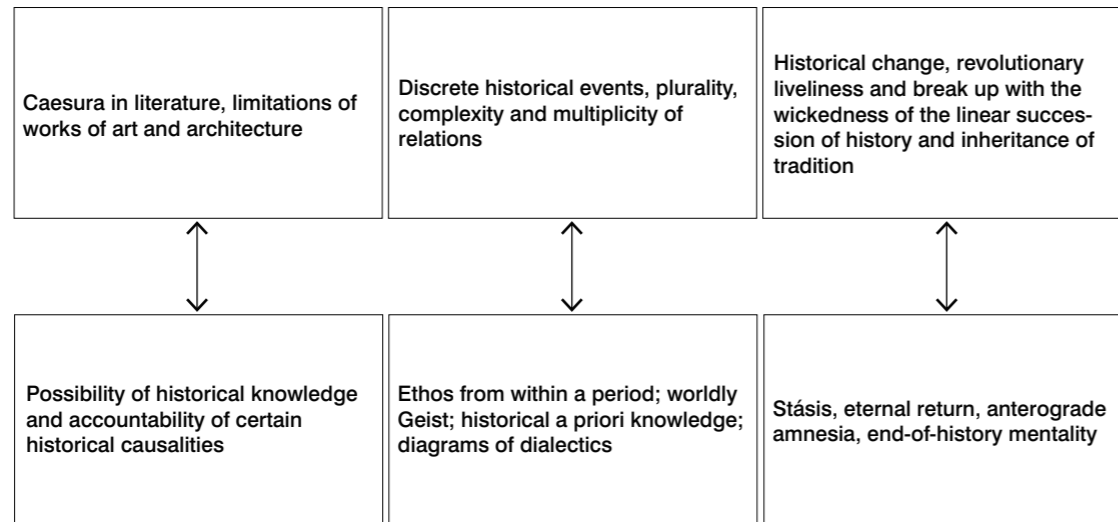
⁶ This is to be distinguished from some of the contemporary usages of the term, for example, in terms as “speculative market” that refers to the potential or provision of the profitability and increase in exchange value of a certain real estate property. Here this term is introduced to refer to the qualities of things or of relations being idealistic, evocative, visionary, anticipatory, unfinished, premature and “utopian.”

⁷ See Italo Calvino, **Invisible Cities**, p. 32.

⁸ Le Corbusier, **Towards a New Architecture**, p. 269.

without a firm causality with their material substrate, and knowledge of material basis should foremostly be attained through the analysis of the superstructural representations. Shockingly enough, during such dialectic reasoning, after almost four decades of experimental disenchantment, the exorciser is found to be faced with the return of ghost of the necromancer again.

**Discontinuities
Ruptures
Incompletion**



**Continuities
Coherences
Self-containment**

Chapter 1 The Historiographical Project

⁹ Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Benjamin, *Arcades*, Convolute N1a, 1.

“In the windswept stairways of the Eiffel Tower, or, better still, in the steel supports of a Pont Transbordeur, one meets with the fundamental aesthetic experience of present-day architecture: through the thin net of iron that hangs suspended in the air, things stream – ships, ocean, houses, masts, landscape, harbour. They lose their distinctive shape, swirl into one another as we climb downward, merge simultaneously.”⁹ “In the same way, the historian today has only to erect a slender but sturdy scaffolding – a philosophic structure – in order to draw the most vital aspects of the past into his net. But just as the magnificent vistas of the city provided by the new construction in iron for a long time were reserved exclusively for the workers and engineers, so too the philosopher who wishes here to garner fresh perspectives must be someone immune to vertigo – an independent and, if need be, solitary worker.”¹⁰

This chapter explores the historiographical questions with a detailed discussion of diagrams of historical continuities and ruptures. Agamben and Benjamin have presented reflections on the position of specific works of literature or art in history with an analysis of incompleteness of such mediums of communication. Without any excessive elaboration on the dialectics between the part and the whole, the specific and the universal, the singular and the pluralistic, the discrete and the continuum, etc., only to undermine the common misapprehension of both aspects as merely isolated, detached, and distinct qualities attached to the object of inquiry. In the second section, it is further introduced the Hegelian-Marxist model of dialectics of history, with reference to historical materialists and historians including but not limited to Benjamin, Adorno, Jameson; meanwhile it also attempts to draw connections to other historians working closely with the architectural discourse or the discussion of modern and postmodern historiography with a spatial or architectural reference, such as Giedion, Pevsner, Tafuri, and Jencks. Historiographic

diagrams should be presented and discussed also with a material connection, and such enterprise will be carried out in the next chapter. Finally, the question of a historical stásis or impasse is discussed using the prototypical historiographical diagram introduced in previous sections.

Continuity and Caesurae

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, "Experimentum Linguae," in *Infancy and History, The Destruction of Experience*, pp. 1-10.

*"Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned, and destined to remain so, because later works, which in turn will be the prologues or the moulds for other absent works, represent only sketches or death masks. The absent work, although it is unplaceable in any precise chronology, there by constitutes the written works as prolegomena or paralipomena of a non-existent text; or, in a more general sense, as parerga which find their true meaning only in the context of an illegible ergon."*¹¹

Not many works begin with a claim for caesurae like this. Caesurae are thresholds where ongoing projects halt prematurely, remain subsequently transfixed if not collapse into a status of incompleteness. The predilection for completeness thus reveals the panic and unrest about the caesura, which is perhaps due to the inability of the perception of a tantamount mental settlement or relief in the unfinished works and in the incompleteness of the *œuvre*, as if one has become so feeble, unnerved and distracted that only with some sort of eternal termination or renouncement that instantaneously directs or precipitates the historical project into the post-mortem of the *œuvre*, the revolutionary potential into a historical stásis, would one be sufficed at all. For the ones that see only satisfaction, if not achievement or fame, from the completeness of work and the effortful avoidance of any *détournement* that has sacrificed so much its richness, multiplicity, respect for limitedness of human sensibility, acknowledge of the narrowness of formal reasoning, openness of arguments to interpretation and generosity to oppositions, only in seek of mere communicability and illusions of self-fulfilment, they would surely be too preoccupied to be aware of such idea and would possibly struggle in situating their projects historically: in-between the complexities of relations and in the form of discursive representations which could be so unexpectedly feeble and unreliable. We may find other arguments related, or indeed similar to this subject, if Benjamin is here brought to provoke some historical resonance:

"To great writers, finished works weigh lighter than those fragments on which they work throughout their lives. For only the more feeble and distracted take an inimitable

*pleasure in conclusions, feeling themselves thereby given back to life. For the genius each caesura, and the heavy blows of fate, fall like gentle sleep itself into his workshop labour. About it he draws a charmed circle of fragments.*¹²

In the work of theory, literature, and art¹³ that incorporate some mental labour or preparation where no material or realist benchmark of failure could be agreed beforehand, it should be firstly acknowledged that such argument ought not to be read as a total, or even partial negation of the idea of a complete work. In fact, if one dares to risk vulgarisation, one could argue that this idea is instead challenging the degree of measure, or the criterion against which an intellectual piece of work is deemed as complete or finished foremostly: degree of completion is merely a commonly agreed threshold never to be purposefully arrive at, if ever aimed for, and this logic applies for material and concrete projects of construction, engineering, and science as well.¹⁴

Agamben's readings here are considered systematic to reveal an immaterial and hardly discernible structure of thoughts, which Benjamin might have referred to as **constellations** that incorporates tantamount the movement of thoughts and their arrest.¹⁵ Benjamin is interested in the caesura of thought, the **dialectic images** that capture the saturation of constellations with tensions of thoughts in flow and in standstill.¹⁶

In this sense, early enlightenment thoughts giving birth to a linear historiography should not remain unchallenged. Regarding enlightenment, the conceptualisation of time or history as a status of immaturity and an incompleteness is manifested to evoke the critique of pre-existing relations to seek for a "way out" that releases people to reach a state of disenchantment and of critique, a passage of history alongside the course of humanity towards its adult state.¹⁷ Here nothing of significance is to be distinguished from an endless continuity of history where the present is merely an unfinished state towards the eventual accomplishment; in fact, if one accepts the literal analogy where works on history could be considered as simultaneously the closing argument of some previous chapter and thus opening a new state of incompleteness, then enlightenment itself should be thought as some death sentence to a passing moment of tradition to establish the state of immaturity of humanity, eternally progressing towards a goal that it bears within itself: this is made possible through its claimed arsenal of reason. In this manner, the history of

¹² Walter Benjamin, "One-way Street" in **Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings**, p. 84.

¹³ Apart from previous instances involving theory, literature, and art, there is also an extraordinarily pertinent "genre" of architectural discourse or presentation that deals with incompleteness, negation of a realist paradigm if not reality per se, and an extensive exercise in producing imageries that render this ideal in still, in concrete and lastingly transfixed at the horizon of human vision: utopia. Connections with this theme will be drawn in following sections.

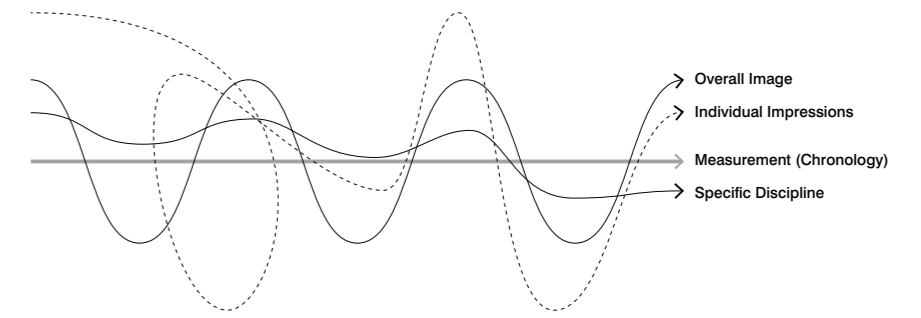
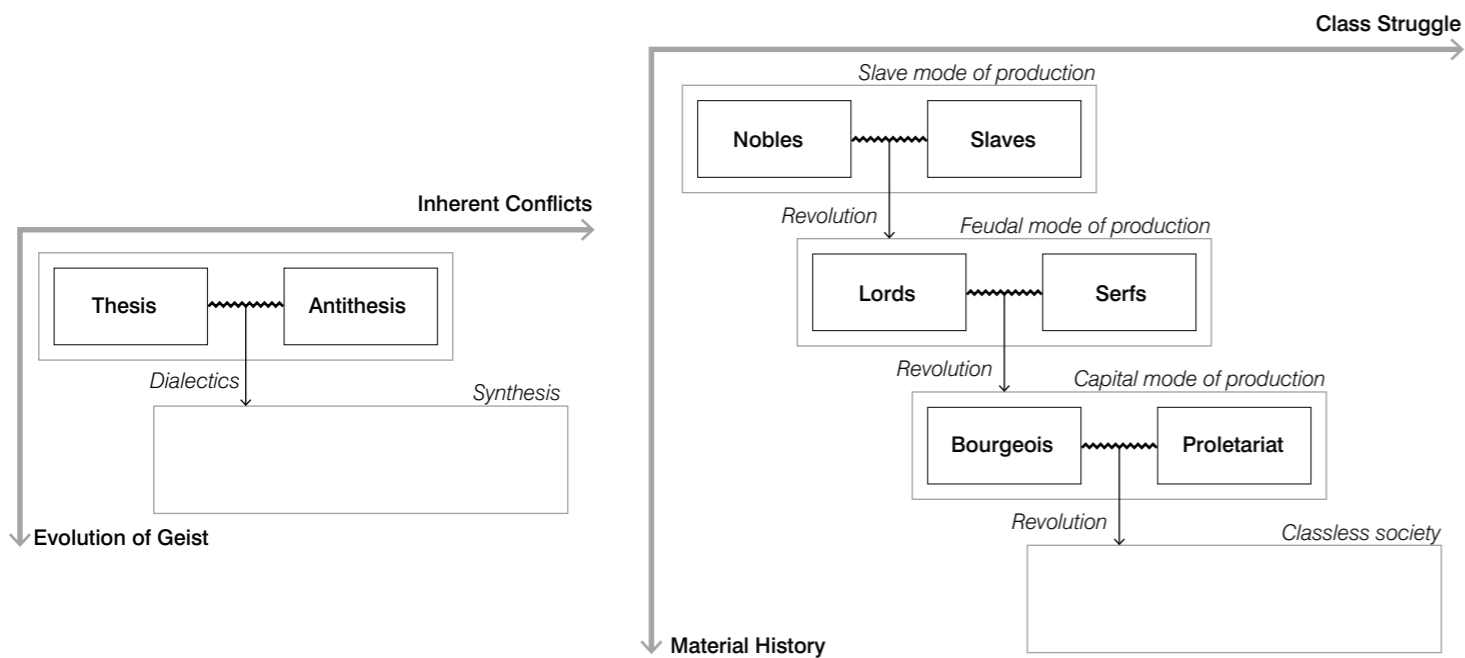
¹⁴ Further discussions on the material benchmark of failure will be discussed specifically for the 1970s re-evaluation of council housing projects.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, **The Arcades Project**, Convolute [N10a, 3], p. 475.

¹⁶ Ibid. The idea of the dialectic image and the historical materialist perspective constructs the presentation of historical objects and history itself in the dialectic image.

¹⁷ See "What is Enlightenment?" in Paul Rabinow, ed., **The Foucault Reader**, pp. 34-38.

progression actively negates its theoretical tradition and the restrictions from the clergies and the families only to set up its own agenda that incorporates perhaps even more contradictions and limits.



Historiographical Continuities and Discontinuities

18 Hermann Lotze, *Mikrokosmos*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1864), p. 21, quoted in Benjamin, *Arcades*, convolute [N13, 2], p. 478.

19 Jules Michelet, "Avenir! Avenir!" *Europe*, 19, no. 73 (January 15 1929): 6, quoted in Benjamin, *Arcades*, "Paris, [the] Capital of the Nineteenth Century," (Exposés of 1935 and of 1939), pp. 1-26.

20 Indeed, Benjamin is significantly influenced by such temperaments and during his lifetime one could see with increasing clarity the traceable connection in, for example, writings on Baudelaire, who, the "painter of modern life," in the age of developed capitalism, captures the transient and contingent figure in one half of the art, in order to render the eternal and the immobile in the other. Such qualities are believed to be the temperaments of "the present" (of the 19th century): of modernity. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations, Essays and Reflections*. See also, Neil Leach ed., *Rethinking Architecture*, "Walter Benjamin," "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire."

Alongside the enlightenment perception of historical time as an ongoing process of completion tackling immaturity, this historical time are also claimed to be presented as a task or obligation. Yet, this historical model of linearity and progression is best read in conjunction with its unobvious presuppositions and inherent contradictions if one really adopts the ethos of enlightenment: that of reasoning and of critique. In opposition to the teleological conception of history as the progress of humanity into its mature state, cautious reflections and rethinking have subsequently revealed that the courses of history "take the form of spirals – some prefer to say epicycloids."¹⁸ Regardless of the various spatial diagrams of the trajectory of history that challenge merely the formal presentation of the linear model without a total reevaluation of presuppositions – some may argue such theoretical deviation of geometrical revision as reactionary of oddities in reality without an understanding of the mechanics of their enunciation – what could be viably accepted at that time was that since the introduction of such model, humanity had been faced with successive dearth of thoughtful but not completely unveiled consensus that prescribes the impression of history from the part and the whole.

"Each epoch dreams the one to follow."¹⁹ Michelet has noted, though primitively, on the prototype of a historical device or "organ" beyond the fatefully rectilinear inheritance: dreams. Perhaps extending also from a Hegelian tradition, Benjamin adds that not only do each epoch dream of the one to follow, in this process, its awakening is also precipitated. Benjamin might be considered to be too frequently adopting allegories (of dreaming and awakening, and certainly of others as well) and constantly based theoretically on the transient presences of images, on research into fleeting figures in the Parisian urban landscape, and on the experience from illusory phantasies in panoramas and in arcades: these idiosyncrasies which might appear inappropriate in historical materialism are more related to the temperaments of modernity than to Benjamin.²⁰ Benjamin claims to have derived this prototype from the observation between the raptures and tensions between the material base and the superstructure, the economic substrate and the cultural representation. Objects of interest are the visions and inherent contradictions of historical materials and evidences related to past attempts to realise a somehow self-ref-

erential ideal or to react to a certain technical advancement, including utopian projects as Charles Fourier's Phalanstère;²¹ reappraisals of Georges-Eugène Haussmann's Paris and his œuvre as the prefect of La Seine;²² some of the observations based on Sigfried Giedion's thesis on ferroconcrete constructions of **Bauen in Frankreich**.²³ In **Bauen** and other works, Giedion encourages the rational and critical analysis of history according to the need of the present through the transformative backward look²⁴ whose deeply involved historiography Tafuri would refer to as "operative criticism."²⁵ Giedion is perhaps too predestined to establish the historiographical justification for modernist avant-gardes to reach a disciplinary autonomy for architecture to succeed in such task. By re-evaluating the 19th century claim for universal forms and absolute standards, the 20th century arguments of modernism for universality and progressive outwardness per se are somehow undermined as well.

"Few things in the history of humanity are as well known to us as the history of Paris. Tens and thousands of volumes are dedicated solely to the investigation of this tiny spot on the earth's surface. For many streets, we know about the fate of every single house over a period of centuries ... "a landscape built of pure life" (Hugo von Hofmannsthal) ... the kind of beauty that is proper to great landscapes – more precisely, to volcanic landscapes. Paris is a counterpart in the social order to what Vesuvius is in the geographic order: a menacing, hazardous massif, an ever-active June of revolution. But just as the slopes of Vesuvius, thanks to the layers of lava that cover them, have been transformed into paradisaal orchards, so the lava of revolution provides uniquely fertile ground for the blossoming of art, festivity, fashion."²⁶

Marx is believed to have laid bare the causal relation between the economic basis and its cultural representations. For Benjamin, rather than the economic origins of culture, the foci should be shifted towards the expression and representation of economy in its contemporary cultural forms. With the grasp of the economic process as some conceivable and perceptible **Urphänomen**, the material history of the 19th century is believed to have been made accessible as an archetypal form or prototype for historical analysis.²⁷ What historical materialism actively aspires here, is neither the historiography of continuities nor

²¹ See Benjamin, **Arcades**, pp. 1-26. Fourier has envisioned the Phalanstère to be an autonomous commune, a utopia where social organisations are proposed to be not only drastically different from the status quo of the metropolis but refreshingly productive and collaborative. This negative of the metropolis was later overrun by the metropolis per se with the incorporation of some of its gist (of a shared enclosure, of the arcadian typology) into the space of its negative, the commercial interior which is opposite to Fourier's initial intention.

²² Ibid. According to Benjamin, one of the main objectives of Haussmann's plan was to broaden the street and create boulevards as direct passages from workers' quarters to the city, and to military camps: in the event of a barricade which would be very unlikely due to the broadened streets, military intervention could be brought directly into enforcement. Such planning was effective with only one exception: the antithesis reveals itself during the Paris commune, where barricades took place and the boulevards played no role in prohibiting this event, as the French army was defeated by the Prussians and was thus absent. What Benjamin has been occasionally criticised is that he has failed to see the larger impact of Haussmann on the speculation of real estate market and the increase of rent levels due to the building of boulevards and the relocation of existing tenants to make place for new constructions. This is perhaps one of the very early models for urban regeneration. Relevant themes regarding the political economy of contemporary urban regeneration will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

²³ Sigfried Giedion, **Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete**.

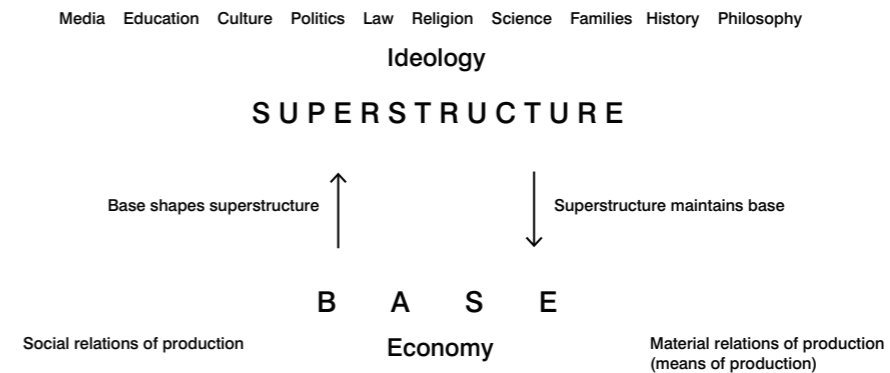
²⁴ See Giedion, **Space, Time and Architecture, the Growth of a New Tradition**, pp. 5-11.

²⁵ See for reference, Manfredo Tafuri, **Theories and History of Architecture**, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia, (Norwich: Granada Publishing Ltd, 1980), p. 148. According to Tafuri, there are two types of situations where history and operative criticism would flourish, one being an uneasy stásis calling for a courage for radical historical change; the other being the establishment of a refreshingly new artistic movement that suddenly ascend into dominance, in desperate need of the clarification of a profoundly engaging historiography as its support. Apparently, Giedion is in desperate need or interest to establish a reformed historiography of modernist architecture through the ethos of the space-time and the justification of the "transformation" or reappropriation of the past to cater to contemporary interests.

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, **The Arcades Project**, 1999, First Sketches <f>, 3>, 882. See also Convolute C1, 6.

²⁷ Benjamin, **Arcades**, Convolute [N1a, 6], p. 460; exposés, pp. 1-26.

²⁸ Benjamin, **Arcades**, Convolute [N7a, 2], p. 470.



homogeneities. From the causality of the superstructure and the base, one could easily deduct that if the continuities of the material substrate were to be maintained, little spaces could be reserved for the continuous history of economy, of culture and of politics. On the other hand, due to the limitation of human knowledge and perceptibility, past days are never touched equally by historians with the relatively recent past revisited frequently while the most recent one untouched completely. Historians are unable to do justice to the presentation of history in its homogeneity or continuity.²⁸

Considering Benjamin's position, extending from a Hegelian-Marxist tradition, this essay adopts the model of dialectics in the framework of historical materialism. In the context of post-war public housing developments in the UK, the material base in terms of economics and means of production, will be discussed in conjunction with the superstructure of legislative documents, political agenda, architectural narratives and debates on the possibilities and effectiveness of public housing programmes. Such discussion will be categorised in several sectors featuring different socio-political climates, typically periodised by both the shift in material production and the rupture in housing policies. Due to the oscillation and asynchrony between (sometimes, the perception of) the base and the superstructure, conditions of mechanical iterations of ostensible syntheses could be occasionally observed (where no actual synthesis has taken place, for example, a revolution turning into reconciliation or negotiation is sometimes deemed as a secret failure); there is another condition of illusive "returns" to a point in prehistory (which is actually invalid) or "stásis" where history appear as transfixed or in regression. The two ill-digested perspectives of viewing history are discussed in the following section.

To summarise, what is crystalised or distilled in the concrete, physical architecture is not the realisation of a utopian ideal of a generation, but the material relations that are often rendered invisible, together with some of their social relations. Marx's concept of commodity fetishism brings to light such view and explains the hidden exploitations beneath almost every material and immaterial product. Besides the fetish point of view, if one could regard them, the towering pinnacles of reinforced concrete blocks as an economic phenomenon, then certainly they should be read in parallel with their cultural, public image, as the economic substructure lurks beneath culture and causally gives birth to and

delimits the latter.

When architecture gains its cultural image situated in the field of relations generated and delimited principles of commodity production and exchange, it is thus no longer possible to distinguish between the material, economic basis from the cultural superstructure; instead, they are concealed in the image of the opposite: when a commodity, based on certain factual, material necessities, are to be exchanged in the market, its cultural and symbolic image also play a role in bargaining and fixturing itself within the system of exchange; on the other hand, as Lefebvre puts it, the foci of economic production shifts to the production of space²⁹ and the cultural, symbolic values or images attached to it.

Thus, if one could argue that Lefebvre concentrates on the spatialisation of Marxism, then one could regard Benjamin's work as its counterpart in (dialectic) images, in language and culture. Thus Benjamin argues: if Marx have therefore laid bare the causal relation between economy and culture, between substructure and superstructure, what is at stake now is the thread of expression. Rather than the presentation of the economic origins of culture, the expression of economy in its culture, the image of the substructure from its superstructure.³⁰

²⁹ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

³⁰ Benjamin, *Arcades*, Convolute [N1a, 6], p. 460.

³¹ Theodore Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 3.

³² Benjamin, *Arcades*, pp. 1-26.

H(a)unting the Ghosts of History

In view of Fourier and the Phalanstère, if one could argue that the arcades in Paris is its ruin and its eventual precipitation into a world of built structures and social relations, then this is a prototype of historical dreaming and awakening. Its dialectics also follow the general rules discussed in the previous section, and since the Phalanstère and the arcade should be both read as a superstructural response and revision of the material relations of production, exchange, and reproduction, the paradigm of dreaming and awakening thus, shows the dialectics between the base and the superstructure, and, in Benjaminian terms, that between the economical origin and its cultural representations. The further relations one could creatively extract from this twin is that, in retrospection, the forms and relations precipitated in the arcadian “awakenings” should not be without inherent contradictions as well, and such internal conflicts eventually leads to the typology of department stores and supermarkets, and perhaps, the worldly interior of global capital. The intention of bringing in this paradigm is solely to demonstrate the dialectical relations between the thesis of historical dreaming, the antithesis of the process of waking up, and the synthesis of the final lucid status which transforms into another pair of contradictions.

Nonetheless, no sublation could ever be exhaustive and always timely. In fact, some might argue that the transformation of the world has already failed.³¹ When such dialectical dynamism appears to be in regression or in stásis, there is the sensation of a “return of the past” or the ghostly images of the dead epochs reviving and haunting the contemporaries.

Apart from the haunting ghost of the Phalanstère on the arcades and that of the arcades on later types of public interior spaces, one could also draw reference to *l'Éternité par les astres* (The eternity through the stars) of Blanqui³² where, through the finitude quantity of stars, Blanqui reached the (false) conclusion that the history should repeat itself due to the finitude number of possibilities. Although such conception is even at the first glance problematic as it treats each moment ahistorically: each moment should instead be considered containing its prehistory; yet the conception of a historical stásis did

continue to haunt later generations. "The End of History"³³ has seemingly heralded the death sentence of historical change with the dull future free of history but solely events. Hauntology³⁴ has squashed such misbelief and haunt us again with unrealised promises and lost futures rendered concrete by the contradictions and decay of the realities of culture³⁵ and architecture³⁶ of the late capitalist society.

Apart from the *haunting* ghosts, there is also another exercise aimed at *hunting* the ghosts. It is also bifold: on the one hand it could refer to the Fukuyama mentality of precipitating a premature resolution for a temporal relief and triumph yet not necessarily successful in tackling historical crisis; on the other it could also refer to the historical materialists' demystification of history and the presentation of its primal principles and the laying-bare of the material relations and their contradictions. The latter is exactly the ethos of this thesis.

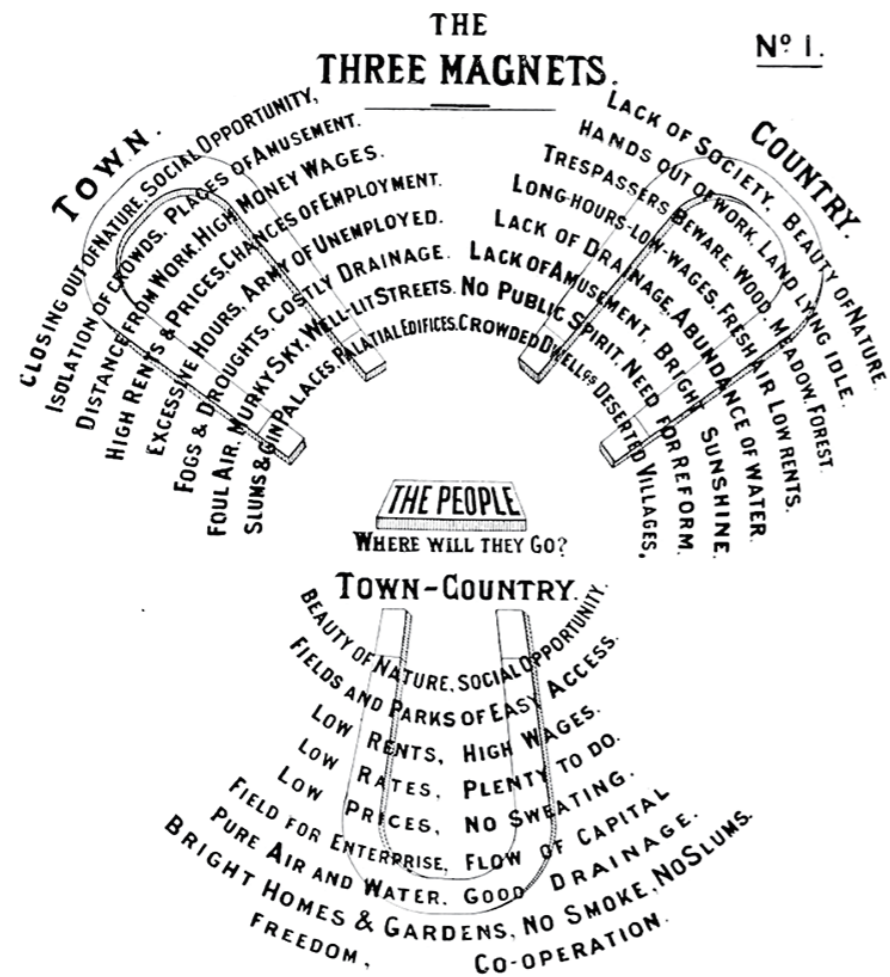
33 Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" pp. 3-18.

34 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*.

35 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*.

36 Martin, *Utopia's Ghost*.

Chapter 2: Municipal Dreams



37 Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, quoted in Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." See also Leach ed., *Rethinking Architecture*, p. 23.

Prehistory

*"A city like London [is] where one can roam about for hours without reaching the beginning of an end [...] The colossal centralisation, this agglomeration of [millions of] people on a single spot has multiplied the strength of [these] inhabitants a hundredfold. But the price that has been paid is not discovered until later. Only when one has tramped the pavements of the main streets for a few days does one notice that these Londoners have had to sacrifice what is best in human nature in order to create all the wonders of civilisation with which their city teems, that a hundred creative faculties that lay dormant in them remained inactive and were suppressed [...] The greater the number of people that are packed into a tiny space, the more repulsive and offensive becomes the brutal indifference, the unfeeling concentration of each person on his private affairs."*³⁷

As noted in previous sections, "architecture or revolution" is perhaps one of the most well-known manifestos of modernism architecture. Modernist manifesto focused on the establishment of the disciplinary autonomy by opposing the revolutions and the uprise of the working class. To this regard, the main goal based on such disciplinary justification, should be the provision of mass housing. During the early 20th century, modernist approaches to housing (alongside with its spiritual predecessors), is hooked with the mentality of the perfectibility of the Tabula Rasa represented in the will to start anew and to purify and to establish an autonomy of the discipline. Yet Tabula Rasa, as its name suggests, originally and quite paradoxically referred to a reusable wax board for writing. It was simultaneously a "clean," ready-to-write surface and a palimpsest or script, although the latter was more or less irrelevant as it was contradicted by the use of such device. The latest layer of writing was almost immediately erased at the end of use in preparation for the inscription of the next layer. However, one could still argue that the Tabula Rasa is thus the closest idea to the palimpsest. This is valid not only for what Rossi claims decades afterwards: "Architecture, attesting to tastes and attitudes of generations, to public events and private tragedies, to new and old facts, is the fixed stage for human events ... One need only look at the layers of the city that archaeologists show us; they appear as a primordial and eternal fabric of life, an immutable pattern ... This inseparable whole is

at once the natural and the artificial homeland of man ...³⁸ This is valid also because of the mentality of the Tabula Rasa has persisted for such a lasting period that through such superstructural representation and its changes in meaning and its internal reflections, one could almost discern the traces of an endless corpus of economic and material relations that might not manifest themselves otherwise. All material erections of architecture come into being alongside the traces of the material relations and social relations of the city; meanwhile, the architecture is also deeply rooted in and affecting the formation of such relations of material and of society. What Rossi claimed as the urban artefact in the benefit of the critical preservation of historical values of a culture,³⁹ should now be rewritten also as the historical artefact or dialectic artefact that bears with it the inklings and implications of historical changes and their material relations. With time, such palimpsestic object grows upon itself to attain certain new traces and scripts.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 22-27.

³⁹ Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, p. 21.



Mass Housing for Today and Tomorrow

⁴⁰ See Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block, Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*.

If the overarching system of valuation formed during the interwar period since the 1919 Tudor Walters Report were constantly revisited and reiterated during the decades to come till the 50s, then it would not be difficult to discern the similar sense of mission that was manifest so much in contemporary ideals of (late) modernity. Specifically, the ultimate course of this "municipal crusade" was the maximization of output through (regulative) standards and (industrial) standardisation. It is until after the war where the Welfare State furthermore focused on comprehensive and systematic provision of public services, that the ideal of housing the massive working class population in public sector rental tenure, gained increasing thinkability and practicability. In the prevailing ethos of reconstruction after the war of which the urgency derived from not only the destruction and devastation from airstrikes and warfare, but also the accumulated conviction and necessity to deal with the decaying inner towns and the traditional urban fabrics that was not yet prepared for a modern way of life.⁴⁰ Such factors were godsend opportunities for the public provision for housing, as it was perhaps the only instrument that could **appear** to touch the most urgent and fundamental issues of the metropolis in the most comprehensive and reformative way.

The rule of thumb for public sector housing and planning shortly after war should be: the larger the development is, the more weight the client carries with themselves, the more autonomy and professional agency the architects and planners will enjoy. In England, the legal and regulatory framework for public sector housing then was the joint effort of the state, Parliament, Exchequer, relevant Governmental departments; however, the actual organisation of the construction of the building was undertaken by local authorities.

Such historical period featured the rise of autonomy of the architectural profession (in metropolitan areas in England, especially,) where architects and planners were not only employed at massive scale in public sector services and could direct the course of public sector provision and innovations which had been unimaginable by their forebears. From 1950 onwards, this is particularly descriptive of the newly appointed architects at the London County Council (LCC). Such trend is of the interest of both parties: planning



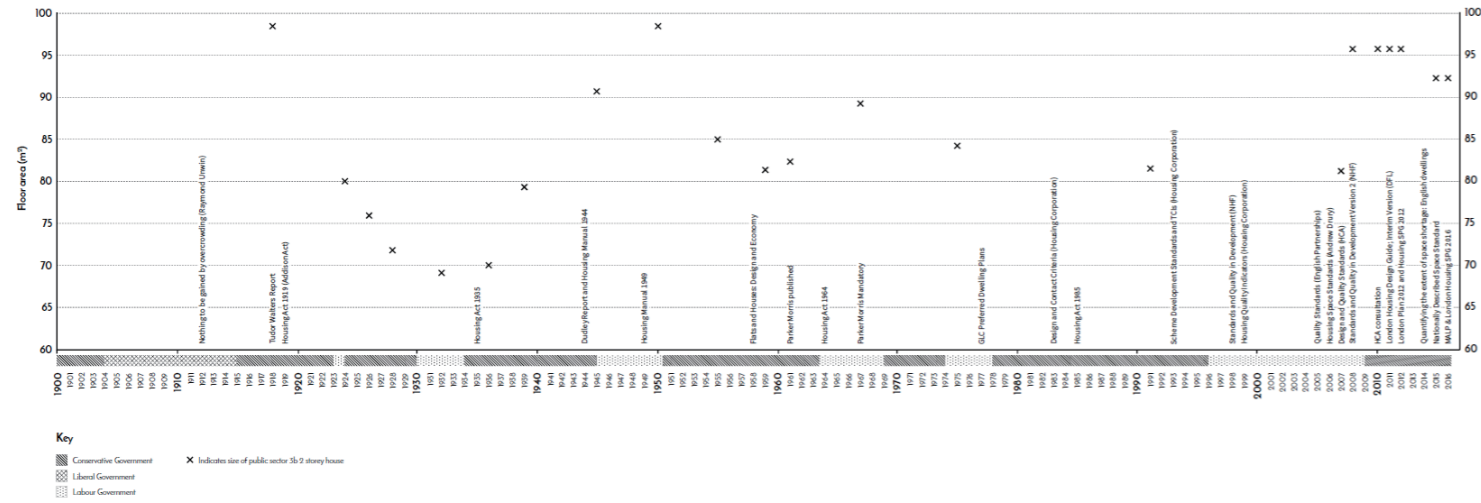


Figure 1.3 Local authority dwellings approved in various contract size categories, 1960-1973. NOTE: Tender approvals, local authorities and new towns, England and Wales. LCC and new town approvals were included for the first time in 1963, hence the sharp rise in average contract sizes. Scottish approvals show a similar distribution; in 1967 71 per cent of Scottish approvals were in contracts of over 100 dwellings.

officials and the group of architects and planners in London.⁴¹ One the one hand, it was in the interest of councillors and planning officials if LCC projects could be established as national exemplars of council housing blocks for their novelty in terms of scheduling, construction, and visual characteristics; indeed powerful LCC councillor such as Evelyn Denington who stuck to “progressive” ideals provided significant political backing for architects aiming for innovative designs later on celebrated across Britain with an emblem of “national” values of “British” design.⁴² On the other hand, architects in London had the “mouthpieces” of *The Architectural Review* (AR) and *The Architects’ Journal* (AJ) which were (and perhaps, are nowadays even more) considered as the places of publicity more than locution and criticism; this was the disciplinary backings for design works carried out in the LCC. “In the beginning was the phrase,”⁴³ it was Nikolaus Pevsner’s exposé in AR⁴⁴ that relates the LCC flagship project at Roehampton to a European ancestry of Le Corbusier and the Unité. The AR and the AJ did include criticisms in the narrowest sense: simple and unsupported opinions and judgements as to whether a building was bad or good. However, the selection of certain projects for description, illustration, and discussion per se should be regarded as some outstanding merit.

It is thus even clearer the progressive outwardness of the architectural practice and academia during the first decades of honeymoon with the LCC. It is also with little doubt that such conditions did not apply for anywhere else in England. In retrospect, London is not only epitomic of the triumphs of autonomy of architects and the progressive outwardness of the architectural discipline, but also typically manifest for the inherent conflicts of relevant parties and the later decline of such favourable environments. If one could treat the 50s as the infancy and trial period of this municipal utopia where various factors and resolutions were being actively and open-mindedly experimented, then the following decade of the 60s should be regarded as the conclusive triumph of certain types and parameters of and the antithesis of the rest, before the total overturn of the paradigm and the modernist project starting from the 70s. In London and other metropolises, the finally precipitated form during the 60s was the tower blocks and multi-storey flats.⁴⁵ Contributing factors giving rise to this phenomenon should include the subsidy schemes in the first place, followed by other specificities in material relations. These factors will be discussed subsequently.

41 Ibid., pp. 1-6, pp. 13-14, pp. 53-60.
 42 Ibid., pp. 1-6, pp. 104-9.
 43 Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism*, p. 10. See also pp. 116-17 for Alton West [Roehampton] Housing [Estate] in Roehampton, 1959, designed by LCC Architect’s Department (Housing Division).
 44 Nikolaus Pevsner, “Roehampton, LCC Housing and the Picturesque Tradition,” in *The Architectural Review*, vol. 126, iss. 750 (Jul 1, 1959), pp. 21-35. Pevsner is straightforwardly establishing the justification of his position by relating the Roehampton project to the modern European tradition of town planning starting from the first line in the review. He claims without hedging the idea that LCC Roehampton Estate [Alton West Estate] is one of the masterpieces of post-war residential design and makes an appreciation of the lessons learnt from methods employed in this project. See the previous note for the inclusion of this project in Banham’s book.
 45 These types comprised about half of total council housing delivered in the mid and late 60s in Greater London, and 75% in Glasgow from 1961 to 1968. See Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, p. 4.

46 Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-1975, A Study of Corporate Power and Professional Influence in the Welfare State*, pp. 9-33.
 47 Ibid., p. 9.
 48 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
 49 Collin Turpin, *Government Contracts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), cited in Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, pp. 34-52. Specifically, a flat in a 6-storey block would receive 2.3 times the basic level of subsidy paid on a house; 3.0 times for 15-storey flats; 3.4 times at 20 or more storeys.
 50 Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, pp. 34-52.
 51 See Thomas Andrew Broadbent, *Planning and Profit in the Urban Economy* (London: Methuen, 1977), cited in Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, pp. 12-15. In the 1960s, about 14% of the profession worked in the private sector, largely because of the growth of consultancy.



would hardly ever extend to moderate and “humble” pieces of architecture that also served as civic amenities or infrastructure, such as public housing or schools. “Many authorities considered the use of architects for dwellings for the working class a quite unnecessary expense and have continued to do so until very recently.”⁵² As discussed, in response to his threat on the disciplinary autonomy, housing architects, especially in LCC, were fairly active in establishing the justification for their professional labour in council housing projects. Meanwhile, the increasing preference for multi-storey to high-rise blocks called for industrialised production and prefabrication, and such processes demonstrated the need for private contractors’ architects that would be more than eager to maintain their position and industrial speciality and would thus be in favour of multi-storey prefabricated blocks as well.

In the economic feasibilities enabled by the industrialisation of components, the reduction of land use due to increased storeys, and speedier construction⁵³ that could be in time to solve acute housing shortages as well as to fulfil promised political agenda. This aspect could be developed in further research following this trajectory.

52 Elizabeth Layton, *Building by Local Authorities, the Report of an Inquiry by the Royal Institute of Public Administration*, “Division of functions between the architect and the engineer.”

53 Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, pp. 61-63.

54 Alan Powers ed., *Robin Hood Gardens, Re-Visions*, pp. 56-75. See also B. S. Johnson, “The Smithsons on Housing.”

Interlocutions

This section features the reflections from within the discipline that deals with the urgent issues and internal contradictions. Many of the materials are transcribed from a broadcast conversation in 1970 between Alison and Peter Smithson on the public sector housing project of Robin Hood Gardens in what is today Blackwall, Isle of Dogs, London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

They started with the brief account of the history of housing in London with touches made to suit the interest of this interlocution: the description of the underlying mental labour dedicated into Robin Hood Gardens. In fact, this interlocution should be treated as some sort of rhetorical technique due to the shared interest and belief for both parties.

“London has the simple good spaces but above this scale there is virtually nothing. London really has never faced up to being more than a collection of villages.”⁵⁴

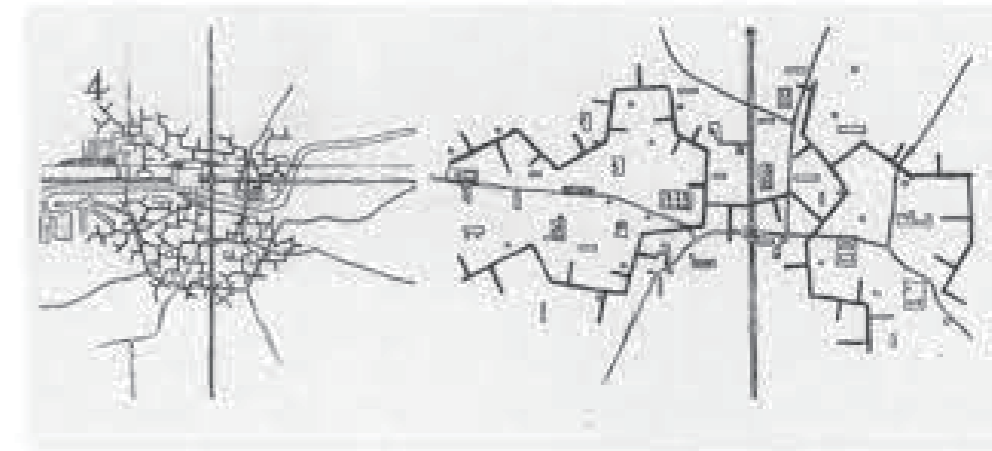
“[Peter Smithson:] **At the turn of the century, architects dreamt of garden cities. And in every town and village in England we see council houses built and building right up till today, which are the children of the garden city ideas. And in the 20s, in the heroic period of modern architecture, the models, the prototypes developed on the continent for a simple, clean, sun-giving architecture are now being built in England in the 60s. What we have now is people living in these clean, sun-drenched boxes with fitted carpets inside and vandalism outside.**

“[Alison Smithson:] **The realities of our working life are going to traffic, noise, air pollution, vandalism, lack of quality.**

“[Peter Smithson:] **And the theory, developed in the 20s and 30s, the simple architecture in which there will be few cars, this dream, this model, has been overrun – overrun by the glut of the supermarkets and the glut on the roads.**”

Personally, the opinion that 20s and 30s modernism encouraged few cars could be subject to further discussion. Instead, in the case of the Radiant City, to travel to almost all





destinations, automobiles are required.

The two architects appeared to be powerless about the contrast between the effort and the outcome: they claim GLC to be “the worldly best architectural briefers,” **“Although this is done very responsibly, the building of this mutated dream by all the people concerned, it seems that the GLC really get very small thanks from the society for all this ... horrified at the amount of vandalism [there].”**⁵⁵

“[Peter Smithson:] **We still feel under an obligation to provide the best possible quality irrespective of what people expect and what treatment it is going to get. Nevertheless, it is very depressing for the builders and the contractors, the sub-contractors and the architect, to feel that much of the effort they have put in is going to be smashed up.**

“[Alison Smithson:] **Society at the moment asked architects to build these new homes for them. But I mean, this may be really stupid, we may have to rethink the whole thing. It may be that we should only be asked to repair the roofs and add the odd bathroom to the old industrial houses and just leave people where they are to smash it up in complete abandon and happiness so that nobody has to worry about it anymore. You know, we may be asking people to live in a way that is stupid. They maybe just want to be left alone.**”⁵⁶

“Architects have always felt the need to build not for the occupying generation, but to sort of body out the ideas of their period, in a way that could be felt by generations that follow ... We feel ... an obligation which is outside of the present financial or economic situation, to build for successive occupying generations.

“Unless a building outlasts its first users, we get no body of choice, that is, there’s no pool of housing from which people can choose how to live where they want to live. And more important, you get no build up of a comparable body of quality. This was the situation we stepped into after the war – completely vandalised environment, of anything will do, make do ... There were no possible standards, because there was nothing decent to compare things to.

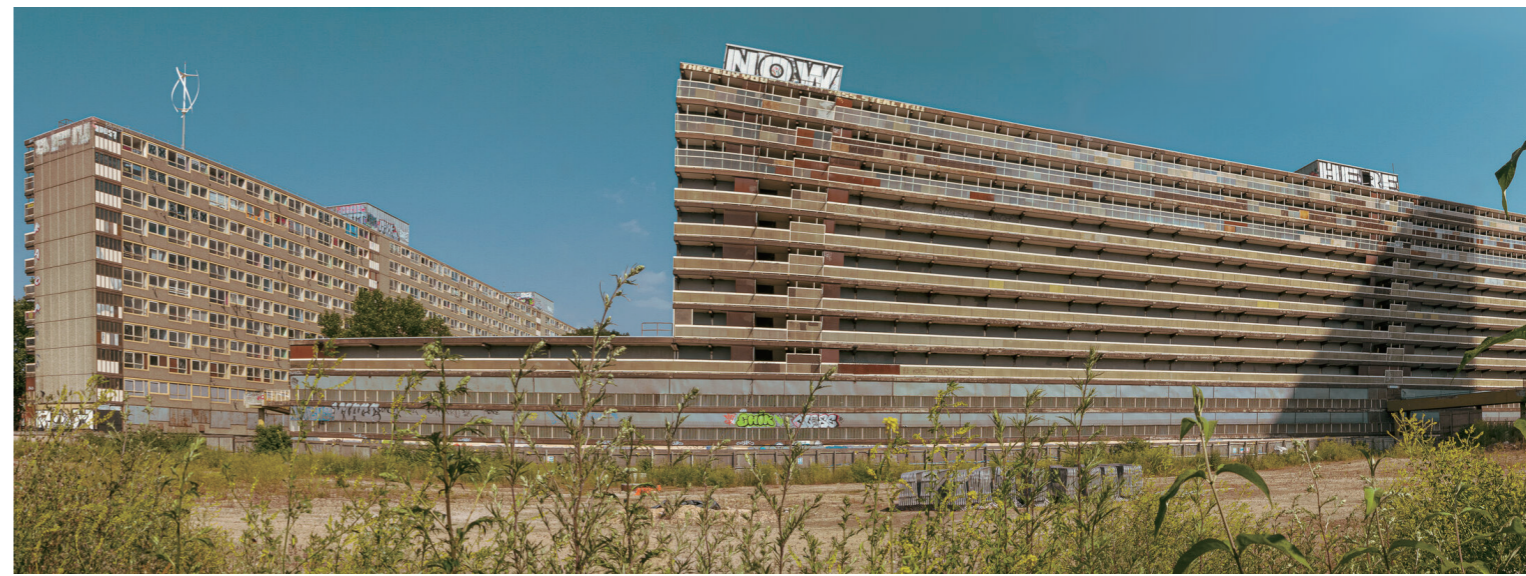
55 Powers ed., *Robin Hood Gardens, Re-Visions*, p. 68.

56 Ibid., p. 69.

57 Ibid., p. 71.

“If we are not to be torn apart by our differing individual natures as makers and destroyers, society has to make a framework so that the makers can get ahead of the destroyers.”⁵⁷

They claimed that it was not the duty for architects to think and talk about the mechanisms for changing the responsibility for housing that effectively discouraged vandalism, they still claimed the responsibility of shedding light on this issue in front of professional audiences hoping to safeguard the architects’ and the municipal dreams of social housing. Although we see still some inheritance from the modernist tradition where the arrogance and the complacency of the paternal role of the architect as social reformer was still in dominance, such reflections from within the discipline had manifest a similar scope of problems. Smithsons were perhaps rather ahead in the profession in recognising the irreconcilable rupture between the design effort and the ultimate use, and such rupture had evoked valuable reflections. At the time of the interview, Robin Hood Gardens was still under construction. Today, when we revisit it, we will not be surprised that Smithsons’ ideals, together with the numerous contemporaries of theirs, have for long marked is monumental failure. Yet when we look at the empty street-in-the-sky decks and the rain-washed concrete panels as-found, the past time suddenly return, rendering a perplexing melancholy.



Pro-Regression and the Inherent Contradictions

Even before the introduction of theories and criticisms, including Jacobs, Jephcott, Newman and Coleman, some of them from external to the discipline, that reflected the economic base and material interests of their time, such inklings were already accessible in the built forms of buildings and preferences in architecture and planning. There were several reversions: before the wars and in the 19th century, prestigious-looking terraced houses, maisonettes and tenements lining traditional streets were favoured; after the war, they were condemned with their derelict status, overcrowding issues, and lack of modernised amenities, while the tabula rasa project of high rises and low density schemes were praised; not long after the widespread sprawl of the British model of Radiant City, one witnessed the rejection of high blocks in the late 60s and early 70s, while the disciplinary interest seemed to have moved back to traditional periphery blocks and tenement rows and maisonettes. We could ostensibly extend this narrative by claiming that after the 80s, one could witness an ever-growing preference in flexibility of use; and later on at the turn of the century, due to the thrive of the speculations in real estate market, architectural qualities, social context, and aesthetics interrelated and were judged according to the speculative exchange value; and after the crisis when urban renewal projects popped, we could imagine the very same façade treatment, bay design, fake brick finish and well-gentrified modes of living as some sort of hegemonic prototype across the urban areas of the nation.

No other major counties in the world would seem to have demonstrated such volatility and turbulence in debates about valid and preferred forms of housing as England. Although sometimes such fluctuating impressions vary with personal experiences and one's position on the political spectrum, not even in such cases should one treat these representations of the so-claimed epoch-defining forms as secondary, invalid, and immaterial. Readings from such ever-changing countenance the representations of the material base are often possible, and this is surely independent on the individualities of experience. Perhaps it is not all the time that the publicly expressed preferences for architecture is representative only of the ruling class, but one could certainly be reminded of such connections: if the 19th century featured the entry of the private individual into

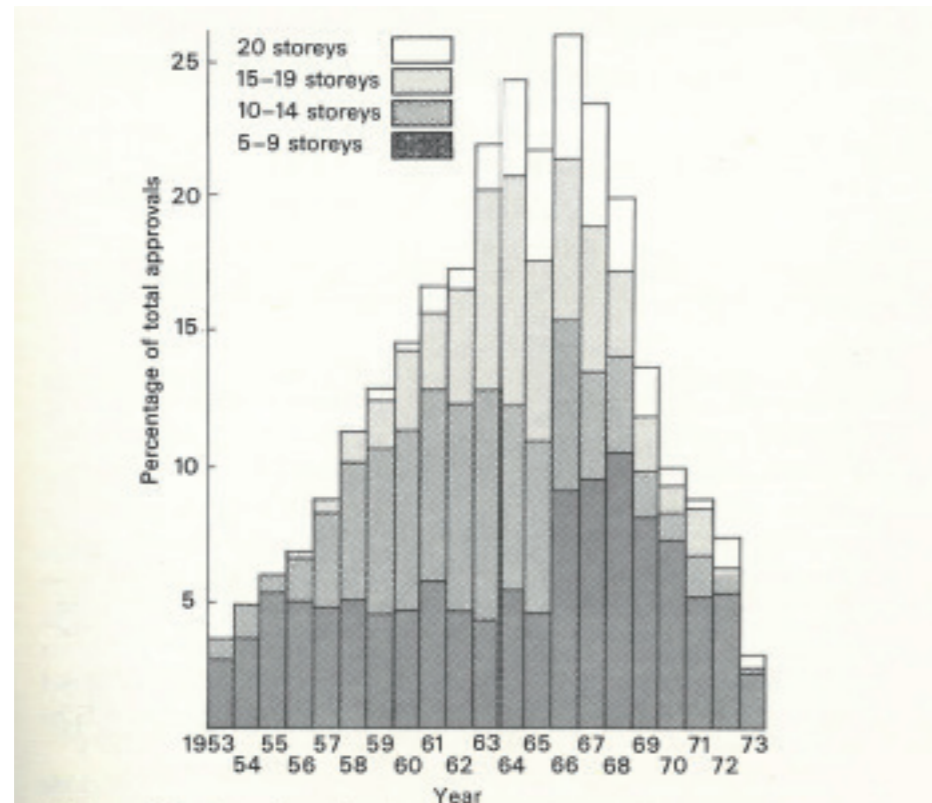


Figure 2.2 Local authority dwellings in high-rise blocks as a proportion of total approvals, by storey-height categories, 1953–1973 NOTE: as Figure 2.1.

history, then such private individual should only include the thriving bourgeoisie and the aesthetics and social relations of their peers. It was commonly observed, or in this case, unobserved or effortfully left out regarding the working class conditions in the mainstream architectural preferences for tenement houses and mansions and up until the threat of revolution appeared on the horizon where the conditions and the resolution of slums and ghettos came firstly into the political agenda. Before the late 19th century, flats were originally unbiased in terms of providing for accommodation for both higher-class clients and lower-class families.⁵⁸ They were stigmatised and acquired a negative image shortly afterwards because the construction of new flats housed mainly the latter in the coming decades. Dereliction and destruction due to the wars which could also be regarded as the upmost material and superstructural representation of the internal contradictions of capitalist development, also brought the dialectics of housing forms and their social structure into an elevated thesis: if the climax of mechanical production laid concrete the material base in terms of means of production and relations of production for the construction of multi-storey and high-rise blocks, then the social call for a refreshingly enlightening future that could wash away the trauma cast by the wartimes, together with the international socialist movements and debates which also derived from certain material contradictions of earlier times, would prepare the superstructural response to the forms of thriving public-sector homes. Well beyond 1960, in many areas councillors were daily faced with the long queues of their constituents with pleas for rehousing into the new, well-devised modernist flats.⁵⁹

There was the seeming unison that the attitudes of both welfare state within capitalism and socialism had shared, regarding the lower-to-middle strata of consumers. Specificities might differ; nevertheless, the welfare state approach had prided itself in having successfully supplied the demanding market with relatively affordable prices, also in having somehow tackled issues of employment to create enough demand; the socialist approach, incorporating the subsidised or nationalised operation of key public services also included housing as one of its most urgent concerns, and promising examples were taking place in some Eastern-Europe countries. Ideologically, there was not much ground for a debate and the two polars had not yet presented their most incongruent beliefs due to the urgency of the material need. One refreshing yet less supported argu-

⁵⁸ Glendinning and Muthesius, **Tower Block**, pp. 1-6.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 307-11.

ment could be made here: from the 1960s onwards, there seemed to have been an on-going dissatisfaction with state provision which were then deemed as inherently rigid or downright dictatorial: beyond provision, consumers were deemed to demand the right of choice, of user flexibility and of participation; the widespread enthusiasm and optimism for council estates turned into an equally widespread hatred.⁶⁰ What was faced here was firstly the superstructural attempts to correct and shape the material basis. 60s witnessed a new form of journalism and media that brought the inherent issues with council housing blocks into the public review; and the mouthpieces of the AR and the AJ that served perhaps solely the satisfaction of architects then, was later outrun by the systematic reviews and reassessments of the outcomes of modern council housing developments from external to the architectural discipline at that time: from sociologists, activists, from the realm of psychology and the research into mental facts of these homes. What will be presented in this section is a well-debated selection of them.

There are three cautions that one should be constantly reminded of. Firstly, it is unwise to isolate the criticisms on the state provision per se, without the knowledge of the fact that it did provide enough housing for the majority and contributed to their well-being at a significantly affordable economic and social cost; new ideas and reflections gained their credibility and justification on the ground that such a vast volume of housing stock existed and such considerable accumulation of material relations. Therefore, such criticisms should never be read as a retreat into the prehistory of state provision for housing or a slogan calling for total regression and negation; they are instead, a critical retrospection. Secondly, although such revisions from the superstructure are, ultimately, reflective of the internal conflict, tracing from the arrogance and the complacency of the modernist architect to the critique of private property, one should never ignore that there is a certain degree of material interest, economic interest, alongside their ideological distinctions and the demand of progressive outwardness and disciplinary autonomy claimed by other subjects and fields. Finally, even if the criticisms from the latter were to really triumph over the architectural discipline somehow, they are never considered without an inherent contradiction, one of which, regarding their ill-formulated methodologies will be demonstrated in the last section of this chapter.

Jane Jacobs provides an American view of the problems regarding the Radiant City model. Based on the observation and discussion of the essence of successful neighbourhoods, she challenges the ongoing urban renewal projects of that period and proposes mixed-use neighbourhoods featuring local economy, street front spaces, and neighbourhood surveillance (“eyes on the street”).⁶¹ Working also in the US, Oscar Newman develops his theory of Defensible Spaces based on Jacobs’ findings, with a particular focus on the social factors of criminal activity. He concludes that the unifying principles that could contribute to a likelihood of criminal activities include anonymity, lack of surveillance, and the presence of alternative routes of escape.⁶² Anonymity refers to the quality of a community where they fail to develop the network of acquaintanceships. Specifically, low-density layouts and fewer people sharing the same entrance could contribute to the protection and defence of common areas, and could thus prevent criminals from their entry. Additionally, neighbourhood surveillance could also be effective in the prevention of crime and vandalism. Besides, the absence of alternative routes of escape could also actively deter crime, such as avoiding interaccessible lifts, stairs and exits. Meanwhile there were similar genealogy of research carried out in England as well, for example Pearl Jephcott⁶³ that looks into the dereliction of high-rise blocks particularly and Alice Coleman⁶⁴ who, with the knowledge of all the 3 cases, has developed comprehensive research aiming to work out the cure for the status quo of council estates around late 70s and early 80s.

61 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Detailed evaluations of her research should continue beyond the scope of this paper.

62 Oscar Newman, *Creating Defensible Space*.

63 Pearl Jephcott and Hilary Robinson, *Homes in High Flats: Some of the Human Problems Involved in Multi-storey Housing*. It is argued that although tenants’ opinion about council estates were somehow mixed, many of their positive attitudes towards council estates were due to their location instead of the architectural qualities of the blocks. This seems to emphasise the role of planning provision for infrastructure rather than architectural design. This is also predicative of later planning theories that take shape in the 80s and 90s which, unfortunately, will not be included in the scope of this thesis.

64 Alice Coleman, *Utopia on trial: Vision and reality in planned housing*.

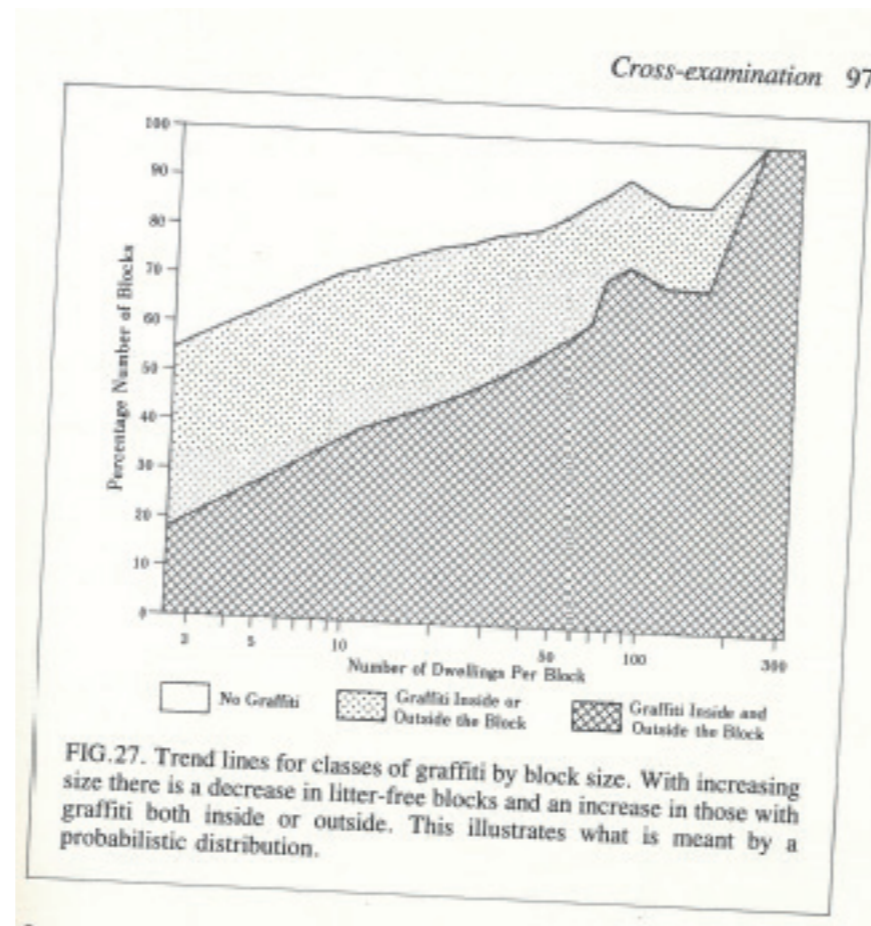
65 Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, p. 6.

66 This is also manifest in some of the early chapters in the book. See *Ibid.*, p. 4. “Prevention [of the guilty or failure of the municipal Utopia of planned public housing] would seem to lie in a decision to build no more flats and concentrate on houses instead ... various test measures show that inter-war houses consistently perform better than those of ... post-1945 vintage. Modern house design seems to have deteriorated over the decades as the DoE [Department of Environment] recommended increasingly undesirable designs, for example, ... the abandonment of the traditional streetscape.”

A Utopia on Trial, or Alice in Wonderland?

“The twentieth century in Britain has been split in two by a great revolution in housing. The first half of the century was dominated by the age-old system of natural selection, which left people free to secure the best accommodation they could. They second half has embraced the Utopian ideal of housing planned by a paternalistic authority, which offered hopes of improved standards but also ran the risk of trapping people in dwellings not of their own choosing. Unfortunately, Utopia is not automatically synonymous with progress, and much of our planned housing is proving to be retrograde – the sense of many kinds of social malaise.”⁶⁵

The first edition of Coleman’s *Utopia on Trial* was published in as early as 1985. From this viewpoint the prehistory of mass housing in Britain since the turn of the century could be periodised into two epochs by the form of homes provided and whether such housing is regulated and/or subsidised by an institution. Coleman took an undeniably critical stance against the latter, referring to the public-sector planned forms of housing carried out as “Utopian” projects that had failed the benchmark of “progress.” Coleman was preoccupied with putting on trial the interrupted projects of “Utopia” of post-war council housing and municipal dreams of public sector homes, and was dedicated to outline with “scientific method” issues with regard to faults in design in these council estates. The assessment in the spectrum of progression naturally indicated that any failure of meeting such criterion should be but the status of stasis, if not regression. Much as it remained to be discussed the presuppositions and mentalities with the obsessions about progression, the character of the latter period or epoch of planned public housing, judged with such assessment criteria, could only be unfavourable and problematic only if it had brought about a physical and social fabric of housing no better than the previous epoch of “natural selection,” if not, in this case as she would like to prove ardently, even worse. One could now easily see that her ideal mode of housing under her assessment criteria to be discussed later in this section, is nothing but the previous epoch of housing before the second world war, when she finally went to propose building houses instead of flat blocks.⁶⁶



“Shoddy research is usually criticised and eliminated before publication. In this case it has not been and we are faced with the embarrassing task of having to discuss it in front of a wide audience.”⁶⁷

Extending the previous point presented by Bill Hillier, issues undermining Coleman’s report are presented as below.

Misleading presentation of results. In the presentation of the frequency table of household with children in care, categorised by block sizes,⁶⁸ Coleman has drawn the result that with increased block size, there is a growing trend of having children in care (this is invalid if one observes the chart really carefully). The frequency of having children is done per each block regardless of its size, and inherently, blocks with more dwellings should have more households with children in care. And in fact, if one reworks on the representation carefully and revise the frequency to be calculated on a per-dwelling basis, then not surprisingly the exact opposite conclusion could be drawn. A possible explanation for the opposite conclusion could be that high-rise flats are favoured by singles who might not have a child in the near future, while blocks with fewer dwellings might be prioritised in terms of the allocation to families with children in care. Regardless of the interpretations, this chart fail in its entirety to do justice to the statistics behind.

Misleading mathematical models. In the modelling of the relevance between block size (number of dwellings per block) and the presence of graffiti⁶⁹ (an indicator of her choice that Coleman argues to represent an undesired estate – this conception itself should be challenged as well, but here we are focusing on more decisive and lethal problems), she have not adopted any means of quantifying the presence of graffiti, before reaching the conclusion: the more dwellings per block, the more likely there is graffiti, and the more undesired the estate is considered. Such deduction is flawed in that, consider the hypothesis that the possibility of each individual creating graffiti in the premises is fixed, and each dwelling has also a fixed number of individuals, then the mathematical expectation of graffiti existing for a premise should be proportional to the number of dwellings, and this has no indication of any negative or positive implications on the relations between the number of dwellings in a block and the degree to which an estate is undesirable. One might even argue that judging from the results, low-rise blocks does

⁶⁷ Bill Hillier, “Special report: City of Alice’s dreams,” *The Architects’ Journal*, vol. 184, no. 28 (Jul 9 1986), pp. 39-41. Alice refers to Alice Coleman and the article is understood as a dedicated criticism against the book, research methods and conclusions of Coleman (see *Ibid.*) published a year before in 1985. The title “A utopia on trial, or Alice in wonderland?” also pays tribute to this debate. Notably, Hillier is one of the pioneers of Space Syntax which is, in retrospect, a much evolved and unbiased theory that depicts, models, and makes abstract complex spatial relations. This subject has from very early on departed from the analysis of residential design to establish itself as some paradigm or autonomous scientific subject.

⁶⁸ Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, p. 196, table 27, section “Children in Care (Southwark Only).”

⁶⁹ Coleman, *Utopia on Trial*, p. 97, fig. 27.

Table I Frequency tables, design values by abuse classes (from Coleman p196)

No of dwellings in the block	Total No of blocks in survey	No of households per block with children in care							Percentage of blocks with children in care
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1-4	95	95	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·0
5-9	441	415	20	5	—	1	—	—	5·9
10-14	274	233	33	7	1	—	—	—	15·0
15-19	229	181	35	7	5	1	—	—	21·0
20-29	377	262	72	25	10	6	—	2	30·5
30-39	221	128	53	27	9	3	1	—	42·1
40-49	122	71	27	9	7	5	2	1	41·8
50-59	56	33	8	10	5	—	—	—	41·1
60-69	39	16	10	4	3	1	4	1	59·0
70-79	29	13	7	7	1	—	—	1	55·2
80-89	25	9	6	3	1	3	1	2	64·0
90-99	14	3	2	4	4	—	—	1	78·6
100-199	25	13	5	3	4	—	—	—	48·0
200-317	8	2	4	1	—	1	—	—	75·0

(Low values are irregularly spread and have been grouped in fives.)

The key column is the one on the right which shows the percentage of blocks at each size range with *any* households with children in care. This seems to show—quite falsely it will turn out (see table II below)—that the worst cases are the largest blocks.

Table II How Coleman’s data should be read, when the sums are done properly

Mean block size	No of blocks	No of affected blocks	Total No of households	Total No of households with children in care	Coleman’s block % corrected for size	Rate affected 1 household per
(2)	(95)	(0)	(238)	(0)	(0)	—
7	441	26	3087	34	21·7	91
12	274	41	3288	50	32·0	66
17	229	48	3893	68	31·6	57
25	377	115	9425	194	31·3	49
35	221	93	7735	151	31·6	51
45	122	51	5490	105	23·8	53
55	56	23	3080	43	19·2	72
65	39	23	2535	60	23·1	42
75	29	16	2175	33	18·9	66
85	25	16	2125	50	19·3	43
95	14	11	1330	31	21·2	43
150	25	12	3750	23	8·2	163
260	8	6	2080	10	7·4	208

The first column shows the mean block size (mean number of dwellings); the second, the number of blocks; the third, the number of affected blocks (Coleman’s figures [from table I, column 10 above] result from dividing column three into column two while ignoring column one); the fourth, the total number of households (an approximation based on the average); the fifth, the number of affected households; the sixth, Coleman’s percentages of blocks affected, but corrected for block size (column three divided by column two, multiplied by the actual block size divided by the mean block size for the whole sample) and the seventh, the rate at which affected households are found at each size, ie, one per so many, so a high number counts as good.

Table II brackets the sample of very small blocks (one to four dwellings) because the total number of dwellings is an order of magnitude less than all the other size ranges (around 238, as opposed to several thousand) and, with a mean occurrence of affected households of one per 61 households over all blocks sizes, this sample is far too small for anything to be said statistically.

not perform any better than high-rise flats, and this is perhaps due their sheer proximity to the street which makes graffiti easier to produce.

Predilection and interest. Judging from the previous arguments, one of the very few explanations left that could render clear the motives for Coleman’s position (considering she is not an early starter in any case), indeed, perhaps the only remaining explanation is that she is predilected with the application of theories of Jacobs et al. within the context of British metropolises. In such case, the method should be relatively immaterial or irrelevant as long as a conclusion has been somehow precipitated beforehand. More ulterior motives should lie beyond the scope of this thesis, yet if one relates this case within the widespread eager to claim disciplinary autonomy and the sea-change in the political agenda and the need of justification by a thriving political economy (neoliberalism, to be discussed later), it is also not too shocking if one argues that another of Coleman’s objective could be the undermining of the previous programme of state provision in favour of the current political agenda of the deregulation of the market and the confidence its spontaneity. Certainly, this might not be a conscious decision yet should be read as a hidden leitmotif which frequently reveals itself in such traces and ambiguities.

Faire-reflexivity. The other issue with conducting research with a clear predilection, is that it is susceptible to faire-reflexivity, which will be discussed in the next section.

Thus, Coleman’s report should not be read as some scientific approach to the analysis and the presentation of quantitative summaries of the malfunction of council estates with a revelation of their inherent issues. It should be, instead, read as a very odd manifesto abundant with ostensibly persuasive mathematics, charts, and graphs. What one could see on it is not only its wicked motive, faulty method, ill-organised presentation, but the traces of historical change and the prematurity and weakness of a new political economy on the horizon; this is manifest in the eager of seeking ideological justification.

On Method, Faire-Reflexivity

70 Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things, On Method*, p. 7.

71 Ibid., p. 8.

72 Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, p. 114.

73 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 186-87.

74 Ibid.

Contrary to what is commonly believed, method (faire) shares with logic the same inability that renders itself incapable of a complete separation from the context and the field of inquiry. In other words, there should be no method that could be applied in the first place to very domain and field, just as there is no inherently consistent and congruent logic that could set aside its objects.⁷⁰ Additionally each inquiry in to the field of human sciences, including the reflection of the present on method per se, necessarily entails the archaeological vigilance. This means that such inquiry should retrace its own trajectory of coming to the present as found, back to the point where there is still something that remains obscured and unthematized. Only such though that is free from the unconscious concealing of its own unsaid while incessantly brings it to light and elaborates it, should ultimately lay claim to originality.⁷¹

"In short, there is a problem of the regime, the politics of the scientific statement ... it's not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power, and how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification."⁷² This brings one to the question of the epistemological threshold. ***"When in the operation of a discursive formation, a group of statements is articulated, claims to validate (even unsuccessfully) norms of verification and coherence, and when it exercises a dominant function (as a model, a critique, or a verification) over knowledge, we will say that the discursive formation crosses a threshold of epistemologisation."***⁷³

The conceptualisation of the historical a priori and, subsequently, the épistémè – "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalised systems"⁷⁴ – is not definitive in terms of defining the enunciable and the knowable or accessible, but, instead, should be useful in outlining the implications of certain discourses and epistemological figures.

Chapter 3 La Casa Brucia

Death of an Epoch

⁷⁵ Martin Richardson, *Interview*, 1989, cited in Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, ch. 27.

⁷⁶ See Christopher Pierson and Francis Castles, *The Welfare State Reader* (Polity Press, 2000) cited in Jamileh Manoochehri, *The Politics of Social Housing in Britain*, pp. 79-81.

"The whole of the Housing Division seemed like a giant nursery school, whose main object was the happiness of architects!"⁷⁵

The 1979 general election marked a radical shift in political agenda perhaps more enormous and profound in scale than ever in the post-war UK. The new conservative government in residence is led by Thatcher who is known to have contributed to the shift from Keynesian economy to neoliberalism. This change in political agenda also brought to an end almost the entire post-war public housing apparatus that had effectively lasted for more than 3 decades. This housing programme had once ensured that almost 50% of the UK population was accommodated in public-sector homes in around the mid-70s.

As a result of this change, market-driven policies became predominant in the 80s. For the energisation of the market, state controls and market regulations were also lessened, if not removed. Deregulation of the market began most fiercely with housing, and with the removal of local authorities from new social housing developments, a few measures and legislations were introduced for the residualisation of council housing as a part of the political agenda, including:⁷⁶

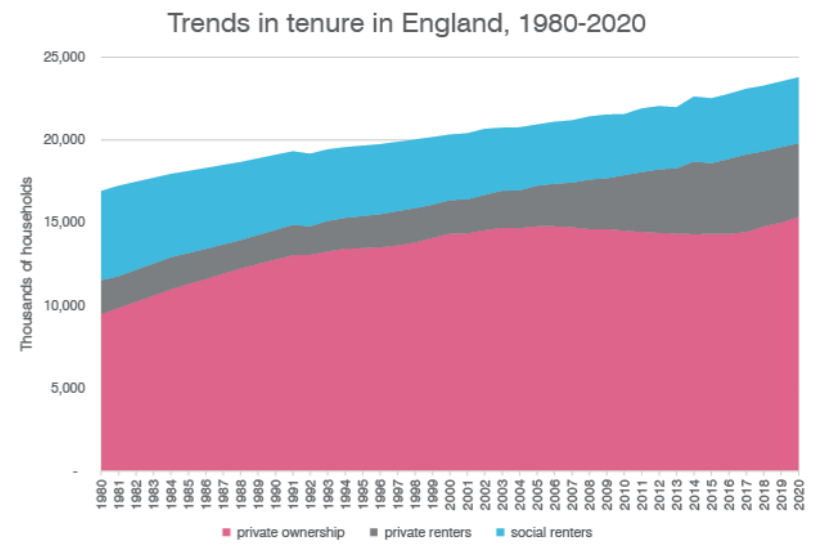
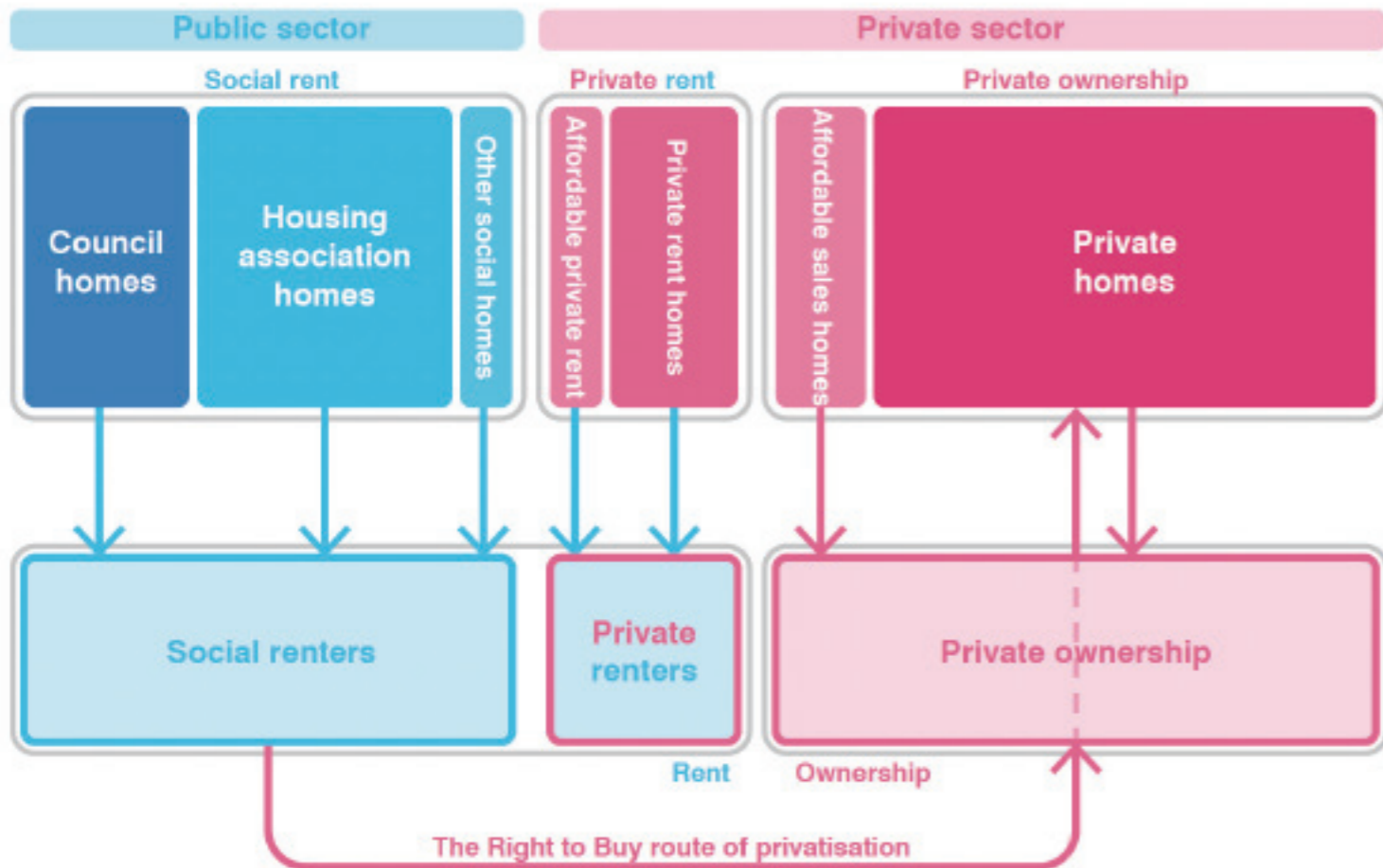
The increase in individual freedom of choice and sense of personal opportunity, with the expansion of opportunities of the ownership of home;

Continuation of the improvement of quality of housing;

Removal of restraints on private house builders for the speculations of real estate value;

Enhanced use of resources with concentrated focus on areas with the most acute housing needs;

This chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the council estates more as "legacies" than as an actively potent apparatus of state provision, under the political economy of neoliberalism in the UK.



Privatisation

77 Michael Heseltine, *Second Reading Housing Bill* (Hansard, 15 January 1980), p. 976
 78 Cooper et al. "Sold out? The right-to-buy, gentrification and working-class displacements in London," *The Sociological Review*, vol. 68, no. 6 (2020), pp. 1354-69.
 79 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, *Your Right to Buy Your Home, A guide for tenants of councils and registered providers, including housing associations*, (London: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, April 2022).
 80 Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 8 November 2022. [House building data, UK: financial year ending March 2022](#)

"We propose . . . that council and new town tenants shall have the right-to-buy their own homes . . . to give people what they want, and . . . to reverse the trend of ever-increasing dominance of the State over the life of the individual. There is in this country a deeply-ingrained desire for home ownership. The Government believes that this spirit should be fostered. It reflects the wishes of the people, ensures the wide spread of wealth through society, encourages a personal desire to improve and modernise one's own home, enables parents to accrue wealth for their children and stimulates the attitudes of independence and self-reliance that are the bedrock of a free society."⁷⁷

Thatcher's rhetoric of Britain as a nation of shopkeepers implores British citizens to become entrepreneurial property-owners accumulating economic security through the market.⁷⁸ The introduction of the Right to Buy⁷⁹ scheme in the Housing Act 1980 enables the social tenant to buy his/her home at a price lower than the full market value. The discount is dependent on the length of time spent as a tenant. The Right to Buy scheme was effectively extended to housing association homes since The Housing and Planning Act 2016.

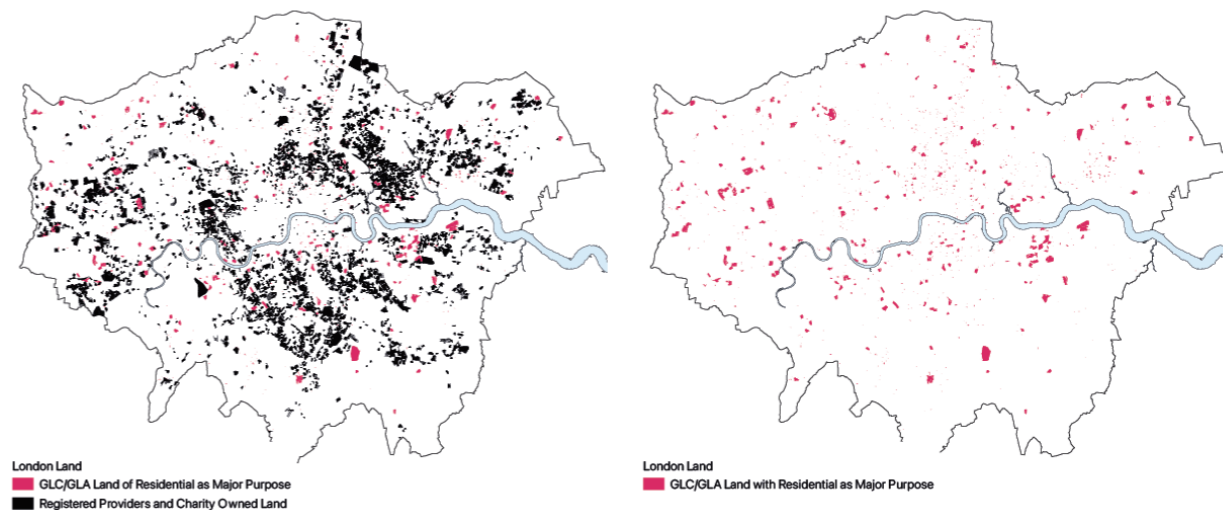
Housing does not work if provided for the market, anywhere in the world. People are not able to fund the building and maintenance of their own housing because it requires an income above the average, and you cannot all have an income above the average. At the beginning of the 1980s, 42% of the population lived in social housing. In 2017, that figure has fallen to less than 8%. An estimated 1,400,000 people are on the waiting list for a council home. More than 2.2 million council and social households have been sold to the private market since 1980, while only 1.2 million new social homes have been added to the social (local authority and registered private providers) housing stock, including new builds and acquisitions. This sums up to be a net loss of 996 thousand homes from the public sector.⁸⁰

Privatisation also takes place in terms of the management responsibilities and freehold ownership, and the setup of housing associations (registered private providers) is also

another unique form of UK-specific social structure that incorporates private-sector management to supplement the decaying public-sector housing provisions.

Regarding other forms of public services, the privatisation is also carried out, specifically for London airports and for the national rail. Ironically, many of the transport sector privatised during the 90s are now run by companies controlled by governments of other states in Europe (Arriva-DB, Abellio-NV, Trenitalia, MTR). This should be viewed not as the triumph of public sector of other countries but the pervasiveness of global capital market and the incompetence of the private sector operators in the UK. For the ones who would ardently support the privatisation of essential public services, highlighting its success by claiming that the public sector is incapable of financing and operating a decent and efficient public services system, their arguments are viably palpable yet unavoidably biased: in some sector of public infrastructure, especially public transport, the triumph of private sector in UK features also the triumph of "public sector" and state-owner companies of other countries of Europe; yet they are no longer part of the domestic public sector of either country and have subject themselves to the neoliberal economy and the common market (before Brexit).

This thesis is yet unable to demonstrate enough material analysis for the coming sections which will be enriched and well-supported by future investigations.



Wonderland Trial Revisited: Council Estate Legacies Today

81 George-Eugène Haussmann, *Les Memoires*, Paris, 1891, cited in Maneglier, *Hervé Paris Impérial*, p. 262.

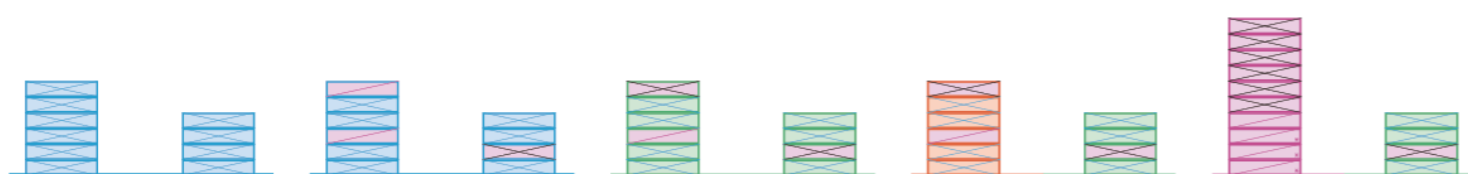
82 René Héron de Villefosse, *Histoire de Paris*, Bernard Grasset, 1959, pp. 339-55.

83 Neil Jackson, *Interview*, in Powers, *Robin Hood Gardens*, pp. 114-21.

"In the eyes of Parisians, who like routine in things but are changeable when it comes to people, I committed two great wrongs: Over the course of seventeen years, I disturbed their daily habits by turning Paris upside down, and they had to look at the same face of the Prefect in the Hôtel de Ville. These were two unforgivable complaints."⁸¹ ***"The old ship of Paris was torpedoed by Baron Haussmann and sunk during his reign. It was perhaps the greatest crime of the megalomaniac perfect and also his biggest mistake ... his work caused more damage than a hundred bombings."***⁸²

In view of Paris, Haussmann is more damaging to the urban fabric than 100 bombings. Ironically, in view of inner London, a bombed site is more rewarding than 100 planning officers in favour. Private developers are seeking for new **bombing sites** in inner London boroughs, and the locations of their interventions are often former council estates for demolition and redevelopment. Such process is often referred to as urban regeneration or urban renewal. The debate of the previous century on the types of favourable dwellings and the autonomy of the design discipline has been overwhelmed by the logic of speculations in the real estate market. We see the death sentence at the trial of utopia, but from a entirely and systematically different dimension. Type of access, finishing material, and façade aesthetics seem to be outrun by land value and density that could more directly impact the exchange value of the property.

"Like ... the early 20th century Garden Cities, [Robin Hood Gardens] signifies the progressive state of architectural design and public expectation at a time of change and social advance. Whether it is considered good or bad is not really the question; what is important is what it represents and what one learns from it."⁸³ Arguably, such phrases could be applied to almost all objects of inquiry, as if the entire course of history could be contained in some sort of logos or principle that shares its affinity with this argument. All that is past is neutrally assessed and unselectively accepted, and should be necessarily reduced to the simplest element of constituting a



Before Right to Buy
The majority of public sector housing are owned by local authorities.

Introduction of Right to Buy
With Right to Buy, social tenants are able to buy at a discounted price the property where they had been living as a secured tenant. Some of such purchased properties were sold later on; some contributed to the private rental sector; some were occupied by the owner.
Before the introduction of housing associations and the transfer of the council estate stock to these registered providers, the majority of social homes are still held by councils.

Transfer to Registered Providers
During the turn of the century, public sector housing stock is gradually transferred to registered providers, together with the responsibilities and fundings for the management of such former social estates.

Option 1: Transfer to Community RPs
The option enabled by Right to Transfer allows for the transfer of social housing stock to community-based registered providers based on proper application, assessment, ballot and feasibility studies processes. If successful, this option will embrace more local support and will best reflect the benefits of the residents and tenants.

Option 2: Regeneration
Regeneration schemes are often led by private developers in co-operation with registered providers and/or local councils. New homes are guaranteed, yet the provision for affordable and social homes are limited, and sometimes the delivery of such homes are often delayed and/or compromised. Such option helps with providing more housing stock yet such homes are often targeted at the private sales and rental sector and would contribute to the gentrification of the locality.

- Freehold: Local Authorities
- Freehold: Registered Providers
- Freehold: Community-based Registered Providers
- Freehold: Private developer
- Leasehold: Local Authorities
- Leasehold: Registered Providers
- Leasehold: private property
- Leasehold: Community-based Registered Providers
- Occupier: Assured shorthold tenancy / private tenant
- Occupier: Social tenancy / social tenant
- Occupier: Owner-occupier

lesson to learn from, and the object of history and historical inquiry per se are ruthlessly approached to according to their usefulness. In the field of architecture, the idea of the Garden Cities is much more frequently discussed and debated, and so are the political economy of the post-war state where such an enormous stock of public housing were being delivered across Europe: discussions and debates around such ideals outrun all our spiritual and material predecessors, and with the expansion of the profession thanks to public sector employers, the sheer volume of the profession climaxed. To treat such issues at stake with an equally articulate gesture from an equally distanced position fail to do justice to the material and immaterial labour that have given rise to and have rendered manifest such differently scaled architectural problems and inquires. It is equally appalling to see the self-reflective device of the discipline as much as the decline of its autonomy and the dissolution of its positivity.

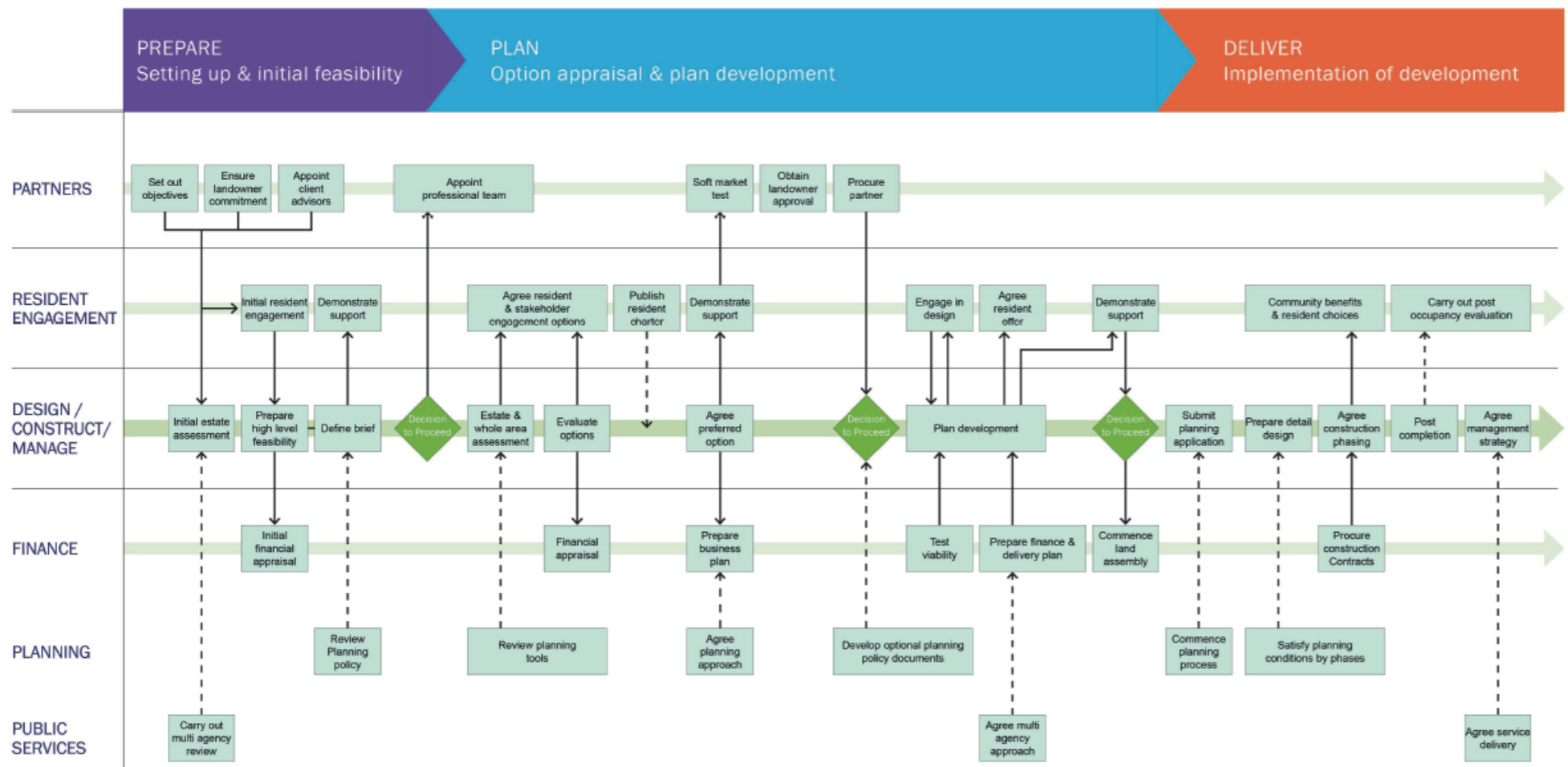
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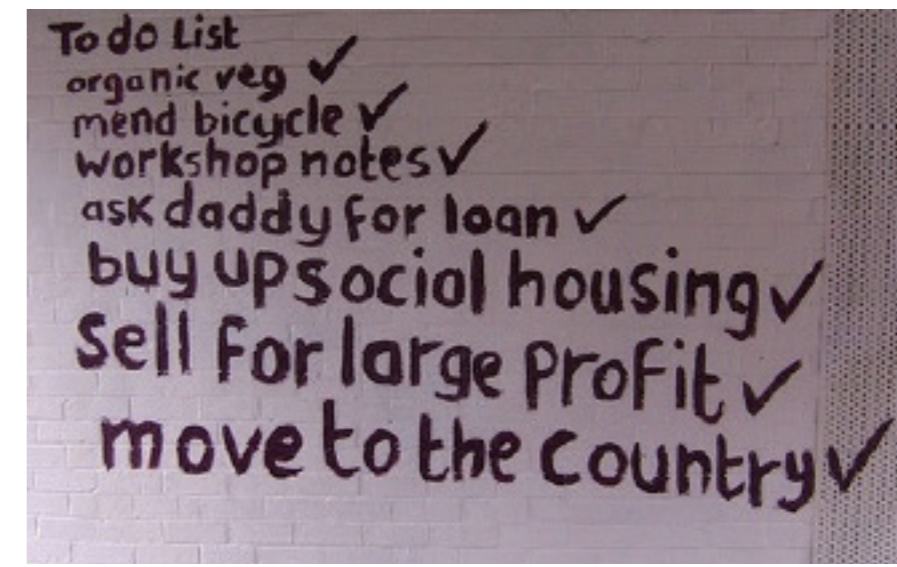
Policies on Urban Renewal

84 A. D. H. Crook et al., *The Incidence, Value and Delivery of Planning Obligations in England in 2007-08: Final Report*. (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, London, March 2010). <https://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningand-building/planningobligationsreport>

Planning Obligations (S106). Planning obligations (also known as Section 106 Agreements or 'planning gain', and a Section 75 Agreement in Scotland) are obligations attached to land that is the subject of a planning permission. They are used to mitigate or compensate for the negative impacts of a development or to prescribe the nature of a development. They are intended to make acceptable developments which would otherwise be unacceptable by offsetting the impact by making local improvements. Because they apply to the land not the applicant, planning obligations transfer with the land to future owners of the site. S106 typically requires that the development includes affordable housing; the compensation (or substitute provision) for the loss of open space; a contribution to the provision of additional infrastructure to serve the development (such as a new classroom at a school) or increasing the provision of public transport.

The Report. The Report (The Incidence, Value and Delivery of Planning Obligations in England in 2007-08)⁸⁴ examines the use of planning obligations in England in 2007-08 and the value of the obligations upon developers that arose as a result of such agreements. Some conclusions drawn in this report lead to the introduction and the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). According to section 6.2 of **The Report**, "More recently many LPAs [Local Planning Authorities] have been approached by developers seeking to change the agreed payments schedule [...] because [of] cash flow problems [...] asking to renegotiate lower contributions, saying that the overall finances do not "stack up" in the current economic climate [...] Most LPAs are refusing to reduce [...] but are offering flexibility over trigger points for delivering the contributions, for example [...] payments in instalments." According to section 6.4 of **The Report**, "as a result of the downturn, some developments have stalled [...] some asked to change the triggers for the delivery of agreed contributions [...] more payments are overdue and LPAs are having to spend more time chasing payments [...] increase in renegotiating S106s [...] mainly related to the timing of payments [...] Many LPAs said that the downturn had resulted in sites with planning permission not going ahead or being delayed





[...]” According to section 6.7 of **The Report**, “**If S106 contributions are monitored, they are generally delivered [...] LPAs have had to threaten developers with legal proceedings because they are increasingly failing to pay their contributions on time. LPA officers are spending more time chasing payments and there are more breached agreements.**” Additionally, considering the cost of incessant monitoring and payment chasing, the deeds of certain developers have positioned the LPAs in a position of a forced misuse of government time and resource as well as a significant increase in the workload of LPA officers.

85 Department for Community and Local Government, **Community Infrastructure Levy: An Overview** (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, May 2011).

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Community Infrastructure Levy (the levy) came into force in April 2010. It allows local authorities in England and Wales to raise funds from developers undertaking new building projects in their area. The money can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure that is needed as a result of development. This includes new or safer road schemes, flood defences, schools, hospitals and other health and social care facilities, park improvements, green spaces and leisure centres. The CIL is a generalised Tariff Approach of S106. In section 4 of the introductory document,⁸⁵ “**the Government has decided that this tariff-based approach provides the best framework to fund new infrastructure to unlock land for growth. The Community Infrastructure Levy is fairer, faster and more certain and transparent than the system of planning obligations which causes delay as a result of lengthy negotiations.**” In section 59 of the introductory document, “**the Government considers there is still a legitimate role for development specific planning obligations [...] However, in order to ensure that planning obligations and the levy can operate in a complementary way and the purposes of the two regimes are clarified, the regulations scale back the way planning obligations operate.**” In section 12 of the introductory document, “**the Planning Act 2008 provides a wide definition of infrastructure which could be found by the levy [... allowing] the levy to be used to fund a very broad range of facilities such as play areas, parks and green spaces, cultural and sports facilities, district heating schemes and police stations and other community safety facilities. This gives local communities flexibility to choose what infrastructure they need to deliver their development plan.**”

Economy of Urban Renewal

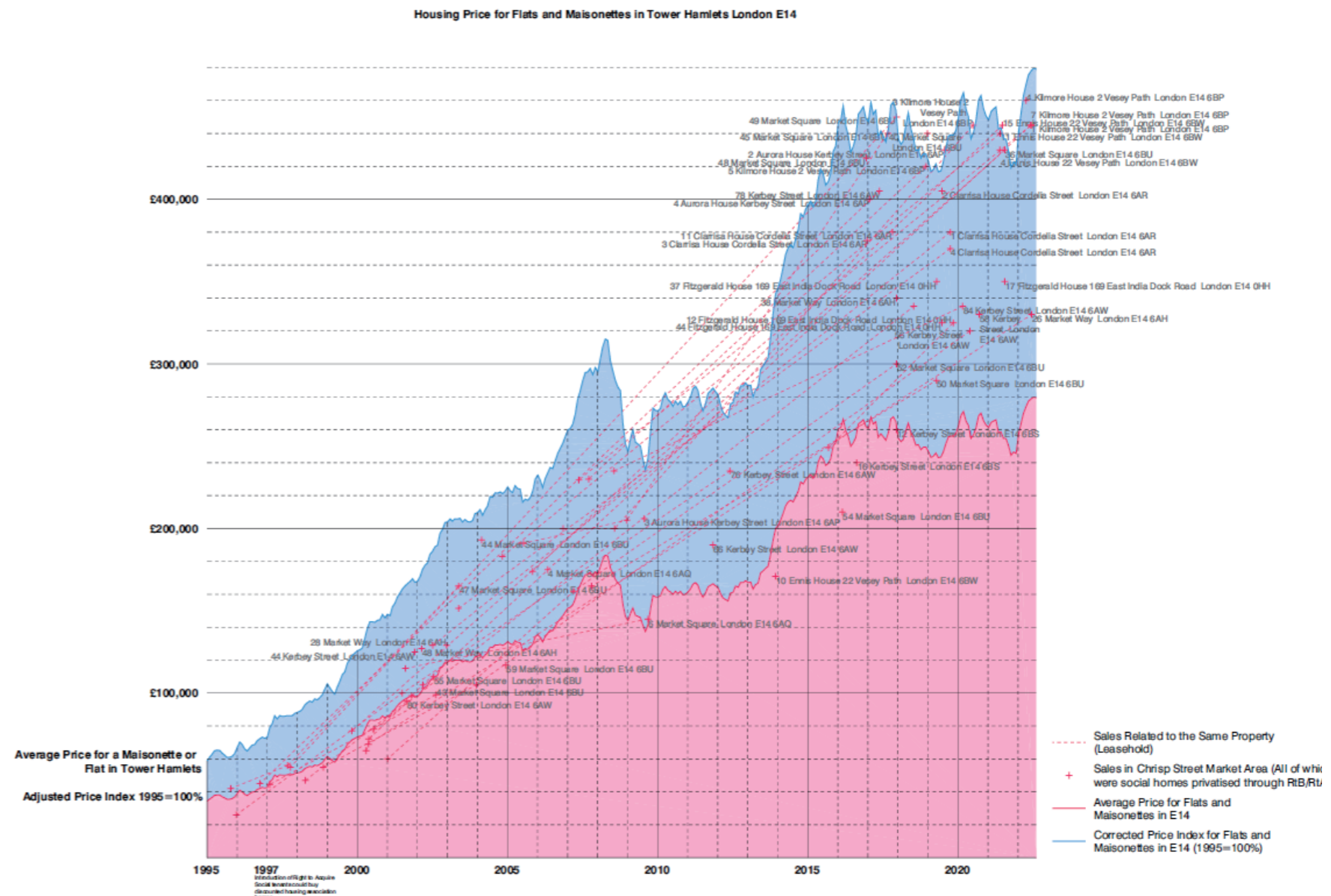
This thesis is yet unable to demonstrate enough material analysis for the coming sections which will be enriched and well-supported by future investigations.

False Promises

Financial Feasibility

Social Cost

Displacement of tenants, loss of community, loss of social rent provisions, gentrification.





Einbahnstraße

⁸⁶ Einbahnstraße [One-way street], is taken from the title of an anthology of short essays, brief meditations, aphorisms, and criticisms by Benjamin, published as a book in 1928. See Benjamin, *Reflections*, ch. 1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., "Imperial Panorama, A Tour of German Inflation," in "One-way Street".

⁸⁸ See Giorgio Agamben, *Quando la Casa Brucia*, 2020. <https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-quando-la-casa-brucia>

In perhaps the most well-known prose ("Imperial Panorama") in the comparatively less public-reaching anthology *Einbahnstraße*,⁸⁶ Benjamin noted that probably the only way out from the daily-repeating drama, gaily, enervating amazement and suffocating alienation, is the view that frankly accepts and acknowledges the decay and the regression as the fundamental, if not the sole cause of the derelict situation of the present. Apparently, the criticism is well directed towards the Weimar Republic and the amalgamation of short-sightedness and cowardice, complacency, and resentment of the German bourgeoisie. However, from this point, one could effectively extend the perception of decline or historical downfall as the regularities of history per se while the rescues and messianic moments of salvation as the extraordinary, if not too marvellous and barely encountered to be comprehensible and thinkable at all.⁸⁷

If it is only in the burning house that the fundamental architectural problem becomes visible, then we can now see that is at stake in the story of the West, what it tried at all costs to grasp and why it should only fail.⁸⁸ It so seems that towards the present we could only regress, whereas in the past we proceed straight ahead. If in take the allegory of the no way-out *Einbahnstraße*, the only option left seems to remain transfixed, haunted.

Chapter 4 H(a)unting Ghosts

89 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 1-13.

90 Ibid.

91 See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.

Chapter 4 H(a)unting Ghosts

If in a mature, well-developed state of postmodernity, there had been a consensus that the features of modernity should all belong to the dustbin of history just like its predecessors, then, amidst all such attempts to cleanse and to rip off, recent years since the turn of the century has witnessed also another extraordinary phenomena that suggest the return to the historical juncture where history appeared to have been transfixed at the threshold between the two epochs, the establishment of the old mentality and the melancholy of a past which postmodernity had claimed so effortfully the completion of its wholesale liquidation.⁸⁹ As Jameson argues, the return is firstly and fundamentally discernible in that the seemingly uncontested “triumph” of neoliberalism as a hegemonic agenda or political economy are considered as the resurrection of an older political economy that now totters forth like a shade: the revival of confidence in the laissez-faire market. Jameson should have hardly expected the total collapse in 2008 that reveals the very qualities the inherit, structural contradiction that both the present and the past versions of laissez-faire economy have shared in common. Jameson notes also on the resuscitation of aesthetics and styles which modernism had invented, destroyed, and perhaps reinvented, emphasising the reevoked popular interest in issues of beauty and the central objects of aesthetics.⁹⁰ With the knowledge of hindsight about such consequences, it is perhaps not premature to claim that the post-modern condition has already taken too much a détournement (if its task as it have proclaimed is possible at all) from the original course or enterprise whose well-known rhetoric settles in decentralisation, multiplication, heterogeneous qualities, and the displacement of “grand narratives.”⁹¹

In retrospection, the past could be mapped in terms of its trajectory that led into the present. The beginning of the end could be grasped from as early as the 70s, in economics, in the political agenda, in popular culture, and in architecture as if it had been some sort of companion to a society’s cultural images. Poetically, some would tentatively argue that the grainy finishes of the béton-brut constructions and the rain-washed paleness of the plattenbau surfaces already heralded some sort of decay or a depressed countenance of a time that eventually precipitated during the decades to come. The way in which

this could be regarded as meaningful at all, is not that through their visual, artistic and symbolic forms one empathises the ostensible mentality of devastation, sustained vandalism, fractures of the whole and ruins of an epoch as such empathies or conceptions are made accessible only through the views of the contemporaries and such views are inherently bounded, if not determined, by the Geist of our ages and the ghost of unfulfillments that haunt and unnerve our contemporaries; the signatures of an official foreclosure of a future and upcoming depression that we discern from the built forms of the 70s, are immanently influenced by our positions, consciously or not, in full knowledge of *what came next*, our transformative retrospection.

To this regard we find the precision and concision in Benjamin, extending Giedion,

“Apart from a certain haut-goût charm, the artistic draperies and wall-hangings of the previous century have come to seem musty.”⁹² “We, however, believe that the charm they exercise on us is proof that these things too, contain material of vital importance ... not indeed for our building practice, as is the case with the constructive possibilities inherent in iron frameworks, but rather for our understanding, for the radiology ... of the situation of the bourgeois class at the moment it evinces the first signs of decline ... In other words: just as Giedion teaches us to read off the basic features of today’s architecture in the buildings erected around 1850, we, in turn, would recognise today’s life, today’s forms, in the life and in the apparently secondary, lost forms of that epoch.”⁹³

However, for us, such past return only as trauma. We notice a future gradually suspended in time with the inability of conceptualising anything original or new. With the temporary, illustory standstills of history and the obscured material contradictions, the spectre of the past seems to have returned to be haunting our ages now. We are haunted by these futures never to be arrived at, and the actual material degradation and dereliction we are left with. The frustrated and exhausted reality of material degradation seems also to recall the ghosts of the 19th century Europe and its arcades explored by Benjamin. These ruins did possess some messianic power calling for radical historical change, yet we might no longer be able to recognise ourselves and our histories in these prototypes. We may well be situated in a similar situation of austerity, of nihilism, and of depression. One remaining

⁹² Giedion, *Building in France*, p. 7.

⁹³ Benjamin, *Arcades*, Convolute [N1, 11].

⁹⁴ Martin, *Utopia’s Ghost*, pp. 147-79.

hope is that in staging the variety and the coercive nature of such forms of frustration and disenchantment, they could not help but to also precipitate its antithesis,⁹⁴ yet a forever deterred and perhaps already missed moment of salvation or sublation, just as the fact that beyond hunting the ghost of former selves and being haunted by it, there should be the option to learn from it, to think with it, and to live with it.

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