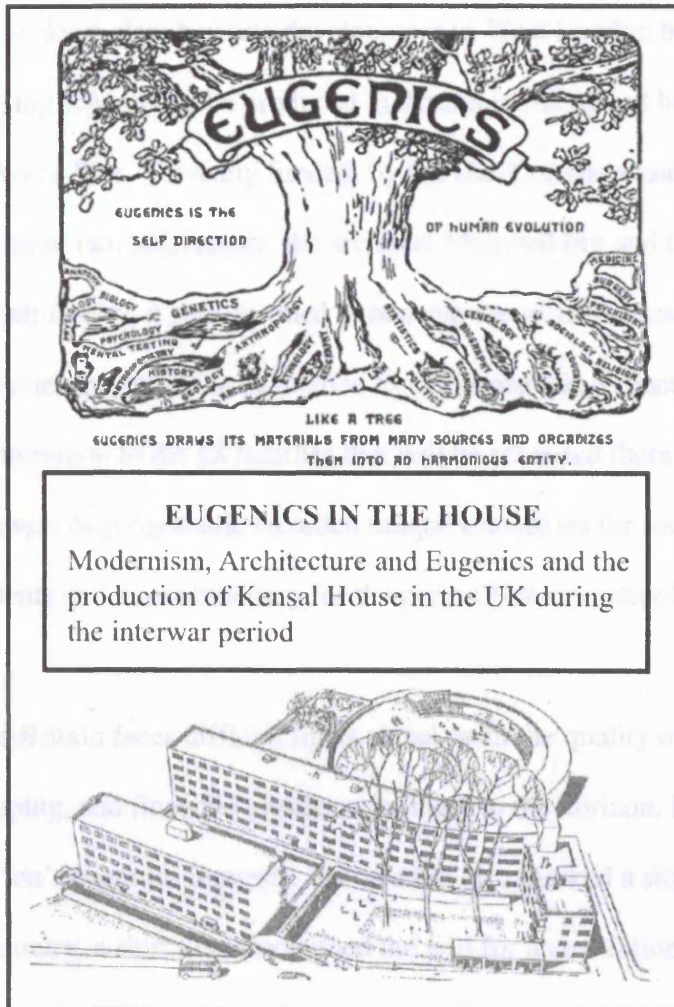




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## **Abstract**

Kensal House, a working-class housing development in West London became the beacon of Modernist housing schemes to be produced in Britain in the period between the First and the Second World War. Privately funded, by the Gas Company and realised mainly by the collaboration of two individuals, the architect Maxwell Fry and the housing consultant Elizabeth Denby, it was destined to become the greatest example for the use of gas in domestic environments at the same time as it will provide a functional, efficient and hygienic environment to the 68 families that will be rehoused there following slum clearance. Moreover, its programme included unique provisions for social interaction between the residents and a revolutionary for the period Nursery school.

At a period where Britain faces difficult times ahead, with the quality of the population significantly dropping, and financial problems looming in the horizon, Kensal House was faithful to the nation's eugenics interests. Its creation also marked a shift in eugenic practices in the country, a shift that proclaimed the will for an evolutionary environment for all.

Looking at Kensal House, through the ideas of that period's leading eugenicist, Julien Huxley, this analysis points at the similar goals of Modernist housing design and eugenics ideology for a scientifically constructed Utopia and questions the scheme's creation using Foucault's notion of biopower to critically approach the relation between Kensal House and eugenics of every type.

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## **The Housing Scheme**

Kensal House is a working-class housing development completed in 1937 on a 1.5 acres site on the west side of Ladbroke Grove. The scheme is meant to provide much needed residential space for the area, known for its slums, together with social and educational amenities for the housed community. The land, which used to be part of the Kensal Green gas works, becomes the site where one of the most progressive, modernist buildings in Britain is erected, as part of the government's effort in the inter-war years to provide with affordable solutions for the working-class population that had overcrowded the urban centres. Its production is marked by many distinctive characteristics that set Kensal House apart from other similar housing projects of the era. It defines the change in governmental policies, which up to that point had focused on the construction of housing estates on unused sites on the outskirts of town and cities, setting the working classes in the periphery of the existing urban centres, to an approach which focuses on the relocation of the working classes to new, modernist housing estates within the urban territories. At that moment in time, in the mid to late 1930s, the government's strategies and guiding principles relatively shift, from out-of-city repositioning to slum clearance and inner-city schemes, which requires an altogether different approach to the issue of housing. Schemes are achieving different status than of the purely practical and simplified notion of the house, and their appearance closer to the urban centres creates a desire for architects, governments and private sponsors, for radical design and examples of new ways of living. While the schemes were becoming more public, their function is

altering too to accommodate this event. Housing schemes start to become exemplary and illustrate and set new standards for the concept of mass living.

Even though Kensal House is particularly important in thinking how it serves this new strategy in housing and urban policy, one significant characteristic for it is that it is not erected with public funds, but it is instead financed by a private subsidize, provided by the Gas Light and Coke Company (GLCC). The reason is that GLCC thought of the scheme as a practical demonstration of the use of gas as a fuel in a modern block of flats. Behind that decision of course, there are financial and commercial interests for the company. With the emergence of electricity as a competitor to supplying power for domestic use, GLCC, the traditional power supplier until now, is forced to act on securing its position on an increasingly competitive market. That means the company has to find a way to secure commissions so much with the municipal building programmes that were under way as well as the growing market for houses built for owner occupation. With the projection of electricity as a contender for the same markets, GLCC moved swiftly to advertise itself and its services in an unprecedented way in order to maintain and increase consumption of gas as a fuel of choice. Kensal House became a model scheme and an advertisement for the use of gas and a crucial element in the company's future progress. This is another function schemes of such kind are now taking, being living and lived adverts for the promotion of certain consuming amenities.

The Gas Light and Coke Company, from the 1920s onwards, is constantly seeking out new ways of encouraging the use of its products and essentially the wider use of gas.

Some of the means it used for these purposes were advertising campaigns and films, a lot of which were not straightforward publicity but loosely connected to the company's aspirations and sentiments. It also followed political campaigns to influence governments in order to ensure that their interests will be satisfied by new policies that will endorse the availability and use of gas in municipal housing schemes. The decisions to pass a series of slum clearance acts, gave the company a further drive to support a future sale of its products, within the newly proposed plans for the relocation of slum dwellers and the creation of new housing estates.

So, in 1933 GLCC takes the decision to build a block of flats that will become a living showcase for the advantages of using gas in domestic environments and inevitably will profit the company by encouraging the development of similar schemes and promoting the use of gas in other similar projects. The new block of flats, built exclusively with funds provided by GLCC would re-house former slum dwellers and it will reveal the use of gas as the leading power supply for a modern living environment. 'Working class tenants will be provided with an all-gas service offering every amenity that a reasonable middle-class family might demand - and this without any abnormal capital outlay and at a running cost within their means'.<sup>1</sup> The importance of this project is crucial to the company since it has the ability not only to serve its commercial purposes, on a single project basis, but more importantly it can lead to a long-term gain, proving GLCC's indisputable commitment to public service and undeniable pledge to ameliorating and advancing the nation's housing and living standards. The company's board of trustees

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<sup>1</sup> Anon. *Opening of the Kensal House*, Co-partners Magazine, (London; April 1937), p. 181

concludes that ‘the estate should be an enlightened contribution to rehousing in a wider sense’.<sup>2</sup>

For the design and execution of this project GLCC announces the formation of an Architect’s Committee made of Maxwell Fry, who would be the executant architect working in consultation with Robert Atkinson, C. H. James, Michael Tapper, G. Grey Wornum and Elizabeth Denby, a housing consultant. Fry and Denby are the main figures in the project, wholeheartedly engaging with creating a prototype for modernism, a housing project that will become the cornerstone of modernist design in Britain and will demonstrate how modernist architecture can provide former slum dwellers with a clean and healthy environment complete with provisions for social interaction and children’s education. Their mission is aligned with that of the Gas Company’s to achieve a major contribution to the nation’s well-being and provide a radically different model of living than any that ever existed before, thus proving the case, that on the one hand modernist mass dwellings could produce a new type of living conditions and solving many problems of the past, while, and this involves satisfying the interests of the GLCC, representing the advantages of the use of gas in a clean, healthy and advanced environment.

The site in North Kensington has been chosen for the following reasons. The area, unlike its affluent neighbour South Kensington, has some of the worst slums in London and Denby and Fry are well aware of that fact and determined to produce together a housing

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<sup>2</sup> Anon. *Kensal House*, The Times, (London; 16 March 1937), p. 13



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scheme that will restore for its re-housed tenants, former slum dwellers, a sense of family life and decency and help create a new setting for life, away from the misery and misfortune of the slums they have previously experienced. According to Fry, 'Elizabeth and I thought very hard about how people could live there.' The outcome of their efforts was 'no ordinary block of flats but a community in action, with social rooms, workshop, a corner shop, with larger flats, better balconies, even a separate drying balcony...and...a nursery school.'<sup>3</sup> The abandoned site is now the playground for modernist ideas to explore and expand, to get in touch with the wider milieu of a common people to affect and be affected.

Fry's final design of the scheme, with the invaluable consultation from Denby's side is an amalgam of the use of the latest domestic technologies, cutting-edge modernist architecture and social welfare. In order to bestow and satisfy more than material provisions for the residents, but taking the whole project one step further, Denby and Fry aim at coupling the well-planned and designed flats with conditions able to contribute to the social needs of the population who is to occupy the development. Significant attention is paid to the design of facilities like the workshop, the social club and the nursery. These particular provisions are unique for any building project until now and prove once more Fry's and Denby's commitment to both an architectural and a social ethics based on their values for well-planned, well-produced and well-thought out dwelling for the working class, that once built and inhabited it will be an indisposable tool for the well-being of its occupants.

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<sup>3</sup> Maxwell Fry, *Autobiographical Sketches*, (London; Elek Books), 1975, p. 143  
(See also Elizabeth Darling, *Kensal House: The Housing Consultant and the Housed*, in *Twentieth Century Architecture* 8), p. 110

Kansai Ho is a three-story apartment building in the city of Osaka, Japan. It is a fine example of the work of the architect, who has a long and distinguished record in the field of architecture. The building is a fine example of the work of the architect, who has a long and distinguished record in the field of architecture.



Plate 1

The building is a fine example of the work of the architect, who has a long and distinguished record in the field of architecture. The building is a fine example of the work of the architect, who has a long and distinguished record in the field of architecture.

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Kensal House shows a commitment to architectural innovation and experimentation. At a time where conditions of living in the capital have reached a critical point, the scheme rethinks inside and outside patterns of living and offers the combination of a distinct equal environment and a high-standard concentration of facilities, and demonstrates the desire to harness the enormous potential and vitality existing within the population.

In a closer analysis of the scheme, we can see that Kensal House is originally designed as two, five-storey blocks of flats. The ground where the project stands rises 9 ft. below the pavement level of the street, creating thus two inner courts, laid out with lawn for the use of the residents. The sides of the blocks are facing east and west and main access is provided by a raised footbridge from Ladbroke Grove, which also connects the suspended galleries on the east side of the blocks. Via these galleries, the tenants have access to the covered staircases between each pair of flats. At the north end of the site, a smaller four-storey return block connects with the west block on the one side and the entrance road from Ladbroke Grove on the other. The same entrance road also leads to the nursery school, on the other side of the west block. The nursery is being built around the curve of the circular pit of a disused gasholder, which has been filled up and fully equipped as a children's playground. A carriageway under the north block, connects the nursery with the upper court for the children's access.

Two are the striking features of the exterior design of Kensal House. On the one hand the building has a very distinct and different appearance from all other housing that surrounds it. It is modern and new, and that means white walls and perfect finishes,

devoid of ornaments and with minimalist touches. Its white walls and perfect clean-cut lines, with all the balconies precisely aligned and the ample use of glass and transparency, in the nursery particularly, make a very dramatic first impression to North Kensington residents and set it apart any other building in the area. It is instantly dubbed the 'white house' and both residents and visitors are ecstatic about the facilities and the conveniences as well as for the well-thought design and details like the 'sun balcony', for drying the clothes outside.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the straightforward connectedness and practical means of circulation within its spaces, suggest an interest in relationships and are oriented to encourage encounters between the residents. The building thus will provide the backdrop where communication takes place and social engagement unfolds. This second attribute is mainly due to the highly desirable intention of Elizabeth Denby's for an urban modern setting that would not fail to dismiss the sense of community and social ties offered by village life. The architectural commentator Antony Bertram notes that blocks of modern flats 'are not merely blocks of flats. They are villages, as it were, with some dwellings on top of others.'<sup>5</sup> For Denby, Kensal House is this 'urban village'<sup>6</sup> and a response to the problems previously associated with living in flats in Britain.

Denby unquestionably aims at addressing what she finds to be lacking English modernist flats<sup>7</sup>, namely the social interaction and involvement between residents outside their flats and the desire for contribution in public life. She addresses that, with the inclusion of

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<sup>4</sup> Voiceover in Peter Wyeth (dir.) *Twelve Views of Kensal House*, (London; 1984)

<sup>5</sup> Antony Bertram, *Design*, (Harmondsworth; Penguin Books, 1938)

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Denby, *Kensal House, An Urban Village*, in *Flats: Municipal and Private Enterprises*, (London; Ascot Gas Heaters Ltd, 1938), pp. 61 - 64

<sup>7</sup> In 1938 Elizabeth Denby publishes her book *Europe Re-housed*, which is the outcome of her one travels in Europe under the Leverhulme Fellowship, and which investigates post-war housing schemes in Europe.

communal amenities in the design of the scheme. For Fry, who aspires the same ideals, this becomes an outright challenge in order to correspond to this 'inclusive' notion of living. Most definitely he believes that the production of communal spaces that will become elements of social and technical unity alike. For Fry, Kensal House symbolises the perfect balance between these 'two complementary approaches to housing.'<sup>8</sup> As the author William Curtis notes 'it was the symbiosis of society and the machine, a social and architectural response to the problems associated with bad housing. This impulse to provide high-standard accommodation for the working-classes through avant-garde design and utopian sentiments'<sup>9</sup> that inspired Fry's design. His idea for a 'democratic housing' focused on a 'type plan, a repetitive pattern which was reproduced effectively and cheaply in every flat throughout the scheme, provided a kind of universal and egalitarian device, which Fry believed would be instrumental in the planning of the 'new Britain'<sup>10</sup> and according to the architect, it has been brought forward to the discussions with Denby at their first meeting at Ben Nicholson's flat in Hampstead.<sup>11</sup>

As for the 'white house' description that was given to the scheme from residents and people from the neighbouring areas, it gives us another insight that certainly confirms the intention for creating an environment clean and functional, with the perfection of an unspoiled, white canvas and which will determine the break away from older conceptions of living spaces. In a sense, the colour scheme, will denote a spatial cleanliness and signify the progressive orientation of the whole project. Adhering to the modernist

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<sup>8</sup> Maxwell Fry, *Kensal House*, in *Flats: Municipal and Private Enterprises*, (London; Ascot Gas Heaters Ltd, 1938), p. 56

<sup>9</sup> William Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, ( London; Phaidon, 1996), p. 163

<sup>10</sup> Maxwell Fry, *The New Britain Must Be Planned*, (London; Picture Post 10, 1944), pp. 16 - 20

<sup>11</sup> Maxwell Fry, *Autobographical Sketches*, (London; Elek Books, 1975)

ideology of a positive expression found in 'whiteness' in addition to the hygienic attention of a modern aesthetic, the 'white house' as it came to be called by many, produces a clean, sterilized and potentially stimulating environment for living, a new experience in domesticity for the former slum dwellers, used to inhabit derelict and unhygienic places. Furthermore, the effect of the white walls reflecting the sunlight whenever that is possible, make it appear so distinctive from anything else in the surrounding area, setting Kensal House in a league of its own, so much with the sentiments of its tenants as with passers-by and people from the area alike.

Apart from the outside characteristics and the exterior impressions, the interior design keeps up with the philosophy of a clean and functional dwelling, a dwelling 'of the future' and for the future.' Kensal House has a total of 68 flats, 41 of which were to be found in the west block, 20 in the east and 7 in the north. The majority of the flats consists of four rooms, with fourteen of the flats having three rooms. These three-roomed flats are placed at the gallery level. The striking characteristic, which amplifies the modern orientation and functional determination of their design, is also probably the first application of *zeilenbau* principles in England<sup>12</sup>, is that all the bedrooms face east and, taking advantage of the morning sun, and the living-rooms face west so that maximum natural sunlight penetrates during the afternoon hours and throughout the day to the corresponding interior spaces. This is an element aiming at invigorating the life of the residents and providing a totally different environment from their previous slum homes. As every flat is more or less the same, it effectively creates the democratic,

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<sup>12</sup> The *zeilenbau* principle demands buildings to be planned so that they are exposed to the maximum possible sunlight. See Elizabeth Darling, *Kensal House: The Housing Consultant and the Housed*, in *British Modern: 20th Century Architecture* 8, (2007), p. 111

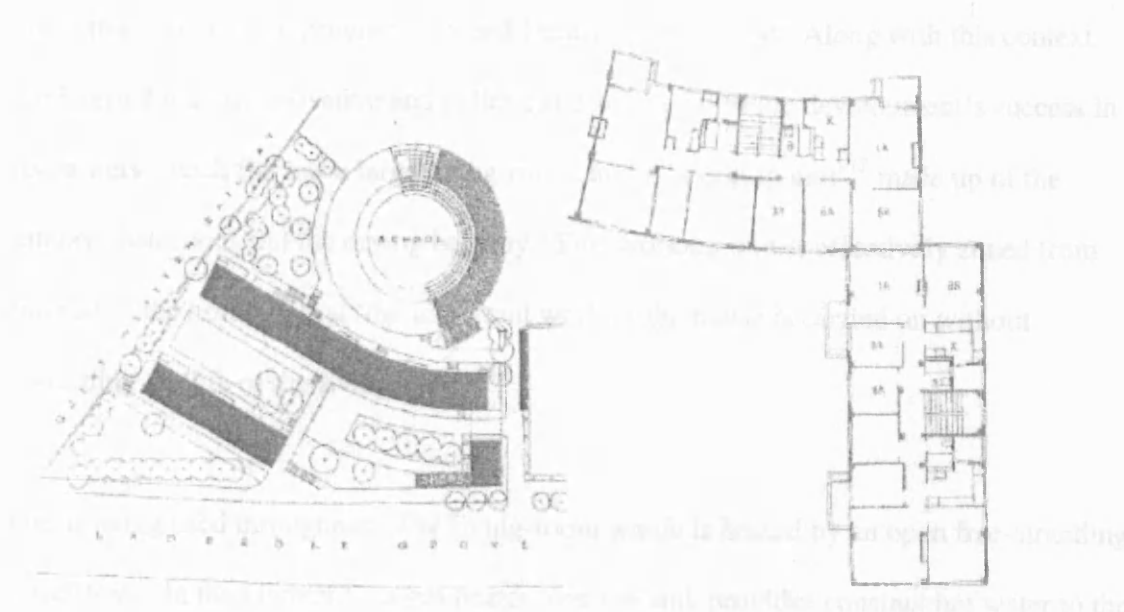


Plate 2

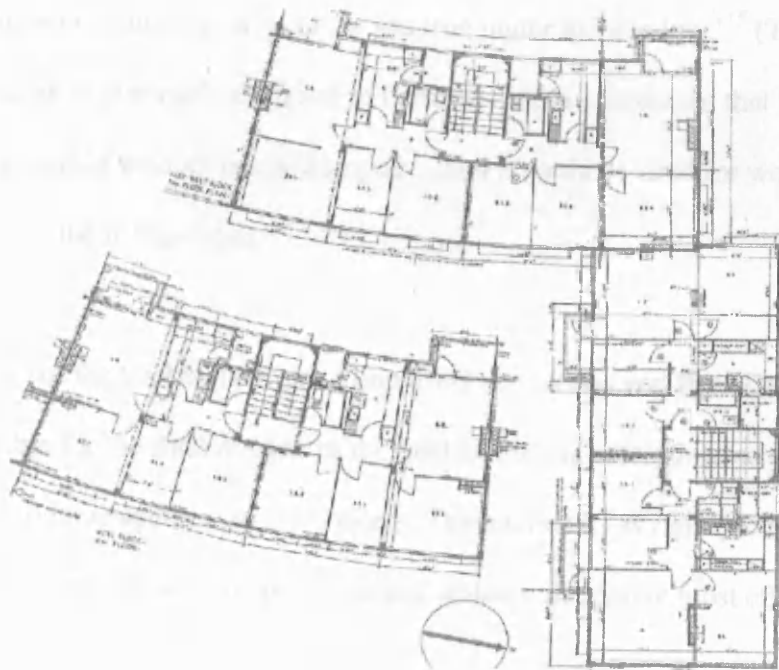


Plate 3

collectively shared environment Fry and Denby have in mind. Along with this context, the internal plan is innovative and radical, and so crucial to the development's success in its entirety. Each flat has a large living-room, and a 'working unit'<sup>13</sup> made up of the kitchen, bathroom and the drying balcony. This working unit is effectively zoned from the rest of the home so that 'the important work of the house is carried on without disturbing the life of the living-room'<sup>14</sup>

Gas is being used throughout. The living-room which is heated by an open free-stranding coke stove. In the kitchen '...a gas heater over the sink provides constant hot water to the sink and cooking is confined solely to the kitchen on a modern enamelled automatic controlled gas cooker. It is also equipped with ventilated larder and store cupboard and working table with plug-in point for gas iron under the window.'<sup>15</sup> (The Builder, p.??). The kitchen is purposely designed to be small with the intention that 'if it were made really workable without being cramped...then it could be used for work only and meals be taken in the living-room.'<sup>16</sup>

The plan for the kitchen is of great importance to Denby and Fry. Denby, who is responsible for the final designs of the kitchen unit, is determined to apply the principles of scientific management to her concept. The kitchen '...is rightly considered as a machine for the preparation of meals, and which will operate most efficiently when all

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<sup>13</sup> Maxwell Fry, *Kensal House*, in *Flats: Municipal and Private Enterprise*, (London; Ascot Gas Heaters Ltd, 1938), p. 58

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Maxwell Fry, *Kensal House*, in *Flats: Municipal and Private Enterprise*, (London; Ascot Gas Heaters Ltd, 1938), p. 57



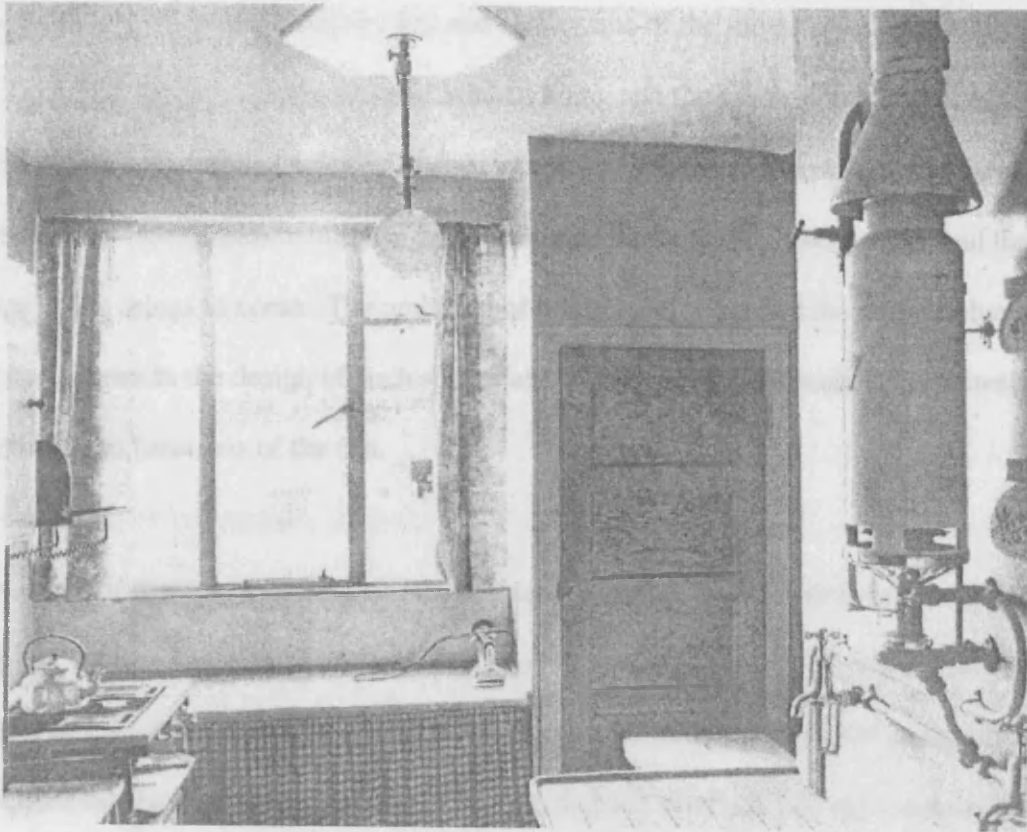


Plate 4

the equipment is at hand, and no [excessive] walking from side to side is necessary.’<sup>17</sup> It firmly complies to the architectural rhetoric of labour saving, with its efficient plan and equipment matching the visionary approach to family relations and the position of female tenants. The unit is considered by Fry and Denby one of the most celebrated features of the flats. These scientifically planned kitchen units, and the whole combination of living-room, kitchen, and drying balcony layout, would provide the cornerstone for the creation of modern residents who would use them, prepared to accept the machine age and the shape of the things to come. The ambition of this project is the end the current phase of the uneven use in the design of such spaces and introduce programmatic split between activities and functions of the flat.

However, for Kensal House to fulfil its goal as a landmark of modern living and a ‘life shaping’ scheme Denby and Fry added those elements crucial to the development of the project and the ideas behind its instigators. This has to do with ‘places of engagement’, which means those facilities outside of the flats that are to be used by the residents for social purposes and to improve interaction and communication between them. These social provisions included in the original structure of the scheme are outlined herein.

First of all, the lower ground floor of the east block near the road, is planned as a social club managed by the ‘Feathers Club’. Its large hall, with French windows opening to the lawn, a stage at one end and a well-equipped kitchen and service counter, it is the perfect place for various kinds of activities to take place and that would provide an initiative for

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<sup>17</sup> F. R. S. Yorke and Frederick Gibberd, *The Modern Flat*, (London; Architectural Press, 1937), p. 36

the residents to get to meet each other and participate in communal life outside of their houses. Denby, whose experiences outside the architectural profession had given a different edge on her ideas, was the one who propagated the need for the residents to mingle and engage with each other in as many possibilities as possible. 'In her view, architecture alone could not solve the problems of modern age...only by a combination of social provision, management and architecture could society progress'.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the social club was only one of the provisions offered. Others included a workshop for the men, equipped for joinery, furniture and model-making<sup>19</sup> and there is a women's sewing and meeting-room. While Fry was left to design the technical aspects of the project, his collaborator, Denby was busy managing and producing these social elements to incorporate to the scheme. She wanted facilities and provision of this kind to be equally distributed to both children and adults, proving for once more her devotion to inclusion of all sorts. Her ultimate goal is for the residents to run the estate themselves<sup>20</sup> believing that giving responsibilities and boosting the confidence of the tenants will become the biggest achievement of the scheme.

Reflecting on the creation of the nursery now, Denby commented that, 'The Nursery School is a delight...It is like a conjuring trick to see how infants entering at two years of age with the expression of men who have been through Borstal and Wormwood Scrubbs,

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Darling, *Enriching and Enlarging the Whole Sphere of Human Activities: The Work of the Voluntary Sector in Housing Reform in Inter-War Britain*, in C. Lawrence and A. K. Mayer (eds), *Regenerating England: Science, Medicine and Culture in Inter-War Britain*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2000), p. 168

<sup>19</sup> The Builder, *Kensal House, Ladbrooke Grove: reinforced concrete flats and nursery school: good example of modern subsidised housing: Architect: E. Maxwell Fry*, Mar. 26 1937, p. 687

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Denby, voiceover in *Kensal House*, (dir. Frank Sainsbury, sponsored by the Gas Light and Coke Company, London, 1938)

are in a couple of months transformed into carefree happy babies.’<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the Nursery held probably the most central position to all the social amenities within Kensal House. Considering the experimental nature and the efforts of the funding body and their Committee for a built project that will exemplify the new standards of living and will promote new ideals on the ways of structuring and carrying out successful citizenship and domesticity, thinking of the differentiation that so scientifically has been practiced herein, and the pursuit of higher conditions of living, Kensal House Nursery School is the uttermost achievement and a great leap towards a well-born and shaped future community.

The Nursery School showcased Denby’s strong eugenic faith in creating and safeguarding an adequate level of education. She was determined to introduce successfully a process of putting the children of North Kensington’s slums through the Nursery.<sup>22</sup> She personally inspected the Nursery’s functioning and advised the teachers on teaching practices they should follow. A short review of those practices that were applied at the Nursery in Kensal House will prove the point that this minor institution is important in the service of a eugenic purpose and satisfies the clear approach for a eugenic future that marked the conception and production of Kensal House in its totality.

There was a strict health care programme followed in the nursery, with a nurse visiting the school three times each week to give the children general health checks and advice on

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Denby, *Kensal House, an Urban Village, in Flats: Municipal and Private Enterprise*, (London; Ascot Gas Heaters Ltd, 1938), p. 62

<sup>22</sup> Felix Driver, *Moral Geographies: Social Science and the Urban Environment in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*, in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, (London; New Series, vol. 13, 1988), p. 279

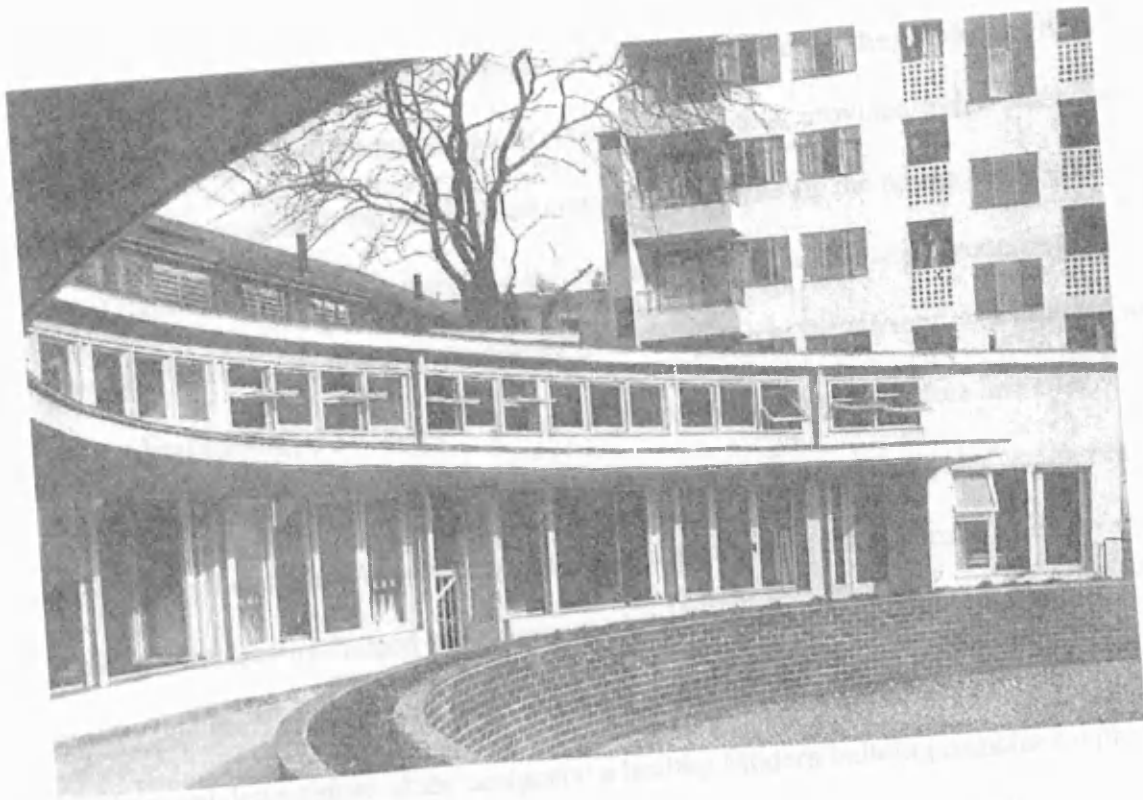


Plate 5

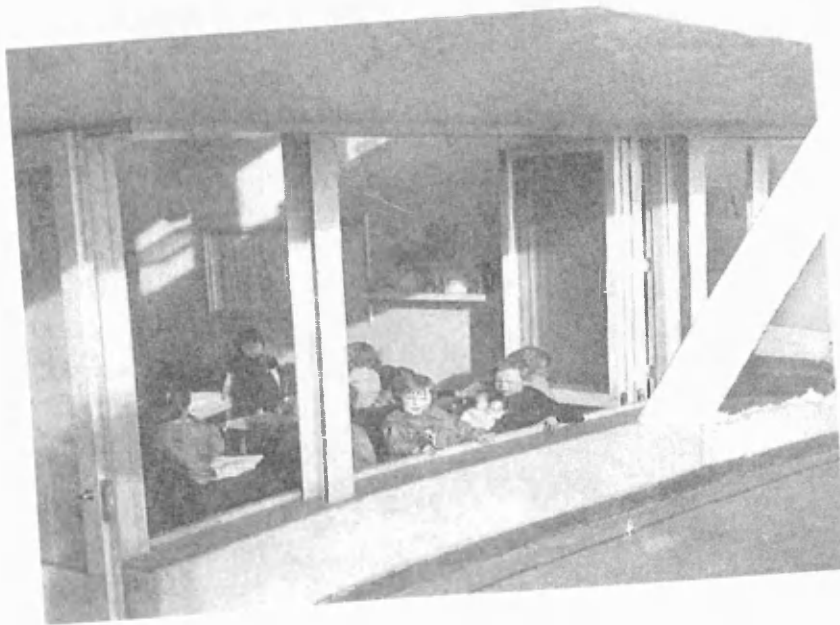


Plate 6

the mothers. The dietary regulations demanded the daily intake by the children of milk and cod-liver oil. The filled-up gasometer, outside the school, provided with a place for exercise and recreation in the sunshine and the school, following the design for ample natural lighting, similar to the flats, had the sun penetrating the building throughout the day. 'Everything, even down to the regime of the children in the nursery, was initiated to produce healthy, happy youngsters. Images of the children washing before and after meals, getting plenty of sleep, and playing games such as 'Follow the leader', or games encouraging the children to serve one another at lunch, where the actions were all about washing and cleaning, helped to reinforce the broader concerns of Modernism with healthy bodies. These positive steps were part of the philosophy, and also part of the architectural determinism of the designers: a healthy Modern building combined with healthy Modern living would inevitably produce healthy Modern subjects.'<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> David Matless, *The Art of Right Living: Landscape and citizenship 1918-1939*, in Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (eds.), *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, (London; Routledge, 1995), p. 93

## **Eugenics**

Denby and Fry however are not the only people sharing a belief and a hope in Britain's eugenic future and the advances that can take place in that domain via the design of living spaces and improvement of social circumstances and living conditions. After all it is not only urban decay and the expansion of slums the only preoccupation in Britain's socio-political agenda. If this can be thought as the tip of the iceberg, further down the line lies a deficiency into the adaptation of the nation to the decline of financial stability and prosperity that has characterised the country at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, and an incapacity of maintaining the rhythm of progress of heavy industry and the advancing mechanisation of the world. Other nations, like Germany, France, USA and Japan, are fast evolving into considerable powers in industrial exports and are experiencing a rapid financial growth. Their appearance in the same economical circuit is enough to unsettle and disturb the already struggling British reality. It is true that under these pressures, heavy industry starts to decline and the whole of the nation has to face up to the effects of this decline.

Heavy problematization on economical and financial concerns and the fact that, undeniably, and through various investigations in the conditions of living and the nation's health, it is believed that low standards of living and hygiene as well as phenomena considered by certain circles as signifiers of physical and mental deterioration of the population are on the rise. These are certainly not desirable events and they are placing the nation's fortune at risk. The alarming circumstances that come to the fore,

circumstances concerning Britain's ill economy and productivity, and a bleak horizon of a degraded future, is addressed by many a significant and influential people at the time. One of them is the chairman of the British Eugenics Society, Julian Huxley.

Julian Huxley is a keen supporter of the modernist movement in architecture and a close friend of Fry's. He was the best man to Fry's wedding with the architect Jane Drew and their relationship has evolved into a mutual admiration in each other projects. Huxley is coming from a distinguished background a well-known family of scientists and biologists. Himself, has devoted lifetime to science and evolutionary biology and he is a firm populariser of science and its related disciplines and the coiner of terms such *new synthesis* and *evolutionary synthesis*.<sup>24</sup> During his career, he held eminent professional positions. After lecturing in the 1910s, he was appointed chair of biology in the Rice University, in Houston and in the 1930s, he came back in England to become the secretary to the Zoological Society of London. More interestingly for us here though is the fact that in the 1930s he is appointed chairman of the British Eugenics Society. Huxley, a proponent of eugenics as a method of bettering society through the control of acquired characteristics, gave his inaugural lecture at the Eugenics Society in February 1936. In his lecture he diverges and criticises extreme eugenic measurements that were favoured in the past, and denies the inferiority of the working classes in general. However this does not mean that he does not see as important the removal of undesirable variants from the human gene pool as a whole. In a more humanistic way his lecture becomes instrumental in a newly proposed appreciation of eugenics and defines the

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<sup>24</sup> Julian Huxley, *Evolution the Modern Synthesis*, (London; Macmillan Publishing Company), 1975



moment where the Society itself notably rises against its traditional doctrines defined previously by its members.

Historically eugenics is a conservative institution aiming at preserving and improving an ideal of hereditary genius found in the genetic outfit of the upper classes. The British Eugenics Society was formed in 1907 in London by Francis Galton with the aim of pursuing the preservation of these notions of genius and genetic differentiation between social groups, something that lies within the scopes of eugenic ideology. Galton aspired to establish it as a specific area of scientific study and research, and a definition by him states the aims of the Society and eugenics as ‘...the science, which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop it to utmost advantage.’<sup>25</sup> In these early years, the Society was deemed a highly elitist place affiliated with upper class and the satisfaction of its interests, both in genetic and in other relevant standards. By the time of the interwar period, however, and with Huxley’s chairmanship, a rather humanistic face of the Society is being presented. A side, although, still suspicious, as most of the Society’s aims still remain very similar...

The nation’s gene pool and the upbringing of capable and charismatic individuals, gifted so much in physical as in mental abilities, is a prime concern to the Society’s as well as in Huxley’s interests. In many ways, there are innumerable strings that connect financial development, industrial progress and an increase in numbers, size, power or intensity of the population so much in physical standards as in mental capabilities. And these are in

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<sup>25</sup> Francis Galton, *Eugenics in Definition, Scopes and Aims*, (London; Sociological Society – Sociological Papers, 1905)

the foreground of the Society's involvement. Huxley in particular, faced with the above-mentioned, negative developments on national and international levels, is eager to propagate the ideas and plans for a eugenic programme that will determine and assist in a scientific manner what Britain needs. Something, which will safeguard a successful for the country future. The year of 1936 saw Huxley taking up his duties as the Eugenics Society's chairman. From the first instant of his career as the leading eugenicist, he drew out the plan that would set the foundation stone for eugenics to become 'the most sacred ideal of human race, as a race.'<sup>26</sup> This is the realm of elements that, given a substantial support from Huxley became common to eugenicists and social reformers alike. Generally speaking, it is the idea of social responsibility, linked to notions of community and race. The interest and solidarity of the social body is the ultimate appeal and the common ground for all eugenicists, reformers and liberals and the inter-war period marks for Huxley and eugenics a long line of alliances that will satisfy a widespread practice of creating the necessary knowledge and understanding of human life, a knowledge which will prove beneficial for the nations gene-pool and the production of 'healthy, happy individuals that will constitute the race.'<sup>27</sup> This of course demands the creation of an environment that will 'accommodate' and assist at advancing physical and mental characteristics. A favourable environment, so much in its built form as well as its social extensions, is a bare necessity in order to produce a healthy and prolific results within the nation's gene-pool.

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<sup>26</sup> Julian Huxley, *Eugenics and Society*, *Eugenics Review* (vol 28:1), 1936, p. 11

<sup>27</sup> Sidney Webb, *Eugenics and the Poor Law; The Minority Report*, *The Eugenics Review*, 1927, p. 240

During his inaugural lecture, on February 1936, the annual Galton lecture to the members of the British Eugenics Society, Julian Huxley expresses the shape he believes eugenics need to take so that they can have a positive influence in the development of contemporary and capable individuals, communities and in extension a nation able to respond to its evolutionary requirements.

Therefore, in order to achieve his purposes and fulfil his eugenic vision, Huxley necessarily distances himself and the Society from older eugenic beliefs that for the time are to be considered dated. The idea that the development of genius, an issue that lies in the core of eugenic ideology and which was previously considered a privilege of the upper classes and only a trait that could only appear and flourish within the part of the population, which enjoys the benefits of being born in well-off environment, shifts towards an all-encompassing spectrum. What in the past has been advocated by famous eugenicists, such as Galton himself, needs to be abandoned, especially in the wake of the risks the nation's general deterioration and subordination of standards entails. Certain doctrines that distinguish genius and other eugenic principles and place them on an elitist level of practices, become a major concern that is now unsatisfactory, proving its inability to cope with the escalating problems on a wider, national scale. The danger for the Society to backtrack into unnecessary domains of inquest and the risk this involves of turning the whole eugenic project into oblivion, urges Huxley to promote a programme devoted to the mending of conditions of living and communal life for a wider part of the population, and from then on expanding onto other means of acting to achieve a eugenic control over society.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenics was considered ‘the science of improvement of the human race germ plasm through better breeding.’<sup>28</sup> Considering the present and the interwar period, Huxley recognises that the future of eugenics demands a paradigmatic shift, a shift that will set eugenics within both the realms of natural sciences and more importantly within the complexities, variable causations and subjective methods of the social sciences. This way eugenics will become simultaneously more accessible and will gain for itself more access. It is a double-headed movement which will prove so important to the expansion of the discipline and its practices and will assist to advancing eugenics to the most important ideal of life. A kind of sacred, religious ideal is what Huxley dreams of. In other words, without fully abandoning the law-governed techniques and experimental tactics of the laboratory, he wishes to allow an entry point of social reality into these sterilised functions in order to produce practical experimentation, with results and outcomes in the wide terrain of human activity and more certainly, a terrain that includes even the most disadvantaged, degenerated elements of society. One can argue that this was an inevitable procedure, and it is fairly so, as the majority of the population is not any more distinguished by its affluence and the high-standards of living where hereditary genius once upon a time was being observed, but unhealthy and degenerative tensions are becoming commonplace.

Presenting his concept in the drape of a humanistic cause and the potential for a practice that will improve human life in general and in its totality, Huxley demands a careful

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<sup>28</sup> Francis Galton, *Eugenics, Its Definition, Scope and Aims*, Sociological Papers, (London, 1905)

consideration of the consequences the environment and in particular the social and the living aspects of it, will have to the well-being and the creation of a good stock of people. 'Since the social environment is by now far the most important part of the environment of man; and since the social environment differs from one nation to another, one period to another, one class to another, and its differences are outside the control of the eugenicist, he must not neglect it. Its uncontrolled variables bring the eugenicist face to face with the principle of multiple causation, at work here as in all the social sciences.'<sup>29</sup>

These preoccupations are perfectly aligned with the doctrine and concerns shared by Fry and Denby at the creation of Kensal House. As we saw before, the ideas of an intermingling of scientific paradigms and in particular, scientific management, absolute efficiency and functionalism that were after all developed into the prototypical scheme, sought to unify and advance industrial efficiency and traditional values of family and community. In a parallel fashion to Huxley's scientific and social combinatory logic, Kensal House contains an approach that promises a harmonious reunion of values able of safeguarding evolutionary survival and ground-breaking design that will prove to be thriving in an environment so 'unnatural' to individuals used to the conditions of criminal, filthy and unhealthy slums. Fry's modernist design and Denby's considerations for social implementation echo Huxley's realization of a eugenic project based evenly on science and society, on management and efficiency and on social interaction, involvement and hygiene. Here is how Huxley reflects on these matters.

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<sup>29</sup> Julian Huxley, *Eugenics and Society*, *Eugenics Review*, (vol 28:1), p. 13

Being aware that very similar genetic outfits could develop differently depending on the environment, Huxley suggests to combining eugenic measurements with social and political reforms to ensure the most rapid and effective plan of eugenic improvement. In Huxley's vision, the reform of the environment not only ensures the perfect development of the individual personality but also allows the social and political authorities to discover the 'defective' elements in the 'human stock'. More specifically, the failure of some individuals to live up to the evolutionary standards in a eugenic environment, according to this doctrine, could only be due to their defective genetic outfit. Once recognised and isolated, these individuals would be prevented from 'breeding' and this would increase the speed of the human improvement process. The crucial factor essential for this process of elimination is no other but the environment, the physical, built environment as well as the social.<sup>30</sup> In other words, a building scheme like Kensal House could act as a 'filter' where genetic outfits will be sieved through and assessed according to a degree of specifications introduced by the eugenic standards.

Eugenics' new social policy according to Huxley aims to supply a single equalised environment of a very high standard. This means that the new policy will have to counteract the pre-established eugenics order that demanded as a necessity of a maximum degree the prevention of dysgenic effects by using counteractive methods. In previous years, he suggests, upper economic classes were considered better endowed with ability.

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<sup>30</sup> Huxley takes as an example a book published by Carr-Saunders, where Carr-Saunders claims, after having conducted research in the city of Liverpool, that 'so far as persons in this country are concerned, the mental differences which we observe, after stripping off the obvious acquirements in the form of knowledge of facts, habits, customs, manners, are due only in small part to differences in the physical environment and in a varying degree though never to a large degree to differences in the social environment, and for the greater part to inherited abilities'. Huxley fiercely criticises Carr-Saunders conclusion as 'general and extremely unlikely, as recent work has shown.' (Julian Huxley, *Eugenics and Society*, The Eugenics Review, (vol 28:1), (London, 1935), p. 16)

However, their reproduction pace has been significantly smaller than that of the lower classes, who, on the one hand are thought to be less well-endowed genetically, on the other hand they are reproducing relatively too fast.

In the recent past and up till that moment, various methods that were applied involved birth-control, the refusal of easy access to hospital treatment for the poorest part of the population and of course sterilisation or financial compensation for not giving birth to children, for that part of the long-term unemployed population or those considered mentally and physically deficient. These methods, although suitable for some time, are becoming deeply unsatisfactory for this exact moment at which the lecture is delivered and the reason for that lies in the fact that changes need to be carried out so as to assure the future of the nation's competence in a larger scale. For eugenics to have the opportunity to achieve a substantial influence in the transformation of a future civilization, it has to abolish older and dated forms of practices and embrace a forward thinking movement. The results of previous procedures were purely 'curative, counteractive and remedial'<sup>31</sup> as he remarks. What is needed now, is a rather constructive method which will not demand a differentiation in the positioning or hierarchical ordering of quality against quantity but a method, which essentially will raise the standards both quantitatively and qualitatively. A kin of machine, which will advance both through the betterment of the environment and of the socius, a machine set in such as way as that its organisation will demand an automatic, 'natural' elimination of undesired elements.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 24

Looking into this in more detail, ultimate success will arrive after considering this dual method of approach, which in part has been described above. The mingling of nature and nurture, on a theoretical basis, which is something Huxley advocates passionately will inevitably lead to a 'progress in our attempt to disentangle the effects of nature from those of nurture for good, in so far as we follow the footsteps of the geneticist and equalise environment.'<sup>32</sup> The production of environment will not, in any way resemble the radical methods used by the pure scientists, 'by testing out a whole range of controlled and equalized environments on selected stocks'<sup>33</sup> but rather by focusing on the production of an environment that will be of the highest standards, and which will be available to the great majority of the population. Moreover, it will have to be 'as favourable as possible to the expression of the genetic qualities that we think desirable. Equally, clearly, this should include the following items: a marked raising of the standard of diet for the great majority of the population, until all should be provided both with adequate calories and adequate accessory factors; provision of facilities for healthy exercise and recreation; and upward equalization of educational opportunity.'<sup>34</sup> Kensal House is the perfect model of such a utopian vision. Eugenic living will inevitably produce healthy eugenic citizens.

Raising the standards of life among the lower classes will result to getting closer to increasing eugenic germ-plasm. To the extent that equal opportunities will be provided

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 25

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 25

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 25



for all members of the society, members who are genetically 'fit' but until now their desired traits have been masked by the dysgenic environment in which they happen to have been born, with the change to an evolutionary environment, starting from the direct environment of the house, the provisions within it and amelioration of the social surroundings, is believed that they will come to achieve their true potential. Society has to make use of the innate intelligence of its members, and for it to take place a system of provisions and adequate opportunities has to be developed. Roughly sketching out the new eugenics programme and assuming its genetic side is to be successful, he adds: 'We should plan a eugenic programme with a single and very high standard. We should aim at a high level of inherent fitness, endurance and general intelligence; and we should encourage the breeding of special talent of any and every sort, for mathematical as much as for business success, artistic as much as administrative. We should realise that if we succeeded' and this is where it is interesting considering the implication on the environment, 'our great results would over a great range of the population be out of harmony with their surroundings, and would either be wasted or lead to friction and discontent, or might express themselves in characters such as neurosis or a sense of maladjustment which would represent a lower level than that from which we started. For ultimate success we should rely on creating a demand on changing the environment towards our optimum. The supply of genetic types which could only reach proper expression in such an environment would help to create the demand. The friction and the discontent would add themselves to the forces of change'. And he continues: 'we should therefore concentrate on producing a single equalized environment; and this clearly should be one as favourable as possible to the expression of the genetic qualities we think

desirable. [...] The higher we raise the average the more certain shall we be that physical or mental performance above the average is dependent upon genetic endowment and therefore provides the raw material for positive eugenics. Not only this, but we know from various sources that raising the standard of life among the poorest classes almost invariably results in a lowering of their fertility. In so-far, therefore, as differential class-fertility exists, raising the environmental level will reduce any dysgenic effects which it may now have. Returning, however, to the more important aspect of the eugenic knowledge to be gained by levelling up the environment, I anticipate that at the bottom, the social problem group, though shrinking in size, will be left, clearly marked out by its inadequate performance in the new and favourable conditions, as a well-defined target for measures of negative eugenics such as segregation and sterilization.<sup>35</sup>

This programme, its definitions and scopes are of crucial interest herein as it has a great impact on the built environment, and the role architecture will come to play in the near future. With the significant effect of architecture on the majority of the socius, it is inevitable that the way architectural space was practiced escaped Huxley's attention. For the new eugenics vision, it is necessary to attest to a new degree of living standards. Not only for satisfying the needs and desires of an upper class, and advancing in a parallel nature, but more critically here, for the lower classes, the disadvantaged, as these are for Huxley as important as those who were draping the advantages in the society. A kind of positive eugenics is looming in the horizon and basic principles in the field are being transformed. For example, the quest for genius, a possibility that could previously only

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. pp. 15, 16

occur within the upper class circles, Huxley now believes can be found in all people, of all classes. Furthermore genius can find its expression in varied ways. Its nature becomes not necessarily a hereditary trait but a human potential, an environment social as well as built that aims to explore the possibilities of fulfilling this common innate trait, will serve right the new eugenics' positive utopian vision.

This line of thought seems to be perfectly aligned with modernist ideals, feelings and doctrines based around the belief in the capacities of a modern environment which is able to assist to the progress of the human species and will make create a better world. The same utopian desire drives modernism and the belief in new qualities and technologies to achieve social improvement. The rational utopia of the modern architecture movement, in designing a new world and the trust in mechanisation and the role it could play to improve daily life and transform the public resembles so much the desire and belief in eugenics. The two lie very close to each other and feed from each other. In the particular case we have here, is suggestive of the proximity that characterises the two fields. After all it is interesting to remark the fact that Fry and Huxley were very close to each other indeed. Huxley was Fry's best man to his marriage with his second wife Jane Drew. Huxley's had a notorious interest in architecture and a keen admirer of the Bauhaus movement and Walter Gropius in particular. The image of modern architecture as pure form and functional purpose lodged in the rationality of mechanised progress, and social utility, and as a proposal for heroic experimentation, increasingly seems to suggest an equal shift in sensitivities and sensibilities to the eugenicist's dream to achieve precision

and efficiency on a social, reproductive level, which will lead to the betterment of humanity.

However, the general attitude of his lecture embraces an understanding of Huxley's renewed mission and eugenics in terms of a change in their programme and a definite focus to the positive aspects of its practice. Therefore, he calls for higher standards of living, education, social improvement and a programmatic initiative that will include architecture as a fundamental attribute to the creation of an evolutionary environment. Its totalizing sentiment is obvious and it proves the will for the production of a homogeneous, standardized life, or the living. In many ways and from many sides this is considered absolutely fine. and it can certainly be. When there is a general feeling of disappointment, a kind of loss and fear makes a presence so much in the mind of the governments and the officials as well as the minds of the citizens and the people, then a lot of measurements can be taken up without further questioning of their validity and their ethical background and consequences. Especially, for Kensal House, who could dismiss the project as a non-fortunate, who could think of it as a kind of experimentation in ways of imposing measurements in a non-obvious, maybe transparent way? Such a modernist, radical structure could only be praised for what it represented. But, is it really so innocent? And can it be thought outside of criticism?

Beyond the 'white walls' and the zeilenbau applications, and behind the scientifically planned kitchen units, and the self-organization procedures established within the community, a suggestion could be made to approach the whole scheme as a

methodological instrument in the expansion of eugenics. We have seen how the two main characters here, Maxwell Fry and Julian Huxley are connected to each other and are bonded by friendship. We have seen that Kensal house has been funded by the Gas Company as a living ad of the use of gas in domestic environments. We have also seen how eager the Gas Company is to promote its interests and how it uses different media to achieve them. Kensal house can be one of them, and films are another well-known strategy that is being followed. At the same time as Kensal house is being inaugurated, the same company, GLCC, is funding one of Huxley's films. The film entitles *Monkey into Man*, produced in 1938 by Julian Huxley and S. Zuckerman shows primates behaving like humans when in captivity in zoos, and stresses the need for civilized man to be well-groomed and act dignified. However small this relation can appear, however, it leaves traces that can be useful when reconsidering the creation and aspirations of Kensal House. Evolutionary architecture and a film on evolutionary characteristics of men and primates, can certainly aim at the same goal. To influence ideas on life and its structural elements.

On a different level, and thinking again of Huxley's lecture, we will see that the idea of negative eugenics has not been eliminated, but slightly minimized and just covered up. Especially when he refers to the fact that, after an evolutionary environment has been created, then it will become easier for different kinds of measurements to be taken, the critical. With this said, the point he aims to get across signifies that those who will not 'fit' into an environment made for the 'fit' will be exposed to other enforcements. In other words, measurements like sterilization and institutionalization will be consulted for those

who fail to adhere and become assimilated in the evolutionary environments that have been offered to them. Kensal House, thus achieves a different function, and this is to 'act' as a filter for the recognition of 'fit' eugenic outfits, becoming this way a kind of power bearing institution itself within the boundaries of the city and an experiment in eugenics, a node in early modes of genetic surveillance in groups and individuals. This is also where Foucault's notion of biopower gains relevance in order to provide the background to this particular critique and analysis for Kensal House.

## Biopower

The notion of biopower appears in Foucault's writings with *The Will to Knowledge*, the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault argues that whereas previously power has been a matter of 'impeding [forces], making them submit or destroying them,' since the 17<sup>th</sup> century power has worked 'to incite, reinforce, control, monitor. Optimize and organise them...'.<sup>36</sup> This for Foucault is biopower, in other words a power, which seeks to bring 'life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations'<sup>37</sup> – to objectify the forces of life, to quantify them, measure them, and on the basis of this knowledge, to set them into productive coordination. This transition to the ways of enforcement coincides with the transition in modernity and whereas formerly people were negatively oppressed and prohibited in certain of their actions, in the modern condition people are positively shaped and conditioned to behave on prescribed ways.

In this modern type of power, this biopower, 'is destined to produce forces, to make them increase and to manage them rather than devoted to bar them, to break them in half and destroy them' and the new role of the power, as we also saw before, is 'of assuring, supporting, reinforcing, multiplying life and putting life in order.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Alan Sheridan (trans), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 136

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 143

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 179

Here we have two examples, a practical and an ideological one, and a theory that links the two. Kensal House, by the architect Maxwell Fry and the housing consultant Elizabeth Denby the greatest example of modernist architecture in the UK, bearing its creation and its aims as a scheme on a basis which demanded a scientific approach and a functionalist method of standardisation of the environment with its ultimate goal the betterment of life for its inhabitants. Eugenics, under the leadership of Julien Huxley, an avid admirer of modernist design and a close friend of Maxwell Fry's, demanded a pioneering shift in order to encompass and infiltrate the whole of the nation's population, believing that the production of healthy and productive individuals shall not be entirely focused on the upper classes any more and shall not impose a negative force of determination upon the rest. Believing eugenic programme that overlooks the wider gene pool is suicidal in the long-term, he purports to establish it as a novel for-all ideology. It might be called positive eugenics, but as Foucault shows, it is a shift in the way it is exercised, a shift that becomes inevitable. The underlying philosophy though remains the same.

The restructuring of government and planning policies in relation to the establishment of housing projects within urban areas, parallels the shift on eugenics' course of action and the creation of Kensal House. The housing scheme in question is closely associated with the functionalism and iconography of modern architectural endeavour, and with an emphasis on its programme on better living conditions, high hygiene standards, and wide standardisation throughout. With these and the social provisions thought and implemented by Denby it acts as a model so much in the domain of individuals'



interaction and social relationships as much as in the creation of happy and responsible future citizens through the creation of a paradigmatic nursery school to breed the new generation of children formerly living in degenerate conditions in the slums. What it combines to, is a first attempt to create a 'synergy' instrumental in promoting not only the interests of the Gas company who funded the venture, but to reflect all the contemporary notions of how life needs to be constructed.

An experiment project in many senses, it signifies with its white walls and the clean, functional interiors, the nursery and the social club the zeitgeist of the period, invested with elements of efficiency and fit bodies, perfect health and eugenic models of living, of scientific and social engineering, of an evolutionary environment and a modernist utopia, a node of importance within an expanded city-scape and at the same time a household which provides all the necessary means of empowerment for its inhabitants. However, standardisation and efficiency create a homogenising environment which subjects its users, with prescribing not only movements and actions but the total way of carrying out an existence through zoning.

The attention that has been paid from Fry and Denby especially to facilitate family life, to make time for recreation and actually have the provisions for that to take place, the design of the kitchens and the bathrooms and the ample space, which demanded the differentiation and separation of activities to take place within it, in on the one hand an attempt to provide the best articulation of scientific management in a domestic environment and on the other hand, an effort to create the symbolic insignia associated

with eugenic ideals. After all, these two, scientific management and eugenics have so many things in common whatsoever. Kensal House is a utopia constructed both as spatial imagery and eugenic engineering. A dream world that would forge a new English citizen, worker, family man and happy individual. The creation of the scheme is a commitment to progress, production and the interests so much of a nation as of a science.

Health and hygiene standards, exemplary interior spaces and identified zones of work and interaction, the nursery and its educational focus, the attention in design to the details such as the sun balcony and the zeilenbau, are the characteristics that make the meaning of Kensal House so significant. They are also what establishes the project within the eugenic aesthetic and the will for creation of a better human, which inevitably recognises the desire for a control from a central form of power, a control on bodies, a control over reproductive habits, and the creation of institutions dedicated to that purpose. This urban utopia is the model for a new eugenic humanism. New forms of social organisation, (Denby put a lot of effort in having the tenants deciding about their own issues and taking political standpoints in cases that were of their interest) new institutions within rationalized space, and in extend an urban rational expanse, would create the conditions for a new British society. The creation of Kensal House was a celebration of rationality, hygiene and power, both in terms of aesthetic design and material production. Designed to enhance the quality of life, the natural landscape transcends the spatial configurations of the city and attempts to appeal to the 'natural' characteristics of genetic outfit. By proving the hegemony of reason as far as housing projects are concerned, it exemplifies

the fact that urban renewal is heavily influenced by scientific management and the idea that the power of science will rule over human activity.

This falls within the parameters of the notion of Foucault's for biopower. And in the case of Kensal House, we can see the transposition of its utopian rationality in the individual arrangements of every flat, where everything is ordered and every instrument is selected for particular functions, with all the implications this has on body movement, through a kind of domestic zoning. In as much as only certain activities are allowed, the environment itself proves that it begins to exercise some kind of power upon the bodies of the inhabitants of the scheme. A previous anarchy and disorder experienced in the domestic life of slum dwellings, a pandemonium, lack of hygiene and sanitation, or what might be termed, a 'deficient' existence, gives way to a new order, where the stove is not anymore in the living-room, the bed in the dining-room and the wardrobe in the kitchen, but instead the house is divided in zones of activity, with every function taking place in specific parts of its territory.

In its practical expression, in the creation of Kensal House, this model housing project and the living advertisement for the Gas Company, the eugenic programme finds its best thought out and exemplified model. A model that circumnavigates all the nation's ideas and propagations, that however hard it tries to appeal in its humanistic cover, all that it carries within is the desire to control the body, the emergence of a homogenizing culture and the reduction of people to biological entities, occupying prescribed 'living space, producing quantifiable forces and becoming 'productive' in the service of an abstract

form of power. If eugenics seeks a control from the within, from the molecular, the human body as genetic material, Kensal House can be its expression from the without, from the outside of the body altogether a different body and a control of the individual via its zoned-out spaces of interaction, where behaviours and expressions of the inherent are determined as a consequence of being within. In other words a disciplinary technique where the conduct of individuals and groups is directed towards the production of capable stock and useful subjects.

## **Conclusion**

Kensal House, is undeniably a very important element in British Modernist movement in architecture. Without Kensal House, living conditions in the country would certainly be unfulfilled. However, the scheme's success has a different side too. This side tends towards the new social utopian type that takes shape in the interwar period and reflects the changes in Britain's social consciousness and interpretation of social ideals. First and foremost, this kind of rational utopia affected part of the industrial bourgeoisie and experts in sciences and technologies. Caused by the rapid advances in these fields and the social change they produced, its utopian character contains a promise of breaking from older traditions. It proclaims a new rhetoric built according to the principles of rationality and efficiency. In its rhetoric, all life of society, all institutions, relations and values are determined by positivistically interpreted scientific laws. The principles which operate in the sphere of human activity are fully in the spirit of scientific fetishism. The same ideas that suggest that we view the production of Kensal House from a humanitarian point of view, can easily shift to accommodate the ideals of a technocratic, functional faith.

This project, aligned with the project of eugenics defines the advancing of a rationally harmonized society and a form of organisation drafted upon distinctions of power and subordination. If Kensal House is an engine for potential use of energy, it is also making and regulating potential energy. It may also be a discarding machine that does not only reflect the crisis in the structure and functions of the state and the market, but the

disintegration of traditional society into liberal ideology, where the socio-political and economical conditions demand the transformation of institutions in mechanisms of assimilation, which function more efficiently. Rationality, order and the power over the body in the domestic and urban environment.

Kensal House and eugenics seems to complement each other. It is the sentiment of utopia so much inscribed in both, and the ideals for a betterment of society through design that defined the era and became the highest ideal between progressives and reformers in the inter-war years. It is the will for a better future for the society. However the desire to control is always present.

## **Appendix**

### **Plate 1**

Kensal House, Ladbroke Grove

West facing façade, sun and drying balconies.

(The Builder, 26 March 1937)

### **Plate 2**

Plans of Kensal House flats.

(Ascot Gas and Water Heaters Ltd)

### **Plate 3**

Typical 3<sup>rd</sup> floor plans

(Ascot Gas and Water Heaters Ltd)

### **Plate 4**

Kensal House kitchen

(Ascot Gas and Water Heaters Ltd)

**Plate 5**

**Kensal House, The Nursery School**

**(The Builder, 26 March 1937)**

**Plate 6**

**Detail of playroom**

**(The Builder, 26 March 1937)**



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