

Contested understandings: The Lansbury estate in the post war period.

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**CONTESTED UNDERSTANDINGS:
THE LANSBURY ESTATE IN THE POST-WAR
PERIOD**

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Doctor of Philosophy 1994
University of London**



ABSTRACT

The Lansbury estate was the LCC's first post-war reconstruction area, it formed the Exhibition of Architecture during the Festival of Britain, and received considerable media, political, architectural and planning attention. This coverage articulated hegemonic post-war ideas about the future, the East End and communities. I have examined this material and the representations and understandings about the estate from non-hegemonic groups. My intention has been to explore these representations, and emphasise the complexity associated with the creation and negotiation of understandings about places. While the research is concerned with understandings of the Lansbury estate, I have examined the ways those meanings and understandings are created, and based my work around a conceptual critique of cultural geography. I argue that cultural geography has overly relied on hegemonic discourses produced by the powerful and neglected less powerful groups' understandings. As a result of this, some cultural geographers have over-simplified the complex ways meanings about places are created, reproduced and contested, and failed to address the range of meanings about places. This work, therefore is offered as a response to these limitations, and aims to show that to appreciate the meanings of places it is necessary to examine the understandings of hegemonic and non-hegemonic groups, and emphasise the relationships between those groups.

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Some of the illustrations are of poor quality, they come from newspapers or articles written in the 1940s and 1950s, and in some cases were restricted to the library making reproduction difficult.

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Most of all thanks to the residents of Lansbury, who generously spared me time, and allowed me to record their views.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research is an examination of the ways different groups understood the Lansbury estate in Poplar during the period of its design, construction and initial habitation, that is, until 1951.¹ Illustrations 1.1 and 1.2, show the location of the estate. This brief introductory chapter is intended to provide information about the Lansbury estate as a context for later discussions, rather than to provide a substantive analysis of the estate or a recounting of my theoretical positions and concerns. It draws on a number of histories and descriptions of the Lansbury estate which have outlined the shape of buildings at Lansbury and the chronologies of its development.² These histories and descriptions, however, relay only a part of the history of Lansbury, the 'official' planning and architectural history. It is not my intention in this thesis to duplicate the material covered by these histories and accounts. In chapters two and three, I elaborate and define my theoretical and methodological positions, which in many ways seek to undermine or reorientate the, sometimes implicit, claims made by factual, descriptive accounts. This research is not concerned to produce a descriptive, empirical history of Lansbury, but to examine how different groups understood the estate, and to suggest the limitations of accounts which fail to engage with the complexity of understandings about places.

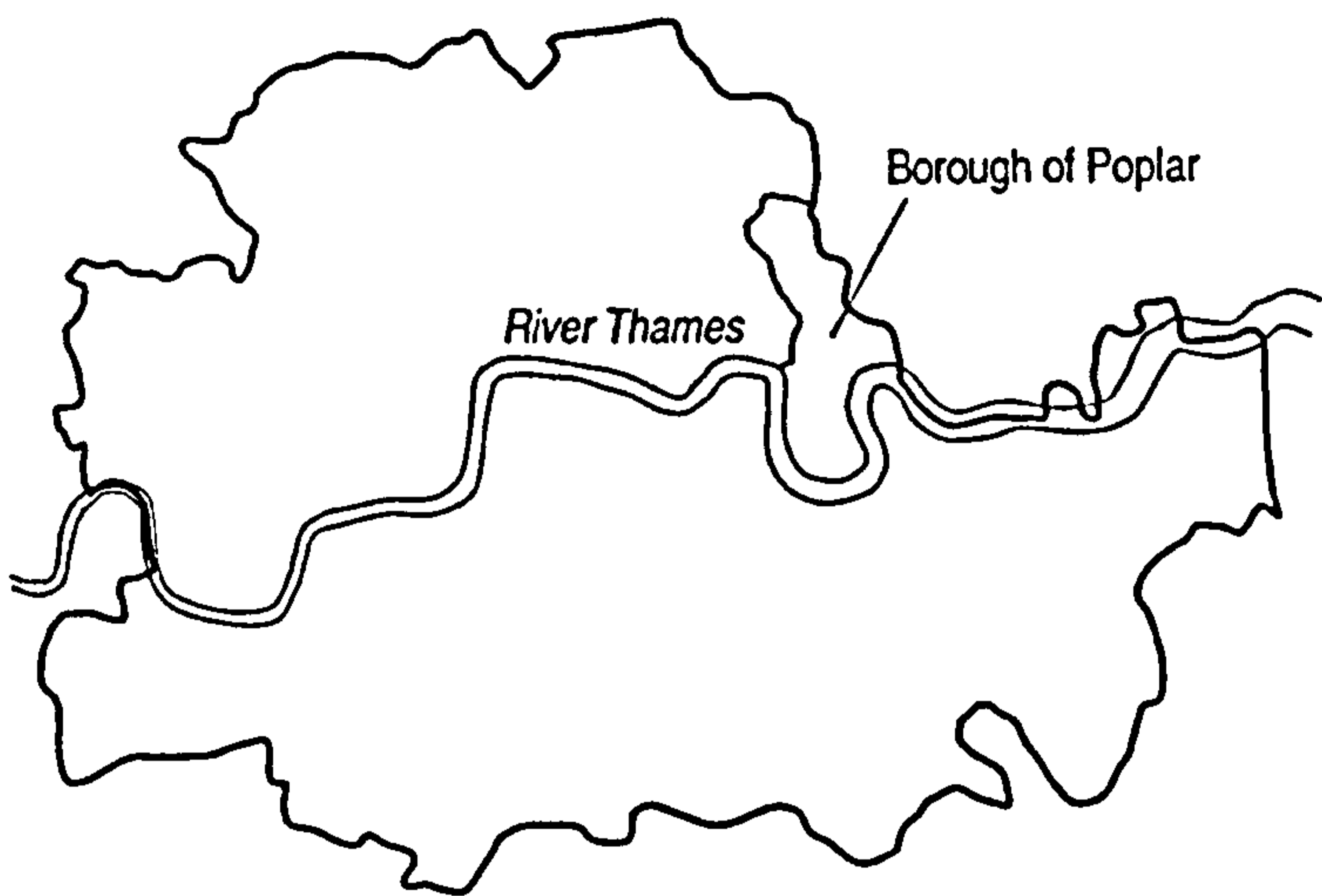
1a Planning Lansbury: the Division of Responsibilities

The first stage of the Lansbury estate, was supposed to be completed by 1951. There were some delays,³ but by 1951 the estate resembled the shape outlined in illustration 1.3. The estate, which was named after George Lansbury, was the first of the London County Council's (LCC) reconstruction

¹The groups I am concerned with are: National politicians, architects and planners; the LCC; Poplar Borough Council, local and national media and residents of the estate. In chapter 3, I discuss the 'selection' of these groups.

²Cox, A. (1989) *The Lansbury Estate, Poplar*. Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England Survey of London. Johnson-Marshall, P. (1966) *Rebuilding Cities*. University of Edinburgh Press, Edinburgh. McDunnett, G. (ed) (1951) *Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning and Building*. HMSO, London.

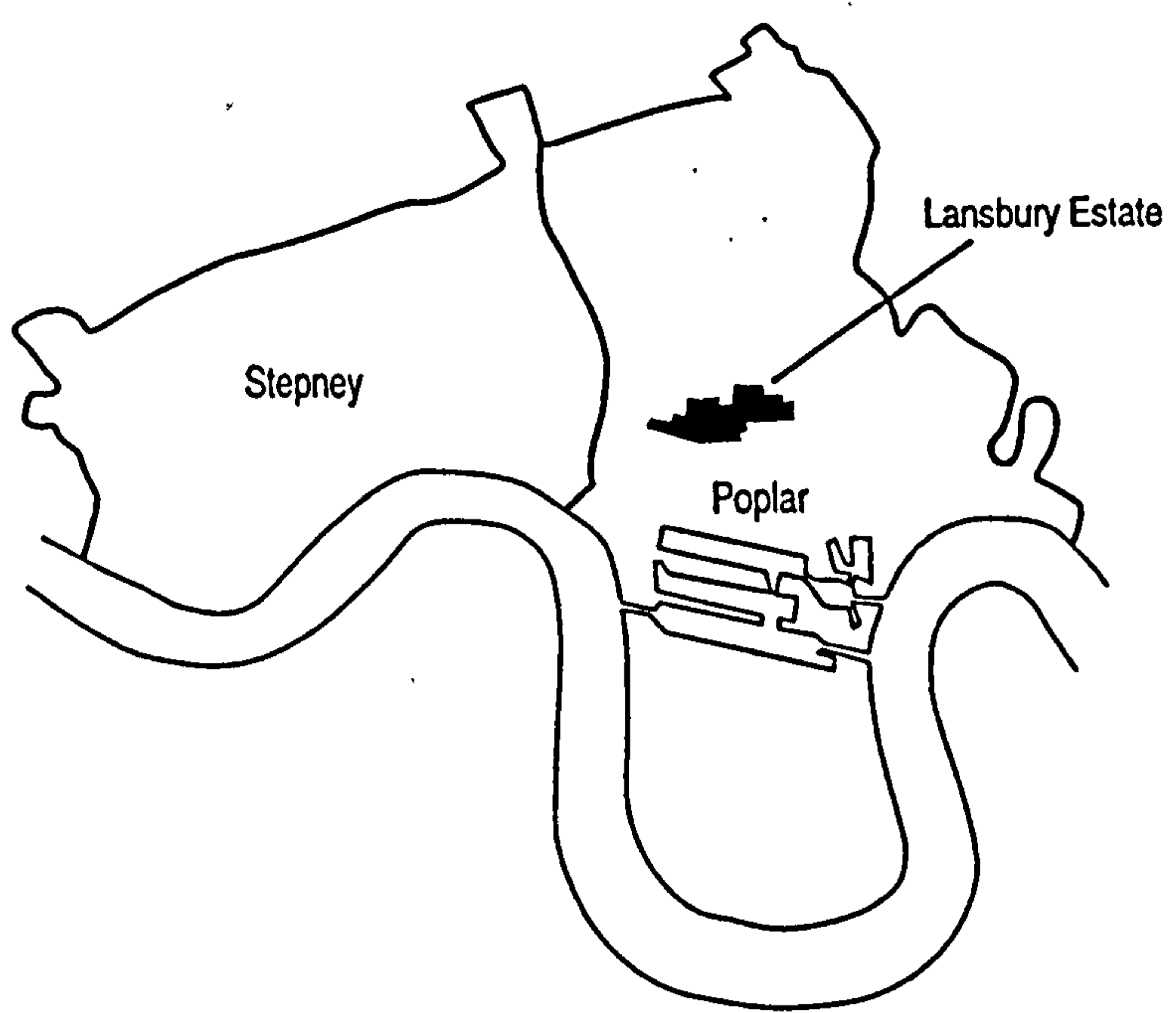
³CAB 124/1346 (1942) Memo from Hugh Casson to Jane Lidderdale.



Location of Poplar in London.



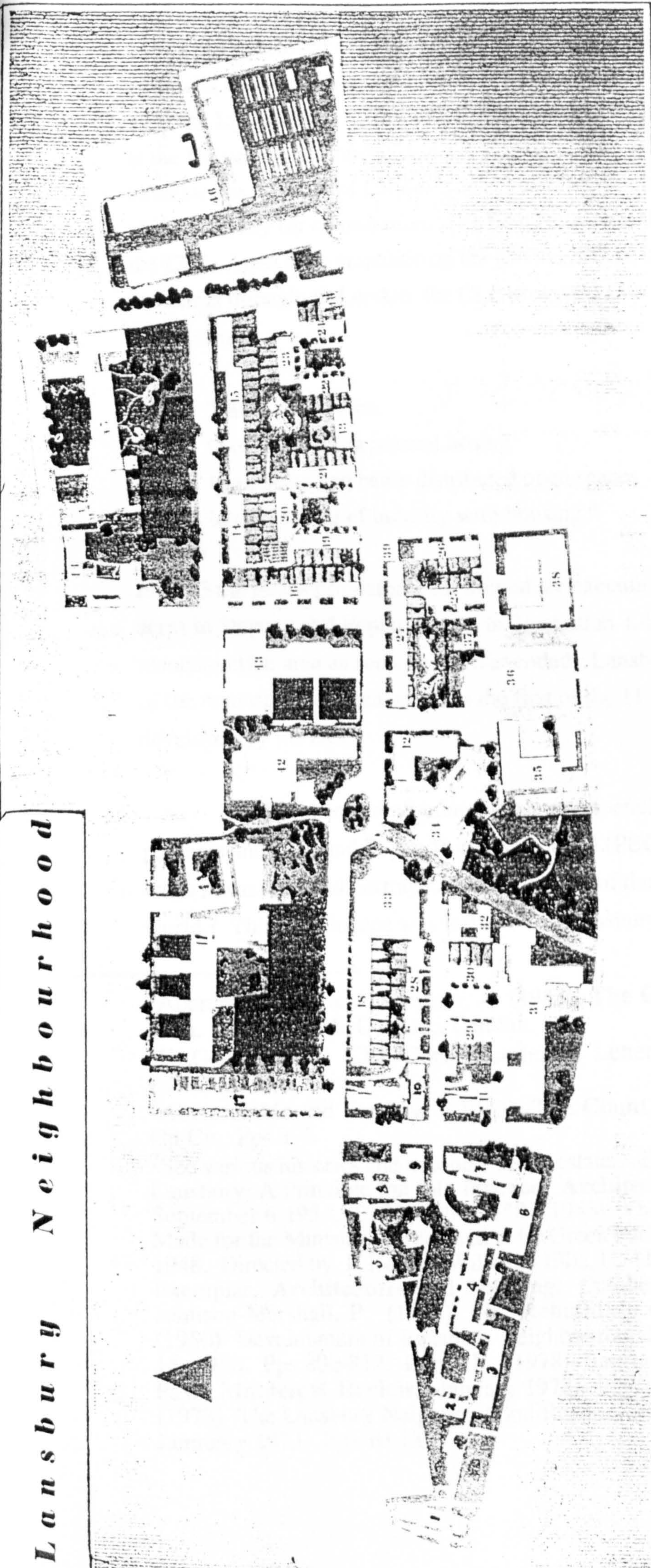
Illustration 1.1



Location of Lansbury Estate in Poplar.

Illustration 1.2

Lansbury Neighbourhood

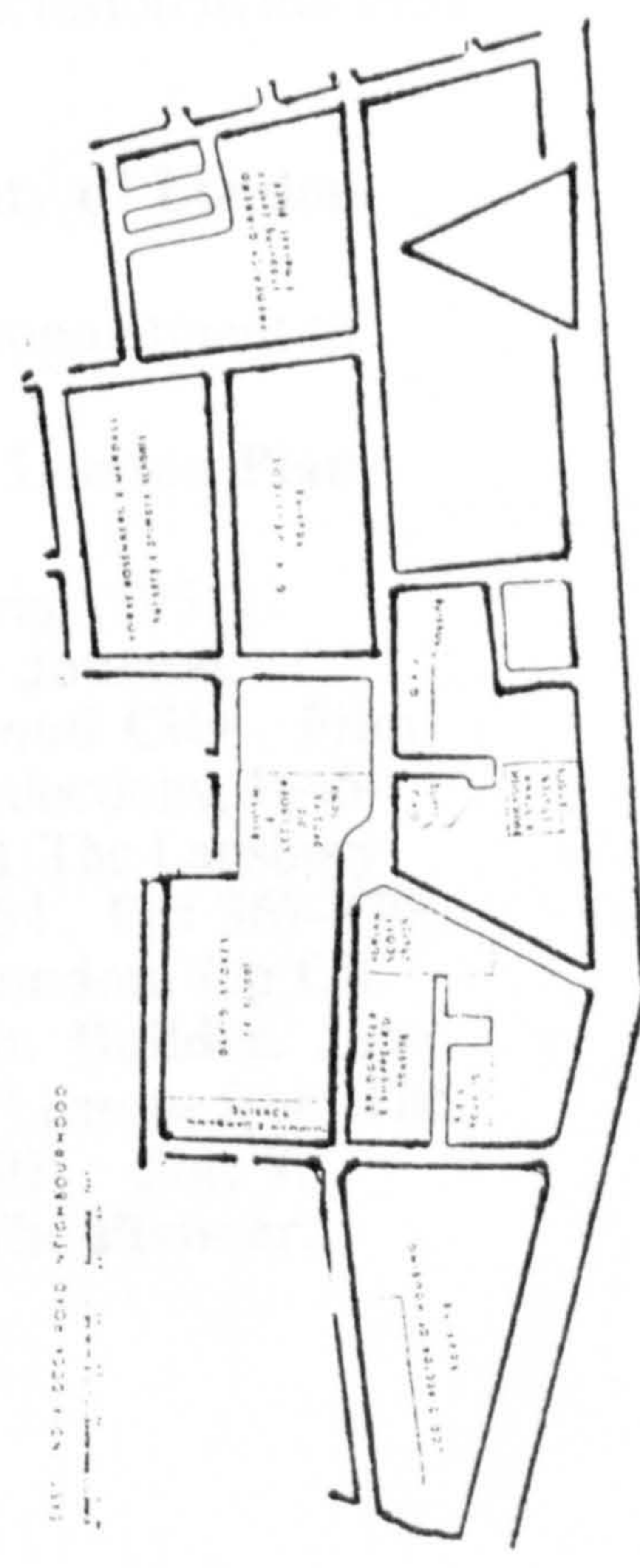


KEY

- L.C.C. Housing Architect.
- 1-2 6 storey flats
- 3 3 storey flats
- 4-5 6 storey flats
- 6-7 3 storey flats
- 8 6 storey flats
- 9 3 storey flats
- Norman & Dawbarn
- 17 3 storey (2 storey maisonettes with flats over)
- David Stokes
- 41 R.C. Secondary School
- Bridgewater and Shephard
- 10-11 3 storey flats
- 18 2 storey terraced houses
- 28 2 storey linked houses
- 29-30 2 storey terraced houses

- Adrian Scott
- 32 R.C. Presbytery
- 33 R.C. Church
- Booth and Ledebor
- 42 Old People's Home
- G.A. Jellicoe
- 12 2 storey flats (old people)
- 14-15 4 storey maisonettes
- 16 3 storey (2 storey maisonettes with flats over)
- 19-24 3 storey terraced houses with single room flats
- 25-27 2 storey terraced houses
- Handiside and Stark
- 35 Trinity Church and Hall
- 37 Trinity Church Manse
- Yorke, Rosenberg & Mardall
- 44 Ricardo St. Nursery School
- 45 Ricardo St. Primary School

- Frederick Gibberd
- 46 Shopping Centre and Market Place and Public House (later existing)
- Other Buildings:
- 13 3 storey flats. Existing Borough Council Flats
- 31 Health Centre (Future) Architect, L.C.C. (1951 Festival Site Buildings not shown)
- 34 Upper North Street. Future Community Centre
- 36 Seamen's Mission & Extensions Architects: Gouton & Gouton
- 38 Board of Trade (existing)
- 39 Public House (existing)
- 43 Holy Child R.C. Primary School (existing)
- 40 New Public House. Architects: Stewart & Hendry



ARCHITECTS' SITES

areas to be developed after the Second World War, and was based around proposals outlined in the 1943 County of London Plan (CLP).⁴ During the War, the LCC appointed Sir Patrick Abercrombie, Professor of Town Planning at the University of London, and J H Forshaw, then architect to the LCC, to examine the problem of London's future development.⁵ By July 1943, a draft plan was ready for consultation. The final result was the publication in 1943 of the CLP. Apart from emphasising the general lack of coherent architectural standards throughout London, the CLP presented four main physical problems for solution:-

- 1 Traffic congestion
- 2 Great areas of depressed housing
- 3 Inadequate and badly distributed open spaces
- 4 Intermingling of industry with housing.⁶

In 1943 the Plan's programme for immediate execution was a site of 1,500 acres in Stepney and Poplar, shown in illustration 1.4, to redevelop as a reconstruction area as soon as the War ended. Lansbury was neighbourhood 9 of the reconstruction area, and was the first of the 11 neighbourhoods to be developed by the LCC.

The Lansbury estate gained some prominence among architects, planners and LCC and Poplar Borough Council (PBC) officials, because of the ways it was seen and portrayed as an exemplar of the reconstructed post-war world.⁷ This prominence was furthered by Lansbury's inclusion in the 1951

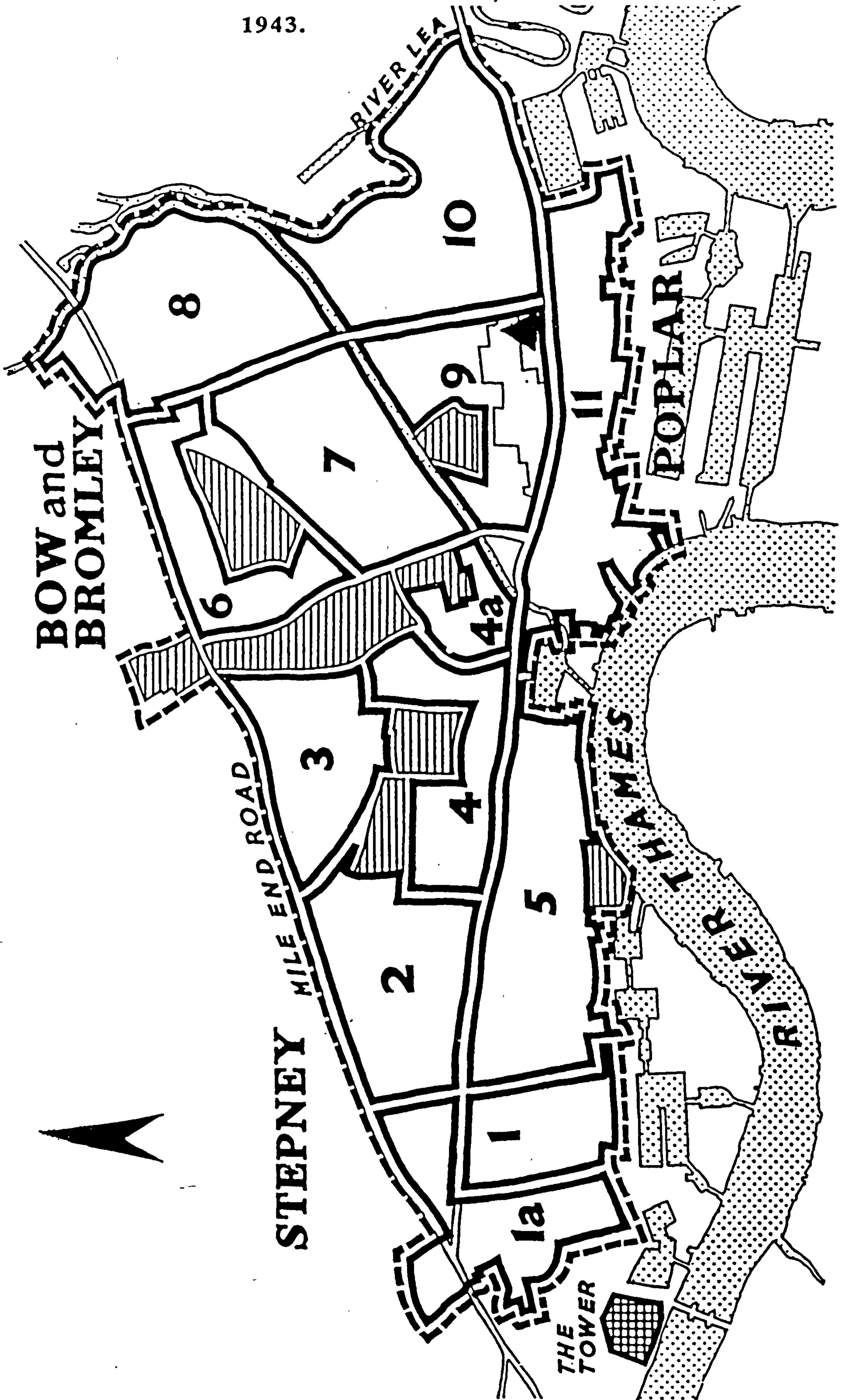
⁴Abercrombie, P. and Forshaw, J. (1943) **The County of London Plan**. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London.

⁵HLG 116 (1942) **CLP Correspondence**. Letter of appointment to Patrick Abercrombie.

⁶Abercrombie and Forshaw. (1943) **The County of London Plan**. Op Cit. Pps 3-7.

⁷See various histories and accounts of the estate. Editorial (1951) **Lansbury: A Principle Put Into Practice**. **Architecture Journal**. September 6 1951. P275. INF 6/658 (1945) **The Proud City**. Film Made for the Ministry of Information by Green Park Productions, 1945-1948. Directed by R Keene. Williams-Ellis, C. (1954) **The Lansbury Exemplar**. **Architecture and Building**. October 1954. Pps 367-370. Johnson-Marshall, P. (1966) **The Rebuilding of London**. Op Cit. (1950) **Development of Lansbury Neighbourhood Unit**. **Builder**. June 16, 1950. Pps 800-812. Berry, F. (1978) **Lansbury: Lessons from The Past**. **Municipal Review**. January 1978. Pps 300-301. Bor, W. (1973) **The Lansbury Neighbourhood Reappraised**. **The Planner**. January 1973. Pps 10-13.

Illustration 1.4: The 11 Neighbourhoods of the Stepney-Poplar Reconstruction Scheme, based on the CLP, 1943.



Festival of Britain, as the Live Architecture Exhibition. The estate as exhibit, was enthusiastically promoted and publicised by festival organisers, and received considerable media coverage, and generated lay and professional interest.⁸ The planning and reconstruction of Lansbury was the responsibility of the LCC. However, they had to liaise with the festival authorities, who had considerable power to limit or alter the LCC's plans, and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning kept a close watch on the development at Lansbury. PBC had no official capacity through which to influence the planning of Lansbury, but the LCC informed them of what they were doing, and defended their proposals during an official enquiry demanded by PBC.⁹ In subsequent chapters I discuss the relationships between the various groups concerned with Lansbury in more detail, and highlight some of the disagreements and disputes between them.

b Planning Lansbury: Planning the Built Environment

Neighbourhood 9 was built by the LCC from 1949 onwards, although initial proposals and examinations of the area began considerably earlier. According to the CLP, the estate was supposed to be a self-contained neighbourhood possessing what were seen as essential state-provided, local services, combined with the provision of community facilities. Percy Johnson-Marshall, who was the senior architect-planner at the LCC after the War, summarised the facilities and services provided at Lansbury for the first stage of the development:¹⁰

Stage one was the Live Architecture Exhibition for the 1951 Festival of Britain. In this first big attempt at post-war neighbourhood planning and development, every effort was made to show as great a variety of social facilities as possible. Homes were provided in two-storey terraced houses with gardens, three-storey houses, houses with a flat over, maisonettes with a flat below, four storey maisonettes and three and six-storey flats. There were also special flats for old people and an old people's home. A careful distribution of sandpits for under-five year old children, and playgrounds for the five to eleven group were provided; while the older than eleven group would be catered for in the new, larger open spaces and

⁸McDunnnett, G. (ed) (1951) *Guide to The Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning and Building Research*. Op Cit. CL/HSG/2/31. (1950) *Joint Statement for the Press by the LCC and Council of the Festival of Britain*. 6 June 1950. See also CAB 124/1345, CAB 124/1346, CAB 124/1347, CAB 124,1297, WORK 25.

⁹THHL 331.2 (1949) *Reconstruction and Resettlement in East London. The Case of the Sepney-Poplar Joint Committee*.

¹⁰See appendix 1 for brief biographies of the personnel involved with Lansbury.

school playgrounds (we tried to arrange for these to be opened after school hours). In addition to living accommodation, there was a new secondary, primary and nursery school besides the existing Roman Catholic Primary School. The first stage of the new community consisted of a shopping centre, clock tower, covered arcades, two public houses and maisonettes over the shops. There were two new churches, one for Roman Catholics and one for Congregationalists (with Church Hall and Club Rooms) to replace buildings that had been destroyed. The existing Upper North Street School was converted into a Community and Evening Educational Centre and finally the Seamen's Mission and Hostel was to be reconstructed. A comprehensive Health Centre was also proposed but was vetoed by the Government at the last minute on grounds of economy; it was to have been sited on the area used for the Festival Town Planning Exhibition.¹¹

A number of architects and planners were involved with the design of Lansbury. The LCC were anxious to ensure a variety of features and variety of design at Lansbury, despite a fairly restrictive architectural brief issued by the LCC.¹² Most of the architects involved with the design of Lansbury were not LCC employees, but were brought in by the LCC and Festival Council to provide variety, and to produce a supposedly higher standard of design than that the Festival Office felt the LCC architects were capable of.¹³ Illustration 1.3 depicts which architects were assigned to the various sites at Lansbury. As Johnson-Marshall indicated there was an emphasis on variety in the style of housing in the reconstruction area. Part of the reason for appointing differing architects for each site was to achieve this variety, and there were several different housing areas and styles, the majority of which are low-rise and terraced. The illustration 1.5, from a model of the estate in 1951, shows the variety of housing design on the estate.

Frederic Gibberd, a prominent architect and town planner at the time, proposed the Live Architecture Exhibition idea to the Festival authorities,¹⁴ and as illustration 1.3 indicates, he was also responsible for the market area and

¹¹Johnson-Marshall, P. (1966) *Rebuilding Cities*. Op Cit. P227

¹²CAB 124/1346 (1949) Letter from Lidderdale to Hugh Casson. 22 February 1949.

¹³ CL/HSG/2/31 Lansbury Housing Sites 1-5. CAB 124/1297 (1949) Lord President of the Council. Festival of Britain Architecture. Council for Architecture, Town Planning and Building Research. Meeting 23 April 1949 and CL/HSG/2/31/ 29/10/48.1949. For discussions about choice of architects at Lansbury.

¹⁴See chapter 6 and CAB 124/1297 (1948) Council for Architecture. Memo by Gibberd. 19 July 1948.

Illustration 1.5: The Lansbury Estate, 1951. A Model.



From Johnson-Marshall, P. (1966) *Rebuilding Cities*. Op Cit. P50.

clock tower at Lansbury,¹⁵ both of which, as subsequent chapters indicate were particularly significant to various groups associated with the estate.¹⁶ The new shopping centre and market place consisted of open space for the stalls of the street traders, and was the first pedestrian precinct in the country. Illustration 1.6 depicts a model of the market in 1951. The market square was the prototype for Gibberd's larger and more complex Market Square at Harlow New Town.¹⁷ It was the LCC's aim to create a well-balanced shopping centre, with all the necessary trades represented in their 'proper proportion' according to the needs and demands of the locality. Priority was to be given to existing traders in the area who had been displaced, and to those whose premises had been destroyed during the War. A photograph is shown in illustration 1.7.

1c Planning Lansbury: The Residents

The first residents on the estate, the Snoddys, moved into Gladstone House on the 14th of February 1951.¹⁸ Their arrival was marked by a small ceremony, and attracted considerable press attention.¹⁹ In 1952, Westergaard and Glass carried out a survey of Lansbury residents.²⁰ They noted, that by the end of 1951, 168 households had arrived at Lansbury. Their investigations into these residents provides a useful indication of the socio-economic status of residents at Lansbury in 1951 and 1952. To summarise here, they suggested that these residents were almost entirely working-class; 90% of the chief wage earners interviewed in the survey were manual workers.²¹ They reported that 40% of households interviewed were living two persons or more to a room before moving, and that 63% had no access to a lavatory inside the house; all

¹⁵Gibberd explains his involvement in Gibberd, F. (1976) *What Architecture and Housing and Planning Can Do for Us: Lansbury in Banham, M. and Hillier, B. (eds) (1976) A Tonic to the Nation.* Thames and Hudson, London. Pps P138-143.

¹⁶See: (1951) *The Festival Inn, London. Building Review.* August, 1951. Pps 216-7. (1952) *Clock Tower at Lansbury. Architectural Review.* August, 1952. Pps 80-81 and (1952) *Lansbury, Poplar. Building.* Pps 254-5 July, 1952 and Gibberd, F. *Bibliography File.* RIBA.

¹⁷See appendix 1.

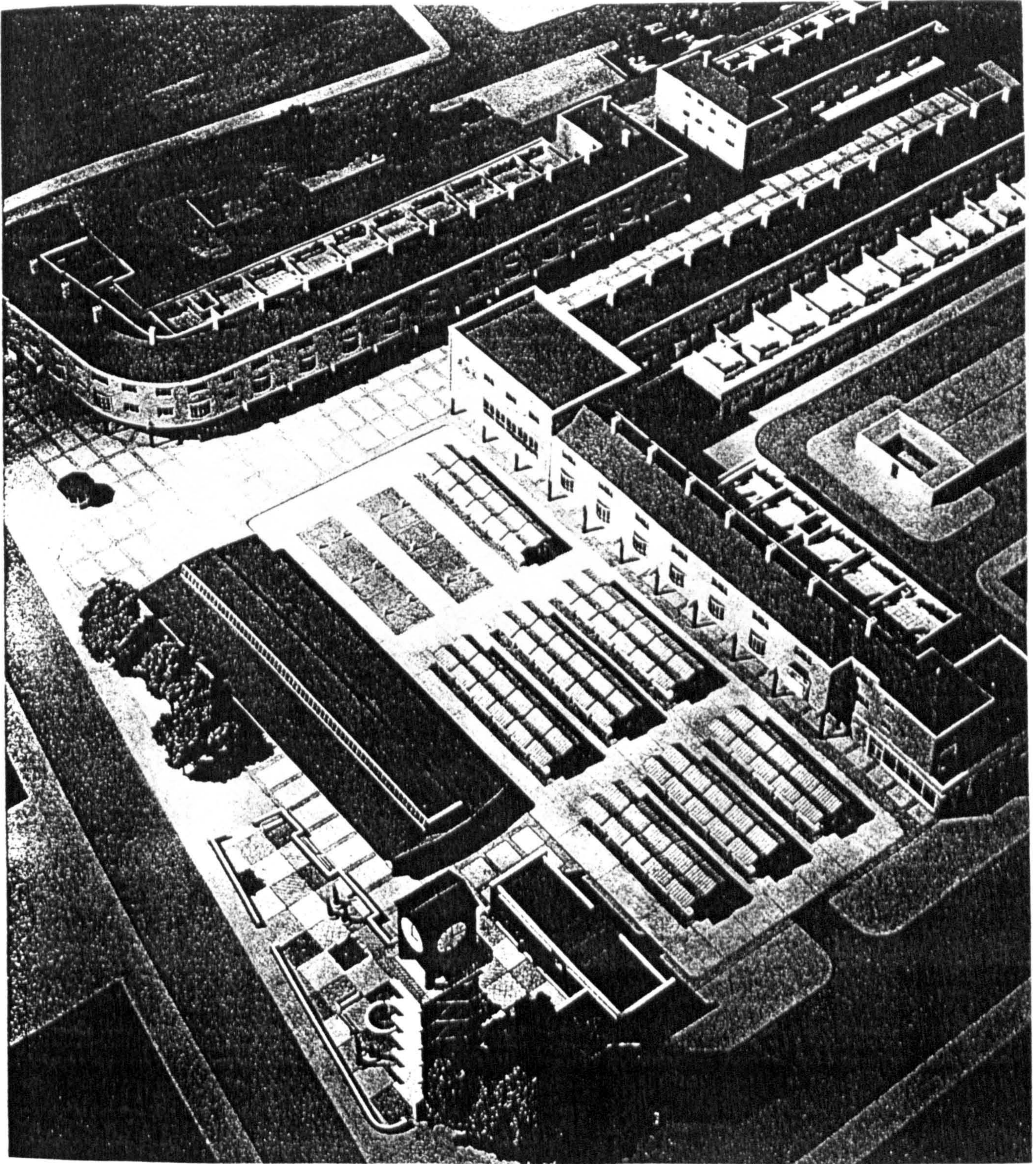
¹⁸See chapter 6.

¹⁹Humphries, S. and Taylor, J. (1986) *The Making of Modern London 1945-1985.* Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., London.

²⁰I discuss their work in more critical detail in chapters 4,5,6 and 7. Westergaard, J. and Glass, J. (1954) *A Profile of Lansbury. Town Planning Review.* Vol XXV, April 1954. Pps 33-51.

²¹See chapter 7 for examinations of attitudes towards working-classes by groups concerned with Lansbury.

Illustration 1.6: A Model of Crisp Street Market, 1951.



From Johnson-Marshall, P. (1966) *Rebuilding Cities*. Op Cit. P51.

Illustration 1.7: Crisp Street Market 1951.



From (1951) *The East End News*. November 18, 1951.

the accommodation at Lansbury had inside bathrooms and toilets. Westergaard and Glass also noted that rents ranged from 25 shillings a week for 3 rooms, to 35 shillings a week for 5 rooms at the end of 1951, rents were raised in 1952. Westergaard and Glass noted that by the end of 1951 all tenants, except a few shop keepers, were paying substantially more rent than they had before moving, with two-thirds paying at least twice as much as before.

All the residents were selected by the LCC on the basis of need, priority being given to those with families and those, either homeless, or living in bombed property. Although the CLP and architects and planners associated with the estate, emphasised the importance of having Poplar people on the estate, Westergaard and Glass found that 80% of the Lansbury residents in 1952 were 'outsiders'.²² Clearly the LCC as a London-wide institution, found it preferable to move people, in difficult circumstances, from other areas into the estate, rather than wait until their area had been reconstructed. Despite this, most people I spoke to said that the majority of the first residents came from what is now Hackney and Tower Hamlets.

1d The Live Architecture Exhibition

As noted earlier, the estate was the Live Architecture Exhibition of the 1951 Festival of Britain. This had important ramifications in terms of how the estate was portrayed and what meanings were attached to it; it also resulted in increased publicity concerning the estate. The Live Architecture Exhibition opened on Thursday 3 May 1951, and contained a number of permanent and temporary exhibits. The number of visitors to the Exhibition proved unexpectedly low. The total number up to the 31st of May was 18,724, and the Festival Office announced a reduction in opening hours.²³ The Live Architecture Exhibition closed in September 1951, and the final figure for those going into the Exhibition enclosure at Lansbury was 86,646; rather low when compared with the 10-25,000 visitors a day predicted in 1950, or the 8 million people who visited the main South Bank Exhibition. Despite the low attendance, inclusion in the Festival had significant effects, in terms of what was built at Lansbury, by whom and also in terms of how the estate was understood by the groups involved with it.

²²See chapter 7 for a fuller discussion.

²³WORK 25/7 Story of the Festival of Britain. The Exhibition of Architecture.

This project differs substantially from other histories of Lansbury and the Festival referenced here. Those have tended to focus on the intentions of architects and planners, and have implicitly assumed that the architects' and planners' intended meanings and interpretations are the only ones, or certainly the most important ones. I draw on work from cultural, feminist and media studies to argue for approaches which are more sensitive to the complexity of meanings about places, and which are more aware than conventional architectural histories, of the importance of less-powerful, non-professional groups in the negotiation and contestation of meanings. The following two chapters discuss these issues in more detail.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explained that the main agenda of this research was to examine the ways in which different groups understood the Lansbury estate, and to try and suggest some reasons for those understandings. Examining the work of architectural historians could potentially offer some insights into the ways peoples' understandings about the built environment are constructed, since a part of the architectural literature is concerned with meanings in the built environment. The first part of the literature review is concerned with some of their work. I also felt that cultural geographers who focus upon the meanings of landscape, might suggest some of the ways the 'Lansbury landscape' might be understood, and suggest some reasons for those understandings. The second part of this review is concerned with their work.

This review is not intended as a comprehensive discussion of all the literature which purports to relate to the 'meaning' of built environments or landscapes, but is specifically drawn from architectural historians and new cultural geographers because the basis of their work is explicitly concerned with meanings of (built) landscapes. I argue that while architectural historians and cultural geographers provide some useful insights into the ways landscapes and buildings are given meaning and interpreted, there are also problematic silences within both these areas. Architectural historians have traditionally focused only upon architects' and planners' intended meanings, and thus ignore or strategically denigrate, residents' and users' understandings. I also argue that new cultural geographers' interest in representations of landscapes, and their tendency to emphasise, at least empirically, powerful and elite meanings, silences different and potentially oppositional understandings and representations from those who live in, or use the landscapes concerned. These silences from both disciplines, stimulate my theoretical and methodological approaches.

2 Architectural Social Criticism

Efforts by architectural historians to understand the meanings of the built environment have been rather limited; usually work consists of specific aesthetic critiques relying upon promotions of, and comments upon, the

architects' intentions.¹ Pevsner describes the way architects and artists were seen, until the end of the nineteenth century, as unaffected by worldly concerns: "The artist and architect were seen as the high priests of the world...Both living on the summit of mankind."² Similar comments were also made by William Morris: "Artists out of touch with everyday life wrap themselves up in dreams of Greece and Italy, which only a very few people even pretend to understand or be moved by."³ Architectural histories and critiques have frequently relied only on promotions of, and comments upon, the architects' intentions, in their expositions of the meaning of architecture. This conception of art and architecture takes little or no account of social, political and cultural contexts within which buildings are produced and understood. Lack of attention to the social and cultural contexts within which architects work, ignores both the forces which influenced their design, and crucially the way these designs are seen and understood. Within architecture, commentators have been slow (and unwilling) to include social, cultural and political contexts into their critiques of architectural meanings. It was not until 1976 that the editors of the *Journal of Architectural Research* stressed the need to, "put much greater emphasis on historical understandings of the economic, functional and cultural aspects of built form and social conditions within which particular types of building form have evolved."⁴ Relatively few architectural criticisms or histories have considered the social, cultural or political meanings of the built environment or buildings.

Where social and cultural considerations are taken into account, they generally refer to producers' intended meanings, by which I mean they articulate understandings of architects, politicians and other groups concerned with the construction and design of the built environments, and the social, economic and political contexts which supposedly shaped or determined the

¹See Swenarton, M. (1981) *Homes Fit for Heroes*. Heinemann Educational Books, London. Frampton, K. (1985) *Modern Architecture*. Thames and Hudson Ltd, London. Jencks, C. (1985) *Modern Movements in Architecture*. Penguin, London, for criticisms of aesthetic only approaches.

²Pevsner, N. (1960) *Pioneers of Modern Design*. Penguin, London. P21

³Morris, W. (1915) *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Thames and Hudson, London. Pxxiii

⁴Editors. (1976) *Journal of Architectural Research*. Vol 5, 2. P120. See also (1968) Editorial 'Notes and Comments'. *Landscape*. Vol 17, 2. Pps 1-3 in which the editor complains about the current determinist approach by designers.

architecture. There has been less interest in users' meanings. King, who is interested in social and cultural meanings of built environments, confirms this neglect, commenting upon what he sees as the deficiencies within the literature.

One set of scholars, prompted perhaps by aesthetic motives, produce lavishly illustrated scholarly books on individual architects or styles, to be appreciated by one social group, while another set of scholars, recruited from different social backgrounds, and prompted by social and political motives, produce equally scholarly books on economic fluctuations in the production of working-class housing which are read by another social group.⁵

King's second point refers to the emphasis, by Marxist-inclined commentators, on the economically-determined nature of the built environment, and the social, economic and political contexts which 'shaped' and, in some commentators minds, determined the meanings of the built environment.⁶ The first part (a) of this section is concerned with their work. The second part (b) is concerned with architectural histories which do focus upon users' interpretations.

2a Producer Oriented Approaches

The rather limited literature which has emphasised the social, cultural and political contexts and meanings of architecture has tended to focus upon architects', planners' and politicians' understandings and intentions, and has therefore prioritised the position of 'producers' in the process of creation of understandings about buildings.⁷ Non-professional understandings are often considered unimportant, or treated as misreadings, as a failure to grasp the significance of the design. Literature which focuses on producers', particularly architects', conceptions about their work, suggests part of the way in which meanings about buildings and the built environment are developed, but fails to discuss or interpret consumers', frequently different understandings, which may draw on discourses only partially, or unrelated, to producers' articulated meanings. Thus, while users may possibly understand the design according to

⁵King, A. (ed) (1980) *Buildings and Society*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. P70.

⁶See Rubin, B. (1979) Ideologies and Urban Design. *Annals of Association of American Geographers*. Vol 69, 3. Pps 339-361.
Harvey, D. (1988) Voodoo Cities. *New Statesman*. 30 September 1988. Pps 33-5. Castells M. (1978) *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*. Edward Arnold, London and Pickvance C. (1976) *Housing Reproduction of Capital and Reproduction of Labour Power: Some Recent French Work*. *Antipode*. Vol 8, 1. Pps 58-68.

⁷Swenarton, M. (1990) *Artisans and Architects: Ruskinian Tradition in Architectural Thought*. Macmillan, London.

producers' articulated intentions, or according to social, political and cultural circumstances, there is no necessary correspondence between their understandings and those of the producers. Therefore, while there is a need to contextualise architectural production, there is also a need to examine users' understandings, a need which the writers discussed in this section have failed to address.

Mark Swenarton, an architectural historian, has tried to move away from aesthetic interpretations of architecture, and situate the built environment he examines within the dominant social, political and economic ideologies of the time. He finds the lack of attention to the social and political function of design "a serious omission."⁸ Swenarton predominantly grounds his understanding of architecture and design in extant material conditions, he sees developments in architectural ideas partly as a response to changing economic and political conditions.⁹ His book 'Homes Fit For Heroes' deals with the post-1918 housing programme. Swenarton discusses the political and design context of the 'homes fit for heroes' campaign, and examines policies and reports which debated design policy, and establishes the political considerations and intentions of the programme and the design of houses.

Swenarton's almost exclusive concentration on desired and intended meanings, means that he fails to ascertain how far the avowed intentions of politicians were assimilated and accepted by inhabitants, or even reacted to by, for example, the press, local and opposition politicians. His overriding prioritisation of the national, hegemonic political discourse surrounding the design and implementation of 'homes fit for heroes' does not adequately explain "what the houses reproduced in political and ideological terms" which is his explicit aim.¹⁰ Swenarton establishes what a number of politicians wanted the social and political 'effect' of the designs to be, but from his analysis it is difficult to establish how far, if at all, the buildings 'performed' their function and whether these intentions were assimilated and accepted by residents. Swenarton concludes: "That the evidence of 'homes fit for heroes' suggests that design can perform [this] political and ideological function"¹¹, yet he offers no

⁸Swenarton, M. (1981) *Homes Fit For Heroes*. Op Cit. P2.

⁹See also Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Post-Modernity*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford and Zukin, S. (1988) *Loft Living*. Radius, London.

¹⁰Swenarton, M. (1981) *Homes Fit For Heroes*. Op Cit. P1.

¹¹Swenarton, M. (1981) *Homes Fit For Heroes*. Op Cit. P105.

insight into whether or not the programme did 'perform' as intended. What Swenarton does offer is a comprehensive analysis of the political intentions of this design process and a study, unusual in architectural literature, which moves away from aesthetic, 'insider' architectural accounts. His work then, provides a thorough examination of the intended meanings of buildings.

Holston has produced a similarly producer-oriented architectural history, this time for the design and construction of Brasilia. Holston describes how Oscar Niemeyer, the prize-winning architect of Brasilia, developed a 'mythical' history for the Brasilia site.¹² Niemeyer, Holston argues, created and mobilised imagined historical circumstances to justify and enhance the credibility of his designs and plans for Brasilia. Niemeyer's intentions were to provoke interpretations and conceptions of the project which related to the transformation of Brazilian society which he envisaged and desired. "Brasilia was built to be more than merely the symbol of this new life. Rather its design and construction were intended as means to create it, by transforming Brasilia."¹³ This transformation was to be engendered by physical structures, which were meant to encourage and encapsulate certain social relations within the planning layout, design and internal configurations of spaces.¹⁴

Holston's project then, is to identify the perceived social, economic and political conditions, which the planners and designers identified and then sought to change or enhance by design. To try and understand the designers world, Holston investigates the dominant design and political discourses, and analyses the socio-historical circumstances of Brazil, the modernist project and Niemeyer's interpretations of it. His approach provides an excellent insight into how and why Brasilia was shaped. However, Holston assumes that architects, politicians and planners are the creators of meaning, their intentions are taken as the context of significance in architecture and planning, their understandings of material life are seen as the most crucial, their interpretations mirrored by users. He does not seek to ask how or why Niemeyer managed to create a dehistoricized and futuristic context for the site, whether or not this

¹²Holston, J. (1989) *The Modernist City*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

¹³Holston, J. (1989) *The Modernist City*. Op Cit. P3.

¹⁴See Jackson, A. (1970) *The Politics of Architecture*. Architectural Press, London and Lane, B. (1966) *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-45*. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

was opposed, nor why CIAM's radical proposals were accepted.¹⁵ The concern, or result of, Holston's project is the prioritisation of architectural and planning discourses in much the same way as the architects themselves envisaged; plans and designs are 'disembodied' from other contexts which facilitated the project, and Holston ignores residents' and users' views of the City. Residents may have ignored, disbelieved or adapted Niemeyer's version of history; they may have not been determined socially and politically by the design. While his is a fascinating analysis of the construction and design of Brasilia, and emphasises the importance of examining architects' and politicians' expressed intentions, it fails to suggest that residents and users may have reacted differently, let alone suggest what those reactions may be, but assumes the overwhelming significance of producers in the construction of meanings in the built environment

In the two texts I have discussed, part of the ways in which meanings and understandings are created is examined, yet this only a part. Users may draw on entirely different notions to understand buildings and built landscapes. Indeed Swenarton and Holston seem to imply that ideology and politics can stand outside users' experiences, and assume that people are unconsciously determined by the design of buildings, and that there is no point discussing users' views because the architects and planners have said it all. I would suggest that meanings about buildings are far more complex than their reliance on material conditions, and the pervasive power of design to socially determine, would allow. Buildings only perform a social and ideological function in as much as people understand, support and go along with those functions.¹⁶ I would argue instead, that meanings about built environments are related to numerous conceptions and understandings, and not determined directly either by politicians' and architects' intentions, nor by material conditions, nor by design. Buildings are not always seen in the way architects and politicians wanted, their intentions and designs are misunderstood, opposed, ridiculed and undermined by other perhaps more pervasive, or relevant, meanings.

¹⁵Proposals formulated at La Sarraz Declaration (1928) during the *Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*, 1928. For discussion of these proposals see Frampton, K. (1985) *Modern Architecture*. Op Cit.

¹⁶But see Jacobs, J. (1965) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Penguin, London. Newman, O. (1972) *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Design*. Macmillan, New York. Le Corbusier. (1927) *Towards a New Architecture*. The Architectural Press, London for discussions about the determining nature of design.

King's work is more sensitive to users' understandings than that of Swenarton and Holston. He asks: "What can we understand about a society by examining its buildings and physical environment, and what can we understand about buildings and environments by examining the society in which they exist?"¹⁷ His premise is that buildings are essentially social and cultural products, and may have a social effect: "Society produces its buildings, and buildings, although not producing society help to maintain many social forms."¹⁸ King attempts to generalise a cross-cultural relationship between society and built form, and tries to demonstrate this relationship with a collection of essays which deal with buildings as culturally diverse as lunatic asylums in Victorian Britain,¹⁹ Hindu temples in South India²⁰ and office buildings in North America.²¹ His aim is to provide a frame of reference which would help to explain the characteristics and development of built form as it relates to society and culture which would be equally valid, whether in New York or New Guinea, in medieval Europe or twentieth-century Japan.²²

The difficulties associated with trying to generalise a relationship between culture and built form across such culturally, socially and politically diverse areas would, I suggest, make any 'relationship' discussed, at best, very tentative. King's analysis fails to recognise the importance of local cultures and histories in creating distinct local meanings and understandings.²³ King also neglects users' interpretations, which may draw on cultures and social and political practices other than those which relate to international, hegemonic architectural, social and political relationships. As Bonta points out:

What people want is to see *their own meanings* in the environment-with their own system of values, from their own frames of reference, shaped by the expressive systems that they share with

¹⁷King, A. (ed) (1980) **Buildings and Society**. Op Cit. P1.

¹⁸King, A. (ed) (1980) **Buildings and Society**. Op Cit.

¹⁹Scull, A. (1980) A Convenient Place to Great Rid of Inconvenient People: The Victorian Lunatic Asylum in King A. (ed) (1980) **Buildings and Society**. Op Cit. Pps 37-60.

²⁰Leandowski, S. (1981) The Hindu Temple in South India in King, A. (ed) (1980) **Buildings and Society**. Op Cit. Pps 123-150.

²¹Duffy, F. (1980) Office Buildings and Organisational Change in King, A. (ed) (1980) **Buildings and Society**. Op Cit. Pps 255-282.

²²King, A. (ed) (1980) **Buildings and Society**. Op Cit.

²³See Wright, P. (1985) **On Living in an Old Country**. Verso, London.

their community, but not necessarily with the designer. And that is exactly what they do, whether designers like it or not.²⁴

The relationships between culture, society and the 'form of buildings' are not constant spaceless, timeless certainties, as King suggests, but are complex, interrelated processes in which, for instance, alternative interpretative strategies and shared local meanings may be more relevant to relationships between design and culture than a supposed immutable interrelationship.

A perhaps more useful critique of the producers' role in the production of styles, designs and (their) intended meanings, has been made by feminist design critics, seeking to expose the gender assumptions inherent in architecture and town planning and trying to move away from materialist, Marxist interpretations. These authors have sought to demonstrate that the 'unsaid' implications of, in particular, domestic architecture, leads to the embodiment of gender roles in physical structures.²⁵ Their accounts tend to stress both the production and consumption of the designs, and therefore offer a clearer understanding of how built environments might be understood by various groups involved.²⁶

Roberts, for instance, examines state housing post-1945, "from the initial decision about location and dwelling, form and density to more detailed questions of internal layout, fixtures and fittings."²⁷ She includes discussions of policy at different levels and highlights the views of the LCC during this period. Her penultimate chapter analyses the response of the first tenants to moving to a new housing estate in the 1950s. Her work covers thus both the

²⁴Bonta, J. (1979) *Architecture and Its Interpretation*. Lund Humphries, London. P232.

²⁵Ravetz, A. (1984) *The Home of Woman: A View from the Interior*. *Built Environment*. Vol 10, 1. Pps 8-25. Forty, A. (1977) *Housewife's Aesthetic*. *Architectural Review*. Vol 142, 969. Pps 284-286. Mackenzie, S. and Rose, D. (1983) *Industrial change the Domestic Economy and Home Life in Anderson, J., Duncan, S. and Hudson, R. (eds) (1983) Redundant Spaces: Social Change and Industrial Decline in Cities and Regions*. Academic Press, London. Pps 155-200.

²⁶Roberts, M. (1991) *Living in a Man-Made World: Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design*. Routledge, London. P7, and Bowlby, S. (Guest Editorial) (1990) *Women and the Designed Environment*. *Built Environment*. Vol 16, 4. Pps 244-248. Matrix. (1984) *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*. Pluto Press Ltd., London.

²⁷Roberts, M. (1991) *Living in a Man-Made World*. Op Cit. P23.

productive and consumptive spheres of design, and the meaning attached to buildings and style by each; meanings which she acknowledges may differ.²⁸ Roberts states that, "it would have been an anathema to have introduced a discussion of gender divisions without recording the views of women themselves."²⁹ Although this is an anathema to her, her focus on users' understandings is very unusual in architectural criticism and relates to widespread critiques of overly-deterministic, Marxist-approaches, developed during the 1980s in both cultural and feminist studies. Most work which stresses the productive side of meanings, that is the producers intended meanings of the built environment, tends to ignore or disregard the way those who look at or use the building create their own meanings, and thereby imply users' meanings are determined by producers' intended meanings.

For the meanings of built environments to be understood, it is necessary to examine all those discourses related to producers' conceptions; and also to examine users' understandings, to try and get a sense of the way users' views and meanings relate to producers' views, and suggest where other, unrelated understandings might arise from. It is users' interpretations which partly shape the role - social, political and economic - that a building may have. Discussions about the meanings of design and the built environment are impossibly restricted and limited, unless their (contested) reception and subsequent (re)interpretations are assessed, or at least acknowledged. In the following section some of the works which have tried to elicit and explain users' meanings in the built environment are discussed.

2b User Oriented Approaches

In the preceding section, I stressed that the ways buildings may be seen and understood are affected by a range of different meanings, and that all these meanings need to be examined if an understanding of built environments is to be made. I discussed some of the literature which has dealt with producers' conceptions and with social and political contexts. In this section, I discuss literature which has focused on the reception of architecture. That is, with the ways in which meanings may be attributed to buildings by users and observers. It argue, however, that attempts to understand users' views of their buildings have been hindered by the ways some authors have tried to ascertain and

²⁸Boys, J. (1990) Is There a Feminist Analysis of Architecture? *Built Environment*. Vol 16, 4. Pps 25-30.

²⁹Roberts, M. (1991) *Living in a Man-Made World*. Op Cit. P28.

explain these views. Most user-oriented approaches only consider users, and thereby miss significant overlaps between producers' and users' understandings.

During the 1970s social scientists were preoccupied with what is generally termed behaviouralism,³⁰ and there were a spate of people-environment studies which concentrated on the 'consumption' of architecture, using techniques which aimed to reveal and describe peoples' attitudes towards design, via, for instance cognitive mapping, mental maps, psychological tests and quantitative techniques.³¹ These approaches sought to elicit and describe which design aspects 'people', often taken as a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass, reacted positively to, and which they objected to, or were indifferent towards. Such examinations typically involved large numbers of participants, answering numerous questions about architectural features, or the classification of various design aspects according to some prearranged 'objective' system. The main premise of such studies has been a stimulus-response model in which human behaviour is seen as a mechanistic response to certain specified and external stimuli.³²

These types of behaviouralist studies are of interest because of the way the research is carried out, and the assumptions underlying such work. The explicit problematic of these studies is to 'uncover' and 'account' for an objective and eternal, constant relationship between aspects of built environments and interpreters' meanings. As Knox points out in a review of Lynch's work:

³⁰See Lynch, K. (1984) *Reconsidering the Image of the City* in Rodwin, L. and Hollister, R. (eds) (1984) *Cities of the Mind*. Plenum Press, London. Pps 151-161, for examples of behavioural approaches to built environment studies.

³¹See for example Abel, C. (1980) *Meaning and Rationality in Design* in Broadbent, G., Bunt, R. and Llorens, T. (eds) (1980) *Meaning and Behaviour in the Built Environment*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester. Pps 293-313.

³²See for instance Gollege, R. (1981) *Misconceptions, Misinterpretations and Misrepresentations of Behavioural Approaches in Human Geography. Environment and Planning A*. Vol 13. Pps 135-44 and Gold, J. (1981) *An Introduction to Behavioural Geography*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Krampen, M. (1980) *The Correlation of 'Objective' Facade Measurements with Subjective Ratings* in Broadbent et al. (eds) (1980) *Meaning and Behaviour in the Built Environment*. Op Cit. Pps 61-79. Hershberger, R. (1980) *A Study of Meaning and Architecture* in Broadbent et al. (eds) (1980) *Meaning and Behaviour in the Built Environment*. Op Cit. Pps 21-43.

The main weakness of Lynch's approach to mental maps, as with his work on urban form and design, is that it fails to engage the production of space, or its economic, social and political context. The built environment is abstracted from space and society and is treated simply as a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction for the 'common man.'³³

The use of controlled tests to uncover relationships between people and environments, implies that the authors expect to find a relationship which exists independently of social and cultural and political contexts, changing social and historical circumstances, localised cultures, and so on. There may indeed be reactions which are not predicated upon social and cultural contexts; but it is doubtful whether stimulus-response tests would be capable or useful in trying to retrieve or describe them.³⁴ As Knox points out in reference to Lynch's work on mental maps:

Commendable for its aim of introducing into the design process the views of ordinary citizens. The more one reads Lynch, the clearer it becomes that his portrayals of peoples' mental maps came less from his subjects, than from his own obsession with paths, nodes, landmarks and districts as the keys to the sensual qualities of the built environment.³⁵

The implication of the studies briefly described above is that there must, or should be an ideal architecture which satisfies the 'human condition' and would continue to provide satisfaction, because its appeal would lie in the nature of the human psyche.³⁶ But meanings and understandings of buildings are much more complex than retorts to unconscious human proclivities and predictable responses imply.

³³Knox, P. (1992) Review: Banerjee, T. (ed) (1990) *City Sense and City Design: Writings and Projects of Kevin Lynch*. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 19. Pps 321-324.

³⁴Bachelard, G. (1958) *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon, Boston. (1969 edn).

³⁵Knox, P. (1992) Review. Op Cit. See Dewey, J. (1958) *Art as Experience*. Capricorn, New York and Langer, S. (1953) *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*. Scribners, New York for discussions of the derivation of aesthetic concerns. Bourassa, S. (1988) *Towards a Theory of Landscape Aesthetics*. *Landscape and Urban Planning*. Vol 15. Pps 241-252.

³⁶Broadbent, G. (1980) *A Semiotic Programme for Architectural Psychology* In Broadbent et al. (eds) (1980) *Meaning and Behaviour in the Built Environment*. Op Cit. Pps 313-361.

Bonta's approach to understanding architecture is more sensitive to the ways discourses about buildings influence, although not determine, how people may understand the building. He sees both architects' ideas and subsequent interpretations as cultural operations, and stresses that interpretations, by which he means principally press interpretations, affect architects' conceptions of their work. Although Bonta's primary concern is not with how and why users see their buildings, but how and why architects conceptualise and reconceptualise their buildings and designs, his focus on the importance of representations and interpretations in determining meanings provides an interesting move away from positing instinct, or individual intention, or material conditions as the determining structures of meaning in the built environment. "We should be concerned with meaning not as seen by single individuals, but with perceptions of meaning as shared by a whole community and as reflected in that community's shared behaviour."³⁷

Although Bonta is specifically interested in the ways critiques affect architects, his arguments suggest the importance of the media in affecting interpretations of built landscapes: "People are ready to read meanings into a form that were not intended by the designer and that are not really manifest in the form itself."³⁸ Bonta is indirectly stressing the ways that discourses about architecture and planning may affect peoples', not just architects', understandings. His work is useful, therefore, in that he suggests the potential range of differing understandings about places, while focusing mainly on producers' understandings.

Boudon, whom Bonta cites as an example of his critic-oriented approach, concentrates more directly on the effect of press and marketing literature in shaping understandings about buildings. He discusses press and residents' reactions to Corbusier's Pessac complex in southern France, and suggests that press treatment of the complex affected residents' interpretations.³⁹ Boudon's suggestion is that rather than engage in what he sees as serious architectural comment, press articles portrayed a series of

³⁷Bonta, J. (1979) *Architecture and Its Interpretation*. Op Cit. P65. Bonta suggests using introspection, questionnaires, psychological tests or employing experimental techniques, studying texts or documents which record peoples reactions to architecture and art.

³⁸Bonta, J. (1979) *Architecture and Its Interpretation*. Op Cit. P7.

³⁹Boudon, P. (1969) *Lived in Architecture*. Lund Humphries, London.

commonplace stereotypes and verbatim Corbusian theory, written in a rather awkward and alienating manner. Boudon conducted a number of 'non-directive' interviews with residents of Pessac. His primary intention was to discover whether or not residents were sympathetic towards Corbusier's ideas for the project, or whether they were opposed to it, and keen to alter the original structures and thereby effectively undermine Corbusier's envisaged, standardised and functional development. The interviews revealed that the 'stereotypes' found in the press articles were often replicated in residents' expressed attitudes, and that peoples' interpretations were influenced by the tone and implicit assumptions of the articles. Boudon's work stresses the importance of discourses and representations in affecting residents' understandings, although in a rather simplistic manner. Boudon does not try to establish residents' other meanings, nor theorise why they might differ. I want to stress that users' views are not automatically determined or produced by the media; people interpret what the media says, and they frequently reject or subvert media interpretations. It is important to continually stress the complexity and interrelatedness of meanings, to be wary of over-reductionist, mechanistic accounts which reduce or ignore complexity and posit automatic responses arising from discernible, specified conditions and interpretations.

In this section I have concentrated on approaches to architecture which focus on, or at least acknowledge and discuss users' understandings. I have tried to argue that some of those attempts have obscured more than they have revealed, and produced articles which advocate specific designs as satisfying a supposed essential human need. Other attempts which focus on the transmission of meaning to consumers via representations conceive of this process as incidental, unidirectional and unopposed.⁴⁰ It is my contention that to appreciate peoples' understandings it is necessary to confront the complexity of the interpretative process, to gain a sense of the way users draw on differing discourses in their interpretations of their built environments, some of which are shared by producers, some of which may not be. In the following section I discuss some of the new cultural geographers' work which centres around meanings of landscapes. I argue that this literature offers some useful insights into how, and why, different groups view the landscape. However, I also argue that there are some problems with some of this work, particularly neglect

⁴⁰Bonta, J. (1979) *Architecture and Its Interpretation*. Op Cit.
Bonta, J. (1969) *Lived in Architecture*. Lund Humphries, London.

of the complexity associated with consumers' meanings; although recently some authors have confronted some of these complexities.

3 Cultural Geography

In chapter one, I stated that the general aims of my research were to examine different ways groups of people connected with the Lansbury estate understood the estate. Part of the intention is to try and see how these different understandings and meanings relate to each other, and thereby ascertain some of the ways in which meanings about places are constructed. In the previous section, I discussed literature which has examined meanings of architecture, both producer and user orientated. I argued there were limitations associated with some of these approaches. In the second main part of this chapter I examine literature from new cultural geographers whose overall project is concerned with meanings of landscapes.

3a New Cultural Geography

During the last five to ten years there has been increased interest and work within the field of cultural geography, as several commentators have noted.⁴¹ This work has markedly different characteristics than that which reached ascendancy in North America under the leadership of Carl Sauer, during the early and middle part of this century. Sauer was concerned primarily with, "man's role in changing, intentionally, the face of the earth in directions determined by his immediate needs."⁴² He suggested that culture was the agent through which landscapes were shaped: "Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result...The shaping force lies in the culture itself."⁴³ So, Sauer saw culture as the determining base according to which people acted, and according to which landscapes were fashioned. His attribution of determining power to 'culture' has been criticised.⁴⁴ Jackson, for instance, argued that: "By attributing causality to 'culture' rather than to

⁴¹Jackson, P. (1989) *Maps of Meaning*. Unwin Hyman, London.
Anderson, K and Gale, F. (eds) (1992) *Inventing Places*. Longmans, Australia

⁴²In Leighly, J. (ed) (1963) *Land and Life - A Selection from the Writings of Carl Sauer*. University of California Press, Los Angeles. P4

⁴³Sauer, C. (1925) *The Morphology of Landscape*. University of California, Publications in Geography. Vol 2. Pps 19-54. P41. See also Jackson, P. (1989) *Maps of Meaning*. Op Cit.

⁴⁴See Jackson, P. and Duncan, J. (1980) *The Super-Organic in Cultural Geography*. *Annals of Association of American Geographers*. Vol 70. Pps 181-198

particular individuals or social groups, Sauer implicitly diverted attention away from the social, and towards the physical environment."⁴⁵

Sauer argued that landscapes, particularly 'rural' and 'primitive' landscapes could be explained by extensive fieldwork and the subsequent description and mapping of observations.⁴⁶ As the 'Dictionary of Human Geography' states in its definition of Sauerian cultural geography: "It depends largely on direct field observation based on the techniques of morphological analysis, in that it seeks to determine the cultural successions which have taken place in, and contributed to the character of definable territories over the earth's surface...the work [of the Berkeley School] was seen to be empirical, observational and above all historical."⁴⁷ The assumption underlying the Sauerian position is that trained observers unencumbered by 'abstract theorizing', and writing in accurate and clear prose, produce an accurate understanding of the cultural world.⁴⁸ As Jackson suggests, the work was largely untheorised,⁴⁹ and Duncan and Ley more recently have argued:

A principal criticism of this [traditional cultural geography] is its preoccupation with geographic descriptive patterns on the map which provide an incomplete intellectual project. First it is a perspective addressed primarily to a stable rural, and often preindustrial world located even further in the past. Second its cartographic patterns are not problematised in terms of social, economic, political or even cultural context. The description is thin rather than thick, and treats the landscape in a purely phenomenal manner.⁵⁰

The new cultural geography was heralded by Cosgrove and Jackson in 1987 and is informed by very different problematics and premises than Sauer's version.⁵¹ It largely centres around a basic theorization of the complexity of

⁴⁵Jackson, P. (1987) *Maps of Meaning*. Op Cit. P14.

⁴⁶See Zelinsky, W. (1973) *The Cultural Geography of the United States*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey. P4.

⁴⁷Johnston, R. (ed) (1986) (2nd Edn) *Dictionary of Human Geography*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. P87

⁴⁸See Wagner, P. and Mikesell, M. (eds) (1962) *Readings in Cultural Geography*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

⁴⁹Jackson, P. (1987) *Maps of Meaning*. Op Cit.

⁵⁰Duncan, J. and Ley, D. (eds) (1993) *Place/Culture/Representation*. Routledge, London. P11.

⁵¹See Cosgrove, D. and Jackson, P. (1987) *New Directions in Human Geography*. Area. Vol 19. Pps 95-101. And Gregory, D. and Ley, D. (1988) *Culture's Geographies*. Environment and Planning D. Vol 6, 2. Pps 115-116.

landscape, and the inability to describe its essence by resort to the the essence itself. New cultural geographers have criticised the Berkeley school.⁵² Principally they object to the meaning of landscape being rooted in the shape of that landscape, arguing instead that landscape should be understood in different ways, which relate to representations of those landscapes, as much as to the form of the landscape. As Daniels makes clear:

A number of features distinguish this new cultural geography from the old, from the tradition deriving from the world of Sauer. There is a humanistic emphasis on the symbolic as well as on the material dimension of culture - on painting, literature and the mass media as sources as well as on more palpable artefacts like fences and farm buildings. Moreover the very distinction between the material and symbolic is brought into question with the development of the analogy of all artefacts - from poems to maps to fields of crops - as cultural texts or representations.⁵³

Duncan and Ley suggest in the introduction to a recent collection of new cultural geography essays:

The Berkeley school treated culture as a totality which imprinted its messages mechanically upon the residents of a cultural area. Such a view is flawed in several ways. Contemporary work...sees society as constituted by a plurality of cultures, some dominant some marginal. A dominant or hegemonic culture is rarely passively internalised, commonly it is negotiated, resisted or selectively appropriated by people in everyday life. So too cultural representations (like landscapes) invoke both ideology and power.⁵⁴

So the new cultural geographers emphasise and prioritise the interrelatedness of understandings between different groups, and the process of negotiation and struggle by which, various and often competing understandings and representations of landscapes, achieve precarious dominance. There is nothing certain or absolute about meanings of landscapes; they are contingent upon numerous interrelated social, political and power-ridden processes.

⁵²Cosgrove, D. (1983) *Towards A Radical Geography: Problems of Theory*. *Antipode*. Vol 15. Pps 1-11. But see Price, M. and Lewis, M. (1993) *The Reinvention of Cultural Geography*. *Annals of Association of American Geography*. Vol 83, 1. Pps 1-17 for a defence of Sauer's cultural geography.

⁵³Daniels, S. (1989) *Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape* in Peet, R. and Thrift, N. (eds) (1989) *New Models in Geography: Vol 2*. Unwin Hyman, London. Pps 196-220. P196.

⁵⁴Duncan, J. and Ley, D. (eds) (1993) *Place/Culture/Representation*. Op Cit. P11.

Drawing on approaches by Williams,⁵⁵ Berger,⁵⁶ Hoggart,⁵⁷ and cultural studies and feminist literature more generally, the new cultural geographers have undermined the epistemological status of traditional, Sauerian cultural geographies. Cosgrove made an early plea for more priority to be accorded to what he terms the social and economic formations within which landscapes are produced and consumed.⁵⁸ He argues that Marxist geography provided an overly determinist explanation of culture, in which culture is merely referred back to a super-structure.⁵⁹ He also criticises humanism for according too much agency and determining power to people. He suggested a union between Marxism and humanism, so that:

Cultural geography can not only reveal the symbolic contribution of human agency in producing and sustaining landscapes, and the degree to which those landscapes themselves structure and maintain symbolic processes, but it can examine critically emergent forms of spatial organisation and landscape.⁶⁰

New cultural geography then, problematises the notion of landscapes, arguing that landscapes should be related to social and cultural contexts, and to representations of those landscapes.⁶¹ Therefore, there is no singular process by which landscapes determine understandings, the processes whereby landscapes attain (frequently different) meanings is complex and cannot be explained in reference either to 'agency' or to 'structure'. This, of course, follows the work in other disciplines and comes under the general postmodern rubric.⁶² Landscapes are understood as constituted by politicised and negotiable positions, articulated through representations, which frequently

⁵⁵Williams, R. (1973) *The Country and the City*. Hogarth Press, London and Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

⁵⁶Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin, London.

⁵⁷Hoggart, R. (1957) *The Uses of Literacy*. Chatto & Windus, London.

⁵⁸Cosgrove, D. (1983) *Towards a Radical Geography*. Op Cit.

⁵⁹See also Duncan, J. (1980) *The Super-Organic in Cultural Geography*. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. Vol 70. Pps 187-198.

⁶⁰Cosgrove, D. (1983) *Towards a Radical Geography*. Op Cit. P10.

⁶¹Daniels S. (1989) *Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape*. Op Cit.

⁶²See Geertz, C. (1983) *Local Knowledge: Further Essays on Interpretive Anthropology*. Basic Books, New York. Said, E. (1979) *Orientalism*. Penguin, London and La Capra, D. (1983) *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts and Language*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

purport to relate to, or portray fact, but which do not accurately mimic the things they purport to portray. As Gregory and Walford state: "Our texts are not mirrors which we hold up to the world, reflecting its' shapes and structures immediately and without distortion."⁶³ And as Cosgrove and Domosh argue: "While we do not question the possibility of constructing and communicating knowledge we do resist the naivety of representation as reflection of a separate reality."⁶⁴ So representations of landscapes do not constitute an accurate portrayal of that landscape, but partly convey and help create social and cultural positions. It is argued landscapes are rendered intelligible and meaningful through the mobilisation of various representations of them. Cosgrove and Daniels makes this clear where they state: "Images are more than merely an appendage to a place but constitute an integral part of the composition and meaning of that place."⁶⁵

New cultural geographers see landscape meanings as unstable, subject to frequent reinterpretations, and relating ostensibly to the power of representations of places to influence or affect peoples' understandings of them. Some representations are accorded more power than others, usually because they form a part of the hegemony, these powerful representations have more influence than non-hegemonic representations. The interrelationships between power, representations, landscapes and understandings are central to conceptualisations of landscapes.

A landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings...A landscape park is more palpable but no more real, or less imaginary than a landscape painting or a poem. Indeed the meanings of verbal, visual and built landscapes have a complex interwoven history. To understand a built landscape, say an eighteenth century English park, it is usually necessary to understand written and verbal representations of it, not as 'illustrations', images standing outside it, but as constituent of its meaning or meanings. And of course, every study of a landscape

⁶³Gregory, D. and Walford, W. (eds) (1989) *New Horizons in Human Geography*. Macmillan, London. P2.

⁶⁴Cosgrove, D. and Domosh, M. (1993) *Author and Authority: Writing the New Cultural Geography* In Duncan and Ley. (eds) (1993) *Place/Culture/ Representation*. Op Cit. Pps 25-38. P27

⁶⁵ Cosgrove and Daniels. (eds) (1989) *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. P120

further transforms its meaning, depositing yet another layer of cultural representation.⁶⁶

Cultural geographers interested in the meanings of landscapes and places seek to study the way understandings are shaped by representations. The study of landscapes becomes not the study of the landscapes but the study of representations of landscapes, the study of texts.⁶⁷ Texts in this sense include all representations, pictures, photos, Television programmes, political oration and so on, which have sought to represent, or explain, or define a particular landscape.⁶⁸ In the context of my research the meanings of Lansbury partly relate to representations made in the press and by politicians, and by architects, for instance.

Emphasis on the texts associated with landscapes, and the notion that a landscape is a text which can be read and interpreted, has led to widespread use of the landscape-as-text metaphor. "The village is a text and it is as a text that we explore it."⁶⁹ As Barnes and Duncan explain:

The social life-as-text metaphor is easily applicable to landscape because it too is a social and cultural production. Thus a landscape possesses a similar objective fixity to that of a written text. It also becomes detached from the intentions of its original authors, and in terms of social and psychological impact and material consequences the various readings of landscape matter more than authorial intentions. In addition, the landscape has an enormous importance beyond the initial situation for which it was constructed addressing a potentially wider range of readers. In short, landscapes are characterised by all those features that Ricoeur identifies as definitive of texts.⁷⁰

Duncan's influential book, 'The City as Text' sought to examine the relationship between the Sakran discourse and the Kandyan landscape showing how the landscape became the site of a political struggle between interest

⁶⁶Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. (eds) (1989) *The Iconography of Landscape*. Op Cit. P1.

⁶⁷See section 3b which discusses lack of empirical attention to non-hegemonic understandings.

⁶⁸Duncan, J. (1990) *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁶⁹Smith J. (1993) *The Lie that Blinds: Destabilizing the Text of Landscape* in Duncan and Ley (eds) (1993) *Place/Culture/Representation*. Op Cit. Pps 77-94. P88

⁷⁰Barnes, T. and Duncan, J. (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Routledge, London. P7

groups, who argued in terms of competing discourses, within a broader unchallenged discursive field of kingship.⁷¹ He suggests that: "In the case for the Kandy in the early nineteenth century, a struggle over political power focuses on the meaning of the landscape of the Capital precisely because that landscape encapsulated the intersection of competing discourses and competing material interests."⁷² Anderson writing in 1988 about the interpretations of meaning of North American Chinatowns treated the landscape as a text, expressing European representation of the Orient. She saw that meanings of that landscape suggest particular social and political relations.⁷³ The Chinatown landscape was meaningful in reference to representations of it, and in particular representations from the hegemonic white community, despite challenges from within that community. Other authors have examined other landscapes, using the landscape-as-text metaphor.⁷⁴

Duncan and Duncan seem to have accepted the landscape-as-text metaphor implying that it is possible to 'read the landscape'.

What are the implications of all this for reading the landscape? As geographers the textualised behaviour that concerns us is the production of landscape; how they are constructed on the basis of a set of texts, how they are read, and how they act as a mediating influence, shaping behaviour in the image of the text.⁷⁵

Barnes and Duncan's collection of essays are premised upon the landscape-as-text metaphor embracing literary theory, as a way of theorising and examining the landscape.

⁷¹Duncan, J. (1990) *The City as Text*. Op Cit.

⁷²Duncan, J. (1990) *The City as Text*. Op Cit. P182

⁷³Anderson, K. (1988) *Cultural Hegemony and the Race-Definition Process in Chinatown, Vancouver: 1880-1980*. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 6. Pps 127-149. Although Anderson does stress oppositions and resistances to these social meanings.

⁷⁴Bishop, P. (1989) *The Myth of Shangri La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscapes*. The Athlone Press, London. Smith, J. (1993) *The Lie that Blinds*. Op Cit. Short, J. (1991) *Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment*. Routledge, London. Domosh M. (1992) *Corporate Cultures and the Modern Landscape of New York City* in Anderson and Gale (eds) (1992) *Inventing Places*. Op Cit. Pps 72-85. Goss, J. (1992) *Modernity and Post-Modernity in the Retail Landscape* in Anderson and Gale. (eds) (1992) *Inventing Places*. Op Cit. Pps 159-176.

⁷⁵Duncan, J. and Duncan, N. (1988) *(Re)reading the Landscape*. *Environment and Planning, D*. Vol 6. Pps 117-126. P120.

We suggest that 'text' is also an appropriate trope to use in analysing landscapes, because it conveys the inherent instability of meaning fragmentation or absence of integrity, lack of authorial control, polyvocality and irresolvable social contradictions that often characterise them.⁷⁶

Daniels and Cosgrove can point to a sizeable body of work, and their list is not exhaustive, which is based on the landscape-as-text metaphor.

For some years geographers have been using the terms 'theatre and text' in a casual way referring to spatial conduct as 'role playing' or likening landscape interpretation to 'reading' a written document. But we are now witnessing a more sustained use of these analogies to formulate a new configuration of geographic enquiry (Bonnett, '89, Cosgrove '85, Daniels and Cosgrove '88, Duncan and Duncan '88, Ley and Olds '88).⁷⁷

Although there are considerable, important and meaningful differences within this body of work, there are some important commonalities, mainly the notion that the meanings of landscapes revolve around representations of those landscapes, and the idea that landscapes can thus be read as a series of interrelated texts. However, the extent to which cultural geographers are willing to accept the landscape-as-text metaphor varies, and there seems to be increasing concern about the textualisation of landscapes.⁷⁸ Principally there is some confusion about whether the landscape-as-text metaphor implies the landscape can be read as a text, or whether it implies that textual representations of landscapes are central to understanding landscape. While accepting the latter position with major reservations,⁷⁹ I find the former unacceptable. Landscapes are not texts, and they are interpreted differently. Principally landscapes are visual phenomenon, which are interpreted in different ways to written texts.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Barnes and Duncan. (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. P7.

⁷⁷Daniels, S. and Cosgrove, D. (1993) *Spectacle and Text: Landscape Metaphors in Cultural Geography* in Duncan and Ley. (eds) (1993) *Place/Culture/Representation*. Op Cit. P57.

⁷⁸Rose, G. (1994) *The Cultural Politics of Place: Local Representation and Oppositional Discourse in two Films*. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Vol 19, 1. Pps 46-60.

⁷⁹which are discussed in the following section.

⁸⁰See Burgess, J. (1993) *Review of Barnes, T. and Duncan, J. (eds) (1992) Writing Worlds*. *Progress in Human Geography*. Vol 17, 2. Pps 275-6.

A related problem has been a lack of attention to non-hegemonic groups, despite theoretical approaches which acknowledge the variety of possible interpretations of landscape. Duncan, in a recent review of cultural geography, notes the overwhelming consideration of powerful representations within cultural geography: "The majority of work surveyed was not only written by middle-class males, but was written about the spaces constructed for the middle-class in Europe and America."⁸¹ He goes on to argue that, "while there was exhortation to conduct research on behalf of the working class...very little empirical work on this group appeared in the geography journals."⁸² Such a situation may have emerged because of the landscape-as-text metaphor, and the resultant tendency to concentrate on textual representations of those landscapes, very often produced by the powerful. In the following section I examine some of the implications of this concentration.⁸³

3b 'Readers' and 'Readings'

In the previous section I demonstrated that new cultural geography had focused on the importance of representations of landscapes as purveyors and creators of social and cultural meanings. Focusing on representations for example, from developers, advertisers, the media, art and literature and so on, suggests the centrality of producers' meanings in the construction of understandings of landscapes. In this preoccupation with hegemonic representations and the groups of people who produce and articulate them, cultural geography has mirrored the overriding concern of architectural criticism which, as I sought to demonstrate in section 2, has largely ignored users' meanings, or treated users' meanings in a mechanistic way. In this section, I will show how cultural geography has predominantly relied on hegemonic representations and intended understandings to suggest landscape meanings, and implicitly conflated those with all understandings. I will argue that conflation of the powerful with a presumed universal, while increasingly recognised and criticised, is still prevalent within much new cultural geography.

⁸¹Duncan, J. (1993) Landscapes of the Self/Landscapes of the Other(s): cultural Geography 1991-1992. *Progress in Human Geography*. Vol 17, 3. Pps 367-377. P367.

⁸²Duncan, J. (1993) Landscapes of the Self/Landscapes of the Other(s). *Op Cit*. P369

⁸³Rose, G. (1994) The Cultural Politics of Place. *Op Cit*. Burgess, J. (1992) The Cultural Politics of Nature Conservation and Economic Development in Anderson and Gale. (eds) (1992) *Inventing Places*. *Op Cit*. Pps 235-251.

Cosgrove's influential work illustrates this more general lack of concern with the consumers of images and representations. In one of the formative essays in new cultural geography he states:

Here I will examine the iconography of Venetian landscape within the context of the technical practices of land survey and reclamation, and of late Renaissance literary and philosophical ideas.⁸⁴

His focus on material conditions (of the landscape) and representations of them, gives us a sense of generalised, hegemonic understandings of the landscape, but fails to examine non-hegemonic or oppositional interpretations. Daniels focuses upon a nineteenth century water-colour of Leeds by Turner, attempting to explicate the types of social relations dominating in Leeds in the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ Daniels study is hailed by Barnes and Duncan in the introduction to their collection of essays as a 'virtuoso reading', in which he shows, "how it [the painting] speaks both of facets of Leeds industrial circumstances as well as of the intellectual and political space occupied by the artist."⁸⁶ Daniels articulates what he believes Turner's painting to represent, and this might well have been what Turner intended, and had the power, authority and skill to portray, but not all those who viewed the painting would have recognised those intentions, let alone accepted them or related to them. Suggesting that the painting speaks of Leeds gives no sense of how people who viewed the painting understood it, rather it speaks of Daniels' interpretation of Turner's interpretation of Leeds. People may well have viewed the painting very differently from Daniels, or from Turner, and hence some of the meanings of the landscape of Leeds at this time remain hidden. As Burgess points out:

Within cultural geography, we will readily find studies of the production and the transformations of built environments, visual representations of landscapes and places, and the construction of meaning in literary texts. By comparison, empirical field research which focuses on the talk and actions of 'ordinary' people is rather less well developed although a growing number of geographers are turning to participant observation, in-depth interviews with key informants and group interviews.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Cosgrove, D. (1984) *Social Formations and Symbolic Landscapes*. Croom Helm, London. P254.

⁸⁵Daniels, S. (1990) The Implications of Industry: Turner and Leeds in Barnes and Duncan (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. Pps 38-49.

⁸⁶Barnes and Duncan (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. P17.

⁸⁷Burgess, J. (1992) The Cultural Politics of Nature Conservation and Economic Development. Op Cit. Pps 235-251. P240-241.

Work on urban landscape has often reflected only the most powerful, dominant representations and neglected their consumption and the articulation and production of other representations which may not be in general circulation, or may not be supportive of the dominant representations.⁸⁸ Although Duncan and Duncan do not explicitly seek to ascertain what readers' meanings might be, they do acknowledge that they may not mirror or ape the intended, projected ones. "If landscapes are texts which are read, interpreted according to an ingrained cultural framework of interpretation they are often read 'inattentively' at a practical or non-discursive level."⁸⁹ Duncan makes this point again in 1990 in connection with its work on the Kandy landscape:

The notion that there is a single, correct interpretation of a given text has been challenged in literary theory by reception theorists. Whereas I do not believe it is useful to follow some of the reception theorists to their more extreme conclusion that each reader of a text has the autonomy to 'author' a new and unique text, these theorists have alerted us to the necessity of calling into question the hegemony of the author's original intention. The lesson to geographers here is that if the political efficacy of textual messages encoded in the built environment is to be assessed, it should be studied not only from the point of view of those who built it, but also from the point of view of those who read it.⁹⁰

Rose has reviewed some of the new cultural geography and commented on their preoccupation with hegemonic representations of landscape. She comments on:

[s]omething which almost all these accounts of representation and the (post)modern city share: a fascination with the images produced by the powerful. All the work mentioned above focuses on hegemonic representations. Geographers look at the texts of the local state, real estate developers, mainstream architects, corporations, planners, the mass media, tourist boards, chambers of commerce and so on. Despite the insistence that the representation of urban places is a contested process, and the adoption of the

⁸⁸For instance Domosh, M. (1992) *Corporate Landscapes*. Op Cit. Winchester, H. (1993) *The Deconstruction of Women's Roles in the Urban Landscape* in Anderson and Gale. (eds) *Inventing Places*. Op Cit. Pps 139-156. Op Cit. Goss, J. (1993) *Modernity and Post-Modernity in the Retail Landscape*. Op Cit. Crilley, D. (1991) *The Enchanting Mountain: Olympia and York and the Contemporary Megastructure* in Knox, P. (ed) (1991) *The Restless Landscape*. Prentice Hall, Dublin.

⁸⁹Duncan, J. and Duncan, N. (1988) *(Re)reading the Landscape*. Op Cit. P88

⁹⁰Duncan, J. (1990) *The City as Text*. Op Cit. P154.

methodological metaphor of landscape as text precisely in order to emphasise that the meanings of landscapes are always open to negotiation,...very little detailed research on the interpretation of place images by different audiences has been undertaken. Nor have many geographers examined the texts and images produced by the less powerful.⁹¹

Burgess has also pointed out a general lack of attention to consumers, and her work has focused on the consumers of images, as well as the producers of them. She states, in the context of examining environmental meanings in the mass media:

I shall argue in this paper that geographers could work much more closely with the different groups of people who produce media texts and those who buy, read, watch, enjoy, worry about and are angered by the enormous range of media products they encounter in everyday life...Few geographers seem willing, as yet, to undertake empirical research with the consumers of post-modern meanings.⁹²

She demonstrates something of the complexity of creating understandings and meanings when she states:

How people decode media texts depends on the different context in which they are read and the position of the individual in relation to the texts: sometimes readings will be dominant, at other times the individual will make an oppositional reading of the same material.⁹³

This complexity demands serious enquiry into the different, contingent nature of these 'decodings'.⁹⁴

Burgess is not alone in persuasively arguing for more attention to be accorded to the recipients of images, to the 'intended' targets of representations, the viewers and inhabitants of landscapes. Recent work in cultural studies, has argued for attention to be devoted to the consumers of images and

⁹¹Rose, G. (1994) *The Cultural Politics of Place*. Op Cit. P47.

⁹²Burgess, J. (1990) *The Production and Consumption of Environmental Meanings in the Mass Media: A Research Agenda for the 1990s*. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Vol 15. Pps 139-161. P140

⁹³Burgess, J. (1990) *The Production and Consumption of Environmental Meanings in the Mass Media*. Op Cit. P155

⁹⁴Jackson, P. (1993) *Towards a Cultural Politics of Consumption* in Bird, J., Curtis, B., Putnam, T., Robertson, G., and Tickner, L. (eds) (1993) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. Routledge, London. Pps 207-228.

representations. Stuart Hall developed a theoretical model of the process of creating cultural meanings involving encoders and, significantly, decoders.⁹⁵ His work provided theoretical support for some empirical work by Morley.⁹⁶ David Morley working on viewer reactions to the BBC regional current affairs programme, 'Nationwide' suggested that audiences oppose and ridicule meanings. He states that the same event can be encoded in more than one way; the message always contains more than one potential reading. Understanding the message is also a problematic practice, however, transparent and 'natural' it may seem. Messages encoded one way can always be read in a different way,⁹⁷ so Morley sees the reading of messages as an unstable and differentiated process.⁹⁸ Rosalind Brunt supports this emphasis on the powers of decoders to subvert, change and reinterpret what are often posited as all powerful media messages.⁹⁹ She conducted some research in Sheffield with groups watching programmes made for national television during a local by-election. She found that viewers were generally sceptical of claims made by the media; they felt the media was biased, while claiming to be unpartisan, and also ignorant about Sheffield.¹⁰⁰

Brunt and Morley's emphasis on the contested ways in which meanings are portrayed, led them to criticise, both a more usual concentration on the producers, and a sustained conceptualisation of viewers and consumers as passive receivers of hegemonic meanings in media studies. Brunt suggests:

The sheer productivity of textual analysis often rendered any reference to actual audiences redundant as the audience-text relationship became unproblematically inferred from a particular 'reading' of the by now, extremely problematised text. Interpreted

⁹⁵Hall, S. (1980) Encoding/Decoding in Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A. and Willis, D. (eds) (1980) *Culture, Media, Language*. Hutchinson, London. Pps 128-38.

⁹⁶Morley, D. (1992) *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies*. Routledge, London.

⁹⁷Morley D. (1992) *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies* Op Cit. P85

⁹⁸Livingstone, S. and Lunt, P. (1994) *Talk on Television*. Routledge, London. Eldridge, J. (ed) (1993) *Getting the Message: News, Truth and Power*. Routledge, London.

⁹⁹Brunt, R. (1992) Engaging with the Popular: Audiences for Mass Culture and What to Say About Them in Grossberg, L., Nelson, C. and Treichler, P. (eds) (1992) *Cultural Studies*. Routledge, New York. Pps 69-80. See also Baker, S. (1990) The Sign of the Self in the Metropolis. *Journal of Design History*. Vol 3, 4. Pps 227-233. He disputes the assumed omnipotence of advertising in creating meaning.

¹⁰⁰Brunt, R. (1992) Engaging with the Popular. Op Cit.

only as 'textual subjects' audiences became primarily positioned, produced by, inscribed in the text. So for media studies, what started as a useful way out of a research dead-end caused a failure to analyse exactly how media encodings operated, and often resulted in a theoretical detour that inhibited any concrete engagement with audiences.¹⁰¹

Brunt castigates cultural studies for assuming an unproblematic concept of the audience, and this castigation could similarly be applied to cultural geographers, preoccupied with texts and producers.

But at a theoretical level, researchers in cultural studies have tended to construct audiences as 'imagined communities' to which theories about other aspects of the mass communication process, in particular, media messages, could be inferred, rather than concern themselves with actual beings living in a material world.¹⁰²

The same lack of emphasis, at least empirically, is found in new cultural geography. Even where cultural geographers have considered the 'reading' or 'decoding' of representations of landscapes, they have tended to be considered in a simple and mechanistic form,¹⁰³ or authors have merely acknowledged that non-hegemonic groups may not always agree, before returning to considerations of hegemonic representations. Yet messages are neither accepted wholeheartedly nor unilaterally. Rather, the consumption of representations and the formulation of (changing) meanings about landscape, is a highly complex and unstable process. Since a principal part of my research is to examine non-hegemonic as well as hegemonic groups it is necessary to consider the variety and heterogeneity of non-hegemonic positions and their interrelatedness with hegemonic meanings.

Strategies and practices of resistance and opposition to hegemonic groups, are most evident where practical, opposition groups are formed.¹⁰⁴ Keith and Pile, for instance, examined the ways Docklanders reacted politically to the LDDC, and show that despite the vast economic and political power of

¹⁰¹Brunt, R. (1992) Engaging with the Popular. Op Cit. P70.

¹⁰²Brunt, R. (1992) Engaging with the Popular. Op Cit. P71-2.

¹⁰³Duncan, J. (1992) Elite Landscapes as Cultural (Re)Productions: The Case of Shaughnessy Heights in Anderson and Gale (eds) (1992) *Inventing Places*. Op Cit. Pps 37-51.

¹⁰⁴As in Keith and Pile's discussion of the Docklands in Keith, M. and Pile, S. (eds) (1993) *Place and the Politics of Identity*. Routledge, London. Pps 1-40.

the LDDC they have, relatively successfully struggled against that power, basing their differing struggles around conceptions of spatialised identity.

[P]erhaps the greatest achievements of the community groups is that they have not gone away. By mobilizing a territorialised sense of both place and community identity, they forced themselves onto the political agenda, and because of their continued commitment to 'their land' (even though they neither own it nor control it), they will outlast the LDDC and continue to resist the fly-by-night property developers.¹⁰⁵

However, oppositions can also be 'silent,' or unheard publicly. Resistance to hegemonic understandings and (re)interpretation around non-hegemonic as well as hegemonic interpretations are commonplace, but not always obvious in the form of oppositional groups or demonstrations, for instance. Neglect of these types of resistances are also common-place because of their lack of visible or practical, organised form. However oppositions and resistance and struggles over meaning also take place away from the public eye, or outside organised groups; for instance in social groups, between neighbours, in individual, personal complaints to those in authority and so on. These types of quiet, or at least unheard, daily and often routine oppositions and constructions and re-workings of meanings and of understandings, are rarely discussed in literature, because they are not visible - but they are important. As Fiske states:

Both academics in cultural and media studies and left-wing political theorists and activists have found the everyday culture of the people in capitalist societies particularly difficult to study either empirically or theoretically.¹⁰⁶

If users' understandings are to be examined, 'silent' or 'undramatic' challenges to the dominant positions should be examined. Lack of attention to 'quiet', everyday practices of resistance to powerful groups is partly a result of an unwillingness to assume a passive, powerless consumer, partly a response to the need for visible, empirical evidence even by those whose professed interest is in capturing the nature of resistance to hegemonic understandings, and partly, the conceptualisation of the 'other' as a homogeneous and naturally oppositional group. As I discuss below, a focus of my research will be

¹⁰⁵Keith and Pile (eds) (1993) **Place and the Politics of Identity**. Op Cit. P16.

¹⁰⁶Fiske, J. (1992) **Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life in** Grossberg et al. (eds) (1992) **Cultural Studies**. Op Cit. Pps 154-173. P154.

examining residents' understandings of the Lansbury estate, as they conceive it, rather than as part of an organised political or community group. The way that meanings are constructed, negotiated, (re)formulated and so on will be highlighted in a day-to-day sense, thereby emphasising the importance of social groups of neighbours and families in constructions of meanings about the estate.

Where oppositions and resistances to hegemonic representations have been acknowledged in cultural geography, it has been rather simplistically. James Duncan's examination of the changing landscape of Shaughnessy Heights acknowledges some of the readers, or recipients, of images but assumes no shared understandings and practices between producers and consumers.

By tracing the history of Shaughnessy Heights from its founding by the railroad as a speculator suburb in the early twentieth century until the early 1980s when it was defined as a historic resource, I will show how cultural production is enmeshed within a whole sociopolitical complex of development companies, zoning boards, city planning departments, city council and heritage committees... The final section of this chapter explores some working-class responses to the institutionalisation of this elite landscape model.¹⁰⁷

However, Duncan finds it astonishing that 79% of working-class residents accepted the 'elite' argument about the benefits associated with their model of Shaughnessy.¹⁰⁸ Duncan is only astonished because he had expected, according to a binary conception of understandings, that elite and non-elite would have wholly opposing interests and comprehensions. He has not considered the complex ways in which meanings are constructed and reworked. They are constructed through shared hegemonic and non-hegemonic portrayals, meanings are not simple products of neat social divisions which either support, or contest, the status quo in any simple way.

Rose has recently argued against a bi-polar model of culture, which she believes cultural geography is based on, stating that: "[C]ulture tends to be understood as a process constituted in two parts: hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. Analytically, the cultural field is thus divided into two."¹⁰⁹ She

¹⁰⁷Duncan, J. (1992) *Elite Landscapes*. Op Cit. P37.

¹⁰⁸Duncan, J. (1992) *Elite Landscapes*. Op Cit. P48.

¹⁰⁹Rose, G. (1994) *The Cultural Politics of Place*. P48.

goes on to suggest that this bi-polar model has resulted in a neglect of the 'other', because of concerns about pathologising or exoticising 'others', and suggests that an interest in power is translated into an interest in the powerful. She argues that recent work in cultural studies suggests, "that culture's fields of meaning are much more complex than a simple twofold division between the powerful and powerless."¹¹⁰ More complex because of, "the intersecting dynamics of class, gender, race and sexuality, which do not align everyone neatly into two groups"¹¹¹ and because, "many cultural identities are hybrid forms; marginalized cultures are neither the same as hegemonic cultures nor entirely different from them; cultures affect one another, cultural forms are adopted, transformed, returned; and cultural identity is itself constantly renegotiated through such dynamics."¹¹²

There is not a complete split between two differing, opposed discourses, but a spectrum of differing meanings which relate to each other, and draw on each other; and some new cultural geographers seem to be increasingly aware of this fluidity.¹¹³ Woodward's work on opposition to the redevelopment in Spitalfields in London, for example, focuses on protests against the powerful developers representations of the area.¹¹⁴ Boyle and Hughes' work on the Lefts' reaction to 'Glasgow 1990', demonstrates an awareness of the complexity of hegemonic and non-hegemonic understandings. They show three types of representations about the City; the official version, that of a socialist playwright, John McGrath, and that of the Workers City. The three representations are different, but they also overlap. So opposition to Glasgow 1990 is differentiated but interrelated.¹¹⁵

Anderson seems to have accessed something of the complexity of non-hegemonic constructions of meanings where she states:

¹¹⁰Rose, G. (1994) *The Cultural Politics of Place*. P48.

¹¹¹Rose, G. (1994) *The Cultural Politics of Place*. P48.

¹¹²Rose, G. (1994) *The Cultural Politics of Place*. P49.

¹¹³Monk J. (1992) *Gender in the Landscape: Expressions of Power and Meaning in Anderson and Gale (eds) (1992) Inventing Places*. Op Cit Pps 123-138 and Woodward R (1991) *Saving Spitalfields: The Politics of Opposition to Redevelopment in East London*. Unpublished Thesis. University of London.

¹¹⁴Woodward, R. (1991) *Saving Spitalfields*. Op Cit.

¹¹⁵Boyle, M and Hughes, G. (1991) *The Politics of the Representation of 'The Real': Discourses from the Left on Glasgow's Role as European City of Culture 1990*. *Area*. Vol 23, 3. Pps 217-228.

The process by which cultural understandings become constructed and reproduced through time and space is complexly negotiated. It involves not just the efforts of powerful groups to secure conceptual and instrumental control, but also the struggles of weaker groups to resist definitions that exclude and marginalise them.¹¹⁶

The struggles and resistances of supposedly marginalised and excluded groups are not unitary, there are multiple strategies and ways of resisting and reformulating understandings, and supposedly divided and non-complementary hegemonic and non-hegemonic understandings do affect each other, and sometimes draw on similar interpretations and representations.¹¹⁷

For a fuller understanding of the ways in which non-hegemonic understandings are constructed it is necessary to focus on what these understandings are, and to recognise that non-hegemonic understandings may often reflect hegemonic views, partly draw upon them and also impinge on and help reformulate them. Also consumers have often been considered only where organised political practices are developed, or where the 'marginalised' groups have access to some means by which to define or illuminate their understandings, there has hence been a neglect of quiet, everyday understandings. In the following section, I discuss my understanding of discourses, which I will draw on in the rest of this work; an understanding which stresses the interrelatedness of various discourses, and their everyday, taken for granted nature.

4 Discourses

In the previous section, I suggested that to understand the meanings of places it is necessary to examine representations of them, produced by particular groups associated with them. I see the groups associated with Lansbury as constituted by particular discursive arenas, arenas which produce and articulate discourses, and which embody and produce certain shared positions and understandings.¹¹⁸ These positions are revealed and formulated through representations and articulations of specific positions. Discursive positions are revealed in the representations; textual oral and visual produced by certain

¹¹⁶Anderson and Gale (eds) (1993) *Inventing Places*. Op Cit. P8.

¹¹⁷As Duncan, J. (1992) *Elite Landscapes*. Op Cit found to his surprise and Burgess, J. (1992) *The Cultural Politics of Nature Conservation*. Op Cit discusses.

¹¹⁸Achards, P. (1993) *Discourse and Social Praxis in the Construction of Nation and State*. *Discourse and Society*. Vol 4, 1. Pps 75-98.

groups which are often institutionalised, and which attempt explanation or propose particular understandings. As Laclau and Mouffe have argued,¹¹⁹ and Macdonnell has also suggested, any method through which meanings are produced may be considered part of a discourse.¹²⁰

Discourses, are not mutually exclusive entities, speaking only to a recognisable and identifiable group, and ignorant or ignoring of other discourses; they overlap, share similar derivative discourses and mutate continuously. As Macdonnell points out: "A discourse may take effect directly and indirectly through its relation or address to another discourse."¹²¹ Foucault's attention to the interrelated and transformative capacity of discourses, makes his work of particular importance.

We must conceive discourses as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies.¹²²

Part of the power of hegemonic discourses lies in their transformative capacities and varied appeal, their adaptability becomes a source of strength, enabling prolonged hegemony. They draw on other discourses, subsume them or rework them.

My emphasis, from Foucault, on the interrelatedness of discursive formation and articulation was stressed in the previous section, where I criticised some cultural geographers for relying on a stagnant dichotomous version of society, where non-hegemonic discourse battled against a supposedly oppositional, rigid and monolithic hegemony. As Foucault points out:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it...they can, on the contrary,

¹¹⁹Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (1987) *Post Marxism Without Apologies*. *New Left Review*. 166. Pps 79-106.

¹²⁰Macdonnell, D. (1987) *Theories of Discourse*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. P4.

¹²¹Macdonnell, D. (1987) *Theories of Discourse*. Op Cit. P3.

¹²²Foucault, M. (1976) *Power as Knowledge in Lemert, C. (ed) (1993) Social Theory*. Westview Press, Oxford. Pps 518-523. P523

circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.¹²³

So the relationships between hegemonic and other discourses are unstable, complex and interrelated and ultimately leave scope for attack and resistance.

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process, whereby discourses can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy.¹²⁴

Within discursive arenas therefore, there may also be dissent, contradiction and tension, there is some heterogeneity of positions, and representations and production of texts struggled over by various personnel and often negotiated or compromised. In terms of this project, I conceive of several discourses, which have sought to explain or ascribe meaning to the Lansbury estate. For example national politicians, architects and planners, the media, the LCC, PBC and residents. These possess similarities as well as contradictions. Residents' views, while differing from the above in some respects, are discursive, but not institutionalised. All these discourses share similarities, at times draw on other similar discourses and relate to each other. There is, therefore, no fixed, stagnant discursive arena, immune to incursions from other discursive arenas, but the discursive arenas are interlinked; personnel, policies and understandings are shared and the division of these discourses into neat discursive arenas is somewhat problematic, as I go on to discuss further in chapter 3 and chapter 8.

The association of a discourse with an institution is particularly vital, because it is through an institutional position that a specific discourse attains power, and becomes hegemonic.¹²⁵ Said states:

A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual...is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical success warrant. Most importantly, such texts can *create*, not only knowledge, but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what what Michel Foucault calls a discourse,

¹²³Foucault, M. (1976) Power as Knowledge. Op Cit. P523.

¹²⁴Foucault, M. (1976) Power as Knowledge. Op Cit. P523.

¹²⁵Bowers, J. and Iwi, K. (1993) The Discursive Construction of Society. Discourse and Society. Vol 4, 3. Pps 357-393.

whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.¹²⁶

Said, while discussing the way discourses materialise, alludes to the significance of institutions to shape and empower particular positions. Foucault's work relates the importance of institutions in the forging and articulation of discourses. He exposes, and critiques, the institutionalised power systems which he argues control and regulate subjectivities.¹²⁷ He sees that these institutionalised forms of power are the later stages in the formulation of hegemonic practices. He sees the processes leading up to the state power apparatus as fragmentary and contested and negotiated.

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation, as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.¹²⁸

So, for Foucault, it is partly the institutionalisation of discourses which legitimates the 'truths' that they produce and which enables some discursive arenas to achieve ascendancy, to attain power. As Barnes and Duncan state: "It is not so much from the abstract ideas they represent as from their material basis in the institutions and practices that make up the micropolitical realm, which Foucault sees as the source of much of the power in society."¹²⁹ Analysis of discourses therefore involves analysis of the mobilisation of power, partly through institutions, and demands a focus on the contexts associated with their production of representations. Analysis of representations associated with discourses, combined with awareness of relative positions of power associated with those representations, facilitates analysis of the construction of social meanings and suggests what those meanings might be. Not all discourses are institutionalised, or powerful, but these non-institutionalised discursive arenas remain important in forging understandings and meanings, crucial clearly for

¹²⁶Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. Op Cit. P94.

¹²⁷Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Penguin, London.

¹²⁸Foucault, M. (1976) *Power as Knowledge*. Op Cit. P518.

¹²⁹Barnes and Duncan (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. P9.

the people involved, but also crucial because of their ability to resist hegemonic understandings, and undermine or alter the power of the hegemony.

In the previous section, I noted cultural geography's preoccupation with hegemonic representations of places and suggested the lack of emphasis on the readers of texts and potential resistances. I argued that ignorance of these resistances has led to an over-prioritisation of hegemonic discourses and a concurrent neglect of counter hegemonic discourses, and I am anxious not to replicate these theoretical and methodological preoccupations. I suggested that discourses should be seen as interrelated and interdependent and not homogeneous nor mutually exclusive formations. In terms of my project, I will examine hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses, and stress the similarities as well as the differences between them. I have also suggested that frequently these discourses are associated with institutions, and institutionalisation embodies certain positions with power; and hence their representations of reality are particularly persuasive and poignant; but still open to attack. In the next chapter I discuss how I examine the positions articulated by various groups or discursive arenas associated with the Lansbury estate, in the period from 1939 until 1951.

5 Conclusions

I argued in the first section that architectural historians have rarely considered the social significances and meanings of the built environment. Where they have been considered, I argued the approaches tend to be overly determinist and ignore the consumers of the buildings. The architectural literature which has focused on consumers' understandings about buildings has been hampered by a mechanistic and essentialist conceptualisation of the consumers. However, the few attempts to relate understandings to representations of the building in the press and architectural literature are, I argued, useful in illuminating some of the ways through which users construct understandings, but they rarely consider the users' opinions or theorise the relationships between the understandings of different groups associated with landscapes.

New cultural geography, with its focus on the representations of landscapes provides some valuable insights into the ways in which meanings of landscapes may be articulated and defined by those people with the power to define. I argued that an adequate theorization of the complex and differing

ways in which groups of people, hegemonic and non-hegemonic, construct meanings needed a conceptualisation of the ways in which meanings are transmitted, received, (re)interpreted, contested and (re)formulated by all those concerned with the built environment, most and least powerful. More recently, some cultural geographers have problematised the ways consumers create meanings, and no longer assume a passive receipt of producers' intended meanings, nor a hegemony untouched by oppositions and resistances. I also argued that where authors have focused on oppositions they have tended, for valid reasons, to be where political or opposition groups were formed. I suggested that people may oppose and interpret meanings more quietly, and argued that these quiet protests could help illuminate the day-to-day ways in which meanings are struggled over and reinterpreted.

Chapter 3: Methodology

1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter I discussed my theoretical perspectives, which centre around a critique of architectural history and cultural geography. I argued that theoretical and methodological emphases on hegemonic understandings and meanings had marginalised or excluded less powerful groups' understandings. I suggested that to more fully appreciate the range of different meanings associated with, and mobilised about, particular places, required theoretical and methodological perspectives which allowed, or enabled, non-hegemonic understandings to be appreciated. This chapter is concerned with elucidating my methodological approaches, approaches which are geared to those theoretical concerns. The first part of this chapter is concerned with how I examined texts associated with Lansbury and with post-war reconstruction more generally. The second part of the chapter discusses interviews with residents and interpretations of these interviews.

2 Examining Texts

2a Purpose

In the literature review, I argued that to grasp the complex ways in which understandings about places are built up, it is necessary to examine those discourses which have sought to explain, describe and justify them. It is through articulation and dissemination of these discourses that understandings about places, or in the context of this thesis, Lansbury, are made. By interpretation and examination of discourses it is possible to reveal some of the ways in which the groups who produced, and were involved with those discourses, saw the estate and associated issues of reconstruction.

My methods for the examination of such texts is based on work, originally from literary and cultural theorists, who sought to demonstrate that modes of communication do not present or reflect, in any mimetic sense, objective reality, although accurate reflection and objective, unbiased description may be the avowed intentions of the author and the expectation of the reader.¹ They have suggested that thorough analyses and interrogations of texts can suggest the ways social meanings are circulated, articulated and disseminated both explicitly and implicitly. Feminist literary critics, for instance, have exposed the usually unacknowledged masculinist stance of much writing, while

¹Hutcheon, L. (1989) *The Politics of Post-Modernism*. Routledge, London. Spivak, G. (1988) *In Other Worlds*. Routledge, New York. Harari, J. (ed) (1979) *Textual Strategies*. Methuen & Co, London.

post-colonial critics have highlighted the ethnocentric stance implicit in many western discourses.² Such stances are not always evident in the explicit content of what is written, but are revealed in the way it is written. My intention in this section is to explain how these positions and stances are conveyed and thus how meanings are (re)produced, and to suggest ways of examining texts in order to elucidate these positions and meanings.

Specific political and ideological positions are portrayed in texts, for instance, often unwillingly or unknowingly, as right, real and apolitical and thereby (re)produce or infer particular meanings and understandings. However, as stressed throughout this project, positions thus articulated do conflict, objections do arise, not everyone is persuaded, find arguments plausible or positions acceptable and meanings are negotiated, representations struggled over and differences occur, hence the importance of non-hegemonic discourses in appreciating the range and complexity of understandings about places.

2b Methods

The previous section suggested that to understand meanings about places it is necessary to interrogate texts. In this section, I want to discuss some of the ways in which meaning is conveyed in written texts. I argue that narrative devices involving appeals to common-sense, shared assumptions, practices and histories reveal and imply particular standard norms and positions, which are rarely acknowledged or explicated, but which are assumed and thus constructed, I term this aspect of texts 'textuality'.³ However, not all texts have the same power to effect or convey particular positions, and it is important to examine the position of the texts in terms of historical context, the authority of the author and relationships to other texts; that is to acknowledge the importance

²Bhabha, H. (ed) (1990) *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, London.
 Bhabha, H. (1992) Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt in Grossberg et al (eds) (1992) *Cultural Studies*. Op Cit. Pps 56-68. Spivak, G (1990) The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues in Harasym, S. (ed) (1990) *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Routledge, New York. Wilson, E. (1991) *The Sphinx in the City*. Virago, London.

³Macdonald, D. and Tipton, C. (1993) Using Documents in Gilbert, N. (ed) (1993) *Researching Social Life*. Sage Publications, London. Pps 187-200. P191 and Silverman, D. (1993) *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. Sage Publications, London. Hodder, I. (1994) The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) (1994) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage, London. Pps 393-402 and Denzin, N. (1994) The Art and Politics of Interpretation in Denzin and Lincoln. (eds) (1994) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Op Cit. Pps 500-515.

of power in the ability of a text to affect, persuade, or portray positions and understandings; to elucidate the production of texts. There are therefore two aspects to my analyses of texts: their production and their textuality. The first part of this section discusses the importance of the socio-cultural contexts in which texts are produced, the position of the author and their claims to authority; that is to acknowledge the power of the texts to shape understandings at particular times in particular places. The second part, discusses some ways of closely interpreting written texts by examination of narrative devices.

2bi Production of Texts

Said's work provides one of the most thorough analyses of textual representations.⁴ His research involved intensive analysis and interrogation of a large number of texts, produced by Europeans which sought to describe and explain the Orient, and which simultaneously affected Western identity. However, his interpretation neglected the possibilities of readers' and consumers' disrupting the positions outlined in the texts he analysed. This neglect meant a tendency towards depicting Orient and Occident as homogeneous entities where people conformed to, and believed, the positions outlined by the texts. However, while he over-emphasises the homogeneity of 'Orientalism' and the 'West' through a conceptual and methodological neglect of readers, he provides an exemplary method of examining texts.⁵

Said suggests that, in order to establish the relative power of texts, their importance in the construction of meanings and articulation of positions, the things one needs to look at are:

- The institutional setting
- The genre of the text
- The ideological positions of the author
- The historical context.

Said's four fold schema is a useful way of assessing the socio-historical contexts prevailing during the production of specific texts. This scheme enables the power of particular texts and discourses to be acknowledged, and it is the recognition of the relative power positions, or hegemonies, imbued in Said's

⁴Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. Op Cit.

⁵See Young, R. (1990) *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. Routledge, London for a critique of Said's positions.

work, expressed in his attention to contexts, which makes his work particularly useful.⁶

The genre of the text, and institutional setting in which meanings are produced and set down are vital in assessing the relative power and believability of discourses. Claims to represent reality, for instance are given added weight, made to appear more believable by the reputation of the author, or the newspaper an article is published in and so on.⁷ The genre, or form of text is crucial in creating and mobilising particular images; for instance 'fiction' as opposed to 'fact' or documentary as opposed to soap opera.⁸ The political position which sustains the author imputes authority or expertise, and hence facilitates or supports the operation of a hierarchy of differential power positions between authors, texts and related institutions. The historical context relates the dominant social and political positions in which the text was created and assumed to be read in. The historical context gives the text its form, its positions and, in conjunction with its textuality, gives it its power.⁹

In terms of this project, my analyses of the various texts associated with the Lansbury estate involve discussions of the historical context in which they were produced, that is the post-war and war-time political, architectural and planning milieux, and the position of the author.¹⁰ The fourth chapter is intended to provide a socio-historical context to later arguments, discussing the ways in which various groups saw their role in society, and emphasising the perceived role of planning and architecture in the post-war period. Comments are made about the genre associated with the text, the implicit claims made for it and how it might be interpreted, and the institutional setting associated with particular texts. These elaborations are fundamental to this project, since I am seeking to elucidate the different 'versions' of Lansbury associated with various institutions and groups associated with the estate, to acknowledge the different

⁶See also Ogborn, M. (1992) Teaching Qualitative Historical Geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. Vol 16, 2. Pps 145-150.

⁷See Morley, D. (1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. Op Cit. Eldridge, J. (ed) (1993) *Getting the Message*. Op Cit. Pile, S. (1992) Oral History and Teaching Qualitative Methods. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. Vol 16, 2. Pps 135-144.

⁸Morley, D. (1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. Op Cit, and Brunt, R. (1992) *Engaging with the Popular*. Op Cit. Livingstone, and Lunt. (1994) *Talk on Television*. Op Cit.

⁹The reading of texts and consumption of images will be discussed more fully in the final section, and was discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁰See appendix 1 and discussions around particular quotes for clarification of the positions of authors.

power of different texts and discursive arenas in the creation of particular meanings.

2bii Textual Devices

Having established the socio-political contexts in which texts were produced, textual devices need to be scrutinised, because through them understandings are constructed and conveyed. As I have stressed throughout this and previous chapter, texts are not accurate, mimetic reflections of reality. Rather texts should be seen as creating understandings about what they are seeking to describe. By examining texts in terms of textual devices, it is possible to suggest ways in which political, social and cultural practices are assumed, and hence propounded, meanings constructed and assumed to be eternal and preordained, and therefore not needing exposition, clarification or even authorial, or reader awareness. The linguistic structures used, the types of metaphors employed, the naturalisation of specific and particular positions imply particular understandings. As Said points out: "The things in the text to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original."¹¹

Pile, meanwhile suggests examination of:

- Ideas/beliefs/attitudes
- Phrases/expressions
- Metaphors/similies
- Other figures of speech
- Organisation/presentation
- Silences/absences
- Inconsistences/contradictions¹²

in order to elucidate the conveyance and construction of particular meanings and understandings. At varying times throughout this thesis, texts are examined according to the methods suggested by Pile and Said, and those kind of interpretations are made explicit in my commentaries. In the sections below I shall briefly detail some of the most common linguistic devices, and the ones I examine most often in my interpretation.

¹¹Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. Op Cit. P21.

¹²Pile, S. (1992) *Oral History and Teaching Qualitative Methods*. Op Cit. P137.

2bii1 Metaphors Metaphors are of particular importance in creating and shaping social understandings. Metaphors require and demand shared understandings and associated common-sense understandings. They seek to clarify arguments by analogy to some more usual image, but often work in effect, by evoking shared assumptions and more usual practices, to naturalise political and ideological processes and understandings. Barnes and Duncan point out: "Metaphors are implicated in the very fabric of society and social processes; if they are to work they must resonate with an existing set of social and cultural representations."¹³ However, metaphors may also disrupt particular understandings, and undermine commonly assumed truths or question accepted wisdoms.

One metaphor recently discussed in geography is the state as organism which as Hepple has discussed, legitimated, justified and explained a series of geopolitical strategies and military campaigns.¹⁴ Other authors have also sought to relate the power of particular metaphors in socio-political practices.¹⁵ Analysis and interpretation of metaphors then elucidates the particular assumptions made in discourses and suggests the social, ideological and cultural positions conveyed by, and (re)produced by, texts. Analysis of metaphors is also discussed in the context of interview transcripts in the fourth section of this chapter.

2bii2 Common-sense Other narrative strategies or tropes which convey unacknowledged political processes, and naturalise ideological practices, are appeals to common-sense and to right-mindedness. Geertz sees appeals to common-sense as central in the construction of thought and culture, because appeals to shared assumptions, self-evidence, right mindedness and so on create and convey ideological, political and social positions, they assume common, shared understandings and practices.¹⁶

There are a number of reasons why treating common-sense as a relatively organized body of considered thought, rather than just what

¹³Barnes and Duncan (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. P12.

¹⁴Hepple, L. (1992) *Metaphor, Geopolitical Discourse and the Military in South America* in Barnes and Duncan (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. Pps 136-154. See also Gregory, D. (1994) *Geographical Imaginations*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford for discussion of Ratzel and the metaphor of state as organism

¹⁵See Keith, M. (1992) *Angry Writing (Re)presenting the Unethical World of the Ethnographer*. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 10. Pps 551-568.

¹⁶Geertz, C. (1983) *Local Knowledge*. Op Cit.

anyone clothed and in his right mind knows, should lead on to useful conclusions.¹⁷

Pile sees interpretation as directed towards problematising common-sense:

Centrally, I believe that qualitative methods raise the problem of interpretation, in order to avoid naive descriptions of the world, they set their evidence, usually some kind of text - within a context. Another way of phrasing this would be to say that qualitative methods are directed towards problematising common-sense rather than accepting the text at face value.¹⁸

O' Tauthail makes a similar point about the style of rhetoric employed by politicians, which, he argues, principally relies on appeals to common-sense.

It is absolutely crucial to the power of political leaders that their rhetoric is seen to make common sense and appears reasonable to political and civil society. It need not, of course, be an accurate or adequate representation of its object.¹⁹

Appeals to common-sense, conveyed via an authentic or 'obvious' shared experience and understanding, effectively homogenises potentially differing conceptions and understandings; they negate and deny differences and thus seek to assert a unitary conception and understanding, based on particular socio-cultural 'norms', on the obvious, self-evident rightness of a particular conception. The denial of alternative, different meanings and understandings is suggested, for instance, by the implication that the rejection of the position is 'wrong-mindedness', ignorance, stupidity or simply nonsense.

3biii3 Narrative Structures The narrative structures referred to here are associated with the ways explanations and justifications are constructed, the way arguments or persuasive rhetoric is framed.²⁰ Authors follow writing conventions, attempting to construct a plausible argument which aims to persuade the reader of the viability of what s/he writes. For instance a well-known or exceptional event might be used to generalise an explanation or justification for a wider conception of social life; the event is taken to signify

¹⁷Geertz, C. (1983) *Local Knowledge*. Op Cit. P75

¹⁸Pile, S. (1992) *Oral History Teaching and Qualitative Methods*. Op Cit. P136.

¹⁹O' Tauthail, G. (1992) *Foreign Policy and the Hyperreal: The Reagan Administration and the Scripting of South Africa* in Barnes and Duncan. (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. Pps 155-175. P158

²⁰See Silverman, D. (1993) *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. Op Cit for a detailed discussion of narrative structures.

broader notions. In the context of this research, for instance, reporters wrote of individual acts of kindness by Lansbury residents, suggesting this was typical of East Enders, the working class and tightly-knit communities.²¹ Other narrative structures which I have examined are paired opposites, where oppositional contrasts are framed within the text, and by oppositional association, used to justify a particular position. For instance, common associative pairings I found were dirt and cleanliness, and old and new, with the past portrayed as dirty and old, the future clean and new. The future therefore is justified in oppositional relation to the past, dirt is assumed to be bad and is associated with the past; the future with cleanliness and by implication progress.²² In terms of my work, these types of dichotomous pairings form a substantial part of the rhetoric of persuasion, of credibility and legitimation employed by groups associated with the estate.

Close analysis of narrative structures enables underlying grand narratives to be discerned.²³ For instance the past as bad the future as good suggest or reveals an unquestioning, or assumed belief in enlightenment notions of progress; while emphasis on order and rationality relate to more prevalent and widespread emphasis on reason and order, and also reflect masculinist ways of interpreting the world.²⁴

Implicit associations made, for instance, between community and good and community and whiteness are highlighted throughout my interpretation.²⁵ These assumed linkages indicate the ways in which words become trigger words through association. Keith and Rogers have demonstrated how the term 'inner-city' has become a trigger word for racialised and criminalised versions of particular places, which legitimates and fosters a series of policies and common-sense understandings of those places.²⁶ By looking at trigger words and the contexts in which they are used and the associations made, it may be

²¹See chapter 6, for more detailed discussions along these lines.

²²See chapter 5 in particular and Stallybrass, P. and White, A. (1986) *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Methuen, London.

²³See Gilroy, P. (1994) *The Black Atlantic*. Verso, London and Gregory, D. (1994) *Geographical Imaginations*. Op Cit

²⁴Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Polity, London. Wilson, E. (1991) *The Sphinx in the City*. Op Cit.

²⁵Explored in more detail in chapter 7.

²⁶Keith, M. and Rodgers, A. (eds) (1991) *Hollow Promises: Rhetoric and Reality in the Inner City*. Mansell, London.

possible to highlight the ways understandings are constructed, meanings referred to and (re)negotiated and suggest what those meanings might be. During my examination of discourses surrounding Lansbury, I will highlight and emphasise these grand underlying narratives which structure texts, and give them their meaning. By so doing, these taken for granted assumptions are problematised and hence available, made accessible for critique.²⁷

2bii4 Recurrent Themes Recurrent themes obviously indicate the degree of importance attached to particular themes, or issues by the authors, and by extension the discourse which they are relating and contributing to. Thus for instance, the constant repetition of ideas about community by planners, architects and residents indicates the importance attached to community for those groups in the post-war period at Lansbury, and also indicates some of the inter-relatedness of some of their accounts.

3 Thesis Organisation and Texts

3a Thesis Organisation

These recurrent themes provided the basis of the content and organisation of my thesis. My research suggests there were three major recurrent themes in the discourses which surrounded Lansbury (including residents). These were ideas about the future, the nature of the East End and ideas about communities. The themes were not decided upon before reading the material, although they were topics I was interested in, and had read about prior to looking at the material. The selection of themes involved my own interests, which material I found relevant and interesting, and also those issues that arose with most frequency. These form chapter 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

Within each chapter, the amount of weight or importance placed by various groups on the issues differed. In chapter 5, national politicians, architects, and planners placed most emphasis on wide-scale abstract ideas about the future, while residents spoke less and showed less interest in these utopian, theoretical ideas. When speaking about ideas of community residents

²⁷ New Ethnicities Unit. (1994) *Island Stories: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the Remaking of East Enders*. Paper presented at Goldsmiths College, May 1994. Feldman, D. and Stedman Jones, G. (eds) (1989) *Metropolis London*. Routledge, London. Denzin, N. (1994) *The Art and Politics of Interpretation*. In Denzin and Lincoln. (eds) (1994) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Op Cit. Pps 500-515. Ware, V. (1992) *Beyond the Pale*. Verso, London. All of whom problematise and expose 'grand narratives'.

had more to say and hence the balance of the chapter shifts. Ideas about the future, the East End, community and planning and reconstruction were those which came up most as I was looking through material. Within each chapter the material is organised in relation to the discursive arenas outlined in chapter one. Each chapter begins with interpretation of material relating to Lansbury, originating from national planners, architects, politicians and the media, then moves on to discuss LCC material and personnel, then discusses PBC and local media interpretations and representations, and finally residents' understandings are discussed. One of the main reasons for organising the material in this way is to highlight the differences and similarities between groups' understandings; accessing both the differential power of these discourses to influence and create meanings and the complex relationships between these discourses. However, I had some difficulty in dividing the material neatly, in terms of the four arenas outlined here. There is considerable interlinkage between the groups associated with Lansbury. For instance, LCC architects and planners also worked for the national government during the War; while the Exhibition of Architecture was officially a joint production between the LCC and festival authorities. Moreover, LCC and PBC officials liaised quite closely at times, and the local media sometimes reproduced material from both organisations. Within each chapter therefore, while the intention is to separate out the discursive arenas and highlight differences and similarities between them, this did not always prove practical, at various times the distinctions between the discursive arenas are blurred. This confusion illustrates the points I made in chapter 2, about the interrelation and interreliance of discourses. I also suggested that hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses were not diametrically opposed, nor hermetically sealed from each other and resistance and attacks on the hegemony sit alongside compatibilities and shared understandings. The structure of each chapter, while intended to follow a hierarchy of discursive arenas is not fixed, and sometimes groups, events or personnel are considered part of the LCC, for instance, and sometimes associated with national discourses. This fluidity reflects the interrelations between discursive arenas.

3b Sources

In this section, I will briefly detail the texts I have examined for each group, and associated problems of limiting material to be examined. As I suggested in previous sections, to appreciate how Lansbury and ideas about post-war reconstruction were understood it is necessary to carefully examine the texts which considered the estate, while appreciating that not everybody agreed

with, or accepted the positions outlined. The variety of texts I examine in this project is testament not just to the numbers of institutions, people and organisations involved with the estate, nor just to the intended symbolisms attached to it, but more to the variety of positions and understandings projected by various groups involved with the estate and post-war reconstruction more generally. The primary and secondary source bibliographies carry all the material I have examined.

3bi National, Hegemonic Discourses

Selection of related material within this arena was problematic since there was a considerable quantity of material available. Initially I looked at all the material in various archives which related to Lansbury, and which came from national government sources. I also examined architecture and planning material which directly or explicitly dealt with Lansbury. I extended my research into areas dealing with post-war reconstruction, particularly centred around discussions during the War and particularly the Blitz. This was because Lansbury was conceived in and around 1943, and as I have suggested was profoundly shaped and influenced by war-time proposals, expectations and experiences. I also investigated material which detailed how national politicians felt the 'people' were expecting and hoping, via Ministry of Information reports and research. I examined publicity produced by the Ministry of Information and Housing and Local Government Ministry material, including film transcripts and camera instructions.

I also investigated Festival of Britain material, which related how the Festival was organised, and also central government responses, reactions, and attitudes towards it. This included discussions about Lansbury, meetings with architects and planners and also I looked at publicity and understandings about the main Festival of Britain exhibitions. These types of discussions, while not necessarily directly concerned with Lansbury, provide an indication of the context in which the estate was produced, the meanings and symbolisms attached to it, and the discourses which people may have drawn on in understanding and viewing the estate. In terms of Said's checklist these texts provide the historical context associated with the production of knowledges about the estate. With similar concerns in mind, I examined contemporary dominant attitudes towards planning and reconstruction, including the liaisons between central government and architects and planners during the War, attitudes towards reconstruction plans, and modernism. Architects and planners

were heavily involved with the Festival of Britain, and the Exhibition of Architecture, and drew on dominant and hegemonic theories and techniques in architecture and planning. Analyses of this material included reviews of architecture and planning journals and discussions between central government and the LCC. Architects and planners worked closely with central government in formulating reconstruction plans and their discussions provide a good indication of how some politicians and architects understood their roles and issues of reconstruction. These understandings were powerful, partly because they were widely articulated and portrayed as 'solutions' and, partly, because they were the conceptions upon which reconstruction plans were proposed and implemented.²⁸

In putting all these varied conceptions and understandings together under one heading, I am not suggesting that what I have termed the national 'discursive arena' was unitary or its personnel in complete agreement. There were substantial differences between individuals and groups within this arena, differences which are evident in archival material, in minutes of meetings, in memos, in appointments and discussions and so on. However, the production of material publicity, and reports often tried to present a united image, in which the national line held, and in which the idea of the nation came to represent coherence. There were published and articulated differences but these should be seen as part of a powerful set of meanings emanating from very powerful, far reaching discursive arenas concerned with post-war reconstruction.

3bii LCC Discourses

I examined material mainly stemming from the LCC and discussions about their plans for London after the War and, in particular, the CLP. The CLP was the major outline of LCC plans during the 1940s, and my investigations into LCC understandings about Lansbury and post-war reconstruction in London centred around a close examination of the CLP, and discussions with Arthur Ling and Walter Bor about it. These investigations also involved examinations of film material related to the CLP and LCC and national government discussions about the plans. Media portrayals and representations and criticisms of the Festival and the County of London Plan were also examined because they give indications of understandings of post-war reconstruction in London. I also examined material concerned with LCC involvement in the Festival of Britain, and particularly the Exhibition of

²⁸See chapter 4 in particular.

Architecture at Lansbury. As in the previous section I am not suggesting that the LCC and London-related representations were unanimous, but they formed a powerful discursive arena, and produced material, and publicity which suggested that unanimity prevailed even where LCC Minutes suggest this was not always so.

3biii Local Discourses

Local material about Lansbury, principally came from local newspaper portrayals of the estate. There was extensive local media interest in the estate, and publicity about it was common. I examined all the media discussions about the estate that I could find, having looked through local newspapers for the period. I also looked at local press portrayals about the East End, and about war-time reconstruction more generally. These press reports were frequently in direct opposition to national and LCC proposals, claiming privileged insider status from which to base their oppositions to the hegemonies.²⁹ I also examined PBC records, although these were missing in many cases. PBC meetings were not usually fully transcribed, but in some cases notes were made, and meetings were usually reported in local papers the next day. Where discussions with the PBC and the LCC occurred these notes were kept by the LCC, and were stored in the LCC archive, at the Greater London Record Office.

4 Interviewing

4a Purpose

In the previous chapter, I suggested that some authors may have overstated the influence texts, particularly those associated with hegemonic discourses have, and assumed unproblematically that what hegemonic discourses stated was accepted uncritically and unilaterally.³⁰ In terms of this project, Lansbury residents may have opposed the ideas conveyed by hegemonic discourses and drawn instead on less-powerful, competing, non-hegemonic discourses. Therefore residents' understandings about Lansbury cannot be assumed merely by examining the most powerful texts. As far as I am aware, there have never been any organised resistances to the

²⁹See chapter 5 in particular.

³⁰In particular Cosgrove, D. (1989) *Power and Place in the Venetian Territories* in Agnew, J. and Duncan, J. (eds) (1989) *The Power of Place*. Unwin Human Inc., London. Pps 105-123 and Cosgrove and Daniels. (eds) (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape*. Op Cit. And in architectural work, Bonta, J. (1979) *Architecture and Its Interpretation*. Op Cit.

understandings and schemes of planners, politicians and architects at Lansbury, other than traders' objections to market plans, and hence interviews were the only means of accessing residents' understandings. I stressed in the literature review that complaints, letters to estate authorities, local councillors and discussions with neighbours, for instance, were also practices of resistance, of everyday resistance, and that conversations with residents might enable these struggles, objections, renegotiations and interpretations over meanings and understandings to be elucidated. Lansbury, for instance, built in the aftermath of the Blitz and portrayed as the symbol of the future for the East End and the working-classes, provoked reactions in the residents not contemplated by the designers, and commentators, and not accessible in texts; but they can be examined through interviews and oral histories.

The ascendancy of oral history in the past two decades is evidenced by the increasing quantity of oral history literature across a wide variety of disciplines.³¹ Oral history's initial mission was to hear from people marginalised by authoritative histories, which are usually written about the most powerful. As Thompson stated in 1978: "Oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgement inherent in its tradition."³² Oral historians wanted to hear versions of historical events from groups usually marginalised, versions which do not necessarily conform to written accounts. By incorporating their understandings of the past into historical analyses, Thompson and others hoped to change the focus of history, to hear 'new' histories and to challenge accepted views about the past. "Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope."³³ In this sense oral history was, and in many cases remains, a radical political project, aiming to establish the importance of previously silenced or ignored understandings and experiences, and to undermine or add to histories which have neglected those groups, and which therefore produce some notion of a homogeneous, undifferentiated society.

In some senses this concentration on voices which are usually ignored, mirrors one of my concerns and motivations for interviewing. The Lansbury estate has been talked about by politicians, architects, planners, journalists and

³¹For instance the Oral History journal carries interviews from historians, geographers, sociologists, anthropologists and non-academics.

³²Thompson, P. (1990) (1st edn 1978) *The Voice of the Past*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. P21.

³³Thompson, P. (1990) *Voice of the Past*. Op Cit. P21

other commentators, but these discussions very infrequently refer to residents' views. All these groups who propounded views of Lansbury did so from a site of power, with very definite conceptions about what Lansbury should represent, and how the residents should understand it. Their representations are supposed to reflect residents' understandings.³⁴ However, residents may have drawn on less powerful representations. For instance, they may have objected to, or ignored the ideas conveyed by those hegemonic discourses peddled by politicians and planners.

Not all the historical representations that win access to the public field are 'dominant'. The field is crossed by competing constructions of the past often at war with each other. Dominant memory is produced in the course of these struggles and is always open to contestation.³⁵

As the above quotation indicates, residents may have drawn on non-hegemonic discourses, which were less visible than more powerful representations. These types of non-hegemonic discourses would be assembled in less public, less powerful arenas. The Popular Memory Group stress there is a hierarchy of representations, in terms of power, and these are often in competition with each other. "We do want to insist, however, that there are relative processes of domination in the historical field. Certain representations achieve centrality and luxuriate grandly; others are marginalised or excluded or reworked."³⁶ I am not suggesting that hegemonic discourses were unimportant in the construction of understandings, they were, and remain powerful social and cultural forces. However, usually published accounts of Lansbury rely only on those hegemonic discourses, and hence both over-simplify the process of meaning construction and marginalise other, less public and apparently less powerful or widespread understandings.

The Popular Memory Group make a distinction between those hegemonic representations which are presented in public and achieve ascendancy there, and those which are circulated and constructed in less public

³⁴For instance Cox, A. (1989) *The Lansbury Estate Poplar*. Op Cit. Andrews, A. (1951) *Heaven Among the Common People*. *Public Opinion*. January 12, 1951 and Westergaard and Glass. (1954) *A Profile of Lansbury*. Op Cit.

³⁵Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories: Theory, Politics, Method* in Johnson, R., McLennan, G., Schwarz, B. and Sutton, D. (eds) (1982) *Making Histories*. University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota. Pps 205-252. P206

³⁶Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories*. Op Cit. P206

forums. 'Private' understandings, usually neglected, are culturally and politically informed since they draw on shared (although less dominant) aspects of culture and politics. The terminology of public (powerful) and private (less powerful) understandings may be misleading, since it implies that private understandings are individual. However, private understandings are constructed from discourses and shared understandings in the same way as hegemonic representations. As Samuel states:

We want to show...that no statement that is made about one's past individually, is in any way innocent of ideology or of imaginative complexes...we want to break down the differences between the public and the private, and the personal and the political by showing that the same kinds of imaginative paradigms which structure ideology and which structure politics, also structure the way in which people understand their own lives...we want to show that personal narrative is as ideologically and imaginatively constructed and complex as politics.³⁷

Feminist oral historians have also challenged the notion of a split between public and private understandings. Indicating that the concept of private understandings, has meant a neglect, and silencing of those usually marginalised by 'mainstream' society; they suggest that concepts of private understandings has led to a false distinction between what is political and what is not, of what is structured by society and what is not. Womens' understandings have been neglected, perhaps because they usually have no public forum, they are considered private, and therefore non-political or asocial. These neglects or exclusions are compounded by ignoring 'quiet resistances', even by those who seek to focus on marginal, less powerful or excluded groups.

A knowledge of past and present is also produced in the course of everyday life...Usually this history is held to the level of private remembrance. It is not only unrecorded, but actually silenced. Feminist history challenges the very distinction public/private that silences or marginalises women's lived sense of the past.³⁸

If we consider private understandings to be central to the experience of people, and forming part of general cultural and social experiences, then it is important to examine those 'private' memories (via interviews) in order to understand the ways in which culture is constructed and transformed. In which case:

³⁷Samuel, R. (1988) Myth and History. *Oral History Journal*. Vol 16, 1. Spring. Pps 15-18. P15

³⁸Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories*. Op Cit. P210

The individuality of each life story ceases to be an awkward impediment to generalization, and becomes instead a vital document of the construction of consciousness, emphasising both the variety of experience in any social group, and also how each individual draws on a common culture, a defiance of the rigid categorisation of private and public.³⁹

The purpose of interviewing in this project is to try and examine how residents have interpreted and understood Lansbury, and to discover what hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses have been drawn on, both in the 1950s, and subsequently.

We need to ask what it is about autobiographies or life histories that makes them not merely 'rich', but significant and representative in some stronger and more definite sense...Such accounts are representative and significant for a larger account, not because they express a genuine abstract humanity, or a particular unique subjectivity, but because they are the product of social individuals. Their authors speak out of particular positions in the complex of social relations characteristic of particular societies at particularly historical times. These accounts appropriate and make sense of salient features of social relations within which their authors have been implicated, and within which they have acted and struggled.⁴⁰

These comprehensions are related to the discourses prevalent during the 1950s, and now, and they also relate to what have traditionally been seen as private understandings, in which hegemonic and non-hegemonic cultural representations converge to produce a range of understandings. These 'private' positions are just as socially and politically constructed as public ones, and should be portrayed as such. They represent not individual accounts, but accounts which are the result of, and form part of, the social world.

My research, focuses on understandings about Lansbury in the 1950s, but was carried out during 1992. Memories about the estate will have been transformed since the 1950s, infused and altered by other discourses, representations and experiences. Or as Buckley suggests: "Oral history [is] more informative about the present life and culture of the informant than it [is] about the past which it purport[s] to reconstruct."⁴¹ Interviewing will thus not produce 'pure' insight into the past but provide a contemporary understanding

³⁹Thompson, P. (1990) *The Voice of the Past*. Op Cit. P2.

⁴⁰Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories*. Op Cit. P228.

⁴¹Buckley, A. (1983) *Neighbourliness - Myth and History*. *Oral History Journal*. Vol 11, 1. Spring. Pps 44-51. P45

and interpretation of the past. Some oral historians have attempted to minimise the impact of the present by providing scientific 'evidence' to the effect that memories of the past can be accurate.⁴² As Samuel states: "Oral history...began as an empiricism. One of its main inspirations was to show social life as it was personally experienced, and events as they really happened."⁴³ This has led to a debate about the epistemological status of oral history, with the Popular Memory Group suggesting that Thompson ignored the 'effects' of contemporary interpretations, working from an empiricist view of history in which a true and objective view of the past is portrayed as obtainable and desirable.

If we treat historical sources only as bearers of 'fact', we will tend like Paul Thompson to be interested mainly in certain orders of facticity, concerning past action and behaviour...Our own explanations are judged not against the pre-given facticity of the sources (except in the vulgar sense of its material existence) but against the human constructions of meaning that are found there.⁴⁴

I would agree that attempts to verify present day accounts of the past are misleading, since memories are influenced by contemporary experiences and understandings.⁴⁵

Present memories of past attitudes and feelings are subject to distortion and schematization, and they do not provide direct access to past feelings and attitudes. It would be impossibly naive to pretend anything else.⁴⁶

The Popular Memory Group make a similar point where they state: "Oral history testimony...is profoundly influenced by discourses and experiences in the present. That is the stand-point from which oral accounts (and formal histories) are constructed."⁴⁷

⁴²For example Thompson, P. (1990) *The Voice of the Past*. Op Cit. Lummis, T. (1987) *Listening To History*. Hutchinson, London and Vansina, J. (1985) *Oral History as Tradition*. James Currey Ltd., London.

⁴³Samuel, R. (1988) *Myth and History*. Op Cit. P15.

⁴⁴Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories*. Op Cit. P225.

⁴⁵Coleman, P. (1991) *Ageing and Life History: The Meaning of Reminiscence in Late Life* in Dex, S. (ed) (1991) *Life and Work History Analyses: Qualitative and Quantitative Developments*. Routledge, London. Pps 120-143.

⁴⁶Hay, C. (1981) *Pangs of the Past*. *Oral History Journal*. Vol 9, 1. Spring. Pps 41-51. Pps 42-43.

⁴⁷Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories*. Op Cit. P243.

Interviews, thus produce information which illuminates the cultural processes through which memories of the past are constructed. Accounts should be conceived of as understandings which are shaped by relationships with political and cultural forces, both hegemonic and non-hegemonic, which are transformed and reworked continuously. "Their stories are necessarily influenced by present events and by the restructuring of what it is possible to think and say. Oral history testimonies do not form a simple record, more or less accurate, of past events, they are complex cultural products."⁴⁸ My analyses of 1940s and 1950s texts are conducted in the 1990s; I therefore see both interviews and textual analyses as interpretations, which should not be seen as, nor expected to be, accurate representations of 1950s life unaffected by subsequent and contemporary events and social life.⁴⁹

4b Methods

4bi Semi-structured, Depth interviews

My selection of interview style reflected my theoretical orientations. I wanted an approach which enabled and encouraged residents to discuss at some length their views of the estate; and allowed me to try and examine how those views were constructed. I also wanted an approach which I felt was relaxed, and encouraged residents to refer to and discuss emotive issues, which are often neglected in written accounts. There are a wide range of interview techniques, which tend to produce different sorts of information, and which relate to, or suggest, differing theoretical positions. These approaches have been discussed by a number of authors.⁵⁰ My reasons for selecting a depth, semi-structured approach, were based upon a rejection of other approaches which I felt would not have produced such useful information in the context of my research aims and theoretical concerns.

It would have been possible to conduct a questionnaire on Lansbury. Devising a questionnaire with yes-no type answers would have enabled me to examine large numbers of residents and produce statistics about those who, for

⁴⁸Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories*. Op Cit. P241.

⁴⁹See Driver, F. (1991) *Geography's Empire: Histories of Geographical Knowledge*. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 10. Pps 23-40.

⁵⁰For example: Burgess, R. (1984). In *The Field*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London. Bulmer, M. (ed) (1977) *Sociological Research Methods*. Macmillan Press Ltd., London. Walker, R. (ed) (1985) *Qualitative Applied Research*. Gower, London.

instance, wanted to move, or who had wanted to move to Lansbury in the 1950s, if I could have found a large number of residents who had lived on the estate from the 1950s. However, my intention was to try and establish how residents' understandings had been constructed and what those understandings might be. I felt an approach which did not facilitate open discussion around issues to do with, for instance, the strength of community at Lansbury, and in Poplar, would not help inform me about understandings of the estate. A rigid, inflexible framework interview style with set questions would elicit only certain predetermined responses.⁵¹

Other than a questionnaire-type survey, I could have entered interviews with a set of predefined questions which could have led to more expansive responses than a yes-no type format. However, I felt that it would be more informative if I was able to respond to residents, to carry on discussions with them with a flexibility not possible with pre-set questions. It seemed important to allow the residents to tell me in their own terms about what they felt to be important.

To understand other persons' constructions of reality we would do well to ask them rather than assume we can know merely by observing their overt behaviour, and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms (rather than those imposed rigidly and *a priori* by ourselves) and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings (rather than through isolated fragments squeezed onto a few lines of paper). The essential point is a refusal to accept that the interviewer can accurately predict or determine beforehand what are relevant questions.⁵²

The respondents' preferred topics were illuminating in themselves, and were considered an integral part of the interpretive strategy, rather than as tolerated deviances. Interview approaches which call for pre-set questions indicate that digressions are not of value (hence the necessity of having pre-set questions), and I wanted to encourage respondents to talk about what was important to them, rather than rely on my criteria of what I felt to be important. Changing the topic, or becoming bored with one topic, and animated by another, reveals much about what was important to residents - and the information gained from these types of 'digressions' was useful. However, the interviews also needed to be centred around my research interests. Prior to the

⁵¹As with Westergaard and Glass. (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit.

⁵²Jones, S. (1985) Depth Interviewing in Walker, R. (ed) (1985) Qualitative Applied Research. Op Cit. Pps 43-55. P44

interviews I had surveyed the material from politicians, architects, planners and the media. I wanted to establish how the residents' ideas related to those discourses, and I intended to centre the interviews around those areas which were evident in those hegemonic representations. There was no point having an interview without any structure at all, which might have resulted in aimless discussions about issues I had no research interest in.

The crucial point is that there is no such thing as pre-suppositionless research. In preparing for interviews researchers will have, and should have, some broad questions in mind...The process of interviewing is one in which researchers are continually making choices, based on their research interests and prior theories, about which data they want to pick up and explore further with respondents and those which they do not.⁵³

I therefore told the respondents very generally, what I was interested in at the outset of the interviews; frequently they inquired themselves. When the discussions seemed to wander too far from the issues I wanted talked about, I felt it necessary to lead discussions back into areas more in correspondence with my research, without jeopardising conversations which might have developed into interesting issues. The idea was to maintain a balance between allowing residents the opportunities to discuss areas which most concerned them (and these could arise from seemingly unrelated topics), and keep the discussions related to my research. Vansina seems to recognise this need for balance when he states:

Any interview has two authors: the performer and the researcher...the interview must at least be structured by the researcher who decides what should be talked about and attempts to keep the informant on the topic being discussed. This should be done unobtrusively and informants should not be interrupted, even when they do seem to wander off the topic. After all, unexpected links with the topics discussed may turn up and most unasked for information comes from such diversions.⁵⁴

From the outset my preference lay with a flexible, semi-structured approach and this was also the one I felt most comfortable with. The intrusion of going into peoples' homes and asking them about personal and emotional parts of their life, seemed to be eased by taking an amiable and more relaxed approach to the whole interview. Part of this informality derives from a desire to allow the respondent to talk as freely and as emotionally as they felt they could, and partly from a desire to minimise and make as friendly as possible

⁵³Jones, S. (1985) *Depth Interviewing*. Op Cit. P45.

⁵⁴Vansina, J. (1985) *Oral History as Tradition*. Op Cit. P61

what could otherwise seem to be a rather brutish intrusion. Feminist interviewers have stressed the desirability of informal and reciprocal interview approaches, which both minimise intrusions and aim for equality between interviewer and interviewee. They reject 'distance interviews' where the interviewer presents a 'disinterested scientific persona'.

Discussions of feminist methodology generally assaulted the hierarchical, exploitative relations of conventional research, urging feminist researchers to seek instead an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her "subjects"...Oakley rejected the hierarchical, objectifying, and falsely "objective" stance of the neutral, impersonal interviewer as neither possible nor desirable, arguing that meaningful and feminist research depends instead on empathy and mutuality.⁵⁵

Approaches which urge interviewers to adopt a neutral stance, to ask neutral questions and not reveal their preferences, politics and so on, centres around a notion that objective truths should be sought, and that preventing or minimising interviewer bias will achieve that. I did not see the search for unbiased, objective information as ascertainable nor desirable. As I discussed earlier, I wanted to see how understandings of the estate were, and are, constructed, not to gather supposed 'truths' about the estate in 1951. As Grele suggests:

We are not testers of memory or recall. We do not go into the field to test how much an informant knows of an event or how good his or her recall is. Nor are we folklorists or anthropologists searching for history in tales or oral traditions and testing their integrity and validity over time...Above all we want to know what the events under discussion meant to those who recall them.⁵⁶

I felt therefore that I should not adopt a dehumanised interviewing stance. I fully expected that my presence, the way I asked questions and the setting of the interview would all affect the information given.

The social situation created by the interview does not simply constitute an obstacle to the respondent's articulation of his or her beliefs. Like

⁵⁵Stacey, J. (1991) Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography? in Gluck, S. and Patai, D. (eds) (1991) *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. Routledge, London. Pps 111-119. P112

⁵⁶Grele, R. (1991) Private Memories and Public Presentation in Grele, R. (ed) (1991) (1st edn 1975) *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. Praeger, London. Pps 242-283. P249

speech events in general, it shapes the form and content of what is said.⁵⁷

Thompson makes a similar point, when he recognises that the context of the interview situation is central to the material given.

The message may also differ, depending just where it is heard. Thus an interview at home will increase the pressure of respectable home-centred ideals; an interview in a pub is more likely to emphasise devilry and fun; and an interview in the work-place will introduce the influence of work conventions and attitudes.⁵⁸

These issues will be discussed more fully in the following section which discusses interpretation of interviews. From the point of view of selecting an interview approach, however, it was important for me to try and establish a friendly atmosphere during the interview. I wanted to be able to ask the residents fairly in-depth questions, to probe them on comments they made, to discuss in detail what I and they considered interesting and relevant issues. I would have felt awkward and exploitative doing this in a formal, unfriendly manner, and this would anyway have been based on an epistemological position previously rejected.

Having established the type of approach best suited to the theoretical positioning of the research, and the one I felt most at ease with, I adopted a semi-structured, depth style of interviewing, which allowed the residents to talk in some depth about what they felt to be most important to them in the context of my research, and which also allowed me the opportunity to discuss issues, and question residents, in some detail.

4bii Interpretation

In the preceding discussions, I outlined my reasons for conducting interviews and for selecting a semi-structured, depth interview approach. In this section I will describe the interpretation of interview material which is based around trying to illuminate some of the questions discussed above, and in the literature review. My intention is to get some sense of how residents understood the estate in terms of both hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses, and in terms of emotions which may have affected and produced

⁵⁷Briggs C. (1986) *Learning How To Ask*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. P22.

⁵⁸Thompson, P. (1990) *The Voice of the Past*. Op Cit. P121

certain understandings. Interpretation of interview material will be framed around analysis of linguistic, and non-linguistic communications. The first section in some sense duplicates discussions in section 1. However, although my interpretation of transcripts partly relied on analysis of linguistic devices, I refer in my discussion here, only to authors who base their discussions around interview material.

4bii1 Linguistic Analysis In previous sections I have suggested that language should not be understood as a neutral force, mimicing a supposed real materiality, but as a force participating in the creation and conveyance of political and cultural forces. Interpretation therefore, is partly based around examination of narrative structures which convey and create a sense of how people understand their position within their social world. Examination of interview material must therefore involve scrutiny of the narrative structure of transcripts. It is partly through narration that ideas about the ways residents view the estate and what has influenced the construction of those ideas becomes apparent. As Etter-Lewis claims, in reference to oral histories:

Language is the invisible force that shapes oral texts and gives meanings to historical events. It is the primary vehicle through which past experiences are recalled and interpreted. Attention to language its variations and categorical forms, enriches narrative text analysis beyond strictly linguistic concerns...Speech patterns inherent in a narrative can reveal status, interpersonal relationships and precepts about language, self and the world.⁵⁹

Understandings about social life will also be apparent from the use of particular linguistic phrases, as outlined in section 2, for instance metaphors, recurrent themes and so on. Chafrault-Duchet analyses key phrases and patterns, which she believes define relationships between self and the social sphere. Key phrases such as 'it was natural', 'everyone did it', 'we had no choice', give a sense of how the person viewed their world and their relationship with it (similar to Geertz' common-sense interpretations of texts). Assumptions made in key phrases that what are complex social and cultural relations are natural or unchallengeable, illuminates the person's view and comprehension of the boundaries and limitations of their social and cultural world. Chafrault-Duchet states that, "the key phrase then, expresses the

⁵⁹Etter-Lewis, G. (1991) Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts. in Gluck and Patai. (eds) (1991) Women's Words. Op Cit. Pps 43-57. P44.

harmony, the indifference, the ambiguity, the conflict and so on existing between self and society."⁶⁰

Recurrence of narrative styles or words throughout the narrator's anecdotes, Chafrault-Duchet calls key patterns. These patterns reflect interpretations of the dominant social mode similar to the grand narratives discussed earlier. As Chafrault-Duchet states: "Speakers in fact attempt to express, in narrative terms, their relation to the social relation or social mode."⁶¹ Chafrault-Duchet then suggests that it is possible to find within the narration, "the complexity, the ambiguities, and even the contradictions of the relationships between the subject and the world, the past and the social and ideological image of women."⁶²

Based upon similar premises as Chafrault-Duchet's notion of key phrases and patterns, Pile partly interpreted his interviews by examination of metaphors. He states: "Metaphors are important because our everyday conceptual system is profoundly metaphorical and, therefore represents the relationship between meaning and social action."⁶³ Metaphors reveal where "social relations become naturalised and thus legitimate, having passed into the taken for granted world."⁶⁴

Interpretation of my interviews involved examination of the transcripts for narrative themes, metaphors, key phrases, appeals to common-sense, right-mindedness and assumed understandings, to establish some sense of the ways in which residents have defined their social and cultural world and their relationships with it. However, analysis has not been limited to analysis of linguistic and narrative structures. There are a number of other ways in which residents may communicate their understandings, linguistic communication is only one part of a complex communicative situation set up during an interview; and my interpretation will also examine those other communicative processes.

⁶⁰Chafrault-Duchet, M-F. (1991) Narrative Structures, Social Models and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story in Gluck and Patai. (eds) (1991) *Women's Words* Op Cit. Pps 77-92. P79

⁶¹Chafrault-Duchet, M-F. (1991) Narrative Structures. Op Cit. P8.

⁶²Chafrault-Duchet, M-F. (1991) Narrative Structures. Op Cit. P12.

⁶³Pile, S. (1990) Depth Hermeneutics and Critical Human Geography. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 8. Pps 211-232. P223.

⁶⁴Pile, S. (1990) Depth Hermeneutics and Critical Human Geography. Op Cit. P222

4bii2 Non-Linguistic Analysis While acknowledging the importance of examining transcripts for suggestions of how people define, through language, their relationship and understanding of the cultural world of which they are a part, I do not want to rely exclusively on this type of narrative analysis. For instance, I would consider that cognitive maps of interview transcripts, which may be of use if there is a great deal of material to be analysed, tend to wrench the words and meanings out of both the context in which they were talked about, and how they were discussed.⁶⁵ Having stated that I wanted to enable the residents to express feelings and emotions about what they are speaking about, it would be of little value if emotions were then discarded from the analysis. Cognitive mapping and computer-aided discourse analysis, while useful tools for examining narrations are not so useful in examining emotions which are apparent during interviewing.⁶⁶ Those feelings are recoverable from non-linguistic communications, if notes of them are made after the interview, or if the tape is replayed during interpretation.

During my interviews there were frequently periods when the participants became distressed or animated. This was apparent both from tone of voice and via body language. If I neglected to incorporate these feelings into the interpretation then I would be omitting a possibly vital indication of how the residents felt, and how they had reacted. "Life history texts are after all, the product of an encounter between the ethnographer (a real self) and real 'others' - who cannot and must not be reduced to a discursive construction of our language."⁶⁷ Non-linguistic communications indicate how the respondent feels about what they are saying. Words may be spoken angrily, sarcastically and so on. Analysing how words are spoken will contribute to understanding of how people evaluate and interpret their situations.

Relying merely on linguistic and narrative concerns then limits interpretation, and means that much other material is discarded.

Some of us found discrepancies between our memories of interviews and the transcripts because the meaning we remembered hearing had

⁶⁵Jones, S. (1985) *Depth Interviewing*. Op Cit. P64

⁶⁶Hodder, I. (1994) *The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture*. Op Cit.

⁶⁷Salazar, C, (1991) *A Third World Woman's Text: Between the Politics of Criticism and Cultural Politics in* Gluck and Patai. (eds) (1991) *Women's Words*. Op Cit. Pps 93-106. P102

been expressed through intense vocal quality and body language, not through words alone.⁶⁸

During the interviews, the interviewees indicated how they felt about what they were speaking of, although without necessarily saying it. It is apparent through people's tone of voice for example whether they are sad, angry or bored during the course of discussions. By vocal intonation and remembering how those interviewees reacted emotionally to some of those topics, it will be possible to incorporate into analysis a greater sense of how that person felt, and thus give a greater understanding of how they relate to certain parts of their life. In my interviews for example, I found that many women wept when they recalled their old homes, or spoke with obvious animation and pleasure about their feelings on moving to the estate. Awareness and recognition of these feelings is central to understanding how residents felt about the estate.

We need to hear what women implied, suggested, and started to say but didn't. We need to interpret their pauses, and when it happens, their unwillingness or inability to respond...they should have an opportunity to explain what they mean in their own terms.⁶⁹

Body language too, provides valuable clues as to how the respondent feels, how relaxed they are speaking about particular issues, or how nervous, angry or bored. Noting changing body language can help us to understand how respondents are feeling at particular times, whether or not they are relaxed and happy in the interview situations, whether they may be avoiding particularly sensitive issues and so on. I also felt it important to note for instance, how relaxed, or nervous I felt I was. These attitudes and body languages will have been communicated to the interviewee and contributed to how the interview situation developed.

We do need to pay attention to the crucial non-verbal data, of posture, gesture, voice intonation, facial expression, eye contact, and so on - by which we can communicate for example interest, encouragement, warmth and caring on the one hand; or boredom, disapproval, coldness and indifference on the other.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Anderson, K. and Jack, D. (1991) Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses in Gluck and Patai. (eds) (1991) Women's Words. Op Cit. Pps 11-26. P12

⁶⁹Anderson and Jack. (1991) Learning to Listen. Op Cit. P17

⁷⁰Jones, S. (1985) Depth Interviewing. Op Cit. P51

This type of communication is an essential part of any interaction, and it is important that note is taken of these types of additional information. In subsequent chapters about the residents' understandings, I acknowledge explicitly these non-linguistic communications and when they affect my interpretation.

4c Interviews

The first task was to contact residents who had lived on the estate during its construction in the 1950s. I contacted the estate management team hoping to gain access to the residents through their recommendations and referrals. However, after considerable effort it became apparent that their knowledge of individual residents was limited and they did not seem willing, or able, to offer any names or contacts. Failing this I contacted a couple of local historians who had a more personal and intimate knowledge of the estate.⁷¹ I was given two or three names of people known by the historians who they suggested I could contact. In addition I obtained copies of the rates listings for 1951 and 1991 in order to compare the names of residents who had lived on the estate in 1951 and remained there in 1991. However, such detailed and time-consuming work proved needless, because contact with one of the people, mentioned by the historians, resulted in an interview, during which I was given a couple of other names of residents she knew who had been on the estate during the 1950s and in this way access snowballed.⁷² In addition I met someone also doing some research on Lansbury, who lived nearby and knew several people there. He introduced me to some of his friends who were considerably younger, and could only remember Lansbury in the 1950s as children. However it proved illuminating to hear their comments, as in some instances the children were much more involved with the Festival and ceremonies at Lansbury than their parents had been. I also contacted one of the pension wardens on the estate, and she gave me the names of several residents.

I conducted only 13 interviews on Lansbury, because very few of the residents who moved on to Lansbury in the 1950s remained there in the 1990s. Many had died and many of the remainder had left and could not be contacted. However, I felt that this was a sufficient number, given the depth and length of the interviews, and since the aim was not to produce a statistically relevant

⁷¹Rosemary Dixon and Joseph Waters.

⁷²Thompson, P. (1990) *The Voice of the Past*. Op Cit. P35

sample number, but to consider in some depth the understandings of those residents with whom I spoke.⁷³

Other than one group interview in a pub with five younger respondents, all interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes. I felt this would foster a more relaxed atmosphere, and also provoke sentiments about the estate, connected with the people's attachment to their homes. Indeed the familiar surroundings did seem to encourage talk about the estate, and frequently I was shown around the flats and houses, and particular parts were picked out to illustrate themes or more general points about the estate. Moreover many of the respondents were housebound or unable to travel a distance and would have been unwilling to leave their homes to conduct the interview elsewhere.

All the interviews were taped in their entirety. None of the respondents objected to the presence of a tape recorder, indeed in most cases after seeking permission, the recorder went totally unnoticed and unremarked upon. I chose to use a tape recorder rather than to take notes or write up afterwards, because I wanted to analyse the entire interview, including pauses, laughter and tone of voice. At no time did I turn the tape recorder off, even when the interview ended and the conversations about family, animals and so forth began. Indeed some of these conversations proved interesting in relation to more personal and emotional feelings about the estate and personal histories. I did not want to make notes, because I felt that would have formalised the whole affair and since I was an active participant in the discussion, I did not feel it would be useful to be constantly looking at the pages of a notebook.

All the interviews were fully transcribed as soon as practical after the interviews, the transcriptions and scripts were reread and notes added where additional information from memory was required. The tapes were kept, so that referral to moments of sadness, anger and frustration and so on could be recounted during later interpretation and examination. None of the interviews were confidential. I asked the interviewee at the beginning of each interview whether they preferred to remain anonymous, but they were all keen to have their real names used. Most informants seemed very anxious to have their

⁷³Interviews: Mrs Snoddy, Zeena, Daisy Jarret, Mrs Donoghue, Alfred Snoddy, Carol Snoddy, Publican of African Queen and Carol Snoddy's mother and Tom, Mrs Price, Mrs Kent, Mrs Mackiowski, Mrs Canning. See appendix 3.

opinions and reactions attributed to themselves by name. The material was not considered sensitive, nor could criticisms jeopardise their positions in the estate.

Following the interview I made some notes about the general atmosphere of the discussion and the apparent willingness of the respondent to confide. My own presuppositions and attitudes were also noted and taken into account during interpretation of the interview, and analysis of the interview. I took note as far as I was able of body language, of refusal to broach certain subjects, and of which room the interview was conducted in. Thus enabling the context of the interview and our own unspoken attitudes to be taken into account during interpretation.

All the respondents were aware of my position as a researcher, and at which college. They were also briefed about the nature of the research and the general tenor and direction of the work. The whole thrust of the interviews was to try and establish how people understood their world, and perhaps equally importantly, how they thought they understood the world in the 1950s. While obviously possessing preconceptions as to what I thought they might have felt, and still feel, the interviews were orientated towards allowing them to tell me, having established that this was what I was interested in. As Jones states: "In short, the researchers are more likely to get good data, and know what data they are getting, if the interviewees are told at the outset what the research topic is, even if initially in relatively broad terms, and why the topic is of interest."⁷⁴ Many of the respondents had preconceived ideas of what I wanted to hear, often having previous experience of being interviewed by local historians about pre-war Poplar, and East End life in the 1920s. They disregarded my questions and spoke about whatever they felt I wanted to hear.

The women all seemed pleased to be asked to be interviewed; they stressed that they felt that it was time 'they had their say'. However, some obviously felt nervous particularly when they established that I was doing a Phd. I tried to reassure them and stress that what they had to say was important. Usually during the course of the interview these tensions seemed to lessen, perhaps when both participants realised that the other was not as intimidating as expected. However, it was obvious that a power relationship developed - initially with them deferring to me - and embarrassed by the 'unacademic' in which they said things. Often, during the duration of the

⁷⁴Jones, S. (1985) *Depth Interviewing*. Op Cit. P48

interview this power relationship altered, when it became apparent that I was listening to what they said with considerable interest, and at times with astonishment. At these times it may have been more apparent that I was seeking information, and was not critical nor attempting to intellectualise everything. However, there was no doubt that because I am a student and middle-class affected their interpretations of what the interview should be about - and of course affected my expectations and presuppositions.

It was evident that our respective ages also made a difference to the interview relationship. I treated the interviewees with perhaps greater courtesy than I might have if they had been my age. I was also aware that the interview was a strain on them, many became increasingly tired throughout the interview period; and in many cases I finished the interview before I would ideally have liked, because I was worried about tiring them. The majority of the women referred to my age, suggesting that I couldn't properly understand what they were speaking about because I was too young and naive, or because I had not lived through the War. The age gap thus altered the ways the women reacted to me, and I to them, and affected what was said and how it was said.

The majority of the residents I have interviewed have been women, and this again affected how we behaved towards each other and how the research alliance was formed.⁷⁵ Several women spoke about their husband and men in general, expecting me to understand their point of view. There were frequently jokes made about men, and several warned me off marriage. They also compared our respective positions; stating that they wished they could have gone to college, and not been stuck in the house, or doing what they considered to be menial jobs. Likewise I compared my position to theirs - in some cases with guilt about the opportunities I had which had been denied to them.⁷⁶ These apparently superficial exchanges indicate the sorts of ways in which our relationship were constructed, and how all those 'characteristics' of both of us, affected the material I was given.

⁷⁵See appendix 3 for discussions about each interview.

⁷⁶Hale, S. (1991) *Feminist Method, Process, and Self-Criticism: Interviewing Sudanese Women in Gluck and Patai.* (eds) (1991) *Women's Words.* Op Cit. Pps 121-136 discusses the problems and disagreements which occurred in what she felt should have been an empathetic, egalitarian, feminist research paradigm.

That I am white seemed to make a great difference to the women I spoke to. They all referred to racial issues, and most accepted and supported racism on the estate. Many expected me to agree with their views, and when I didn't entered into lengthy speeches trying to convince me of their point of view. All the women I spoke to were white; and seemed to assume that there could be no dissent between white people. If I disagreed the discussions became heated or I changed the subject, anxious to avoid antagonisms and upsetting the residents, even though at times I became quite angry.⁷⁷ One woman, Mrs Mackiowski, whose husband was Polish deplored the behaviour of the white community in the East End, and suggested that I couldn't comprehend because I was white. Her husband had been subjected to racism all his life, this had obviously affected her views (she stated that she was racist before she met him).

I also interviewed two architect-planners about the estate and what they were trying to do at Lansbury and at the LCC.⁷⁸ The dynamics of these interviews were quite different to the residents I interviewed. Walter Bor arranged to meet me in the Reform Club in Pall Mall, which I was rather over-awed by, and which I associated with my grandfather who used to take me there. This association was strengthened because both men were Jewish emigres. Walter Bor treated me as a student, asking me questions and pre-empting my questions. I viewed him with considerable respect, and was very grateful for his time. I visited Arthur Ling at his home in Lincoln; again I was very grateful to him and was impressed by his memory and continuing interest in planning and architecture. He had prepared a considerable amount of material for me, despite debilitating illness. Both Arthur Ling and Walter Bor were defensive about the Lansbury project, assuming that I was critical of their work. This defensiveness, I think, related to the work both men had undertaken in the 1960s involving high-rise system building, which has since attracted considerable criticism. Such defensiveness meant the interviews were circumspect and at times I felt they were misinterpreting my questions. The practical implementation and interpretation of these interviews was based on the principles outlined above.

I have briefly discussed some of the most self-evident characteristics which affected the interview situation. My point in illustrating some of these interactions is to demonstrate that the research alliances formed were related to a

⁷⁷These issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.

⁷⁸See appendix 1 for brief biographies.

whole variety of things, and the information I sought and was given, was profoundly affected by them; my interpretations of both interview material and textual material is affected by myself, and by the reader.

4d Researcher and Researched

Interpretation of interview material involved examination of what was said, how it was said, what was not said, and how people appeared (in terms of body language and vocal intonations) to feel about what they were discussing. It is important also to include analysis of the interview setting as a whole, and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, as my discussions above indicated. This relationship will affect the whole discussion, and the nature of this relationship and the interview setting is crucial in establishing not just what the residents said, but why they said it and the ways that they said it. As discussed earlier, there is no sense of trying to establish the truth, my intention is to see what the estate means to those who live there and how those meanings are constructed. "By failing to consider the effects of the interview situation on responses we circumvent the vital process of examining our own contribution to the generation of the data."⁷⁹ My gender, age, class and so on affected both how the residents related to me and me to them. As the Popular Memory Group state: "The practice of research actually conforms to (and may in practice deepen) social divisions which are also relations of power and of inequality."⁸⁰

Pile has analysed the 'research alliance' occurring in an interview situation.⁸¹ He "firstly analysed the power relations between the researcher and the researched, and secondly the ways in which the relations shed light on wider power relations operating in society as a whole."⁸² He sees a notion of a research alliance as crucial to any interpretive stance; it is crucial because it affects all the information given. As Briggs states: "Contexts are not simply situation givens, they are continually renegotiated in the course of their interaction."⁸³ This, as Pile has demonstrated, is a negotiated relationship with both participants working out how they might relate to each other. As Pile states, "all participants in an interpretive study are implicated in the 'research

⁷⁹Briggs, C. (1986) *Learning How to Ask*. Op Cit. P124

⁸⁰Popular Memory Group. (1982) *Popular Memories*. Op Cit. P218

⁸¹Pile, S. (1991) *Practising Interpretive Geography*. *Transactions of Institute of British Geographers*. Vol 16. Pps 458-469. P459

⁸²Pile, S. (1991) *Practising Interpretive Geography*. Op Cit. P459

⁸³Briggs, C. (1986) *Learning How to Ask*. Op Cit. P25.

alliance', but the structures of power between the interviewer and interviewed are complex and unstable."⁸⁴

I have stressed throughout this discussion that my interest lay in illuminating how people understood their estate, and that necessarily involved examining how the relationship between participants may have helped to construct and convey those understandings. Research should not be seen as a slightly biased work, affected by gender, ethnicity, age etc, but as profoundly created by individuals, with all the vagaries and biases and subjective interests and approaches that may apply. The same, of course, applies to interpretation of textual material, although textual analysis is frequently referred to without any mention of the author's role. For instance, as I discussed in the previous chapter, while cultural geographers have focused on the ways in which representations of landscapes constitute or help shape understandings about those landscapes, they have generally speaking failed to confront the representative, interpretive nature of their own accounts. Thus while situating understandings as the product of hegemonic (and to a lesser extent counter-hegemonic) representations, and criticizing totalizing accounts which seek to explain by resort to a single explanatory framework, the same critique is not often applied to their own versions.⁸⁵ Indeed much 'academic' work resorts to precisely the same ways of presenting accounts which implies, and is premised upon, notions of a 'detached' objective observer telling it like it is, even when, what s/he is telling is frequently related to the supposed transience and contextualised nature of all accounts. So the researcher and their work is not subjected to the same rigorous scrutiny as the things being researched, and not placed in context, with little emphasis upon the personal contextualised aspects of accounts, as Duncan has recently pointed out.⁸⁶

If the results of research are to have any coherence or validity, particularly under the rubric of cultural geography which is premised upon the existence of different, fluctuating meanings, then researchers must elaborate

⁸⁴Pile, S. (1991) Practising Interpretive Geography. Op Cit. P464.

⁸⁵For criticism of Harvey's totalising vision in Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Post-Modernity*. Op Cit see Deutsche, R. (1991) Boys Town. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 9. Pps 5-30 and Massey, D. (1991) Flexible Sexism. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 9. Pps 31-51.

⁸⁶Duncan, J. (1993) Landscapes of the Self/Landscapes of the Other(s). Op Cit.

what they think to be their contexts, political influences and so on. As Barnes and Duncan state:

Writing about worlds reveals as much about ourselves as it does about the worlds presented...When we write we do so from a necessarily local setting, there is no mountain top, the worlds we represent are inevitably stamped with our particular set of local interests, views, standards and so on.⁸⁷

However, most of the contributors to their book do not always explain their interests, views, standards and so on, their accounts are couched in authoritative, distanced, objective, style accounts. If writing and interpreting depends so much on the research subject, the researcher, the genre, the institution within which they work, their assessment of the audience and so on then surely it is necessary to acknowledge fully these things and not portray the work as the definitive, 'true' interpretation.⁸⁸

Although it is not possible to escape some degree of ethnocentrism, it may be possible for the researcher's own categories to be deconstructed in such a way that the control of knowledge is exposed and so challenged. This is a first step towards an alteration of the power relationship. It is much more than a question of being culturally sensitive or 'politically correct', of course; it requires a continual and radical undermining of the ground up which one has chosen to stand, including, at times, the questioning of one's own political stance.⁸⁹

Cosgrove and Domosh point out the lack of problematisation of the authors' positions inherent in some of the most important new cultural geography.

The Duncans regard landscapes as readings of texts on the part of dominant individuals or groups who inscribe those readings into their transformations of the natural world, and then naturalise such readings - writings through ideological hegemony. The Duncans, however, do not problematise their own reading and rewriting of the text in the creating of geography, believing that the ideological aspects of landscapes as texts can be unmasked.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Barnes and Duncan. (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. P3

⁸⁸Geertz, C. (1983) *Local Knowledge*. Op Cit and Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. (1986) (eds) *Writing Cultures*. University of California Press, California.

⁸⁹Duncan, N. and Sharp, J. (1993) *Confronting Representation(s)*. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 11. Pps 473-486.

⁹⁰Cosgrove, D. and Domosh, M. (1993) *Author and Authority in Duncan and Ley*. (1993) (eds) *Place/Culture/Representation*. Op Cit. Pps 25-38. P32.

Lack of acknowledgement of authorial input and import centres accounts around an objective/truth axiom which is what many authors are self-confessedly trying to move away from. So, implicit assumptions about authorial competence and distance opposes and contradicts the whole new cultural geography project. Despite awareness of the 'representativeness' of some accounts by some geographers, they do not talk at length about their authorial concerns. As Cosgrove and Domosh now acknowledge:

When we write our geographies, we are creating artefacts that impose meaning on the world. The moral claims implicit in our descriptions and explanations of landscapes and places are what have determined their choice as subject-matter, controlled the mode of study, produced the story we tell and structured the mode of its telling. Our stories add to a growing list of other stories, not listed in a logic of linearity to fit into a coherent body of knowledge, but as a series of cultural constructions, each representing a particular view of the world, to be consulted together, to help us make sense of ourselves and our relation to the landscapes and places we inhabit and think about. These stories are to be read not as approximations to a reality, but as tales of how we have understood the world; to be judged not according to a theory of correspondence, but in terms of their internal consistency, and their value as moral and political discourse.⁹¹

By self-consciously, and within an informed theoretical perspective, raising the question of authorial characteristics, the author ensures that their own readings and writings are problematised and contextualised.

The apparent neglect of authorial characteristics, assumptions of detached, neutral observers telling the (academic) audience how things are, is reinforced by the rhetoric and traditions of academic texts. As Paul Atkinson states:

Sociologists should surely be concerned with how they construct and convey their arguments: not only in relation to historical and theoretical texts, but also in terms of 'facts' and 'findings' of sociological research conveyed in monographs and research papers. For these are not merely matters of neutral report the conventions of text and rhetoric are among the ways in which reality are constructed.⁹²

Atkinson is principally interested in exposing the ways writing conventions and literary devices convey meaning, meanings which are generally not exposed by the author. Olsson has experimented with writing styles and strategies,

⁹¹Cosgrove and Domosh. (1993) *Author and Authority*. Op Cit.

⁹²Atkinson, P. (1990) *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality*. Routledge, London. P2.

highlighting the more usual conventions within which academics portray their interpretations, and emphasising the importance of writing in portraying interpretations as authoritative.⁹³ It is worth noting that some geographers⁹⁴ have discussed authorial import at length, and tried to show within their own work, the difference they make to it, particularly in the context of depth interviewing.⁹⁵

I would like to stress my complete input into this project, and suggest that, even where interpretation is presented as self-evident in the text, it is perhaps only self-evident to me at particular times in particular places, and I am following academic protocol and conventions, trying to persuade the reader of the plausability and relevance of what I write, in the light of outlined theoretical perspectives. Throughout my theoretical and methodological discussions I have stressed the ability of readers to create their own interpretations and have argued against prioritising the writers' conceptions and presuming readers will follow. I would like to extend this argument here, and posit that what I suggested about reading texts also applies to this text, and while I am responsible for the text, I am not prioritising my position by suggesting that the reader agrees with what I mean to say. As Keith suggests:

[A] less frequently acknowledged facet of textual production becomes apparent, the text is discursively constructed, by its reception as much as by its generation, by reading as well as by writing, and crucially for this paper by audience as well as by authorship. The audience is always a part of the writing, a listener always a constitutive element of the speech, the reader a necessary presupposition of the text.⁹⁶

⁹³Olsson, G. (1992) Lines of Power in Barnes and Duncan. (eds) (1992) *Writing Worlds*. Op Cit. Pps 86-96. See also Sparke, M. (1994) *Escaping the Herbarium: A Critique of Gunnar Olsson's Chasm of Thought and Action*. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 12, 2. Pps 207-220 and Olsson, G. (1994) *Jobs and the Case of the Herbarium*. *Environment and Planning D*. Vol 12, 2. Pps 221-225.

⁹⁴Smith S. (1988) *Constructing Local Knowledges* in Eyles, J. and Smith D. (eds) (1988) *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography*. Polity Press, London. Pps 17-35. Pile, S. (1993) *Human Agency and Human Geography Revisited: A Critique of 'New Models' of the Self*. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Vol 18. Pps 122-139. Rose G. (1993) *Feminism & Geography*. Op Cit.

⁹⁵Pile, S. (1990) *Depth Hermeneutics and Critical Human Geography*. Op Cit. Burgess, J., Harrison, C. and Limb, M. (1988) *Exploring environmental Values Through the Medium of Small Groups*. *Environment and Planning A*. Vol 20. Pps 309-326.

⁹⁶Keith, M. (1992) *Angry Writing*. Op Cit. P559.

Given my concerns about incorporating readers' understandings I would stress that the meaning of this text is mutually constituted, and thus while I fully acknowledge that my characteristics and interests have shaped the form, content and style of this research, they do not necessarily determine the meaning. The readers bring their own perspectives and characteristics to bear, and the meaning of this text is a result of both writer (me) and reader (you). Given this stance I do not want to overly dwell on my characteristics, and insert personalised anecdotes throughout my discussions in an overly authorial-deterministic way.

I therefore have four substantial reservations, about personalised accounts, which assert the authors intentions and personality throughout. Firstly, reciting such characteristics can tend towards introspective, narcissistic texts. Secondly inadequate, gestural references to deviations from a supposed norm merely reinforces the idea of the power of that norm. Thirdly that having 'dealt with' reflexivity in an introductory section, authors may get on with 'telling it like it is', unproblematically.⁹⁷ And fourthly and for me most importantly, constantly reiterating authorial inputs, strategies, investments and so on, prioritises the position of the author, and implies that the reader is either absent, vacuous or following the author's intentions throughout.⁹⁸ I suggest therefore, that I am present throughout this text, and, to some extent so is my supervisor; in the choice of material, theoretical preoccupations, literature read, writing styles and so on, but so also is the reader of the text, and as it stands the 'meaning' of the text is the responsibility of both of us.

5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed the methods I use to examine the representations of the various groups involved with Lansbury. I have argued that a thorough interrogation, or in-depth interpretation of texts is essential to comprehend, both the ways in which, often unacknowledged, implicit meanings are constructed, and to reveal some of the interrelations between the various discursive arenas. Interpretation of texts, therefore, involves problematising common-sense, appeals to objectivity, and so on, and enables underlying narratives and meanings to be exposed. This style of interpretation allows the implicit meanings of representations about places to be revealed and discussed, meanings the authors of the texts may not have intended. In chapter 2, I argued that much work about the meanings of built environments was concerned only

⁹⁷See Cosgrove and Domosh. (1993) *Author and Authority*. Op Cit.

⁹⁸See Atkinson, P. (1990) *The Ethnographic Imagination*. Op Cit.

with the most powerful meanings. I suggested that non-hegemonic groups, also constructed their own meanings, meanings which do not necessarily correspond to those of hegemonic groups. My discussion of oral history and interviewing, section 4 of this chapter has been oriented around trying to access and examine non-hegemonic meanings.

Chapter 4: Reconstruction and Planning

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first, comprises a brief outline of the ways planning and reconstruction were portrayed and understood at a national level during the 1940s. Principally this section focuses on parliamentary and planners' attitudes towards planning. The second section concentrates on the LCC architecture and planning departments and the CLP. I will also examine media portrayals of planning and reconstruction in London during the 1940s. The final section is concerned with the Lansbury estate; media and residents' reactions to post-war reconstruction and Lansbury are introduced. It is not my intention in any of these sections to outline fully or describe details of plans or legislation. There are many detailed planning studies, which provide detailed analysis of the contents of plans, eminent planners and planning legislation and so on.¹ The intention is to provide an overview of how planning and reconstruction were discussed during the 1940s, by various groups involved with the Lansbury estate and assess wider issues surrounding planning and reconstruction. The aim of this chapter is to provide a context to the production of representations concerned with Lansbury. The intention is to examine discourses relating to reconstruction and planning and to see ideas about Lansbury as partly contributing to, and partly derived from, these wider discourses.

1 Planning as Power

1a Planning as Panacea

The physical destruction caused by the Blitz impressed upon politicians the urgent need to rebuild and plan for the post-war period. As Cullingworth has noted:

Among the first arrivals at the desk of the Reconstruction Ministry were the plans for the post-war development of town and country and the form of the

¹General planning studies see Cherry, G. and Penny, L. (1986) *Holford: A Study in Architecture, Planning and Civil Design*. Mansell Publishing Ltd., London. Cherry, G. (1988) *Cities and Plans: The Shaping of Urban Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Edward Arnold, London. Hardy, D. (1991) *From New Towns to Green Politics: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning 1946-1990*. C and F N Spoon, London, and Hardy, D. (1991) *From Garden Cities to New Towns: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning 1899-1946*. C and F N Spoon, London. For studies of the LCC see Esher, L. (1981) *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England 1940-80*. Allen Lane, London. Young, K. and Garside, P. (1982) *Metropolitan London: Politics and Urban Change 1837-1981*. Edward Arnold, London, and Saint, A. (ed) (1989) *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965*. The Hambledon Press, London. And for a detailed description of Lansbury see Cox, A. (1989) *The Lansbury Estate, Poplar*. Op Cit and Editorial. (1951) *Lansbury: A Principle Put into Practice*. Op Cit.

central authority which should apply to them. To those living in the blitzed cities of England during 1941, the relevance of the subject was obvious, and a warm public welcome was assured for a bold and comprehensive scheme which would strike the imagination, and offer to those contemplating the ruins of their homes some assurance that the government certainly meant business in the severely practical task of rebuilding the damaged cities, whatever its plans might be in more speculative fields.²

What was more open to dispute than the mere assertion that Britain would need new developments, was how best to undertake and implement reconstruction. Early on in the War, there does seem to have been general agreement, at least among politicians and planners, that comprehensive town planning was the best and most productive method of reconstruction:

Now if you have appreciated the size of the problem, you will see that something very important has to be done. The new housing must be planned. Everybody agrees about that, Britain is a small island, large parts of it have already been spoiled by unplanned building and we cannot afford to spoil any more of our country. So there must be planning.³

Darling's insistence that there was no option except planning, and that 'everyone' agreed on this was a powerful way of justifying and legitimating planning, particularly since uncontrolled ribbon development in the inter-war period was increasingly regarded as disastrous.⁴ Politicians saw, what they felt was, overwhelming public interest in planning and reconstruction, as a positive attribute; one which directed attention away from the War, encouraged talk of peace-time and served to foster ideas about a utopian post-war world. Lord Reith, the ebullient minister for the Ministry of Works and Building during 1940 and 1941, continually pressed his colleagues to initiate bold schemes in preparation for peace-time, and saw reconstruction and planning as intimately related to the War. "I am sure that the idea of a planned and ordered reconstruction is an incentive to, and encouragement of the War effort, and in fact a high and worthy war purpose itself."⁵ Cherry notes how war aims, and the War itself came to be regarded, by some politicians at least, as an opportunity to assert the need for change, and thereby confirm the morality and progressive consequences of Britain's War:

²Cullingworth, J. (1975) *Reconstruction and Land use Planning, 1939-47*. Vol 1 of *Environmental Planning 1939-69*. HMSO, London. P14.

³HLG 108/11 March 1945. *Facts First*. BBC Radio, narrated by George Darling of the BBC.

⁴Swenarton, M. (1988) *Homes Fit For Heroes*. Op Cit. Burnett, J. (1980) *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970*. David Charles, London.

⁵CAB 117/209 1942. *Government Policy and Public Opinion*. Lord Reith. Committee on Reconstruction Problems, 1942.

War damage gave the opportunity to rebuild, and a new social psychology in wartime Britain provided the determination. There was an overwhelming drive to win the war. Britain was not the aggressor and the country could think of itself once more as a nation with a mission. Britain stood for political ideals that must prevail if western civilization were not to break down.⁶

Therefore, appeals to support town planning lay not just in reference to the need for rebuilding, but were frequently associated with supposed shared conceptions about what Britain as a nation was supposed to represent and stand for. "Public attention is now directed on prospects of reconstruction not just because of opportunities in restoration of damaged property, but in hope of a fresh start in a new spirit of cooperation and with the high objective of a better Britain."⁷ Viscount Samuel repeatedly argued for a clarification of post-war policy, and an exposition of the shape and nature of that post-war world. "There is a need for planning in advance because when War ends, towns are destroyed and hundreds of thousands of families will be coming back...If, beforehand, no plans are made for meeting that situation then all the evils which have been seen in this country will be repeated, and perhaps over-emphasised."⁸ There was some reluctance during the War to clarify or even discuss post-war Britain. Churchill was criticised, particularly by Labour politicians, for refusing to clarify war aims and, for refusing to engage in discussions concerning the post-war period. Churchill preferred, he argued, to focus on winning the War, after which discussions about the post-war world could begin. "I don't think anyone has the opinion that we are fighting this War merely to maintain the status quo, we are among other things fighting it in order to survive, then we shall be in a good position to take a further view of what we shall do with the victory when it is won."⁹ Churchill, however, could neither prevent, nor limit talk about the future, and, during the War, planners' status and responsibilities were dramatically increased through legislation and through most politicians' attention to reconstruction matters.¹⁰ As the following note on publicity and propaganda in 1942 makes clear:

⁶Cherry, G. (1988) *Cities and Plans*. Op Cit. P113.

⁷CAB 117/115 31 December 1940. *Organisation for Evolving Methods and Machinery for Planning*. Memo by Minister of Works and Building. War Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction Problems.

⁸CAB 117/115 26 February 1941. *Concerning Viscount Samuel's Speech in the House of Lords on 31 December 1940*. Memo by Minister Works and Building.

⁹INF 1/177 14 April 1941. *Broadcasting Problems of Peace Aims and Reconstruction*. Nicholson, H. Memo.

¹⁰See appendix 2 for details of legislation.

The volume of correspondence about housing is already considerable...references from the press to many of the subjects with which the committee is concerned show that public interest in these questions is increased. The perpetuation of the national unity achieved in this country during the War requires that public opinion should be guided from the outset as far as is possible and expedient, by knowledge of the governments' plans and intentions.¹¹

Some politicians sought to equate nation and national identity and the purpose of the War with visions about the future of Britain. Through such rhetoric and appeals to ideas about the nation, the purpose of the War and the future, planning was portrayed as fundamentally social. Planning, it was argued could create the society which people wanted, and were fighting for, and planning and reconstruction were represented as capable of changing society, of building the kind of society, as well as the kind of environments, which were different to anything that had gone before. As Esher states:

This [planning and reconstruction] was the bedrock on which our new society would be built...It would be tame, unexciting, even threadbare, but the wartime generation could accept that. And it would be achieved by Planning - in the forties always awarded a capital letter.¹²

And as Hardy notes:

In many ways it [planning] could serve as the physical arm of both policy initiatives, economic and social. It could provide the new infra-structure that was required if Britain was to modernize and to compete effectively with other economies, and filled with a social promise, a means to secure environmental improvements for a population long condemned to substandard living and working conditions. A more egalitarian Britain needed planning.¹³

Discussions about planning during the War created impressions of a post-war world in which reconstruction would facilitate social changes, and those impressions were reinforced by the volume and authority with which they were stated. Post-war planning has frequently been portrayed as arising from a political consensus about the

¹¹CAB 87/1 (1941) **Note on Publicity and Propagnada**. War Cabinet Reconstruction Problems Committee. PRO CAB 87/2 War Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction Problems, including Minutes and Memos. 31.3.42 to 3.12.42. discusses anxieties about showing the public a lack of coordination between departments.

¹²Esher, L. (1981). **A Broken Wave**. Op Cit. P30

¹³Hardy, D. (1991) **From New Towns to Green Politics**. Op Cit. P5.

best ways to reconstruct Britain after the second world war.¹⁴ Notions about the levels of consensual agreements have been questioned,¹⁵ and suggestions made that the notion of 'consensus' subsumed a variety of positions and attitudes about the required levels of, and type of town planning necessary for reconstruction. As I noted earlier, Churchill was antipathetic and sometimes hostile towards discussions about reconstruction, perhaps illustrating how a particular discursive arena is formed from a variety of differing and oppositional positions. Despite such discord, the image of inter-party agreement about the best way and necessity of planning was maintained, and widely articulated, in a powerful and authoritative manner.

The lack of articulation about disagreements and the desire to maintain a united front during the War, meant that planning was portrayed as essentially progressive and moral, and the position of planners was portrayed as absolute, unchallengeable and indisputable; politicians were merely reiterating 'fact', when they alluded to the power of planners to effect changes. The change in status and power was reflected in, and furthered by, the increasing professionalisation of planning and planners throughout the first half of the century and particularly during the War.¹⁶ To a coalition government striving for inter-party consensus, and anxious to provide politically uncontentious, well supported statements about the post-war world, town planning was a relatively unanimous issue. Therefore town planning issues and 'information' were given widespread public airings. The idea of planning as post-war social panacea prevailed and was frequently reiterated in the media, as well as in political forums. As the Ministry of Information film 'A Picture of Britain' argued:

What lies ahead...the people of Britain are working hard in the determination to stand again on their own feet, dependent on no other nation. This is deeply engrained in their national character, and despite the uncertainties that lie ahead, the people of Britain are planning hard for the future.¹⁷

The link in this film between 'national character' and planning, seems to aim to persuade viewers that planning could foster an unreflexively positioned, essential character, and facilitate the continuance of those characteristics. In any case the equation of national identity and planning poses an unproblematic, unquestioning

¹⁴See Cullingworth, J. (1975) **Reconstruction and Land Use Planning 1939-47**. Op Cit. and Cherry, G. (1988) **Cities and Plans**. Op Cit.

¹⁵Hardy, D. (1988) **From Garden Cities to New Towns**. Op Cit.

¹⁶Ward, S. (1994) **Planning and Urban Change**. Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd., London.

¹⁷INF 6/35 (1951) **A Picture of Britain**. Crown Film Unit for the Ministry of Information, for distribution in the United States of America.

response to the necessity and demand for planning and reconstruction. The overwhelming tone and stance of publicity about planning in the post-war was that it was undoubtedly right; to question it would be to question Britain's civility, morality, war-time experiences and national character, clearly in the context of War, an improbable and unpopular stance.¹⁸ Planners too saw in the physical destruction the seeds of new beginnings. Williams-Ellis, an eminent town planner said:

As I inspected the ruins in the cold light of day, I had to regard the destruction, not with the excitement of the eyewitness, the pangs of the sufferer or the indignation of the citizen but with the detachment of a professional town planner.¹⁹

He stressed his supposed detachment from the scene he viewed, and produced a portrayal of planners as objective, apolitical and even super-human. Their position therefore was unchallengeable, for they had no discernible, articulated position, and therefore could not have charges of bias levelled against them. This 'professionalism' accorded a great deal of power to planners and to planning, and planning was portrayed as the solution to social ills. As Williams-Ellis goes on to suggest:

[A]nd when I looked on the ruins in that light it struck me that in nearly every British town much of the tissue destroyed was of a morbid growth that we ought to have cut away...quite apart from the drastic wholesale slum-clearance effected by enemy bombs, some have, from town planners point of view fallen so providentially as to have solved problems that might else have continued to hold up really necessary improvements for generations.²⁰

Williams-Ellis' use of an organic metaphor here, in which slums are portrayed as morbid growths afflicting the organism of the city, both naturalises cities and enhances the power of planners; since planners, like doctors could 'cure' the city - scientifically and precisely, cutting away illness and leaving the organism healthy and 'normal'. These surgical and organic metaphors are repeatedly employed in portrayals about cities and plans.

If anything, the progress of the War lent ideas about the power of planning and planners more credence. The highly centralised and planned organisation of almost all social and economic facets of daily life during the War made people not just used to hearing about planning, but provided indications of its worth. "War had demonstrated

¹⁸Nuttgens, P. (1989) *The Home Front*. BBC Books, London.

¹⁹HLG/86/13 1941 *New Towns for Old*. Copy of a published article by Clough Williams-Ellis.

²⁰HLG/86/13 Williams Ellis. (1941) *New Towns for Old*. Op Cit.

that efficiency, rationality and progress were achieved by tight control and planning."²¹ If any more evidence was required to prove indisputably that planning was a panacea, evidence from abroad apparently supplied it. "During the late 1930s and early 1940s the interconnections between planning and the structure of government were increasingly recognized. The achievements of planning in the highly centralized states of Russia, Germany, and Italy had demonstrated such links very clearly."²² By the end of the War therefore it was felt that the war-time populace were used to planning and to government intervention into their lives, and used to seeing planning as a social panacea. Even by 1941 Williams-Ellis felt confident enough to assert that: "It would have been a brave and foolish politician who would have used the election platform to deny the case of planning."²³

Swenarton has argued that post-First World War housing developments partly arose from a desire to prevent socialist revolution or at least insurgence.²⁴ Fear of social and political unrest also motivated politicians during the Second World War. Some politicians felt that the population should be given a placebo, designed to soothe and calm antagonistic feelings towards the government.

Planning systems and plans must be ready, we know what unpreparedness for war has meant. Some of us feel that unpreparedness for peace may be far more serious. We cannot count on the almost instinctive heroic energy which war evokes, the readiness of sacrifice, the subordination of personal prejudices and possessions, the community of nation and individual in one mind and one heart for one single obvious purpose - there will be little of that in the common ways of peace. Not only must local planning authorities have their powers strengthened now and proceed with provisional plans, but central machinery and powers must be correspondingly established, strengthened, settled and applied to the task.²⁵

Reith, here arguing for a central planning authority, invoked ideas about national sentiment and behaviour and suggested that the supposed national unity achieved during the War would be destroyed in peace-time, and argued effective plans and policies had to be developed to prevent this disruption. Reith's argument essentially rests on a perceived threat to the status quo, to the middle-classes, as the expectant

²¹Young and Garside. (1982) **Metropolitan London**. Op Cit. P229.

²²Young and Garside. (1982) **Metropolitan London**. Op Cit. P229.

²³HLG/86/13 1941 **New Towns for Old**. Op Cit.

²⁴Swenarton, M. (1988) **Homes Fit for Heroes**. Op Cit.

²⁵CAB 127/169 1942 **Physical Planning 1942 - March to October**. Lord Reith, J. speaking on the Interim Report of the Uthwatt Committee in reply to the Lord Bishop of Winchester's Motion, 17 July 1941.

working-classes shed their wartime support for the middle-classes, and challenged their authority.

Discussions about reconstruction and town planning were intended to show that the Government was willing to embrace social change, to prove that the War was worth fighting for. Emphasis on order and rationality provided a perfect justification for planners to claim a special social role in terms of preventing social unrest. "The end of the War will release a flood of demand and effort for physical reconstruction for the rebuilding of battered cities and for developments of all kinds - town and country - which unless adequate channels and controls are fixed and set in advance, will overflow into confusion and all manner of ill."²⁶ As a response to fears of unrest, politicians ensured that people were told about the more egalitarian world which awaited them. As Reades suggested: "The fact is that the wartime coalition government deliberately fostered public discussion, especially within the armed forces, of the reforms which would become possible once the War was won."²⁷ During the War, troops were informed via films and lectures of what efforts the Government was making on their behalf. Town planning was an issue which could ensure the support of the public and prevent or lessen the likelihood of resentment and anger towards the government. Fife-Clark, of the Ministry of Health, stressed the need for positive images about reconstruction to be widely conveyed. "What sort of customers the ex-service men and women are going to be will depend partly on how quickly accommodation can be provided, but even more perhaps what sort of impressions, or illusions they bring back from the wars."²⁸ Publicity about town planning and plans was at a premium. As Harold Nicholson stated, "the propaganda value of such discussions [about reconstruction] would be great both at home and abroad."²⁹ Desires to offer the population an incentive to fight and a reason to support the government, meant town planning was accorded a high profile, in terms of publicity and in terms of support for planners.

Long term questions of political and social reform could not be neglected since the measures ultimately applied would be largely conditioned by what was done in the first year or two for the peace. Moreover, the war effort

²⁶CAB127/169 (1942) **Physical Planning 1942 - March to October.** Lord Reith, J. Op Cit.

²⁷Reades, E. (1987) **British Town and Country Planning.** Open University Press, Milton Keynes. P47.

²⁸HLG108/11 23 February 1945 **Publicity about Housing.** Fife-Clark, Public Relations Officer, Ministry of Health to Lieutenant Col K A Wags, Ministry of Works.

²⁹INF 1/177 14 April 1941 **Broadcasting Problems of Peace Aims and Reconstruction.** Nicholson, H. Memo

itself would be stimulated if a clear-cut series of long-term aims could be presented to the nation, indicating not only what we were fighting against, but also what we were fighting for.³⁰

The formulation of plans would supposedly show the population that the government was predisposed to improve ordinary peoples' lives and to indicate physically and symbolically that the War had indeed been worth fighting. Portrayals of bombing as creative destruction led the damage to be viewed not as a defeat or loss, but as a victory. By focusing on the future and the positive effects of bombing, war-time morale was kept up and attention focused onto the improved future, rather than blitzed surroundings and war-time shortages.

Politicians' beliefs that lack of planning or a failure to appear to be serious about town-planning, would invoke dissatisfaction was partly rooted in the apparently extensive and widespread public interest in planning issues, and demands for statements about the direction of planning during the War. Politicians were aware of, and generally encouraged, public interest in reconstruction issues and planning. In 1941 a memo from the War Cabinet Reconstruction Problems Committee noted that:

As the war progresses public interest in all reconstruction problems may be expected to increase. The volume of correspondence about housing is already considerable...references from the Press to many of the subjects with which the committee is concerned show that public interest in these questions is increased.³¹

Politicians, in alliance with planners, responded to these reports of public interest and thereby furthered public interest in planning and reconstruction issues.³² The levels of interest in planning seems to have surprised some politicians and planners. Even Reith and Williams-Ellis seem to have been taken unaware by public interest in, and knowledge about planning issues.

Patrick Abercrombie is coming to stay with us in a fortnights time, so I shall hope to hear more of the general planning situation. The interest in this matter even among the troops is, as I have found to my considerable surprise when lecturing, both vivid and intelligent³³

³⁰Cullingworth, J. (1975) *Reconstruction and Land Use Planning 1939-1947*. Op Cit. P2.

³¹CAB 87/1 27 April 1941 *Note on Publicity and Reconstruction*. Memo from War Cabinet Reconstruction Problems Committee for Minister without Portfolio.

³²For instance Holford was recruited by Reith to research post-war planning issues. See Cherry and Penny. (1986) *Holford*. Op Cit.

³³HLG/86/13 20 April 1941 *Letter to Reith from Williams-Ellis*.

What you tell me about the troops is most encouraging. The interest which is being shown in reconstruction everywhere is extraordinary.³⁴

Attlee also bore witness and tried to explain public interest in planning. He said, "the war itself would create an atmosphere in which there would be general acceptance of the principle of planning, and after the war there would be much less hostility than would have been found before the war to proposals for national control on the lines of those discussed in the Barlow Report."³⁵ These kinds of understandings about public awareness of, and interest in, planning issues and reconstruction, were partly responsible for war-time and post-war legislation which furthered the power of planners and laid the basis for reconstruction.³⁶

1b Planning in the 1940s

Legislation passed during and just after the War enabled planners to implement the kind of changes they had envisaged. As Addison has noted:

In the course of the 1940s the planners obtained virtually all the powers they asked for. The wartime coalition gave rise to the new Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1943 and the location of industry Act of 1945. Lewis Silkin, Labour's Minister of Town and Country planning, carried through the New Towns Act of 1946 and the most sweeping measure of all the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. The planners had won a series of famous victories.³⁷

The authority bestowed upon planners and planning by legislation, again affected conceptions of 'planning'. The legislation did not just practically enable the planners to reconstruct; it also confirmed the import of planning work. Planners had acquired new powerful positions in post-war Britain, and they reacted to the power vested in them by public and parliament. Pressure on politicians from planners and the resultant support was, at least partly responsible for the setting up of a central planning authority in 1943, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. The Uthwatt Report had recommended the establishment of a central planning authority and Reith had campaigned hard for it during 1940 to 1941. Planners too pressed government into setting up the central planning authority. Lutyens, as President of the Royal Academy of Arts, wrote to the Prime Minister.

³⁴HLG86/13 28 April 1941 Letter to Williams-Ellis from Reith.

³⁵CAB 117/115 December 1940. Attlee speaking at the War Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction of Town and Country. First Meeting.

³⁶See appendix 3.

³⁷Addison, P. (1985) Now the War is Over. Op Cit. P71.

It would in our opinion be a national disaster of far-reaching consequence to repeat the short-sighted policy of the state after the Great Fire in the seventeenth century. We also hear of historic cities which appear to be content to leave replanning to their Borough Engineers.

...It seems to us essential that the planning ministry set up by the Government should not only have overriding authority in regard to all civic schemes but take the imaginative view, proceed on a carefully designed long term policy, and see that nothing is there now that will defeat or delay the eventual realisation of the basic plans.³⁸

Lutyens's emphasis on the once-in-a-life-time opportunity, which short-sighted politicians could miss, aimed to persuade politicians of the national importance of his proposals. He also emphasised how historic cities had been left to the borough engineer, implying that the identity of the nation was being jeopardised, because of short-sighted political attitudes.

The link which had repeatedly been made between social and physical reconstruction meant that planners saw themselves, and were seen, as responsible for the nation's future. Theirs was not merely piecemeal, reactive planning but the instigation of new cities and new societies. The film 'A Plan to Work On' produced in 1947, and shown to specialist and professional audiences during 1947-8, was supposed to emphasise the necessity of wide-scale and far reaching plans. "May I remind you gentlemen that looking after a town's development is like bringing up a child. You must know it intimately, and be able to anticipate every stage of its growth, you make mistakes, but if you're a good parent it will work out alright."³⁹ This rather patronising and paternalistic stance seems rather typical of the way planners saw themselves and were seen: authoritative, distant but fond, and above all responsible for social and urban development and progress. I do not mean to suggest that 'everybody' regarded planners in heroic terms, or even believed what planners and sympathetic politicians claimed. However, the overriding impression given or intended, was of planners as the creators of new social practices in the post-war world.

Walter Bor, one of the LCC planners responsible for the Stepney-Poplar reconstruction area, interpreted the post-war planning atmosphere as follows:

- J. There was such confidence in planning though wasn't there after the War? The War had been planned for and so could the peace.

³⁸CAB 123/42 26 February 1943 Letter from Edwin Lutyens. President of Royal Academy of Arts to the Prime Minister. Reconstruction of Town and Country Correspondence.

³⁹INF 6/547 A Plan to Work On. 1947-8. Basic Films for the Ministry of Information.

- Bor Oh what confidence! And when I think back on it it was so simplistic. I'm almost ashamed to think how very, very simplistic we were, and deterministic, environmentally deterministic. Life is so much more complex. The answers are so much more varied. There is no one answer. And there shouldn't be one answer. One should always have alternatives. ...
- J But that was the general feeling then?
- Bor Oh yes, definitely.
- J That people felt that the environment did determine?
- Bor Very much, it was the sort of Labour party view, all you have to do is give them a good environment and everything will be fine.⁴⁰

Bor's (re)interpretation of planning in the 1940s reveals just how planners felt they had somehow uncovered a 'key', a definitive environmental solution to what were posed as urban social problems.

- J Do you think that enthusiasm was partly a result of you planning during and just after the War, you felt that you were creating a better environment for after the War?
- Bor Yeah, the whole post-war euphoria, well there was a lot of damage, people had suffered a great deal, there was a lot of deprivation and so on. And here was a chance to rebuild the country and rebuild London.⁴¹

The supposed worth and power of planners was repeatedly relayed to the public via the media, politicians' speeches and Ministry of Information films. Holford was involved with war-time government research about reconstruction during the War and was also a renowned planner, his ideas were therefore closely associated with war-time hegemonic ideas about planning and were considered authoritative on planning and reconstruction matters. The following excerpt by Holford was part of a programme about reconstruction in the East End, broadcast on BBC radio in 1951.

Town planners have a good deal in common with novelists. Their designs are drawn in front of a vast background, and both deal ultimately with the lives of the individual and of society. The novelist, especially, can hover hawk like, over a great stretch of territory, until the mind of his reader is permeated by the characteristic in which his story is set. He can then swoop down upon his human prey, who thus becomes the type and symbol of all the events and emotions that he is out to describe. This Olympian power is also given in some measure to the designer of towns.⁴²

The attribution here of 'Olympian' powers is typical. Planners saw themselves as having almost unlimited social and economic powers, and the public were repeatedly

⁴⁰Interview with Walter Bor, 1992

⁴¹Interview with Walter Bor, 1992

⁴²THHL 331.3 Holford, W. (1951) *The Stepney/Poplar Reconstruction Scheme*. Sunday 4 March 1951. Transcript of The Third Programme, BBC.

informed of these powers. Typical also, is the way the planner is presented as able to swoop down precisely from a great, all-seeing, all-surveying height. Planners were therefore portrayed as able to see more and able to separate themselves from their lives, unlike more 'ordinary people'.⁴³

In this section I have briefly tried to examine the position of planning and planners during the War and post-war years. Planners achieved new status during the War, both in terms of the way they saw themselves and the power accorded to them. By the end of the War planners believed they were the agents of a new society. Their status and power had increased immeasurably as a result of the War, and hence their ideas about reconstruction, national identity and the future are clearly central to the Lansbury development, in terms of context and in terms of how hegemonic reconstruction discourses relate to non-hegemonic discourses. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the LCC's conceptions about reconstruction and their plans for Lansbury in the post-war period.

2 Reconstruction and Planning in London

My intention, is not to produce a definitive account of either the planning and architecture department of the LCC, nor a detailed description of of the Lansbury estate. Rather to provide a context, both to see how ideas about Lansbury were implicated within, and affected by, broad reconstruction discourses, and to discuss London's particular planning discourses, discourses which differed in some important respects to both national and more local reconstruction discourses.

2a Rebuilding London

Other cities had suffered physical destruction in the War, but it was damage in London which received the most political and media attention.⁴⁴ London possessed symbolic importance which ensured publicity about destruction was widespread, and politicians and planners stressed the urgent need to rebuild London, as a symbol of reconstruction and regeneration for the rest of the country. As Samuel suggested in 1941:

⁴³Wilson, E. (1990) *The Sphinx in the City*. Op Cit. Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography*. Op Cit. These authors, among others, have pointed out the masculinist and class-bound positions implied by viewing and surveilling from a supposed disembodied, distanced and authoritative position.

⁴⁴See Tiratsoo, N. (1990) *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry, 1945-60*. Routledge, London and Hasegawa, J. (1992) *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre*. Open University Press, Philadelphia.

I have no doubt that the Ministry of planning, the LCC, the City Corporation and the other authorities, will take steps to see that they are carried into effect so as to make London what it ought to be - a city really worthy of this nation, of the commonwealth as a whole, and of the position of moral leadership which the country is now taking in the world.⁴⁵

The fate of London, according to Samuel, was tied in with the future fate of the nation, and if plans for London's reconstruction were made, this would symbolise as well as foster the desired international position of the country in the post-war period. As early as 1941, proposals were already being made in the War Cabinet Office to rebuild London.

Our cities have been bombed and after the War we can build up again the squalid inconvenient slums on the old plan, or we can plan afresh and build convenient and beautiful cities as Wren wished to plan London afresh after the fire.⁴⁶

The destruction was portrayed as an opportunity to create the London which politicians felt was more suitable to London's preeminent position both in Britain and internationally. It was argued that the bombs had done a service to Britain, they had removed the worst parts of London, and provided an opportunity to produce something better.

It is an ill wind that blows no good, and Hitler with his bombing has given us a wonderful chance to get rid of slums and overcrowding everywhere, and to get ready to act when the moment arises...there is no question about it, that right up to the beginning of the war conditions in many of our large towns and cities were almost intolerable. You had this awful squalor, poverty, ill health, no sanitation, overcrowding, everything to make life miserable, no amenities of any sort. All that has got to be reversed...the sooner they get on with their planning, the sooner the policy is settled, the sooner can we get off the mark when victory comes and provide for the housing of people who so gallantly defended this country.⁴⁷

The Earl of Cork and Offrey's rather exaggerated, dramatic portrayals of slum conditions related to widespread notions about particular areas of London. These portrayals helped to justify reconstruction plans, particularly in the context of rewarding war-time efforts. Emphasising slums as chaotic, confused, dangerous, and anarchic is

⁴⁵CAB 117/115 26 February 1941 Transcript of Viscount Samuel's speech during House of Lords Debate on Second Reading of Ministry Works and Planning Bill, 31 December 1940.

⁴⁶CAB87/1 27 February 1941 Anderson, A. Reconstruction Problems- Communications and Circular War Cabinet Reconstruction Problems Committee.

⁴⁷CAB 117/115 25 February 1941 Earl Cork and Offrey. Speech made in House of Lords.

a recurrent theme in many portrayals of slum life.⁴⁸ Driver has pointed out that fear of chaos, disorder and disease during the nineteenth century meant the attempted creation of ordered, rationalised spaces, where control and surveillance by middle-classes could be attempted.⁴⁹ Similar attitudes also prevailed during and after the War, where plans and discussions of the shape of post-war Britain focused on the spacious, ordered, controlled and regulated spaces which would be instigated. The order and rationality of planning was frequently favorably contrasted with the anarchy and unrest which might arise without planning, again reiterating the danger of disorder, and the presumed social stability which was associated with planning.

There was considerable publicity during the War and post-war period about how London would be replanned. The publicity frequently relied on images about future national greatness, of reward for war-time efforts, and of the historical importance of implementing plans, as I discussed in the previous section.

We must concentrate upon the opportunity that is before London, as before the world, to create an environment that is worthy of our sacrifices. We have suffered bombardment; nearly one-half of our population of all ages has been scattered; our young men and women are in war work; our industrial and working life has been upset; we grope about in darkness where the cheerful lights of the city were wont to gleam; we have willingly resigned much of our personal freedom; we eat according to a Wooltonian formula, but we are ready and alive to our opportunity...here is the chance to show London on a grand scale what her reconstruction really means.⁵⁰

Rebuilding and planning was portrayed as for the sole benefit of 'ordinary' Londoners, who deserved it, after the dark days of the war. This contrast between light and dark corresponds to the comparisons made between past and future, and between unplanned and planned London. The new London would be light, modern, planned, while the old London was portrayed as dark, dangerous, polluted and confused.

⁴⁸Fried, A. and Elman, R. (1969) **Charles Booth's London: A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century, Drawn from His 'Life and Labour of the People in London'**. Hutchinson, London. Hollingshead, J. (1986) **Ragged London in 1861**. Everyman Library, London. Mearns, A. (1970) (1st published 1883) **The Bitter Cry of Outcast London**. Leicester University Press, New York. Fishman, W. (1988) **East End 1888**. Duckworth, London.

⁴⁹Driver, F. (1988) **Moral Geographies: Social Science and the Urban Environment in Mid-Nineteenth Century England**. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Vol 13. Pps 275-287.

⁵⁰Forshaw and Abercrombie. (1943) **County of London Plan**. Op Cit. P19.

Continual emphasis on the worst aspects of pre-war London, made the future London seem very different, above all more attractive, as Abercrombie and Forshaw indicate in their invocation that reconstruction was akin to nature and to Wren.

The opportunity is great, and is equalled by the responsibility. Whoever rebuilds London will be in competition with man's work in the past, with Wren and the builders of the 18th and early 19th century; and with Nature's work in the eternal river and sky.⁵¹

In the film 'Proud City' London's supposed great past is recalled and provided a comparison with the present for how London would look, and by association how 'great' Britain would be again.⁵²

Just as Wren planned a new city after the Great Fire, so the LCC means to create out of the ruins of war a London that is worthy of her history. Without waiting until the end of hostilities some of the great authorities on town planning worked out a scheme to rebuild the untidy mixture of the ugly and the beautiful that was London before the war.⁵³

The LCC planners were equated with Wren, their new, planned London would rival Wren's proposals and they could, and would, implement their plans, unlike Wren's plans which had not been adopted.⁵⁴ The LCC thereby attached great importance to not missing such great historical opportunities twice; at a supposedly comparative moment of destruction and opportunity they would get it right. By continually referring to Wren and St Paul's, the replanning of London was placed in historical context, as natural, progressive and associated with an important national symbol, particularly significant during the War as numerous representations of St Pauls standing amidst the blaze indicate. The illustration 4.1, is taken from a book concerned with reconstruction, written in 1943 by Gibbon, and typifies the continual linkage of reconstruction with Wren and with a crucial war-time national and historical symbol.⁵⁵ "Just as we condemn now the failure of the citizens of London after the Great Fire to adopt the great planning schemes proposed by Sir Christopher Wren so, we in our turn, will be condemned by posterity for having failed to seize a great occasion, and we, especially in parliament, will be blamed for those missed opportunities."⁵⁶ The suggestion is that

⁵¹Forshaw and Abercrombie. (1943) *County of London Plan*. Op Cit. P13.

⁵²This film included images of St Pauls standing in the midst of surrounding fire.

⁵³INF 6/658 (1945) *Synopsis of Proud City*. Op Cit.

⁵⁴*Signs of the City*. (1992) Omnibus Programme for the BBC, January 1992.

⁵⁵Gibbon, G. (1943) *Reconstruction and Town and Country Planning*. The Architecture and Building News, London.

⁵⁶CAB 117/115 31 Deember 1940. Memo by Minster of Works and Building.

Illustration 4.1: St Pauls: Symbol for Reconstruction



From Gibbon, G. (1943) **Reconstruction and Town Planning**. Architecture and Building News, London. P4.

it would be unpatriotic or derogatory towards those who fought in the War not to support and wish for a newly planned London. As Latham indicates in the foreword to the CLP: "If we miss this chance to rebuild London, we shall have missed out one of the the great moments of history, we shall have shown ourselves unworthy of our victory."⁵⁷

2b The LCC and the CLP

In the battle to rebuild London, the LCC were obviously at the fore. They saw themselves, and were seen as, leaders in the field of public housing and planning. "The planners of the LCC and their architectural collaborators have much to teach us."⁵⁸ The appointment of Abercrombie by Reith, added impetus and status to the LCC's image as the most forward thinking, radical planning department in the country, complementary to the symbolic importance attached to the rebuilding of London. In keeping with national politicians' and planners' notions about reconstruction, the LCC planners relished the opportunities and challenges presented to them and saw their task as one of great national and historical importance:

The council is faced with the tremendous task of undertaking, both by its own direct activities and by its guidance of the activities of other developers, the regeneration of the numerous areas of extensive war damage which have resulted from enemy action against the Metropolis. Above all the process of physical redevelopment will not wait upon a leisurely consideration of the great issues involved...It is therefore vital that a planning treatment should be applied as soon as may be to each of the major areas of war devastation, directed to the resuscitation of war-stricken communities in vastly improved physical and social environments...The task on which the Council is now invited to enter is unprecedented in its scope, in its difficulty, and above all, in the greatness of the opportunity which it presents for creative and imaginative planning and long sighted estate management.⁵⁹

The LCC's insistence on the immediacy of their task, the need for some areas to be 'treated' by planning, using a medical and organic metaphor, justified their use of the CLP. The urgency of the task was allied with the need for long term and visionary proposals, and in the context of War it was unlikely that many people would dispute their proposals and by implication be labelled as short-termist, and unaware of the national significance of reconstruction.

⁵⁷Latham (1943) Foreword in Abercrombie and Forshaw (1943) County of London Plan. Op Cit. Piii

⁵⁸ CL/HSG/2/64 (1952) Memo for Mr Stamp. Quoting from Lewis Mumford.

⁵⁹LCC Minutes of Proceedings (1946) Town and Country Planning Act 1944, Discussions. 14 January 1946. P5. Declaration of area of extensive war damage in Stepney-Poplar reconstruction area

The planners and the LCC described their task in heroic, militaristic terms, and portrayed their work as a great challenge, which they would try and live up to for the sake of future Londoners.

They have shown themselves practical visionaries. Their proposals are bold and far-reaching, but also flexible, because in their humility they are acutely aware of the limits of human foresight. In this most difficult field of planning the authors have, I think, successfully found a balance between the known and the unknown. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude. They have done their best to ease our task-the task of faith. But it remains a task.⁶⁰

Latham's fulsome praise of planners is based upon their supposed heroic status, which echos the way planners were portrayed as producing Britain's future socially as well as physically. Latham emphasises how planners make the unknown known, produce the real from the imaginary, practical visionaries working valiantly on the British peoples' behalf; their position is constructed as almost unassailable. In a similarly hyperbolic manner Bor recalls the esteem in which Abercrombie was held by fellow LCC planners:

- J I've seen it yeah. It's [CLP] in the library.
 Bor In the library, I've got a copy from 1943. That man was incredible. He was my professor at University College. He was incredible. He had this complete understanding, grasp. He wrote this book, he had some help. The staff, it's about a dozen people, not more. And he replanned London, and it was so visionary, and it was so far ahead of its time,...the LCC had to decide what to do with it, and they agreed in principle. But of course in the process, it was cut back and back. But some of the things he, as you know said, one of the top priorities, must be the replanning, rebuilding of the East End, and on one of his big ideas has been implemented, that is Lea Valley Park. Yeah. That was his idea. The South Bank was his idea, the waterside.
 J The reconstruction areas were his idea.
 Bor Yeah. So that man, quite incredible within nine months or so, nine months! Today we would have a team of several hundred people with computers and so on.⁶¹

Abercrombie and other planners were seen and portrayed as unique individuals, 'working to salvage Britain from the debris of the War, implementing a new London. It is unusual to find either critical contemporary comments of Abecrombie, or even commentaries about the CLP, which don't mention in some way his eminence, vision and energy. Abercrombie was therefore placed as above criticism, the true Herculean planner recreating London and forging a new life for the capital and its inhabitants.

⁶⁰Latham. (1943) Foreword. Op Cit. Piii

⁶¹Interview with Walter Bor, 1992.

Abercrombie and Forshaw's CLP formed the basis, although not the blueprint for the LCCs' post-war ideas about how to replan London.

The LCC did not formally adopt the plan prepared by Abercrombie in collaboration with its own Architect, J H Forshaw, but merely received it and circulated it as a basis for discussion with all interested parties. In 1945, in preparation for the post-war, general election, the LCC adopted certain 'planning principles' but these represented both a modification and a narrowing of the CLP's objectives.⁶²

Lansbury, however, was very closely allied to the CLP, as I go on to discuss in section 3 and chapter 7. The CLP was designed to rectify London's defects, to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by the War. I do not want to enter into a detailed analysis of what the CLP stated.⁶³ In subsequent chapters elements of the plan will be studied where they relate to Lansbury, in particular the use of notions of community as the basis of the plan's proposals will be examined.

The CLP was given considerable publicity which affected how post-war LCC developments were understood. The CLP was portrayed by films as catering to a supposed real London, the city of ordinary working people, retaining all that they felt to be the good aspects of London while eradicating or solving what were portrayed as negative aspects. The film 'Proud City' is the most renowned portrayal of the CLP, commissioned by the Ministry of Information in 1945. In this film, Abercrombie, Arthur Ling, head planner of the LCC and Lord Latham, leader of the LCC, discussed the CLP and the LCC.

Proud City is the story of the LCC's plan for rebuilding London not only as a great capital but as a city in which overcrowding and slums have been vanquished and its citizens must find pleasure in living. Maps, models and sweeping views of the city enable the audience to understand and envisage the new London that will arise from the blitzed and battered town of today.⁶⁴

The maps, models and sweeping views of the city presented to the world relates to a particular, authoritative and supposedly objective way of viewing space, a stance which planners were anxious to further, as I indicated in the preceding section. The photo in

⁶²LCC (1945), Minutes of Meetings. Report of the Town Planning Committee, 17 July 1945.

⁶³See also Esher, L. (1981) *A Broken Wave*. Op Cit.

⁶⁴INF 6/658 (1945) Press Release by Academy Cinema presenting Proud City. Op Cit.

illustration 4.2, taken from Johnson-Marshall's retrospective of reconstruction, shows three men who were involved with reconstruction, standing over a model of a reconstructed area of London. This photograph indicates, as well as creates a sense of planners as above ordinary Londoners, replanning London according to all-seeing and all-knowing positions.

The general aim of the film, 'Proud City', was to show how the CLP would benefit the 'ordinary' people of London, and invited viewers to give their views of the plan, despite the fact that the plan had been in existence for two years prior to the film's release, and there were no formal mechanisms for feedback.

Well, that is the plan, the architects have drawn up the London of the future - our London. This is perhaps the greatest challenge to her pride, courage and vitality that London has ever had. What we want to know now, is what do you, the people of London think about it?...A minute study was made of every aspect of life in the capital - from the cooking facilities in a tenement to the number of buses that pass by any given spot in one day. And the completed plan which the LCC now present for the public is one which aims to preserve and encourage that cooperative spirit in work and play which is the essential of every healthy community - rejecting only what is ugly and mean.⁶⁵

The narrators of the film emphasised how much the planners knew about London, implying that they had understood and accessed the real London; any detractors would therefore simply be ignorant or ill-informed and therefore not to be taken seriously. The narration also emphasised, repeatedly, the opportunity presented to transform the city from dirty to clean, from chaos to order, and from unplanned to planned development.

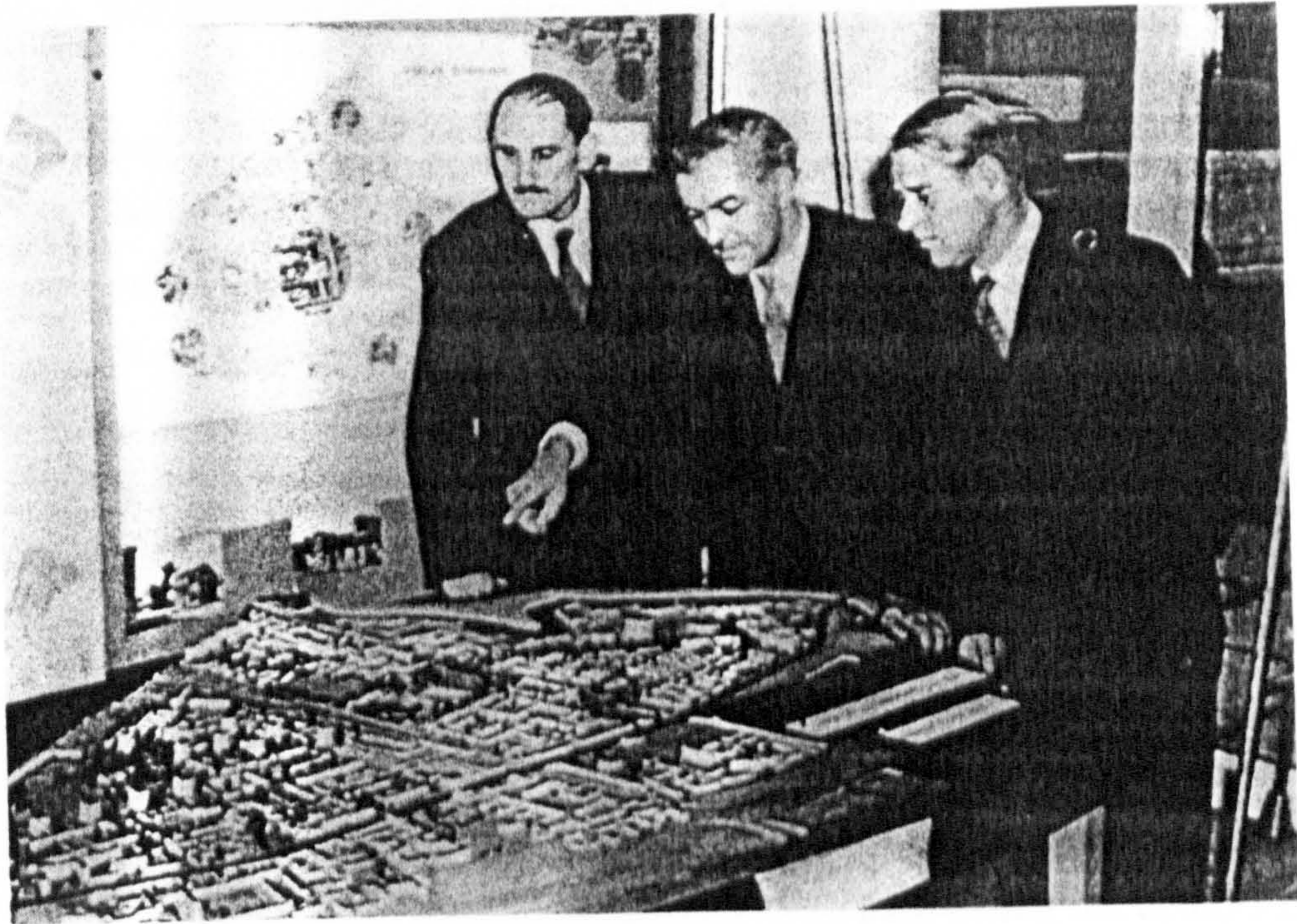
This is a great moment in the history of London - an opportunity to replace the dirt and decay of centuries by a planned and beautiful city. It will cost millions it is true, but no more than war and no more than unplanned building. The plan is there, now it is up to the Londoners to support it, so that from the ruins of war a 'proud city' may arise.⁶⁶

Media coverage of the film was substantial and added to comprehensions of the CLP, and the LCC's visions of London. Reviews reiterated not just the great import of the plans but also the importance of seeing the film.

⁶⁵PRO INF 6/658 Latham, (1945) during the film *Proud City*. Op Cit.

⁶⁶PRO INF 6/658 (1945) *Proud City*. Synopsis. Op Cit.

Illustration 4.2: Johnson-Marshall, Lane and Bennett Examine A Model of the Stepney-Poplar Reconstruction Area.



From Johnson-Marshall. (1966) **Rebuilding Cities.** Op Cit. P220.

Everyone who is interested in the London of the future...should see Proud City.⁶⁷

A serious and informative short about the LCC plan for the reconstruction of London. A film to give hope and confidence and pride.⁶⁸

Proud City is a picture of a dream...the rebuilding of London and the best chance we shall ever have of creating a capital worthy of such a people and such an empire.⁶⁹

These reports again stress the symbolic importance of London, of national identity, of the future; all vitally important themes which circulated in representations about planning, and which justified, legitimated and explained reconstruction.

There were other films which discussed the CLP and the future of London. For instance 'The People and The Plan', in which two returning soldiers discussed post-war London.⁷⁰ One, an East Ender, told his companion, who had never been to London before, about pre-war London; stressing what was good about it would be retained and what was bad, eradicated or cured by the LCC's proposals. The use of East Enders to discuss the plan is supposed to reiterate how this plan was for the ordinary people, which effectively meant the working-classes, and tied in with war-time recognition of the role of the working-classes, and more general post-war reforms supposedly enacted to enhance the power and position of the working classes.⁷¹ The East Ender, talking about 'his London' contrasted rather starkly with the middle-class accents and authoritative tones of the planners appearing in the film; their rhetoric, stance and attitudes confirms the rather paternalistic, patronising but authoritative manner noted in the previous section.

2c The LCC, the CLP and Lansbury

Lansbury was planned around the ideas conveyed in the CLP, and was supposed to be a demonstration and example of LCC post-war planning. It was intended to provide the clearest evidence of the worth of the Plan, as the LCC noted in their discussions with Festival of Britain authorities:

⁶⁷The Star. 8 November 1945.

⁶⁸Daily Worker. 8 November 1945.

⁶⁹Daily Telegraph. 8 November 1945.

⁷⁰INF 6/67 (1945) *The People and The Plan*. LCC Plan for London: A Complementary Film to Proud City, Realist Film Unit Ltd., for the Ministry of Information. 22 October 1945.

⁷¹Calder, A. (1969) *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*. Pimlico, London and Hennessey, P. (1992) *Never Again: Britain 1945-51*. Johnathan Cape, London.

The reconstruction of this part of the East End at Lansbury, which was so terribly damaged by air attack, will provide an interesting example of the Council's reconstruction operations.⁷²

LCC planners under the leadership of Arthur Ling and Percy Johnson-Marshall translated the Abercrombie-Forshaw proposals in the official 1951 LCC Development Plan for the Poplar area.

At the plan density of 136 persons per acre it was to house 100 000 people and be divided into a dozen neighbourhoods. It was decided that the first would be named after George Lansbury.⁷³

The structure of Lansbury, its concept, layout density, and road networks and so on were all affected by Abercrombie's principles.⁷⁴ As the supposed incarnation of the CLP, Lansbury had special importance to the LCC. This was their first major post-war reconstruction, and it was intended to exemplify the LCC's post-war developments, and thereby demonstrate the worth of the CLP. This notion of Lansbury as exemplar for the LCC was furthered by the inclusion of the development in the 1951 Festival of Britain as the Exhibition of Architecture. Fryer, in an article in the national newspaper the 'Daily Herald' in 1951, captured the significance of Lansbury for the LCC: "Architects and town planners are being given a chance to show what they can do on a small scale to reconstruct a much-bombed part of London's East End...A neighbourhood in Poplar is to be rebuilt to serve as a live architecture exhibition during next year's Festival of Britain."⁷⁵

The LCC's decision to use Lansbury as an example of their reconstruction programme, and the decision to have it incorporated into the Festival Of Britain received widespread, and mostly uncritical, media attention. The considerable publicity which surrounded the estate affected comprehensions of the estate, and perpetuated the idea that Lansbury was representative of the post-war world. The Lansbury estate was represented in numerous discussant articles and press reports as the incarnation of planning principles, of the ideal, future East End, and, because of assumed associations between physical and social reconstruction, a symbol of future social conditions for the

⁷²CL/HSG/2/31 7 January 1949 Stepney-Poplar Reconstruction Area - Festival of Britain 1951- Live Architecture Exhibition. Report by Clerk to the Council, LCC Memo.

⁷³INF 6/658 Nelson, S. (1945) Press Release for Proud City. Op Cit.

⁷⁴See Cox, A. (1989) The Lansbury Estate, Poplar. Op Cit.

⁷⁵Fryer, P. (1950) All East London Could be Like This. Daily Herald. June 7 1950.

working-classes. Articles sought to assess whether social changes might result from the estate.

Lansbury, a small corner in the East End of London, has already achieved world fame. It is the core of a new neighbourhood unit in Poplar shown in its early stages as the exhibition of architecture. The first outstanding example of comprehensive reconstruction in the metropolis. As such Lansbury has been in the limelight for some time...But what does it mean to the people who live there? What are their views? Has resettlement brought about any positive changes in their modes of living - changes which are likely to have not merely a transitory, but also a lasting value.⁷⁶

These portrayals partly fitted in with the idea, prevalent among planners, politicians and architects, that Lansbury was socially important and able to alter social relations; the kind of environmental determinism which Bor criticised but, as I noted earlier, was generally dominant in the late 1940s.

One of the revelations of the scheme is this integrated development of architecture as a social art. Here is neighbourliness without domination. But Londoners - or any humans for that matter - are constitutionally malleable, and an architectural plan designed almost to condition them to live as interdependent beings may produce an effort worth recording.⁷⁷

Andrews in his article picked up on a common and powerful theme recurring throughout planning and architecture and politics during the 1940s; that architecture and planning could change social conditions.

The idea of Lansbury as incarnation of modernity, was frequently reiterated, and formed the basis for general approval and support for the developments from many commentators. The idea of positive and progressive modernity was commended and reproduced by commentators in the press.

Fortunately one does not even have to leave London to find a better way of life, and a better kind of architecture. In Poplar, which was one of the most heavily bombed boroughs of London, the County Council has turned out, on a small scale a splendid example of urban building, the best I have found in England, and perhaps the best thing that has yet been done for lower income groups anywhere...Here is space without social dispersion, urbanity without social stultification, variety without infantile caprice, and as far as design goes, a fresh form based on a traditional pattern but reinterpreted in terms of modern needs.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Westergaard and Glass. (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit. P33.

⁷⁷ Andrews, A. (1951) Heaven Among the Common People. Op Cit.

⁷⁸Mumford, L. (1958) The Sky Line: East End Urbanity. The New Yorker. September 26.

Mumford was a renowned commentator on urban design, and strongly objected to high rise blocks; his support for Lansbury is tied in with these objections.⁷⁹ His emphasis on diversity of design, which he assumed would ensure social diversity, is also stressed by the LCC. Mumford's interest in, and praise of, Lansbury relates to his overall project, and to the notion, expressed repeatedly by the LCC and festival authorities, that Lansbury was important nationally, perhaps internationally.

Lansbury's incorporation into the Festival of Britain, as the Exhibition of Architecture, ensured both increased publicity and concentration on the supposed progressive, modern attributes of the estate and the positive effects these would have on the residents.

Lansbury was by no means the first of the post-war housing developments, but it acquired a kind of cachet when it was incorporated into the Festival of Britain as a down-to-earth balance to the extravaganza on the South Bank...at the time it was believed that, together with the buildings research and town planning pavilions which were set up on the site for the duration of the exhibition, it could provide a level-headed vision of the future of housing.⁸⁰

In 1951 a film was made solely about Lansbury, showed how it was intended as the epitome of the future, and an example of the LCC's designs for the 'new' London which they envisaged.

Lansbury can be more of an object lesson than any number of plans and elevations it is not a dead blueprint, it's living architecture taking exciting shape before our eyes.⁸¹

Robert Matthew, one of the planners associated with Lansbury, discussed with a commentator during the film 'Houses in the Town', the merits of the project, the principles which underlay it, and the social assumptions inherent in the design and planning. He concluded that: "If these principles are accepted then our towns would have not only an urban quality, they'd have all the variety and interest that makes urban

⁷⁹Mumford, L. (1944) **The Culture of Cities**. Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., New York and Mumford, L. (1934) **Technics and Civilisation**. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London.

⁸⁰(1974) Buildings Revisited, Lansbury, Poplar. **The Architects Journal**. 3 July 1974. Pps 26-42.

⁸¹INF 6/997 (1948) **Houses in the Town**. Crown Film Unit, 1948-51 for the Ministry of Information. Producer Helen de Moilpied

living so rich and varied."⁸² Like Mumford, Matthews emphasises diversity and heterogeneity as vital to the success of urban design.

Bor reiterated the importance the LCC attached to the Lansbury project as a model for their post war reconstruction projects for the rest of London.

Bor This was one of the great monuments to what an enlightened planning authority can do. So there's a, it's a symbol. I think the Festival Hall and Lansbury, complementary symbols of a great era in the LCC.⁸³

Bor's idea that Lansbury was a monument for the LCC was one which held common currency within the LCC, and because of the Festival of Britain, throughout government and planning bodies. This symbolic importance was relayed frequently to non-professionals via film and other media reports.

2d PBC and the LCC

The LCC's desire to produce a model development at Lansbury, and to have it as the Exhibition of Architecture in the Festival, meant expedited procedures were used. This led to controversy, with PBC and local traders objecting to what they felt was lack of sensitivity to local concerns.

However, many obstacles stood in the way of an even more successful development. To begin with, the tripartite responsibility of the LCC and the Borough of Stepney and Poplar did not work smoothly or efficiently, as could have been expected, and resulted in much infighting, delay and disruption.⁸⁴

These disputes indicate the differing areas of interest for the various groups involved with Lansbury. PBC felt they had local interests most at heart, and suggested the LCC did not, preferring, PBC thought, to bolster their self-image. These different areas of concern and priority both illustrate some of the conflict and complexity of understandings and conceptions associated with Lansbury, and reveal resistance to government, festival authority and LCC understandings of the project.

Bor confirmed to me the rather problematic nature of the LCC and PBC relationship:

⁸²INF 6/997 (1948) *Houses in the Town*. Op Cit.

⁸³Interview with Walter Bor, 1992

⁸⁴Bor W. (1969) *Planned London*. The Town Planning Institute Conference Handbook, 14-16 May 1969.

- J What was the relationship like between the LCC, your bit of the LCC, and the local borough councils, were they happy to cooperate?
- Bor You put your finger on an unhappy situation, I refer to the LCC as an enlightened body, but they were imperialists. Yuh? It had to be their way. And the whole set up for the reconstruction area was wrong. It was an LCC job, and the boroughs were only tolerated and hardly ever consulted. I really was very angry about it but got nowhere. I felt it was quite wrong for the LCC to dragoon the boroughs or to exclude. So the answer is very unhealthy most of the time.
- J They complained did they?
- Bor They complained, particularly Poplar, was very angry. There were lots of very unpleasant confrontations. Absolutely unnecessary.
- J Was that because they objected to what you were doing, or they objected to the structure of the relationship?
- Bor They objected that they were not involved, not asked, not consulted. It is, if you like, like a foreign power building in your territory, this was their responsibility. Okay, the LCC was the housing authority all over London, but even so, it's common-sense, that you not only consult the people who live there, but you consult with the people in charge of the area, who administered the area.⁸⁵

Bor's reflections are also interesting for his notion of the LCC as imperialists operating in a foreign country. The East End has a long history of being cast as different from the rest of London, inhabited by different people.⁸⁶ The LCC here, according to Bor, are very much the outsiders, Poplar Borough Councillors the insiders and hence representative of different interests, and with differing types of knowledges.

Local media reports relayed the differences between PBC, and the LCC during PBC resistance to LCC demands for compulsory purchase and expedited procedures.⁸⁷ As the 'East End News' reported, quoting from a Poplar Borough Councillor:

"The LCC cannot be expected to know local gossip but I am telling no tales when I say that the spring of 1951 was settled for this scheme because there is to be a festival, and this is to be the showpiece of reconstruction. Traders feel that it might result in butchery for a Roman holiday and they want to make sure before it is rushed through that their interests are not forgotten"...The LCC had received a request that if the area was sufficiently far advanced in reconstruction before the 1951 exhibition, it should be made available, as an example of pioneer reconstruction. "I cannot believe that LCC would accept a position in which people would be ejected from business and homes to make a butchery for a Roman holiday as has been suggested."⁸⁸

⁸⁵Interview with Walter Bor, 1992.

⁸⁶See chapter 6.

⁸⁷(1949) Reconstruction and Resettlement in East London. Op Cit.

⁸⁸(1949) East India Dock Road Will be Reconstructed. East End News. May 13 1949

The idea that compulsory purchase constituted butchery turns the medical, surgical metaphor, commonly used by planners and politicians, on its head. The surgical metaphor, instead of being positive, concerned with clinical removal of 'sick' parts of a body, is instead, murderous butchery. Notions that Poplar was to be used by the LCC to further their interests at the expense of Poplar were widespread. Press reports and councillors repeatedly stressed that the LCC was not acting in the best interests of Poplar. Differences between the LCC and PBC were not just over LCC's use of compulsory purchase orders, and ignorance about local interests, but were also over the actual planning of the estate. PBC argued for lower densities, 130 persons per acre (ppa) instead of the LCC's 136 ppa which followed CLP recommendations. PBC also wanted more open space, double the number of houses at three storeys or less, and half the number of flats in blocks of eight to ten storeys.⁸⁹ Despite these demands, the LCC's unamended proposals were those implemented at Lansbury. The LCC merely acknowledged, although not publicly, that the PBC had alternative proposals for one or two of the LCC's specific points, in public they argued that the relationship between PBC and LCC was good.⁹⁰

Inevitably there were differences of opinion between the LCC and Poplar Borough Council, especially at officer level, but no more (and probably less) so, than between the County Council and the festival authorities, or even between one LCC department and another. Percy Johnson-Marshall, who was head of the Reconstruction Group in the LCC's planning Division has paid tribute to the 'long and continuous collaboration between the LCC and the Borough of Poplar. In fact the Borough Council proved themselves in word and deed always eager to cooperate'.⁹¹

The LCC's refusal to admit the severity of disputes between the various authorities, serves to illustrate how they tried to present a united, homogenous understanding of reconstruction, serving to reinforce, and increase the power and authority of their representations and those of the festival authorities. Indeed the LCC frequently issued joint press statements in conjunction with festival authorities, for instance.

Whatever objections PBC made, the LCC did not alter their plans and local residents were never consulted nor adequately informed. The LCC made rather belated

⁸⁹HLG 79/581. (1943) **The Redevelopment of Area 9, Together with a Suggestion of a One Year Programme of Housing.** Asked for by the Ministry of Health Circular 2778, and County of London Plan, a response by Poplar Borough Council. Poplar Housing 1943-51.

⁹⁰HLG/79/581 (1944) **The Redevelopment of Area 9.** Op Cit.

⁹¹Cox, A. (1989) **The Lansbury Estate, Poplar.** Op Cit. P19

and haphazard attempts to involve local people in the developments, but these were not particularly successful:

Attempts were also made through periodic exhibitions and public meetings to involve the public, albeit at that time more with a view of informing than with developing full participation in the planning process. However, even these modest attempts were then frowned upon by officialdom and there was at least one occasion when the planners were severely reprimanded by the LCC for talking to the local community about the proposals for the area, on the grounds that they were divulging to the public confidential Council matters.⁹²

Walter Bor has frequently pointed out that he made an attempt to inform local people about the plans, but was castigated by the LCC.⁹³ Disputes between LCC and PBC may have altered peoples' conceptions of the LCC's work. And certainly the rather antagonistic PBC attitudes towards the LCC does not conform to the self-congratulatory and heroic portrayals of the LCC in films and in their publicity. The relationship between local and central authorities' and residents' attitudes towards the LCC will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. It is perhaps worth noting however, that the portrayals and representations of the LCC and their plans for London were not always echoed or mimicked by those affected.

3 Residents' Reactions

The residents' or future residents' views were, on the whole, not incorporated into discussions about Lansbury, nor were there any attempts, as far as I am aware, to gauge what those views were. Occasionally 'cockney' views were included into newspapers articles, usually as naive and supportive to the general argument of the article. For instance in an article in 'New Statesman and Nation' by John Summerson in 1951:

The best thing in the Town Planning Pavilion is a large, lively model of a reconstructed town centre, on very ordinary conservative principles. "Too good to be true" I heard a cockney visitor murmur. It is of course not too good to be true, but nobody will believe that, until it has been done so often that it has become far too true to be good.⁹⁴

⁹²McEwan, A. (1960) *The Lansbury Story*. East London Papers. Vol 3, 1. Pps 67-86. P85

⁹³Bor, W. (1994) *Speaking at Seizing the Moment: London Planning 1944-1994*. Conference in London, March 1994.

⁹⁴Summerson, J. (1951) *Lansbury*. *New Statesman and Nation*. June 16 1951.

The 'cockney' voice here, provides Summerson with an 'authentic', local voice, and hence validates his support for the project, and allows him to point out what future working class areas of the city should be like. Mumford drew a picture of total support for the project in terms of how residents felt about it, and suggested that the estate had improved the health of the residents: "The old inhabitants of the district who are now housed in these quarters are delighted with them, according to reports, and I must say that I never before encountered such a healthy and relaxed lot of children in this part of London."⁹⁵ Mumford's portrayal of relaxed and happy residents seems both unsubstantiated and exaggerated. His suggestion, however, fits in with the environmentally-determinist discourse which surrounded Lansbury and architecture and planning more generally in the 1940s and 1950s; and like Summerson's anecdote, is supposed to support and 'prove' Mumford's support for Lansbury. Neither Summerson nor Mumford considered residents' views in any substantive way, both related anecdote and hearsay to justify their claims about how well-liked Lansbury was.

One exception to the lack of serious study devoted to residents' opinions is a series of surveys conducted by John Westergaard and Ruth Glass during 1951 and 1952.⁹⁶ They concluded:

Our results proved that working-class families are certainly capable of assessing their physical environment intelligently. Most Lansbury tenants not only devoted a good deal of their attention to their new surroundings, but also gave reasoned and reasonable explanations of their praise and criticisms.⁹⁷

In this concluding paragraph, however, Westergaard and Glass appeared surprised by the ability of the working classes. Perhaps this surprise and their emphasis on it stems from a more general conception among planners, politicians and commentators about the lack of visual sophistication among residents and their disinterest in physical surroundings; beliefs which may account for the neglect of residents' views in other accounts.⁹⁸ Such views implied that the producers knew best, and that though residents might complain or object, these views were seen as ignorant or unsophisticated, and thus mostly irrelevant. In addition, as Lansbury was seen as an

⁹⁵Mumford, L. (1958) *The Sky Line*. Op Cit.

⁹⁶Westergaard and Glass's supposedly accurate, and numerically significant results indicated serious reservations by the Lansbury residents about the estate, and show that a number of the original residents had already left the estate by 1952.

⁹⁷Westergaard and Glass. (1954) *A Profile of Lansbury*. Op Cit. P34

⁹⁸These rather paternalistic view were also prevalent pre-war and during nineteenth century slum-clearance. See Yelling, J. (1986) *Slums and Slum Clearance in Victorian London*. Allen and Unwin, London.

exemplar, and as a potent symbol for the post-war world, most commentators were more concerned with these symbolisms than with residents' views of the place. I stressed in chapter two, however, that it is important to examine how non-hegemonic groups understand particular places; failure to do so either implicitly accepts the power of the hegemony or suggests a dualistic split between powerful and powerless, with no shared understandings or comprehensions.

Talking to residents about how they felt when they first moved in suggests neither total support for the hegemonic line nor complete rejection of it. Individual flats and houses were generally well received, or at least not detested, but there was not a whole-hearted or universal welcoming of the estate. The interviews indicate both nostalgia for a supposed pre-war past and desire for a better, different future.⁹⁹ There seems to have been genuine affection for the individual flats, based on the womens' lives there, frequently related to how other family members felt about the estate. Mrs O'Donoghue's prolonged residence in her flat and her feelings for it are bound up with her husband's affection for the flat:

J
O'Donoghue So they moved you in here?
Yeah, we liked this flat. My husband was delighted. He died about five years, no six years ago, and when I came here it was beautiful. You know there was no car park. There was crocuses and daffodils growing under the trees. My husband said, "this is marvellous" he said: "I'm ending my days here. They can take me out feet first, they won't take me other ways." Because he never intended to move out of this flat because he liked it. Which he did, he stayed here 'till he died. Of course he was 82, when he died.¹⁰⁰

The women I spoke to seemed rather reluctant to engage in rather abstract discussions about the utopian futures envisaged by planners and architects, perhaps because they had never been interested in the planners' views, or perhaps because they lacked the confidence to talk about supposedly grand, theoretical ideas. The women seemed more forthcoming when speaking about what they felt were their particular experiences. There was, however, scepticism about the claims made by authorities and a dismissal of the producers' interpretations and intended meanings.

J
Snoddy I mean at the time, [of post-war reconstruction] were you taken away with all the enthusiasm?
Well I don't think really (hesitant). Well this has always gone on hasn't it, things building up to a crescendo and then

⁹⁹Pearson, G. (1983) *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*. Macmillan, London.

¹⁰⁰Interview with Mrs O'Donoghue, 1992.

all of a sudden it's all forgotten and that's it. Bob's your uncle.

J
Snoddy Were you sceptical at the time?
I think so, I don't know. I think so, I don't think I'm easily convinced by things that people tell you. As I say though I think that it is a shame because they were nice, I think they were nice, flats anyway, I don't think this flat has done bad for forty one years.¹⁰¹

Mrs Snoddy, along with her husband and two children, was the first to move onto the estate. Considerable attention was paid to them, and there was a key handing over ceremony, to which local dignitaries and the press were invited. The illustration 4.3 taken from the 'East End News', depicts the arrival of the Snoddys at Lansbury. The Snoddys subsequently featured in numerous press articles and a couple of television documentaries. Mrs Snoddy, however, rejects the claims made in the late 1940s about the 'new' East End and also stressed her reluctance to move initially.

J
Snoddy But it was all right when you first moved in?
Oh it was very nice. Mind you I'd never lived in a flat, and it took me a hell of a long time...never been in a flat, and it took me a hell of a long time to get used to it
J
Snoddy So would you have preferred not to have come here and stayed in your old place?
Oh yeah (definite) I'd much rather have preferred...I'd much preferred to have stopped in that old house. Oh yeah.¹⁰²

Mrs Snoddy's reveals that although she appreciated the physical layout of the flat and would not explicitly criticise it, she was sceptical about the portrayals of the estate in the media, from the LCC and during the Festival. Attitudes which were never articulated in the numerous articles about her and her family.¹⁰³

J
Snoddy Yeah, its interesting 'cos I really got the impression from... When you read them at the time did you think they were accurate?
Yeah I used to read the paper. No 'um most of it they'd put their own words in, lets put it that way. What I said, as I say, is that I didn't want to move, I was quite content where I was. I had to move see, as it was all bombed; truthfully it was bombed, and those few houses that were left they pulled down, that was when it first started, it was '51 when I came here.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹Interview with Mrs Snoddy, 1992.

¹⁰²Interview with Mrs Snoddy, 1992.

¹⁰³See chapter 6.

¹⁰⁴Interview with Mrs Snoddy, 1992.

Illustration 4.3: The Arrival of the Snoddys at Lansbury



From (1951) *The East End News*. February 14, 1951.

Mrs Snoddy's professed preference for her old place was never mentioned by the LCC nor expressed in any press reports. When I asked about the representations made about her in the media, Mrs Snoddy pointed out serious and important discrepancies in what she felt and said, and how the press represented her.

- Snoddy They don't get it wrong, they just make up their own version of it. Some of the things I couldn't believe what I was supposed to have said, we had a good laugh over it. At the time I didn't care any way, they could put what they like didn't bother me. But 'er some of the things they come out with, and my husband definitely didn't want to come in a flat. No way, he was used to his shed and he'd go in there and bang and hammer and do whatever he wanted to. No way did he want to. We'd never been in a flat, neither of us. And my mother thought it was terrible 'cos the toilet was in the house. 'Cos in the old house the toilet was out the back. She thought it was unhygienic?
- J
Snoddy Yeah, she couldn't get over that. The toilet being in the house (laughter)...And then, as I say, after that. (with emphasis) They've got what they want. It's like the world over, they use people. Everybody uses people. They use one another.¹⁰⁵

Mrs Snoddy's scepticism over authority, her admission that her mother and husband were unhappy living in the flat and her reluctance to move initially, contradicts flatly with press reports which related her celebrating unreservedly the move, and explicitly praising the LCC. She stresses her reservations about LCC and festival authority claims, albeit with considerable encouragement from me, and her general lack of trust or belief in council or media reports.

Other residents seem to have been more anxious to move onto the estate, but also less aware of the publicity about the estate, and its use as an exemplar by the LCC.

- Mackiowski I waited about 8 months and then I got a place, and then I was offered this one. You was only offered one or two I think. And if you turn the first one down you might get a bad one then. And this was so lovely when we came in, we walked in, me my husband and little girl, thinking to ourselves 'well what about this?' And the man says when we got to the door, well what are you going to do, are you going to take. 'Oh' I said 'of course were going to take it (emphasis and laughter). We were so happy, we were so happy.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Interview with Mrs Snoddy, 1992.

¹⁰⁶Interview with Mrs Mackiowski, 1992.

Mrs Mackiowski's delight in moving onto Lansbury, relates to the hardships she and her family had endured during the War. In contrast to many of the other women I spoke to, Mrs Mackiowski remains generally positive about the estate, although she complained bitterly about the behaviour of some children, and about others' racism on the estate. Her generally positive approach to the estate, and work on the estate for the Catholic Church and her determination to emphasise the good qualities of Lansbury was reflected in her recollections of seeing Lansbury and moving in in 1951.

J
Mackiowski Had you heard about the estate before you moved on?
I'd walked past it and thought how lovely it was
J
Mackiowski You hadn't read about it in the press or whatever?
No, I walked past and thought I'd love to live here. I was only young then, and I thought I'd love to be in here. And when I got the place my Mum said I'd love to come in here (laughter).¹⁰⁷

The desire to move onto the estate and the celebration of it by some of the residents is connected to appraisal of other choices. In the accounts in which the women welcomed the flats, they were contrasted both with what had gone before and other places available to them, although there is a notable desire to minimise the impression that where they had come from was a total slum. The whole area was frequently portrayed in hegemonic accounts as entirely slum-like or totally destroyed by bombing, and in urgent need of treatment by the LCC. However, residents didn't always agree, arguing that pre-development conditions were not as bad as planners, the LCC and some press articles claimed.¹⁰⁸ Daisy Jarrett, for instance, who lived in Poplar before and during the War, argued that the area was better than dire representations of the place suggested.

Daisy 'Cos when I go round other boroughs and see the houses I think well haven't they had any war? 'Cos all the old houses, they look beautiful all done up, and so would the houses here if they done them up, but willy nilly. I mean Canton Street you couldn't have wished for nicer houses, the houses from one side to there. They were monied people. Their porches were bigger than this house, honestly I'm not kidding. They knocked them down and they weren't all bomb-damaged.¹⁰⁹

Daisy Jarrett objected to the wholesale redevelopment of the area, without any preservation of structurally sound and adequate houses, her house was knocked down, she felt undeservedly.

¹⁰⁷Interview with Mrs Mackiowski, 1992.

¹⁰⁸See chapter 6.

¹⁰⁹Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

- J What had happened to your house in Chrisp Street?
 Daisy Well it was taken over for slum clearance.
 J So they knocked it down did they?
 Daisy Of course, it was a beautiful house.
 J Why did they knock it down then?
 Daisy Well they wanted the space for the market. The beginning of the market. Where the market is now, the lower end of the market. Opposite is where I lived.¹¹⁰

Her complaints tie in with those made by PBC, noted in the previous section, which claimed that the LCC were redeveloping the area, without the best interests of local residents at heart, and without an adequate knowledge of local conditions. The way these objections are framed seems to relate to a broader local discourse of the East End and East Ender as different, unique, unknown to 'outsiders'.¹¹¹

Jarrett also seems to object to the way the area was depicted as wholly derelict, dirty and poverty-stricken, arguing instead that there were a variety of different people in the area pre-war, not all of whom conformed to the dominant slum-style images. My questions to Jarrett at this point seem particularly leading, and it may be that I was pushing her into saying particular things in particular ways. However, she did appear particularly concerned about what she felt were false images, images which led to unwarranted destruction by the LCC. Her anxiety was evident both in tone of voice and the way she repeatedly insisted on making this point.

- J Cos in the stuff I've read it always says 'oh its a slum'.
 Daisy Well it isn't, it was a beautiful street, and them houses they weren't slums. No they weren't. And Woodstock Road has still got their houses.
 J At the time they said they were clearing this poor slummy area.
 Daisy Not all, there was some, plenty of poverty here, but there was also people with money here. They had the convent along here for young ladies.¹¹²

Jarrett's refutation of the LCC's redevelopment and her insistence on the pre-war social, economic and architectural diversity of the area, suggests that hegemonic accounts of universal deprivation and sordid conditions in the area was a tactic to legitimate and explain reconstruction, and reveals how the LCC tried to justify and explain Lansbury by mobilising particular images about the area and inhabitants. Zeena made a similar point, contradicting prevalent hegemonic images of the place as a slum.

¹¹⁰Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

¹¹¹See chapter 5.

¹¹²Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

Zeena Well this is it yes, especially knowing where we'd come from, it wasn't a slum where we came from, don't get me wrong, there again they were old flats, but they were clean. And as I said they had a job to get them down. They really did. Okay at the time we got on there, we had good neighbours everybody helped one another, but because you don't know any different you live that life don't you. Then when these were built and we had the opportunity to come and view. Because when these were being built my mother and I used to walk along here, and my mother used to say, I'd like that one Zeen, pointing to this flat. So I said it looks alright mum, but don't build your hopes up, you don't know. They'll probably poke us in a back room or somewhere. But when we got them, my mother and father was in raptures.

J So when you first viewed them were you excited?

Zeena Oh really, honestly, oh yeah.¹¹³

Zeena, while stressing the supposedly positive aspects of life in Poplar, before the War, also welcomed the opportunity to move on to Lansbury. This tension I noted earlier, about welcoming the new flats, but hankering for a supposed communal, social past is evident here. Some of the women merely reiterated that they were glad to move onto the estate, because of bomb damage; very few saw it in social terms as a new beginning, mostly saying they missed the pre-war community at Lansbury.

In this section, I have briefly commented on some of the residents' reactions to Lansbury, reactions which sometimes, but not always, refuted hegemonic notions about reconstruction, planning and the Lansbury estate drawing on local expertise and shared histories to undermine or criticise hegemonic accounts.

4 Conclusions

I have tried to provide a sense of the ways Lansbury was discussed by groups involved with the estate, and point out similarities as well as differences in those discussions. I have also tried to show how language and images used during discussions about reconstruction recalled a great past, an undefined but special British character, and a different future which would be recreated by planners according to some definitive or infallible methods. I have briefly discussed that despite such powerful representations, post-war plans and the LCC's reconstruction was not always as welcome as these images would imply, and suggested that residents and the local council in particular claimed special knowledge in order to refute the LCC's scheme at Lansbury. During this brief appraisal of reconstruction and planning, ideas about the future, about the East End and about working-class communities are shown to have

¹¹³Interview with Zeena, 1992.

provided a way of justifying plans and reconstruction, provided a basis on which to discredit other groups' claims and schemes, and provided authenticated 'insider' knowledge. The rest of this thesis is concerned with those powerful and frequently mobilised themes in relation to Lansbury.

Chapter 5: Visions of the Future

As I suggested in the previous chapter, reconstruction discourses were firmly, in some cases principally, oriented towards discussions about the shape and nature of the post-war world. In this chapter ideas about the future in discourses associated with Lansbury are discussed, and the assumptions made in these futuristic images are examined. While there are common and shared assumptions and images in national, LCC, local and residents' portrayals, there are also important differences, particularly in the emphasis on what was most important and significant about envisaged futures. Residents of Lansbury, for instance, were more concerned with domestic arrangements, while national architectural discourses concentrated on widescale utopian scenarios, usually related to entire cities.

1 National Visions of the Future

The first part of this section is concerned with a dominant architectural genre, modernism, which affected architectural developments in the post-war period. The intention is to provide an overview of a powerful architectural discourse, prevalent pre and post-war, and to situate discussions related to Lansbury within that field. As modernism was principally geared towards designing for an envisaged future, this discussion is particularly apt, given the overall theme of this chapter. The discussion then moves on to elucidate how politicians and planners placed great faith in science and scientific methods for reconstruction; they felt science was modern, progressive and therefore conducive to their visions of a modern, rational and scientific future.

1a Dominant Visions of The Future

In the aftermath of the Second World War, modernist architects' portrayals of future urban life had a fairly wide audience, and some popular appeal, and certainly affected architects and planners working on reconstruction projects. Arthur Ling for instance had worked with Walter Gropius and Maxwell-Fry prior to 1945.¹ Modernist architects concentrated on technology

¹Day, N. (1988) *The Role of the Architect in Post War Housing: A Case study of the Housing Work of the LCC 1939-1956*. Unpublished Thesis. University of Warwick. Frampton, K. (1985) *Modern Architecture*. Op Cit.

and machines, both as the facilitator of their buildings² and as the basis for future social lives.³ The association of architectural design with machines related to modernist architects' desire to reveal and replicate the spirit of the age, which they felt was profoundly related to increased technology and use of machinery.⁴ As Jackson suggests, modernists tried to reflect what they felt to be the prevalent economic and social movements, and they designed buildings which they envisaged would both foster and emulate the machine ethic.

A material must seem suitable, a structure must seem logical, a form must seem reasonable...the new architecture took its place with those turbines and grain elevators that were the unconscious symbols of the age. The machine portrayed the new life uncluttered by either the primitive past or the messiness of human sentimentality. Modern architecture stood by the automobile and the aeroplane and tried to look like an emanation from the zeitgeist.⁵

Emphasis on the centrality of machines and technology in urban design was furthered by war-time experiences which had increased faith in the benefits and importance of machinery and technology. Maxwell-Frypps recounted how the increased use and development of technology during the War had affected architects.

War has accelerated the pace at which machinery overtakes handwork. Machines of unbelievable delicacy, made of metals combining strength with lightness guide bombers to their targets and sustain them in the upper air, while on land the engineering services of the armies and air forces have made the caterpillar tractor, the bulldozer and the giant scraper familiar to every magazine reader. There is no doubt that building will take up its post-war job at a stage further in the march of mechanisation and use material increasingly synthetic or machine handled.⁶

Beliefs in, and attempts to (re)produce, mechanised and technologically advanced futures by planning and architecture were associated with reliance on science as the planning and architectural basis of, and legitimation for, reconstruction developments and post-war changes.

²In terms of advances made in technology which enabled high, system buildings. Tafuri, M. (1990) *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. MIT Press, Massachusetts.

³As in Le Corbusier. (1927) *Towards a New Architecture*. Op Cit.

⁴Frampton, K. (1985) *Modern Architecture*. Op Cit.

⁵Jackson A. (1970) *The Politics of Architecture*. Op Cit. P1.

⁶Maxwell-Frypps, E. (1945) *The Future of Architecture*. *Architect's Year Book*, 1. Paul Hele, London. Pps 7-10. P8.

It could have suggested that if technology was believed to have ensured the survival of the nation in War, then harnessed to the welfare state, it would strengthen the system in place by creating the wealth necessary to ensure unity in an unequal society.⁷

In 1945 Herbert Morrison proclaimed the Government's faith in scientific methods as the basis for changes in the post-war world.

The Government attach the very greatest importance to science. We recognise the contribution which science made to the prosecution of the war and the achievement of victory, and we are no less desirous that science shall play its part in the constructive tasks of peace and of economic advancement and progress.⁸

Science was seen to be, not only capable of producing the structures which architects were advocating, but also of providing a way of legitimating particular plans and reconstruction efforts. Scientific methods, it was argued, could solve problems and indisputably prove the curative properties of particular plans and architectures. As Hebbert notes:

The underlying faith in planning as a problem solving method was of greater importance than any of the individual parts making up the package of reconstruction policies...Silkin explicitly stated that he regarded none of the substantive doctrines of town planning - separation of use zones, the idea of neighbourhoods, open space standards, the location and size of new towns - as sacrosanct: all should be subjected to rigorous testing by social scientists, to create a truly 'scientific planning'.⁹

Concentration on scientific principles by social scientists and planners affected the plans themselves, as Hebbert indicated, and also affected how those plans and reconstruction developments were seen and interpreted. Scientific credentials attached to plans and architectural designs, and belief in the objectivity of scientific and mathematical methods, meant that planners and architects were accorded immense 'curative' power, solving urban problems according to definitive and precise principles.

⁷Finnimore, B. (1989) **Houses From the Factory: System Building and the Welfare State 1942-1974**. Rivers Oram Press, London. P46.

⁸Morrison, H. (1945) **Hansard**. Commons 5th series, 416, 30 November 1945. Col 1857

⁹Hebbert, M. (1983) **The Daring Experiment: Social Scientists and Land-Use Planning in 1940s Britain**. **Environment and Planning B**. Vol 10. Pps 3-17. P13

The architect of today is fortunate. He works in a moment of time when people see him as one of the great ministers, of the servants who are also masters. He is longed for like the doctor in illness, but with more hope. For the doctor may remedy a bodily disease but the architect can cure our sick way of life.¹⁰

White's portrayal of architects and the effects of architecture arose from his desire to further and enhance that power. His use of a medical metaphor, here is particularly striking, implying architects could scientifically and precisely cure cities. As I suggested in the previous chapter, emphasis on objectivity, science, and appeals to rationality were conceived, and supposedly understood through, masculinist ways of viewing and interpreting.¹¹

As the previous chapter indicated, there was great faith in planners' and architects' abilities to produce towns free from poor conditions associated with the past.

Today they [nightmares of planning] are all gone - swept clean away to the delight of the more enlightened citizens and of the very able city architect who, at least, has a never-expected chance of seeing his long cherished dreams for a worthy and workable replanning actually realised...with a free, virile people, that is how a great revival may be born. We believe that ours is even now conceived and we await the visible birth, our new renaissance with a vigorous faith.¹²

Reith and Williams-Ellis relate the implementation of plans firmly to criticisms of the past and to 'enlightened' opinion which supported their views about the absolute centrality of planning for the future. Oppositional views were for them simply unenlightened or ignorant. Contrasts between a supposedly disastrous past and beneficent future was a common way of legitimating reconstruction in discourses associated with Lansbury. Emphasis on future technologies and incipient rational social orders were often contrasted with apocalyptic visions of the past, and justified plans for the future. The pairing of opposites in accounts about planning, provided a clear argument for the benefits of futures; the future was attributed with all those positive features seen as lacking in the past. Thus

¹⁰White F (1952) *New Towns for Old*. Architect's Year Book, 4. Paul Hele, London. Pps 33-46. P34

¹¹Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism & Geography*. Op Cit.

¹²HLG/86/13 *Correspondence between Reith and Williams-Ellis*. 1940-42

without necessarily proving their desirability in absolute terms, the supposed new futures were considered desirable in relation to what had gone before.

Beauty, convenience and comfort lay in the promise of new ways of doing things in rationally planned large towns, where the public would now be protected from the result of selfish or short-sighted exploitation.¹³

The brave new world, envisaged by planners, architects and politicians was at least partially justified by alluding to the dire consequences of unscientific, disordered approaches to architecture and planning.

1b The Festival of Britain

Post-war hegemonic versions of the future were enshrined in the 1951 Festival of Britain, a symbolic and accessible statement about particular groups' desires for the post-war period; it also revealed particular notions of national identity and understandings of the past.¹⁴ Lansbury was associated with these Festival of Britain ideas both as the Live Architecture Exhibit of the Festival, and because Lansbury was contemporary with the Festival, both shared reconstruction, and post-war discourses. The 'Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture' made quite explicit that the Exhibition of Architecture was chosen to demonstrate the future social life and design of cities, and it also emphasised the way the Exhibition of Architecture was to be considered as linked conceptually to the Festival of Britain. Thus Festival of Britain considerations and portrayals of futures also applied to the Exhibition of Architecture.

The Exhibition of Architecture is part of something far larger-the Festival of Britain. The Festival is nationwide all through the summer, and all through the land, its spirit will be finding expression in a great variety of ways. Taken together, all these activities will add up to one united act of national reassessment, and one corporate reaffirmation of faith in the nation's future.¹⁵

¹³Cherry, G. (1988) *Cities and Plans*. Op Cit. P118

¹⁴Connekin, B. (1993) *The Festival of Britain and National Identity*. Seminar presented to the Institute of Historical Research, London, November 1993. Banham, M. and Hillier, B. (eds) (1976) *A Tonic to the Nation*. Thames and Hudston, London and INF 6/1944. (1951) *London in Festival Year*. Film made by the Ministry of Information.

¹⁵McDunnett, G. (ed) (1951) *Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture Town Planning and Building*. Op Cit. P3.

The idea of holding an exhibition in 1951 was first mooted by Gerald Barry, editor of the News Chronicle, in 1945.¹⁶ He felt that:

Above all it would afford an opportunity for assembling in London an international collection of exhibitions in the fields of the arts and of science, and of representing developments in the arts and crafts which have taken place in the world behind the cultural blackout of the war.¹⁷

Barry's initial concern in 1945 was to afford the British population uplifting sentiments and incentives in the austere aftermath of the War, and encourage belief in the positive and progressive future which awaited. As Lionel Esher recalls:

We were let out of school in the wet summer of 1951 for the Festival of Britain, sold to the new Government soon after the war by the editor of the News Chronicle, Gerald Barry, as a 'great Trade and Cultural Exhibition' in the tradition of 1851...but in fact it was primarily intended as a tonic for the home front. This it brilliantly was. For the first time, in the misty unlight of that fine May it was possible to feel that we were witnessing here the long awaited opening of the flower of modern architecture.¹⁸

Barry also wanted to demonstrate to the rest of the world that Britain was capable of 'leading' the world, and, of being at the forefront of science, technology and artistic developments. Thus the 1951 Festival was intended to act as a statement of good faith in Britain's future, proclamation that the War, and austerity were over, or at least transient, and suggest that modern, forward-looking more prosperous times awaited.

The purpose of the Festival of Britain is to put the whole of Britain on show, both to its own people and to the world, as a token of thanksgiving for our past and as a testimony of faith in our future ...In a word, the Festival of Britain is intended as a corporate act of national reassessment and of reaffirmation of faith in our future, in which every town and village is invited to join in its own appropriate way, and in which, indeed each individual citizen can share.¹⁹

¹⁶Barry was appointed Director General of the Festival of Britain in 1948.

¹⁷WORK 25/7 (1945) Letter from Gerald Barry, Editor of the News Chronicle to the President of Board of Trade, Sir Stafford Cripps. September 14 1945, proposing the idea of a Festival of Britain.

¹⁸Esher, L. (1981) A Broken Wave. Op Cit. P49.

¹⁹WORK 25/7 (1951) Gerald Barry. Text of a speech made by the Director General of the Festival of Britain 1951.

Barry's perhaps over-optimistic vision of the consequences and implications of the Festival of Britain, provided both a direction as to how it should be understood, and affected the kinds of displays and exhibits which were on show.

The Festival had an important influence upon conceptions about the post-war world, due in part to extensive publicity and media coverage devoted to it, and also due to the numbers of visitors to the South Bank. Politicians and members of the Royal Family gave their approval to the Exhibition and explicitly to the ideas, and conceptions of British life it supposedly enshrined and represented.

[A]t a time when the world is racked with uncertainties there is a special virtue in dwelling upon the arts of peace. It is good to turn our minds to those things in our tradition that are permanent and continuous, through which our country has added so much to the store of human happiness and knowledge. To keep our freedom to live and think as we believe best, we have made heavy material sacrifices in recent years,...we have certainly not forfeited our opportunities of leadership in the world of ideas.²⁰

This excerpt from a speech by Princess Elizabeth about the Festival of Britain, reflected the ways in which the modern future, was to be associated with a traditional, decidedly British, or English past. The Festival also, she had suggested, acted as a catharsis after the confusion and uncertainties of the War.²¹ Lord Ismay, a prominent wartime general, was appointed Chairman of the Festival Council and in some senses his appointment exemplified the ways the Festival was associated with the aims of the War, and demonstrated the supposed changes generated by the War.

We proclaim to ourselves and to the world that we are determined to take up our lives and move forward again, after the gaunt distortion and hideous waste of the war years. The people of Britain deserve, if any people have ever deserved, to be given an opportunity to recall their proud past, to enjoy the gaiety of the festivity and the

²⁰WORK 25/7 (1948) **Speech by HRH Princess Elizabeth** at the opening meeting of the Council for the Festival of Britain, 31 May 1948

²¹Connekin's work aims to show how far that intended message was accepted uncritically. Connekin, B. (forthcoming) **The Festival of Britain and National Identity**. Phd, University of Michigan. See also WORK 25/40 (1950) **The Festival of Britain 1951**. BBC Radio, narrated by Richard Dimbleby.

inspiration of 1951, and to carry forward the spirit of the Festival in the years that lie ahead.²²

Concentration on past national glories in an abstract sense, as opposed to more critical appraisals of particular places, enabled the future to be portrayed arising from a heroic almost metaphysical past, a past cleansed or devoid of less heroic images.²³ The worth of the future was thereby assured, British future ways defined, the national identity secured and incipient changes made to appear manageable, even natural and inevitable.

Our Festival Council will not itself be directly concerned with Trade and Industry, but rather with those intangible things that reveal and express the innermost heart and spirit of a nation...Now is our opportunity as it is our duty, to take up our lives and move forward again in the van. This time in the van of progress in the arts, the sciences and the humanities.²⁴

The link with the 1851 Exhibition was repeatedly stressed, the 1951 Exhibition portrayed as symbolic of the greatness of Britain, just as the 1851 exhibition had purported to do. Barry stressed the need for the future to be emphasised and promoted, while simultaneously retaining 'traditional' British values.

We must not concentrate exclusively on what we have done, but quite emphatically on what we are doing, and what we hope and intend to do. One of the defects of our age is that it lacks a sense of responsibility to the future equal to that which marked the best ages of our past, and which has been the means of giving us so much that we are able to enjoy and to be proud of in the present...In short we should not regard 1951 as an end, but as a beginning. It should be not only a year in which we as a team complete our labours, but also a year which is a starting point.²⁵

The concept of holding a Festival in 1951, was related to a perceived need to define and promote images of an improved post-war world, and to have those images articulated to a domestic and foreign audience. By revealing the

²²WORK 25/7 (1948) **Text of a Statement by the Chairman of the Festival Council, General Lord Ismay at a Press Conference on Thursday October 14, 1948**

²³Pearson, G. (1983) **Hooligans. Op Cit.**

²⁴WORK 25/7 (1948) **Speech made by Chairman of the Festival Council, Lord Ismay, at the opening meeting of the Council of the Festival of Britain 1951, 31 May 1948.**

²⁵WORK 25/7 (1948) **Statement made by Director General of the Festival of Briain, Gerald Barry, at the opening meeting of the Council of the Festival of Britain 1951, 31 May 1948.**

progressive and modern quality of British futures, it was hoped to establish and demonstrate the shape of the future, and in some senses provide the case for British cultural and technological domination, an emphasis presumably replacing imperial, military domination. Lansbury as the Live Architecture Exhibition was conceived within, and meant to be understood through, the Festival discourses.

1c The Exhibition of Architecture

1ci Beginnings

In 1948, Frederic Gibberd proposed to the Festival Council that the Architecture Exhibition should take the form of a live exhibition.²⁶ By live exhibition he meant a genuine reconstruction development, rather than what he saw as a lifeless model, which would show in real-size and 3D form what reconstruction and housing would be like in the future. Gibberd suggested that the benefits of a live exhibition would be to provide a more profound and accessible demonstration of reconstruction, which would remain both as a permanent emblem of what post-war reconstruction was like, and as a useful contribution to reconstruction efforts.²⁷

The whole scheme would form a permanent record of the stage we had reached in 1951, in solving the aesthetic and scientific problems of creating a new environment. As such it would have immense historical significance for future generations.²⁸

The Festival Council and the LCC were in general support of Gibberd's proposal which related to their conceptions about what the Festival was intended to achieve and mean, and what the reconstruction of London was supposed to engender.

The Festival of Britain Committee have for some time been exploring with the Council's officers the possibility of staging a live architectural exhibition in connection with the Festival of 1951. By this they mean a reconstruction scheme in actual progress, preferably on a blitzed or blighted area where the New London could be shown actually arising from the desolation, and by a skilful exhibition technical visitors could be piloted around the scheme in

²⁶CAB 124/1297 (1948) Council for Architecture. Memo by Gibberd. 19 July 1948.

²⁷CAB 124/1345. Letter to Cardinal Griffin, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, 21 January 1949, from Lidderdale of the Lord President's Office, asking for a good architect for Church.

²⁸CAB 124/1297 (1948) Council for Architecture. Memo by Gibberd. Op Cit.

which they would be able to see houses, flats shops and if possible, ancillary buildings, like a community centre, a school, a pub etc.²⁹

The decision to have the Live Architecture Exhibition at Lansbury, was particularly crucial to the LCC and Festival Council for here they could capture the changes between past urban nightmares and desired future improved urban conditions. Particularly as the development would provide a vivid and obvious contrast with surrounding, blitzed areas, and thus visibly provide justifications for the new development. The Live Architecture Exhibition would supposedly dramatically capture the supposed contrasts between pre-war slums and post-war utopias. Illustration 5.1 shows the look of Lansbury during the Exhibition of Architecture, a look which was supposed to dramatically contrast with surrounding blitzed areas. Illustration 5.2 shows that contrast very clearly, and is taken from the Official Festival Brochure. While the emphasis here lay in absolute contrast, the rhetoric which surrounded the project also stressed continuity and tradition. Indeed the design of Lansbury was supposed to reflect local traditions and design styles in an updated format.³⁰ The benefits of the future portrayed at Lansbury by the LCC, justified and defined the future through direct opposition to representations of a mythic future related to a mythic past, and also through focusing on particular past horrors of particular places.

Here lies the bomb-scarred derelict site of some 30 acres which, in less than a year from now, with impetus added to the work by its association with the Festival of Britain, will come to life not only as an Exhibition but as a place where people will again have their homes and go about their daily lives, but under conditions far happier and more spacious and more convenient than in years gone by.³¹

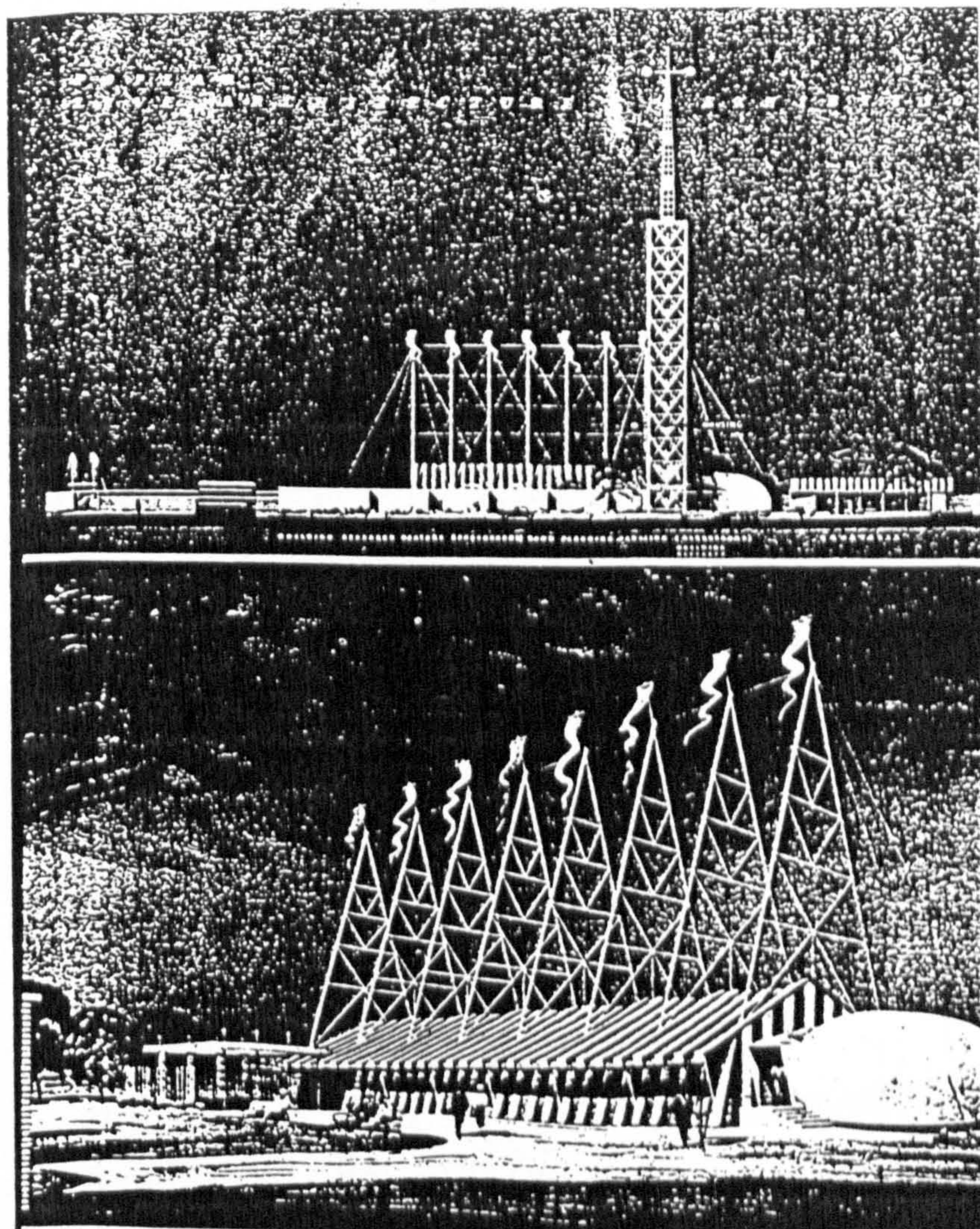
As in many other hegemonic reconstruction texts the past was portrayed as chaotic, unplanned and irrational, the future, portrayed in opposition to those images as ordered, planned and rational, functional and elegant. Both the LCC Minutes of Proceedings and Williams-Ellis stress these themes.

²⁹CL/HSG/2/31 (1948) **Statement by the Leader of the Council.** Lansbury Housing Sites 105, from 29 October 1948 to 26 June 1951. Meeting, 29 October 1948.

³⁰See chapter 6.

³¹CL/HSG/2/31 (1950) **Joint Statement for the Press by the LCC and the Council of the Festival of Britain.** Development of Lansbury, Poplar, in the Stepney-Poplar Reconstruction Area. Live Architectural Exhibition Festival of Britain 1951.

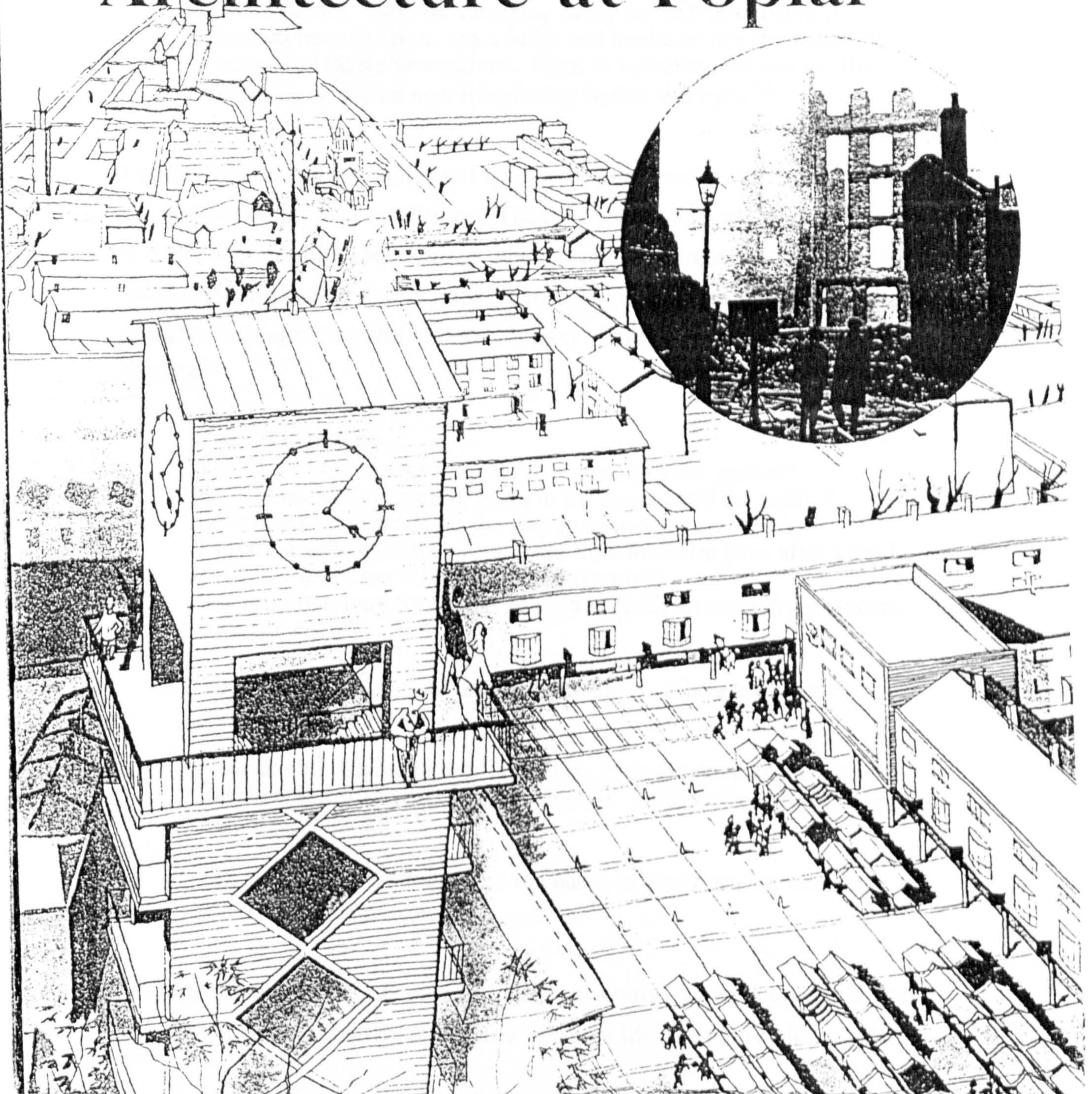
Illustration 5.1: The Exhibition of Architecture



From (1950) *The Architect and Building News*. December 15, 1950.
P639.

Illustration 5.2: The Old and the New

Architecture at Poplar



From (1951) **The Official Handbook of the Festival of Britain.**
HMSO, London. P28.

Our task is to place before the Council such measures as will ensure that all these activities, together with those of other developers, are so combined as to create a gracious and dignified urban development in place of the unplanned and chaotic confusion which frequently disfigures large stretches of London.³²

The purpose then of Town Planning is to ensure that new towns are built and old ones reshaped to suit the changed conditions of today and tomorrow. Only by sweeping away the bad living conditions inherited from the past, can a fuller and healthier life be planned for present and future generations. Here in Lansbury we can see the beginning of such a new life stirring before our eyes.³³

The Festival brochure emphasised what were portrayed as hideous dangerous and unplanned pre-war conditions. The following list of pre-war horrors seems to be directly aimed at those things which urban working-classes might have direct experience of, and which for the middle-classes symbolised the unplanned urbanisation and industrialisation of the pre-war and late nineteenth century.³⁴

Plan for posterity

Would you like a slag heap at the bottom of your garden?

Do you mind if your child plays in the street amid the traffic?

Or crosses main roads on the way to school?

Do you dislike spending your spare time in traffic jams after a hard day's work or after a Sunday in the country?

Do you often long for a little peace and fresh air away from smoke, soot and noise?

There is no need to answer these questions. The answers are obvious to everybody.

How has all this happened? It results from the mistakes of one hundred and fifty years of a 'free-for-all' philosophy and a policy of 'I'm alright Jack!'

These mistakes were made in the name of progress, but they have left us a dreadful legacy.³⁵

The appeals made in the Festival Brochure not only rely on supposed universal abhorrence towards particular features of urban life, but also claim to make

³²LCC Minutes of Proceedings, 1946. 14 January 1945. P5.

³³Williams-Ellis, C. (1954) *The Lansbury Exemplar*. Op Cit. P43

³⁴Swenarton, M. (1990) *Homes Fit For Heroes*. Op Cit.

³⁵McDunnnett, G. (1951) *Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture*. Op Cit. P5.

sense to everybody. The answers, supposedly obvious, came from increased planning, along the lines demonstrated at the Exhibition of Architecture.

Press reports, frequently stemming directly from the LCC and festival authorities, via press releases, emphasised the changes involved from past to future, and suggested to visitors what the Exhibition was intended to symbolise and represent.

During the coming months London's East End will thus be the scene of activities, which in 1951, will enable the people of London and the visitors to our commonwealth capital for the Festival of Britain, to see, for the first time, in life size, 3D form the vision of the future London which will emerge from the LCC's post-war planning and reconstruction work. From the chaotic blitzed ruins will have been born a new concept and design for living which will be in marked contrast to much of the surrounding area.

The 'Live Architecture' Exhibition will in effect demonstrate the future physical context of the British way of life and at the same time show the wealth of thought and effort and achievement in the fields of architecture, planning and building research which lie behind and have made possible the social progress which the redevelopment of Lansbury will exemplify.³⁶

The Festival Council's desire to show reconstruction efforts in heroic terms led them into conflict with the LCC, with whom they were working on the Exhibition of Architecture, and reveals how the production of the estate and associated understandings was fraught with disagreement. Compromise and negotiations eventually enabled diverse positions to be smoothed over, at least in public. The Exhibition organisers felt that the LCC would not produce development of a good enough standard for the Festival and hence would not fully demonstrate the benefits and worth of the new futures they wished to be portrayed by the Exhibition of Architecture.

As you know, the Council's work is unfortunately nowhere near the best in the country, and it would be futile to put the Poplar site on show as a national exhibition if the LCC could not, in practice, adopt for this development higher standards than hitherto. The implications of their draft is that it would be embarrassing to adopt higher standards for Poplar as an exception to their normal policy. I should have hoped that collaboration with the Festival would have

³⁶CL/HSG/2/31 (1950) Press release June 6, 1950. LCC Lansbury Housing Sites 105 from 29 October 1948 to 26 June 1951. Relating to the Development of Lansbury, Poplar, and the Live Architecture Exhibition.

provoked them into adopting higher standards for all their development work.³⁷

The organisers hoped that the LCC would cooperate with the supposed spirit of the Festival and produce an exhibition which would accommodate and reflect the general Festival emphasis on 'progressive futures', whether or not these would be in fact typical of other reconstruction developments in London.

The site for the proposed Architectural Exhibition was to be a national one it should be representative of what country was doing, and it would seem unwise for the Festival organisation to be tied to LCC standards.³⁸

The festival authorities even considered pulling out of the project because of their concerns about the priorities and standards of the LCC. However, after receiving considerable assurances from the LCC, the exhibition went ahead. Although it was not publicly admitted that it made a special case of Lansbury, the estate certainly received a great deal of LCC direction over design, planning and architectural standards, and interventions from leading planners and architects from the Festival Council.³⁹ Post-war hegemonic ideas were thus spatially enacted and enshrined in the Lansbury development.

1ciii The Exhibitions at Lansbury

The LCC and Festival organisers were keen to have an Exhibition of Architecture which would reveal the development of an estate in its entirety, as a 'neighbourhood', community-based development, to demonstrate the principles of town-planning which they would adopt for post-war projects, based around the CLP.

The principal architectural demonstration took place in London, where in cooperation with the LCC it was decided to develop as a full-size, working demonstration of contemporary principles and techniques in building and town planning, one of the proposed neighbourhoods at that time existing only on paper in the CLP.⁴⁰

³⁷CAB 124/1346 (1949) **Dispute With the LCC 23 February 1949.** Office of the Lord President of the Council 12 January 1949 to 31 March 1949.

³⁸WORK 25/49 (1949) **Minutes of the Architecture Council Meetings.** 24 February 1949.

³⁹Such as Hugh Casson, Director of Architecture, Festival of Britain Council.

⁴⁰WORK 25/3 (1951) **Story of the Festival of Britain**

Both the festival organisers and the LCC were insistent that the Exhibition should include those services which they felt important to neighbourhood or community developments and which related to the emergent welfare state.⁴¹ The LCC, based on proposals made in the CLP, insisted that the school, church and market area should be incorporated into the development and into the Exhibition. The decision by the Ministry of Health to withdraw funding for the health centre caused considerable consternation at the LCC, principally because this omission would reduce the effectiveness of community service provision on display during 1951.

To omit the Health Centre will be seriously to compromise the conception of the Exhibition as a forward-looking demonstration of contemporary British technology in the layout of an urban neighbourhood unit. Furthermore it will rob the exhibition of one of its most interesting exhibitions, and one which really had a story to tell, of British initiative and progress in the development of the National Health Service.⁴²

The LCC tried to argue with the Festival Authorities on their terms, that the omission of the health centre would weaken the symbolic importance of Lansbury.

In connection with the proposed development of a suitable proportion of neighbourhood No 9, in the Stepney-Poplar reconstruction area as a live architectural exhibition for the Festival of Britain, 1951, we are of the opinion that both a comprehensive health centre and day nursery should be included in the exhibition to give visitors an idea of the social facilities to be provided in a neighbourhood.⁴³

Very few complaints, other than those of the LCC and from Barry centred around the lack of health service provision for residents. Despite the eventual exclusion of the health centre from the site, the organisers pressed ahead with their plans to demonstrate the social role of reconstruction. Visitors were encouraged to visualise reconstruction nationally, as a series of neighbourhood units resembling Lansbury, almost as self-contained

⁴¹Henessey, P. (1992) *Never Again*. Op Cit and Calder, A. (1969) *The People's War*. Op Cit.

⁴²CAB 124/1297 (1949) Letter from Gerald Barry, to E M Nicholson, of the Office of Lord President of Council, Council for Architecture. 13 July 1949

⁴³LCC Minutes of Proceedings. 22 March, 1949. L Dudley Stamp, with reference to the Festival of Britain, 1951. Live Architectural Exhibition.

communities with all those attributes (state housing, school and hoped for medical care) of the new, emergent welfare state. The permanent Exhibition area, consisted of housing, schools, shops and churches, which were intended to reveal the physical shape of the post-war world and the way that welfare would affect 'ordinary' working people, and directly interact with housing developments. Despite the emphasis on the 'ordinary' and local the exhibition was principally oriented towards experts and non-local visitors. Williams - Ellis' summary of the exhibition suggests this:

[T]he chief object of the show was to demonstrate the most progressive theories of such expert persons in actuality, embodied on a full-scale working model of a social unit inhabited and used by a sample of average citizens.⁴⁴

Illustration 5.3, shows the walk visitors were supposed to take around the exhibition. The leader of the LCC insisted on the need to pilot visitors around, directing them through the exhibits and effectively telling them how the exhibit was to be viewed.⁴⁵ The exhibits both in the main Festival of Britain and at Lansbury effectively amounted to instructions, or at least directions about the shape of the post-war world, and how it should be understood.

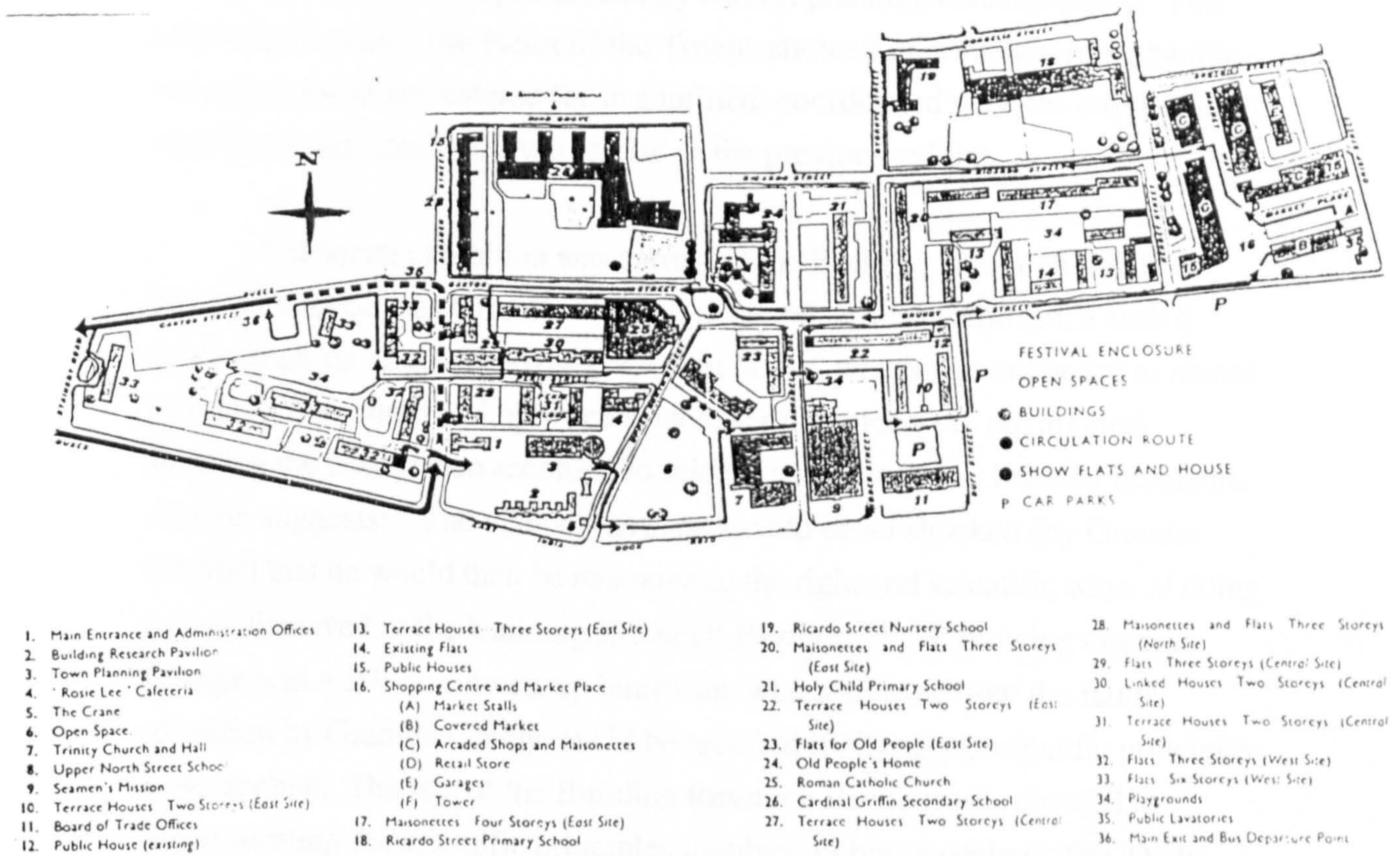
The temporary exhibitions were also designed to demonstrate the desirability of planned, community-based reconstruction projects. There were a variety of exhibitions on display during the Festival. The first exhibition, contained in the Town Planning Pavilion, consisted of a series of three exhibits designed to show the importance of town planning.⁴⁶ The first, 'Battle for Land', was a mural showing competing interests for land in Britain, and emphasising the need for careful, coordinated planning, without which chaos might ensue. The second display further demonstrated the importance of planning in a more personalised context, the display showed the 'typical lives' of sections of the population from babyhood to old age - emphasising how their different needs must be catered for. For instance, 'The World of Mother' supposedly required a school, shopping and kitchen facilities, while a married

⁴⁴Williams Ellis, C. (1954) *The Lansbury Exemplar*. Op Cit. P367.

⁴⁵Sugg, D. (1994) *The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. Paper presented to the Institute of Historical Geographers, London. May 1994.

⁴⁶See Cox, A. (1989) *The Lansbury Estate, Poplar*. Op Cit and McDunnett, G. (1951) *Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning and Building*. Op Cit for detailed descriptions of the exhibits at Lansbury.

Illustration 5.3: The Lansbury Exhibition Walk



From McDunnett, G. (1951) **Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning and Building Research.** Op Cit. P36.

male worker was shown as needing a living room, pub and office. The gendered and nuclear family centred positions of this exhibition indicate and fostered a particular view of ideal lives, of gender roles within the family which people were supposed to emulate or aspire to. Presumably the visitor was supposed to identify with one of these lives and then see how they had been catered for by the development, and by careful planning considerations. The following section, 'The Heart of the Town', showed in graphic terms how the town functioned and catered for in a unified, coordinated way, the requirements of the fictional, idealised lives carried in the previous exhibit.

A separate exhibition was carried in the Building Research Pavilion. The introduction was Gremlin Grange, depicted in illustration 5.4, a scaled down mock-up of an inter-war jerry-built house, which was supposed to reveal how buildings could end up when scientific principles were not applied, stressing the importance accorded to science as a solution to housing problems. As Cox suggests: "The visitor was supposed to be so shocked [by Gremlin Grange] that he would then be receptive to the right and scientific ways of doing things displayed in the Building Research Pavilion."⁴⁷ Following Gremlin Grange was a full-size mock-up bungalow which showed how the faults identified by Gremlin Grange could be rectified if objective, scientific principles were applied. The rest of the Building Research Pavilion was devoted to demonstrating the scientific principles involved in house design. The 'Daily Herald' discussions about the Exhibition of Architecture reveal both how the hegemonic line was reproduced in some sections of the media, and stresses the modern conditions and facilities found at Lansbury.

It's a show-piece house [Gremlin Grange], but plaster is falling, a chimney leans and smokes out the living-room, a badly placed ventilator chills another room, and there's a lopsided ceiling.

These are only a few of its faults, yet the Festival of Britain will be showing the house with pride.

For the guide will say "we don't build them like that nowadays." This Gremlin Grange is one of the many sights at the Exhibition of Architecture in the new neighbourhood unit at Lansbury E14.

The whole area will show modern building techniques. A school, a church with a spire, houses and flats into which people are moving daily are features that will remain after the festival.

⁴⁷Cox, A. (1989) *The Lansbury Estate, Poplar*. Op Cit. P31.

The flats have lifts to take baby and pram to the sun balconies. Each block has a laundry, for mothers do not like walking far with bundles of washing. Then there is the shopping centre with an arcade in front, so that people can stroll past in all weathers.⁴⁸

The emphasis on scientific solutions and modern technology was also reflected in the exhibition area by the presence of a McAlpine crane, a rarity in the early fifties, which was supposed to symbolise the machine-based, rational technology upon which future developments would be based.

The first sign of the locations of the Exhibition will be a vertical feature, consisting of an immense mono-tower crane approximately 180 feet high painted white and with various devices swinging from the jib. This feature not only marks the site but is symbolic of the great constructional effort which is being made in the East End. The crane will be floodlit at night.⁴⁹

The presence of the crane seemed to symbolise to some commentators separation between past East End and new East End conditions.

[T]his will take the form of a very tall crane to suggest and mark the site of this new effort in building. From the chaotic blitzed ruins we have now the birth of a new concept and design for living, which will be a marked contrast to the surrounding area.⁵⁰

Some of the houses on the estate were on loan from the LCC for the duration of the Festival and these flats were decorated by Festival organisers to show what domestic futures might be like. "Items were designed not only to be attractive but also hard-wearing, practical and reasonably priced."⁵¹

One of the attractions of the estate, which is arousing universal interest, is the completely furnished show flat at Overstone House....the furniture designers and craftsmen in collaboration with the Council of Industrial Design, have succeeded in showing how the utmost can be made of the available spaces while retaining the light freshness and beauty of line which distinguish a really comfortable, attractive home...In short, the entire furnishing and decorative treatment has been specifically planned and carried out to provide a perfect example of the small modern flat.⁵²

⁴⁸ Festival Reporter. (1951) Gremlins at the Grange in E14. Daily Herald. April 24, 1951.

⁴⁹(1950) Lansbury Architecture Exhibition. The Architect and Building News. December 15, 1950. P638.

⁵⁰CL/HSG/2/31 LCC (1950) Press Release 6 June, 1950. Op Cit.

⁵¹Cox, A. (1989) The Lansbury Estate, Poplar. Op Cit. P34.

⁵²(1951) Live Architecture in the East End. London Cooperative Home Magazine. August 1951.

The live exhibit stressed modernity, convenience, comfort and beauty; however, these interiors were also expensive and one of the flats had a television, well beyond the finances of most of the original Lansbury residents in the 1950s.⁵³

Throughout the Exhibition of Architecture, science, modernity, convenience and welfare facilities were stressed. These emphases relate to particular hegemonic reconstruction discourses and reveal the gendered and class positions of these discourses. The emphasis, for instance, on welfare and the 'typical lives' exhibit shows a middle-class and gendered view of working-classes and family life. More general emphasis on the modernity of Lansbury, on the science and rationality of the project and reconstruction, and on the difference between past and future, relates to wider hegemonic discourses of reconstruction and architecture, as suggested in the previous section.⁵⁴

2 The LCC and the CLP - Visions of London

In this section, portrayals of the CLP, and of the LCC's reconstruction proposals more generally, are examined for assumptions made about the sort of futures envisaged in the proposals, which were to be generated by reconstruction. In the previous chapter I noted that the CLP was given considerable publicity, and was portrayed as a comprehensive solution to London's problems. The CLP and attendant publicity was based around particular notions of the past and the future and in this section I examine these notions.

2a The Plan for the Future

The CLP then, was devised as, and portrayed in the media as a comprehensive solution to the horrors which were associated with unplanned, pre-war London. The film 'Proud City' expounded these themes, and it is worth repeating here a section of its commentary quoted also in the previous chapter.

This is a great moment in the history of London, an opportunity to replace the dirt and decay of centuries by a planned and beautiful city. It will cost millions, it is true, but not more than war, and no

⁵³Westergaard and Glass (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit.

⁵⁴Day, N. (1988) The Role of the Architect in Post-War Housing. Op Cit.

more than unplanned building. The plan is there, now it is up to the Londoner to support it, so that from the ruins of man a 'proud city' may arise.

Abercrombie It's a pretty gigantic scheme, affecting the future of the whole of London. But big problems call for big solutions and there are parts of London where rebuilding could start right away.⁵⁵

The emphasis on the future as both healthy and modern, relayed key themes throughout reconstruction discourses. Health was associated with space, light and order. This emphasis on health also relates to pre-war and nineteenth century slum clearance and philanthropic efforts in which health was firmly linked to the future, and disease and squalor to the past.⁵⁶ Indeed health and medical references often served as metaphors for modernity, progress, and science, again key themes in discussions about desired futures.

One of the major pre-war planning concerns had been 'ribbon development' or unplanned, disordered 'suburban' developments.⁵⁷ Planners frequently cited ribbon development as one of the main justifications for extensive planning. Ribbon developments were associated with chaos, symptomatic of an uncivilised or fragmenting social order, while the CLP plans invoked images of calm, social stability and self-contained developments.

Ribbon building will become an evil of the past. The banning of this unruly form of development will give those living on the outskirts the same amenities and opportunities for communal living as will be enjoyed by the city dweller.⁵⁸

The new planned city, it was argued, both in the CLP and in films about it, would enhance or create characteristics conducive to a civilised and prosperous society. 'Sufficient space' was an essential component of the new lives, supposedly indicative of a modern, technologically advanced and healthy society. Again the film 'Proud City' draws on prevalent reconstruction themes in its account of the CLP.

⁵⁵INF 6/658. (1945) *The Proud City*. Op Cit.

⁵⁶INF 6/32 (1949) *The Good Housewife in Her Kitchen*. Ministry of Food Film.

⁵⁷Swenarton, M. (1981) *Homes Fit For Heroes*. Op Cit. and Bayliss, D. (1993) *Tudor Walters and the Development of Inter-War Cottage Council Estates*. Paper Presented at the Department of Geography, QMW. April 1993.

⁵⁸INF 6/658 Nelson. (1945) *Press Release for Proud City*. Op Cit.

We think that at the LCC too. Like you, we saw in all the suffering and destruction, a great opportunity to build a new London, a better, finer and more spacious city than the old. It is our job to carry out the wishes of London's people and so in 1941 we asked our architects to prepare a plan that would bring a new order and dignity to the whole of the LCC.⁵⁹

And the press release for the film expanded on many of these themes.

Before the smoke and dust of German high explosive had settled over the ruined areas of London, the idea of recreating the metropolis as a fine, modern city was born. Vistas of incredible beauty, long hidden by a jumble of warehouses and offices were uncovered by the ruthless hand of war to provide the inspiration for the plan.⁶⁰

'Proud City' gave visual impact to the supposed contrasts between past and future, order and chaos, and rationality and irrationality. Shots of slums, old women outside crowded, dirty houses supposedly symptomatic of a chaotic, disordered past, were juxtaposed with children playing in spacious parks, wide streets, and men in open plan offices devising plans using mathematical scales - finding definitive, ordered solutions to the supposed problems of confusion and chaos prevalent before the War.

The content or proposals made in the plans were presented as rationally and scientifically worked out. For planned solutions could only be provided and produced by 'science', by objective solutions to urban problems, as discussed in section 1.

Holford We need compactness, and we need variety. Now this variation in density is a social art, and a mathematical table, and that's why we have to study the way in which people live and work. And this is one reason why the greatest experiment of the new towns is so important.⁶¹

The authors of the plan suggested that they relied on mathematics and science to produce proven, formulaic proposals, which would work every time. However, despite this emphasis on science and accuracy, Bor points out that

⁵⁹INF 6/658 *Proud City*. Op Cit.

⁶⁰INF 6/658 *Proud City*. Press Release. Op Cit.

⁶¹INF 6/997 *Houses in the Town*. Op Cit.

one of the most crucial components of the CLP, the 136 ppa density figure, was not calculated according to those much vaunted methods.

- Bor Yuh. And that had to be justified. The other problem was mystical density of 136ppa. Do you know how it came about?
- J Wasn't that the CLP?
- Bor Oh yes but how?
- J Don't know.
- Bor Arthur Ling worked it out, he was given the task of determining the densities. What did he do? And at that time the East End was very much in the forefront of planning considerations. He went round and took a count of dwellings and people living there, and he found that every density was 136ppa, not 134 or 135. But that was completely so, density 136.⁶²

The 136ppa density, one of the mainstays of the CLP, was certainly crucial in affecting designs and layouts of Lansbury.

The CLP and proposals advocated in it, generally repeated national hegemonic discourses about the future which stressed futures in opposition to the past; futures based on order, science, space, cleanliness and health. LCC presentations of futures relied, perhaps to a greater extent than national discourses, on images of health and cleanliness. Disease and dirt were associated with confusion, chaos, disorder and hence with the past. Health and cleanliness were associated with space, prosperity and with the future. In contrast to abstract, utopian, machine-based, national portrayals discussed in section 1, the LCC and CLP relied on rather more practical themes; which they supposed related to Londoners in rather more direct and perceptible ways than jargonistic, abstract or technical representations made by professional planners. CLP and LCC visions of the future arose from similar derivative discourses to those which related to ideas of progress, science and rationality, but they were also more specific, related to what they saw as day-to-day concerns. Part of this emphasis on practicality and specificity meant a greater concentration on environmental features, particularly on slums, than those of national appeals to a mythic, heroic past.

2b Lansbury - Exemplar of the Future

Lansbury was frequently represented as embodying principles and techniques which would engender the new national futures envisaged by some

⁶²Interview with Walter Bor, 1992.

planners, architects and politicians, and supposedly marked a radical break with some pre-war planning techniques.⁶³

In spite of relative lack of sophistication ...the planning of Stepney-Poplar broke new ground in many directions and was one of the few forward looking examples of positive action at that time. The very idea of comprehensive neighbourhood development...was new and had to be fought for hard to become a recognised approach.⁶⁴

However, as Bor points out, the ostensibly vernacular design of Lansbury was consciously anti-modernist at least in terms of housing design. Bor remembers a deliberately tempered architectural style at Lansbury, a result he says of awareness, both of the lack of working class 'visual sophistication' and because of where residents had previously lived.

Bor Well I've already said that basically people in this country have conservative taste, they would not take too kindly to the glass and steel architecture, for instance, yes? There are some buildings, the nursery school and the primary school, there's a lot of windows. But that is the school. The rest are holes in the wall, really and that's what people feel comfortable with, and we felt that except for a few buildings, there's a church there, a presbyterian church with style which was fairly advanced, and one or two buildings which are a little bit avant-garde, but the rest is deliberately traditional. And the other thing is that if you want to experiment, experiment with all sorts of buildings, but with housing last. Yuh? 'Cos after all this is where people live. And at that time the only way to get the house was through the Council, yuh, so all people who were dependent on the Council to provide for them, and this is another constraint. You are catering for very, for a group of people who haven't had much experience of buildings, they have lived in very down and out slums, and to suddenly put them into glass buildings is wrong. Yeah. It's insensitive.⁶⁵

Bor's explanation of the design of Lansbury reveals both a rather elite conception of modernism, and a rather patronising, consciously middle-class attitude towards the Lansbury residents, as working-class and naive and all former slum dwellers. As I suggested in the previous chapter this notion of Poplar as universally slum-like was disputed by the residents. Despite Bor's

⁶³Which have been discussed in previous sections of this chapter.

⁶⁴Bor, W. (1969) *Stepney-Poplar Reconstruction - A Reappraisal*. Op Cit. P61

⁶⁵Interview with Walter Bor, 1992.

emphasis on the traditional elements of the design of Lansbury the rhetoric of the estate was predominantly concerned with futuristic images.

Media accounts and 'explanations' of Lansbury, describe often in graphic and sometimes exaggerated terms, pre-war and blitzed conditions, descriptions which implicitly justified the reconstruction proposals for the Lansbury area.

T S Eliot's poem the Waste Land might well have been composed in this area. A ruined school, a shattered tree, and rows of derelict houses are the only remnants of a thoroughly bad sub-standard environment. The sombre twilight conditions of before the war gave way to a sharp devastating tragedy for the thousands as the wartime bombing destroyed their families, friends, homes and their whole familiar world.⁶⁶

By powerfully providing comparisons between past and future the worth and benefits of the future which Lansbury represented and symbolised were assured.

In place of this ugliness, disorder, and overcrowding, it is the task of the future to plan homes in which working folk can live in comfort, factories in which they can work without injury to their health, and open spaces which provide plenty of good fresh air and out-of-doors amenities...already much has been done in this direction in various parts of the country, and one of the latest developments in modern town planning and housing methods is to be seen at Poplar in London's East End.⁶⁷

As in other accounts of reconstruction, the emphasis in representations of Lansbury was on health, space and order and was justified and suggested by oppositional pairings.

The new layout at Lansbury seems to have generated considerable media interest, presumably as one of the most self-evident and visible examples of change, and an exemplar of all these features which post-war planners, architects and politicians associated with modernity.

The road pattern has been drastically altered from the closely packed street layout of the mid-nineteenth century, to one recognising not

⁶⁶Johnson-Marshall. (1966) **Rebuilding London**. Op Cit. P30. This text ran alongside a photograph depicting dereliction at the Lansbury Estate.

⁶⁷(1951) **Live Architecture in the East End**. London Cooperative Home Magazine. Op Cit.

only the requirements of the car and the lorry but also the essential needs of the pedestrian.⁶⁸

Hundreds of derelict acres will be cleared, hundreds of properties will be pulled down, including some now occupied. From a wilderness of narrow streets and mean houses will rise miles of new, wide roads, open spaces, and fine blocks of flats- at a cost in millions at present beyond calculation. The scheme for 2000 acres of Poplar and Stepney, it is claimed, will be the world's biggest slum clearance.⁶⁹

The 'East London Advertiser' emphasised the changed road layout, stressing the shift from closely packed, jumbled and disordered legacies from the nineteenth century, to a progressive, open and ordered layout more in keeping with the brave, new, post-war world. The article in the East End News recounts in a rather heroic manner the enormity of the project, financially, spatially and symbolically. The similarity of these two reports and others suggests that both had their origins in LCC press releases. Some accounts also emphasised a supposed brightness and shine to the new Lansbury, again particularly in contrast with portrayals of the old East End.

A bright New Town rising from the slums of the East End. That's the aim of a massive LCC modernisation plan...Revealed this week is the huge development scheme, which means the end of the old, dirty and overcrowded East End-and the birth of a shining community of new housing, schools shopping centres and parkland.⁷⁰

Emphasis in the 'Stratford Express' article above, is on leisure and increased parkland space, and relates to the residents' apparent predominant concerns; reduced workload, increased convenience and increased leisure time. This focus on work and leisure is not found in hegemonic discussions about reconstruction to the same extent. Residents and local press, seem far more concerned with practical details which they felt directly affect them. As mentioned earlier, hegemonic accounts stressed the importance of science and machines and abstract notions about the future in symbolic ways.

3 Residents' Portrayals of the Future

⁶⁸(1959) First Tenants Moving into New Lansbury Estate Extension. *East London Advertiser*. 15 May, 1959.

⁶⁹'Star' Reporter (1948) LCC Push Rebuilding of East End. *East End News*. December 17, 1948.

⁷⁰(1951) New Scheme. *Stratford Express*. 15 November, 1951.

In previous sections, I have examined the ways imagined and intended futures were portrayed in national, regional and more local texts. In this final section, I will examine residents' interpretations of what sort of futures they expected in 1951, and how understandings of the estate were bound up with ideas about the future. From my experience during interviews, there was a general reluctance to talk about futures in any abstract sense. The women seemed more comfortable with, and forthcoming about, what they considered to be personal, and individual experiences and interests. However, those supposed individual experiences seem to have been, in many cases, shared understandings, related to pre-war experiences and to the opinions of others, formed in relation to hegemonic cultures and discourses.

Tom, who was eight in 1951, remembers a positive attitude towards the changes at Lansbury.

J And then when they started developing again after the War, do you think people were pleased or upset that there was a new way of doing things?

Tom My recollection of that is that everyone thought how marvellous it was going to be, this was going to be the new way of living, the garden town in...so my first impression was how marvellous it was going to be.⁷¹

Tom's general summary, and his mention of garden towns differs from most of the other residents I spoke to; they preferred not to generalise and recounted what they felt were individual or personal understandings. Tom's rather broader view may arise from his research into the estate for a college project. He had read a considerable number of press reports about the estate, and was familiar with Festival of Britain literature.

The residents of Lansbury who moved there in 1951 recounted with enthusiasm, domestic, and what they saw as personalised experiences of modernity. These experiences are partly related to hegemonic discourses; both stress cleanliness and hygiene, and the provision of new facilities. The residents were unwilling to relate in general senses their conceptions about the future. In fact general issues of reconstruction do not seem to have generated or inspired much enthusiasm among residents. In particular, the Exhibition of Architecture was of very little interest to the residents, and as I showed earlier was never really intended for them.

⁷¹Interview with Tom, 1992.

- J Did you come here for the Festival?
 Daisy That was when we moved in. I didn't go much 'cos I was at work, see.

Most of the residents I spoke to, except Mrs Snoddy who had agreed to open her flat to professional experts during the Exhibition, did not mention the Exhibition, or didn't know about the Exhibition. There was a distinct lack of interest in reconstruction in other areas, or with the position of Britain in the post-war world. If pressed, a few residents admitted that their expectations were low, as Mrs Snoddy relates during discussions about a film she was involved in in the mid 1970s, intended as a retrospective of post-war changes.

- J What was the name?
 Snoddy 'London Looks Forward' I think. Yeah, I'm sure that was it. 'Cos I remember saying at the time 'I think it looks backwards.'⁷²

Westergaard and Glass, however, found a positive reaction to the estate by residents, whom they felt recognised and appreciated the novelties and newness of the estate.

The experience of Lansbury suggests that where the basic social background is left relatively unchanged, considerable innovations in civic and housing design would be acceptable...Lansbury shows that the alleged conservatism of 'clients' is not a legitimate excuse for the timidity which is often found among the architects, planners and committees of local authorities. Experimentation is not only essential, but also feasible...The Lansbury tenants welcome novelty.⁷³

While Westergaard and Glass were sceptical about some of the features of Lansbury, they applauded the more visibly modern elements of the estate. They suggested residents did the same. Other reports suggested in a similar way that residents were universally delighted with the estate and appreciated of the modern, welfare facilities provided

Here was a chance to begin building a new East End, where people could breathe.

Where the old tonsils hospital once stood, the welfare centre now bouncing scores of babies on its municipal knee weighs them and fills them with welfare foods.

⁷²Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

⁷³Westergaard and Glass. (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit. P49

"Lansbury is giving my little girl a good start" says a young wife. "I dreaded bringing her up in a back to back house, with the light on in the kitchen all day, and a backyard lavatory with one of those noisy cisterns to keep the neighbours informed."⁷⁴

The women I spoke to did not stress or articulate explicitly any excitement at general concepts of novelty and newness associated with the whole estate, which were prevalent in other accounts. Their current, apparent lack of interest in the 'innovative' design of Lansbury may be because what appeared novel and exciting in 1951, would now appear mundane or old-fashioned, or because they did not feel in a position to talk in abstract ways about general concepts of the future, or about planning and architectural concerns. Most of the interviewees, however, were relatively keen to recount their excitement at the interior of their flats and some of the facilities of the flats, rather than the layout of the estate, or even the blocks of flats more generally. Perhaps this interest is because the women felt their areas of expertise lay in domestic concerns, rather than with what may be considered distant and more abstract concerns.

The facilities of the flats inspired frequent comments. Many of the interviewees recounted how they had marvelled at the gadgets and provisions of the flats, again often in contrast to their previous lack.

Price It was very nice. Oh yes. 'Cos it's like even where I come from. Bathroom and all that we had when we come in. It made alot of difference. You know in the other place. My sister-in-law had a shower room in the big house, so you noticed the difference when I come here, nice bathroom. So that was it. I've been here ever since.

Price Oh they was lovely. It was like a palace when I went there. I know it was coal-fire, no central heating. We used to have a fire which would heat all the water to the bathroom, and you could get, not keep reheating the water. Used to have constant water when the coal fire was going. That was lovely heating.⁷⁵

Two features repeatedly occur in the women's accounts, the kitchens and the provision of laundries. The laundries which were under each of the blocks built in 1951 were particularly and repeatedly praised.

⁷⁴Lucas, J. (1951) New Town is Growing Up. *Daily Herald*. April 8, 1951.

⁷⁵Interview with Mrs Price, 1992.

Mackiowski Yes, this block 'ere, this 'ere was a little block of laundry. You all had your certain times to go in there, like half the day, to do your washing for the whole week. And you had driers. Washing machines, driers, boilers where you dried your clothes.⁷⁶

And Daisy Jarrett similiarly emphasised the laundry rooms.

Daisy Cos they had a laundry down there an' all. They had washing machines in there and all, that's all by the board now. We was all down there doing the washing, hot cabinets and all to dry your washing. They was perfect. But all got ruined, what people do (sadly). You all had your time, I used to do mine after work.⁷⁷

The provision of laundries seemed to relate to, and fit in with, notions of the future, based on cleanliness, order and technology. The kitchens were also frequently commented upon, although it was mainly in press reports that the kitchens were portrayed as the epitome of chic-modernity.

Said Mrs Snoddy last night "our new place is just a house-wife's dream. There are fitted cupboards and one to air clothes in, a stainless-steel sink, hot-water tanks. If any Festival visitors want to see my home I shall be glad to show them around. It's the sort of home to be proud of."⁷⁸

However, Mrs Snoddy now denies having said any of the above, and frequently stated she would rather have stayed where she was. Other residents, while less enthusiastic than media reports might have suggested, were still anxious to talk about the kitchens, and domestic arrangements.

Daisy Ohh lovely. There was one room they had gas cookers, in the other they had electric, 'cos I only like gas, 'cos I work cooking and I only like gas. So I said 'oh I don't like electric, but if that's all there is'...so I spoke to someone and they said 'oh there's gas', so I went back and had gas. And when we moved in there the kids had the rooms to thereselves. The living room in Gladstone house was big, and the kitchen was big. The two bedrooms only had a

⁷⁶Interview with Mrs Mackiowski, 1992.

⁷⁷Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

⁷⁸Richman, A. (1951) Lansbury, E14 gets a Family. *Daily Herald*. 14 February 1951.

tiny kitchen, I don't know how they managed. See some they done right and some they done wrong.⁷⁹

The newness of the flats at Lansbury seems to have been predominantly welcomed because of associations between newness and cleanliness. The residents welcomed the cleanliness of the estate when it first opened, particularly in relation with what they had experienced before, stressing that they did not mind sharing cleaning duties.

Zeena Very nice, it was very nice indeed. I mean the surroundings were entirely different to what they are now-clean. I mean we used to have a caretaker, a Mr Henshaw, who was an old naval officer. He used to come around, not to me, but to my mother when it was our turn to do the stair, we had to clean the stairs, not all the way down, because the other people had to do the bottom flight, and 'um we used to come around and knock on the door. 'Mrs Rippin, its your turn for stairs this week', and my mum would say 'yes I know I'm just about to do them'. You know we didn't mind that because everybody took their turn and it was fine, but 'um as I say he used to keep everybody in order.⁸⁰

The emphasis on cleanliness relates to emphases present in Zeena's account on reduced domestic work, and the regulation of that work by an authority. As noted earlier, cleanliness is also a trigger word for health, for space, and as I go on to suggest in chapter 7 also for whiteness.

The new development thus represented a 'step-up' from slums, and this new life was seen as clean and distinct from conditions typically associated with slums, so the supposed improvements in working-class life, were reflected in changing levels of cleanliness.

Zeena At one time, I don't know if Mrs Snoddy told you this, but one time it was considered as a snobby part of Poplar. There wasn't a bit of paper left lying around. It was lovely, the pride of Poplar. But as I say, we're only ordinary people, it was a treat for people to come around and visit you.⁸¹

As I tried to demonstrate in previous sections, visions of the future were related to and substantially defined by understandings and portrayals of the past. The

⁷⁹Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

⁸⁰Interview with Zeena, 1992.

⁸¹Interview with Zeena, 1992.

layout of the estate was also affected by a direct concern with the past. There is a tension between incorporation of traditions and heritage and emphases on futures and modernity in accounts about Lansbury. This tension is also reflected in some of the interviewees who defined their flats newness solely in terms of previous conditions. When asked how much they liked the flats initially interviewees tended to first relate how they had lived before, and qualify their appreciation of the 'novelty' of the flats with accounts of what old conditions were like.

Zeena I mean everything was so new to us, because where we lived before we only had a tiny little kitchen and a big copper...Mum used to do all the work, oh yes, she lived there some years. And outside, we d'int have a bathroom, we had a toilet outside, I mean at least we had a toilet, but I mean we didn't have a bathroom, it was a real luxury to us. But as I say everything was so new and lovely.⁸²

My questions around the design of the estate, either met with silence, or general, but rather disinterested, agreement. Clearly, the planners, architects and politicians concerns and representations were not followed by Lansbury residents. However, there were linkages between the discourses as the hegemonic emphasis on modernity, machines and technology was translated into concern with domestic convenience, cleanliness and contrasts drawn with pre-war conditions. Interestingly, none of the residents I spoke to were concerned with the supposed improved health of the area. The concern with health in some, mainly LCC accounts, arose from a middle-class fear of the East End as a disease-ridden slum, a fear which figured strongly in nineteenth century and early twentieth slum clearance programmes.⁸³

4 Conclusions

Hegemonic discourses about the future minimised personal details, and effectively dehumanised the envisaged futures. They relied on spatially vast images and heroic notions of a modernist, machine based future where light, science and rationality prevailed. Lansbury was situated and implicated in those images by its inclusion into the Festival of Britain, and because the LCC placed a good deal of emphasis on Lansbury as the embodiment of Abercrombie's proposals. Press and media attention, was then, related to both national,

⁸²Interview with Zeena, 1992.

⁸³Mayhew, H. (1967) (1st edn 1851) *London Labour and the London Poor*. Spring Books, London.

abstract notions of the post-war future, to the LCC's visions for London, and to local council concerns about the state of Poplar. Residents in the estate had rather different visions of the future, and on the whole confined their visions to domestic arenas, with one or two relaying overtly sceptical comments about the grandiose claims made by the reconstructors. These differences and similarities between the various groups relate to my notion of discourses discussed in chapter 2. It is clear that understandings about the future from various groups concerned, all draw on similar themes or grand narratives; such as space, light, health, cleanliness, although the degree to which these themes were emphasised varied between groups. The difference of emphasis may be a result of localised discourses drawing on practical experiences and detailed knowledges of particular places and people, to envisage the future and authenticate their proposals. However, there are also substantial and important differences between the groups, not just a difference of emphasis, but also some residents criticised or ignored hegemonic claims altogether, and asserted their own interpretations, both of post-war reconstruction, and of pre-war conditions.

Chapter 6: Views of the East End

In the previous chapter, it was argued that notions about the future were repeatedly structured through oppositional pairings with the past, thereby supposedly assuring the worth of the reconstruction projects. The East End formed an important part of these oppositional pairings; its pre-war condition had been portrayed as dystopian, while the future East End was represented as utopian; the East End therefore partially symbolised hegemonic ideas about the post-war world. By associating the East End with the future, ideas about the future were placed, given a specific location, and the place attained additional significance and importance in the post-war world. In this chapter, firstly hegemonic ideas about the East End in discourses associated with Lansbury are examined. Secondly, LCC ideas and representations about the East End and Lansbury will be examined and finally local and residents' understandings about the East End and Lansbury are discussed.

1 Outsiders' East End

1a Pre-war East End

The last half of the nineteenth century witnessed a growth of interest in the East End, particularly by a philanthropic and sometimes reformist-inclined elite.¹ Numerous studies emerged which attempted to describe social and economic conditions in the East End, and these attracted considerable national, political and middle-class interest.² The East End had inspired a vast array of onlookers, philanthropists, tourists, charity workers, politicians and social surveys. As Pollins states, "It is probably true that no other area in London has experienced so many investigations and surveys into a wide variety of social matters."³ A considerable amount has been written about the portrayals of the

¹For instance: Booth, C. (ed) (1889) **Labour and Life of the People. Vol 1 East London.** Williams & Moorgate, London. Booth, C. (1984) (1st edn 1889) **Charles Booth's Descriptive Map of London Poverty, 1889.** London Topographical Society, No 130, London. Fried and Elman. (eds) (1969) **Charles Booth's London.** Op Cit. Disraeli, B. (1926) **Sybil: Or the Two Nations.** Longmans Green & Co. Ltd., London. Mearns, A. (1970) (1st edn 1883) **The Bitter Cry of Outcast London.** Leicester University Press, New York.

²Howard, E. (1898) **Garden Cities of Tomorrow.** (2nd edn 1902) Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., London. Simpson, G. (1959) **A Comparative Study of the Contemporary and Pre-War Urban Geography of East London.** Unpublished Thesis, University of London. Yelling, J. (1986) **Slum Clearance in Victorian London.** Op Cit.

³Pollins, H. (1961) **East London in Post-War Fiction.** *East London Papers.* Vol 4, No 1. Pps 15-23

East End and of middle-class understandings of it, and how ascribed characteristics becamee synonymous with the term 'slum'.⁴

Considerable attention was devoted to solving what were posed as problems. The concern generated by these supposed accounts of life and conditions in the East End resulted in political pressure on the Government to enact legislation to improve conditions. The first slum clearance programmes were largely unsuccessful, given their remit of slum clearance.⁵ However, by the 1900s there were a number of pieces of legislation which could allow, although not necessarily enforce, local authorities to implement particular standards of housing design and layout.⁶ These programmes and legislation, aimed at preventing, those who were seen as deserving poor, from abject poverty,⁷ had important ramifications and implications extending beyond physical improvement. The linkages made between poor conditions and supposed degeneracy and immorality meant that the area came to symbolise a particular lifestyle considered unacceptable to the Victorian elite.

During the nineteenth century widely articulated and thus powerful portrayals about the East End emerged, and formed a hegemonic set of images about the East End and about East Enders. Many of these depictions of the East End constructed an image of the place as possessed of all the worst features and characters imaginable. Mearns's 'Bitter Cry of Outcast London', serialised in the 'Pall Mall Gazette', the 'Daily News' and 'Telegraph', was a particularly sensational depiction, and caused widespread outrage amongst the middle-classes, unfamiliar with the place and with poverty.⁸ Mayhew's series of

⁴For instance Stedman Jones has discussed the emergence of powerful images about the East End and the supposed place of East Enders in the formation of ideas about the nation and nationalism. Stedman Jones, G. (1989) *The Cockney and The Nation 1780-1988* in Feldman, D. and Stedman Jones, G. (eds) (1989) *Metropolis London*. Routledge, London. Pps 272-324. Fishman, W. (1988) *East End 1888*. Duckworth, London. Fremantle, F. (1927) *Housing of the Nation*. Philip Alan & Co. Ltd., London. Holingshead, J. (1986) *Ragged London in 1861*. Op Cit.

⁵Torrens Acts 1868 and 1891 and Cross Acts 1874 and 1879 (Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Act).

⁶1875 Public Health Act, Section 157. Sutcliffe, A. (ed) (1980) *Rise of Modern Urban Planning 1800-1914*. Mansell, London. Balchin, P. (1981) *Housing Policy and Housing Needs*. Macmillan Press Ltd., London. England, K. (1931) *Housing: A Citizen's Guide to the Problem*. Chatto & Windus, London.

⁷While the undeserving poor were beyond moral redemption,

⁸Mearns, A. (1970) *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*. Op Cit.

articles during the early-nineteenth century in the 'Morning Chronicle' had already set the tone for other descriptions, providing harrowing accounts of disease, incest, criminality, abject poverty and other attributes designed to shock and disrupt complacent middle-class Victorian society.⁹ Thackery commenting on Mayhew's 'Labour and the Poor', in 1850 said it was:

A picture of life so wonderful, so awful, so piteous and pathetic, so exciting and terrible, that readers of romances own they never read anything like to it, and that the griefs and struggles, strange adventures here depicted exceed anything that any of us could imagine...But such wondrous and complicated misery as this you confess you had no idea. No, how should you - you and I are of the upper classes; we therefore had hitherto no community with the poor...until some clear-sighted, energetic man like Mayhew travels into the poor man's country for us, and comes back with his tales of terror and wonder.¹⁰

As Domville concludes in his review of fiction concerning the East End at the turn of the century.

To judge from the fiction published during the period under review, the majority of authors and readers regarded the people of this region as almost a different species of being, inhabiting a place of stupefying ugliness and of sensational happenings of widespread drunkenness and violence.¹¹

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the East End was portrayed as another country, alien, barbaric and terrifying. The racialised tenor of the discussions of the East End exemplified in Domville's review, formed a vital component in the explanation of supposed conditions there. Notions of physiognomy pervaded, and are evident in pictures by Frith and Cruickshank who illustrated for Dickens; Dore, and in the illustrations in 'Punch' and the 'Illustrated London News', for instance.¹² The East End was cast, not just as inherently depraved, but as alien, unEnglish and easy linkages were made between unEnglish, degenerate behaviour, and immigrants. The explanation therefore for the lawless and licentious East End lay in the naturally primitive,

⁹Mayhew, H. (1952) *Mayhew's London: Being Selections from 'London Labour and the London Poor.'* Spring Books, London.

¹⁰Thackery, (1850) quoted in Mayhew, H. (1952) *Mayhew's London.* Op Cit. P18.

¹¹Domville, E. (1965) *Gloomy City or the Depths of Hell. The Presentation of the East End in Fiction Between 1880-1914. East London Papers.* Vol 8, 2. Pps 98-109. P99.

¹²See also Charles Bennet Market Porter, *London People*, 1863 and *Impertinent Street Arabs.* *Judy.* 17 July 1867.

lower order 'race' of people who lived there.¹³ East Enders in the late nineteenth century were therefore foreigners in another country, whether cast as the white, patriotic cockney or as the frightening dangerous alien. Stedman Jones has argued that the notion of the cheerful, white cockney, dominating after the late nineteenth century was an attempt by middle-classes to incorporate what were otherwise viewed as dangerous and alien insurgents, into the centre.¹⁴

The New Ethnicities Unit suggest that: "From the 1870s a new kind of East Ender is increasingly popularised by public commentators, featured in musical hall songs, and comedy acts, the cheerful, wisecracking cockney...not a race apart but the backbone of nation and empire, the salt of the earth."¹⁵ However, while agreeing with this description of the ascribed characteristics of the cockney, the cockney figure had some similarities with the dangerous, alien portrayed in other less sympathetic accounts. Both types of descriptions saw the East Ender as different from the rest of society; occupying special places, whether as a loveable rogue or plain villain, the East Ender was always beyond the law, and outside an assumed centre. Stedman Jones argued the cockney emerged as the dominant character in the East End at those times when national government needed to garner and foster support from even the most outlandish corners of society. The figure of the cockney then, developed during the Boer War, acquired heightened attention and characterisation during the First and Second World Wars.

What was certain, was that the cockney was placed, associated with particular spaces, and those spaces became associated with particular attributes articulated at the time. As Stedman Jones argues: "It is therefore not difficult to see how the recurrent emphasis upon the spatial limitations of the cockneys' world was an excluding device designed to place them beyond the pale."¹⁶ And he notes how a particular geography of the cockney came to dominate after 1945.

After the second world war, the topography of the 'cockney' shifted. Pre-war 'cockneys' were mainly to be encountered in street

¹³Which according to physiognomic principles means negroid. Archer, G. (1985) *Art and Architecture in Victorian Manchester*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

¹⁴Stedman Jones, G. (1989) *The Cockney and the Nation*. Op Cit.

¹⁵New Ethnicities Unit. (1994) *Island Stories*. Op Cit

¹⁶Stedman Jones, G. (1989) *The Cockney and the Nation*. Op Cit. P284

markets, city offices, the surviving music halls, dancing on Hampstead Heath, or 'doing the Lambeth Walk'. Now cockneys were firmly located in the dockland areas and the East End.¹⁷

Perhaps of particular importance in the context of this study, is the emergence of an essentialised notion of the East End throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, in which a location produced a particular and peculiar personality different from the rest of London and England. These pervasive notions were still prevalent before 1939 and beyond.¹⁸ Ideas about the East End which are discussed in this chapter, should be considered as firmly rooted in the images which had emerged in the previous seventy-five years, and particularly the idea that the East End was profoundly different to the rest of London, and East Enders a race apart.

1b The New East End

The War gave renewed impetus to disturbing accounts of life in the East End and on the appalling conditions there, as the Blitz concentrated journalists', politicians', planners' and architects' attention on the area. Extensive damage incurred during the Blitz ensured that problems in the East End were highlighted. During the War politicians and planners frequently alluded to the supposed desperate conditions which East Enders had suffered prior to the Blitz, and drew on dramatic imagery to describe their plight, which was particularly pertinent and effective because it was familiar, related to pre-war representations. Associated with, and implicit in, discussions about physical reconstruction, were notions of social reconstruction, important as chapter 4 suggested, to supply an optimistic conclusion to the War.¹⁹ Images of people rising from the depths of hell were suggested to be a consequence of war-time, in which physical destruction enabled and facilitated human redemption. This process was frequently related to depictions of courageous, self-sacrificing nationalists who deserved change because of their war-time experiences and displays of bravery.

¹⁷Stedman Jones, G. (1989) *The Cockney and the Nation*. Op Cit. P276.

¹⁸See New Ethnicities Unit. (1994) *Island Stories*. Op Cit and Appleby S. (1992) *The Representation of the East End in Photography over the Past Fifteen Years*. Unpublished IGS Project. QMW Geography Department. Keith, M. (1994) *Street Sensibility? Negotiating the Political by Articulating the Spatial*. Paper Presented at University of Oxford, March 1994.

¹⁹As discussed in the previous chapter.

Reconstruction in the East End symbolised the birth of a new society. The symbolism was particularly strong in the East End because of the strong negative associations of the pre-war area, as discussed in section 1a. Planners, architects and politicians all drew on those familiar symbolisms to stress the importance of reconstruction in the East End and at Lansbury.

Like Dickens and Arthur Morrison they painted a general picture of the drabness and dreariness that had succeeded the more picturesque violence and squalor of the East End; but they did not stop to intensify the picture itself, nor to paint its moral in terms that would move the common man to tears or anger...The black spots of London that Dickens exposed a hundred years ago were real enough, but his characters were fictional. Through his skill as a novelist they quickly became familiar and even dear to us. Lansbury is an expose of the opposite sort a bright spot in a drab landscape; and the characters are real.²⁰

Holford on the BBC related the East End of Dickens and Morrison to the new, reconstructed East End which shows not just the importance of those authors' representations of the East End to pervasive notions of the place, but also to how the planners' and architects' East End was meant to be entirely different to the unplanned, pre-war place.

Abercrombie, in the film 'Proud City' reiterated familiar, gloomy themes about the East End in his description of the area, descriptions which justified the East End he had planned.

Abercrombie Look again, and you will see mean, hideous slums of which any city should be ashamed. Row upon row of dirty, dismal houses that should have been pulled down and done away with long ago. Homes without any proper sanitation, where every drop of water has to be carried up and down the stairs in buckets and the only place for cooking store is on the stairway landing. Homes where whole families live, eat and sleep all together in one room and the children have nowhere but the back alleys to play in.²¹

By emphasising slum-like characteristics existent pre-war, and drawing on pre-war depictions of the area as a slum, discussions about the East End portrayed the Blitz as an opportunity. The adjunct of the devastation and horror suffered

²⁰THHL 331.3 Holford, W. (1951) **The Stepney-Poplar Reconstruction Scheme.** Op Cit.

²¹INF 6/658 **Proud City.** Op Cit.

could be new beginnings and the emergence of a new, improved East End, as the synopsis for the film 'Proud City' stated:

The rebuilding of the industrial boroughs of Stepney, London has long been a crying need. A model has been made of a truly impressive Stepney of lawns and trees in which the factories are in a separate quarter from the terraced houses. A new river front is to replace some of the unsightly buildings south of the river there are to be wider streets and modernised traffic and railway systems, and no more unruly ribbon development will be permitted.²²

This synopsis for the film 'Proud City' drew on many prevalent themes, already discussed: modernity, space, an end to ribbon development and located all these changes in the East End, cast as possessed of everything unacceptable, or undesirable, before the War.

Other articles emphasised the supposed 'need' of the East End, and its alienation from, and difference to, other places, again a familiar theme in relation to the East End. As Allen Andrews writing in *Public Opinion* in 1951 suggested:

Death and evacuation reduced the population of the borough to one third its old figure; and though it has risen slightly since then, few come back to share the overcrowding and the insanitary conditions awaiting them in such houses as remain. It was almost another country. In a wide no mans land to the north side of East India Dock Road children grew up and did not know the names of streets fifty yards away from where their parents were born.²³

In conjunction with an emphasis on the negative qualities of the environment there was a stress on the retention of tradition. Press articles about Lansbury frequently alluded to the supposed perpetuation of 'traditional' East End practices and customs, as the next section details.

Ideas about improvement of the area, despite contemporary short-term adversity, were frequently articulated during national films and radio productions concerned with the Festival of Britain. Dimbleby described his visit to the post-blitz East End, during a radio discussion about the Exhibition of Architecture.

²²INF 6/658 *Proud City. Synopsis.* Op Cit.

²³Andrews, A. (1951) *Heaven Among the Common People.* Op Cit.

Now to walk round here in the day time as I did this afternoon is to see the old and delapidated side by side with the very new. There are rows of houses, badly damaged due to demolition and there are great gaps where there are no houses at all, nearly half the houses in this district were laid flat by the air raids and added to this rather untidy jumble is all the paraphernalia of a big building project.²⁴

The Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture stressed the importance and symbolism of having the exhibition in the East End. "Within and to the north of the sudden loop in the Thames which almost encircles the Isle of Dogs, close to the heart of London's busy dockland lies Poplar, part of the East End home of the traditional Londoner, the Cockney."²⁵ The Exhibition of Architecture therefore drew on the presumed special nature of the East Ender to justify and explain the development at Lansbury. Indeed part of the reason for having the Exhibition of Architecture at Lansbury was the special status of the area in war-time and post-war Britain.

1c The New East Enders

The East End acquired status during the War as the site of resistance to the bombing, and as the place of the indomitable, nationalistic and cheerful cockney who had been the subject of intense and sustained media and political interest during the War.²⁶ All of which resulted in a different construction of the East Ender and the East End, than that prevalent pre-war. Depictions concerned with the East End emerged after the Blitz, with inhabitants portrayed not as a licentious and depraved people in need of moral guidance, but brave nationalists who by inherent positive characteristics, had ensured the defence of Britain and of democracy. These images, although less common, had existed earlier, and the War and pre-war images of the cockney and the area were interrelated, and combined with more horrific and horrified depictions of the place. All these images fed into complex post-war representations which stressed both continuity and change, and which drew on and altered pre-war discursive constructions.

As Stedman Jones comments:

²⁴WORK 25/40 (1950) *The Festival of Britain 1951*. BBC Radio Broadcast. Op Cit.

²⁵McDunnott, G. (1951) *Guide to the Exhibition of Architecture*. Op Cit. P61.

²⁶Calder, A. (1991) *The Myth of the Blitz*. Johnathan Cape, London. See also Review of the Myth of the Blitz. *The Making of the Myth of the Blitz*. *The Guardian*. August 19, 1991.

When the war began it was this archaic and nostalgic notion of the 'cockney' spirit which was enlisted by the Ministry of Information with its emphasis on 'cheerfulness' and the 'carry-on spirit' as the dominant motif in its attempt to sustain morale during the blitz. Indeed, if the Conservative press was to be believed, the 'cheerfulness' of the bombed-out East Enders bordered on imbecility.²⁷

The film 'London Can Take It' made in 1940 by the Ministry of Information shows some of the ways East Enders were portrayed in war-time national representations.

It [the film] is made by the people of London about the people of London - the plain people, the true people. I have recently been seeing something of them and know what it is like to be in a city that's being bombed.

Great things are happening in Britain but perhaps the greatest is the display of neighbourliness, of kindness, of cheerfulness, of uncomplaining suffering that is being given by ordinary people who secure no fame and who have no place in the headlines.

In this picture we will catch a glimpse of that spirit which is the surest bulwark of Britain against senseless and indiscriminate bombing by the half-civilised Hun. In brief this is a picture of why Hitler cannot win the war.²⁸

And as 'Neighbours Under Fire' made clear in 1940, it was the working-class East Enders who deserved support and encouragement for their defiance of Nazism.

This is a record of human kindness under fire during the first weeks of the blitzkrieg on London.

On the thickly populated small streets and on the municipal achievements of the docklanders the Nazis rained death and destruction from the skies.

...Into the breach blasted by the bombers stepped the voluntary workers on their shoulders they gladly took a burden that grew beyond all proportions.

[The film] is a tribute to the courage and fortitude of the volunteers and people of London's East End who in their hours of danger

²⁷Stedman Jones, G. (1989) *The Cockney and the Nation*. Op Cit. P313.

²⁸Including scenes of 'cockney cheer and banter.' INF 6/328 (1940) *London Can Take it*. Ministry of Information. Released in Britain October 1941

turned and helped themselves and each other when the established machinery was unable to function.²⁹

The Blitz led to, and inspired an array of images about the East End as a deserving area whose people had substantially contributed to the war effort and which was home to a vigorous, worthy, decent working-class people. War-time discussions about the East End therefore constructed them as defiant, spirited and above all quintessentially English.³⁰ A people who had proven their worth, commitment and attachment to the nation.

Many of the people you are looking at are members of the greatest civilian army ever to be assembled...we haven't had a quiet night now for five weeks.

London doesn't look down upon the ruins of its houses, upon those made homeless during the night, upon the remains of churches hospitals. London looks upwards towards the dawn, and faces the world with confidence.

Dr Paul Josef Goebbels said recently that the nightly air-raids have had a terrific effect on the morale of the people of London. The good doctor was absolutely right. Today the morale of the people is higher than ever before.

A bomb has its limitations it can only destroy buildings and kill people. It cannot kill the incomparable spirit and courage of the people of London. London can take it.³¹

The films mentioned above, intended as morale boosters in the early part of the War, were part of a much broader propaganda drive, aiming to ensure domestic support for the War, undermine the effect of Nazi attacks and show the world that London would not crumble.³² However, as noted in previous chapters, this public articulation of representations of reconstruction as reward for a long-

²⁹INF 6/1036 **Neighbours Under Fire**. (1940) Ministry of Information. Accompanied by general shots of destruction of East End.

³⁰See Feldman, D. (1989) **The Importance of Being English**. Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England in Feldman and Stedman Jones. (eds) (1989) **Metropolis London**. Op Cit. Pps 50-84. See also Light, A. and Samuel, R. (1989) **Doing the Lambeth Walk** in Samuel, R. (ed) (1989) **Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity**. Volume III, **National Fictions**. Routledge, London. Pps 262-271.

³¹INF 6/328 **London Can Take It**. Op Cit. -

³²See also: **The New Britain**. Ministry of Information, July 1940. **The Dawn Guard**. Ministry of Information, March 1941 and **Battle of the Books**. Ministry of Information, October 1941. These films are discussed in Aldgate, A. and Richards, J. (1986) **Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War**. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

suffering population, was tempered by politicians private admissions that failure to improve physical conditions might jeopardise the social and political status quo.³³ Another effect of these films was to foster and create a particular construction of the East End and East Ender which had profound implications for the design of Lansbury and the ways in which it was represented.

The Ministry of Information was not the only source of the 'cheerful cockney' image, other media also picked up on the emergence of the Blitz cockney and also contributed to, and affected, prevalent images of the East Ender. Lucas's article in the 'Daily Herald' in 1951 describes East Enders in rather sentimental terms, fitting in with the dominant cockney image, relating a changed environment, but with all the appealing attributes and customs of the pre-war East End.

The pawn shop [which had a new sign] illustrates Lansbury's story. When the East Enders moved back, to a district they no longer recognised, the pawnshop had to go with them. It is part of their way of life, and still gets 200 customers a week, although nobody tries to pop a budgie any more.

But the pawnbroker had to adapt his sign to suit this new world. The East Enders had to adapt themselves too.

Familiar things like the pawnshop and the jellied eel stalls were their props as they settled in this new town in 1951, Festival of Britain Britain year.³⁴

Lucas's retrospective about Lansbury emphasised the continued presence of supposedly 'typical' Poplar characters, and he writes in a nostalgic and rather patronising tone about their enduring customs, despite the imposition of change from external powers.

The old dears of Lansbury still wear Poplar uniform. Purse in one hand, enormous square shopping bag in another. Apron peeping under coat. Top of an orange box tucked under one arm.

"The old folk talk almost all the time about old Poplar," says the Reverend Jack Andrews. "They miss their tiny backyards where they used to visit. They can't sit on communal lawns; they'd look untidy." Lansbury is mellowing. A new spirit is growing but it isn't the old East End spirit.

³³Woolton, Diary for 1 Nov 1950, Bodlean Library and chapter 4.

³⁴Lucas, J. (1951) *New Town is Growing Up*. Op Cit.

But old Poplar keeps poking its nose in. I did see one old man sitting on a chair outside his front door. And in the Festival Inn, two old dowagers sipped Guinness and gin alternately.³⁵

This account in a national paper illustrates images about the East End, and portrays a reluctance to change what were seen as positive attributes of pre-war community East End life, attributes such as kindness, communality and poverty. The cheerful Anglo-Saxon cockney came to typify the new post-war East Ender, and national politicians and planners sought to develop a new East End based around that image.

Andrews, in *Public Opinion*, regaled his readers with stories of the cheery cockney, unchanged in spirit since war and pre-war times, yet surrounded by better environments, much as the planners seemed to have envisaged.

In the market the mood is casual and the wit is of the cheeky chappie tinge: "You want to know why I can sell such remarkable bargains to you? They fell off the back of a lorry. All right they were pushed but I didn't do it. I was in the road all the time." And the patrolling policeman grins and walks on.

By May the new community will be set down. The planners will have sketched out theories and retired to their separate places to allow London's East Enders to make something of them in practice without too much welfare-minded supervision. Or so George Lansbury would have hoped. He had a great faith in the ordinary Londoner being left to work out his own salvation alone...The Enterprise is not an exhibition pub, it has only one bar and there is little room. But to spend a weekend there, or the permitted parts of a weekend, is to savour to the full the true characters of the people of Poplar.³⁶

Andrews draws on familiar images of the East Ender and relates these characters to the new Lansbury, and invokes George Lansbury as an approving voice. Given George Lansbury's popularity in the area his seal of approval is an important one, ensuring support for the estate and for Andrews's depiction of it.

The following excerpt from a BBC broadcast, unusually allows East Enders to state their opinion. These voices were designed to give authenticity to portrayals of the area which which were supportive of the Government's reconstruction plans.

³⁵Lucas, J. (1951) *New Town is Growing Up*. Op Cit

³⁶Andrews, A. (1951) *Heaven Among the Common People*. Op Cit.

Well here's Harry Thackerall [a carpenter's labourer] who is born and bred in Poplar...what do you feel now about this neighbourhood unit being built in your Poplar?

Harry Thackerall Well I think its a very good idea because you can get rid of some of the old houses that do want coming down in Poplar, and over here we're building a few pubs which is a very good idea.³⁷

Thackerall, cast as a typical East Ender, approves of reconstruction in the area, his use of 'we're' is important here, because it presents a united image of the local people and the national authorities all working towards a common goal, with common methods. As I show in other sections this was not always so, and there were considerable struggles over who had legitimate authority to know the East End, speak on behalf of the place and people, to have an 'authentic' voice.³⁸ These struggles were both, generally not articulated and unheard, and in the following sections, different understandings of the East End are highlighted and some of the areas of dispute discussed.

During the late 1940s the predominant construction of an East Ender was as a cheerful English cockney.³⁹ However, the East End lost none of its symbolism as the site of horrific conditions, and it was this symbolism attached to reconstruction in the East End, particularly Lansbury which shaped post-war rhetoric about it. Between 1939-45, the East Ender became seen as somebody who deserved social change, a people who had shown their worth, and proved that it was not their personalities which had made them depraved and alien, but their environments, as the Stratford Express reflected on in 1963.

This is the new East End, an area in which the old communities are being preserved but in a new physical environment worthy of the pride and spirit of the people who live there.⁴⁰

The blaming of the environment for depravity and immorality fitted in with environmentally-determinist planning and architectural discourses, as discussed in chapter four. In the following section, I discuss in more detail how ideas

³⁷WORK 25/40 (1940) *The Festival of Britain 1951*. Op Cit.

³⁸Keith discusses these struggles for authenticity in East End politics in a contemporary context. Keith, M. (1994) *Street Sensibility?* Op Cit.

³⁹However, the New Ethnicities Unit (1994) *Island Stories*. Op Cit discusses how these images had always existed although not in a dominant hegemonic form.

⁴⁰(1951) *New Scheme*. *Stratford Express*. Op Cit.

about the East End and East Ender affected the plans at Lansbury as conceived by the LCC and Abercrombie.

2 The LCC and the East End

As stressed in other sections and chapters, Lansbury was symbolic for the LCC: their first reconstruction effort, based on the CLP and the Exhibition of Architecture in 1951. That Lansbury was in the notorious East End also lent special importance to the LCC. The East End, as section 1 suggested, was a site of particular importance helping frame a national identity, while supposedly possessed of the worst urban horrors imaginable. Partly because Lansbury supposedly represented the effectiveness of planning in London, the underlying assumption was that if social provision and ultimately social change could be enacted in the East End at Lansbury, it could be done anywhere.

Johnson-Marshall recalls:

The planning was, however, comprehensive and bold, and presented a fine background from which further studies could take place...This area is an extremely complex one which possesses all the serious major defects to which attention was drawn in the CLP. These include excessive density, over-crowding, and obsolescence of existing housing; lack of open space; intermixture of users, particularly with housing; and traffic congestion. In addition to these defects, the area was subject to extremely heavy war damage.⁴¹

The East End, therefore, was the ideal environment for the LCC to implement their plans. Constructed as the ultimate urban nightmare, badly bombed during the War, yet inhabited by self-sacrificing, working-class families, the East End had potent and ready symbolism for LCC reconstruction plans.

In this section I will examine some of the impressions held by the LCC and LCC related media, about the nature and character of the East End and East Enders. The understandings articulated by LCC personnel had direct impact upon the shape of reconstruction, via the development of plans, and affected the ways the estate was understood, because of the considerable publicity the LCC gave to Lansbury and East End reconstruction.

2a The LCC's East End

⁴¹Johnson-Marshall, P. (1966) *Rebuilding Cities*. Op Cit. P179

The images and representations held by the LCC affected the nature and content of reconstruction, and it also affected media portrayals of the area. The LCC produced a considerable quantity of publicity which related to Lansbury, and reconstruction, and which affected more general expectations of Lansbury, and attitudes to the East End.⁴² The LCC, via films, press releases and radio broadcasts, produced material about their plans for the East End. These productions inevitably involved images of, and assumptions about, the East End, and in many cases the justification and rationale for the developments was predicated upon specific and selective portrayals of past and future East Ends. In almost all instances the LCC represented the pre-war East End as a horrific slum, possessing only negative, destructive and inhuman qualities.

Portrayals of the East End as the epitome of what was wrong with unplanned areas, symbolising what could be done with effective planning, meant that the LCC could demonstrate their planning prowess with justification. As Ling during the national broadcast 'Proud City' film suggested:

Well lets deal with the worst places first. Some of the areas in most urgent need for attention are the industrial boroughs in the east and south of London. Even before the blitz, reconstruction here was long overdue. I mean places like Bermondsey, Southwark, Lambeth, Poplar and Stepney. Let's take a closer look at one of them. Here is a photo of Stepney and it tells an unusual story. ← †
There's an almost complete lack of open space. Houses are out of date and jammed in between roads and railways, schools have hardly any playgrounds and are much too near factories and industries, and there are tenements built right alongside wharves and warehouses. It is a typical picture of muddle and overcrowding which clearly calls for drastic reconstruction.⁴³

Ling described both a dismal East End and emphasised particularly lack of space, muddle and over-crowding all themes which were associated with frightening and unprogressive urban pasts.

Thus, as in so much reconstruction material the future of the East End was justified by contrast with a negative portrayal of the past.⁴⁴

⁴²I do not mean to suggest that these portrayals were accepted without dispute and alteration and reformulation, as the next section, 3 indicates, there were powerful and important oppositions to the LCC representations - but they had little or no direct or immediate impact.

⁴³INF 6/658 *The Proud City*. Op Cit. Arthur Ling narrating.

⁴⁴See also Haggith, T. (1994) *Citizenship and National Identity in Ministry of Information War-Time Films*. Paper presented at UCL, May 1994.

I'm very thankful to see the new Lansbury arising. It's so much more spacious than the old Poplar where you were constantly aware that you were walking along tiny streets, buildings pressing on every side and the houses. The houses are now decent for the first time, and people are going to have a really comfortable place in which to live in, and there's colour and playgrounds for the children, oh the place is grand, or going to be anyhow.⁴⁵

In this discussion of the Exhibition at Lansbury, which was affected, although not determined by, LCC understandings, the narrator drew on the familiar, hegemonic notions of the East End as a slum, and using ideas of a modern, rational future society discussed in the previous chapter, applied this progressive futuristic setting to the 'new' East End. Notions about the East End drew on broader, or grand, narratives about the future and the past, in conjunction with narratives about the East End. The East End therefore was publicly articulated as *the* symbolic site of reconstruction, a doubly potent symbolism bearing in mind the significance of the pre-war East End to discussions about the nature of urbanism.

2b East End Communities

In drawing up their plans for reconstruction in London, the LCC planning and architecture department treated the East End as a special area, which required different and distinct treatment from other areas of London, and the rest of the country, related to those nineteenth century portrayals discussed earlier. As Walter Bor explained to me:

- J When you said earlier that you were planning for the East End. What did you mean by that? How was it different to if you'd been planning in Sussex?
- Bor Oh very different. The East End first of all. The East End was the Cinderella of London. Mostly there are poor areas for the very reason in London, just because the prevailing wind is from the south-west, so all the smoke as it were, if there were industry in the west it would be blown over the city. So put it east and that's one reason. The other reason, very important, were the docks. The docks at that time were still thriving. The London docks are among the most important in the world still. And the dockers made up a very high percentage of the population. So they had their jobs there, and they wanted to live nearby and so on. So it was a completely different situation there, then from say Kensington or Hampstead or what have you. So that is -

⁴⁵(1951) Exhibition of Architecture, Lansbury at Poplar. National Sound Archives. BBC tape number 16931.

really the answer, we tried to bear in mind the kind of people who would be living there.⁴⁶

Bor's explanation of the need for special treatment of the area is predicated upon the notion that because of the industrial mix of the area, the population were mainly or wholly working-class, and hence had different requirements and needs to the rest of London.

Planners working in the LCC, seem to have seen the area as homogeneous, with little or no internal variation. There was never a thorough investigation of the social mix of the area, or the kinds of redevelopment people wanted.⁴⁷ Instead the planners worked on the assumption that the East End was undifferentiated, indeed Bor states that this lack of social mix was one of the 'problems' he believed needed to be corrected or rectified. However, his ideas for improving the East End by the provision of socially mixed housing were thwarted by, as he saw it, an inflexible and dogmatic Local Authority who insisted that the area remain wholly working-class.

Bor Just to come back to this kind of rigidity. We had a Labour administration at the LCC. A very enlightened and progressive, competent administration. Probably the best local authority there ever was. But they had also their dogmas. And one dogma was the East End is for the working class, and we had some kind of hunch that maybe this is not right. Maybe it shouldn't be so exclusive, maybe one shouldn't make it a working-class ghetto. Maybe one should try to get some middle-class people, after all you know you also envisage some of the working-class people would move up into the middle-class. Well that was taboo so that is why when we finished it was purely working-class. Its changing already of course. But it's still predominantly working-class. So that's my answer of course, why we planned it as we did, what we had in mind. We had in mind the local population.⁴⁸

Bor's quarrels with the LCC over this issue shows some of the heterogeneity within discursive arenas which I referred to in chapters 2 and 3. Despite Bor's objections the LCC treated the area as wholly working-class, refusing to build homes to cater for the middle-classes.

⁴⁶Interview with Walter Bor, 1992.

⁴⁷As both Walter Bor and Arthur Ling explained during interviews

⁴⁸Interview with Walter Bor, 1992.

LCC planners and architects also had specific ideas about how the East End community was composed and the types of dwellings and developments which would best suit this supposed community.⁴⁹ The assumption, by LCC planners and architects that the East End was constituted by tightly-knit, kin-based communities affected the reconstruction plans and made the East End the ideal 'site' for post-war community based reconstruction proposals, particularly those advanced in the County of London Plan.

- J Lansbury was a neighbourhood?
 Ling I don't think Lansbury was really. Well I s'pose you could say it was a neighbourhood. Well Poplar, Stepney, Bow and Bromley these were the three communities which I felt ought to be defined. Of course they were invaded by mixed industry around the city. You've got a sort of mixture
 ...J So there isn't a feeling, that apart from that it was poorer was in any way different from...?
 Ling So I think poverty is the main thing which divides Stepney-Poplar from the West End communities. Also I think that poverty induces in people a much greater sense of community, they are going to help each other perhaps more than people who are able to satisfy their own wishes in their own way.⁵⁰

A community based development, would, it was supposed, be correspondent with the social entities. Ling had studied the social structure of London for his doctoral research under the supervision of Patrick Abercrombie, and his thesis was the basis of Abercrombie's CLP, discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. So Ling's conception of the community structure of London, bore directly on the LCC's understanding and design of Lansbury, as Lansbury supposedly enshrined Abercrombie's proposals.

The supposed displays of community spirit in the East End were also frequently stressed in the media and in politicians' and planners' accounts of the Blitz. Arthur Ling explained the roots of this working-class solidarity and community strength to Paul Addison.

Professor Arthur Ling, an architect and planner, then working for the City of London remarks: "People were much more together, they met in the air-raid shelters, in the tubes at night they were in the Home Guard or they queued for spam or whatever it was they could get hold of, one egg a week. Everybody really lost a lot of their inhibitions about talking to their next-door neighbours. When the raids were over they used to almost celebrate in the early morning

⁴⁹See chapter 7.

⁵⁰Interview with Arthur Ling, 1993.

and this was the spirit that I think a lot of people hoped would continue after the war."⁵¹

Walter Bor also justified the use of community planning which formed the basis for the CLP and for Lansbury by alluding to the supposed strength of community identity in the East End.⁵²

The comprehensive neighbourhood concept was one of the most important planning ideas which had been developed before and during World War Two, was ready to be translated into practice after the War and which appeared to make good sense, particularly in the context of the social cohesion of London's East End.⁵³

Lansbury was deemed particularly appropriate to social, community planning, in the context of the perceived social solidarity of East Enders, as well as a way of improving the future by enhancing social cohesion. In the following chapter I discuss notions of community articulated by groups involved with Lansbury. In terms of this chapter, the idea that community was particularly strong in the working-class East End is striking. The Exhibition of Architecture made quite explicit the supposed uniqueness and strength of the East End identity and spirit.

Poplar was a firmly established community rich in historical associations and with its own local loyalties, traditions and customs which have endured to the present day.⁵⁴

Throughout discussions of Lansbury the idea that the East End was constituted by tightly-knit communities prevailed, and planners were anxious to preserve and foster this supposed community strength, as the next chapter elucidates. In spite of the numerous representations made by the LCC involving images of the pre-war East End as a tightly knit community existing in slum conditions, there were significant oppositions to both their portrayals and their plans. These oppositions in particular came from residents, and local councillors and are examined more fully in the following section.

⁵¹Addison, P. (1985) *Now the War is Over: A Social History of Britain 1945-1951*. BBC Books, London. P3.

⁵²See also Young, M. and Wilmott, P. (1957) *Family and Kinship in East London*. Lowe & Brylone, London.

⁵³Bor, W. (1978) *The Lansbury Neighbourhood Reappraised*. Op Cit. P12.

⁵⁴McDunnett. (ed) (1951) *Guide to the Exhibiton of Architecture Town Planning and Building Research*. Op Cit. P6.

2c Designing the East End

I have discussed how the LCC saw the post-war East End as working-class and communal and family centred. These notions are partly reflected in the design of Lansbury. The LCC actively tried to plan for what they supposed were typical East End features. For instance the use of yellow-stock bricks and purple slate roofs was meant to reflect a long tradition of building materials in the area, and thereby fit in with surrounding buildings, and complement local traditions and customs. As Berry says: "As for materials, it was laid down at the beginning that London yellow stock bricks and purple slates, highly traditional in the East End should be mandatory to give some cohesion to the whole."⁵⁵ During 1951, Dimbleby, in a programme about the Exhibition, stressed the significance of these building materials and how they were supposed to symbolise and reflect a particular East End identity, one which would be recognised and appreciated by insiders. It is worth noting in the following excerpt that Dimbleby is assuming his audience were not Poplar residents, nor particularly familiar with the area, displaying both the middle-class oriented nature of the Festival and lack of general knowledge about the area.

How am I going to give you a picture of this? Think first of all of a lot of neat, new, well planned blocks of dwellings, most of them not of the familiar, yellow stock bricks, low pitched roofs of purple grey welsh slates, not very beautiful as building materials, you may say, but they are typical to Poplar, they mean home to Poplar people, a not unimportant point when you're suffering a considerable upheaval anyway.⁵⁶

Dimbleby's broadcast captured a sense of what the LCC were trying to do by insisting on the use of local materials; while simultaneously creating a sense of loyal, home-loving residents who wanted some reminder of continuity and celebrated Poplar traditions, for an observing, mainly middle-class festival audience.

The new Crisp Street market was possibly the first pedestrianised area in the UK, and was built around a square surrounded by houses and shops. It replaced the original Crisp Street market which had been very popular and the new market stimulated great interest in architecture journals. Illustration 6.1 show the old Crisp Street Market. The intention according to the architect,

⁵⁵Berry, F. (1978) *Lansbury: Lessons From the Past*. Op Cit.

⁵⁶National Sound Archives. (1951) *Exhibition of Architecture, Lansbury at Poplar*. Op Cit.

Illustration 6.1 The Old Crisp Street Market



From Johnson-Marshall. (1966) **Rebuilding Cities.** Op Cit. P217.

Frederick Gibberd,⁵⁷ was to maintain a traditional East End street market atmosphere while reconfiguring the space partly as a measure to improve traffic flow and partly in an effort to (re)produce a community East End market. The national Festival of Britain archives commented on the traditional elements of the new market, elements supposedly retained, although in an improved state.

[Chrisp Street was] found to be an unusually popular example of the kind of street market which flourished all over London. It draws its custom from all over the Poplar community...it was obviously desirable to ensure that any replanning would not reduce its population but on the contrary improve it and make it a pleasanter place to live in and which to shop.⁵⁸

The LCC said that they appreciated the views of the residents and wanted to retain both the popularity of Chrisp Street market and modernise it. In some ways this approach seems to apply to much of the LCC's articulated intentions at Lansbury: to retain the East End in a cleaned up state, both metaphorically and literally. Metaphorically, because the version of East End and East Enders promoted by the LCC was highly selective, a cleaned-up version, resting on images of bright cheeky cockneys, and completely disregarding other versions of East Enders, and literally to place this cockney figure and associated social customs in a cleaned-up environment. However, the production of what was considered by the planners to be a modern, hygienic although still traditional East End market was unpopular with local residents, as I go on to discuss in section 3.

Some elements of the design of Lansbury therefore were related to how the LCC understood the East End, and in particular, what supposed traditions they wanted to encourage; as with the new market. Bor argued that the type of architecture at Lansbury related to conceptions of what they felt white, working-class East Enders might appreciate, given 'decent' or acceptable standards of architectural taste. I noted in the previous chapter that the LCC deliberately avoided high-rise, high technology building, believing Lansbury residents were not visually sophisticated enough to appreciate that style of building, while Ling argued that even if locals had all wanted mock-Tudor bungalows they should

⁵⁷Gibberd, F. Bibliography File. RIBA.

⁵⁸WORK 25/28. Chrisp Street Market. Part of the 'Story of Festival of Britain' file.

not be given them, because the LCC had a role as aesthetic guardian, which meant they must not let the lowest common denominator prevail.⁵⁹

Despite these references to the East End and the proclivities of East Enders, most of Lansbury was designed in relation to LCC understandings of London; the design was not generally or widely affected by notions of the East End. For instance the organisation of houses around squares relates to Ling's appreciation of London squares. He told me during our conversation that he thought the 'typical' London square was the ideal arrangement both socially and aesthetically. Therefore while architects and planners from the LCC acknowledged the significance of having the Lansbury estate in the East End, only relatively small parts of the estate were overtly tied to what they saw as traditional or distinct East End practices. This is perhaps unsurprising bearing in mind that the LCC were designing other areas in London and that Lansbury was also supposed to be a model for other blitzed communities in other places.

2d Ideal East Enders

The arrival of the first tenants highlighted and revealed some of the LCC's expectations about the area and their beliefs about the type of people for whom Lansbury was designed. Reports about the arrival of the Snoddys tended to be couched in terms which represented them as the ideal and typical working-class East End family, the sort of decent, home-loving nuclear family for whom the estate was built and by implication upon whom the future of working-class Britain rested. The local press reported the arrival of the Snoddys, often relying on LCC press notices for their articles without consulting Mrs Snoddy.

They [the Snoddys] listened to Mr Stamp say that the LCC's first neighbourhood unit was 'named after that giant of love and peace, George Lansbury, who lived and worked and died amongst you.' He called Mr Snoddy 'a quiet and unassuming ordinary working man, a man upon whom England relies.' And he gave him a pledge on behalf of the LCC: 'We shall go on building similar homes until all the people like you in need of houses have got one.'

Then, before Mr Stamp handed over the key, the Mayor commented on the name of block of flats, Gladstone House. The names of two great Englishmen are associated with these flats, he said. Now another great man goes into them - the working man.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Interview with A Ling, 1993.

⁶⁰(1951) First Tenants of Lansbury. *East End News*. 16 February 1951

The significance attached to the arrival of the Snoddys, shown by attendant LCC ceremonies and substantial media interest, relates to the importance of the estate as a symbol for the new world and to notions about the East End and East Enders place in it. However, as noted in previous chapters, understandings differed between groups associated with Lansbury, and certainly Mrs Snoddy disputes the role accorded her as the welcome recipient of LCC property.⁶¹ The LCC, however, were convinced that a white, hardworking, working-class, nuclear family was typical of the future of the area, the type of residents to be welcomed, and the type for whom they had designed the new East End. This portrayal differs distinctly from some pre-war accounts about the East End, which stressed the lack of family structure, lack of 'decent' values and so on prevalent in the East End. In common with national government portrayals of the East End, the War appeared to alter these emphases and resulted in more sympathetic accounts and reports of East Enders.

3 Insiders' Views of the East End

In preceding sections I have examined some of the most widespread and powerful images of the East End, and the way those images affected post-war reconstruction, accompanying publicity, general media coverage and the design of Lansbury. In this section, I will discuss some of the residents', local councillors' and commentators' impressions of the East End and Lansbury. These impressions, frequently countered LCC and national political impressions because they are based around claims to have a particular and unique knowledge about the area. This 'insider' status enabled local residents and councillors to criticise central government and LCC representations of the place and people. However, while frequently directly oppositional to central government and the LCC, residents and councillors drew on hegemonic notions of the East End and East Enders as different to other areas and peoples. As noted in the first section of the chapter, there is a long history of representations which consider the East End unique, and productive of particular characters. While accepting this, residents and Poplar Borough Councillors also disrupted, or opposed, the hegemonic notions of the characteristics of the area. This section is concerned both with elucidating what councillors and residents objected to specifically, and how those objections were framed and justified. Ideas about the East End was the subject area, in the context of this thesis, in which local people seem to have

⁶¹As I noted in chapter 5.

felt they had enough expertise to directly contradict and challenge LCC and government plans and proposals, without directly entering into debates about planning and architectural theory, for example.

3a Poplar Borough Council

PBC directly challenged the LCC over the planning of Lansbury, as discussed in chapter 4, during the 1949 local enquiry. During this enquiry several clear differences emerged between local councillors, speaking, as they claimed, on behalf of local residents, and the LCC, speaking more generally about reconstruction, over the way redevelopment was carried out in the East End. Poplar Borough councillors objected to what they felt to be the 'typical' negligence of Poplar by central government and the LCC, negligence particularly emphasised by extravagant promises made during the War. Councillors were drawing attention to the socially and economically marginalised position they felt Poplar had traditionally had in national affairs.

"We have waited long enough - Poplar's derelict sites must be cleared up." With varying emphasis this was the demand made by speaker after speaker at Monday's meeting of Poplar Council. One councillor complained that the government had let them down, while another bitterly compared war time with its laudatory visitors, with the present day Poplar left alone in its dirty dilapidation.⁶²

The basis of the contention about the dirty, delapidated condition of Poplar and the East End, rested with government promises made during the War, when, as chapter 4 and section 2 of this chapter emphasised, reconstruction was offered as a reward for war-time contributions and sacrifices. The post-war negligence, seemed to have been regarded by councillors as typical of the self-serving, hypocritical, middle-class national government which had never been genuinely concerned about the East End, even when they had emitted platitudes during the War. Councillor Mrs Smith complained bitterly about Poplar's treatment by the national government, and these complaints were reported in local papers.

"On wet days we have the mud and on dry days we have the dirt and dust," she declared. "During the war we were called the salt of the earth. Let us remind the government that this country or any other cannot do without its salt."

Councillor E H Smith said he did not think it should be the responsibility of any local authority to finance clearing debris from sites. "This was not Poplar's war; we did not start this business,

⁶²(1949) Reconstruction and Resettlement in East London. Op Cit.

but we were very unlucky and got the worst of it" he stated. "They are leaving us down here and nobody seems to be taking any notice of us."⁶³

The resentment expressed by the councillors relates to their conceptions of the relationship between Poplar and the rest of the nation, particularly the rest of London, and between working-class people and others. They argued that Poplar had been used for others' interests, and that, by the end of the War more normalised or typically exploitative relations were reasserted, in which central government used Poplar and the working-classes for their own ends, without any material gain for Poplar. These complaints therefore, stem from a particular narrative constructed in the nineteenth century in which the East End, in this case Poplar, had been the most run-down, poverty-stricken and ignored part of London. While seeing the East End as unique, local councillors offered explanations and consequences of that uniqueness; in this case poverty and hardship, which led them into direct conflict with national government. The idea that the East End was different, outside normal society, socially as well as geographically forms a grand narrative which informs many discussions of the East End and East Enders, and is still evident in contemporary notions of the place.⁶⁴

Local papers eagerly covered the disputes between the LCC and PBC, giving considerable space to the arguments and providing evidence of the LCC's and central government's supposed negligence of the area. The accusations levelled by councillors reflected their belief that they knew the actual state and nature of Poplar, and what needed to be done; as opposed to others' scanty and partial knowledge which was not based on experience, or genuine desire for improvement in the area. These discussions reveal an image of Poplar held by the Poplar Councillors and local press as a poor but proud working-class borough always done down and ignored by a different, indifferent and exploitative national government.

Councillor Mrs H F Smith said she hoped the delegates would press the government on this issue. The clean-up of the borough had been left far too long. Its present state depressed the public and educated the children in the wrong direction.⁶⁵

⁶³(1949) Reconstruction and Resettlement in East London. Op Cit.

⁶⁴Keith, M. (1994) *Street Sensibility?* Op Cit and New Ethnicities Unit. (1994) *Island Stories*. Op Cit.

⁶⁵(1949) Derelict Poplar. *East End News*. Friday 3, 1949.

It is interesting to note how the LCC were effectively conflated with central government by Poplar councillors. The LCC considered themselves very distinct, and frequently opposed central government, however, Poplar councillors portrayed the LCC and central government as in league, at least in relation to their treatment of Poplar. This conflation may relate to their assumed status as outsiders.

Particular disagreement arose over the LCC's plans to use expedited procedures and compulsory purchase orders to purchase properties at Lansbury, as discussed in chapter 4. Opposition was based on the belief that the LCC were not acting in the best interests of Poplar but, typically, indulging their own interests in terms of preparations for the 1951 Festival of Britain, to the detriment of Poplar.

The LCC cannot be expected to know local gossip but I am telling no tales when I say that the spring of 1951 was settled for this scheme because there is to be a festival, and this is to be the showpiece of reconstruction. Traders feel that it might result in butchery for a Roman holiday and they want to make sure before it is rushed through that their interests are not forgotten.⁶⁶

The Festival of Britain was seen as largely irrelevant to Poplar, and certainly not put on for the benefit of the area. Neither the PBC or residents were consulted about the Exhibition, as I noted in chapter 5, and none of the residents I spoke to attended the Exhibition; most hadn't heard about it.

The LCC argued that they were acting wholly for the local area, and those who did not accept LCC procedures were in fact preventing good opportunities for the area, which, it was claimed, the LCC had as their first priority in their reconstruction proposals for London.

It is appreciated that in carrying out these proposals certain hardships must be suffered by individuals. It is the Council's desire to mitigate that so far as it is humanly possible to do so, and they do ask those who live in this area, for whom these provisions are being made, and for whose benefit the reconstruction of the area is being carried out, to cooperate with them in what is felt to be a well

⁶⁶ (1949) East India Dock Road Area will be Reconstructed. *East End News*. May 13, 1949 and (1949) Reconstruction and Resettlement in East London. Op Cit.

worthwhile and modern proposal, to serve as a model for similar kinds of reconstruction in 'blitzed' areas all over the country.⁶⁷

The LCC tried to defend their tactics and methods by stating that what they did was of national importance, was modern, progressive, and was beneficial to residents, and therefore, it was worth putting up with various local difficulties. Dissenters were portrayed as selfish, short-sighted or absurdly parochial and unpatriotic. The LCC, in their own defence, evoked national issues, claiming Poplar was at the cutting edge or forefront of development, and thereby trying to demonstrate the central and vital position Poplar and the East End could have. So the LCC also related discussions about the East End and reconstruction around notions of the East End's supposedly historically disadvantaged and exploited position in relation to other areas, and claimed that the Festival and reconstruction generally was evidence of a new changed state. PBC remained sceptical about this new and seemingly sudden interest and investment in Poplar; but the expedited procedures and compulsory purchase orders went ahead regardless. The disagreements between PBC and the LCC, and indirectly central government and festival authorities, were partially based around claims to represent local residents and the local area. All groups involved claimed that they could benefit Poplar most, with an implicit assumption about who knew best how to do so. PBC based their arguments on their special knowledge and experience of the area, an insider status which aimed to undermine the LCC's claims of authority.

3b East End Residents

The Lansbury residents I spoke to were most animated and confident when discussing the East End and particularly the pre-war East End. They often flatly contradicted dominant impressions, repeatedly stressing that no-one, other than they, really knew what was going on in the area, that none of the concerned post-war authorities had understood their needs and wants, and that no-one except Poplar residents could begin to comment with any authority on the nature of the East End. Therefore, while flatly opposing some of the claims of privilege mobilised by the LCC and by the PBC, and mooting strong objections about several parts of the estate, and what were seen as related social changes, the residents were also drawing on a wider discourse which constructed them as different from other Londoners, and which saw the East

⁶⁷(1949) Reconstruction and Resettlement in East London. Op Cit. Objections about compulsory purchase

End as a unique and almost unknowable place. The relationship here with Victorian notions of the East End is striking, and reveals just how powerful those particular notions of the East End were. While the post-war governments and planners had tried to present an amenable and English East End cockney, who supported government plans, the residents I spoke to rejected and opposed some parts of the plans.

3bi Insiders and Outsiders

Mrs Kent told me that after the War all the volunteers for the emergency services who had helped during the War in the East End were called to the LCC offices for a medal ceremony. Her husband and friends refused to go with her saying that it was a waste of time, and that this was the usual mere tokenistic gesture to East Enders. She, however, went and in a tone of contempt told me how she had been given a tin badge to reward her for her efforts. She crumpled hers up in one hand and threw it away before returning home. This rather patronising, even derogatory episode remained with her some forty-five years later, and she told this story as an instance of the demeaning and patronising way in which East Enders had always been treated.⁶⁸ Another story told to me by Mrs Price related with similar contempt the treatment of East Enders by outsiders. She told how, when working as a volunteer for the ambulance service, the authorities were not on hand during a bomb attack. She and two colleagues took the ambulances and rushed to the scene, saving many lives. The next day she was severely reprimanded for not having received requisite permission to use the ambulances. Mrs Price stressed the ridiculous, bureaucratic, inexperienced, and unknowing position of outsiders, who didn't comprehend, or participate in the East End Blitz.⁶⁹ Both Mrs Kent and Mrs Price were sceptical about the interests of the authorities they were involved with, and saw them as profoundly ignorant about the real needs of East Enders.⁷⁰ Both these stories are typical of a wider and more general scepticism about authorities concerned with the East End, and suggest how East Enders, because they saw themselves and were seen as different, rejected, or opposed some of the representations made about the East End, and inhabitants. Clearly, residents of Lansbury had particular views of themselves and the area, related to

⁶⁸Interview with Mrs Kent, 1992.

⁶⁹Interview with Mrs Price, 1992.

⁷⁰I have not quoted from either Mrs Kent or Mrs Price because both these stories took considerable time to tell and were interspersed with other anecdotes and discussions of friends and family. However, I have tried to summarise and present the atmosphere of the stories.

their particular 'inside' knowledges about the area. This knowledge provided them with a different way of seeing and interpreting events and enabled prolonged criticism of outsiders. This rejection of outsiders' knowledges and representations relates to some of the issues I raised in chapter 2 about non-hegemonic groups not necessarily accepting hegemonic discourses.

3bii Reconstruction as Disruption

Residents I spoke to referred to the pre-war social conditions which they felt had been destroyed by the construction of Lansbury and other estates. Daisy Jarrett described in some detail how she saw the pre-war East End social system operated.

Daisy Years ago, if you had nothing the woman next door she'd help you out, but here if you had nothing the woman next door wouldn't help you out. No one would worry if you need a cup of tea or not...That's sad see.⁷¹

Daisy Jarrett saw the pre-war Poplar as infinitely preferable to the post-war one. I encountered this celebration of pre-war lifestyles and behaviour in every interview, with residents who were young children before the War explaining the benefits of the pre-war community and recounting the best features of that.⁷² Certainly no-one had any major complaints about the pre-war world, other than general and often jokey references to extreme poverty, as this extract from the group interview illustrates.

Mary	Our street door was always open.
A Snoddy	The keys would be on a bit of string in the letter box.
Tom	They didn't have much to nick then.
Publican	Well the table cloth used to be 'News of the World' or something like that over at my house. ⁷³

The reconstruction of the East End was criticised for disrupting and destroying an ideal social system.

Tom	What so it was better than now?
Mary	Yeah no comparison to what these were.
A Snoddy	And let me tell you there was no rubbish, everybody cleaned up. The estate's just gone to pot. Let's be fair
Carol	Don't blame it on cans of coke

⁷¹Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

⁷²Pearson, G. (1983) *Hooligans*. Op Cit.

⁷³Group interview, 1992.

Mary Everyone knew each other.
 J What they all moved on together?
 Mary Yeah mostly. Yeah everybody knew each other, but
 now you've got people coming from all over.⁷⁴

At times this mythic, ideal community was transferred to the post-war era, so that the immediate post-war world was attributed with all those characteristics also ascribed to the pre-war East End. The group interview, with middle-aged residents illustrates this particularly clearly, with younger residents, who could not remember pre-war transferring the same supposed communality and solidarity to the post-war period.

A Snoddy We're Poplar people, this estate like is the last
 bastion of the working classes.
 J Oh really?
 A Snoddy Yes of course it is
 Pub Well it was all docks were'nt it, they were all
 dockers
 A Snoddy This is the last bastion of the working classes.
 You don't have aggravation. People get on with
 their business. You've only got to live with them.
 Pub Well the doors and that used to be open, it's only the
 outsiders what have come in and thieves and all the
 rubbish.⁷⁵

These comments in some ways conform to the image of a post-war East End community based on a homogeneous white, working-class group amongst whom there was supposedly little or no dissent, and which was typified by solidarity and neighbourliness. The unsaid (in this context) but implicit attribution of blame is widescale immigration. In the following chapter I discuss how notions of community are translated into justifications for exclusion, and community becomes a trigger word for whiteness.

The residents seem to have seen reconstruction as a disruption or destruction, to an otherwise wonderful social community. The decrepitude of the pre-war environment did not figure in their accounts, despite forming a substantial part of LCC and national accounts. The environment was almost forgotten, while social attributes such as mutual tolerance, support and friendship figured strongly. A considerable amount has been written in oral histories about nostalgia, memory and reminiscences, as I discussed in chapter 3. The East End as symbolic site of cockneys, community strength and

⁷⁴Group Interview, 1992.

⁷⁵Group Interview, 1992.

solidarity relates itself particularly to nostalgic and partial histories. The residents represented pre-war East End particularly favourably, partly because this presumed idyll, justified exclusion of others, and partly because they could claim special and particular knowledge about the area, enabling them to castigate outsiders for not catering for that particular construction of the place.

3biii Not Designing for the East End

Every resident I spoke to complained about the market and wished the old Chrisp Street market remained. They associated the old market with all those features and customs which figured so strongly in many accounts of pre-war East End.

Publican	Biggest downfall I think was the market. I mean they put a brand new clock up there and I think it was out of commission for about ten years wasn't it.
Mary	I liked the old fashioned market. Chrisp Street. Along the street much better. Stalls down each side. It was much more enjoyable. We like the old way best. Theres a little arcade at Chrisp Street everythings closed. ⁷⁶

Mary's preference for the old market may be related to a more general nostalgia for pre-war ways. However, every resident I spoke to criticised the new Chrisp Street Market, whether or not I brought the topic up. It seems that the changed market symbolised to the residents both the LCC's ignorance of East End customs and preferences and their ignoral of residents' views.

Daisy	The worst thing they done was took Chrisp Street away. Chrisp Street was a market from East India Dock Road to Violet Road. Every place was stalls and shops each side. That was the worst thing they ever done in Poplar.
J	Now they've made that square - don't you like that?
Daisy	No. that was the finest market, they come from miles. It really was. And they sold from a pin to an elephant down there, you wanted anything you got it down there. ⁷⁷
J	What do you think of the market area up there?
Zeena	Well that's much to be desired. I mean I'm going back before that market, we had the old Chrisp Street. Do you know the Roman Road? Well we had one side up and one side down. I used to feally like that market. I remember going up and down with my mother...They're are going to

⁷⁶Group interview, 1992.

⁷⁷Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

refurbish it. These Tower Hamlets people I can't see what trees will do. That's their idea. It's better than nothing.⁷⁸

The residents' objections related back to the old market, which they saw as traditional, old Poplar not interfered with by outsiders who did not fully understand or respect Poplar's traditions and customs. The market seems to have symbolised, for residents, an area and a way of life, which the planners and designers changed for the sake of it, according to general interests, such as determination to have the first pedestrian precinct at Lansbury, rather than with specific Poplar-related interests. Dislike of the market by residents revolves around notions of insiders' and outsiders' impressions of the East End. It was only in the context of outsiders' ignorance of Poplar that residents overtly criticised the LCC's designs.

Residents' objections to the design of Lansbury were related to the supposed ignorance of outsiders of local conditions, and to the profound and widespread misrepresentations of the place which had been mobilised to justify the form and method of reconstruction. Again residents were asserting their particular, and as they saw it, unique knowledge; knowledge which had been disregarded by professionals and outsiders.

4 Conclusions

Since at least the nineteenth century the East End has been cast as a strange, alien place, which bred peculiar and unknowable people. These depictions have varied between portrayals of cheerful cockneys and portrayals of immoral, bestial and dangerous people. Both sets of depictions figured strongly in government and national media accounts of the place during and just after the Second World War. The LCC, particularly, stressed the separation of the old and new East End, drawing on images of barbarity and unmitigated gloom to explain their plans, and drawing on both images of the future and the unique character of East Enders to justify their designs. The new East End, they argued, would suit traditional East End customs, in a new environment. Their representations of East End and East Enders therefore partly conformed to dominant images of the East End, with their designs aiming for a cleaned-up East End peopled by cockneys.

⁷⁸Interview with Zeena, 1992. Zeena is referring to alterations made to the market in 1993, an effort intended to increase the popularity of the shopping area.

Local residents and councillors objected to selective parts of these portrayals and plans arguing that outsiders neither knew, understood nor cared about traditional, ideal East End characteristics and characters. Residents were particularly forthcoming during discussions about the East End, and, I think, felt confident enough to contradict outsiders' plans and schemes in the area. Outsiders knowledge was seen as not authentic, and therefore open to condemnation as ignorant, or typically uninterested in Poplar. As Keith has said, "sometimes I think that all East End politics is about authenticity."⁷⁹ Rejections of reconstruction therefore, are based around oppositions to hegemonic discourses, drawing on more localised, non-hegemonic discourses. However, these notions of the East End as unknowable, unique and different also relate to hegemonic discourses which depicted the East End as different and alien. Non-hegemonic groups therefore neither opposed totally, nor accepted uncritically, hegemonic representations of the place. This neatly demonstrates some of the complexities about the way meanings are constructed, articulated and represented, which I emphasised in chapters two and three.

⁷⁹Keith, M (1994) *Street Sensibility?* Op Cit.

Chapter 7: Community

In the first half of chapter 4, I discussed some of the prevalent attitudes of town planners, politicians and architects towards reconstruction. I noted that politicians and subsequently planners were anxious to define a sense of Englishness, which could unite people by stressing national identity, suggesting its preservation was a crucial war aim. In addition, in previous chapters, I have discussed the ways in which the War provided an opportunity for politicians and commentators to undertake a fundamental review of aspects of social life. One of the most significant and important components of this review was the promotion of communities which supposedly fostered and encouraged particular aspects of Englishness. In the preceding chapter, I noted how ideas about the East End were equated with ideas about communal strength and loyalty. The development at Lansbury, therefore, had considerable relation to ideas of community: as an example of communal development built at a time when national identity was at the foreground of political discussions, when community characteristics were seen as essential to that national identity, when architectural and planning discourses centred around the neighbourhood unit, and when the communal solidarity of the East Enders figured prominently in the media and in politicians texts. In this chapter, I will examine notions of community which influenced Lansbury, and assess how residents drew upon and (re)produced notions of community to understand the estate and the post-war East End. The volume of material which discusses community has necessitated limiting it to that which also discusses either Lansbury, the Festival of Britain, or post-war reconstruction. The volume of material is testament to the importance and centrality of ideas about community in the post-war period.¹

In the first part of the first section, I will examine why the notion of community was felt to be important and significant nationally, as an essential component of Englishness. The second part of this section then looks at what

¹Durant, R. (1939) *Watling: A Survey of Social Life on a New Housing Estate*. PS King, London. Marshall, T. (1950) *Citizenship and Social Class*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Robb, J. (1954) *Working-Class, Anti-Semite*. Tavistock Publications, London. Frankenberg, R. (1966) *Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country*. Pelican, London. Bell, C. and Newby, H. (1971) *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community*. Allen & Unwin, London. Yeo, E and Yeo, S. (1988) On the Uses of Community: From Owenism to the Present. in Yeo, S. (ed) (1988) *New Views of Cooperation*. Routledge, London. Pps 229-258.

types of community were considered by politicians and the media as the most conducive and amenable to their visions of Britain. In the second section, I will discuss how particular types of community were incorporated into LCC plans for reconstruction, and how these were portrayed in the media. The third section documents some sociologists' and residents' attitudes towards community at Lansbury, and the concluding section discusses the relationships between various understandings of community in the discourses associated with Lansbury.

1 Dominant Understandings of Community

1a Why Community was Important

In chapter four and in the introduction to this thesis, I noted how politicians were anxious to foster social stability which they felt might be challenged in the aftermath of the War. This desire, as I have suggested, led to investment in housing and other welfare public services, and also led to discussions about the best arrangements for stable domestic, community-based and particularly working-class, life. These discussions had a powerful influence on the shape of reconstruction and potentially on various groups' understandings of state-sector housing. The idea of nuclear family life as the core social arrangement was a central part of post war reconstruction and plans, it affected the design and understandings of housing in the post-war period, as Roberts has noted in her survey of the gender assumptions in post-war housing.² Brendan Bracken, in a 1942 intelligence report for the Ministry of Information, acknowledged what he interpreted as womens' interest in the shape of the post-war world. "A great many people, and almost certainly a majority of women, think about the end of the War, only in personal terms, of a reunited family, normal domestic life and freedom from wartime worries."³ Housing and discussions of family life in the post-war world was an area in which womens' contributions were, at least, tacitly accepted, and demand for housing for individual families was seen as a major request, one which fitted in with politicians' emphasis about the centrality of family life and the importance of reestablishing harmonious domestic arrangements after the disruption caused by the War. One of the results arising from the projected centrality of nuclear families was that community was conceived of as an agglomeration of nuclear families in a domestic setting.

²Roberts, M. (1991) *Living in a Man-Made World*. Op Cit. P29

³CAB 117/209. Bracken, B. (1942) *Committee on Reconstruction Problems*. Report by Home Intelligence for the Ministry of Information, at the request of Jowitt. P2.

Garden cities with their wind-swept central parkways and their scattered cottage dwellings in effect demand that people...shall remain enclosed within the bounds of their cottage home. The life of the future needs the two contrasts...a sense of space, freedom of movement, scope for expression with closely knit family life; and this must be rich, abounding life, not lived in dank and airless alleys, nor in chilly open spaces but in the association of complete friendliness of the neighbourhood outside.⁴

The assertion of family values as the core, or basis, of the new society had important ramifications: firstly a conception of a domestic-centred community as an ideal organisation, and secondly in terms of (re)asserting what was portrayed as a traditional, English-based village, kinship oriented society. This second point is worthy of further consideration here, since it relates to a recurrent theme particularly in hegemonic political discourses associated with community, the East End, the future and Lansbury.

Bevan made clear the influence of ideas about Englishness in his conception of the post-war world.

'We should try,' Bevan declared, 'to introduce into our modern villages and towns what was always the lovely feature of English and Welsh villages, where the doctor, the grocer, the butcher and the farm labourer all lived in the same street. I believe that it is essential for the full life of a citizen...to see the living tapestry of a mixed community.'⁵

In 1941 the Bishop of Winchester argued about the benefits arising from the traditional, pre-industrial cities and villages, and suggested these traditional forms should be the basis of new estates.

Aim at planning communities rather than dormitories. Most of these new estates are excellent dormitories. People sleep there at nights, but spend all their days working elsewhere. In these great new estates there is no common centre. In all the villages and cities in the past there was some central point, usually the church, the guildhall or the market place, but in these new housing estates the houses have come along before any kind of community centre has been established. In planning these new estates I hope very great care will be taken to see that they are built in connection with industries, so that people who are sleeping and living there have the industry at which they are working close by, and also that various central

⁴Tyrwhitt, J. (1945) Town Planning. *Architecture Year Book*, 1. Paul Elek, London. Pps 11-23. P14.

⁵Bevan, A. (1948) quoted in Addison, P. (1985) *Now the War is Over*. Op Cit. P70.

buildings, ecclesiastical, civic, educational and other facilities are established so that a civic life may be built up out of these communities.⁶

The notion that spatial organisation and regulation could produce and foster an English, stable and interactive community was prevalent among some politicians and planners after the War. Such visions were partly inspired, as I have already suggested by fear of change in the future, and by fear of social unrest which could be resisted by turning to a hierarchical, village-town-city, spatial arrangement based around ideal communities, composed of nuclear families. The celebration of rural life also relates to a widespread and pervasive anti-urbanism which runs through many reconstruction discourses, and urban commentaries, an antipathy to city-life noted particularly in discussions about the East End.⁷

In 1949 Forshaw, co-author of the CLP, made apparent his rather fearful view of change. He seems to suggest that transformations in the wake of the War, while inevitable, could unsettle social equilibrium unless efforts were made to retain some social continuity, to harness what was felt to be the source of stability and of supposedly good, decent, traditional values.

Something new is going on. The rate of change in human environment, as I have said, has been stepped up to catastrophic proportions. Thus Mankind has assumed a new power to change its social environment, it may not be able to control that power but that power it undoubtedly has.⁸

Forshaw's antidote to these potentially catastrophic changes lay with conscious and widespread implementation of social services, and he focused particularly on housing, based around an instrumental, determinist view of community and architecture and planning, in which design of environments could produce specific social relations and social life.

I would therefore conclude Mr President, with the plea that while our constant aim in housing must be to make life happier and easier for every family, we must also seek to develop the spiritual

⁶CAB 117/115 25 February 1941. The Bishop of Winchester. Speaking in the House of Lords.

⁷Williams, R. (1993) *The Country and the City*. Op Cit. and Wilson, E. (1991) *The Sphinx in the City*. Op Cit.

⁸Forshaw, J. (1949) Housing As A Social Service. Paper read at Britain's Architects Conference. *RIBA Journal*. Vol LVI, July. Pps 389-404. P394

influences of family life and local leadership by embodying them into physical environments of the community. We shall thus, by degrees induce them in the minds of every individual, in whom these values will evolve and again be passed on to later generations through the same vehicle.⁹

The perceived communality and neighbourliness provoked by the War provided the justification and to some extent the inspiration for politicians', planners' and architects' concepts of what an English community was like.¹⁰ The Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction elaborated:

The War has given a great stimulus to the demand for communal facilities. The sharing of common misfortunes and the development of cooperative effort in such matters as civil defence services, the Home Guard, communal feeding and even the War Savings Movement have done much to break down old reserves and institutions. We are both convinced that a priceless opportunity is now presented...which will do much to open up a fuller life to the mass of the public.¹¹

The idea of community as a basis of post-war society gained ascendancy and popularity during the War among politicians. The notion of community they referred to, however, was rather vague and never fully elaborated. This vagueness may relate to the presumed sub-conscious or undefinable characteristics of communality which were essential traits, particularly to the English and engrained in the national identity.¹² Politicians' notions seem to have related to ideas of rural, historical England, stemming partly from fears of change, to the importance of the nuclear family and to the cooperative spirit supposedly galvanised during the War. Lack of definition also enabled the appeal of community to relate to, and include, a wide variety of people, and therefore have more power and impact than a precise, calculated definition. Vagueness about community, meant that it could be portrayed as natural, as inherently right, relating to a sub-conscious human need, and related to a

⁹Forshaw, J. (1949) *Housing As A Social Service*. Op Cit. P396

¹⁰See INF 6/32 (1940) *Neighbours Under Fire* Made by the Ministry of Information.

¹¹CAB 87/3 *Committee on Reconstruction Problems*. Memo from Minister Without Portfolio and President of the Board of Education. 2 February, 1943.

¹²Orwell, G. (1941) *The Lion and the Unicorn* reprinted in Orwell, G. (1968) *Collected Essays*. Vol II. Secker & Warburg, London. Pps 58-68. Feldman, D. (1989) *The Importance of Being English*. Op Cit. Samuel, R. (ed) (1989) *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*. Routledge, London. Vols I-III. Wright. P. (1985) *On Living in an Old Country*. Op Cit.

particular national characteristic, and this vagueness also made objections to the use and emphasis of the term difficult.¹³ In the following section, I document in more detail the kinds of spatial arrangements and controls which planners and architects sought to implement in order to produce communities based principally around those themes outlined above.

1b Architects' and Planners' Versions of Community

Having established the importance of community in post-war life, politicians, planners and architects then needed to define and outline the shape of these communities. Rattray Taylor, in the 1952 Architect's Year Book, provides a typical understanding of the centrality of community in architects' conceptions of spatial and social arrangements during the late 1940s and early '50s. He makes clear his belief in the importance of organisation and planning of space to community.

To the social psychologist society presents primarily a picture of a network of human relations. The strength and direction of those relationships not only determine the coherence and effectiveness of society - they also are the primary source of individual satisfaction. The function of social planning is primarily to strengthen and direct these relationships. All other mundane activities, such as the manufacture of goods, are of value only in so far as they simplify or facilitate such relationships...The function of town planning is to provide a context for the development of human relationships. If this is accepted, it may be said that town planning, which has long moved from the phase in which it sought to achieve purely spectacular effects to one in which it seeks to facilitate the movements and day-to-day activities of the inhabitants, must now move into a new phase in which these activities are seen to be of importance only in so far as they subserve human relationships.¹⁴

Planners and architects saw their role as facilitating and encouraging what were supposed to be unquestionably beneficial social arrangements by specific spatial arrangements. As the Technical Appendix A of the Joint Press Notice for the LCC and festival authorities acknowledged, in relation to Lansbury:

The layout can be regarded as a series of groups linked by open spaces. The grouping has its importance for a sociological as well as from a visual point of view. A feeling of neighbourliness and social responsibility is much more likely to develop where dwellings are grouped, rather than where they are strung out in long terraces or repetitive blocks of flats. Children are also more likely to behave

¹³Williams, R. (1976) **Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society**. Fontana, London.

¹⁴Taylor, R. (1952) **The Social Basis of Town Planning**. Architect's Year Book, 4. Paul Elek, London. Pps 27-33. P28-29

well if they are part of a community, and if they have their own play space adapted to their needs.¹⁵

Mumford, one of the most vociferous and dedicated exponents of community planning, understood the neighbourhood unit, as a fact, as an indisputable reality, which needed to be designed for:¹⁶

The neighbourhood is a social fact; it exists in an inchoate form even when it is not articulated on a plan or provided with the institution needed by a domestic community. By conscious design and provision the neighbourhood may become an essential organ of an integrated city; and the discussion of the problems raised by neighbourhood design will lead to solutions that will carry further the movement begun theoretically in Perry's studies, carried out concretely at Redbury and applied on a larger scale in the British New Towns.¹⁷

Mumford's use of the word 'organ' in describing the function of the neighbourhood relates to his understanding of the city as a body, which, the implication is, dies without the essential organ, the neighbourhood - or fails to grow at all. As noted throughout this work, the organic metaphor legitimates and naturalises a whole range of urban policies, plans designs, and attributes.¹⁸ Mumford's understanding of the characteristics of community identity related to an almost indefinable presence, to sub-conscious relationships, which, it appeared, could be evidenced in any particular social grouping.

There is nothing foregoing in this relation, and to be real it need not be deep, a nod, a friendly word, a recognised face, an uttered name - that is all that is needed to establish and preserve in some fashion the sense of belonging together.¹⁹

The idea that community-based developments existed, and had always existed in more or less similar ways, enabled planners and architects to appeal to

¹⁵WORK 25/28 (1950) **Technical appendix A to Joint Press Notice.** 6 June 1950. LCC and Festival of Britain Committee of 5 June 1950, relating to the development of Lansbury, Poplar and the 'Live Architecture Exhibition.'

¹⁶Mumford, L. (1940) **The Culture of Cities.** Op Cit.

¹⁷Mumford, L. (1954) **The Neighbourhood and the Neighbourhood Unit.** *Town Planning Review.* Vols XXIV, 4. Jan 1954. Pps 256-270. - P269.

¹⁸See Keith, M. and Rogers, A. (eds) (1991) **Hollow Promises?** Op Cit.

¹⁹Mumford, L. (1954) **The Neighbourhood and the Neighbourhood Unit.** Op Cit. P258

tradition, history, nature and the inherent suitability of community-based design to justify their proposals.

Despite Mumford's insistence about the seemingly undefinable or imprecise qualities of communal behaviour, planners and politicians and architects produced plans and designs which quantified such communal relationships, employing formulae to produce an ideal community, as section 2 of this chapter demonstrates. Promotions of, and justifications for, community-based planning relied on ideas about the family, Englishness, village-life, the character of community which had gained credence and power during the War, and those themes recur in media discourses about planning.²⁰

1c Portrayals of Community in the National Media

Portrayals of community in the national media during and just after the War addressed the notion of community in three main ways. Firstly as a natural, organic necessity, secondly as intrinsic to a desirable and mythic Englishness, and thirdly as both traditional and progressive. There are obvious and important contradictions and tensions within these positions, yet they remain as pervasive, seemingly coherent themes associated with the term community in the post-war period. National media was concerned with community because of the significance of it to politicians and planners, as the source of personal and place-related unity during the War, and as typifying a particular and unique Englishness. Representations and understandings of community obviously affected, as well as reflected, understandings of politicians, planners, architects, critics, commentators and residents. In this section I will examine hegemonic, national media portrayals of community as they relate to the LCC and Lansbury.

The idea that communities were natural, English and inevitable and incontrovertible was suggested by the media and meant that commentators tended to see communities as essential parts of a particular historical-based version of Englishness. This version of Englishness was particularly effective after the nationalism, and depictions of national unity associated with the War.²¹ The 'London Cooperative Magazine' which although not national, was not Poplar or East End orientated either, stressed the need for village-style communities which would bring back an ideal, rural and communal past and

²⁰Hebbert, M. (1983) *The Daring Experiment*. Op Cit.

²¹See chapter 4, and Haggith, T. (1994) *Citizenship and National Identity in Ministry of Information War-time Films*. Op Cit.

have those features reinstated as a central tenet of post-war society. In this excerpt the paper contrasts rural bliss with urban nightmares.

Travellers from any part of the world agree, that in the countryside of Britain, we have some of the finest scenery on earth. The varied beauty of our mountains, valleys, rolling country, verdant woods, and winding rivers is virtually unique in such comparatively small islands.

On the other hand, most of our industrial cities and towns could hardly be more ugly. During the past century, as the result of the industrial revolution, towns have grown up with factories and workers' dwellings cheek by jowl, without any attempt at planning and with little regard for health or aesthetic considerations. In the mad scramble for wealth, human happiness was of little account.²²

These two paragraphs are illustrative of representations which stressed the naturalness of communities and promoted a rural-based, idyllic, mythic Englishness as desirable.²³ They are also indicative of a particular antipathy to cities and city-life, noted earlier, following a tradition of anti-urbanism.²⁴ In the following two paragraphs from the same magazine, the focus is on the ability to recreate the scenes described in the first paragraph, and to destroy those negative attributes associated with a contemporary urban scene.

In place of this ugliness, disorder, and overcrowding, it is the task in the future to plan homes in which working folk can live in comfort, factories in which they can work without injury to their health, and open spaces which provide plenty of good fresh air and out-of-doors amenities.

At last, practical steps are being taken to build a friendly and neighbourly community of the kind for which he [George Lansbury] worked so hard and long.²⁵

Lansbury was seen as the ideal community-based development which would eliminate or rectify the horrors of urban living. Associations between rural England, beauty and community identity and the portrayal of urbanity as hideous, unnatural and alien, provides a powerful and emotive way of justifying the centrality of communal designs in post-war plans, and also helps explain the emphasis on space, light and fresh air in reconstruction discourses.

²²(1951) *London Cooperative Magazine*. Op Cit.

²³Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. (eds) (1990) *The Myths We Live By*. Routledge, London.

²⁴Howard, E. (1898) *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. Op Cit and Wilson, E. (1991) *The Sphinx in the City*. Op Cit.

²⁵(1951) *London Cooperative Home Magazine*. Op Cit.

Understandings of community and neighbourliness as natural and inevitable are revealed, as well as fostered, by repeated use of organic and biological metaphors in articles and broadcasts concerned with reconstruction. In 1951, the BBC Third Programme transmitted a programme about Lansbury, narrated by Holford, which discussed post-war reconstruction and the shape of the post-war world.

How much more than a housing estate is Lansbury going to be? The rural villages and hamlets that were swamped in the flood of London's growth, that subsequently flourished and then decayed, were reformed and then abandoned to their fate, and eventually were patched up under the Housing Acts only to be torn by bombs and by weather from 1940 onwards; can these same organisms develop now into urban villages, each with its local pride and its recognised limits, socially, if not economically self-contained?

These are some of the questions that Lansbury even now suggests to the visitor's mind. There has been a good deal of argument about the theory of the neighbourhood unit. Those who have been confronted with the physical problem of reconstruction on a large scale have naturally tried to create or rediscover an organic pattern in what so often appears as an inchoate mass of haphazard building.²⁶

Holford's belief that he knew what questions Lansbury suggested to visitors' minds is interesting, partly because people hearing this broadcast, are told what and how to think about Lansbury, but also because Holford presumes he is speaking on behalf of visitors, while he was a planner and involved directly with the Festival of Britain. The implication that he speaks on others' behalf is a powerful way of legitimating and credentialising his opinions. His broadcast also suggests an historical, organic understanding of community which existed in some form, despite adversity, and which needed intervention and support in the post-war period.

1d The Festival of Britain and Exhibition of Architecture

The Town Planning Exhibition at Lansbury placed particular stress on supposed 'typical' behaviour of certain groups of people, which illustrated the power of community organisation, and tried to demonstrate how the structures of this community operated. In chapter five I discussed a display where a young, married mother was seen as requiring a school, local shops, playground, while a married worker (male) was depicted as requiring a pub,

²⁶THHL 331.3 Holford. (1951) *The Stepney -Poplar Reconstruction Scheme*. Op Cit.

cricket and, later in life, bowls. Aside from the gender assumptions in these associations, these requirements all complement and suggest English rural pursuits and amenities, and confirm and support the worth of trying to replicate such behaviour.²⁷ The new communal development at Lansbury supposedly (re)created an urban village in an ideal tradition, centred around a particular conception of Englishness, English village and family life.

The Heart of the Town exhibit reiterated the benefits of communal life, and emphasised its almost indefinable appeal. This community was articulated around a notion of deep-England, traits and behaviour which English people could understand and relate to without much effort. Community thus became almost interchangeable with a vision of England and Englishness. As the script for the exhibit makes clear.

There is another function of community life, in fact the function which makes it a community life and distinguishes the community from a mere aggregation of individuals or families. It is not easy to define, although it is easily recognised in practice. It is the expression of the collective life itself, the expression of collective emotion, the heart of the organism.

It is to be seen in the 'promenade' the nightly or weekly concourse of citizens of all ages and conditions who turn out to look at one another, to greet their acquaintances, gossip with their friends or make love to their sweethearts.

It is also to be seen when feelings are aroused when we leave individual tasks or sectional interests and point out in the streets where small excited groups are formed: they coalesce with other groups and move towards towards...what?...the market place? the Cathedral Square? the Temperance Hall? the slag heap?

All over Britain, cities and towns old and new, are being built and rebuilt.²⁸

Emphasis on the traditional, historical, 'natural', community basis of redevelopment suggested Englishness and implicitly suggested the exclusion of people who were supposed to be alien to this traditional, organic pattern. These alienations and exclusions will be discussed in more detail in section 3 and the conclusions to this chapter. Versions of Englishness which communities were supposed to exemplify and foster, necessarily entailed exclusions of groups

²⁷Wright, P. (1985) *On Living in an Old Country*. Op Cit and Wright, P. (1992) *A Journey Through the Ruins*. Paladin, London.
²⁸WORK 25/28 .(1951) *Script for Town Planning Exhibition at Lansbury*.

who differed from these images and throughout discussions, links are made between community, Englishness and implicitly whiteness.²⁹

The media, particularly official press reports and the Festival Brochure, conveyed images of communities as natural, traditional and English but in need of support and encouragement. The efforts of planners to facilitate, and reinstate communities as the basis of social life were therefore portrayed as incontrovertible, an unobjectionable aim, the reassertion of traditional values and forms of behaviour. In the following section, I will discuss the way planners at the LCC saw community and how the CLP and ultimately Lansbury were based around specific notions of community and associated representations of the future, the East End, social life and Englishness.

2 The LCC's Communities

2a The LCC and the CLP - Planning Communities

As suggested in the previous section, ideas about community and the need for community-based reconstruction were central themes of national, hegemonic representations of post-war life. The centrality of specific notions of community related to, and suited, some politicians', architects' and planners' ideas about the English character, alluding to displays of neighbourliness and community, which, it was argued, dominated during the War, and in particular during the Blitz.³⁰ The LCC also asserted the benefits associated with community structures, and stressed the need for community-based planning, during and just after the War. The LCC's representations and understandings of communities suggested that London was composed of village-type communities which needed to be regulated and reestablished in order to facilitate village-style social relationships. Communities in East London were seen as particularly possessed of communal characteristics, and East Enders were seen as inherently neighbourly and mutually supportive, although as we shall see, these understandings and representations implied exclusions of people who were not accommodated by, or included in, these powerful images.³¹

²⁹Chambers, I. (1993) *Narratives of Nationalism: Being 'British' in* - Carter, E., Donald, J. and Squires, J. (eds) (1993) *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*. Lawrence and Wishart, London.

³⁰See Calder, A. (1991) *The Myth of the Blitz*. Op Cit.

³¹Wilmott, P. and Young, M. (1957) *Family and Kinship in East London*. Op Cit.

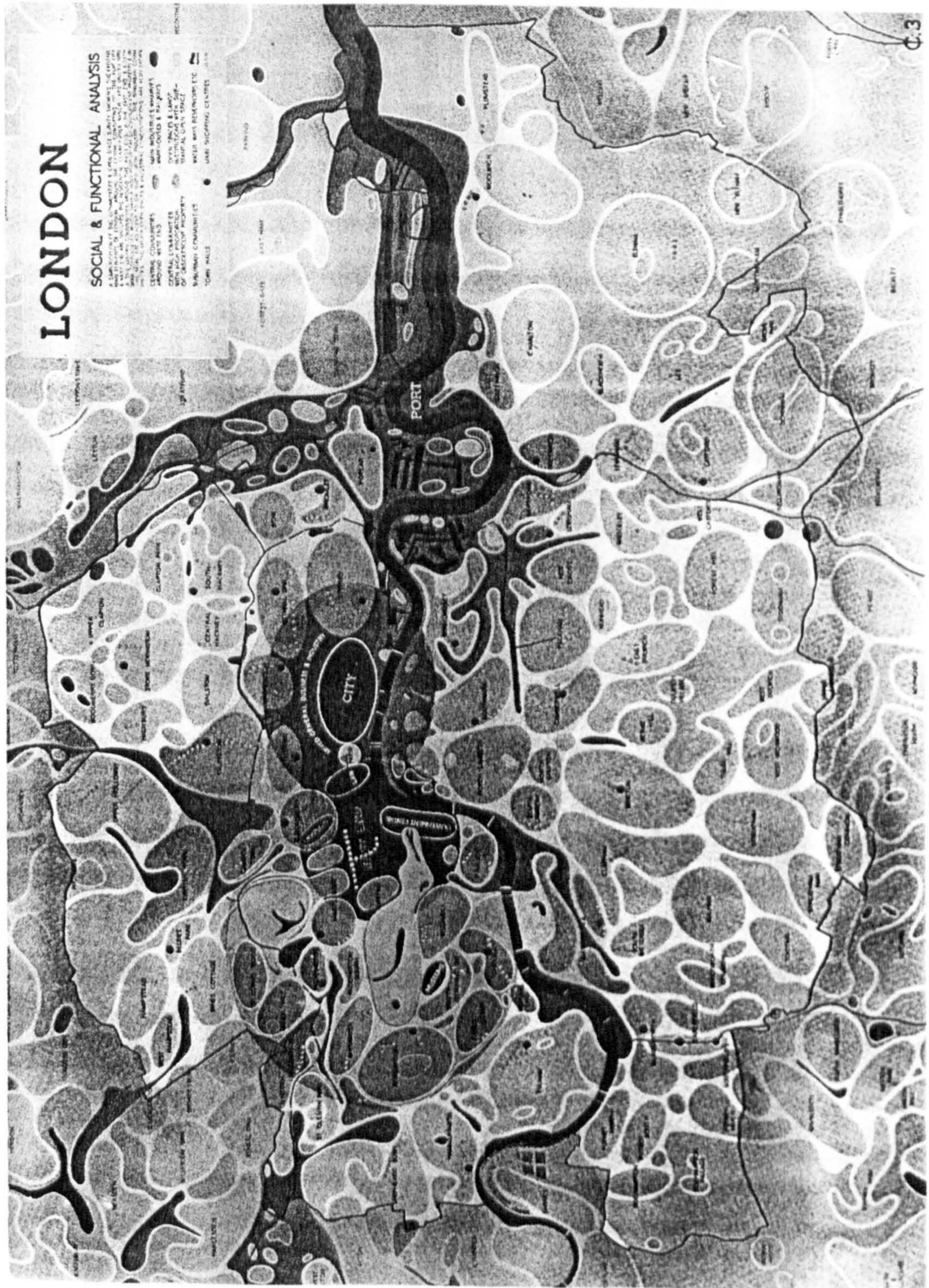
The CLP, as other chapters have related, was the LCC's main guideline for reconstruction. The CLP was based around a conception of London as a series of villages which had been swamped during industrialisation, but which could be recovered during reconstruction. The LCC and the authors of the CLP saw communities as the principal social units within London, and a positive feature of London which need to be enhanced. The illustration 7.1, is from the CLP, and depicts the results of a social and functional analysis of London. The blobs supposedly conform to the community structure of London. The following excerpt from the CLP makes clear the centrality of community to the structure of London:

And yet a patient analysis undertaken for the purpose of this Report, and disregarding to a considerable extent artificial administrative boundaries imposed during the nineteenth century, discovers a living and organic structure still persisting in spite of overgrowth and decay. It consists of a collection of units or communities fused together; though their boundaries may have been lost, their centres are often clearly marked, having descended from ancient villages; and in addition to the physical grouping there is found a strong local loyalty to each community whether large or small. It should be one of the first objectives of the planner to disengage these communities, to mark more clearly their identities, to preserve them from disturbing intrusions such as streams of through traffic and generally adhere to them where reconstruction is necessary owing to war damage or decay.³²

This extract from the CLP, demonstrates both planners' faith in community as the future social organisation, and shows how the ideas of community were expressed, implying particular historical traditions, in much the same way as national politicians, planners and architects envisaged community. The use of a biological metaphor, as argued in the previous section, is a particularly effective way of justifying particular positions by suggesting they are natural, inherent and unavoidable, in this case, that planners are merely recovering an ancient organic pattern. Ling, Abercrombie's research student, discusses his discovery during research for his thesis, of village life existing throughout London:

³²Abercrombie and Forshaw. (1943) *County of London Plan*. Op Cit. P2

Illustration 7.1: London: A Social and Functional Analysis



From Abercrombie and Forshaw. (1943) *The County of London Plan*.
Op Cit. P21.

I remember my thesis in town planning was based on analysis of social units. That is to say the housing group, the neighbourhood the community, the district, the borough or town, and so on from the individual right through to the city. And in a village, in the country, you have no difficulty in recognising neighbourhoods because there is country all round it. In a city it's more difficult because the main things that are around it are either roads or railways or whatever it may be. This analysis I did, of London, you've got your villages, at the centre, the old villages.³³

The recovery of village communities was made to seem incontestable, because they were already present, and the benefits associated with community planning were therefore seen as unarguable.

The proposals put forward in the CLP related to the encouragement and definition of these village communities, and the promotion of community life.

The social group structure of London...is of the utmost importance in the life of the capital. Community grouping helps in no small measure towards the inculcation of local pride, it facilitates control and organisation, and is the means of resolving what would otherwise be interminable aggregations of housing...London is too big to be regarded as a single unit. If approached in this way its problems appear overwhelming and almost insoluble.³⁴

The CLP aimed to encourage and facilitate particular communal identities and patterns of behaviour by the provision of what were seen as necessary services for communities. Their notion that these small groups also facilitated control is important; it relates both to the LCC's remit of governance and to a more widespread fear of chaos and anarchy.³⁵ The CLP goes on to suggest suitable services for each community.

The proposal is to emphasise the identity of the existing communities, to increase their degree of segregation, and where necessary to reorganise them as separate and definite entities. The aim would be to provide each community with its own schools, public buildings, shops, open spaces, etc. At the same time care would be taken to ensure that segregation of the communities was not taken far enough to endanger the sense of interdependence on the adjoining communities or on London as a whole.³⁶

³³Interview with A Ling, 1993.

³⁴Abercrombie and Forshaw (1943) *County of London Plan*. Op Cit.

³⁵Driver, F. (1988) *Moral Geographies*. Op Cit.

³⁶Abercrombie and Forshaw. (1943) *County of London Plan*. Op Cit.

The choice of these particular services for communities relied on an image of a traditional village which would be conducive to establishing community structures. Each community, as envisaged by the CLP, was intended to have its own social services, schools, public buildings, shops and open spaces, almost self-sufficient, but dependent on larger entities for less-frequently needed services. The resultant functional network within which Lansbury was placed, was therefore hierarchical and interdependent.

Having justified community-based planning by reference to the existence of communities, the planners and authors of the CLP sought to quantify and replicate the structure, size and shape of these communities. The idea that while these communities were natural and organic they also required intervention on the part of planners and architects, and this reveals some of the inherent tensions within the planning of London, mentioned earlier. Order, as chapter four suggested, was of paramount importance to government bodies and planners, and the way to get order was to impose it from above. This position sits rather uneasily alongside images of organic, and inherent communities welling up independently and naturally which prevailed in planners', politicians' and architects' discourses. Ling refers to his ability to quantify and (re)produce communities along pre-specified lines.

The thesis I did started with how many people should form a residential group first, then how many residential groups form a neighbourhood, and after how many to a community. Generally it seemed after analysing existing towns and neighbourhoods and communities that you start really with a neighbourhood the size of 6.000 people, and then you went up to the community. So many neighbourhoods formed a community and so many communities formed a district.³⁷

Ling's work then exhibits a central tension or contradiction between views of communities or villages as natural and inevitable, and the promotion of planning measures which quantify those communities and seeks to impose them.

2b Publicity about the CLP

Publicity relating to the CLP focused on some of the issues discussed above. The publicity also exposes how planners and politicians wished - reconstruction to be understood, and relates to their visions of a reconstructed

³⁷Interview with A Ling, 1993.

post-war Britain. Abercrombie and Forshaw were anxious to stress the existence of communities, and the ways in which they were historic parts of the fabric of society, natural, organic and essential to English identity. Emphasis on villages as the primary social unit, emphasises the rural essence of urban life, and hence diminishes or reduces the kinds of behaviour which were typically associated with urbanity, such as anomie, unnaturalness and alienation. Reiterating the village past enabled planners and commentators to imply what future socialization would be, and justified their schemes. The discussion between Abercrombie and Forshaw during 'Proud City', clearly demonstrates their desire to promote a natural, rural social fabric.

- Abercrombie London of course used to be a collection of scattered village communities. Only 200 years ago the centre core was quite small. Round it were the villages, each living its own community life, and each surrounded by open country.
- Forshaw But as London grew, the villages grew also and spread closer and closer together until they joined up in one huge untidy sprawl which is London as we know it, today.
- Abercrombie In spite of all the muddle and confusion the lack of order and design, something very important was discovered when we made our survey, and that is that the spirit of the old village communities has somehow survived.
- Forshaw Yes, I don't think there's any doubt about that. The old local loyalties are still there. It's that loyalty which holds a group of people together because they have the same interests and pleasures and because they share their struggles and their triumphs.
- Abercrombie Yes the spirit of the communities is still there. The trouble is that their boundaries have got blurred and lost in London's untidy sprawl.
- Forshaw It seemed to us that the solution of the problem lay in the replanning of these communities, keeping what was good and replacing what was bad.³⁸

So Abercrombie and Forshaw related the supposedly pre-existing community structure of London, and in doing so suggested that typical, traditional, and therefore natural, patterns of behaviour and ways of life which had been destroyed by the confusion and alienation from the land, associated with industrialisation and urbanism, could be reestablished.

³⁸INF 6/658 The Proud City. Op Cit.

Images of rural, close-knit villages really found its apogee in the East End, following ideas about East Enders which emerged during and after the War. East End communities were seen and portrayed as cohesive and natural. Publicity which surrounded the CLP relied on particular versions of East Enders and the character of the East End, characteristics which were represented as conducive to integrated, cohesive communities.³⁹ The East End was portrayed as particularly community-centred with residents displaying behaviour associated with neighbourliness and mutual support: "Nevertheless there is much to be learnt from the urban cooperation and sturdy individualism of these London communities, typical examples of which are the eastern boroughs."⁴⁰ In the film 'Plan and the People', made for the Ministry of Information, Alfie, a central character, was a cockney returning from the War and relating the advantages of living in a familiar friendly area to a Cornish friend.

Alfie Before the war I might have said the same as you... I was always looking out for a cushy job...but when you're sitting in the middle of a load of sand miles from anywhere, or stuck out on your own with mud, you get to know what its all about. You know what it is to have good mates when you need them, and you get to appreciate good old London, and the old fish and chip shop, the old pub and a game of darts. When I get married, I mean to stick on here.⁴¹

As the previous chapter discussed, the use of authentic cockney voices was one way of justifying reconstruction and revealing how the plans favoured the ordinary Londoner. The communities were, in a similar way to national conceptions, envisaged as organic, as natural, as the primary social force, inherent and inevitable, and of course associated with typical English and London features, for Alfie the chip shop and the pub. 'Houses in the Town', another film for the Ministry of Information, emphasised the focal areas and public places central to a sense of community and national identity.

Villages of the past, compact but with variety, grew round things which people used together, the common land, the pump, or the church. Many towns also grew up as groups around a focal point;

³⁹Rose, G. (1990) Imagining Poplar in the 1920s: Contested Concepts of Community. *Journal of Historical Geography*. Vol 15, 4. Pps 17-38.

⁴⁰Abercrombie and Forshaw (1943) *County of London Plan*. Op Cit

⁴¹INF 6/67 (1945) *The Plan and the People*. Op Cit.

the ford perhaps and the mill on the market square - squares which are today the centre and hub of the place.

In the great cities, sprawled to a monstrous size, the old centres are swamped, but tucked away there are old neighbourhoods which have retained their village character. Wapping for instance - an old dockside community that still fills its sons with the spirit of adventure.⁴²

The idea that the East End exhibited communal, village-style characteristics provided the justification for the development at Lansbury, particularly as Lansbury was intended to symbolise and (re)produce ideal, communal arrangements.

Despite the CLP's claim to reconstruct existing organic and traditional communities, and the fostering and facilitation of communal sentiments and behaviour, the designs for Lansbury and other neighbourhood units were imposed both physically and socially. This demonstrates again the central contradiction evident in discourses of planning, between stressing natural and organic communities, and emphasising quantifying and applying particular techniques to make, or impose communities. In a physical sense the facilities - housing, design and so on - were imposed upon areas which had never resembled that type of structure or layout, and perhaps more significantly in terms of community construction, without any local consultation or participation. In social terms the 80% of outsiders who were moved onto Lansbury by the LCC in 1951, neither complements nor corroborates the LCC's own protestations about the importance of neighbourliness, kinship and local loyalties. As the following section suggests, resentment among residents about outsiders remains strong, and these resentments are expressed or mobilised through appeals to what the East End community should be, and how it used to be.

3 The Community at Lansbury

In this section, I will discuss the only social study of Lansbury, which I am aware of, which directly tried to assess who was living at Lansbury and what they thought of it. As I have noted throughout my work, residents were commonly neglected in accounts about Lansbury. Where they were referred to, it was usually anecdotal, to support a particular line taken by architects,

⁴²INF 6/997 *Houses in the Town*. (1948-51) Crown Film Unit for the Ministry of Information. Narrated by Holford.

politicians and planners. The study considered in this section claims to have systematically studied the opinions and attitudes of residents in 1951. In the final part of the section I examine some of the residents' ideas about community, and what they believed constituted a 'good', strong community. In the final and concluding section of the chapter, I will discuss the various versions and representations of community considered here, and suggest why these different notions of community were mobilised by differing groups.

3a Ideas of Community in a 1954 Social Survey

Westergaard and Glass's survey of Lansbury, conducted in 1951 and 1952 and published in 1954, is worth particular consideration in this section. As far as I am aware this is the only social survey at Lansbury; Westergaard and Glass were anxious to document who had moved onto the estate and their opinions of it, and their investigation is centred around ideas about the importance of community.⁴³ Their theory of community seems principally to relate to what they believed was the inherently communal nature of the working-classes, and the social structures which they saw stemming from class, poverty and East End cultures.

Westergaard and Glass saw the East End in terms of local loyalties, kinship ties and inherent class compatibilities.⁴⁴ As I explored in the chapter about the East End these views about the area were pervasive after the War. As Westergaard and Glass wrote:

Physical continuity has been matched by social continuity. Indeed the East End and its population have a strong continuity of their own. Local roots and local loyalty are strong. And like other East Enders, most of the people in Lansbury are tied to the area by tradition, by choice and by necessity to be near the industries on which they depend. Their birthplaces and workplaces, their families and social associations are in and around Poplar. They 'belong' to Poplar. They have the same social status and folkways as their neighbours in Lansbury and nearby...People are happy to have a home in Lansbury, not only because it is new, but because 'I was born and bred in Poplar'; 'I've always lived around these parts. My family and friends are here.'⁴⁵

Westergaard and Glass's appraisal of the reasons for strong community tendencies and sentiments at Lansbury, relate to a localised historical notion of

⁴³Westergaard and Glass (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit.

⁴⁴See also Rose, G. (1989) **Locality, Politics and Culture: Poplar in the 1920s**. Unpublished Thesis, University of London.

⁴⁵Westergaard and Glass. (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit. P41.

community, to the power of traditions and past experiences to bind and link people together and produce compatibility. The exclusionary implications of this sense of community or place are neglected in this account, but played a large part in residents' accounts. Westergaard and Glass do not acknowledge explicitly these exclusions and marginalisations, arguing that the new residents, while entirely working-class, were not hostile to those unlike them.

It has to be stressed, moreover, that the people of the adjacent area regard Lansbury with the same pride as their more fortunate neighbours who have found new homes there. There is hardly any of the jealousy and resentment against 'intruders' which is so common among the established residents in the vicinity of a new housing estate in the suburbs.⁴⁶

However, they then go on to reassert the unique relationship which long-established residents had with the area, and the social solidarity that engendered.

By and large the people of the old area feel that the new neighbourhood belongs to them, not only because of their traditional solidarity, but also because of their many direct connections with Lansbury: the majority use the new market some of their children attend the new schools; and already in 1952 every second household interviewed in the old area had personal friends and acquaintances in Lansbury.⁴⁷

The implication of Westergaard's and Glass' emphasis on shared, local experiences is that those who had not lived in Poplar prior to arriving at Lansbury, were outsiders who undermined or threatened the strong local community at Lansbury.

Westergaard and Glass summarise their understanding of the community at Lansbury in the following statement:

It is because the population has such strong local roots that the happy features of the East End's social life have reappeared in Lansbury. Similarity of background, circumstances and experience has produced the social solidarity characteristic of the East End. And because most of them are East Enders the Lansbury people too, are a socially homogeneous group: they belong to the same social class, they have moved from-and were 'born and bred' in the same districts, they work in the same places and in the same kinds of jobs, they face identical problems. They thus also show the neighbourliness, the local patriotism, the spirit of give and take,

⁴⁶Westergaard and Glass. (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit. P39.

⁴⁷Westergaard and Glass. (1954) A Profile of Lansbury. Op Cit. P43.

which are found everywhere in the East End. Families have helped one another in the business of moving in, housewives look after the children of neighbours; the Coronation was celebrated with the traditional street parties. Above all, most people in Lansbury have a great affection for their own borough and the East End; they are quite right when they say that 'there are wonderful people in Poplar.'⁴⁸

This summarising paragraph demonstrates Westergaard and Glass's understanding of the supposed community of the East End, and the cultures and characteristics conducive to that community. This notion of community relates to national versions of community in some important ways. Perhaps most notable is the belief in the special, unique characteristics of the East Enders and Poplar people, and their historical roots in the area.⁴⁹ Westergaard and Glass chose to emphasise and promote a local, closed-style community which was based on particular East End traditions and shared experiences. Although these understandings were not explicitly couched in racist language, or even directly alluding to ethnic issues, the implicit conclusion of this belief could be construed in racist terms, and certainly the residents were more forthcoming about the racism legitimated and fostered by ideas of traditional East End communities.⁵⁰

3b Residents' Communities

One of the most persistent themes to emerge from discussions with residents whose families were in Poplar pre-war has been a refusal to accept into their community, people who are not white and not from Poplar. The residents, in a similar way to other groups associated with Lansbury, focused on the nature of East End cultures and traditions, and on those who 'belonged'. I will begin this section by examining the exclusions and racisms implied by some residents' understandings of community.

Albert Snoddy's anxiety about his family's inability to secure a flat on Lansbury seems to typify many of the attitudes towards ideal community based on kinship, tradition, and, by extension whiteness. He castigates the housing authorities for breaking this supposedly traditional social grouping.

⁴⁸Westergaard and Glass. (1954) *A Profile of Lansbury*. Op Cit. P50

⁴⁹Holmes, C. (1988) *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*. Macmillan, London.

⁵⁰See New Ethnicities Unit. (1994) *Island Stories*. Op Cit.

A Snoddy Nothing's changed. The majority of the people are the same. What they've tried to do, what they do, they do not live in the community, and what they end up doing, is they try to break down the community, they think, for whatever reasons. I don't know whatever reasons they do it they go...Now say like my daughters want to live here, which they do, they can't get a flat, they move an Asian, 'cos they've got to be. I'm not racist or anything, or we move someone from Hackney here, which they don't blend in.⁵¹

Snoddy both castigates the 'outsiders' who were ignorant of local needs and communities, and blames newcomers to the area for disrupting the community. Snoddy denies racism, and then suggests that the 'authorities' have imposed outsiders who don't belong, and who undermine traditional Poplar society. Mary, Albert Snoddy's mother-in-law, makes a similar point.

J What they all moved in together?
 Mary Yeah mostly. Yeah everybody knew each other, but now you've got. But now you've got people coming from all over.
 A Snoddy There is a lot of people from Lansbury estate and this area who've made themselves into, or they've dragged themselves up by the bootstrings. And then they've looked around and said we might as well move. But instead of keeping a community together they're fetching people from Hackney, and they don't mix with us.⁵²

Albert Snoddy's desire to preserve what he saw as a local Poplar community necessitates the conscious exclusion of others. His desire to prioritise Poplar people stems from a powerful image of pre- and post-war communal living in the area, where Poplar people lived contentedly with each other. As Albert and Carol Snoddy told me:

Carol That's what wrong with the estate, it's not people that live round here.
 A Snoddy No, it's not Poplar people.
 Carol It's people that have come in that have ruined the estate.⁵³

Mrs Snoddy's association of newcomers with alienation and change, in particular in relation to what she saw as the lack of friendliness in the area,

⁵¹Interview with Albert Snoddy, 1992. (son of Mrs Snoddy).

⁵²Group interview, 1992.

⁵³Group interview, 1992.

explains her sense of isolation and the breakdown of the old-style community. This breakdown she attributes to 'newcomers' living at Lansbury.

Snoddy See they come from everywhere now don't they? Whereas before, it's like the shops now 'innit. A shops there one week and gone the next week. I mean shops years ago, you had a corner shop that was there for life you might as well say, but there's nothing like that now.⁵⁴

The attribution of community breakdown then is almost wholly attributed to the arrival of newcomers rather than any wider social changes and movements which could have been invoked to explain community break-up.

In contrast to discursive constructions of recent unwanted change as due to immigration, idyllic mythic lifestyles figure prominently in accounts about community pre and just post-war.⁵⁵ These relate often to myths of the Blitz and the East End, and various representations of community strength which acted as a support network, and, as I have argued elsewhere, as an essential component of Englishness and a source of strength against the common enemy. Mrs Kent discussed the workings and structures of that community.

Kent Yeah, oh yeah. Everybody mucked in. Everybody did see, during the War, everybody helped one another during the War. When they got bombed out they dragged their stoves out, they'd be cooking their little bits out on the street. Everyone ducked in. All give you little bits, I'll give it you back when I get my ration. We all looked one another out. But since the War's been over, nobody wants to know.⁵⁶

The portrayal of just pre and post-war life in Lansbury is frequently seen or relayed as wholly favourable, and based upon a tightly knit and cohesive clan, who knew their place and how to behave, in a compatible, communal manner.

Daisy You had those things for washing, we washed all the tiles, everybody cleaned. But not now, you go up there now its not. But of course, as I say, its different people, different country people. We did our share, but not from Bangladesh, those people, they don't live the same as us, their living is different 'innit? I mean they don't do what we do shopping in the market, not what it used to be. You all done was washing, you scrubbed the pavements, the doors, and the walls. You had little iron grating, scraped your feet

⁵⁴Interview with Mrs Snoddy, 1992.

⁵⁵Pearson, G. (1983) *Hooligans*. Op Cit.

⁵⁶Interview with Mrs Kent, 1992.

on before you come in. You did your place up for the week end, they looked a picture, but when they went in the flats they never did the scrubbing. They didn't know the rules, they had different rules. I mean I remember the end of the first world war, we had all red, white and blue flags and painting on the walls, all the curtains, and the parties, all up and down the streets. Everybody was everybody's mate - not like now.⁵⁷

Daisy Jarrett's explanation of why community has deteriorated rests upon an understanding of Englishness and traditional English and East End ways. It is interesting in this quote, to see how her discussion moves from describing everybody sharing cleaning duties (which, as I have noted before figures largely in residents' discussions), to a supposed breakdown of those shared duties and then immediately into a symbolic celebration of Englishness and the end of the First World War; other residents mentioned the Coronation in a similar context. In this sense the relations between ideas of Englishness, ideas of community and associated exclusions and racisms are clear in the structure of the narratives.

The desire for exclusion of outsiders on the estate is seen not as racism but common-sense, as local knowledge: exclusions are seen as allowing community spirit. Many residents denied racism, arguing that they liked certain races as long as they didn't intrude on their community. The publican of the African Queen, on Grundy Street in Lansbury, which I was told was a 'typical white working class family pub',⁵⁸ put forward his understanding of other communities at the end of the War.

Pub The Chinese was the only community around here, and they was alright, apart from that you had no Asians, and you never see a black round here or anything like that. The Chinese, yeah you had China Town, and they wasn't a bad race they keep themselves to themselves. You had Cable Street where you had the Malts and you had Aldgate and that you had the Jews, and they all had communities where they was, and it was a lot better. I mean the Chinese kept themselves to themselves there was never no harm. Good race they was. Good race.

Despite that 'good race' status, these 'races' were isolated and did not challenge the supposed homogeneity of the white, Poplar community. The

⁵⁷Interview with Daisy Jarrett, 1992.

⁵⁸Tom, during the Group interview, 1992.

publican was the only person I spoke to who explicitly mentioned the existence of non-white, ethnic groups during and just after the War.⁵⁹ Interpretations of community at Lansbury then, seems to rely on an image of the blitz-spirit, and pre-war self-sufficiency and on the inherent compatibility and mutual support of white people from Poplar.

Among residents, a much less remarked upon explanation of community rests on the working-class nature of the area. In contrast, as we saw in the last section, Westergaard and Glass prioritised and emphasised the class composition of Lansbury. Albert Snoddy saw the area as predominantly working class, and he saw this as a positive attribute. It is useful here to consider the following extract from the group interviewed, which I also used in the previous chapter.

- A Snoddy We're Poplar people, this estate like is the last bastion of the working-classes.
- J Oh really still?
- A Snoddy Yes of course it is.
- Publican Well it was all the docks weren't it, they was all dockers.
- A Snoddy This is the last bastion of the working-class. You don't have aggravation. People get on with their own business, you've only got to live with them.⁶⁰

While Mrs O'Donoghue, saw the community in class terms, she was anxious to emphasise the distinctions between the working classes, and to stress the heterogeneity of the working classes who moved on to the estate, she also sympathetically described the ethnic composition of the area.

- O'Donoghue They wanted to keep it sort of not exclusive, because everyone's a worker, we're all workers. They didn't want it dragged down into the gutter sort of thing, they wanted to keep it more or less. And 'er, I moved here. Well from then instead of it being...well my husband used to say 'this is the West End of London'. Now, well, it's a polyglot of everybody. You got all nations, mind you they don't interfere with you. I've got Bangladesh neighbours living next door. Quite nice people. The children they're no trouble. So you speak as you find, you've got to live with the different nationalities. The only thing is you can't really get to know them because they don't understand English and I don't

⁵⁹Exceptions were references to Irish residents, and there were several anti-Semitic comments.

⁶⁰Group interview, 1992.

understand them, that's the pity 'cos otherwise you might have some nice conversations.⁶¹

Her analysis of the first residents to arrive on Lansbury, stresses their supposed superiority to others, and later during the conversation she stated that the residents had been specially selected for their high standards and above average social-status. However, the LCC stated that tenants were selected on the basis of need. The number of references to class in residents' analyses of the old community at Lansbury are few. This may relate to the types of questions I was asking and my emphases, but considering the emphasis placed by planners and architects on class and more general notions of the East End as working class, I found the lack of attention or interest in class at Lansbury among residents surprising.⁶²

Another area which was stressed in other representations, but relatively neglected in residents' accounts, was how the layout and design of the estate encouraged and affected the community. This may be the result of forty years of familiarity with the layout, and perhaps because residents felt that the destruction of the old street patterns and housing coincided with what they felt to be the destruction of the Poplar East End community, and they saw that as self evident. Nonetheless, Mrs Snoddy saw the flats as a major contribution to alienation and weakening of community ties.

- Snoddy Oh yeah! That's finished now everywhere. Or at least here. The East End, the community. I think the flats have a lot to do with it, building so many flats when you lived in little streets.
- ...J You could talk to everyone?
- Snoddy Yeah. I think the flats, worst thing they've ever done was build those flats. Definitely. I mean we're not so bad here, were only a small block. How must it be with people stuck about seven floors up with a couple of kiddies, they can't get out to play or whatever.⁶³

Zeena saw the flats as a mistake and regretted their construction. Her linkage of this with destruction of neighbourly behaviour is significant. However, she,

⁶¹Interview with Mrs O'Donoghue, 1992.

⁶²But see Rose, G. (1989) *Locality, Politics and Culture: Poplar in the 1920s*. Op Cit.

⁶³Interview with Mrs Snoddy, 1992.

and other residents of the blocks still insisted that they carried on in traditional ways.

Zeena Well, I think some parts are worst than this, they really are. There's another big block over there, I mean they get all the graffiti, I can't really describe it. It's not right I suppose, to say too much. I just wish, you know, I know you can't put the clocks back, but I do wish it was like it used to be. They used to be good neighbours.⁶⁴

Zeena implies that the flats are partly responsible for the destruction of the old-style community. Her comment that it's wrong to say too much demonstrates how residents were generally unwilling to comment on things they felt they had no knowledge about, such as design. However, residents seem to feel most comfortable and forthcoming discussing issues they felt most familiar with, and knowledgeable about, such as community and the East End. Often my attempts to discuss design were translated into discussions about community, about typical East End customs and the experiences of the Blitz. There was remarkably little discussion about how the community operated in terms of institutions and organisations, apart from rather oblique references to neighbourliness:

Mackiowski They do sit outside yeah.
 Carol Everybody knows everyone else.
 Mackiowski The people, I think people were more. They knew you, they'd say hallo, but really you had more respect for one another. Know what I mean Well now they haven't. If you tell their children off, they tell you to mind your own business, didn't they. But now it's terrible, years ago they'd bring the child in and say what've you been doing, and tell it off, sort it out. But now...⁶⁵

There appeared to be little interest in institutional social activities; notions about the community instead rested upon a supposed shared history and vision of East End and Englishness, which manifested itself primarily along ethnic lines, but was evidence in unacknowledged unconscious behaviour, neighbourliness.

The residents' version of community is premised upon an understanding of the harmonious, and supportive pre- and war-time East End, understandings similar to those images promoted by the LCC and national politicians, planners

⁶⁴Interview with Zeena, 1992.

⁶⁵Interview with Mrs Mackiowski, 1992.

and architects. The residents, however, extend this to justify their almost total desire for the continuance of this style of community and the exclusion of others who do not figure in such images. There were one or two notable exceptions: Mrs Mackiowski and Mrs O'Donoghue, who criticised their white neighbours for racism. So, while the majority of residents conformed to an increasingly powerful stereotype of older, white East Enders as racists, there were important and notable exceptions.⁶⁶

The idea of community is an ideal state, with the notion of the ideal used to legitimate the exclusion of supposed outsiders. Planners tried to (re)create what they saw as happy, pre-war traditional, historical communities. Residents argued that planners had broken up the community, but then argued that community still existed when they wanted to justify exclusion of outsiders. There are therefore some significant tensions in these ideas of community. This highlights, perhaps, the way in which community, while supposedly a force for empowerment, in this case of a poor, working-class, blitzed group, becomes as well a force for exclusion, for racisms.

4 Conclusions

When ideas about community are explored, we can begin to see some of the interrelations between the various groups associated with Lansbury, and how narratives of tradition, of Englishness, of family-orientated, village-communities and of the East End run through discussions and understandings of community, although with different emphases. Politicians, architects and planners were anxious to (re)produce what they saw as stable, natural and English village-style communities. Their publicity, via press releases, frequently referred to the significance of such communities to a national identity, implying that cities where such communities had been lost were unnatural or alien.⁶⁷ Justifications for the proposed community-based, post-war reconstruction were based around appeals to a shared national history and national identity, centred around a version of the past as rural, cooperative, peaceful and fulfilling. The strong implication, or association, in these discussions about shared tradition, rural history and so on, was that communities were white; history and future effectively racialised. In this way

⁶⁶See New Ethnicities Unit. (1994) *Island Stories*. Op Cit.

⁶⁷See Connekin, B. (1994) *The Festival of Britain and National Identity*. Op Cit. See also Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds) (1976) *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Sub-Cultures in Post-War Britain*. Hutchinson, London.

community, whiteness and the future become linked, and in some senses associative. This link or association was particularly strong at Lansbury because of the supposed strength of community there, and because of the associations, made between community, Englishness and whiteness both explicitly and implicitly. Residents explicitly mobilised a particular version of community to legitimate exclusion, their versions of East End communities bore strong resemblances to that promoted and produced by planners, politicians and architects. The idea, the aesthetic, abstract, utopian notion of community, which was supposed to engender solidarity and empowerment in the face of more general deprivation or oppression, was simultaneously reactionary. In the case of Lansbury an idea sanctioned by politicians, the media, academics and planners about the value of tradition, Englishness and attachment to place, was used as a justification for exclusion by residents.

Therefore there are strong similarities in the narratives which run through all discourses discussed here, from the emphasis on Englishness and on communality during the War, to the special character of the East End, to promotion of rural village life, and on to the imagined communal strength of East Enders. It is perhaps in discussions about community that other themes and narratives discussed throughout this thesis connect, and this shows how particular discourses draw on and relate to powerful grand narratives. This interconnectedness was something I discussed in chapter two, where I criticised a bi-polar model of discourse. Non-hegemonic and hegemonic groups both drew on similar grand narratives, related to each other, and reworked and reproduced various understandings about the estate. In the final chapter I discuss these interrelations and interdependencies in more detail.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

In the first chapter, I suggested that my research was concerned with an examination of the ways various groups associated with the Lansbury estate understood the estate until 1951. In subsequent chapters, I have sought to discuss those understandings particularly in relation to three themes; the future, the East End and community which dominated representations of the estate. Throughout each chapter I have drawn some conclusions regarding the relationships between the various discourses associated with the estate, these conclusions are briefly summarised in section 1 of this chapter. Secondly I examine these discursive relations further and relate discussions back to the notions of discourses which I set out in chapter 2. In the third section, I highlight some of the problems and difficulties I experienced, methodologically as well as theoretically during my research and interpretations. Finally, I situate the conclusions I draw within my critiques of architectural history and cultural geography outlined in chapter 2.

1 Groups Associated With Lansbury

In chapter 3 I argued that there were four main discursive arenas associated with Lansbury: national politicians, media, architects and planners; London-wide institutions and media; local institutions and media; and original ← residents of Lansbury. I saw these groups as distinct, although interrelated, and suggested that their representations and understandings of Lansbury provided neat ways of examining the various ways Lansbury was understood; and, by conceptualising these groups as discursive arenas, I hoped to provide some insight into the relationships between hegemonic and non-hegemonic groups. The differential power of each of these discursive arenas to suggest and articulate understandings and meanings about the estate were highlighted, in order to stress the differences between the discursive arenas and the understandings they promoted. I shall briefly recapitulate the conclusions I drew following each of the main four empirical chapters (chapters 4,5,6 and 7), in order to initiate a discussion into the constructions of various understandings of the estate.

1a Reconstruction and Plans

During and after the War, planning came to be regarded by politicians, as well as planners, as a way of fostering, even ensuring the social relations which they wanted to predominate in the post-war period. Whether this emphasis on planning resulted from a genuine desire to improve conditions for the working-classes, or from a less altruistic desire to ensure the preservation of the status quo, planning was accorded a high priority in the post-war period. By linking planning and national identity, invoking both images of the past and the future, architects, planners, politicians and the media drew on important and powerful grand narratives or discourses to justify reconstruction. The language and images used in reconstruction representations then, ensured their association with the preservation and encouragement of a particular English national identity, with the purpose of the War, and the fostering of a progressive, peaceful future. The understandings of planning and reconstruction articulated by planners, politicians and some sections of the national media provided the context within which post-war reconstruction should be seen.

Groups within London, particularly the LCC drew on similar grand narratives, although with different emphases. The LCC highlighted the significance and prominence of their task to ensure their desired futures, and they emphasised heroic individuals and the significance of plans. The LCC, however, were more specific than national discourses in their invocation of particular pasts to justify their plans. The East End of London in particular was represented as uniquely disgusting, which ensured the significance and symbolism of that area. In this way, Lansbury was accorded particular prominence as the 'shape of things to come', and an encapsulation of the LCC's vision for the future London. Local groups, in particular the PBC, were not always willing to accept the LCC and national versions of either the East End or Lansbury. They argued, usually by claiming authenticity or experience, that the more powerful and influential groups - such as the LCC and national government, were merely exploiting Poplar for their own aims. These challenges to the authority and integrity of the reconstructors never really directly attacked the underlying issues which they had implicitly invoked, such as national identity and progress. Instead arguments centred around the specifics of the place and people, which the PBC claimed the LCC could and did not understand. PBC's complaints demanded more attention to local

conditions and histories; something these grand narratives, because of their supposed universality and power were not concerned with. Therefore over issues of reconstruction and planning in the East End, local, less powerful groups issued a challenge, if not a fundamental reworking of the hegemonic representations which sought to explain and justify reconstruction in their areas.

Residents meanwhile appeared largely unconcerned with hegemonic reconstruction and post-war discourses. It is difficult to establish whether this lack of concern arose from outright rejection of the claims made, ignorance of them, a more general scepticism towards authority and hegemonic discourses, or whether interest in local concerns and issues overrode any substantive engagement with supposed national issues. This lack of interest may also result from a lack of confidence among the women in speaking about what are traditionally seen as masculine concerns and debates. In retrospect any singular explanation is probably unfeasible, and the residents' overwhelming concentration on what were seen as local issues, is probably the result of any combination of the above factors. Perhaps Mrs Snoddy's denial of the place ascribed to her in the history books is the most outright rejection of hegemonic representations and understandings, and her articulation of her rejection in straightforward and accessible terms may result from her knowledge of, and inclusion in, national and LCC reconstruction discourses.

While this chapter was intended primarily to serve as a context, an introduction to subsequent debates and issues raised; the relationships between the various groups concerned with Lansbury and reconstruction more generally are already evident. It is clear that hegemonic representations did not have it all their own way, with people ascribing uncritically to the positions outlined for them by these hegemonic understandings and representations. Disputes and contestations were articulated, particularly over who could speak on whose behalf, and parts of the reconstruction at Lansbury were rejected. These disputes and contestations were highlighted further in the subsequent chapters.

1b Whose Futures?

In chapter 5, I sought to further examine ideas about the future which had been introduced in the preceding chapter, and examine more extensively the

relationships between the discursive arenas, and the differing areas of concern for each of them. National politicians, planners, architects and the media were predominantly concerned with versions of the future which rested on rather vague, but supposedly all encapsulating, universal visions of the post-war future. Modernist architects and planners in particular, outlined a vision of the future which rested on technical, scientific and rational schemes, which aimed to banish or substantially lessen what were portrayed as chaotic, primitive and repressive pasts. The future, in these accounts, was predicated on a selective and caricatured national past. By associating the shape of the environment so firmly with social conditions, the power of architecture and planning was emphasised.

National politicians, while less concerned than architects and planners, with the significance of the environment to post-war Britain, also stressed the importance of new, improved environments. The role of science in auguring their desired futures was frequently invoked, particularly during the Festival of Britain, which sought to outline a vision for the national future. Lansbury's projected place as symbol of the future, was ensured by its inclusion as the Exhibition of Architecture, and it is evident from the exhibits and surrounding publicity, that this Festival version of Lansbury, while not specifically modernist drew on similar discourses of rationality, science and progress. The LCC, also closely involved with the Festival of Britain, did not wholly ascribe to the notions outlined during the Exhibition, emphasising as well the importance of the 'new' East End to the future of London. The PBC and local media were largely unconcerned with the ideas enshrined in the Exhibition, and were more anxious to ensure that local residents were not forgotten in the interests of the national Festival and what were seen as predominantly middle-class concerns. Their lack of attention to these debates is interesting in the context of my research, as it highlights a failure to accept or engage with predominant hegemonic representations.

Residents, meanwhile were largely unaffected by the Festival, with the notable exception of the Snoddy family, who seem to have regarded the whole episode as an unwelcome and irrelevant intrusion. Most residents expressed pleasure at the clean environment, and the convenience of their flats. This emphasis on cleanliness, and on labour-saving devices, does relate to

hegemonic discourses of the future; both emphasised hygiene and technology, although in rather different senses. The residents again emphasising particularities and domestic concerns, while nationwide discourses were largely unconcerned with the more specific effects of their reconstruction proposals. Again, in the context of ideas about the future, as articulated by the discursive arenas, there are some clear areas of dispute, as well as some shared understandings and positions.

1 c East End

During discussions about the East End and East Enders, Lansbury residents were much more forthcoming, confident and assertive in challenging the hegemony than in relation to other themes. This confidence relates firmly to what the residents saw as their direct experience of, and knowledge about, the area. National politicians, planners and architects were keen to espouse, during the War, a version of East Enders as cheerful, patriotic but burdened by a disgusting environment and unmitigating poverty. These representations, not only cast the East Ender as different from the rest of society, but also drew on notions of the East Ender as alien, beyond the pale; although perhaps in a less castigatory manner than in some pre-war, particularly nineteenth century representations. By portraying East Enders as valiant, and a vital part of national identity, it was hoped that their war-time support could be ensured, and also implied that a change of environment would reward the East Ender and alleviate their supposed misery and poverty. Reconstruction was therefore offered as recognition of the part played by East Enders in saving the nation, and suggested their assimilation into that, by now, tolerant and grateful nation.

The LCC effectively replicated the kinds of cheery cockney images relayed in national portrayals. They also sought to represent their plans at Lansbury and in the East End as enhancing those positive features associated with the place, while advocating a drastically changed environment, which would still allow the cockney spirit to flourish. This was particularly evident during the arrival of the much-celebrated Snoddy family. The designs at Lansbury were articulated as suiting the typical and ideal East Ender, and the whole estate made to epitomise the new East End. The market at Lansbury, for example, was seen to be particularly conducive to a presupposed East End tradition and spirit. However, I noted that PBC and local traders were

vehemently opposed to the new market, arguing that it not only destroyed typical East End traditions, but also the procedures used demonstrated the LCC's self-interest. The ensuing inquiry revealed many of the issues at stake, particularly over who had an authentic and justified right to speak on behalf of East Enders.

Residents repeatedly stressed that they were different from the rest of the Country, implying that nobody else could understand them. The LCC, national government, planners, media and architects were cast as outsiders who, while claiming to act on behalf of East Enders, were ignorant and frequently dishonest. The residents clearly opposed many of the representations made about them and the place, but still saw themselves as different, unique and unintelligible to any outsiders. This emphasis on difference relates to a long history of constructions of the East End, both sympathetic and hostile, which placed the East End and inhabitants as outside 'normal' society, and reveals a powerful narrative which runs through all the debates about the place and people. Close relationships, mostly unacknowledged or unperceived, between the groups associated with Lansbury are evident, but so too are the contestations and differences between them. The relationships are therefore neither wholly clear nor fixed. Perhaps discussions about the notions of community, particularly pertinent to discussions of East Enders demonstrates these interdependences more clearly.

1d Communities

National politicians, architects and planners, related the East End as different and unique, as discussed above. They also continuously stressed the strength of community there. The idea of community was therefore seen as central to the future of the nation, a typically English, traditional and beneficial arrangement. Given the more general and widespread emphasis on community during the War, particularly the idea of a national community, and typical English solidarity, the East End accrued added significance and impact during reconstruction. The LCC were particularly anxious to foster a sense of community in their reconstruction plans particularly in the CLP, which was based around a conception of London as a series of historic, village-style, interrelated communities. Lansbury was clearly regarded as the ideal, English community development. The often unsaid, but implicit corollary of community

strength, was that this necessarily entailed exclusion; exclusion of outsiders, of those who did not have family roots in one place and those who did not share in the English, rural-based heritage.

Residents, local councillors and press, however, frequently explicitly related the implicit assumptions in London and national discourses; that is that these ideal communities were also white. East End communities, in particular, based around images of chirpy cockneys, traditional communal solidarity and mutual support were interpreted as white, and residents argued for the exclusion of others based around their difference, and their inability to be incorporated into the English and East End ideal. It is clear when discussing community that a strong link can be found between the various discourses associated with Lansbury, and that residents, academics, the media, politicians, planners and architects were all implicated in the construction of East End communities as ideally white. The interrelationships between hegemonic and non-hegemonic groups, between those overtly concerned with reconstruction and those supposedly commenting on, between those with the power to effect change and those affected by it, are exposed when the language used, images invoked, narrative structures and associations made are critically examined.

2 Discourses

The relationships between the discursive arenas associated with Lansbury, are therefore complex and changing. Clearly a simple assumption that hegemonic discourses determine non-hegemonic discourses is ineffectual here.¹ Hegemonic groups, while institutionalised, widely articulated and very powerful are not immune to challenges, incursions, ridicules and contestations from non-hegemonic groups. Indeed their self-constitutions are partly based on defence from these challenges; justifications and claims invoked in anticipation of criticisms.² The ability of hegemonic discursive arenas to accept, often in moderated or mediated form, challenges, is a key to their ability to sustain their power hegemony, and claim democratic credentials and sensitivity to less minorities.

¹Hall, S. (1980) Encoding/Decoding in Hall, S et al. (1980) *Culture, - Media, Language*. Op Cit.

²Foucault, M. (1976) *Power as Knowledge*. Op Cit.

However, in the discourses I examined about Lansbury, there were also similarities and compatibilities, particularly in the grand, underlying narratives. These grand narratives were sometimes used for different ends, invoked to highlight and justify differing positions, but still remained as reworked versions of similar underlying stances. Where resistances and oppositions did occur, for instance with Poplar Borough Council's criticisms of the LCC and Festival of Britain, they were, at least directly, ineffective, largely because they lacked power or, because the claims of universality made by hegemonic groups, made them to appear small, parochial even. However, as with Walter Bor's later recognition of problems between the LCC and PBC they may have indirectly affected the positions and understandings articulated by the hegemonic discourses. The relationships between the discourses are therefore much more complex than a simple bi-polar understanding of discourse would imply, as suggested in chapter 2, since the various discursive arenas were interrelated, there are shared understandings and positions, and, at times clashes; the power, claims and actions of the hegemony disputed.

3 Problems

Initially I will highlight some theoretical problems, and then concentrate on more specific methodological problems I experienced during my research. In the previous section I stressed the complexity of relations between hegemonic and non-hegemonic groups. I argued that there were similarities between the groups concerned as well as differences. However, throughout this work I have sought to delimit the discursive arenas associated with Lansbury, and represent them as distinct; the four arenas mentioned above. I saw institutionalisation as a key to defining particular discursive arenas. However, these supposedly separate institutions often had similar interests, shared personnel and shared enterprises; as with for instance; the LCC, national government and planning and architecture experts' involvement with the Festival of Britain. In addition the institutions I discussed were not homogeneous. There were for example, a variety of positions outlined, arguments put forth and disputes between personnel involved with national government.³

³See Young, R. (1990) *White Mythologies*. Op Cit.

This heterogeneity within the discursive arenas is played down by a conception of them as distinct, and as forming particular discursive arenas. However, internal heterogeneity was frequently played down by the institutions themselves as they sought to present a united front to the public, and maintain their power, escaping damaging charges of internal dissension. The media were also difficult to situate within my outline of discursive arenas, the national media frequently did not follow the national line, while local media sometimes drew on hegemonic representations, sometimes drew on local representations, and once or twice opposed both in their representations. The divisions between the positions were therefore frequently blurred, and this confusion is perhaps reflected within the chapters where the media do not neatly conform to the four discursive arenas, their positions fluctuate between them. This confusion and complexity however, relates to some of the interdependences and shared discursive positions I outlined in chapter 2, and therefore while providing some problems in the actual organisation of each chapter, conformed to my overall theoretical conceptualisations.

The structure of each chapter was meant to reflect the differential power of each discursive arena, in terms of representation and articulation of understandings. I anticipated that the weight of material between the groups would alter, depending on the issues discussed, and how direct the concerns were to the discursive arenas outlined. This proved to be more or less accurate. However, because of the power, expertise, finance and institutionalisation of hegemonic discourses, they could produce more of everything and have wide areas of interest. So, I encountered some difficulties in limiting the material covered for hegemonic groups, and in some cases, finding enough material to allow residents and local media and PBC adequate space. This relates to something I stressed in chapter 3, about the need for oral histories, which give less powerful groups space and time to articulate their understandings. However the residents I spoke to did not always seem willing to speak at great length about what they may have seen as irrelevant issues. While this was illuminating in itself, it also was frustrating in terms of balance of material and giving non-hegemonic groups the opportunity to state their case, one of my predominant theoretical concerns.

4 Cultural Geography and Architectural Histories

In chapter 2, I suggested that a theoretical and methodological disregard of non-hegemonic groups within both cultural geography and architectural history had limited those approaches, and meant they had failed to recognise, study and sometimes theorise the importance of non-hegemonic groups in the construction of understandings about built environments. My focus on users and their relationships with producers is a shift away from architectural histories which do not even consider the user, let alone study them in any substantive way. I would consider these omissions crucial, and render a great deal of architectural history, which claims to examine meanings of the built environment, as partial. Despite this criticism, some architectural histories shaped the ways I approached my research, and in particular those studies which have examined the understandings, intentions and representations made by architects about their buildings.⁴

Cultural geography perhaps has more direct relevance to this project, and certainly my theoretical and methodological approach were informed by new cultural geography. I argued that new cultural geography had tended to neglect non-hegemonic understandings, a neglect which has also been criticised by some new cultural geographers.⁵ This study was intended as a response to those criticisms, an effort to show that non-hegemonic representations are important, particularly of course, but not only, to non-hegemonic groups. Having established that non-hegemonic groups did not blindly follow a monolithic hegemonic line, I also found that there were shared opinions and understandings; the grand narratives I identified often ran through the various groups' discussions and representations; especially concerning ideas about community and the East End. Given the comments I have made about the nature of discourses, I would suggest that cultural geographers need to be much more attentive to the complexity of understandings about places, rather than trying to posit rather simple or instrumental understandings of landscapes.

⁴Bonta, J. (1979) *Architecture and Its Interpretation*. Op Cit.
 Boudon, P. (1969) *Lived in Architecture*. Op Cit. Swenarton, M. (1981) *Homes Fit for Heroes*. Op Cit.

⁵Burgess, J. (1990) *The Production and Consumption of Environmental Meanings in the Mass Media*. Op Cit. Duncan, J. (1993) *Landscapes of the Self/Landscapes of the Other(s)*. Op Cit. Rose, G. (1994) *The Cultural Politics of Place*. Op Cit.

While many new cultural geographers stress the importance of non-hegemonic meanings, these non-hegemonic groups are sometimes assumed to be completely different to hegemonic groups; conforming to the bi-polar model I criticised in chapter 2. There are shared understandings and similarities between the various groups associated with landscapes. I also queried the conceptual use of the metaphor landscape-as-text, suggesting that its usage had been both confused, and related to an overwhelming attention to powerful texts, often the only texts available. The metaphor of the landscape as a text implies both that a landscape can be read as a text⁶, ignoring the significance of visual imagery, and suggesting that texts about landscapes relate to the meaning of that of those ←² texts.⁷ In the case of Lansbury residents had never written down their understandings of the estate, highlighting some of the problems of solely concentrating on texts which are frequently belong only to the most powerful groups; thus suggesting the importance of oral histories, if non-hegemonic groups' views are to be examined.

This study has sought to examine the various understandings of the Lansbury estate, based around a critique of much new cultural geography, which disregards non-hegemonic groups. The study aimed to incorporate the understandings of non-powerful groups, frequently ignored by cultural geographies and architectural histories, and who at Lansbury, have never been included in any of the numerous histories and descriptions of the estate. I have repeatedly argued, in the case of Lansbury, that the relationships between the various discursive arenas, were interrelated, fluid and changing and not always in agreement; I highlighted the areas of dispute and contestation between them. The understandings of the non-hegemonic groups were therefore neither totally opposed to, nor totally supportive of the hegemonic groups; therefore a dichotomous notion of discourse, sometimes appropriated by new cultural geographers, is inappropriate here.

⁶Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S. (eds) (1989) *The Iconography of Landscape*. Op Cit.

⁷Burgess, J. (1993) Review. Op Cit.

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331.2

331.3

365.2

700.2

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Appendix 1: Personnel

- Barry, G.** Editor of the News Chronicle. 1933-1947. 1948-51 Director General of the Festival of Britain. Member of Government Committee on the scope of town and country planning 1948.
- Bor, W.** 1947-62, architect planner of LCC. In charge of planning London's East End 1958.
- Forshaw, J.** Architect to the LCC and joint author of the CLP.
- Gibberd, F.** Member of the Festival Council for Architecture during the Festival of Britain, 1951. Proposed the Live Architecture Exhibition at Lansbury. Designed Chrisp Street Market, 1951, and in the 1950s designed Harlow New Town
- Haywood, I.** 1950 Chairman of LCC
- Holford, W.** Professor of Town Planning UCL, 1948-70. After Abercrombie he was the leading contemporary authority on town planning and civic design, and was himself the author of the post-war reconstruction of the City of London. Holford joined the Town and Country Planning Ministry in 1943.
- Ismay, Lord.** Chairman of Council 1951, Festival of Britain. Previously, 1940-5 Chief of Staff to Minister of Defence. 1940-5 Departmental Secretary to War Secretary. Chief of Staff to Earl MountBatten, Burma.
- Johnson-Marshall, P.** Planning Architect Coventry 1938-41. 1942-1946 Assistant Regional Planner Ministry of Town and Country planning. 1949-59 Group Planning Officer in charge of Reconstruction Areas Group of the LCC. Including Lansbury, and Stepney-Poplar, South Bank, Barbican, Tower Hill area. Then Professor of Planning, University of Edinburgh.
- Latham Lord.** Leader of the LCC, 1940-7.

- Ling, A.** Reconstruction Areas Group Director for Stepney-Poplar. Pre-war worked with Maxwell-Fry and Gropius, during the War had been part of the team responsible for preparing the CLP. 1941-1955 Chief Planning Officer LCC. After 1955 Ling left the LCC to become City Architect and Planning Officer of Coventry where he was responsible for major reconstruction schemes.
- Lobb, H.** Chairman of Festival's Architecture Council.
- Lutyens, Sir.** 1938 onwards President of Royal Academy.
- Matthew, R** 1948 member of the Architecture Council.
1951 Architect to the LCC.
- Morrison, W.** February 1943 Minister of Town and Country Planning.
- Nicholson, H.** 1940-1941 Junior Ministerial post at Ministry of Information.
- Reith, J.** October 1940 Minister of Works and Buildings. 1941, Reith established Scott Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural areas. 1942 Reith sacked. 1945-8 Director of Broadcasting.
- Samuel, H.** 1942-5 Chief Censor and Press censor.
- Woolton, Lord.** 1940 Minister of Food.

Appendix 2: Town and Country Planning Policies

1939-40	Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population. The Barlow Report 1940.
1940	October. Ministry of Works and Building established.
1942	Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services.
1942	Scott Report. Report of the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas.
1942	Uthwatt Report. Final Report of the Expert Committee on Compensation and Betterment.
1943	Ministry of Town and Country Planning Act. Ministry of Town and Country Planning established. Minister W S Morrison.
1943	The Interim Development Act
1944	Dudley Report
1944	Greater London Plan published
1944	Ministry of Works Housing Equipment Health Housing Manual.
1944	Town and Country Planning Act. 'Blitz and Blight Act'. Gave Compulsory Purchase powers to permit the wholesale replanning of war-damaged and obsolescent areas. Extended powers of Local Authorities to acquire Private property.
1945	Distribution of Industry Act
1945	Lewis Silkin appointed Minister for Town and Country Planning.
1946	New Towns Act
1947	Town and Country Planning Act.
1948	Central Housing Advisory Committee for the Appearance of Residential Areas.
1949	Housing Act. Removed statutory restriction which limited public housing to the working classes. Introduced Improvement grants.
1951	Parker Morris Report
	i compensation
	ii Betterment
	iii Development Planning
	iv Development Control.

Appendix 3: Interviews - In Chronological Order.

1 Tom

Preamble

I met Tom in the Tower Hamlets History Library, where we were both studying the Lansbury Estate. He lived near the estate, and had many friends on the estate. He suggested that I meet them, and also agreed to discuss with the estate with me. I met Tom in a Pub the following week, and before meeting his friends, we had a brief, taped conversation about the estate.

The Interview

We were both rather nervous, and the atmosphere in the Pub, was not really the most comfortable place to be. We talked for a while about the estate, and Tom told me what he could remember about the estate in the 1950s, including what his parents thought about it. However, Tom was only 8 in 1951, and his memories were brief. He could only vaguely remember the Exhibition of Architecture, and said that local children weren't encouraged to get involved. He remembered being told to get off the building sites. Our discussions were interrupted because Tom's friends arrived and we joined them.

2 Group Interview - Albert Snoddy, Carol Snoddy, Mary (Carol's Mother), the Publican, and Tom.

Preamble

This was the second interview I did, and while extremely interesting was also somewhat problematic. I had met Tom in the Tower Hamlets History Library, where he was also researching Lansbury. He suggested that I come down to the African Queen Pub, the following Sunday, as he said a number of long-term residents drank in there, and would talk to me. I met Tom and his brother in the African Queen, and interviewed him there, as above. He then introduced me to some of his friends. Albert Snoddy, the son of Mrs Snoddy seemed a bit annoyed that Tom hadn't mentioned that I would be there before, but said it would be alright to talk. He said that all the attention his family had received during the opening of the estate had annoyed him, and he didn't really like talking about it. Many people in the Pub knew he had been on television and in the papers and commented on it .

The Interview

The group as listed above, sat in the garden of the African Queen around a large table, and talked about the estate in the 1950s. Albert Snoddy had very definite, mainly negative views of the estate, and this affected the rest of the group. It was interesting to note how the opinions changed as they went around the table and came back to me rather differently. On one noticeable occasion Albert Snoddy said he had heard a Muslim man had been given two kitchens by the Council, because he had two wives. After ten minutes this story was repeated to me by Carol Snoddy, only she said the man had two semi-detached houses provided for him. When I listened closely to the tape, I could hear the additions to the story being made as the discussion went around the table.

It was very difficult to record these discussions, the people who sat furthest from me could only be heard when no-one else was talking. Frequently even those people sitting next to me could not be heard, because there were so many people talking at once. I tried to keep a grip on discussions, but I didn't really succeed. I felt embarrassed that they hadn't been forewarned, and conscious that I was interrupting their family Sunday drink. While the group seemed quite happy talking about pre-war Poplar, where they had all originally lived, they were less forthcoming about the estate in the 1950s, and I did not know how to change the topics, without appearing rude. We talked for about an hour, after which they were joined by some other friends who they had been out with the night before, and they all started discussing the previous night. I left shortly afterwards.

While the material from the interview had potential, I found it extremely difficult to transcribe, because of the poor quality of the recording. I regretted that this group interview was one of the first that I did. I feel that I would have been more capable of organising the debates, and controlling the tape-recording after a rather less demanding interviews. I was not very confident talking to the residents, nor exactly sure about what I wanted to ask them. Some of the topics we discussed were both relevant and enlightening, but I think with more interview experience this could have been an extremely productive interview.

3 Daisy Jarrett

Preamble

This was the third interview I conducted at Lansbury. A local historian had suggested that I visit Daisy, she said that Daisy loved to talk and had many fascinating stories to tell. The interview lasted the whole afternoon. Daisy

Jarrett, had lived in Pusey House from 1951 until 1976, when she was moved to a newer part of the estate, Hind Grove, which was more suitable for wheel chair access, which she needed. Daisy said that she missed Pusey House, and her friends there, and didn't really like the new flat, despite its added convenience. Daisy had always lived in Poplar, and was obviously very attached to the place. She repeatedly insisted that the place had been ruined by outsiders, and particularly by mass-immigration.

The Interview

Daisy seemed very pleased to have someone take an interest both in Poplar, and in her life-history. She talked at great length and with considerable animation. I thoroughly enjoyed hearing her stories, and they were very useful in terms of the research. Her previous experience with the local historian, had affected her considerably, and she said she had been struggling hard ever since to remember more about Poplar in the 1920s, the period the local historian was interested in. As a result she talked much more about Poplar in the 1920s than in the 1950s, but because of the length of time I was there, we seemed to fully cover the 1950s as well.

4 Zeena

Preamble

Zeena has lived in the same flat in Gladstone House since 1951. She originally moved with her parents, both of whom have died. Zeena said that she had only retired recently, and had worked in the City for many years as a typist. She was particularly worried about the run-down appearance of the estate, because she said she felt ashamed about it when her work friends visited her. She was very conscious of the reputation of Poplar, and clearly didn't like some of the rude descriptions of it that she had heard at work. Before moving to Lansbury, Zeena and her family had lived on the Isle of Dogs. She said she preferred that area, and wished she could have remained there. She was very upset by the LDDC development there, and complained bitterly about the noise and it which had accompanied the construction of new buildings there.

The Interview

Zeena was very keen on her flat, and extremely house-proud. She took me round the flat, and lovingly described it in detail. She had had the flat re-decorated recently, and was very pleased with the results. We sat out on the balcony, which over-looked East India Dock Road for much of the interview,

and she pointed out various parts of the estate, and what she felt were some of the problems with it. I was worried about the noise of the road affecting the tape-recording, and it was difficult to hear some parts of the conversations when I played them back afterwards. Eventually we moved inside, where I relaxed a bit more.

Zeena established what I did after about an hour, and it had a remarked effect upon her. She said she was embarrassed by what she had been saying, and how stupid she would sound. I tried to reassure her, but not I think, very successfully. However, we talked for about three hours, and covered a number of very interesting topics. Zeena was very keen that I did not think that all of Poplar was a slum, and inhabited by what she called 'slum creatures'. She continually referred to the more expensive parts of the Borough, and insisted that in the 1950s it was much better cared for. I think Zeena was acutely aware that I was at College, and am middle-class; she often referred to my voice and asked me questions about my parents' jobs and home. This was a particularly striking example of how the research alliance is affected by age, gender, class and so on, and how the research alliance changes during the course of the interview.

5 Mrs Snoddy

Preamble

Mrs Snoddy still lives in the flat she, and her family moved into in 1951. The flat, in Gladstone House, a three storey block was the first block to be opened in 1951. She now lives alone, her husband Albert died a number of years ago. Her son Albert lives on the estate with his family. It was he who suggested I went to see her. She did not seem particularly surprised to see me, although she stated it was a number of years since any people had visited her wanting to talk to her about the estate. She had had a number of researchers call on her since the 1951 Festival and had been involved in two television programmes about the estate 25 years on. She was very cynical about why people were interested in her, and continually questioned their motives.

The Interview

Mrs Snoddy had obviously discussed the estate, and her role as the first tenant many times. She knew exactly the kind of material I was interested in, and did not really question why I was interested in talking to her. Mrs Snoddy's confidence during the interview differed from most of the residents I

spoke to, and she had no qualms at all about my tape recorder, or my presence. We talked for about three hours, and she was very anxious to 'have her say'. She stated that she did not want to be misrepresented any more, and was rather bitter about the claims made about her in the press, which I have discussed throughout this work. She said that she had felt abused; by the amount of attention which surrounded her arrival, by the claims which were made about her, and by, what she saw as subsequent neglect by the people involved with the Festival.

Given Mrs Snoddy's experience with researchers, and her anxiety to have her say, I found this interview very rewarding, and comparatively easy. Mrs Snoddy clearly felt at ease talking to me, and I to her; she was very forthcoming, pre-empting many of my questions. We talked for about three hours. The interview was both informal and relaxed, although I was rather taken aback by Mrs Snoddy's dislike of the estate now, and her dismissal of her role in the 1951 Festival. I had believed the press reports I had read which reported her pleasure at moving in. I was therefore rather surprised to find her voluble rejection of their sentiments, and her general sceptical and hostile attitude towards, both the press and local government officials. Despite her criticisms, and her expressed desire to move, Mrs Snoddy liked her flat, she said she had great affection for it, especially since her family had grown up there.

The amicable relationship we built up was rather undermined by Mrs Snoddy's hostility to other ethnic groups, and people not from Poplar. I felt very uncomfortable, and tried, rather meekly, to challenge her once or twice. She ignored my protestations, and suggested we had a cup of tea, and we both abandoned the topic. Overall I felt this was a very rewarding interview, many of my preconceptions were shattered, and I realised quickly that the residents had much more to say, along quite different lines, than I had realised from reading media reports and official histories.

6 Mrs Mackiowski

Preamble

Mrs Mackiowski still lives in the flat in Overstone House which she moved into in 1951. Her daughter lives with her, but her husband has recently died. Mrs Mackiowski had lived in Milwall before and during the War, her house had been badly bombed, and she was one of the first batch of residents to

arrive at Lansbury; much to her delight, she said. Mrs Snoddy suggested that I talk to Mrs Mackiowski, Mrs Snoddy said that a lot of people on the estate knew Mrs Mackiowski because she made a point of visiting elderly residents to see if they were alright. Mrs Mackiowski is closely involved with the Catholic Church, and organises and attends social events within the Church.

The Interview

Mrs Mackiowski was very welcoming to me, and sounded quite enthusiastic about the project. She said that not enough attention had been paid to the estate, and its history, and that a lot of the people she visited told her very interesting things about it. She did not seem at all nervous about the interview, nor over-awed by it. Her daughter is also a student at QMW, and had recently done her own research project; so Mrs Mackiowski said she knew what I was up against. Her daughter in fact turned up half way through the interview, and stayed talking with us for about half an hour. It was interesting to hear her views about the estate, even though she wasn't born when the estate was built. Mrs Mackiowski, enthusiastically promoted the estate, and talked very affectionately about the other people living there. She repeatedly objected to the racism on the estate, and as I noted in the text, this related to the racism her husband had been subjected to, and the behaviour of some of the children towards her when her husband was ill.

I found this interview very interesting, Mrs Mackiowski seemed to have a different perspective than most of the residents I spoke to. I felt very comfortable talking to her, and was pleased to find that not all the residents ascribed to racist views. Mrs Mackiowski showed me around her flat, and said that since her husband had died she could not feel anything for the flat. At one point when telling me about her husband, she became very distraught, and I did not know what to do, or say. However, she insisted I stayed. Since the interview I have called round to see Mrs Mackiowski a couple of times, and have bumped into her daughter at College.

7 Mrs O'Donoghue

Preamble

Mrs O'Donoghue lived along the corridor from Zeena, and Zeena suggested I talk to her. Zeena went to visit her at least once a day, and brought her shopping, and sometime cooked for her. Mrs O'Donoghue, was in her nineties and entirely housebound. She was obviously unwell, and Zeena had

told me before to only stay a short while. Mrs O'Donoghue had always lived in Poplar and seemed rather resentful about the post-war changes.

The Interview

We talked for about forty minutes, until Mrs O'Donoghue said she needed to rest. At the beginning of the interview, Mrs O'Donoghue was very animated, and talked at considerable length about the estate, and about the War. She said that her memory was very poor, and she was clearly frustrated by this. After about twenty minutes, Mrs O'Donoghue talked almost entirely about her family and her husband who had died eight years previously. I found these discussions both interesting and very moving, and I did not broach the subject of the estate again.

8 Mrs Price

Preamble

The pensioner warden suggested that I talked to Mrs Price. She came along to the interview, and her presence had a marked impact on the discussions. Mrs Price had lived in Stoke Newington before moving to Lansbury in 1951. She had been moved to Lansbury, with her husband, when it opened, because the house she was living in had been partially destroyed during the Blitz. She had moved out of the house she had originally lived in, when her family left home and moved to Essex, and her husband died. She was living in a small, warden-controlled flat, which she liked a lot more she said, than her original house on the estate, which she said was too big, and she was worried about vandalism and burglary there. As with many of the residents, she did not like the estate, did not like her neighbours, did not like 'outsiders' on the estate, despite stating that she had always felt like an outsider because she had not always lived in Poplar. She was delighted when she found out I live in Stoke Newington, and we talked at considerable length about how the area had changed.

The interview

The interview lasted for about an hour and a half, and we covered many of the topics I wanted to discuss. However, Mrs Price understandably had a lot to say to the warden about some of her immediate problems; and I did not want to interrupt their discussions. Particularly since, she had not seen Karen (the warden) for about two weeks. However, Karen was aware of what I wanted to discuss, and led our discussions back to the estate in the 1950s at times. Mrs

Price was quite reserved during the interview, and despite considerable encouragement from Karen and myself did not seem very willing to discuss the estate in the 1950s. She did talk at some length about her war-time experiences, which clearly affected her views on moving to the estate, and I found these discussions very interesting.

9 Mrs Kent

Preamble

Mrs Kent had always lived in the Lansbury area, and immediately expressed her preference for the 'old' Poplar. She said she was very concerned by some of the recent changes there, and had resented the estate since it was built. Mrs Kent had recently moved into a small flat, from a bedsit on the estate, and she seemed very relieved about that. She had been in the bedsit for twenty years, despite continual complaints to the council authorities and demands for better accommodation. Karen, the Pension Warden introduced me to Mrs Kent, and she came with me to the interview. Mrs Kent, however, seemed much more anxious to talk to me than to Karen, and said she was pleased and surprised that I was taking an interest in her.

The Interview

I felt this was a very rewarding interview. Mrs Kent was very forthcoming, and spoke at great length about many topics. I was very impressed by her memory, and by her war-time experiences. The interview lasted for two and a half hours. Mrs Kent, was very anxious that my tape-recorder was working properly, and several times we played back what we had just recorded, which caused much amusement. She said she had never heard her voice recorded before. Mrs Kent had many reservations about the estate, and her wrangles with the authorities over moving, had clearly affected her very deeply, she said she was very distrustful of the council, and suggested they did not have the residents well-being at heart. She also said that during the War, she had many run-ins with the LCC, as she was working as a relief ambulance driver during the Blitz.

I was very impressed by Mrs Kent, and felt very affectionate towards her; the interview was thoroughly enjoyable, Mrs Kent had many amusing anecdotes to tell; all of which revolved around the mess officials make. Mrs Kent was very relaxed, and very friendly, and this affected me, despite interview nerves. Indeed she went out of her way to make me feel at ease.

Karen obviously also had a good relationship with Mrs Kent, and they seemed to know each other very well. Karen ended the interview by saying that Mrs Kent ought to rest, although Mrs Kent denied this.

10 Mrs Canning

Preamble

Mrs Mackiowski had suggested I visit Mrs Canning, she was an old friend of hers, and they lived very close to each other. Mrs Canning had lived in Overstone House since 1951, and had lived in Hackney before that.

The Interview

Mrs Canning seemed a bit disoriented, and assumed I was from the Council. I repeatedly tried to tell her I wasn't, but this didn't seem to make any difference. Mrs Canning took me around her flat pointing out the numerous things which she felt was wrong with it. I think she thought that if I was from the Council, then I would be able to get them fixed. We did not discuss Lansbury in the 1950s, and I left after about twenty minutes.

11 Walter Bor

Preamble

I wrote to Walter Bor, asking to meet him. He agreed and we arranged to meet in the Reform Club. We talked for about two hours. I noted in the main text of this work, that Walter Bor reminded me of my grandfather, there was a striking resemblance, and I immediately felt very relaxed and comfortable, if a little surprised. However, I was also rather conscious of the surroundings, and felt somewhat out of place with my tape-recorder.

The Interview

Walter Bor was very keen to discuss Lansbury, which he said had been forgotten and neglected. He said he was very pleased that I was taking an interest in the estate, and was keen to hear what the residents had been saying about it. We discussed Lansbury at great length, and the County of London Plan, and town planning in general. I found this a fascinating discussion, and I was very pleased to meet someone I had read so much about during my research. Walter Bor was very critical of the LCC at times, and of other Councils. He said that his attempt to prevent high rise building in other cities had been thwarted by inflexible authorities. He was very defensive about the work he had done in these cities, which has attracted some criticisms, and this

defensiveness spilled over into our discussions about Lansbury. I was not criticising the design of the estate, but trying to ascertain the underlying philosophy at the time, and eventually I told him that directly, whereupon he was much more forthcoming and expansive. Since the interview I have met Walter Bor a couple of times at Conferences, where I have heard him speaking about Lansbury.

10 Arthur Ling

Preamble

I wrote to Arthur Ling asking to meet him, and we arranged a time when I could drive to his home in Lincoln. He said that he had been unwell and was unwilling and unable to leave his home. Despite his frail condition, Arthur Ling had found, and organised a great number of his papers about Lansbury, which we discussed. He let me take away a couple of pamphlets to be photocopied. Again, this was a fascinating discussion, and we talked for a long time, until he felt tired, and I was very grateful to him for putting so much effort into preparations for our interview, and the interview itself.

The Interview

Arthur Ling seemed pleased that I was taking an interest in Lansbury, and was very willing to help me. He spoke at considerable length about the County of London Plan, working with Abercrombie, and particularly the atmosphere in the architecture and planning departments of the LCC in the post-war period. He conveyed the sense of urgency and enthusiasm, which he had encountered there very acutely; and I found this a fascinating insight into the intentions and ambitions of planners after the War. Certainly his perspective came across much more vividly than it had in any of the articles I had read.

