

Minor Cinemas and the Redevelopment of London
in the Long Sixties

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that minor London cinemas and minority cultures of the period 1956-1974 played an important role in implementing and reimagining the reconstruction of the city during the 'long sixties.' The thesis discusses a wide range of films by immigrant directors as varied as Don Levy, Lloyd Reckord, Robert Vas, collectives such as Cinema Action, as well as the political cinema of the Greater London Council (GLC) and housing documentaries produced by the BBC. What each of these diverse, yet equally remarkable films share in common are their relative neglect in the history of London cinema and, by extension, British cinema (only *Herostratus* can claim any significant critical response). This thesis not only makes a case for minor cinema in the field of British film studies, but also argues for its importance to British social history. In doing so, this study considers what it meant to be represented both cinematically and politically in the long sixties, as minority narratives both flourished and suffered at the hands of the GLC, the BBC and the BFI, three of London's central institutional powers. In tandem, the cultural and political significance of these institutions is scrutinised by considering their role in cinematic production in relation to the city's reconstruction. Ultimately, the thesis demonstrates that such issues of visibility undermined the historical significance of minor aesthetics on the social and cinematic reconstruction of London.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

INTRODUCTION:

MINOR CINEMAS AND THE REDEVELOPMENT OF LONDON IN THE LONG SIXTIES

This thesis traces interactions between the policies and civic experience of housing in London during the ‘long sixties’ and the responses of London-based filmmakers to post-war discourses of social reorganisation, reconstruction, movement and migration.¹ I argue that there is a deep and inextricable link between London’s moving image culture and the policies and politics of housing and social reorganisation in the city in this period. The deep political and social tensions that beset the city underline a diverse body of non-commercial ‘minor’ cinema that focussed upon marginal narratives of migration and inequality in London. Little has been written about the emergence of these minor cinemas and the films I discuss in this thesis have been forgotten to a large extent. Many of them now belong to the realm of the archive and cannot be seen outside of its viewing rooms.

Those individual directors who made this ‘minor’ cinema—for example, Lloyd Reckord, Robert Vas and Don Levy—had distinctive trajectories, as either Commonwealth migrants or migrants displaced by war. In the first two chapters of the thesis I pay close attention to five films made by these directors, which were all supported to some extent by the British Film Institute’s (BFI) Experimental Film Fund:

¹ Marianne Dekoven coined this term, in a different yet related context. In doing so, she challenges the rigid demarcation of a decade that connects the moments of modernism and post-modernism through political and aesthetic transformations in 1960s United States. The North American ‘long sixties’ extends ‘from the late fifties to the early seventies; from the heyday of the Beat Movement and the rise of popular youth culture to Watergate.’ Notably, Dekoven is concerned in principle with the ‘representative’ literature of this moment, in which she discusses the work of figures such as Herbert Marcuse, William S. Burroughs and R.D. Laing in the context of ‘the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the New Left, antiwar and student movements, second-wave feminism, and gay liberation’ in order to argue that sixties radical politics and counter-cultures ‘embodied simultaneously the full, final flowering of the modern and the emergence of the postmodern.’ Historical studies of 1960s culture (by Fredric Jameson and Pamela M. Lee, among others) figure this period as a deep rupture in the terrain of twentieth century political thought, wherein enshrined notions of spatiality, temporality and identity collide with emergent, hybridised social, aesthetic and philosophical forms. It is worth noting here that the specificities of DeKoven’s project do not map neatly onto mine, yet her periodisation is both useful and relevant. See Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: the Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 3-4, Fredric Jameson ‘Periodizing the Sixties’, in *Social Text* 9/10 (Spring/Summer 1984), pp. 178-209, Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: on Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2006) and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

Herostratus (Don Levy, 1968), *Ten Bob in Winter* (Lloyd Reckord, 1963), *Dream A40* (Lloyd Reckord, 1965), *Refuge England* (Robert Vas, 1959) and *The Vanishing Street* (Robert Vas, 1962). The subject matter of these films is distinctive: they focus on marginal characters and document the radical spatial and social reorganisation of London in the period. They also show that this reorganisation accompanied redefinitions of race, gender and sexuality, and paid heed to emerging architectural and urban planning practices. Their aesthetics and the conditions of their production also reflect the BFI's processes of economic and cultural assimilation. Here, my study revolves around detailed analyses of these films and situates them alongside other innovative and unique films about London in the long sixties. My argument draws on the extensive archive I have assembled around these films and around debates that concern housing and redevelopment in the same period. I discuss 'redevelopment' and 'social reorganisation' as two imbricated facets of a larger phenomenon. In his study of queer culture in post-war London, Richard Hornsey uses the term 'reconstruction' as a catch-all for these facets of urban renewal. Hornsey's terminology underscores the nuances inherent in civic experience itself, and in everyday lives shaped by London's rebuilt municipal spaces.²

My study also traces less influential narratives of British cinema and responds instead to the marginalia of cinematic scholarship on London. Studies such as John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism*, Robert Murphy's *Sixties British Cinema* and Charlotte Brunson's *London in Cinema*, as well as Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber's edited collection *London Eyes* have all provided crucial context to my research yet underline the neglect that has affected the reception of the films I discuss in this thesis. Pertinent responses do exist and in order to present them here, I have established a large archive collated from resources housed across London's cultural and municipal institutions and considered questions that have long been central to urban planning, cultural studies, sociology and architecture. Urban, cinematic and cultural theorists have long since theorised Paris, Rome, Florence, New York City and Baltimore yet neglected London. Monographs such as Hornsey's alongside Elizabeth Lebas' comprehensive study of municipal cinema, *Forgotten Futures*, show that there is much to gain from turning to minority cultures and film genres and to returning to the archive.

²Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 11.

My use of ‘minor’ is indebted to David E. James’ seminal monograph *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*. James’ project has historical and geographical specificities that do not map onto this project in any convenient way. For James, the minor cinemas of Los Angeles are almost always defined by their relationship to Hollywood. No such simple relationship binds London’s minor cinemas to a central dominant industry and place. My study holds that this major difference relates to institutional frameworks and I look at the role played by institutional bodies such as the BBC, the BFI, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, the Jewish Chronicle, the Greater London Council, as well as private investors, campaign groups and trade unions. In James’ account, Hollywood is the power-centre around which the minor cinemas of Los Angeles orbit; in London, the power-centre itself—the BFI—played an active role in the foundation and reproduction of minor cinemas. In a footnote, James points out that he ‘adopts’ the term ‘minor’ from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s study *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Elsewhere he reflects on this philosophical lineage as follows: ‘though it makes no sense to think of Kafka as minor literature according to common usage of the term, the concept is useful if it is constructed as equivalent to that of ‘minority’ culture used in the United States to refer to the practices of social groups situated outside or marginal to the hegemonic cultural industries.’³ However, James does not restrict his study to ‘ethnic identity’ and neither will I, for the relationship between centre and margin is more complex than a simple ethnic opposition and should extend to questions of gender, sexuality, race and class, as well as to wider questions of culture and place. The expansion of James’ study is not my aim here. Instead, I look to redefine this evocative notion of ‘minor’ cinema in the related yet specific context of London in the long sixties.

Rooted as they are in the aesthetics and politics of redevelopment in London in this period, the films of Don Levy, Lloyd Reckord and Robert Vas I discuss also respond to cinematic styles and modes both current in and preceding the period: the modernist feature-length narratives of European directors Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais and London-based expatriates such as Joseph Losey and Nicholas Roeg; the Free Cinema movement led by Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz; the queer

³ David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 446.

reveries of Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith, as well as the celebrated documentary studies of British society typified by John Grierson and the Documentary Movement. In Chapter III, I turn to films produced by London's local authority the Greater London Council (GLC) and the radical Marxist collective Cinema Action in order to discuss the effect that modes of public, civic or municipal filmmaking had on debates about housing in London. The GLC Public Relations Branch commissioned films such as *Somewhere Decent to Live* (Ronald E. Haddock, 1967) and *Living at Thamesmead* (Jack Saward, 1974) as vehicles of public information and to contextualise and argue for the necessity of 'slum clearance' and 'urban renewal'. These films form part of a wider communications circuit around the GLC which included television, press relations, written publications, exhibitions and public talks.

The 1960s marked a turning point for London-based cinema for many reasons. By the start of the period, national legislation on matters as diverse as housing, industrial relations and sexuality had prompted the emergence of collectives who used cinematic production as a means of political struggle. Among them were Cinema Action, the London Filmmaker's Co-operative, the London Women's Film Group and the Berwick Street Collective. These collectives produced films that redefined political cinema in the 1960s and offered remarkable responses to the 'official' narratives of the GLC. In Chapter III, I situate the GLC films in this wider context and discuss two films made by Cinema Action that focus on housing in London: *Not a Penny on the Rents* (1969) and *Squatters* (1970). These films, I argue, offered a direct challenge to both the housing policy of the GLC and the spectacle of policy offered in GLC cinema. In Chapter IV, I turn to programmes on housing commissioned by the BBC and broadcast on television in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Drawing on a wide range of archival sources, I show that films such as *I Love This Dirty Town* (Ron Parks, 1969), *The Smithsons on Housing* (B.S. Johnson, 1970), *The Block* (Paul Watson, 1972) and *Horizon: the Writing on the Wall* (John M. Mansfield, 1974) played a crucial role in informing and shaping public opinion on town planning, public housing, homelessness and poverty in London.

At this juncture it is appropriate to outline more precisely the nature of the archival corpus that I have assembled. There is a great wealth of neglected archival sources that are pertinent to this period of British filmmaking, held in diverse archives in London and beyond. The documents of particular

significance to this thesis are held at the BFI Special Collections and National Archive, the British Library, the London Metropolitan Archives, the BBC Written Archives, the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Bishopsgate Library. These documents have great historical significance but have been as neglected as the films that I consider. However, my approach to archival sources is not indebted to any one scholar or methodology. Rather, the use of archives was necessitated by the demands of such a specific historical inquiry. In order to discuss the relationship between the moving image, the archive and social history I have used interpretive methods drawn from across the fields of film and television studies, cultural studies and sociology, in particular the work of Elizabeth Lebas, Richard Hornsey, and the ‘classical’ cultural studies focus on race and gender utilised by thinkers such as Lola Young and Stuart Hall.

By mapping out the trajectory and historical remit of London’s minor cinemas, I wish to tease out some of its broader contradictions and tensions. The terms used to qualify cinematic styles in this period include modernist, art-house, avant-garde, home movie, artists’ film and video, minority, experimental, propaganda, public information, agitational, political, theoretical, agit-prop, documentary, observational, programme, activist, campaign and regional, the list goes on. ‘Implicit here is the assumption that each of these categories are essentially historical and yield a mode of reading that thinks

⁴For discussions of these categories in terms of individual films and groups discussed in this thesis, see Deke Dusinberre, ‘A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film’, *Programme* 5 (1978), Central St. Martins Artist Film and Video Archive; Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner, eds., *Working Together: Notes on British Filmmaking Collectives in the 1970s* (Southend: Focal Point Gallery 2013); Mike Dunford, ‘Experimental/Avant-Garde/Revolutionary Film Practice’, *Afterimage* 6 (1976); BBC Audience Research Department, ‘Herostratus’, File: VR/70/410, Folder: R9/7/106, BBC Written Archives; Jonas Mekas, ‘Movie Journal –London Festival of Independent Avant-Garde Film’, *Village Voice* (25 October 1973); Jim Ellis, *Derek Jarman’s Angelic Conversations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Chris Lippard, ed., *By Angels Driven: The Films of Derek Jarman* (Trowbridge: Flick Books, 1996); Michael Balcon, ‘Introduction’, in *Experiment in Britain*, BFI Archive, Box 121, File 2, Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections; *Sound and Television Broadcasting in Britain*, Central Office of Information Reference Pamphlet (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1966), Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives; ‘Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Experimental Production Committee held at the National Film Theatre, SE1, on Tuesday, 30th January, 1962 at 3:30pm’, 4. Michael Balcon Collection J/71: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections; ‘Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen interviewed by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen’, *Screen* 15:3 (Autumn, 1974); Elizabeth Lebas, *Forgotten Futures: British Municipal Cinema 1920-1980* (London: Black Dog, 2011); *The Future Public Relations, Advertising and Market Research Requirements of the Greater London Council* (London: The London Press Exchange, 1965); David Curtis, *A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain 1894-2004* (London: BFI, 2007). These texts should be considered a representative list rather than a comprehensive one.

about how each style—index of the filmmaker’s interaction with an historical mode of cinematic production—reproduces and reflects the same physical materials it encounters. *Herostratus*, for example, has been considered ‘modernist’ by some commentators (on account of the self-conscious homage paid by Levy to directors such as Sergei Eisenstein) and as ‘experimental’ by the BFI’s Experimental Film Fund committee. In his history of artists’ film and video, David Curtis even places the film under the rubric ‘ambitious narrative.’⁵ The passages and byways of scholarship on British cinema reflect these tensions. My aim in this thesis is not to resolve these tensions, but to explore the historicity of the descriptive terms assigned to the films I discuss. For this reason, I do not trace to any extensive degree the relationship between Free Cinema and the Griersonian Documentary Movement of the thirties (although the work of Robert Vas and Lloyd Reckord sit in awkward relation to the latter). Rather, this study charts the aesthetic, political and economic contexts from which the films discussed came into existence, the conditions of their public release and their reception.

The period from 1956 to 1974 witnessed major shifts in the political and physical landscape of London and the films I examine respond to these shifts. The tension between London’s local authorities and the communities they governed is most evident, I will argue, in the struggles fought over housing policy and urban planning in the long sixties. I show that moving images were crucial to these struggles in a period bookended by the twin crises of British foreign policy and European communism that emerged around 1956 and the conclusion of a comprehensive redevelopment of public housing—London’s last—in the mid-1970s. The politics of the Cold War loom on numerous levels of British political life and filmmakers associated with Free Cinema responded to the threat of nuclear war and disruptions in international relations. In 1956, ten thousand British Communist Party members left in protest against the Soviet invasion of Hungary following the latter state’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. *Refuge England* (discussed in Chapter I) tells the personal tale of a Hungarian man’s exile and subsequent integration into London life following the uprising. In 1957, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was formed and ushered in the rise of the New Left. The CND’s first annual march to the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in Aldermaston, Berkshire, was documented by Free Cinema critic and filmmaker Lindsay Anderson in 1959. The footage was then edited and

⁵Curtis, *A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain 1894-2004*, 175.

exhibited as *March to Aldermaston*, funded by the British Film Institute's (BFI) Experimental Film Fund.

At the other end of the period, the Thamesmead housing estate in South-East London was completed in 1974 and featured in three separate public information films between 1968 and 1974 as the GLC campaigned to convince tens of thousands of Londoners to move east to the new town. Working against the GLC's efforts, international filmmakers in London had already been busy contributing to the mythology that the new housing estates were accelerating London's 'urban decay'. Both *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) and *Fahrenheit 451* (François Truffaut, 1966) set their dystopian futures in modernist South London housing estates—Thamesmead and Alton, respectively—while London's central film and television institutions, the BFI and the BBC, were also representing the expansion of London's social topography.⁶

Taken together, these transitions were the focus of a seminal study published in 1964 by the Centre for Urban Studies, *London: Aspects of Change*. The study was a collection of essays and empirical research by architectural and town planning professionals, sociologists and critics. In one essay, 'The Structure of Greater London', J.H. Westergaard discusses the relationship between housing and social mobility. 'Social frontiers are fluid', he asserts. 'Nowadays, working class quarters are often being invaded by new luxury flats and also by the conversion of old houses and mews for middle class occupation.'⁷ Where the need for housing was greatest, he claims, private developers built least. In another essay, the architect and town planner William Holford remarks with great accuracy that what 'is unfortunate about the present changes in London is their consistent trend towards a greater uniformity and greater anonymity of appearance. The small, the individual, the eccentric, and the flamboyant buildings are disappearing; large, impersonal, repetitive and much less interesting buildings are taking

⁶ Little is written on the relationship between these films and their environment, although Kubrick and Truffaut have been discussed in the context of their own lives in London. See Robert Murhpy, 'Truffaut in London', in Lucy Mazdon and Catherine Wheatley, eds., *Je t'aime... moi non plus: Franco-British Cinematic Relations* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 211-222 and Bill Krohn, *Stanley Kubrick* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2010).

⁷ J.H. Westergaard, 'The Structure of Greater London', in Centre for Urban Studies, eds., *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), 104.

their place.⁸ But Holford also praises the Alton housing estate built by the LCC in Roehampton; evidence, he argues, that ‘urban renewal can be attractive as well as efficient.’⁹ The introduction to this volume was written by Ruth Glass, the director of the Centre for Urban Studies and a combative voice among social thinkers, whose work is crucial to my analyses in Chapter II. Glass contends that the ‘large programme of urban reconstruction and re-building since World War II has had the result of reducing the contrasts between rich and poor districts within the boundary of the present County.’¹⁰

Glass’ essay makes a number of typically bold assertions: among these, her coinage of the term ‘gentrification’ stands out. She describes ‘gentrification’ as an ‘invasion’ of working-class districts by owner-occupiers that plays out ‘rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed.’¹¹ She criticises Patrick Abercrombie’s celebrated Greater London Plan of 1944 for failing to take ‘either the demographic or economic facts of life into account [because] it was based on the assumption that there would be a stationary population, economy and culture’. This statement is a gallant, yet necessary response to successive local and national governments who preferred top-down reorganisation.¹² Glass claims that the ‘cardinal concept’ of town planning, ‘public interest’, had been increasingly abandoned, which she pinned on the ‘drastically amended’ 1947 Housing Act, as well as the ‘denationalisation’ of development rights, the ‘liberation’ of real estate speculation and, finally, the ‘relaxation of rent control’.¹³ Her introduction challenges the ‘the image of the frank and free society [...] so assiduously promoted,’ and remarks, ‘there is bound to be severe disappointment whenever it is manifestly fictitious [...] the old men of power, from the old schools, have taken over again.’¹⁴ Glass’ identification and classification of ‘gentrification’ is the single most important aspect of change articulated in the Centre’s study of post-war London.

⁸ William Holford, ‘The Changing Face of London’, in Centre for Urban Studies, eds., *London: Aspects of Change*, 153.

⁹Ibid. 155.

¹⁰ Ruth Glass, ‘Introduction’, in Centre for Urban Studies, eds., *London: Aspects of Change*, xvii.

¹¹Ibid. xviii-xix.

¹²Ibid. xix. The various facets of this plan are awkwardly articulated by Abercrombie and his collaborator John Henry Forshaw in the film *Proud City: A Plan for London* (Ralph Keene, 1946).

¹³Ibid. xix-xx.

¹⁴Ibid. xxiii-xxiv.

These debates around housing policy and town planning provide crucial context to my study of minor London cinema in the long sixties. In coming to terms with the transitions occurring in London during the sixties, the city's cinematic institutions recast heated controversies around housing as staged encounters with the city's social, spatial and economic margins. The internal politics and cinematic production of the BFI Experimental Film Fund—established in 1952 to finance experimental British cinema and later renamed the Production Board—are also essential to my study (particularly Chapters I and II). The term 'experimental' itself was not fixed by any means and anonymous notes for a speech at the National Film Theatre (NFT) in January 1956 state that 'the word can be interpreted very widely' by the Experimental Film Fund, but 'the emphasis hitherto has been on films whose content rather than their technique has been experimental' and, moreover, that the Fund's committee 'has been anxious to spread its limited resources over as broad a field as possible.'¹⁵ One screening programme from December 1962 clarifies the Fund's approach to its patronage and notes, 'the idea of "experiment" has always been interpreted liberally. The Committee's aim has been to encourage originality not only in the art and craft of film-making but also in the use of film art as a medium for the communication and interpretation of the arts.'¹⁶ Experiment is curiously embedded in scare quotes, hidden as if it were a cause of embarrassment, lifted from another text, or someone else's idea. Originality, in contrast, is encouraged and considered achievable without a hint of self-consciousness. The programme also reveals a competitive bent, as it regrets the paucity of infrastructure and stakes a claim as Britain's representative body in the global film industry. 'In all leading countries in the world where films are made, except Britain,' it states, 'there are schools and colleges for the study of the cinema and for technical training.' The Experimental Film Fund justified its existence in these terms and claimed that it

¹⁵ 'Notes for Speech at the National Film Theatre on Wednesday 25th January, 1956 at 3.30p.m.', P/1, Experimental Film Fund, 1956-1961, BFI Archive.

¹⁶ '10th Anniversary Programme' (18 December 1962), File 2, Box 121: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Archive. Films screened at this event include *Together* (Lorenza Mazzetti and Denis Horne, 1955), *A Short Vision* (Joan and Peter Foldes, 1956), *Momma Don't Allow* (Karel Reisz and Lindsay Anderson, 1955), *The Vision of William Blake* (Guy Brenton, 1958), *The Pit* (Edward Abraham, 1962), *Michael* (Heather Sutton, 1960), *The Door in the Wall* (G.H. Alvey, 1956) and *Top Deck* (David Andrews, 1962).

provided ‘the only independent source of assistance for the would-be film-maker with serious intentions.’¹⁷

Some of the first British films dealing with questions of race and immigration owe their existence to Experimental Film Fund support. Of this there can be no doubt, regardless of the Fund’s subsequent attitude towards an early pioneer, the Jamaican actor and director Lloyd Reckord. Elizabeth Burney argues in *Housing on Trial*, her study of housing and immigration, that ‘cities are created and nourished by immigrants, yet never welcome them.’ Immigration, she argues, satisfied the demands of London’s economy (as well as the broader national post-war economy), yet the immigrant labourer faced poverty ‘and the poor services that go with a poor environment, [which] depress his ambitions and attainment.’¹⁸ This, Burney points out, is a one-sided picture of immigration, and tentatively terms the other side ‘the Dick Whittington syndrome’, which involves the poor boy who ‘arrives in the big city and by dint of hard work and good luck makes the break to the top.’ Such narratives in British white working-class culture had been portrayed, most notably, in *Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1959), yet Reckord’s films created a new strand in the national aspiration story. For Burney, ‘only success makes the immigrant acceptable. Only success enables him to escape from the depressed environment of his fellow immigrants.’¹⁹ This latter depiction is the story of Paul told by Reckord in *Ten Bob in Winter* (Lloyd Reckord, 1962), one of two films directed by Reckord that I discuss alongside the work of the Hungarian filmmaker Robert Vas in Chapter I.

Reckord’s film focuses on the Jamaican communities of West London in the early 1960s and frames in a far more delicate manner than any empirical study could the vagaries of ambition and the shame of poverty. Other early attempts to address racial politics in British cinema in this period include the BBC’s *A Man from the Sun* (John Elliot, 1956), *The Heart Within* (David Eady, 1957) and the ITV Television Playhouse film *To Keep Our Way of Life*. Two full length feature films—*Sapphire* (Basil Dearden, 1959) and *Flame in the Streets* (Roy Ward Baker, 1961)—also attempted to address the social transformations affected by immigration to South and West London. Other strands of television

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Burney, *Housing on Trial: A Study of Immigrants and Local Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1. This study was conducted by Burney for the Institute of Race Relations, London.

¹⁹ Ibid.

and independently-funded cinema illustrated the dynamic of these social transformations across a variety of formats. In 1958, ITV broadcast *Mixed Marriages*, an episode in the *People in Trouble* series. A notable regular in the series was the outspoken writer and broadcaster James Wentworth Day, who predictably castigates mixed marriages. After labelling France a 'third-class nation', Day warns against immigration to Britain and complains that immigrants 'come over here, they cause housing troubles, employment troubles [...] ask any landlord of working-class property where they go in, the houses become cesspits of dirt.' In contrast to Glass, who laid the conditions of 'twilight' housing at the feet of negligent landlords, Day collars the city's newcomers. The conflation of the dirty city with an undesired social element is shifted also from the unaccompanied nineteenth century woman to the mid-twentieth century immigrant. Day even goes as far to accuse self-made 'wealthy' Caribbean immigrants of a 'lack of taste', 'flashiness' and 'arrogance'. In a simple transformation, aspiration becomes arrogance and poorly-maintained houses become cesspits. Yet the perceptions of Day do complicate the perspectives offered by Burney in her study: he gives voice to a commonly held perception of immigration and public feeling towards hasty settlement policies.

Another notable film of this period is *Return to Life* (John Krish, 1960), a relatively lavish film shot on 35mm and funded by the Foreign Office and the Central Office of Information (COI) for screenings in British overseas embassies. The film is one of the British government's contributions to the efforts made during World Refugee Year (1959-60), a United Nations (UN) initiative designed to 'clear the camps' still dotted across Europe after the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War. Produced shortly after Robert Vas' *Refuge England* had first screened in London, *Return to Life* parallels Vas' film, especially in the opening scene of a train station, which uses the prototypical establishing shot commonplace in the 'immigrant' film. Where *Refuge England* begins with a lonely Hungarian man seeking a friend, Krish depicts a Serbian family who have just arrived in London. Ultimately, however, the nuance of Vas' film is missing in *Return to Life*, which succeeds only as a self-congratulatory work of government propaganda. The films discussed in Chapter I are part of this wider cinematic context. Along with other neglected works such as the allegorical *Fable* (Christopher Morahan, 1965), the modernist acid-trip *Death May be Your Santa Claus* (Frankie Dymon Jr., 1969)

and the East End-set documentary *Tunde's Film* (Tunde Ikoli and Maggie Pinhorn, 1973) they reveal the existence of the networks that shaped minor London cinema beyond the Experimental Film Fund.

Perhaps the most remarkable production financed by the BFI Experimental Film Fund during this period was *Herostratus* (Don Levy, 1968). The production of this two-and-a-half hour film was aided by additional funds from the BBC and from the pockets of James Quinn, a former BBC executive. *Herostratus* took six years to finish and cost roughly ten thousand pounds. The Experimental Film Fund (now the Production Board), who had invested much in the film, almost went bankrupt in the process. During its production, Levy also made two public information films: *Time Is*, for the Nuffield Foundation in 1964 and *Opus*, for the COI, which screened as a loop at the British Pavilion at *Expo '67* in Montreal, Canada. In the relatively substantial commentary available on Levy's work, his Eisensteinian editing techniques have been equally applauded and derided. What is clear, however, is that Levy's experimental vision was constrained by relatively minimal institutional support, which makes *Herostratus*, a film depicting a lost counter-cultural and anti-establishment poet, all the more striking. In Chapter II, I hold that the protagonist Max (played by Michael Gothard) is an exemplary 1960s minority character and that *Herostratus* should be read as a modernist parable of London's reconstruction.

At this point, it is pertinent to briefly set out the film's artistic context. Levy was not the only filmmaker to think about London as cinematic material. Across London in the early sixties, many other art-school graduates were engaged in thinking about London through the now mobile medium of film which, for many, was newly-available and affordable. On the south-east bank of the Thames, the young Derek Jarman was making films such as *Studio Bankside* (1970) in a converted warehouse space at Butler's Wharf where he and other filmmakers and artists had taken up residence. Jarman reluctantly moved on from his loft studio, 'pursued by the developers,' as he puts it in the voice-over for a retrospective of his work at the Tate Modern. But this space remained dear to him: the Jarman archive shows that, as late as 1974, Jarman was organising exhibitions of his film art in his former abode.²⁰ By

²⁰ One draft for an advert for a film show at Shad Thames (Butlers Wharf), 27/28 (later changed to 29/30) May 1974, asks attendees to bring cushions and refreshments. The films of Jarman's to be screened include: *Arabia*, *Burning the Pyramid*,

the early seventies, London art school graduates such as Gill Eatherley, Roger Hammond and Peter Gidal became central figures in the London Filmmaker's Co-operative (LFMC), in addition to Guy Sherwin, Malcolm Le Grice and Annabel Nicolson. The work of the LFMC cannot be neatly organised into a coherent body of work, but overall it exhibits a self-conscious effort to 'resist' the notion of time and place beyond that of the material or structural logic of film. Alongside founder member Steve Dwoskin, these artists were committed to exploring domestic and inverted interior spaces by using new cinematic modes. Films such as *Pan Film* (Gill Eatherley, 1972), *Window Box* (Roger Hammond, 1971) and *Room Film* (Peter Gidal, 1973) rearticulate domestic spaces already converted into artists' studios and processing rooms.

Although details of the LFMC's work are beyond the remit of this thesis, I would like to stress that Steven Dwoskin's approach to domestic space has some affiliates with Levy's work. In *Alone* (1961), a collaboration between Dwoskin and the Scottish sound artist Ron Geesin, an acquaintance known as Zelda plays the film's only character 'Girl'. Zelda's actions are banal (she smokes on an unmade bed against a brick wall backdrop in a New York City apartment) and the film's technique is sparse (at one moment, for example, the camera zooms in as Zelda picks her nose). Further along, she is depicted (apparently) masturbating. In *Chinese Checkers* (1963), Dwoskin frames a story written by the American experimental filmmaker Harry Smith, in which Joan Adler and Beverley Grant play checkers in a barely furnished room. It is suggested that they are lovers. At different points, both Adler and Grant look directly at the camera wearing veils. Dwoskin uses similar approaches to *mise-en-scène* and cinematic technique in his other films from the 1960s. *My, Myself and I* (1967), *Naissant* (1967) and *Soliloquy* (1967) portray women engaged in, respectively, mystical rites in a domestic bathroom, smoking on an unmade bed (the same bed as in *Alone*) and alone in a dark room in London meditating on self-loathing, ageing and British sociality. The disembodied voice in *Soliloquy* is a remarkable rebuttal of the happy-go-lucky portrayals of women in 'Swinging London' and calls to mind, in a very different context, the discussion of the role of women in municipal cinema found in a proposal by John Pitt, submitted to the GLC in 1974. But Dwoskin's films (*Dirty* (1975), in particular) naggingly focus on

Stolen Apples for Karen Blixen, Miss World, Caterpillar Trail, A Walk on [???], Sunday Film. See 'Film Project, June-August 1974', Derek Jarman Collection: Box 48, BFI Archive.

sexualised bodies engaged in sexual acts, in ways that complicate readings of their historical moment, or their nature as alternatives to an industry that granted very limited means of representational production to women.

There is another, crucial, side to these developments in minor London cinema, which is of central importance to the argument held throughout the thesis. That is to say, while London's artists were freely experimenting with the new found flexibility and affordability of celluloid and, while immigrant filmmakers utilised the medium for its story-telling capabilities, the narrative of London's long-standing white working-classes witnessed a deep shift in its trajectory. The 1960s saw a rise in municipal film production, as well as an increase in the political activity of filmmaking collectives across London, as the city shifted geographically and socially. Cultural organisations such as the BFI and the BBC, alongside their filmmaking counterparts at the GLC, invested much energy into the aesthetic reconstruction of London. This parallel development of the iconic and the physical threw up an intriguing set of stories that I will show speak to each other in fascinating ways. In Chapters III and IV, I look at the ways in which films that focused on working-class housing and marginal culture responded to anxieties and ill-feeling around the reorganisation of London and its social fault-lines. Chapter III focuses on two films produced by the GLC, *Somewhere Decent to Live* (Ronald L. Haddock, 1967) and *Living at Thamesmead* (Charmin and Jack Seward, 1974), and Cinema Action, *Not a Penny on the Rents* (1969) and *Squatters* (1970).

By bringing these films together, I show that municipal cinema was polarised in particular ways. In a wide-ranging study, Elizabeth Lebas has begun to chart these polarities by focussing on local authority films produced by the Bermondsey (London) and Glasgow borough councils in the mid-twentieth century. My own focus is different but, like Lebas, I want to draw attention to the immense diversity and the great significance of municipal cinema during this period.

The context of this municipal cinema and its modes of operation were distinctive. Throughout the sixties, London's other local authority, the City of London Corporation (the administrative body responsible for the City of London financial district), was also busy producing two films for its new Barbican estate, a brutalist complex under construction at the heart of a ward named Cripplegate, which was completely destroyed during the Blitz. The development of the Barbican was bookended by two

public information films, *Barbican Regained* (Stephen Cross, 1963) and *Barbican* (Robin Cantelon, 1969). The Barbican marked a shift away from municipal housing, even though it must be considered a ‘municipal’ project on account of its local authority status. Its flats and maisonettes would be private and compartmentalised dwelling spaces, designed to fulfil the needs of the district’s young working professionals. The opening of *Barbican* uses the metonymic voice of a ‘working man’, a cockney, as the establishing testimony. In the jolly fashion of a local ‘knees-up’, a singing voice bemoans the ‘horrible’ blocks of concrete changing the architectural façade of the city. A montage of construction and empty streets accompanies the voice while signage hangs lonely in the city wind. The film claims affinity with the cockney song on the soundtrack, a fabrication that underscores the argument that follows. That argument is voiced not by a jovial cockney, but by the reasoned verse narration of the writer and legal reformist A.P. Herbert, who delivers his lines in the Received Pronunciation typical of the public information genre.²¹ The unseen cockney in question—conservative, powerless—sits in distinction to his politically savvy counterpart in *Not a Penny on the Rents*.

Herbert addresses the unseen cockney in iambic pentameter: ‘Cheer up my friend, forget your sad refrain/For London Town is climbing up again.’ The film’s verse voiceover suggests that the sheer proximity of the banking sector, ‘Mammon’, to the press on nearby Fleet Street, ‘sturdy dogs’, and the Old Bailey courthouse will keep the bankers in check. ‘At night,’ Herbert recites, ‘the City loses all her sheep/Here, thousands sweat, but hardly any sleep.’ The montage returns over and over to the east-facing establishing shot of Tower Bridge and the Thames, of London looking out beyond its centre. Much like the GLC’s *Living at Thamesmead*, the film offers a potted and highly selective history of London from 1215 onwards: a procession of great cultural, political and military achievements are rolled out as the narration lays claim to each and claims a place for the Barbican at the most

²¹ In *The Long Revolution* (1961), Raymond Williams argues that ‘received standard’ pronunciation is the voice of power and authority, at once geographically and socially specific. Also called ‘public school English’, this style of utterance has, since the mid-nineteenth century, become, as Williams puts it, ‘entrenched in education, then in broadcasting, and so had wide effects on the national development[...].’ While on one hand, Williams points out, ‘received standard’ was an evolution in English speech, it also petrified social relations, as it became ‘identified with a particular class’. In films commissioned by the Greater London Council from its inception in 1965, to its abolition in 1986, the role of the voice is central, as I will discuss in the main text. See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Parthian, 2011), 263-68.

contemporary point along this continuum. London is invoked iconically, against images of its architecture and painted artefacts of the Great Fire of 1666. The Thames is aligned with Shakespeare, Francis Drake, Christopher Wren and Horatio Nelson. Given the period, mention of London's social history is conspicuously absent. Contemporaneous questions of immigration, cultural politics and labour disputes go ignored.

These questions, however, are central to the work of Cinema Action, which sits on the other side of the municipal divide. Cinema Action were among the first of a wave of filmmaking collectives that formed in London and other parts of the country as the late sixties rolled into the early seventies. In this thesis, my discussion focuses only on Cinema Action, although the activities of other collectives, such as the London Women's Film Group and the Berwick Street Collective are also part of this constellation of political cinema. Their work, too, has been neglected in discussions of post-war British cinema, although one recent publication has brought much of the sixties culture of collective filmmaking to light. *Working Together: Notes on British Collective Filmmaking*, edited by Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner, focuses on the films and politics of the London Women's Film Group, the Berwick Street Collective and Cinema Action. In collating essays, interviews and archival documents, Bauer and Kidner struggled against the same problems that have become familiar to me while researching this thesis. There is no central, canonised bibliography, filmography or archive for this particular kind of work and this is an absence that generates unavoidable yet interesting gaps and ellipses.

This thesis ends with a discussion of the BBC and its important contribution to debates around housing in the long sixties. The four documentaries that I discuss illustrate a long-running tendency in municipal filmmaking to feign neutrality and populism where, in reality, a political point is often being advanced. This tendency, as I point out, develops through the municipal cinemas discussed in Chapter III and reaches a kind of synthesis in the housing films of the BBC in the 1960s and 1970s. The form of these BBC documentaries differs from the municipal cinema of the GLC: they attempt to combine a critical or even radical approach with a focus on centralised building programmes. Without going as far as offering, say, the Marxist perspectives of Cinema Action, the BBC documentaries I discuss in the final chapter cast a discerning eye over their subjects. Since the long sixties, the BBC has continued to produce work reflecting the centrality of housing policy and the politics of social organisation to British

culture, with documentaries such as *The Great British Housing Disaster* (Adam Curtis, 1984), *The Great Estate: The Rise and Fall of the Council House* (Chris Wilson, 2011) and series such as *The Secret Life of Our Streets* (2012). Like the films I discuss throughout the thesis, the documentaries of Chapter IV have long been neglected. Such neglect says much about the vagaries of this kind of scholarship, not only on minor London cinemas, but on the relationship between architectural and cinematic spaces and between post-war, reconstruction and the moving image. Scholars have paid little attention to such connections, yet their subject matter connects with contemporaneous debates in the fields of urban planning, architecture and urban theory. Importantly, this study intervenes beyond the field of film studies alone and considers the ramifications of minor London cinema beyond its immediate historical and political scope.

CHAPTER I

MINORITY EXPRESSION AND MINORITY CINEMA: LLOYD RECKORD, ROBERT VAS AND THE BFI EXPERIMENTAL FILM FUND

I. Introduction

Broadly speaking, this chapter discusses a double transformation in processes of cultural assimilation in London in the long sixties: the assimilation of minority cultures into a renascent sense of national identity and the assimilation of representations of these cultures into the institutional cinematic canon overseen by the BFI.²² My argument is based on an analysis of what cultural and cinematic minorities meant to the cultural and artistic institutions of post-war London, as the city witnessed the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from mainstream civic life of ‘homophile’ groups, refugees, long-established and newly-formed migrant communities. The films under scrutiny in this chapter—by the Jamaican Lloyd Reckord and the Hungarian Robert Vas—relate these transformations to a precise cartography. In relation to Reckord and Vas, the term ‘minority cinema’ is not without its contradictions.²³ Both filmmakers produced remarkable yet neglected films, whose production and reception were constrained by the simultaneous support and restrictive reception that they received from the BFI Experimental Film Fund. These films focussed on minority cultures that were rendered prominent by social and legal

²² There are a multitude of perspectives from which to view this moment. My own analysis is particularly indebted to Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Post War London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1-38; Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Penguin, 2009), 147-89; and T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto, 1992), 3-51.

²³ I use the term in reference to David E. James’ major study of Los Angelean avant-garde cinemas, which lays out the perils of minority filmmaking: ‘Though they were obliged to construct their filmmaking in a cultural field controlled by Hollywood, aspiring minority filmmakers generally began from the belief that the industry was their enemy. [...] Conversely, as previously disenfranchised groups acquired filmmaking skills and productive capabilities, the resources of industry—the possibility of working in larger formats and of reaching mass audiences—became immensely attractive to all but the most separatist or nationalist filmmakers.’ See David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 299-300.

responses to immigration and homosexuality, two social facts which, along with prostitution, had attained paramount 'problem' status in public debate in London in the late fifties.²⁴

The films of Reckord and Vas offer unique perspectives on immigration and homosexuality by focussing on a variety of individuals and groups: a recently arrived 'displaced person' from the Hungarian uprising of 1956 (*Refugee England* by Vas, 1959); a dwindling Jewish community in East London (*The Vanishing Street* by Vas, 1962); an aspirational, British-born student of Caribbean descent in West London (*Ten Bob in Winter* by Reckord, 1963) and a gay couple who seek to escape homophobia in a literal and symbolic chase through London (*Dream A40* by Reckord, 1965).

Refugee England, Vas' first film, deals with another kind of pursuit and follows a Hungarian refugee in London as he looks for the house of a friend. The film begins with his arrival at Waterloo Station and the voice-over narrates the story of his first day in the city. His status as an exile is made clear from the beginning, when he proceeds to search for an address written on the back of a photograph. A reflective voice-over imagines an interlocutor, opening with: 'I want to tell you about my first day in London.' In 1956, Vas himself had made this journey following the failed anti-Soviet uprising in Hungary. Three years later, Vas had secured employment at the BFI and became acquainted with the leading filmmakers and exponents of Free Cinema, Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz. He convinced the Experimental Film Fund to meet the costs of *Refugee England* in 1958 and the film was screened in March 1959 as part of 'The Last Free Cinema' programme at the new National Film Theatre on the South Bank.

Vas continued to make films about London: his next film, *The Vanishing Street* (1962), depicts the last days of communal and commercial activity on Hessel Street, a Jewish enclave in Whitechapel. An 'observational' documentary, the film offers a distanced perspective of the inhabitants and traders of

²⁴ Although this chapter is not as explicitly concerned with the division of gender in institutional cinema, it should be noted that, as of December 1962, the BFI Experimental Film Fund Committee boasted two Knights and a Lord. Of course, the categories of 'gender', 'race' and 'sexuality' are not mutually exclusive in terms of my analysis. One notable example would include Horace Ové's 1974 feature *Pressure*, an otherwise remarkable film undermined by its portrayal of the protagonist's mother as an aspirational social-climber, held responsible for the family's immigration from Jamaica to England. Interestingly, a BFI Production Board 'Production Report' lists the film as *The Immigrant*. See 'Production Report', PB 38 Paper 4 (7 November 1974), BFI Archive, Box 121, File 1.

this small Victorian market street weeks before the LCC demolition contractors moved in. What was demolished, as the street made way for a medium-sized housing estate, was not simply homes and livelihoods, but a physical marker of Jewish London.²⁵ The ‘propagandist’ qualities of *The Vanishing Street* became a bone of contention between the Experimental Film Fund and the *Jewish Chronicle*, the film’s co-sponsors. Vas was trapped in a quandary: he had to satisfy the Fund’s aesthetic remit as well as allay the *Chronicle*’s anxiety over the film’s potential public reception.

The Jamaican director and actor Lloyd Reckord belongs to another strand of this international diaspora. If Vas was quickly assimilated into British cinematic culture through employment at the BFI as a filmmaker and a critic (Vas wrote for *Sight & Sound*, the BFI’s journal), Reckord suffered a fate that is typical of black filmmakers in the period.²⁶ Despite his successful films and critical acclaim, Reckord was shunned by the film and television industries. His films, which had a clear social remit and dealt with fraught subjects such as race and sexuality, were produced at potentially great risk to himself

²⁵ Jewish Historian William J. Fishman notes that between 1955 and 1957, approximately 132,000 Commonwealth migrants arrived in Britain, a greater number than the total Russian and Polish Jews who arrived at the height of the pogroms between 1870 and 1910. The East End, however, was relatively unaffected by this migration, with a 1961 census pointing out that the number of West Africans (the largest group of ‘newcomers’ to the area) was less than 600. Nonetheless, the Jewish population was rapidly declining, as observed by juxtaposed female voices on the soundtrack of *The Vanishing Street*: ‘we had a marvellous crowd here’, ‘forty years ago’, ‘this was a market!’, ‘the golden era, yeah’. He writes, ‘Since the 1950s the last bastions of the *shtetl* have crumbled, with Zangwillian Whitechapel already a legend, as its old bounds are transmogrified into Indian or Bangla-Deshi settlements.’ See *The Streets of East London* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 87-90.

²⁶ In separate interviews with the chronicler of black British culture Stephen Bourne, both Reckord and Ngakane have complained of ‘institutional racism’. Reckord recounts his frustration as one after another unexperienced creative workers were offered places on training programmes at institutions such as the BBC. Ngakane’s first and only British production, *Jemima + Johnny* scooped the first prize for Best Short Feature Film at the Venice Film Festival in 1964. However, the recognition that Ngakane expected to follow this award did occur, as he points out in the following passage: ‘I was thrilled that we had won first prize representing Britain, and confident that I would make more films. But I had never had one offer, or enquiry. I had high hopes, but people did not come to me. Years later I had this nagging feeling that, if I had been white, my career as a film-maker would have been very different as a result of that prize.’ See Lloyd Reckord, ‘Interview with Stephen Bourne, London, 14 August 1991’, in Jim Pines, ed., *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television Since 1936*, (London: BFI, 1992), 55. Interview also reproduced in Bourne, *Black in the British Frame* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 126; and Lionel Ngakane, ‘Interview with Stephen Bourne’, in *Black Arts in London*, No. 103, August 1988, 16. Interview also reproduced in Bourne, *Black in the British Frame*, 130.

and his actors.²⁷ His first film, *Ten Bob in Winter*, does not depict racial difference as a problem between blacks and whites, as previous films made by white directors had done²⁸, but as a social phenomenon that also engenders conflicts inside a racial group (although, as I will discuss, markers of whiteness and national identity nonetheless puncture the film's images).

The title of Reckord's next film, *Dream A40*, suggests a meld of the imaginary and the concrete: the A40 to which the title refers was the road built through West London to join the capital with the Welsh coast at Fishguard. In order to build Westway, a 'fly-over' extension road, parts of Harrow Road and the surrounding area, one of London's two most prominent Caribbean immigrant communities (the other found south of the river in Brixton), were pulled down during the 1960s. In *Dream A40*, however, the road fulfils a rather different purpose and it is in this way that the film subverts the organisational policy of the LCC (and the GLC after it). In Reckord's film, the road does not connect the capital to other parts of Britain but is, in fact, an escape route out of an urban topography known for its violent homophobia.²⁹

Crucially, these films exist on the margins of British cinema, but all of them have received funding and nominal critical attention from the BFI, Britain's only major post-Ealing Studios cinematic institution. The BFI's dominant cultural status and insularity may have prevented the dissemination of these films to wider national and international audiences beyond special screenings usually restricted to London venues. At the same time, it is also through the BFI that these depictions of post-war minority culture were brought before any audience whatsoever. In his introduction to *Experiment in Britain*, the then annual catalogue of BFI-funded experimental film, Michael Balcon comments on this problem:

²⁷ In the Bourne interview, Reckord implies that he had considered casting black actors in *Dream A40*, yet admits that '[t]he black actors I spoke to would have had a more difficult time afterwards than white actors for playing gays.' See Reckord, 'Interview with Stephen Bourne, 14 August 1991', in Pines, ed., *Black and White in Colour*, 52.

²⁸ Notable examples of this trend would include the feature films *Sapphire* (Basil Dearden, 1959) and *Flame in the Streets* (Roy Ward Baker, 1961). Television plays such as *The Heart Within* (1957) and *Hot Summer Night* (1959) also sought to broach the 'problem' of race in Britain (Reckord himself starred in *Hot Summer Night* and appears briefly in *Sapphire*).

²⁹ *Dream A40* is among the first works of British cinema to deal explicitly with homophobia, after the feature-length *Victim* (Basil Dearden, 1961), which deals specifically with a blackmail plot.

[...] to regard experiments as simply a means to an end is to take altogether too narrow a view of them. The most important experimental films in the cinema's history have not only led to other things, they themselves have been rounded, complete works [...]³⁰

Balcon recognises the importance of minor 'experimental' cinema as crucial to film history and capable of producing 'rounded, complete works', but undercuts that statement with the following qualification: 'I regard them not as self-contained islands of minority expression; they form an important tributary to the cinema's mainstream.'³¹ Balcon presents experimental film as at once autonomous and valuable, yet subservient to the diktats of the mainstream. Ultimately, Balcon's statement recuperates potentially resistant or oppositional cinema and positions it in alignment with the equally imaginative work of Ealing Studios and the firebrand masculinity of the New Wave, the period's dominant cinematic registers. To borrow the words of Stuart Hall, the mainstream, as a beacon of cinematic Englishness, is persistently 'doomed to survive' by the very act of 'marginalising, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting' other cinematic 'ethnicities'.³²

As the head of the Experimental Film Fund committee, Balcon oversaw the production and reception of a London-specific corpus of films dealing with minority communities in the 1960s. Significantly, Balcon seems reluctant to give the Fund's productions the consideration and acclaim they warrant. His reluctance speaks of an entrenched belief in the cultural capital of 'higher' forms of filmmaking, represented, for instance, by the commercial feature films produced by his own Ealing Studios as well as Bryanston Films, which produced the New Wave film *Tom Jones* (Tony Richardson, 1963). To raise the Experimental Film Fund's minor works to the level of the studio-produced feature would be a step too far in shaking the hierarchy of cinematic forms that Balcon clearly valued.

³⁰ Michael Balcon, 'Introduction', in *Experiment in Britain*, 2-3. BFI Archive, Box 121, File 2, Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hall's discussion of the struggle between national identity and 'minority cultures' is particularly pertinent to my discussion of 'minority cinema' and, in many respects, responds to developments that began during the late 1950s and 1960s. See Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, Eds., *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 447.

My discussion takes into account each film as a distinctive contribution not only to the cinema, landscape and history of London, but as a unique, innovative work of filmmaking that deals seriously with political and cultural responses to immigration; culturally-coded notions of racism and ‘passing’; sexual politics; London’s complex relationship to its Commonwealth; the containment and displacement of unassimilable social behaviours in the form of legislation and urban planning and, finally, the politics of institutional practice.³³ Each film, moreover, does not merely illustrate the cultural *zeitgeist* or civic structure shaping its genesis, but contributes something to these formative debates and moments.

In what follows, I consider each of the four films by Reckord and Vas (*Refuge England*, *The Vanishing Street*, *Ten Bob in Winter* and *Dream A40*) as contingent cultural objects, shaped by institutional politics at the BFI. These are short, yet dense and intricate films. Using production notes, correspondence, distribution catalogues, reviews and other ephemera, I show that the BFI played a dominant civic role that can be traced through a number of cultural, social and spatial markers.

II. Robert Vas, the Experimental Film Fund and immigration

In 1958, the Experimental Film Fund awarded Robert Vas—a novice filmmaker—£400 to make *Refuge England*, his debut. The film was produced in close collaboration with Walter Lasally, Free Cinema’s *de facto* cinematographer and Tibor Molnar, the film’s protagonist-perambulator, with whom Vas took to the streets of Central London to shoot the film. *Refuge England* is described as a historical testimony

³³ The examples I could list here are endless, but to offer a few works of cinema and television that relate to each facet of minority culture discussed in this chapter: for contemporaneous works related to displacement or ‘refugeeism’, see *Return to Life* (John Krish, 1960); for works related to London’s Jewish population, see *The Barber of Stamford Hill* (Caspar Wrede, 1962), as well as two programmes that featured as part of current affairs series: *Citizen 63: Barry Langford* (John Boorman, 1963) and *This Week: Britain’s Jews* (Peter Robinson, 1965); for works related to Commonwealth immigration to and settlement in London, see *A Man from the Sun* (John Elliot, 1956), *The Heart Within* (David Eady, 1957), *Mixed Marriages* (Rollo Gamble, 1958), *To Keep Our Way of Life* (Cliff Owen, 1959), *You in Your Small Corner* (Claude Whatham, 1962), *Fable* (Christopher Morahan, 1965), in addition to the feature films mentioned elsewhere in this chapter; for work related to non-heteronormative sexuality, see *The L-Shaped Room* (Bryan Forbes, 1962), in addition to later films such as *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (John Schlesinger, 1971) and *Girl Stroke Boy* (Ned Sherrin, 1971).

of sorts in the BFI's annual distribution catalogue, where it is classified under 'Experiments in New Talent':

This is a film from the heart. A refugee arrives alone in London and spends his first day searching for lodgings. Abruptly transplanted from a very different soil, he gathers his first violent impressions of the country which will henceforth be his home. Bewildered, affectionate and ironic in turn, *Refuge England* is at once a searching look at the face of the London we take for granted, and a poetic expression of what it means to be a Displaced Person.³⁴

The film is shaped by Vas' own experience following Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. Its representation of London is a rich tapestry of military and cultural imperialism, evidenced by architectural markers of Empire, such as the Duke of York memorial, Waterloo Station and the Royal College of Art. The film is replete with other references to work and leisure in montages of the Strand and, later, Piccadilly.³⁵ It portrays local hostility towards outsiders with subtlety, particularly when the voice-over reflects, 'I didn't want to come, we were fighting, we had lost, I had to come, that's all: it wasn't my fault.'

Refuge England was barely circulated beyond the BFI's admittedly large distributive remit. Yet, it was produced by the Experimental Film Fund, directed by one of its employees, first screened at its own cinema—the National Film Theatre—and, much later, released on DVD as part of the BFI *Free Cinema* box-set in 2006. Structurally speaking, the film's production bears close resemblance to the industrial or public information films from this period.³⁶ The historian of artists' film David Curtis

³⁴ Balcon, 'Introduction', in *Experiment in Britain*, 17.

³⁵ For an interesting response to British Productivity Council initiatives aimed at boosting production in post-war Britain, see *People, Productivity and Change* (Peter Bradford, 1963).

³⁶ In their introduction to *Shadows of Progress*, Patrick Russell and James Piers Taylor discuss the aesthetic freedom afforded to both pre- and post-war documentary filmmakers, as opposed to the more restrictive remit stipulated by state sponsors. They establish an opposition between the tendency in post-war documentary that operates inside the Griersonian pre-war aesthetic mode, with which Vas self-consciously sympathises and Free Cinema, of which Vas is contemporaneously and contemporarily associated. However, I think a case could be made for Free Cinema works, such as those mentioned above,

classifies *Refuge England* with, among other works, Don Levy's *Herostratus* (1968), under the rubric of 'ambitious narrative', a register Curtis suggests was most active between 1953 and 1976. He also suggests that, after *Together* (1956), Lorenza Mazzetti's tragic depiction of deafness (funded by the Experimental Film Fund), *Refuge England* offers 'another depiction of urban alienation'.³⁷ Beyond this, however, critical studies of British cinema do not reference Vas's work. The peculiar silence positions work of this kind as a minor mark in the cartography of British cinema.³⁸ *Refuge England* resonates with other film's that offer an outsider's view upon a city of strangers, such as *Together* and *Nice Time* (Claude Goretta and Alain Tanner, 1957), a muted perspective on Piccadilly night-life (also produced by the Experimental Film Fund). It is interesting that both Vas and the directors of *Nice Time* should be drawn to the bustle of Piccadilly Circus: the square features an iconic imperial marker at its heart, a memorial to Lord Shaftesbury, remembered, somewhat ironically, as a philanthropist and social reformer. When the voice-over in *Refuge England* declares that London 'is the middle of the world', these words are spoken over a montage of Piccadilly night-life: London as an international centre of economic exchange is made up of images of mass culture, rather than industrial and military power.

The Vanishing Street is concerned with a very different cultural centre, yet shares many of the concerns already prominent in *Refuge England*.³⁹ The film is entered into the BFI's *Experiment in*

are exemplars of the 'industrial' film *par excellence*, made, as they were, completely 'in-house': the substitution is simply one of oil, or steel, or concrete for the cinema itself; of the production of goods for the production of civic life. See *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain* (London: BFI, 2010), 3-7. The book was published to coincide with a DVD box-set of the same name, distributed by the BFI in 2010.

³⁷ David Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain 1894-2004* (London: BFI, 2007), 175.

³⁸ Lloyd Reckord has been effectively written out of British cinematic history. Apart from David Curtis' survey of artists' film, one would be hard pressed to find any mention of Reckord in surveys of British cinema. Posterity has been slightly kinder to Vas, who is noted in Roy Armes, *A Critical History of British Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978), Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1997) and as a footnote to the much later East London films of William Raban, John Smith and Emily Richardson in Charlotte Brunson, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City Since 1945* (London: BFI, 2007). Both Reckord and Vas are omitted from Brian McFarlane, *The Encyclopaedia of British Cinema* (London: Methuen, 2008). I single out McFarlane not out of pedantry, but rather to draw attention to the difficulty of working with a particular historical remit, but also to underline the politics of the survey form.

³⁹ Moreover, besides the film being co-funded by the BFI and the *Jewish Chronicle*, *The Vanishing Street* shared a sheltered existence with *Refuge*, that is, until the release of the *Free Cinema* box-set in 2006.

Britain distribution catalogue under the same category as *Refuge England* ('Experiments in New Talent'):

A highly personal, intense study of the Jewish community of the East End of London today. The film concerns itself with Hessel Street, a centre for Jewry for the past 100 years which is now being pulled down as part of a slum clearance operation. The film poses the question as to whether close-knit communities will be able to survive under modern housing conditions involving large blocks of impersonal flats.⁴⁰

The proposal that Vas submitted to the Experimental Film Fund in 1960 reveals that the film was 'originally located in Manchester and came before the Committee in that form under the title *District for Sale*', an altogether more barbed title for a film concerned with urban renewal. The proposal continues: 'Shooting actually begun in Manchester, but disagreements developed and work was recommenced in East London.'⁴¹ Where the proposal fails to state what kinds of 'disagreements developed', it makes abundantly clear that there was at this moment no shortage of 'Jewish quarters' under threat from redevelopment in Britain's major cities.

The Experimental Film Fund Committee received the proposal 'favourably' and approved 'an initial grant of £50', under a third of the amount that Vas had sought. The Committee's tentative support is noted in the minutes of a July 1960 meeting, in which members expressed their doubts that Vas would be able to complete the film with the resources available.⁴² Seeking additional funds, the Committee approached the *Jewish Chronicle*, a long-standing newspaper that had a large international readership. The *Chronicle*, however, was concerned about the perceived lack of 'propagandist qualities'

⁴⁰ Balcon, 'Introduction', in *Experiment in Britain*, 18.

⁴¹ 'THE VANISHING STREET: a proposal for a 16mm, black-and-white film submitted by Robert Vas'. Michael Balcon Collection J/71: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections.

⁴² 'Minutes of the 19th Meeting of the Experimental Production Committee, held at Elstree Studios on Tuesday, 26th July, 1960, at 2:30pm', 3. Michael Balcon Collection J/71: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections.

in the film.⁴³ Notes from a meeting held in January 1961 reveal that the Committee were also unsatisfied with Vas' progress.⁴⁴ A 'Progress Report' on the film from January 1962, re-titled *The Vanishing Street* (a less confrontational title), notes that the perceived lack of 'propagandist qualities' identified by the *Chronicle* pertain mostly to the 'ritual killing of chickens', an objection that was subsequently 'withdrawn on the understanding that minor cuts were made in the chicken scenes and that additional scenes of Jewish children were included.'⁴⁵

Finally, after test-screenings for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, BFI director Stanley Reed wrote the following to Balcon:

[David] Kessler [*Jewish Chronicle* Chairman] and his colleagues realised quite clearly that there may be some criticism in Jewish circles, but they feel the film to be warmhearted and that the cuts which Vas has made ~~are~~ [then handwritten:] *make the film* less likely to arouse prejudice than in the version we showed to you.⁴⁶

Balcon responded the following day with the declaration that '*The Vanishing Street* is a film of some importance and it ought to stand a good chance of recognition.'⁴⁷ For all of the haggling over the representational content of the film, it was, ironically, not its content, but its *form* that proved too much for some critics. One reviewer complained that, as was the case with Michael Grigsby's *Tomorrow's Saturday* (another documentary funded by the Experimental Film Fund and screened as part of the same programme), images such as 'the faces of the Kosher slaughterers slitting chickens' are delivered

⁴³ 'THE VANISHING STREET: a proposal for a 16mm, black-and-white film submitted by Robert Vas'. Michael Balcon Collection J/71: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections.

⁴⁴ 'Note of a Meeting of Experimental Film Fund Officers, 12th January, 1961', BFI Archive P/1: Experimental Film Fund, 1956-1961.

⁴⁵ 'Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Experimental Production Committee held at the National Film Theatre, SE1, on Tuesday, 30th January, 1962 at 3:30pm', 4. Michael Balcon Collection J/71: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections.

⁴⁶ Letter from Stanley Reed to Michael Balcon, 2 May 1962.

⁴⁷ Letter from Michael Balcon to Stanley Reed, 3 May 1962.

with *'too much virtuosity [my italics]'*, that '[t]oo many original camera angles one after the other make one wish for a few patches of dullness.'⁴⁸

III. Lloyd Reckord and the production of cinematic space

Lloyd Reckord's work belongs to the same margins as Vas' films. David Curtis suggests that both Vas' work and Reckord's *Ten Bob in Winter*, along with *Jemima + Johnny* (Lionel Ngakane, 1966), should be considered as late contributions to Free Cinema or even as contemporaneous responses to the *nouvelle vague*.⁴⁹ Curtis' recommendation troubles the transparent assimilation of Vas' work into the Free Cinema canon and, furthermore, throws up the question of institutional racism addressed by both Reckord and Ngakane in interviews. Both filmmakers have recounted that they had to leave London shortly after writing and directing their films as they both, in different circumstances, failed to break into the British film industry. The documents held by the BFI on *Ten Bob in Winter* show a clear air of dismissal I would argue pervades responses to the film today.

At the BFI Mediatheque on London's South Bank, a public library where visitors can sample rare works of British film and television under supervision for up to two hours per day, *Ten Bob in Winter* is available to view as part of the library's 'Black Britain' collection. The library's written entry for the film describes it as a 'neat skit'. The BFI's contemporary description echoes that found in a list titled 'Experimental Film Fund Productions 1964-65', in which the film is described as 'an *amusing* and ironic tale of the difficulties undergone by a West Indian student in need of money mid-winter [...] the film reflects the contemporary London scene both in its authentic settings and in its *light-hearted* revelations of mental attitudes [my italics].'⁵⁰ Programme notes for an undated screening (most likely late 1964 or early 1965) of *Ten Bob in Winter*, which was shown alongside *Blackhill Campaign* (Jack

⁴⁸ Terry Coleman, 'Experimental Films at the British Council Theatre', from an unknown and undated newspaper source. Michael Grigsby Collection, Box 1. It should be noted that *The Vanishing Street* never screened as part of a Free Cinema programme in the late 1950s or early 1960s, but has retrospectively been assimilated into the Free Cinema canon and, in 2006, was released as part of the same DVD box set as *Refuge*, under the category of 'Beyond Free Cinema'.

⁴⁹ Curtis, *A History of Artists Film and Video*, 175.

⁵⁰ 'Experimental Film Fund Productions 1964-65'. BFI Archive, Box 121, File 2, Experimental Film Fund. Michael Balcon Collection J/71: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections.

Parsons, 1963), *Gala Day* (John Irvin, 1963) and *Time Is* (Don Levy, 1964) suggest that '[w]hile in the realist tradition of Free Cinema this film emphasizes the *amusing* side of its characters' situation as they pivot around one last ten bob note [my italics].'⁵¹ The light-heartedness attributed to the film and the amusement inferred from Reckord's filmmaking style contrast with both the implied seriousness of Free Cinema and the actual contents of Reckord's narrative, which deals with poverty and its attendant shame. Reckord's proposal from May 1962 notes that the story is indeed a 'slight one, [with] the interest centring on the human relationships of the characters.' But where the proposal makes no mention of the director's desire to amuse critics or BFI copy-writers, it does make clear references to poverty and shame. In the proposal, the protagonist Paul is described as 'rather reluctant to lend the money [to the labourer he meets on the street] as it is his last ten shillings'. Moreover, he is notably 'embarrassed at being with a labourer outside a pawnshop and pretends to disassociate himself from the whole affair.'⁵²

Ten Bob in Winter won first prize for the Best Short Feature Film at the Venice Film Festival in 1964. The Experimental Film Fund did not fund Reckord's follow-up, *Dream A40*, although he acknowledges both the BFI and Karel Reisz in the opening credits, along with the documentary filmmaker and producer Derrick Knight (who helped fund Ngakane's *Jemima + Johnny*).⁵³ Gordon Gow's 'Focus on 16mm' column in an issue of *Films and Filming* from 1971 celebrates *Dream A40* after a recent screening as an 'imaginative and meaningful' short film.⁵⁴ Gow praises Reckord's 'canny

⁵¹ 'The Experimental Film Fund of the British Film Institute presents...' BFI Archive, Box 121, File 2, Experimental Film Fund. Michael Balcon Collection J/71: Experimental Film Fund, BFI Special Collections.

⁵² Widely screened at festivals upon its release, the film has since been neglected by the institution financially responsible for its very existence, filed away and reduced to the status of 'skit' in the BFI Mediatheque. 'TEN BOB IN WINTER: A proposal for a 16mm. black-and-white film submitted by Lloyd Reckord'. PC. 21, Paper No. 6(c) – 17th May, 1962.

⁵³ However, the BFI is responsible in part for the film's initial yet limited distribution and the film's re-distribution, first at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (LLGFF) in 2011 and then on the DVD *Encounters: Four Ground-Breaking Classics of Gay Cinema*, released in 2012. From the limited archival materials that exist on the film, only a patchy record of its social life can be inferred, which would partly explain its omission from two relevant and relatively contemporary critical projects: Curtis's broad history of artists' film, whose historical remit predates the 'rediscovery' of *Dream A40* and recent evaluations of LGBT cinema, such as Robin Griffith's edited collection *British Queer Cinema*, published in 2005. In an interview at the LLGFF in 2011, Reckord himself notes his surprise and elation that the original distributor of *Dream A40*, Barrie Pattinson (who actually utilised the BFI's distributive scope to get the film screened), had agreed to hire a copy of the film to the BFI for the festival. For a recording of this interview, see <http://www.bfi.org.uk/live/video/645>.

⁵⁴ Gordon Gow, 'Focus on 16mm', in *Films and Filming* Vol. 17, No. 7, April 1971, 78.

use of minimal dialogue'. Homosexuality, he states with admiration, 'is depicted unequivocally, yet without a single image or word that any but the utmost puritan could decry as sensationalism.'⁵⁵

Indeed, the action of *Dream A40* deftly handles the cultural and spatial marginalisation of queer practices in post-war London. The film can be read as a response to changes to the Sexual Offences Act in 1967—changes that, as Derek McGhee has observed, ultimately facilitated a greater punitive approach to homosexuality in public life.⁵⁶ Rather than suggest 'the freedom of the open road', *Dream A40* makes many references to the 'road movie' genre and only uses its markers of mobility to denounce the false emancipation offered by the coming Sexual Offences Act. Scenes on the A40 road and in the Austin Healey Zephyr 1964 Station Wagon (borrowed from Ford) undermine consensual articulations of mobility and re-code them as avenues of flight from participation in a repressive civic society. Reckord claims in an interview with Jim Pines that, despite its positive reception, the 'theme' of homosexuality limited the willingness of London cinemas to screen the film. 'Some people were not so excited when they read the script for *Dream A40*,' Reckord admits, 'because it had to do with a relationship between two young men which was sort of sexual[...] They [the cinemas] didn't dare show it.'⁵⁷ Given the international success of *Ten Bob in Winter*, Reckord's subsequent failure to secure funding for *Dream A40* and distribute the film reveals much about the internal practices of London cinemas and the Experimental Film Fund in the mid-1960s, no matter how coy the director was about the film's homosexual content. The anxiety demonstrated by the BFI with regard to the distribution of Horace Ové's *Pressure* as late as 1974 (12 years later) makes clear that the institution and its immense sphere of cultural influence in Britain were not ready for a film about the persecution of gay men, written and directed by a self-proclaimed, 'defiant', Jamaican.⁵⁸ Reckord's portrayal of homosexuality

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁶ Derek McGhee, *Intolerant Britain?: Hate, Citizenship and Difference* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 145.

⁵⁷ 'Interview with Lloyd Reckord', in Jim Pines, Ed., *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* (London: BFI, 1992), 54.

⁵⁸ As mentioned above, *Pressure* was originally titled *The Immigrant* and faced a protracted distribution due to the film's 'racial' content. Production on *Pressure* was finished in 1974, yet the film would not see general release until 1978. As Lola Young points out, 'BFI ineptitude was cited as being one of the major reasons for the delay, but it was also reported that both Scotland Yard and what was then the Race Relations Board had requested to see the film before release.' Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996), 142.

and the prejudices faced by gay men in London in the long sixties was indeed frank and it is hardly surprising, yet no less disappointing, to see work of such quality halted in this way.

The BFI boasted an unrivalled dominance in the field of British cinematic production and exhibition as the proprietor of the NFT and as the publisher of *Sight & Sound*, a widely-read journal which many Experimental Film Fund filmmakers contributed to. Vas, Anderson, Reisz and others legitimised their own theories and practices through critical contributions to the journal. However, in the light of Reckord's work and experience, another facet of the BFI emerges, as a culturally entrenched, heteronormative, and white patriarchal organisation. The history of minor London cinema has been shaped by the tensions between the BFI as an astute diplomatic body capable of thoughtful negotiation between its filmmakers' aesthetic imaginations and the varied interests of an emergent 'multicultural' society, and the BFI as an organisation that has dismissed politically fraught works as comedy and faced legitimate charges of institutional racism.⁵⁹

IV. The style of minority cinema

Successive post-war Governments in Britain worked with GLC (and its predecessor the London County Council (LCC)) to reorganise and coordinate Greater London along social and spatial lines. Immediately after the war, their aim was to create a new sense of national identity founded on the civic inclusiveness of the Welfare State. The realm of legislation reflects these aspirations, particularly in the later deployment of commissions such as the Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution in 1954 resulting in the Wolfenden Report in 1957 and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962. These reports and their subsequent acts legislated on sex workers, the sexual practices of homosexual men and women and the social mobility of British citizens born outside of the UK now living in the nation's major urban centres. As Richard Hornsey points out in a major study of 'unruly life' in post-war London, the Wolfenden Report claimed that 'Homosexuality[...] challenged the social stability of the postwar metropolis precisely because of its inability—or perhaps its unwillingness—

⁵⁹ See 'Interview with Lloyd Reckord, 54.

to respect the spatial and temporal orders through which peace and civic harmony were currently being pursued.⁶⁰ Similarly, special investigative television reports, such as *Mixed Marriages* (Rollo Gamble, 1958), produced by Associated-Rediffusion for ITV, looked with some curiosity into distressed notions of national identity and Britishness engendered by mass immigration to Britain since the end of the Second World War. As I show below, the reaction to these perceived social ills was of such strength that the act of covering-up one's social performance in order to 'pass' for an acceptable, normative, citizen, became necessary across lines of race, sexuality and gender. In contrast, for the white, male immigrant, the task of 'passing' was far easier and cinematic depictions of white Europeans (such as those offered by Vas) turn to a more 'internal' focus. The deafness of the two men in *Together*, as well as the introspective ruminations of the protagonist in *Refuge England* can be situated in this context.

Hornsey points out that Wolfenden's call for the decriminalisation of homosexuality came after a decade of contestation during which both the national government and the LCC pursued a cultural campaign illustrated by the organisation of the Festival of Britain in 1951 and, before that, an exhibition of industrial and product design called *Britain Can Make It*, held at the V&A Museum in 1946. These exhibitions beamed onto visitors 'a persuasive projection of a unified and peaceful social democracy' and 'sanctioned ways of looking at, responding to, and circulating around the built environment [which] became morally identified with a form of spatial citizenship at once localized and national.'⁶¹ Hornsey argues that, because homosexuality had already been 'culturally marginalized by renewed social investments in the child and the nuclear family the equation of national citizenship with a mode of spatial and temporal conformity further criminalized queer metropolitan cultures.'⁶² (I discuss this matter in greater detail in Chapter III.) This rejoinder complicates the apparently progressive aspects of the Wolfenden Report.

Such insights are pertinent to Reckord's and Vas' films, which focus on patterns of mobility within and between civic spaces and spatialise the workings of sociality and commercial exchange. At the beginning of *Refuge England*, the protagonist walks alongside the train that has brought him to London,

⁶⁰ Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 16.

⁶² *Ibid*.

framed by an aerial exterior shot of a platform in Waterloo Station. The train station is also important to Don Levy's *Herostratus*, where it functions as a transitional space of illegitimate labour where women sell sex for rent money (See Chapter II). The previous montage, shot from the train as it passes terraced roof-tops and streets, depicts the end of the protagonist's journey. Through such sequences, the film presents England as a dense mass of industrial and imperial buildings, a motif that will return throughout the film. Superimposed over the montage, as an epigraph, are two lines from a poem by the Hungarian poet Lászlò Cs. Szabò: 'Restore to me, last rock of refuge, England,/Dignity, that befits me as a man.' The narrator's use of English is notable: in the city to which he refers to diegetically, it is a language he is unable to speak, but it is a language that his older self has mastered. English is also, as the narrator is only too aware, the language of international cultural and economic exchange. The protagonist-on-screen's failure to speak English, to comprehend the vastness of London, or to consult an *A-Z* in the correct manner are rendered legible by the performance of an English-speaking voice, now assimilated into the cultural and economic circuit.

British newspapers at the time made clear there was great public support for the Hungarian uprising. In an exterior shot of the protagonist walking east along Piccadilly, past the Royal College of Art and towards Piccadilly Circus, the voice-over draws attention to this support: 'I know many of you liked us, others maybe not so much: you all did what you could.' In another montage, shot among exterior scenes of leisure on Piccadilly Circus, the voice-over wonders who is to blame for the protagonist's displacement, wherein images respond to the following dialogue: 'Whose fault was it? Hers? Mr Kay's? The United Nations? His?' Culture, politics, commerce and leisure are all implicated in this juxtaposition of montage and voice-over that envelopes Vas' partly-autobiographical depiction of a displaced man's inauguration into civic life in London, emboldened when, in the final scene of the film, he finally arrives at the house he has been looking for throughout the film. His search structures the narrative, but *Refuge England* presents London as a city in which there is no space anymore. The aerial shots at the beginning of the film present London as a dense cluster with barely a pavement running between monstrous buildings. Later, however, when the protagonist resolves to live in London, the city, once again depicted from above in full bloom and teeming with grand Victorian façades.

With *The Vanishing Street*, Vas turned to communal life, rather than the individual, in order to portray London as a centre of economic migration, where minority cultures can flourish at one moment and perish the next. But it is not with newcomers that the film is concerned. Rather, it works with a long-established migrant community faced with two major changes: the proposed demolition of Hessel Street's Victorian terraces and the decrease in the Jewish population living in the Commercial Road district.⁶³ The opening photo-montage demonstrates this community's historical attachment to Hessel Street: it presents photographic images from the 1910s, accompanied on the soundtrack by Chaim Tauber's contemporaneous Yiddish song *Vaytshepl, mayn Vaytshepl*. The sound engineer Robert Allen created a sonic collage that contains both harmonious and dissonant sounds, songs and dialogues, recorded in two main locations, the exterior market on Hessel Street and the interior synagogue or *steibel*. On a visual level, the film consists almost entirely of images of day-to-day work, with the lengthy *steibel* scene in the middle. In this film, the civic life of this community is shaped by work and prayer. After years of hardship, Hessel Street businesses and stalls thrived, and the film's backers at the *Jewish Chronicle* hoped that, with the aid of Vas' film, audiences would perceive the people of Hessel Street as hard-working and that the film would contest unfavourable public perceptions of London's Jewish communities. As cited above, the *Chronicle* opposed the inclusion of 'propagandist' scenes in which Kosher butchers slaughter chickens. BFI production notes and correspondence report that the more gruesome scenes were replaced by images of children playing in a bombed-out church graffitied with swastikas.

Vas had thought hard about the qualities of propaganda in filmmaking. In an article written for *Sight & Sound* in 1963, he cites a remark made by the documentary filmmaker Paul Rotha in 1931: 'In one form or another, directly or indirectly, *all films are propagandist*. The general public is influenced by every film that it sees.'⁶⁴ For Vas, propagandist film, despite the coyness of British filmmakers and

⁶³ See William J. Fishman, *The Streets of East London* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 80. Fishman notes that by the end of the 1950s, the Jewish communities of the East End had moved on to other parts of London, replaced by migrants from Bangladesh and India. The Bangladeshi man seen in the film, then, might be read as an ambiguous indicator of this demographic shift in Whitechapel.

⁶⁴ Paul Rotha, cited in Robert Vas, 'Sorcerers or Apprentices: Some Aspects of Propaganda Films', *Sight & Sound*, Vo.32, September 1963, 200.

critics in the 1950s had been, twenty years before, a filmmaking register that had been fully and fruitfully investigated. The onset of the Cold War, however, had changed everything. In a *Sight & Sound* article, Vas laments the forgotten art of propaganda and highlights the tensions between past and present:

As the world political climate became more and more gloomy during the Fifties, so film propaganda grew scared of its own power and responsibility. Soft, mild, middle-of-the-road film-making became the style. The political situation, the fertiliser of propagandist art, was itself too desperate, and faced with the elemental problem of sheer survival everything became ridiculously over-simplified.⁶⁵

Vas clearly aligns his work with that of the pre-war Documentary Movement headed by John Grierson.⁶⁶ In *Shadows of Progress*, a survey of post-war documentary film in Britain, Patrick Russell and James Piers Taylor write that Britain's post-war documentary filmmakers had indeed 'been thrice overshadowed. First, by the towering presence of what came before them, the 'Documentary Movement' of John Grierson and others. Second, in the field of film criticism, they were elbowed aside by a short-lived contemporary development: the 'Free Cinema'. Finally, as the fortunes of the documentary film gradually fell the status of television documentary increasingly rose.'⁶⁷ Vas, then, appears to complicate this distinction, since he produced work from inside this critical tension between the Documentary Movement and Free Cinema. Rotha, too, in his new role as the Head of the Television Documentary Department at the BBC, would add in 1954 that, 'to those who still believe that documentary has a specific job to do, this mass access [afforded by TV...] is of paramount importance'.⁶⁸ It is perhaps a little reductive to suggest that television documentary, Free Cinema and the

⁶⁵ Vas, 'Sorcerers or Apprentices', 203.

⁶⁶ It is possible, moreover, that Vas came into contact with the work of these filmmakers when they worked under the auspices and distributed films as part of the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) Film Unit, ostensibly the propaganda arm of the Imperial trading companies. The unit would transfer to the General Post Office in 1933.

⁶⁷ Russell and Taylor, eds., *Shadows of Progress*, 3.

⁶⁸ Paul Rotha, cited in E. Bell, 'The Origins of British Television Documentary: the BBC 1945-55', in John Corner, ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 71.

canonisation of the ‘Documentary Movement’ have ‘overshadowed’ the post-war documentary work of a diverse number of filmmakers, such as Sarah Erulkar and Michael Orrom. Parsing each into mutually exclusive fields only makes the task of analysing the commonalities and specificities harder. Vas’ interest in and valuation of the ‘propagandist qualities’ of film clearly resonates with each register of documentary outlined above—Griersonian, televisual, ‘free’ and post-war sponsored—and his work might be a good place to start to think about the tensions inside the overall field of documentary production, rather than looking to build stable mutually exclusive factions.⁶⁹

The two films directed by Vas discussed here also converse with each other from a number of divergent anchor-points: *Refuge England* features the individual newcomer fixed by a retrospective voice-over, while *The Vanishing Street*, voice-over technique discarded, claims to merely ‘observe’ the established community unravelled by municipal reorganisation. Both films, however, concern the non-Commonwealth European migrant, a crucial figure whose significance can be unpacked further still. The silent protagonist of *Refuge England* has a different relationship to the colonialism that shadows films such as *Ten Bob in Winter*, which depicted the son of Commonwealth migrants. This distinction is important, for, as Elizabeth Burney points out in her study of immigration and housing in British cities in the mid-1960s, the ‘coloured’ immigrant—from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan, Africa (excluding South Africa)—could expect less civil assistance from municipal authorities when it came to housing and other amenities than the Polish, Irish or other white European immigrants.⁷⁰ Burney’s sociological insights reflect those made succinctly in Sam Selvon’s 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners*. Selvon, who with Horace Ové wrote the screenplay for *Pressure*, presents the kind of resentment municipal discrimination had stirred up in the mid 1950s in his novel about the fictional Commonwealth migrant Moses Aloetta:

⁶⁹ If we return to Vas’ investment in Rotha’s critical assertions with regard to the power of moving images, it is important to note that in the early twentieth century, the work of Grierson and his employees (including Rotha) directly and effectively served the needs of imperial power and commercial hegemony. Thus, the work of the pre-war group is more than a little at odds with Vas’ more liberal subject matter, which has been described in BFI distribution catalogues as at once ‘affectionate’, ‘poetic’, ‘highly personal’ and ‘intense’⁶⁹ and by David Curtis as ‘sensitive’ and ‘humanist’. See Curtis, *A History of Artists’ Film and Video*, 175.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Burney, *Housing on Trial: A Study of Immigrants and Local Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1-3. The study was commissioned by the Institute for Race Relations.

‘You don’t believe me, eh?’ Moses say, ‘Listen, I will give you the name of a place. It call Ipswich. There it have a restaurant run by a Pole call the Rendezvous Restaurant. Go there and see if they will serve you. And you know the hurtful part of it? The Pole who have that restaurant, he ain’t have no more right in this country than we. In fact, we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner, we have more right than any people from the damn continent to live and work in this country, and enjoy what this country have, because is we who bleed to make this country prosperous.’⁷¹

Emboldened by a very British sense of entitlement, Moses tells it like it is to his newly-arrived compatriot Galahad. Precarious living conditions and casual labour are the only certainty for the imported Commonwealth working-classes. Perhaps that is why the only interior scene in Reckord’s *Ten Bob in Winter*, is set not in a house, but in a Labour Exchange. By situating the action predominantly in the street, Reckord emphasises the social inequalities fostered by housing policy in London’s minority quarters.⁷² The film offers a poignant social analysis. The subtle and moving story of Paul, the young black student whose economic hardship and self-loathing define the narrative he inhabits, can be usefully broached, as I suggested earlier, in terms of ‘passing’ and social aspiration. It is clear that Reckord seeks to depict his protagonist as hopeful to improve his civic status and free himself from economic hardship. This is well-expressed in his relationship with the other characters in the film: his white student friend who lends him the ten bob of the title, the similarly skin-toned student friend who accompanies Paul and their white friend to the City to look for employment, the lighter-skinned ‘snob’ Andrew and the impoverished darker-skinned unnamed labourer who borrows money from Paul outside a West London dry-cleaners. When he approaches Paul for a ‘touch’, Paul only curses his bad luck at being stung for some money. Reckord makes clear that Paul does not think about the conditions

⁷¹ Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), 26.

⁷² *The Lonely Londoners* also features an important scene set in a labour exchange and unemployment office. See Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 27.

that might have led to the labourer's impoverishment, or about the ways in which the situation accords, or not, with his aspirational fantasy of betterment and affluence.

Both Andrew and the labourer hold a social mirror up to Paul. Reckord's camera work underscores this correlation. The three encounters structure Paul's narrative as a reality of hardship and struggle that precludes his dream of another civic reality. A number of formal devices also resist the narrative drive and run against the protagonist's attempts to assimilate into 'white society'. The first of these devices is the film's music, played by the Joe Harriot Quintet and led by the eponymous Jamaican-born saxophonist. The second is Reckord's voice-over. These formal elements remain outside of the diegetic space, which is reserved for assimilation and exchange as if to suggest that the non-diegetic, sonic, realm can facilitate counterpoint and resistance to a greater degree than the diegetic. This formal resistance plays out in much the same way as the Hungarian recorder music in *Refuge England*, which punctures the assimilative drive of Vas' protagonist.

By casting black actors with distinct skin tones, Reckord foregrounds the notion of 'passing' found in discussions of British, North American and Caribbean cultural history. Paul is targeted by the labourer because he is beginning to 'pass' for white, much as Andrew has already 'passed'. As suggested, 'passing' occurs when a person defined culturally as of one 'race', lives—'passes'—for another. It is on these terms that Lola Young discusses 'passing' in the context of British cinema. Young makes clear that passing as white 'is not necessarily to be perceived solely as a desire not to be black: it is as much to do with desire to have access to the privilege invested in whiteness by white people.'⁷³ She argues, moreover, that 'passing' is usually grounded in the aspirational *female* body, in what she describes as the 'denial of temporal continuities' brought on by the 'possibility of bearing a dark-skinned child.'⁷⁴ In a discussion of Ové's *Pressure*, Young notes the 'adherence' of the protagonist's mother to English cultural values and finds that her desperation to assimilate into white society 'relates especially to the idea that (black) women are more likely to be socially aspirant than (black) men and that female-dominated households are responsible for the confused state in which black youths find

⁷³Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996), 86.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

themselves.⁷⁵ By entirely excluding the female body—an issue another analysis might probe further—*Ten Bob in Winter* makes no such assumptions on the nature of aspiration but, in fact, resists a consensus that figures only women as aspirational.

Young points out that, films such as *Sapphire* and *Flame in the Streets* (both set in London), responded in earnest to what she calls ‘racial moments’: ruptures in the self-evident cohesion of ‘race relations’ in British society. ‘The themes and preoccupations of these texts, made by white filmmakers,’ she argues, ‘articulate the tensions regarding inter-racial relations and black people’s contradictory status and presence here [in Britain].’⁷⁶ Young suggests that black bodies on screen in this period are often only markers of the *problem* of race and are frequently ‘dispatched’ (killed off), as happens in *Flame in the Streets*, *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961) and *Heavens Above* (John and Roy Boulting, 1963). *Ten Bob in Winter* abandons the fashionable ‘problem of race’ and complicates Young’s formulation in a particular manner: the focus remains solely on a male protagonist throughout and, moreover, the ‘problem’ the audience is faced with is not the threat of some disruptive blackness, but with the representation of a complex social dynamic beyond the immediate identificatory anchorage of whiteness. Reckord almost appears to parody this denial in the *mise-en-scène* through a striking confluence of symbolic and literal surfaces and reflections. Immediately after Paul refuses to lend money to the labourer, he crosses the road to buy milk from a vending machine. The labourer is presented in close-up against a dense backdrop made of the glass pane frontage of Advance Laundry & Dry Cleaning which reflects another sign on the other side of the road for Richards & Curtis Chemists. The labourer’s bright white cap mirrors the brilliant white carton of milk held by Paul over the road. The film presents a range of tones, shapes and planes in order to convey the complexity of racial politics and inscribes the social transactions taking place around Paul into a broader economic and commercial activity.

Reckord’s early cinematic focus on the public life of minority cultures shifts laterally in *Dream A40*, which considers a different social milieu yet retains the necessary exterior action already apparent in *Ten Bob in Winter*. The film is split into two parts. The first, which I will discuss here, is imbricated

⁷⁵ Ibid. 139.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 86.

in a sparse road movie and revolves around the sexual dynamic between the two unnamed protagonists (the ‘dominant’ dark-haired man, played by Michael Billington and his fair-haired lover, played by Nicholas Wright). The second, the ‘dream’ discussed in the next section, was shot in the derelict Victorian storage spaces and ticket halls of Blackfriars Bridge Railway Station, a cargo depot closed in 1964. The film offers a response to the Wolfenden Report, which suggested that homosexuality should be of no concern to the British judiciary if it is practiced in the privacy of the domestic space (although this suggestion would not be written into law until the Sexual Offences Act of 1967). For McGhee, however, ‘[t]his act of toleration was associated with a strategy of attempting to marginalize homosexual acts, through attempting to distance them from the social mainstream by banishing homosexuals and homosexual practices to decriminalized ‘privacy’.’⁷⁷

The contradictions of this ‘tolerable’ homosexuality play out in *Dream A40* in the depictions of the two men. Billington plays the gay man ‘passing’ for straight: he dances with one woman in the party scene at the beginning of the film and flirts with another woman who drives alongside him on the motorway, yet shies away from physical contact with his lover in public on two occasions, first under the watchful eye of a young girl in an adjacent car on the motorway and, second, in the café scene. This performance of shame resonates throughout the film in portrayals of ‘interracial’ relationships, as at a house-party in the opening scenes, where black and white mix freely, in the spontaneous photo-shoot at a petrol station where a black female model poses for a white male photographer, and the openly flirtatious lovers in the motorway café. These moments suggest a softening of attitudes towards ‘miscegenation’, as it was then known, as much as they reinforce the rigid social binary—good/bad—upon which attitudes towards gay men were predicated. Wright, on the other hand, plays his role from another perspective: he is effeminate, critical of his partner’s anxiety and, ultimately, plays the film’s victim, who is ‘dispatched’—as all ‘problems’ in ‘passing’ narratives are—in the dream sequence. The contrasted performances respond to an emergent social characterisation indebted to the Wolfenden Report that defined gay men as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The ‘good’ gay was the homosexual man imagined by the Wolfenden Report, an outwardly heterosexual man who, as McGhee describes it, knew

⁷⁷ McGhee, *Intolerant Britain?*, 138. See also A.R. Wilson, ‘Which Equality? Toleration, Difference or Respect’, in J. Bristow and A.R. Wilson, Eds., *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), 171-89.

his ‘proper place’ on the secret and discrete fringes of mainstream society.’ Moreover, as McGhee points out, ‘[k]nowing one’s proper place amounted to discreet and controlled homosexuals existing non-offensively in the narrowly defined realm of privacy created for them’.⁷⁸ The ‘bad’ gay, then, lived in opposition to and in defiance of this containing structure. Although, as the death of Wright’s character in the film’s final sequence suggests, this defiance carried great risk for the ‘bad’ homosexual. With this analysis in mind, ‘passing’ should be read as not merely a condemnable aspiration in minority culture, but a kind of protective cloak against the harder blows of civic repression.

It is not enough to read these films as condemnations of their characters or subjects for ‘selling-out’ or ‘social climbing’. Rather, if the films are put into dialogue with one another and, considered in the light of their production and reception, a different picture emerges, one that illuminates a politics of assimilation that works on a number of levels. Firstly, these films put a number of minority narratives, social groups and cultural practices to work, representing a wide range of marginalised characters, from the white European refugee and the compartmentalised urban community, to the aspirational next-generation Commonwealth citizen and the criminalised gay man. Folded into each film are the BFI’s (literal) investments in the aestheticisation of post-war London as a site of social and spatial redevelopment. However, the assimilation of these films into the history of the BFI has been laden with tensions between its liberal orthodoxy and its institutional conservatism. The second level of assimilation functions at the level of form. The films oscillate between realism and documentary, and depict specific social realities. Each ruptures the self-evident inevitability of assimilation, especially in those moments when irreducible aspects of each cultural practice are portrayed (the Hungarian Recorder music in *Refuge England* or Reckord’s use of the Joe Harriot Quintet, for example).

IV. Historical traces and residual signs

The living conditions of economic migrants from the Commonwealth and of those who arrived in London displaced by military conflict in the 1960s were shaped by poverty, poor amenities and dilapidated housing, just like the conditions experienced by other established minorities such as the

⁷⁸ McGhee, *Intolerant Britain?*, 145.

Jewish communities of East London since the mid-nineteenth century.⁷⁹ In *The Streets of East London*, the Jewish historian William Fishman recounts the rich and extraordinary story of Tower Hamlets, the London borough that borders the City of London financial district to the West and the Thames to the South, and in which was shot *The Vanishing Street*. Fishman notes that, in the nineteenth century, rapid expansion of the Port of London ‘provided an *entrepôt* for successive waves of foreign immigrants’ to the borough.⁸⁰ These were, first, the Huguenot weavers who fled the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, then the Irish weavers, who arrived over the next two centuries after a decline in the manufacture of linen in Ireland.

The next great influx of ‘strangers’ came between 1870 and 1914, mostly from Eastern Europe. Among this group, Fishman reports, were over 120,000 mainly Russian and Polish Jews, ‘the most dispossessed and impoverished of the European proletariat’, who sought asylum from ‘the worst persecution of their people until the Nazi holocaust.’⁸¹ Employment opportunities in early twentieth century London, ‘were strictly limited.’ He explains: ‘The system was periodically choked with high static and frictional unemployment. Every year, the inevitable gap between ‘busy’ and ‘slack’ season brought the threat of homelessness and hunger. For the casual Jewish worker this spelt out a precarious living, always poised on the margin of subsistence.’⁸² This description of the newly-arrived economic migrant’s plight is reflected in the plight of the male Commonwealth migrant after the Second World War: it is, as I show in Chapter II, the condition of those excluded from property ownership and stable employment contracts, who rented rooms at exorbitant prices and lived in lodging houses and tenement districts close to their places of employment.⁸³

But what of the ‘sexual minority’ that does not come from ‘outside’, but emerges from inside the borders of the nation-state? Sketching British attitudes towards homosexuality after the Wolfenden

⁷⁹ See Burney, *Housing on Trial*, 1-7.

⁸⁰ Fishman, *The Streets of East London*, 76

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.* 80-81.

⁸³ Ruth Glass’ study of West Indian immigration to Britain published in 1960 features a map that demonstrates the main areas of ‘settlement’ in London: Brixton, Stockwell and Peckham in South London; Notting Hill, Maida Vale and North Kensington in West London. See Ruth Glass, *Newcomers: the West Indians in London* (London: Centre for Urban Studies and George Allen & Unwin; 1960), Map 1.

Report, McGhee argues that many subsequent analyses and polemical writings have further spatialised the findings of the Wolfenden Report: ‘the citizenship that is promoted with regard to sexual minority communities is one where they know their good and proper (private) place in society’.⁸⁴ McGhee draws attention to an observation made by David Bell and Jon Binnie, in which they note that ‘the current problem is its [sexual politics] cementing into rights-based political strategies, which forecloses or denies aspects of sexuality written off as ‘unacceptable’. In particular[...] this tends to demand a modality of sexual citizenship that is privatized, de-radicalized, de-eroticized and *confined* in all senses of the word: kept in place, policed, limited.’⁸⁵ The roots of this struggle, then, begin with the suggestions first made in 1957 by the Wolfenden Report. Along with the discrimination that underscored the Commonwealth migrant’s socio-economic status in London in the 1950s and 1960s, the solutions offered by Government departments and municipal authorities legitimised in the Immigration Act of 1962 all appear to boil down to the same essence: privatise, contain, confine. In what follows, I discuss how both Vas and Reckord responded to this trajectory of municipal policy and tease out the traces and signs of a residual pre-Welfare State London in anticipation of my discussion in the following chapter.

The London of these films, as both place and referent, is at once metonymic and irreducibly specific. *Refuge England* pays heed to this fact and depicts the city as an everyday, ‘business-as-usual’ environment, a place of work and leisure. Against images of people at work on the Strand, the narrator notes the ‘extraordinariness’ of the movements of his past self. As the protagonist strolls along the Strand, the montage juxtaposes footage of a shop-clerk arranging watches in a display window, a newspaper vendor counting out change, the delivery trucks flowing up and down the road, a window-cleaner, a Westminster City Council employee re-touching the gloss on one of the district’s many decorative lamp-posts, a barber at work and two char-ladies scrubbing the exterior marble steps of a hotel. It is notable that this sequence is not composed of a shot/reverse-shot structure, in which the images of day-to-day work are the objects of the protagonist’s gaze. Rather, the images are arranged consecutively: the film jumps out of its ostensible character-based narrative structure and the flow of images engenders a shift in the film’s focus from narrative to associative. The stylistic roots of *The*

⁸⁴ McGhee, *Intolerant Britain?*, 144-48.

⁸⁵ Bell and Binnie, cited in McGhee, *Intolerant Britain?*, 147.

Vanishing Street are clearly visible in this sequence in *Refuge England*. The soundtrack, too, conveys the ubiquity of work in *Refuge England*: we hear a hawker touting his wares and road drills breaking the ground, indices of the city's redevelopment.

The aforementioned memorial to the Earl of Shaftesbury is one of a number of physical signs of Empire that the film depicts. Where the Shaftesbury memorial celebrates the purportedly benign and much-championed 'progressive' aspects of British imperialism, the memorial to the Duke of York on Waterloo Place and the stone Victoria-as-Boadicea atop the entrance to Waterloo Station indicate its militaristic and nationalistic flipside.⁸⁶ Such markers reveal the film's concern with its post-imperial context, a concern mirrored in the facts stated by the narrator as the protagonist emerges from Waterloo Station and looks towards one of the most famous cultural markers of Clement Alee's 'New Jerusalem' project: the Royal Festival Hall. The narrator notes Britain's isolation as an island nation and its concomitant imperial power. We learn that the protagonist knows only one English word—'refugee'—which is demonstrated by a close-up image of a poster on which is printed a drawing of a woman with her head in her hands. 1959 was, in fact 'World Refugee Year' and Vas' film offers an interesting counterpoint to films such as *Return to Life* (John Krish, 1960), funded by the Foreign Office for screening in overseas embassies, a comparatively lush 35mm exemplar of state cinema at its most self-congratulatory. In contrast, *Refuge England* offers a tale of individual endeavour and benevolent networks of fellow expatriates.

As Fishman points out, the most important waves of Jewish migration from Russia and Poland to the East End of London took place between 1870 and 1910, a period during which the British Empire was a dominant military and economic force in the world. By the time Vas moved production of *The Vanishing Street* from Manchester to East London, London's Jewish community had vastly dwindled. As in *Refuge England*, Vas' film remains concerned with work and economic exchange, as well as the work of prayer in the *stiebel*. The film's second sequence (after the opening photo-montage), for example, shows work in progress or completed: a linen-seller laying out his products, sausages

⁸⁶ Representations of the Imperial Queen Victoria as the ancient and, ironically, the anti-Imperial Queen Boadicea (who once completely destroyed London) are peppered throughout the city, from Waterloo Station to the Tate Britain. Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson, who wrote *Boudicea* in 1865, is perhaps the most famous proponent of this historical conflation.

displayed hanging in a butcher's window, a woman hanging dresses for a window display, the toy-seller who places a rocking-horse on the street, another barber, an interior sequence of women working in a textiles factory, other women at work in the butcher's shop. Women not depicted working are presented shopping and talking: the market-place is not only a space of commercial, but social exchange. Men not depicted working in the street's commercial spaces are presented as engaged in no less laborious activity inside the *stiebel*, as they are shown praying and deciphering the Kabbalah.

Vas' portrayal of Hessel Street is offset by his depiction of the street's 'clearance'. The figure of the Quantity Surveyor is an ominous presence. He is introduced by a point-of-view shot through the viewfinder of his theodolite. The viewfinder features a number of markings not unlike those on a periscope or the sight of a rifle: both are markers of potential violence and through its identification with the camera's viewpoint, the audience becomes the actor of this violence. All of this takes place inside the first minute and a half of the film. The Surveyor then disappears and returns only after the richness of social, cultural, domestic and economic life on Hessel Street has been fully illustrated. The return to the identical point-of-view shot of the theodolite viewfinder suggests an unremitting persistence on the part of the municipal authorities to quantify the street's spaces and take measurements for its reimagined architecture. This process of reimagining is then given a literal form as the film cuts to a shot of a model tower block, followed by a medium shot of a solitary plastic figure standing on a balcony of that block. The camera zooms out to reveal the relative immensity of the building, the 'lonely Londoner' of the future isolated among its modernist grids.

Ten Bob in Winter, takes place on the street, akin to the bustle and vibrancy of *The Vanishing Street*. But, unlike Vas, Reckord appears unconcerned with domesticity, private life or housing in his film, which only features one interior sequence inside a Labour Exchange. Paul visits the Exchange when he fails to secure employment for the Hudson's Bay Company, one of the oldest trading companies in the world and an adjunct marker of Imperial trade then based on Bishopsgate in the heart of the old City. When the film uses that most conventional of cinematic riffs—the 'establishing-shot'—it also undercuts this convention: the sound of a drumstick on the bell of a ride cymbal denotes the first flourishes of Joe Harriott's jazz score. Over this tension between sound and image, Reckord's distinctive voice utters the assonant opening lines of the film's narration: 'At Christmas the Post Office, but If

forced to, Joe Lyle's, or washing milk bottles and cleaning out cars, or charring the railways, delousing box-cars.' The camera pans across various spaces of social and economic opportunity, along High Holborn towards the City, to which the montage then cuts and frames a deep shot of a City street. This image depicts the City as open and inviting, transparent in contrast to the close-up jumble of planes and surfaces in the West London scenes. However, the film also alludes to the spoils of global trade and imperial might through the conversation that it creates between this 'postcard' London, the jazz score and Reckord's voice-over.

The juxtaposition of historically specific action and spaces of trade and commerce is also at the heart of *Dream A40*, particularly its 'dream' sequences. The 'dream' part is, in some ways, more historically accurate than the 'real' part. It begins when a motorcycle policeman pulls the couple's Austin Healy Zephyr over for speeding. He appears to lead them to an abandoned building outside the city. The sequence then cuts to interior scenes and the action shifts to the disused Blackfriars Bridge Railway Station in South London a bold re-imagining of the consensus to emergent homosexuality laws. By shooting the scene inside an old railway station, a public space, the film spatialises a different form of civic participation to the kind historicised by McGhee and offers insights that are more in line with the 'systemic' participation described by Hornsey.

In *Dream A40*, the protagonists are free to move around the city, even leave it, with no fear of persecution, only so long as they obey the stipulations of the Wolfenden Report. As Todd McGowan observes, the folding of reality and fantasy has always been the necessary condition of Hollywood cinema: 'fantasy informs the structure of every Hollywood movie, but we often cannot identify its precise logic because the worlds of desire and fantasy blend together, obscuring fantasy effects.'⁸⁷ Reckord's very un-Hollywood film applies stress along various points of this fault-line in order to pry apart the transparency, the fantasy, of the Wolfenden Reports spatial consequences. The film suggests that the society imagined by the Report cannot fully assimilate homosexuality, so creates the fantasy of a tolerant society. Reckord's characters live this fantasy: one fully assimilates into the social category of

⁸⁷Todd McGowan, 'Lost on *Mulholland Drive*: Navigating David Lynch's Panegyric to Hollywood', in *Cinema Journal* 43:2 (Winter, 2004), 68-69. McGowan's essay was instrumental in my reading of *Dream A40*.

‘good gay’ while the other resists and remains the ‘bad gay’. The dream sequence is the manifestation of this situation: the ‘bad gay’ is punished and the ‘good gay’ is left holding his body as the political reality of their sexual lives is spatialised by the abandoned under-croft of Blackfriars Bridge Station. They look to leave the city, yet find themselves trapped in an even more geographically central and repressive part of it.

V. Conclusion

This chapter serves as an introduction to the vagaries of minor cinematic production in London the long sixties. In the above cases, the aestheticisation of the city recorded in the films of Reckord and Vas underscores not only an economic exchange, but also a cultural one. Where it is not enough to state that either filmmaker produced the works they did because of their respective social formations and personal narratives (which would be to simplify), they nonetheless produced unique films on subjects that had been dealt with either clumsily or not at all in British cinema. Indeed, there is more than a little autobiography in *Refuge England* and *Ten Bob in Winter*. Similarly, both *The Vanishing Street* and *Dream A40* demonstrate a social sensitivity at odds with the scathing criticism of English culture evident in Lindsay Anderson’s *O Dreamland*.

The processes of production behind these films, discussed here in terms of production negotiations, distribution, and critical reception was a process of assimilation and resistance. On one hand, the films portray the near-impossibility of assimilation into a culture dogged by racism and anti-Semitism. On the other, the films themselves risked assimilation into that culture’s dominant cinematic institution. This assimilation has left the works neglected, devalued and diminished in the public realm. Perhaps what are most striking about these films are the evocative depictions of the London that came to marginalise, as well as define them.

CHAPTER II

DON LEVY'S LONDON AND THE POLITICS OF ART-HOUSE CINEMA

I. Introduction

Don Levy's first and only feature film, *Herostratus*, premiered at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) on 3 May 1968. Those in attendance at this inaugural screening at the ICA's new home on The Mall may well have marvelled at Levy's command of cinematic techniques drawn from a rigorous understanding of 'classical' European and North American film history. Having immigrated to London from Australia via a PhD in Theoretical Physics, Levy had been a postgraduate student of Thorold Dickinson, the director of *Gaslight* (1940) and an employee of Ealing Studios. In 1960, Dickinson established a film studies department at the Slade School of Fine Art that privileged students to a comprehensive survey of works of early narrative cinema: the films of Jean Renoir and Michelangelo Antonioni, poetic or 'subjective' films such as those made by Sergei Eisenstein and Luis Buñuel, and a varied survey of documentary cinema, which included films by Joris Ivens, Leni Riefenstahl and Alain Resnais.⁸⁸ Yet *Herostratus* tells a rather straight-forward story: a young poet, Max (Michael Gothard), offers to sell his suicide to Farson (Peter Stephens), a nefarious advertising executive, a weighty token of retaliation against 1960s materialism. Levy was not the first to rework the Greek myth of Herostratus, the arsonist who burned the Temple of Artemis to the ground for fame. Marcel Schwob's late nineteenth century Symbolist version foregrounds Herostratus' contempt for Artemis, the woman-god he blames for his social exclusion. In Jean-Paul Sartre's inter-war re-imagining, his protagonist plots murder and suicide, but the majority of the story hinges on his cruelty towards a sex-worker on whom he hangs his contempt for bourgeois society.⁸⁹ Crucially, however, all three adaptations demonstrate a certain antipathy towards their women characters.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which *Herostratus* represents living conditions and social policies in mid-sixties London, which at once takes place within and reassembles new patterns of

⁸⁸ A typical programme of films taught at the Slade Film Department during one year can be found in the second appendix of Thorold Dickinson, *A Discovery of Cinema* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 150-153.

⁸⁹ See Marcel Schwob, *Imaginary Lives*, trans., Lady Jane Orgasmo (Washington: Solar Books, 2009), 25-29 and Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Wall*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1975), 41-54.

representation in response to the so-called cultural revolutions occurring in London. Scenes of urban redevelopment litter the film. By 1965, the London County Council had changed its name—‘re-branded’ itself—to the Greater London Council. The administrative area of the capital had by that point doubled and the mass development of high-rise building—embodied by the tower block—had begun in earnest. By 1968, the mass building of pre-fabricated tower blocks in response to unrealistic housing targets set by the Labour government in the 1964 general election had suffered its first major setback.⁹⁰ Two weeks after the premiere of *Herostratus*, an accidental gas explosion in a twenty-second floor flat at Ronan Point in Canning Town, East London blew out a load-bearing wall and caused the collapse of an entire corner of the block during which three people died. GLC press releases and internal memoranda from this moment demonstrate how the blow-out at Ronan Point caused the local authority great anxiety and effected, to a considerable degree, not only subsequent housing policy but also public relations well into the 1970s.⁹¹

Herostratus was screened across the city’s art-house cinemas as well as the European festival circuit in 1968. Its images of London show the city becoming Victorian ruins—its grand houses, monumental concert halls, soot-blackened railway arches and chipped iron bridges sit decaying against

⁹⁰ House-building numbers were at the centre of the clamour for votes in the election. In *The Great British Housing Disaster* (Adam Curtis, 1984), a retrospective investigation into the structural deficiencies found in many sixties pre-fabricated blocks for the BBC’s *Inquiry* series, this is remembered as ‘the numbers game’. The game consisted, simply, of the Labour and Conservative parties castigating each other for failing to offer the public a sum total of how many houses each would build if elected. Labour promised more and won with 50% of the vote. See also the 1964 General Election special issue of *Contemporary British History* 21:3 (September 2007).

⁹¹ The first of these press releases, from August 1968, claims that eight out of thirty-four Council blocks had been passed as safe while the remaining twenty-six were to have their gas removed ‘as a precaution’. Memos circulated at the GLC Public Relations Branch in the early seventies make clear the need to prevent not the building of tower blocks, but the representation of them in public information films, such as *Everybody’s London* (unknown director, 1971) and the *Thamesmead* series (Jack and Charmian Saward, 1968/1970/1974). Finally, a handwritten addendum at the foot of an internal memo from GLC Research Analyst Peter Morris to colleague Miriam Andrew (8 October 1974) suggests that, due to the collapse of Ronan Point six years previously, tower blocks should be omitted from the film proposed to replace *Everybody’s London* in demonstrating the GLC’s general activities. An attachment to a copy of the same memo points out that the Pepys Estate in Deptford, South-East London should feature for, ‘although situated in a deprived area it has interest and variety.’ See ‘GLC Tall Blocks Examined – Eight cleared, 26 to have gas removed as precaution’ (21 August 1968), GLC/DG/PRB/35/005, ‘Press Releases’; GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 1, ‘Proposed Film “Everybody’s London” 1969-1975’ and GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 2, ‘Proposed Film “Everybody’s London” 1969-1975’, London Metropolitan Archives.

the GLC's pre-fabricated blocks and privately-developed modernist cuboids. Much as Derek Jarman transformed the abandoned docklands in his early 'home movies', Levy's film captures vividly the physical decay of Victorian London, a phenomenon exacerbated by the Blitz, the rapid decline of the city's docks and the displacement of its industrial economy.⁹² The opening montage of *Herostratus* juxtaposes the neglected façades of Harrow Road in Paddington and the Gas Works of St. Pancras with the shiny new Royal College of Art and the grid-iron rectangle office blocks of Paternoster Square. Residual and emergent architectural forms entwine and forms of social organisation collide. Max meanders through the film, a pendant to Levy's explicit social commentary. In an evocative response to Max's quest for fame, Stuart Heaney suggests that 'Max's only solution to the problem of finding meaning in his life is to sacrifice his physical form for a transcendent, infinitely reproducible electronic image.'⁹³ Max, the errant wanderer who hurls his disgust through the city is an individualist given license to roam yet tortured by the perceived absurdity of his environment. He pursues televised fame as a kind of perverse vengeance on the grid-iron rigidity of a calculating world.

As John Weightman points out in his review of the film, Max is the archetypal alienated hero of an absurdist age.⁹⁴ Max is violent: he smashes his bed-sitting room to pieces with an axe, obliterates a television set in a TV studio and hurls a photographer from the roof of the General Electricity Generating Board headquarters in Paternoster Square, framed in the montage between the twin domes of St. Paul's Cathedral and the Old Bailey courthouse. In Levy's original treatment script for the film, presented to the Experimental Film Fund in 1962, Max kills himself by jumping from the building, only to be portrayed in the next scene pushing through the crowd gathered around his own lifeless body.⁹⁵ This ending aligns *Herostratus* with other international experimental films, such as *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962), a circular narrative in which the unnamed protagonist witnesses his own death as a child

⁹² A number of Jarman's early Super-8 films take place in and around the South London docklands. These films include *Studio Bankside* (1970), *Miss Gaby* (1971), *Tarot* (1972), *Andrew Logan Kisses the Glitterati* (1973), *Art of Mirrors* (1973) and *Vampyr* (1973).

⁹³ Stuart Heaney, 'The Experimental Psychologist', *Sight and Sound* 19 (September 2009), 10-12.

⁹⁴ John Weightman, 'A Pad in Paddington', in *Encounter* (September 1968), 43-44.

⁹⁵ It is important to note here the distinction between the film's treatment, a kind of proposal submitted to the Experimental Film Fund in early 1962 and the revised script, submitted a few months later. Each is a unique document that marks the development of *Herostratus*.

and *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1944), in which the protagonist witnesses her past and future selves in a narrative that collapses spatial norms.⁹⁶ Each of these films represent major urban environments—London, Paris and Los Angeles, respectively. In each, the symbolism of urban materialism, memory and dream are grounded in the indexical footage of recognisable urban spaces, yet also create symbolic systems of their own.⁹⁷

Unique to *Herostratus* is its exploration of this question through a character violently traversing the West and Central London, where three of its five women characters are glibly and unsympathetically portrayed as sex-workers: Clio (Gabriella Licudi), a topless dancer (Brigitte St. John) and a dark-skinned prostitute, Sandy (Mona Chin). The fourth woman character is a jobbing actress (Helen Mirren) selling rubber gloves and ironically depicted as a sexualised body in a montage that unironically sexualises her body. The final character, the ‘Woman in Black’ (Inés Levy), played by Levy’s wife is presented as a figure of ‘repulsion’, ‘pestilence’ and even ‘death’ by the director.⁹⁸

The distinctive social and political topography mapped out by *Herostratus* may be more multi-layered than its critics have acknowledged. The film’s complexity can be teased out in terms of the urban redevelopment and cultural values it portrays and in terms of the conditions of its production. Although the film resonates with depictions of London in films such as *Peeping Tom* and *Performance*, it was funded much like any other art or experimental film at the time, especially those being produced by art school graduates working outside of London’s film industry clique. Where the going rate for feature-length 35mm productions ranged from £100,000 to £600,000, *Herostratus* was funded for only £10,000, placing it very much in the category of a minor production. The correspondences of Michael Balcon, the Chairman of the Experimental Film Fund and Ralph Stevenson, the Experimental Film

⁹⁶ See Maya Deren, ‘Cinema as an Art Form’, in Bruce McPherson, ed., *Essential Deren: Collected Writings on Film by Maya Deren* (New York: McPherson and Company, 2005), 30-31.

⁹⁷ In an interview with Bruce Beresford, a compatriot filmmaker, Levy remarks upon his admiration for Marker, whose early works, it may be supposed, Levy was introduced to by Dickinson at the Slade. Levy’s praise of Alain Resnais, Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Denys Deunant and Vladimir Kristl in this interview challenges Robert Murphy’s claim that British cinema’s avant-garde of the late 1960s looked more to North America and the Soviet Union for its filmmaking models than it did to European cinemas. See Bruce Beresford, ‘Interview with Don Levy’, *Cinema 2* (March 1969), 16 and Robert Murphy, *British Sixties Cinema* (London: BFI, 1997), 87.

⁹⁸ Beresford, ‘Interview with Don Levy’, 15-16

Fund's Secretary, reveal the initial difficulty to fund *Herostratus*. In an August 1962 letter to Stevenson at the BFI's headquarters on Dean Street, Soho, Balcon expresses his 'bewilderment' at the film's script and declared consequently that he 'would not be prepared to recommend substantial investment' and, furthermore, 'that [it] is a project for a somewhat adventurous commercial company.'⁹⁹ The minutes of meetings held by the BFI Experimental Production Committee in May 1962 concur with Balcon's impression. The notes make clear that, although the committee were 'sympathetic' to Levy's proposal for *Herostratus*, they expressed doubt as to whether the filmmaker could fulfil his proposed ambition to shoot a sixty-to-eighty minute film in 35mm colour for £3,235, the amount he initially quoted. The document points out that this sum would require a 'substantial proportion of the Committee's slender resources' which might have been shared among a greater number of projects.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, production went ahead after backing from figures such as Basil Wright who, in identical letters to both Balcon and Stevenson written in August 1962, applauded an 'admirable' script.¹⁰¹

II. Aspects of Change: Housing in *Herostratus*

Herostratus occupies a unique position in the history of British cinema.¹⁰² The film's linear narrative, duration and 'angry young man' story invites comparisons with the mainly northern New Wave features such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Tony Richardson, 1960) and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, 1962). Its expatriate perspective upon London sets *Herostratus* alongside art-house films like *Repulsion* (Roman Polanski, 1965) and *Performance* (Nicolas Roeg and Donald Cammell, 1970) and, finally, the film's experimental bent suggests an affinity with Free Cinema and emerging collectives such as the London Filmmaker's Co-operative. Beyond Britain, *Herostratus*

⁹⁹ Michael Balcon, 'Letter to Ralph Stevenson' (8 August 1962), Folder J/71, Michael Balcon Collection, BFI Special Collections.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes from the 21st Meeting of the Experimental Production Committee (17 May 1962), National Film Theatre, Folder J/71, Michael Balcon Collection, BFI Special Collections.

¹⁰¹ Basil Wright, 'Letter to Ralph Stevenson' (11 August 1962), Item BCW/6/2: Correspondence, Basil Wright Collection, BFI Special Collections.

¹⁰² Representative examples include John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963* (London: BFI, 1986); Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema*; Amy Sargeant, *British Cinema: A Critical History* (London: BFI, 2005) and Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997).

anticipation of North American and European countercultures invites readings in dialogue with films such as *The Trip* (Roger Corman, 1967), *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) and *Zabriskie Point* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1970). I am not concerned with those comparisons here. Instead, I will discuss *Herostratus*' complex cinematic context in terms of its topographical co-ordinates.

In *London on Cinema*, Charlotte Brunson considers the 'impossible and expressive' geographies created by montage techniques in the Ealing production *The Ladykillers* (Alexander MacKendrick, 1955), that is, 'the way in which London is invoked by a film, and the ways in which it works in the narrative.'¹⁰³ Such 'impossible and expressive' geographies are evident in *Herostratus*, although this mode of spatial organisation is essentially cinematic. The film's opening sequence, for example, ends with Max running towards the camera as it strafes left to right across the opening of a narrow city alleyway. The montage performs non-linear geographical shifts and locks Max's body into an illogical rhythm as the film jumps from the East to the West of the city in quick cuts. Levy describes the narrative structure as 'emotional' and predicated on 'resonances' between equivalent parts that represent the network of social relations.¹⁰⁴

Colour also plays an important role in Levy's depiction of London. The palette blends the muted tones of flaking paint on Victorian bridges and dim interiors to the brilliant white of Farson's offices and psychedelic flecks. The colour of London was under fierce scrutiny and the subject of much debate in the 1960s, in journals such as the *Architectural Review*. The cleaning of landmark buildings, such as St. Pauls Cathedral, divided opinion. One side would call for the return of the Cathedral to its pristine original state, as its architect Christopher Wren had intended. The other side of the argument followed another line: that it is because of the carbon sash wrapped around the building, the very dirt of London, that the 300-year-old landmark could offer a stable landmark in the city and its history. Levy, too, preferred London's grimy tones and dull hues. By the 1960s, high carbon emissions, congealed traffic and coal soot coated everything static in the city up to a certain height in a dark brown membrane.

Levy, along with cinematographer Keith Allams used colour to shift the emotional tenor of

¹⁰³ Charlotte Brunson, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City since 1945* (London: BFI, 2007), 4-5. *Herostratus* and *The Ladykillers* not only shared filming locations such as the St. Pancras Gas Works, but both Levy and MacKendrick would later go on to work at the California Institute of the Arts.

¹⁰⁴*Cinema 2* (March 1969), 15-16.

scenes such as, for example, the shift from yellow-scale to blue in the seduction scene. Cited in John Gillett's preview of *Herostratus* in *Sight and Sound*, Levy claimed that colour in the film 'is very closely controlled and tied to the film's emotional forces but not character subjectivity in the Antonioni manner, which I also find sacrifices mood and content for chic photography.'¹⁰⁵ Levy's comment clearly alludes to the marriage of architectural and emotional registers in *Herostratus*. The decision to shoot on location in London, allied with Allams' subtle cinematography allows the architectural palette of the city to meld with the emotional action. Moreover, the importance of colour to the film is emphasised in Levy's notes, in interviews and in his frequent comparisons of his film to abstract painting or, even, to the work of musical composers interested in synesthetic structures.

The urban spaces represented in *Herostratus* are transient, and map onto a real London whose topography shifted as municipal housing and town planning policies changed in response to the destruction of the city of London in the Blitz and the subsequent paranoia of the Cold War. On a local level, the LCC's 'slum clearance initiative, vested private speculation and the government's industrial and administrative displacement projects also played a large part.'¹⁰⁶ London is at once reconstructed and veiled in *Herostratus*. The film is, on one hand, eager to draw attention to the city's physical specificity and, on the other, reluctant to present itself as obviously set *there*. In one scene, shot in the whitewashed interior of the recently built Royal College of Art campus on Kensington Gore, Central London, the only verbal affirmation of a London location comes when Max informs Farson that he lives in a 'mansion' at 176 Harrow Road. The house itself is depicted in one static exterior shot and a number of interior shots. It forms part of a terrace of grand Victorian houses occupied by single families in a once affluent district of West London and since partitioned into bed-sitting rooms.

The house on Harrow Road is framed by a static shot of homogenous brown, with a diagonal grey strip of tarmacked road in the foreground and a tiny red square of a bus stop sign puncturing the subdued frame. Even a wispy green bush is absorbed by the brown hue. This indexical rendering of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ As Joan Aucott points out, the 'strategic value of dispersal' in London was a serious concern for the LCC and the government in light of the nuclear threat. Joan V. Aucott, 'Dispersal of Offices from London', *Town Planning Review* 31:3 (April 1960), 37. See also Oliver Marriott, *The Property Boom* (London: Hamilton, 1967) and Rex Touchstone, 'No Place for Victoria', in *Architectural Review* 130 (July-December 1961).

London is, for Levy, crucial to the ‘emotional forces’ of *Herostratus*: ‘I shot real locations normally regarded as impossible because this gives the action the quality of the actual places.’¹⁰⁷ At the time of filming (1964-65), Harrow Road had been earmarked for demolition by the GLC to clear space for the Westway overpass, a part of the comprehensive motorway system that would join London to the west of England and Wales. Ruth Glass described these areas of ‘patched’ housing in so-called slum clearance areas as ‘twilight zones’, where the unrecognised or non-priority elements of London’s population—immigrants, students, prostitutes—lived and worked.¹⁰⁸ Glass describes ‘zones of transition’ as situated ‘adjacent to expanding middle class areas, [that] become lodging house districts, where all sorts of people who have to keep, or want to obtain, a foothold in Central London are crammed together—and frequently have to pay exorbitant rents for the privilege.’¹⁰⁹ It is not, she argues, merely ‘the poor’ who dwell in these ‘zones’. The less in need, those ineligible for National Assistance and immigrant communities all share these precarious spaces under the local authority radar. A ‘motley collection of people,’ Glass, observes, ‘are pushed into these ‘twilight’ zones—long established Londoners and newcomers; Europeans and Asians; the Irish, the West Indians, the Poles; families of respectable manual workers; students; delinquents and prostitutes. All of them have one thing in common: their housing needs are being exploited’.¹¹⁰ Written at the same time as Levy shot *Herostratus*, Glass’ study articulates concerns about urban dwelling that align with the intangible aspects of Levy’s London. Max’s relationship to capital is that of the exploited dweller, the renter who, in apparent protest at the ills of advanced industrial society withdraws his labour and occupancy. Where the house on Harrow Road was once an emblem of wealth, a solid investment, Levy portrays it as a dilapidated shambles. The owner-occupier class who lived in these houses had, by the sixties, moved on to areas such as Hampstead, Chelsea, Islington, Paddington, North Kensington, Battersea, parts of Notting Hill and other districts

¹⁰⁷ John Gillett, ‘Happening Here’, *Sight and Sound* 34:3 (Summer 1965), 141.

¹⁰⁸ See Ruth Glass, ‘Introduction: Aspects of Change’, in Centre for Urban Studies, eds., *London: Aspects of Change* (London MacGibbon and Kee, 1964).

¹⁰⁹ Glass, ‘Introduction: Aspects of Change’, xx.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* xxi.

both north and south of the Thames.¹¹¹ Levy depicts Max and his neighbours living in rented rooms, all watched over by a live-in landlady, a maligned and celebrated character in British cinema.¹¹²

III. Levy's women: confinement, liberty and death

In *Herostratus* two women occupy the house on Harrow Road alongside Max. The introduction of these characters adds to the spectrum of social positions represented in the film and their individual dialogues with Max also demarcate an antagonistic gender dynamic. In particular, both the social and dramatic roles played by these women can be mapped onto the spatial politics of London's redevelopment. The first of Max's co-inhabitants is the unnamed Landlady (Hilda Marvin) who is represented as a nagging authority figure. The second is Sandy, Max's neighbour, who is never seen beyond the house. She is portrayed as a prostitute, a migrant ineligible for social welfare. Among them, only Max is depicted outside and at liberty to wander. Social mobility is restricted for these women yet they are not 'kept' by a husband or 'live-in' cohabitant in contrast to the women discussed in Chapters III and IV. It is Sandy, in fact who supports Max's wanderings. He asks to borrow money from Sandy when he encounters her at the top of a staircase outside their rooms as she is leaving for 'the station, to see if [she] can get a man who will pay for [her] rent and buy [her] a beer.'¹¹³ Although she has nothing to give him, the dialogue makes clear that Max has borrowed from Sandy before. Her investment in his mobility to roam forces her to work more.¹¹⁴

The staircase plays a vital function in grounding this exchange of economic and sexual relations between the two characters. In this period of renewed municipal socialism, the staircase exemplifies residual forms of social organisation and a number of similar examples can be found in London art-house cinema of this period. Both *The Servant* (Joseph Losey, 1963) and *Peeping Tom* (Michael

¹¹¹ See Ruth Glass, 'Introduction: Aspects of Change', Centre for Urban Studies, eds., *London: Aspects of Change* (London MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), xix.

¹¹² See, for example, the racist guardian of the homestead portrayed in *Pressure* (Horace Ové, 1975), a seminal depiction of Caribbean migrant life in West London, the landlady of the eponymous victim in *Sapphire* (Basil Dearden, 1959) and the squeaky-clean Mrs Wilberforce in *The Ladykillers*.

¹¹³ Images of a despondent Sandy resurface later in the film.

¹¹⁴The role of Sandy is credited to Mona Chin, a Chinese-Jamaican actress who emigrated from Jamaica to England in 1959.

Powell, 1960) use staircases to stage difficult, vacillating, relationships between social classes and genders. In contrast to *Herostratus*, these films depict houses in the affluent districts of Chelsea and West Kensington as owned by their occupants, with their grandeur still more-or-less intact. Similarly, in *Blow-up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), Jane (Vanessa Redgrave) pleads with Thomas (David Hemmings) not to take her photograph on an exterior staircase built from logs in Maryon Park in Charlton, South-East London.¹¹⁵ In *Herostratus*, the chipped architrave, tarnished banister and the wallpaper flaking around Max and Sandy present at once a house and two young lives in spectacular decline.

The dialogue between Max and Sandy suggests that the latter is not engaged in ‘street-walking’, but solicits sex in railway terminals. This distinction is crucial, for, as I mention above, three of the six women characterised in the film are depicted as sex-workers of one form or another. Levy describes another of those women, the ‘Woman in Black’ who prowls the streets dressed in black PVC, as ‘basically a sado-masochistic attraction/repulsion image’, but qualifies this statement: ‘she also has associations with death or pestilence.’¹¹⁶ Another important character, Clio, first appears in the film as Farson’s secretary, but is later revealed as his courtesan. In one scene, she turns up unannounced at a TV studio where Max is waiting for Farson and, after a short exchange of dialogue, begins to tease him by removing her lamé drape, her movements presented in long and medium shots, as well as close-ups of her hands, (covered) breasts and face. As she undresses she spins, the camera’s proximity to her body shifts between long, medium and short shots in various permutations. Edited into this montage is footage of Clio crying, her initial encounter with Max at Farson’s office and in a sequence that has drawn

¹¹⁵ Thomas’ studio—which is also his home—is located in Pottery Lane, Notting Hill, another district registered by Glass as being in the midst of gentrification.

¹¹⁶*Cinema 2* (March 1969), 15-16. The scene in which the rubber gloves model gyrates before the camera attempts to criticise the sexualisation of women’s bodies for commercial purposes. By filming this scene on a mock-up studio set and positioning the model in relation to the film camera, crew and studio space—the apparatus of the process of reassembling bodies for capital gain—Levy at least demonstrates an awareness of such processes. It should be noted here that the Woman in Black’s painted white face adorns the original promotional poster for the film’s run at the ICA. A scale reproduction of the poster is held in the Tate Archive Poster Collection, TAP/1229.

comparisons with the triptychs of Francis Bacon.¹¹⁷ These remarkable Baconesque sequences feature Max, Clio and Farson contorted into various shapes and pulling anguished faces, shot against a black background with white boxes marked out against it. Using freeze-frame shots held for alternate lengths of time, the figures move in spasmodic convulsions that suggest seizure. The composition and photographic processes of the montage suggest the kind of asylum-confinement scrutinised by experimental psychology. Levy took great interest in these developments, marked by the work of R.D. Laing.¹¹⁸

In interviews and introductory notes for screenings of *Herostratus*, Levy's discussion of his editing techniques swerves around cinematic semiotics. This allowed him as the director to evade narrative analyses in interpretive responses to the film that clearly seek to knit together a coherent story, rather than the elaborate, non-linear tapestry Levy offers. The proper analysis, he claims, is a rhythmic analysis grounded in ideas fostered by Thorold Dickinson at the Slade. In his research statement to the Slade Levy, who held a PhD in Theoretical Chemical Physics from the University of Cambridge, proposes to 'investigate the problems of perception, memory, time-sense and emotion associated with the techniques of the film medium, using scientific methods of experimental psychology.'¹¹⁹ Levy incorporates black spacing into the seduction scene and throughout the film, most noticeably at the beginning. In an interview, he notes that he used this technique 'because of rhythm and impact, and because it separates images in a special way.' That is to say, black spacing 'can separate emotional shocks, and stops the meaning of otherwise adjacent images from bleeding into one another.'¹²⁰ Levy often avoided or proscribed the association of images that montage usually demands. Nevertheless, Levy's montage technique in the seduction scene pulls each of the women together, conflates them

¹¹⁷ This connection was first made by Pierre Apraxine in *Art and Artists* (March 1968) and echoed later by Michael Kustow, Director of the ICA. See, 'Publicity for Don Levy's 'Herostratus' showing at the ICA Cinema' (May 1968), Institute of Contemporary Arts, TGA/955/13/3/1.

¹¹⁸ The documentary *Asylum* (Peter Robinson, 1971), attempts to demonstrate how experimental psychologists such as Laing looked to create new spaces for radical methods of psychiatric treatment. It is also a film about a house: Kingsley Hall in East London, which would play home to the headquarters and clinic of Laing's Philadelphia Association between 1965 and 1970.

¹¹⁹ Cited in Henry K. Miller, 'Don Levy and the Slade School', *Herostratus* DVD booklet (London: BFI, 2011), 10.

¹²⁰ *Cinema 2* (March 1969), 15-16.

and, finally, draws them into the performance of the dominant body on screen, the now metonymic Clio.

The women of *Herostratus* are confined to boarding houses and TV studios, to reception offices and stairwells. The film's depiction of residual Victorian London also carries with it the cultural norms of the previous century. Levy dexterously portrays the clearance of London's neglected Victorian housing stock to make way for new local authority developments and the rise of gleaming private developments such as Paternoster Square. Yet *Herostratus* does not represent the concomitant clash between emergent and residual cultures which are altogether more intangible. As Elizabeth Wilson points out, Victorian commentators often associated London with moral and biological disease. The radical pamphleteer and farmer William Cobbett famously likened London to a 'great wen'; a growth, Wilson writes, 'wherein gathered all the poisonous humours of the social organism.'¹²¹ One consequence of this perspective was the slow disappearance of 'respectable' women from the city's streets. As Wilson puts it, 'women of the bourgeoisie had already begun to withdraw from commerce and other employments in the eighteenth century [...] It became undesirable and even indecent for a lady to walk in the streets unless she was accompanied by a husband, father or brother, or at least by a male servant.'¹²²

Concerned with the degradation of urban living conditions, London's intellectual classes took to draught paper to design out filth and squalor. The physician and historian of medicine Benjamin Ward Richardson produced a short treatise titled *Hygeia: City of Health* (1876), in which, as Wilson paraphrases, 'women in cities were perceived as objects of both regulation *and* banishment. It was recognised that women would continue to work, and could not be entirely excluded from the public sphere, and for these the policed city, cleansed of temptation, was to be created.'¹²³ Many twentieth century developments in housing, from central heating and inlets for gas and water to the large-scale garden cities and new towns, were first sounded out in this period of furious urban revision, a hygienic turn that banished bourgeois women to the parlour. On the other hand, the figure of the prostitute

¹²¹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 34.

¹²² *Ibid*, 30.

¹²³ *Ibid*. 46.

represented an affront to order and moral regulation.¹²⁴ It is, as Wilson points out, no accident ‘that prostitutes were referred to as women *of the streets*, streetwalkers. For the open street with its lack of boundaries and its freedom for all to use was precisely what created ‘promiscuity’ in every form.’¹²⁵ The continuation of these Victorian modes of urban planning and social policy into the sixties is remarkable. As I discuss in Chapter I, legislation concerned with immigration, prostitution and homosexuality in that period shows the GLC wrestling with the lingering problem of urban ‘promiscuity.’

That boundless promiscuity is inverted in *Herostratus*. Sandy, to give one example, is confined to the staircase of the house on Harrow Road and, even, to Max’s memory. Her railway station goes unseen. Clio, however, presents an interesting case. She occupies a reception office, a staircase and a TV studio, but is also depicted in exterior scenes. In those scenes she is accompanied by Farson. One shot in particular depicts the historical clash of municipal Modernism and Italianate Victoriana so central to the film’s aesthetic through a long shot of Clio and Farson in a courtyard outside the Royal College of Art, the Royal Albert Hall rising behind them. Finally, the topless dancer gyrates against a non-specific interior backdrop of psychedelic colours, neither indoors nor out. These women are often isolated in spaces that would ordinarily teem with other bodies: college campus, TV studio, (the unseen) railway station. The film portrays the legacies of Victorian London bubbling away under the ‘sexual revolutions’ and the supposed uplift in women’s social mobility celebrated (mostly by men) in ‘the swinging sixties’. Indeed, as Sue Harper points out, the ‘sexual revolution’ merely acted as a veil to a sexual conservatism that was no more apparent than in portrayals of women in the cinema.¹²⁶

Herostratus reflects these observations. The Woman in Black, however, freely roams the streets of London. Levy’s describes her as an analogue of pestilence or death: she is the very embodiment of the promiscuous street-walker discussed by Wilson. Dressed in a black PVC miniskirt outfit and matching umbrella, the Woman in Black appears in footage shot mainly in the St. Pancras Gas Works, edited into the film’s structure as short sequences. There are longer shots in which the camera moves towards the figure as she saunters along the cobbled ground. In other sequences, she is

¹²⁴ Ibid. 40.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 41.

¹²⁶ Sue Harper, *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* (London: Continuum, 2000), 102.

shown walking through a deserted concrete underpass or gazing into the camera while she stands over it. The woman in *Black*'s characterisation of pestilence or death suggests an historical continuum that brings to mind well-documented traumas suffered in London: the Plague of 1665, the Great Fire of 1666 or the Blitz of 1940. The Woman in Black can be read as a kind of visual motif, like a soothsayer in the mythologies to which the film self-consciously responds.

Levy's recourse to myth and fable clearly permeates *Herostratus* and he himself notes that, 'Farson is a modern Alexander the Great, and Clio [...] represents the social decisions that define history.'¹²⁷ Clio's betrayal of Max leads him, finally, to desire the suicide he has sold to Farson. He desires suicide now, not for fame, but for its own sake, to escape an absurd urbanity typified by unscrupulous money-men and treacherous women. He begins his revenge, in one scene in the film, by disfiguring the faces of magazine models and obliterating a TV set in the studio where he is waiting around to die. In terms of the film's narrative and emotional structure, Levy's remark that Clio 'represents the social decisions that define history' ascribes a particular meaning to the character. She is responsible, firstly, for granting Max access to Farson (failing in her secretarial duty), secondly, for seducing Max after which he rediscovers his vitality and, finally, for Max's betrayal after which Farson coldly confesses that Clio was sent by him to ensnare and betray Max.¹²⁸ The claims that Clio merely 'represents' History might appear to take the sting out of her betrayal, that Max is the victim only of a noxious historical current devastating everything in its path. However, Clio's characterisation might also be read as the portrayal of a pliable young woman whose prostitution is considered historically deplorable while, say, Farson's lack of moral fibre is accepted as synonymous with his vocation. It is important, moreover, to understand that Clio's subservience to Farson is made clear in *Herostratus*, yet both are portrayed as merely doing their jobs. While Clio's actions are castigated, Farson's are accepted, if only negatively.

As the film's script progressed, what began as a kind of sexual hallucination became a curious turn in the narrative depiction of Max's decline. Submitted to a committee at the BFI Experimental

¹²⁷*Cinema*, No. 2 (March 1969), 14.

¹²⁸ It is worth noting here that, earlier in the seduction scene, Clio tells Max that Farson has sent her, yet Max appears unconcerned.

Film Fund in 1962, Levy's unpublished script for *Herostratus* features a softer 'reverie' sequence, albeit one with the same outcome (the script is broken into alphabetical sections):

L Booker of Private Eye. M smashes TV set. Preens himself. Chucks bottle and cups at broken TV tube. The night mare.

M Strip tease in reverse.

N Two dancers.

O Girls shoot man. M. wonder if he's dreaming.

P Sexescapade. M sententious.

Q ~~Orgasm~~ [then handwritten:] Ejaculation.

R Orgasm. Adman interrupts. Two hours to go. Breakfast. Fun with sausages.

The adman castigates M. Clio arrives. Says M was clumsy. M. horrified. Clio makes adman kiss her foot.¹²⁹

The later script obscures the description of the scene reproduced above from the earlier script which makes clear the distinction between Max's reverie and his seduction by Clio. Levy rewrites Max's reverie as 'three peculiar parables which seem to be shot on the floor in the form of advertising filmlets,' the last of which Clio appears in. As Max 'dozes', Clio appears. Levy emphasises Clio's experience in terms of inhuman physicality: 'She has the smooth beauty of Swedish glassware, but she apparently melts and makes passionate advances to him.' Max becomes smitten with Farson's succubus and no longer wants to kill himself. 'She is gone,' Levy writes in the script, 'but he is obviously having second thoughts about the day's project[...] the girl was given a large fee for the night's work.'¹³⁰ The film's final montage shows, to the contrary, that Clio is as trapped as the man she plays the pivotal role in

¹²⁹ Michael Balcon Collection, J/71, BFI Special Collections, unpaginated. The spelling of 'night mare' clearly harks back to the thirteenth century conflation of 'night' and 'mare': 'an evil female spirit afflicting sleepers with a feeling of satisfaction'. *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹³⁰ Don Levy, 'Outline Treatment for Herostratus', Folder J/71, Michael Balcon Collection, BFI Special Collections.

ensnaring. In a performance that resonates with those encouraged in the experimental psychological treatments offered by figures such as Alexander Lowen, Fritz Pearls and Arthur Janov—early pioneers of ‘scream therapy’ in the fifties and sixties—the scene plays out like a ‘primal scream’ session, depicted against a white wall reminiscent of an asylum. The scene is stripped almost of all visual denotation. Clio, sobbing and screaming, rails against the voice-off-screen of Levy’s: ‘I CAN’T GET OUT!’ The off-screen voice replies: ‘YOU CAN GET OUT[...] YOU’RE CHOOSING... YES YOU HAVE TO!’ A distraught Clio retorts, ‘yes I am, YES I AM!’

This final scene undermines its force with an explicit qualification. Levy’s voice, that of both the experimental psychologist and filmmaker, implores Clio to see her social status as the result of various consequences over which there is always a choice to accept or refuse. In contrast to Max’s decline, portrayed in the film as an inevitable consequence of systemic corruption, Clio is held up as responsible for not only Max’s undoing, but her own too.

IV. The question of place and the critical context of *Herostratus*

In the limited critical and scholarly attention paid to the film, *Herostratus* has often been perceived in terms of its spatial representation, yet little has been made of this even though reviewers of the film often grounded their analyses in the film’s urban and industrial topography.¹³¹ Thomas Quinn Curtis, for example, sympathises with a ‘London youth [who] leads such a monotonous and meaningless existence in a rooming house’.¹³² Of all the reviewers who saw the film upon its initial release in art house cinemas and on the European festival circuit between 1968-70, Richard Roud clearly saw the specific nature of the film’s topography as an oscillation between the city’s resistance to representation and the indexical nature of cinema. The London of *Herostratus* was a litter of important references to Roud. “HEROSTRATUS” is stunningly photographed, he writes, ‘W.2., the twilight area between Westbourne Grove and the Harrow Road with its gasometers, its iron bridges, and rotting slums are

¹³¹ According to Plutarch, Herostratus burned the temple of Diana (the Roman incarnation of Artemis) at Ephesus while the temple’s mistress was in attendance at the birth of Alexander of Macedon. See *The Life of Alexander the Great* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 5.

¹³² *International Herald Tribune* (20 January 1968), 20.

rendered in such a way as to make them play an almost independent role in the film.’¹³³ Roud singles out the ‘independent’ nature of these Victorian indices and, in doing so, suggests an uncanny duplication. Before (both *in front* of or *captured* by and *pre-existing*) the camera, ‘the gasometers, iron bridges, and rotting slums’ stand integrated with their landscape. Captured on celluloid, they created a new dimension for Roud, between the captured landscape and the integrated whole of the projected image. Arguably, Roud’s response to London’s industrial and civic structures portrayed in *Herostratus* supports Levy’s claims that the film at the same time creates and operates inside a multi-dimensional space which no unified mode of analysis or discipline will suffice to explain. That is to say, the tentative, fragile dialogue between a London undergoing redevelopment and its cinematic representation is amplified by the tension between the montage and the physical reality of the city it represents.

International reviewers also stressed the film’s geographic specificity, in addition to its tidy transformation of London into a crucible of sounds and colours. Early cuts of the film were screened at the Knokke-le-Zoute and Bergamo film festivals in 1967, as well as a finished version at the Berlin festival. After winning the Special Jury Prize at the Festival du Jeune in Hyeres in April 1968, *Herostratus* screened at film festivals in Melbourne, Sydney, New York and New Delhi in 1969.¹³⁴ In a review of the Sydney Film Festival, Charles Higham pays special attention to the scene in which Max ‘wanders round his room strewn with newspaper reports while London’s traffic bleeps incessantly outside.’¹³⁵ In the same review, Higham reproduces a gloomy counter-myth to Swinging London (an idea arguably created by the cinema in the first place) by noting, ‘the bleak, grey room where Max lives; the sunless abyss of the less swinging parts of London’.¹³⁶ This perception of London as an ‘abyss’ converges neatly with literary and cinematic representations of the city’s less affluent wards and boroughs and, moreover, harks back to a number of Victorian and pre-war sources: the sketches of Dickens, the late nineteenth century ‘poverty surveys’ of Charles Booth, Jack London’s 1903 dispatch from East London, *People of the Abyss* and George Orwell’s 1933 slum memoir, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. As Elizabeth Wilson points out:

¹³³ *Guardian* (2 May 1968), 29.

¹³⁴ The Festival du Jeune jury included the filmmaker Miklós Jancsó and the film theorist Jean-Louis Comolli.

¹³⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald* (18 June 1969), 21.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

[...] much Victorian journalism was a literature of voyeurism, revealing to its middle-class audience a hidden life of the city which offered not so much grist for reform as vicarious, even illicit enjoyment of the forbidden ‘Other’ that was so close yet so far from, the Victorian bourgeoisie.¹³⁷

These views of poverty and ‘slum living’ in London are also of foremost concern in numerous public information films and didactic documentaries in the post-war period, such as the LCC’s *Look in on London: Tramps* (Michael Ingrams, 1956) and *Land of Promise* (Paul Rotha, 1946).¹³⁸ These cinematic and literary works transform urban development and so-called slum life into an aesthetic question and implicitly lay the ground for the kinds of wholesale redevelopment witnessed in London in the 1960s and 1970s (I pursue this idea further in Chapters III and IV).

These critical operations can be traced throughout *Herostratus*, as the film depicts specific locations that narratives of poverty and slum living termed ‘sunless’, ‘anonymous’ or ‘sinister’: an empty Pepys Street and other passages and alleyways in the financial heart of the old City, the Albert Embankment and the Harrow Road with its bridges and railway lines. This separation of London into viable spaces and sunless slums in critical writing sets up an aesthetic binary that positions less *spectacular* districts as ‘anonymous’ and opposes them to the ‘major thoroughfares’ depicted in commercial cinema.¹³⁹ Rather than view ‘major’ London landmarks as historically-determined architectural symbols of religious, political or cultural power, these responses reproduce the assumption that the importance of these buildings and built spaces is somehow given. The problem, I would argue,

¹³⁷ Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 27.

¹³⁸ Poverty and homelessness are also depicted in *Herostratus*. In one early sequence, a bare-foot man sleeps on newspaper below a board that advertises the *Sun*, a tabloid newspaper, as ‘the only newspaper born of the age we live in.’ Later in the film, footage of elderly vagrants accompanies a voice-over that meditates without hope on the loneliness of old age and death.

¹³⁹ Notable discussions of this approach include Hugo Frey, ‘Shutting Out the City: Reflections on the Portrayal of London in 1960s *Auteur* Cinema’ and Roland-François Lack, ‘London circa Sixty-Six: The Map of the Film’, in Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber, eds., *London Eyes: Reflections in Text and Image* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), pp. 136-143 and Peter Wollen, ‘Possession’, in *Sight and Sound* 5:9 (September 1995), 21-23.

is one of metonymy, of imagining London in terms of ‘London’, the proper noun, or holistically as the The City, visually identified by a dominant architectural canon.¹⁴⁰

V. Conclusion

Herostratus depicts first and foremost the manner in which municipally-regulated space differentiates between and manages the political life of London’s inhabitants. Max hopes to flee the city but flails only towards his death. Caught in the rupture chewed up by the slow decline of Victorian London and the modernist metropolis, *Herostratus* reproduces the ‘paranoid view of mass culture’ Andreas Huyssen records in *After the Great Divide*. In ‘at least one of its basic registers,’ Huyssen writes, ‘modernism accords with historical identification of woman as inferior artist, as mass culture and as political threat.’¹⁴¹ The confinement of women in the film is an extension of an historical containment of what Huyssen calls ‘the masses’. As he points out, nineteenth-century European bourgeois print culture would ‘persistently’ present images ‘of the raging mob as hysterical, of the engulfing floods of revolt and revolution, of the swamp of big city life, of the spreading ooze of massification, of the figure of the red whore at the barricades.’¹⁴² It is no accident, I think, that the two bluntest depictions of ‘the crowd’ in *Herostratus* feature the drudgery of an escalator on the London Underground and a baying mob at a public execution. The unpredictability of a mass that can switch between docile obedience and powerful savagery once spurred the psychologist Gustav Le Bon to warn: “The simplicity and exaggeration of the sentiments of a crowd have for result a throng that knows neither doubt nor uncertainty. Like women, it goes at once to extremes[...] a commencement of antipathy and disapprobation, which in the case of the isolated individual would not gain strength, becomes at once furious hatred in the case of an individual in a crowd.”¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰In the specific case of London, it is important, further, to not confuse this usage with the relatively autonomous Central London borough administered by the City of London Corporation known as the ‘Square Mile’ and also known as The City.

¹⁴¹ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 50-53.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 52.

¹⁴³ Cited in Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 52.

Consequently, Levy's desire to create a confluence of symbolic spaces appears to fail, always, in its struggle to transcend the social complexity of its topography. The question remains as to whether the planning policies and housing developments of the period facilitated the reactionary social politics of *Herostratus*, or if reactionary politics facilitated local and national government planning and housing policies. The temptation is to posit a dialectical tension, where one perspective intertwines with and upholds the other. That is to say, the reactionary politics in municipal planning and Levy's experimental film practice are at once the cause and effect of the film's free-floating misogyny. My reluctance to anchor this buoyant challenge to perceived radical aesthetics in the rich lineage of women's struggle comes about, crucially, because I am similarly reluctant to misread the film as an evidential document that merely mirrors the social zeitgeist, a tacit reproduction.

CHAPTER III
HOUSE AND HOME: THE CINEMA OF CIVIC LONDON

I. Introduction

In one scene from *Going Greater* (Ronald E. Haddock, 1965), a public information film commissioned by the Greater London Council, Michael Aspel highlights London's housing crisis and its importance to municipal planning policy and also the work undertaken by the GLC to address it. *Going Greater* begins with an aerial exterior shot of Piccadilly Circus, an area at the centre of a heated debate in the *Architectural Review* and *Town Planning Review* in response to redevelopment plans put forward by Lord Holford that would, after protracted wrangles, not come to fruition.¹⁴⁴ Aspel reads three lines from William Wordsworth's poem *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* (1802): 'Earth has not any thing to shew more fair/Dull would he be of soul who could pass by/A sight so touching in its majesty.'¹⁴⁵ Wordsworth's unfamiliar gaze is undermined by the montage, which marries typical, 'postcard', footage of London depicted in films in the 'public information' genre: the River Thames, the Routemaster double-decker bus, bridges (especially Westminster, Waterloo and Tower), Westminster Palace and its clock-tower Big Ben, the Coldstream Guards on parade and Nelson's Column at the heart of Trafalgar Square. These are not simply landmarks, but historical symbols that feature consistently in films commissioned by the GLC throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In this chapter, I consider the ways in which civic experience was shaped by and communicated in housing films from the public information and activist cinematic genres. I pay close attention to films produced by the GLC Public Relations Branch (*Somewhere Decent to Live* (Ronald L. Haddock, 1967) and *Living at Thamesmead* (Jack and Charmian Saward, 1974)) and the Cinema Action collective (*Not a Penny on the Rents* (1969) and *Squatters* (1970)). Both groups demonstrate a commitment to achieving specific political ends via cinematic production. Film production was a crucial tool in the GLC's governance of London—its commitment to cinematic filmmaking and cinematic exhibition

¹⁴⁴ For a cinematic homage to what was then perceived as an endangered Piccadilly Circus, see *Goodbye, Piccadilly* (George Grafton Green, 1967), produced as part of the Rank Organisation's *Look at Life* series.

¹⁴⁵ See William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 285.

occupies a central position in the discussion of municipal cinema in this chapter, and will be set in dialogue with the working-class campaigns carried out by Cinema Action in direct response to GLC housing policies.¹⁴⁶

In 1968, a wave of rent strikes broke out across London, during which council tenants refused to pay increases to their weekly rent. Some of the demonstrations were spectacular. One press release issued in response to a demonstration claims that GLC tenants ‘brought a cardboard “coffin” filled with uncompleted [rent rebate] forms to County Hall[...] and dumped them in front of the Chairman of the Housing Committee, Mr Horace Cutler.’ Cutler responded to this slight in deadpan fashion and repackaged the issue as merely the result of a miscommunication between the GLC and its tenants. He suggested that those who participated in the action should ask for new application forms so as not to miss out on rebates.¹⁴⁷ In opposition to GLC representational strategies, Cinema Action offered a visual platform to these campaigns, which involved producing cinema that represented a largely heterogeneous citizenry.

The place of cinema in these developments is not new. From the early twentieth century, London’s local authorities have continuously and efficiently utilised moving images to influence and inform the city’s population. In London, the GLC’s Public Relations Branch commissioned films that illustrated the various areas in which it had comprehensively reorganised the lives of the working classes and those excluded to some degree from the ownership of housing and transport, in possession of a basic education, but without any significant expendable income or private health insurance. These social

¹⁴⁶ One note in the GLC archive, which discusses the proposed film *Everybody’s London*, demonstrates that the Council not only exhibited films at County Hall, its headquarters on the south bank of the Thames in Waterloo and loan the films to community organisations, but through the Central Office of Information (COI), achieved ‘world-wide circulation’. See ‘Note to Dr S. Haseler, Chairman General Purposes Committee, from G.A.H. Lewis, Acting Director of Information’ (4 June 1973), in GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 1, Proposed Film “Everybody’s London”, 1969-1975, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives. Another note points out that the COI distributed 60 prints of *Thamesmead ’68* ‘throughout the world.’ See ‘Note to the Leader of the Council from the Director of Public Information’, in GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 1, Proposed Film “Everybody’s London”, 1969-1975, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

¹⁴⁷ ‘GLC Housing Chairman Worried that Tenants will be Deprived of Rent Rebate’ (26 July 1968), GLC/DG/PRB/35/005, Press Releases, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

groups are at once realistically represented and idealised in GLC films.¹⁴⁸ I will argue in this chapter that the municipal subject is not merely represented by local authority film production, but is reconstructed by it in an idealised form. Where the previous chapters discuss cultural tensions and institutional relations—the manner in which state cultural institutions such as the BFI and the BBC appropriate ‘minor’ or minority London cultures and their labour—the two chapters that follow focus on atomised facets of this field and analyse how minor cinematic cultures ‘speak’ for themselves and are spoken for by institutional powers. I show that the GLC and Cinema Action were equally committed to the politics and aesthetics of public housing and hold that both fiercely contested questions of citizenship and representations of municipal experience in their films.

The necessity of flexibility and mobility in municipal cinema is evident in the exhibition practices of both the GLC and, later, Cinema Action. In the only comprehensive survey of British municipal cinema published to date, Elizabeth Lebas argues that the idea of a mobile cinema, for example was clearly attractive to the GLC’s predecessor, the London County Council (LCC). In 1945, the LCC facilitated ‘a cinema van tour for six weeks [in] certain parks and open spaces to show promotional films at the initiation of the National Savings Committee.’¹⁴⁹ In an interview with filmmaker Margaret Dickinson, Cinema Action member Gustav Schlacke recalls the origins of the collective’s initial commitment to the mode of mobile exhibition. After arriving in London in 1968 with his co-member, wife and the founder of Cinema Action Ann Guedes, the pair sought the necessary financial support to exhibit ‘a French student film on the events of May 1968.’ Schlacke remembers the role of producer Richard Mourdant in the early formation of the collective, who ‘arranged a party for the purpose of raising funds for the import of the student film.’ Schlacke recalls that ‘thirty pounds was raised and Ann sent the money to France for a print. Richard lent his projector, and that was the

¹⁴⁸ Press releases in the GLC Collection point towards issues as varied as homelessness, gypsies and squatters, housing waiting lists, rent strikes, obsolete housing and unsafe tower blocks after the collapse of Ronan Point in May 1968.

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Lebas, *Forgotten Futures: British Municipal Cinema 1920-1980* (London: Black Dog, 2011), 30. The monograph was well received upon publication, with British Film Institute Senior Curator Patrick Russell praising Lebas for her ‘sound empirical research’ and adding that the book should ‘serve to inspire comparable treatment of larger-scale bodies of ‘forgotten’ filmmaking’. See Patrick Russell, ‘Review of *Forgotten Futures*’, in *Sight and Sound* Volume 21, Issue 10 (October 2011), 93.

beginning of the mobile cinema activity of Cinema Action.¹⁵⁰ As Guedes puts it in a later interview, ‘when Cinema Action started, we wanted to try to do what the French did with their Ciné-tracts. We started to be given things, like a van, and more people joined.’¹⁵¹

Lebas suggests that the historical trajectory or ‘evolution’ of the municipal subject is illuminated by the cinematic production of municipal authorities and defines what she calls ‘municipal filmmaking’ as local authority-financed cinema that performs an alternative or minor cinematic practice as representative of tenants and rate-payers. This, she argues, produced films by the people for the people, where spectators are no longer consumers but citizens, viewers who look in on themselves as they perform their lives, reflected as in a mirror.¹⁵² Close analysis of these works, she implies, yields strategies of social, economic and political amelioration that play out in the lives of the citizenry.¹⁵³ For Lebas, local-authority films were ultimately ‘local films for local people and except for public health and promotional films were of little interest beyond their community[...].’¹⁵⁴ Her classifications and analyses, however, strongly allude to other kinds of representative filmmaking tendencies that transform spectators into citizens in a broader sense and further articulate the dimensions of the local.

The films that I discuss in this chapter offer perspectives on social and spatial reorganisation in the city in terms of tenant-hood, local governance, alternative dwelling practices, gendered divisions of labour and the effect of the large-scale public housing programmes. *Somewhere Decent to Live* (Ronald E. Haddock, 1967) is a typical example of GLC ‘public information’ filmmaking, in which women are represented as family managers in charge of all domestic affairs. The camera follows them as they clean and polish the homes they share with their families.¹⁵⁵ The housewife becomes the emotional

¹⁵⁰ ‘Cinema Action’, in Margaret Dickinson, ed., *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Films in Britain 1945-1990* (London: BFI, 1999), 263-265.

¹⁵¹ ‘Ann Guedes in conversation with Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner’, in, Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner, eds., *Working Together: Notes on British Film Collectives in the 1970s* (Southend-on-Sea: Focal Point Gallery, 2013), 66.

¹⁵² Elizabeth Lebas, *Forgotten Futures: British Municipal Cinema 1920-1980* (London: Black Dog, 2011), 14.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Public Relations Branch documents in the Greater London Council archive are littered with references to the social meaning of wives and mothers. See *The Future Public Relations, Advertising and Market Research Requirements of the Greater London Council* (London: The London Press Exchange, 1965); John Pitt, *The Greater London Council: A Film Treatment* (London: Gerard

centre of society, her representation and role in the film are indicative of wider GLC planning and housing policy: she is perceived as rooted to the city, bereft of the ambition to travel and, therefore, an accurate and constant indicator of the city's needs in general. As one housewife puts it in the film, 'My husband would fly tomorrow, anywhere out of London, but for me if I leave London I've lost the centre of the world. This is the place where everything's happening.' Echoing the protagonist of *The Vanishing Street* (Chapter II), the housewife restates the popular conceit that placed London firmly at the centre of the world.

The second GLC production, *Living at Thamesmead* (Jack and Charmian Saward, 1974), uses the sex-life of two teenage residents of Thamesmead to frame the broader story of civic life in the gleaming new South-East London housing estate. Footage of young children paddling and splashing in a shallow artificial lake demonstrates a utopian tone in keeping with estate's modernist design. A young black boy plays on a see-saw with a young white girl, an image of racial harmony not unlike that optimistically proffered by Lionel Ngakane's independent 1966 short film *Jemima + Johnny*. The film heralded a radical shift in GLC film production, because it substituted two professional actors—Julie Dawn Cole and Spencer Banks—for the daughter and son of two actual Thamesmead families, the Glocks and the Aides. The remainder of the families appear in the film as themselves. This bizarre substitution of Thamesmead tenants for actors who are then resituated among the 'authentic' life of the new community also sees Cole and Banks take on the additional role of conveying the kind of 'public information' commonly articulated by a voice-over commentary.

These two films represent the development of London's housing plan, as well as the behaviour of its citizens, as a frictionless unravelling. Cinema Action contested those images by representing a resistant, active citizenry. Their films do not respond to GLC cinema as a pendant of GLC policy (which is then in turn channelled through GLC cinema). *Not a Penny on the Rents* (Cinema Action, 1969) signals the movement of municipal filmmaking into a different kind of 'participatory' aesthetic, wherein the subjects of the film—council tenants—were consulted during initial screenings and

Holdsworth Productions LTD, 1974); 'Mothers 'Star' in GLC Housing Film' (1 August 1967), GLC/DG/PRB/35/002: Press Releases; 'Memorial to 'Model' GLC Tenant' (22 January 1968), GLC/DG/PRB/35/002: Press Releases; 'GLC to Provide Homes for 'Battered' Wives' (13 March 1974), GLC/DG/PRB/35/022, Press Releases, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives Collection.

encouraged to produce the final edit. The aim of this practice was to advocate the participation of rent strikers, squatters and other campaigners in the creation of the film's meaning at screenings.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, given the GLC's perception of women citizens as housewives in charge of the emotional and monetary stability of the home, the montage and soundtrack of *Not a Penny* depict a very different kind of female citizenship. In this film, women tenants are figured as active participants in the organisation and execution of rent strikes and public demonstrations.

Cinema Action's next film, or 'ciné-tract'¹⁵⁷, *Squatters* (Cinema Action, 1970), documents the struggle of Londoners who occupied unused or abandoned houses in retaliation to the housing and property policies of the GLC. Cinema Action employ similar formal techniques to those used in *Not a Penny on the Rents* to portray the plight of squatters in East and West London as well as the campaign to legitimise squatting as a revolutionary and ethical housing practice. Like *Not a Penny on the Rents*, *Squatters* employs the tactic of naming official and other figures of authority perceived as especially corrupt.

Films such as *Not a Penny on the Rents* and *Squatters* built a counter-narrative to the portrayals of ideal communities developed by the GLC Public Relations Branch in relation to issues around the withholding of rent and squatting. Peter Wollen has discussed radical cinemas in terms of 'agitational' cinema which, he argues, were produced 'for a specific conjuncture and for a specific limited audience.'¹⁵⁸ In the case of *Not a Penny on the Rents*, that specific audience were the participants of rent strikes across London to and for whom the film was exhibited. With *Squatters*, a similar logic applies:

¹⁵⁶ For a critique of this position, see Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, 'Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)', in *Screen*, Volume 16, Number 4 (Winter 1975/76), 101-118.

¹⁵⁷ The ciné-tract is a variant of the newsreel form. British filmmaker and critic Simon Hartog describes the newsreel as 'a film form with particular stylistic characteristics and a specialised content. [...] Even though the particular units may be of historical, aesthetic, or comic interest the newsreel's essence resides in its serial production, for such modes of production require a continuing, obvious stylistic identity.' Ultimately, Hartog claims, 'Newsreels are historically group films made by people with a common point of view.' Ciné-tracts, he goes on to remark, are the unique product of 'May [1968], Paris and Cartesian mind[...] the most radical and the most original of the new newsreels[...] documents with communicative intent'. See Simon Hartog, 'Newsreel or the potentialities of a political cinema', in *Afterimage* No. 1, 1970, unpaginated. Reproduced in Bauer and Kidner, eds., *Working Together*, 72-83.

¹⁵⁸ 'Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen interviewed by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen', in *Screen* 15:3 (Autumn, 1974), 130-131.

the audience were members of the London Squatters Campaign formed by Ron Bailey and other ‘revolutionary libertarian[s]’ in 1968, whose theory and practice are both represented and discussed in the film.¹⁵⁹ ‘Obviously,’ Wollen claims, ‘most political films are either agitational or propagandist.’¹⁶⁰ This distinction leaves theoretical filmmaking, such as, say, that produced by the London Filmmaker’s Co-operative for its ‘cadre’ audience, who Wollen suggests occupied ‘a specific conjuncture but a theoretical conjuncture rather than an immediately political one.’¹⁶¹

Somewhere Decent to Live and *Living at Thamesmead* reflect Wollen’s description of ‘propagandist’ cinema. These films, he claims, were aimed ‘at a mass’ audience and focussed upon the transmission of a ‘general kind of political line and broad ideas’, a distinction that chimes with that offered by Robert Vas in his writings on propagandist cinema (see Chapter I). Indeed, documents from the very early days of the GLC demonstrate the newly-formed local authority’s intention to use cinematic production to communicate a ‘general kind of political line and broad ideas’ aimed at a ‘mass’ audience. One pamphlet states that ‘Film, like television, can convey the Council’s identity to the individual more vividly than other media.’ Later in the same publication, there is insistence that ‘there must be enough central thinking to ensure that all films carry a sense of common identity, and are of a standard which does justice to the stature of the GLC.’¹⁶² For Lebas, local authority films were ‘local films for local people’. Yet GLC documentation contradicts this idea. GLC films in the sixties were, in fact, expected to reach as wide an audience as possible, inside the boundaries of the Greater London

¹⁵⁹ Bailey recalls most of the initial members of the London Squatters Campaign were ‘from the revolutionary libertarian left – there were a couple of anarchists, and three or four people from the Solidarity group, and some ‘unattached’ libertarians, like Jim Radford. There were also two young Liberals, John and Mary Dixon, who came all the way from Camberley, and there were a few more non-political people.’ See Ron Bailey, *The Squatters* (London: Penguin, 1973), 33.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen interviewed by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen’, 130-131. Wollen’s contemporaneous analysis of political cinema was itself a pointed node in a nexus of ideas around cinematic form published in *Screen* throughout 1975, a fruitful nexus that would yield game-changing essays by Laura Mulvey—‘Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure’—and Christian Metz—‘The Imaginary Signifier’—as well as a special edition that focussed on Bertolt Brecht’s impact on the cinema. Metz was published in *Screen* 16:2 (Summer, 1975), Mulvey in *Screen* 16:3 (Autumn, 1975) and the Brecht special issue formed *Screen* 16:4 (Winter, 1975).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *The Future Public Relations, Advertising and Market Research Requirements of the Greater London Council* (London: The London Press Exchange, 1965), GLC/DG/PRB/37, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives, 49-50.

conurbation and abroad. The films produced by the GLC in the 1960s and 1970s were produced with the commercial work of organisations such as British Petroleum in mind. One internal memorandum from J.G.S. Wallace to one ‘Mr. Richards’ from January 1971 states that the recently completed film *Everybody’s London* ‘will be used in several ways’. These modes of exhibition included an exhibition at County Hall (the GLC Headquarters on the south bank of the Thames opposite Westminster Palace) for ‘our constant stream of [visiting] parties’; making the film available to ‘older school pupils through the ILEA [Inner London Education Authority] film library’; loaning the film ‘to organisations in Greater London using distribution arrangements for our existing films as arranged by Sound Services, the C.O.I. [Central Office of Information] and our own information network’ and ‘use on induction and other staff training courses’ for ‘new entrants to the Council’.¹⁶³ In short, GLC cinema was expected to reach as many Londoners—citizens, voters—as possible, in addition to screenings for visiting dignitaries—investors, trading partners—and exhibitions organised across the world. In contrast, Cinema Action’s *Squatters* does not even merit recognition in Bailey’s memoir about precisely the same occupation campaigns documented and supported by the filmmaking collective. The huge disparity in the means of exhibition demonstrated by these cases makes a comparative analysis of the two groups an enticing endeavour, especially given the similarities they offer in spite of their ostensible opposition, grounded one and the same in the cinematic contestation of municipal politics and civic experience.

II. Municipal cinema and community advocacy

In her discussion of the early twentieth-century origins of municipal filmmaking, Lebas centres in on the notion of civic responsibility. This citizens’ cinema was a heterogeneous corpus exhibited with a singular

¹⁶³ ‘Note from J.G.S. Wallace to Mr Richards’ (22 January 1971), GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 2, Proposed Film “Everybody’s London” 1969-1975, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives. Interestingly, only one year earlier, Wallace ponders the use of an advertising campaign similar to one carried out by British Petroleum. Attached to the note is a clipping from the *New Scientist* (17 September 1970), which promotes ‘five enlightening films from BP’. The audience for *Everybody’s London*, Wallace notes cautiously, ‘would be grass roots Londoners, and we shouldn’t meantime aim any higher than this.’ See ‘Note from J.G.S. Wallace to Steve Lyle-Smythe’ (5 October 1970), GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 2, Proposed Film “Everybody’s London” 1969-1975, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

purpose. For Lebas, the Bermondsey Borough Council's films 'and the films rented or borrowed from specialist libraries, other municipalities, voluntary organisations, and the Board of Trade itself were to have a civic place in the everyday life of citizens.' Moreover, 'what the films could do was to make a concept such as 'civics' actual and visually precise by showing the spaces and processes that were needed for it to be believed.'¹⁶⁴ Municipal cinema visualises the physical narrative of London's redevelopment. The stable representations of the city commissioned by the GLC sit in awkward distinction to the comprehensive reorganisation that took place in the 1960s. This paradox is reflected in the films of Cinema Action, among others, as well as unintentionally in GLC cinema. As I demonstrate, the aim of GLC cinema was to ratify a consensual narrative concerned with London's past, present and future, and offer a seamless transition into new spatial developments such as housing and the construction of other civic or public spaces.

In *Representing Reality*, Bill Nichols argues—with reference to distinctions made earlier by David Bordwell—that all documentaries, of which the municipal film is a hybrid cousin, 'take up a specific relationship to their own commentary or perspective.' He states that 'some of these possible relationships can be summarized in terms of formal properties such as the degree of knowledge possessed by the text [the film], subjectivity, self-consciousness, and communicativeness.'¹⁶⁵ On the matter, or 'degree', of subjectivity in documentary cinema, Nichols states that 'social actors', the 'ordinary' subjects of the documentary film, who can 'convey a sense of psychological depth by means of their looks, gestures, tone, inflection, pacing, movement and so on become favoured subjects' to documentarians. Priority, he notes, 'goes to those individuals who can convey a strong sense of personal expressivity that does not seem to be produced by or conjured for the camera—even if, in fact, it is.'¹⁶⁶ Nichols' comments offer some explanation to the cohesiveness evident in the argument for new housing put forward in *Somewhere Decent to Live* and the role of tenants therein. The 'tone' and 'inflection' in the voices of its working-class women are an index of the 'noble peasants' who have populated liberal

¹⁶⁴ Lebas, *Forgotten Futures*, 23-26. The Bermondsey Borough Council were a local council part of the wider London County Council network, previous to the GLC.

¹⁶⁵ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 119. See also, David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 57-61.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 120.

cinematic narratives concerned with ‘the poor’ since the British Commercial Gas Association’s *Housing Problems* (Arthur Elton and E.H. Anstey, 1935).¹⁶⁷

Shortly after the opening sequence of *Somewhere Decent to Live* and the narrator’s introduction to the housing crisis in London, a woman with a soft voice describes the emotional strain of life on a council waiting list. As she chews over the ‘depression’ and ‘humiliation’ of her attempts to secure a mortgage, the montage cuts between footage of a woman’s feet in heeled shoes walking on the pavement and a mobile shot from inside a car as it drives along a street lined with large Victorian terrace houses. The problem, she suggests, is that those comfortable enough to have secured mortgages have never experienced, or have since forgotten, the difficulty of such an endeavour. Another voice points out that slum clearance—typified by the demolition of low density areas of old housing stock and replacing them with high density housing estates—halted completely during the Conservative Party reign of 1951-1964. These voices parrot the same criticisms volleyed towards the previous Conservative government by the then Labour-controlled GLC and must be taken to some degree as political baiting.

Not a Penny on the Rents begins with an aerial establishing shot (most likely from a high-rise block on the Trowbridge estate in Hackney Wick, East London). The camera sweeps across the tree-tops towards St. Paul’s Cathedral, an index of ‘major’ London and a metaphoric marker of the distance between the city’s hegemonic centre and the social reality represented in the film. The camera zooms out to reveal a tower block on the right hand side of the frame. Over this footage, a disembodied cockney voice begins to speak. The speech is equal parts informative, accusatory, combative, ponderous and militant. Later, the speaker appears, an ageing white trade unionist who points out that, despite the unfavourable reportage of the rent-strike in which he and his audience are engaged, most of the attendees at this tenant’s meeting will continue to buy and read the very same newspapers that denigrate them: ‘you give them the tools to beat you with,’ he exclaims.¹⁶⁸ The depiction of the trade unionist constitutes one of the eight formal ‘elements’ that David Glyn and Paul Morris point out make up the

¹⁶⁷ Other pre-war films produced in this register include: *Kensington Calling* (Kensington Housing Trust, 1930), *Paradox City* (Gerard E. Belmont and Leonard A. Day, 1934), *Workers and Jobs* (Arthur Elton, 1935) and *Enough to Eat?* (Edgar Anstey, 1936).

¹⁶⁸ Richard Hoggart thinks especially hard about this in the second part of his 1957 publication *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London: Penguin, 2009).

‘ciné-tracts’ of Cinema Action, which can be parsed into ‘image’ and ‘sound’ categories. Elements I, III, V and VII are image-elements made up of ‘working-class mass campaigning actions’, ‘interviewed militants and activists’, ‘miscellaneous footage’ that does not fall into element I and, finally, ‘titles and other graphic material’. Elements II, IV, VI and VIII are sound-elements. Element II matches the image-element I and element IV matches the image-element III. Element VI differs from this pattern as it is the ‘sound of statements prepared and read for the film by militants.’ Element VIII is described as ‘music, mostly from protest songs’, such as the sequence in *Not a Penny on the Rents* where the campaigners are heard singing ‘Build a Bonfire’.¹⁶⁹ These classifications convey the nature of the formal conventions common in this register of propagandist cinema.

The trade unionist’s militant rhetoric forms the films establishing commentary. However, the matter of voice in civic cinema, especially in the work of Cinema Action, has become a central issue in criticism of the collective, especially their insistence on screening their films to the campaigners they represent. Glyn and Morris argue, in response to an article by Claire Johnston, that active engagement or participation in the construction of a film’s meaning in terms of ‘the film itself as a political issue’, risks the reduction of discussion to ‘internal relationships and ahistorical referential function’. This reduction, they claim, is at once ‘formalistic and aestheticizing, leading to an understanding of the film as commodity, standing on the same (exchange) relationship to all potential audiences.’¹⁷⁰ That is to say, through the creation of an interpretive space in which ‘the ‘single’ ‘voice’ of the film is set against many other voices’, the ‘primary task of the individual at a mass screening is not simply the production of a reading of the film, but rather of understanding the relationship between his/her own voice and the clamour of other voices within the labour movement, including that of the film.’ The problem with this kind of exhibition, Glyn and Morris argue, is that the potential for the mere ‘accumulation of the individual member’s film-viewing experiences’ works against the political necessity of seeing the film-text as in dialogue with rather than producing ‘the requirement for collective action’ and a ‘developing class consciousness’.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ See David Glyn and Paul Morris, ‘Seven Years of Cinema Action’, in *Afterimage* Issue 2 Number 6 (July 1976), 68.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

Squatters nonetheless demonstrates a similar investment in voice and voicing. The film begins, not unlike the housing films of the GLC, with a woman—a housewife—framed in medium black-and-white shot. The woman vents her frustrations with Camden County Council (a London borough council within the remit of the GLC), who had refused to help her and her family in their own search for accommodation. Her treatment at the hands of the local authorities, she goes on to claim, has led the family to squat. This establishing testimony is followed by a montage of boarded-up windows, doorways blocked up with iron shutters and estate agent’s ‘for sale’ signs. The montage illustrates the conflict at the heart of the crisis unfolding in London, which the film explores through the lives of London’s squatting communities.¹⁷² In *Squatters*, the conflict between the GLC and the London Squatters Campaign is depicted as a litter of reference and signage, from the repetition of ‘for sale’ signs to a slogan painted on a sign above the doorway of a squatted house that reads: ‘People Declare War on the Council’; from footage of padlocks and barbed wire to another slogan: ‘AWAKE YOU DEAD PEOPLE’. The locks and wire appear to literalise and parody the notion of ‘defensible space’, a term coined by American urbanist Oscar Newman who was at this moment conducting research into crime and vandalism in public housing ‘projects’ in New York City (see Chapter IV).¹⁷³

The voices of *Squatters* bolster the montage with an additional layer of reference and signage. Occupiers, bailiffs, councillors, excerpts of legislation, addresses and institutions are all handled in the way that factual information is handled—political markers in an argumentative case built for the value and necessity of squatting in London. On the eviction of Maggie O’Shannon of 7 Camelford Road in Kensington, for example, a voice cites Kensington Council Leader Sir Maltby Crofton’s bold riposte that ‘if the working class can’t afford to live in Kensington, they will have to leave.’ The voice-over claims that property owners had received grants from local and central government with which to improve their recently-acquired property.¹⁷⁴ Another address is voiced: 81 Courtland Avenue in Ilford, East London.

¹⁷² In addition to Bailey’s memoir, see also Astrid Proll, ed., *Goodbye to London: Radical Art and Politics in the 70s* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010).

¹⁷³ The first results of Newman’s work would be published in 1973. See Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City* (London: Architectural Press, 1972).

¹⁷⁴ This scheme is discussed retrospectively in the ‘Camberwell Grove’ episode of the documentary series *The Secret History of Our Streets* (BBC, 2012).

Next, the voice-over offers the home and business addresses of Alan Quartermain, a bailiff sub-contracted by the GLC who had become notorious among squatters for the violent evictions carried out at the Council's behest. Quartermain and his associates are accused of causing one occupier, Olive Mercer (81 Courtland Avenue), to suffer a miscarriage after an eviction in which she was allegedly struck in the stomach with an iron bar.¹⁷⁵ At a historical juncture wherein the occupation of empty residential property was not illegal, the aldermen and councillors of the GLC are outed as 'accessories to illegal evictions'. This partisan articulation of the GLC's shady legal and spatial practices counters the GLC Public Relation Branch's filtration of idealised narratives into the televisual and print media. The weaving together of voice-over with the testimony of squatters and the voices of the 'grass-roots' political left are crucial to the creation of this counter-narrative.

Resistance to housing policy and the construction of narratives outside of the GLC's municipal organisation are unsurprisingly absent from *Living at Thamesmead*. The film was the third commissioned by the GLC to supplement both the literal construction of the South-East London housing estate and its imaginative construction by Public Relations Branch press releases and pamphlets. Thamesmead heralded the first attempt by the GLC, in collaboration with private development contractors, to combine the garden city aesthetic of the Victorian urbanist Ebenezer Howard with the bold modernist designs of young GLC Housing Department architects. In a speech given in 1967, Leader of the London Borough of Greenwich T.E. Smith attempts to come to terms with the complexities of Thamesmead and its construction. Although Smith describes the development as 'about the size of one of the new towns [Becontree, Essex, for example]', he regards it as a special challenge because 'we have planned and intend to integrate this great new community into the civic and work-a-day life of the two existing London boroughs[Greenwich and Bexley].'¹⁷⁶ For Smith, 'it is vital that we should avoid there being any feeling of 'two separate townships' - the old and the new - or of the idea of separateness [...] This is why we, at borough level, are busy planning not only the new services which we shall need to provide and administer in Thamesmead but also proposals for what the planners

¹⁷⁵ Many of these narratives are given greater detail in Bailey's *The Squatters*, especially the two chapters dedicated to Redbridge.

¹⁷⁶ 'Thamesmead Speech made by T.E. Smith, Leader of the London Borough of Greenwich' (February 1967) GLC/DG/PRB/35/001, Press Releases, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

call the ‘urban renewal’ and revitalisation of the Woolwich Central area.¹⁷⁷ Confronting a segregated London appears to deeply trouble Smith. This may partly explain why funds were invested into producing three linked films on the development of Thamesmead.

The first two films, *Thamesmead '70* and its eponymous predecessor from 1968, are typical GLC public information films that combine paternalistic commentary with footage of the civic spaces and objects described by the commentary. An internal note disseminated by GLC management indicates that *Thamesmead '68* was, moreover, dubbed into ten languages and that, by 1970, the Central Office of Information (COI) had distributed sixty prints throughout the world.¹⁷⁸

In *Thamesmead '70*, recorded footage is married to static shots of maps, animated sequences and footage of architectural models, to persuade the public about the validity and necessity of the new estate. As with all GLC productions, the voiceover commentary is central. After an opening montage of famous landmarks such as County Hall, the Tower of London and St. Paul’s all shot from the river, the commentary—read by actor Robert Gladwell—aligns the proposals for Thamesmead with the functional history of the Thames. Gladwell points out that the area is one of the last large undeveloped sites of land in Greater London. The montage then shows this abandoned space—the quietude of the once-inhabited place is underscored by the relative lack of voice-over commentary. Long sequences of groundwork carried out by plant machinery describe the machines as ‘ponderous, powerful and strangely prehistoric’ machines, another attempt to locate the development of Thamesmead in an historical trajectory that begins with ancient construction methods and seamlessly integrates the new with the old.

Living at Thamesmead, completed four years later, signalled a radical shift in GLC film production. The substitution of actor’s dialogue for voice-over, of diegetic speech for non-diegetic voice-over, is performed without the delivery of GLC policy being corrupted. In one scene, Tom informs Sally that the pub ‘always stays open ‘til five-thirty’. In another, focussed upon the community church, Tom states, ‘You’d never know it was a church if it wasn’t for the cross,’ to which Sally replies, ‘Well it’s

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Note to the Leader of the Council from the Director of Public Information’, GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 2, Proposed Film “Everybody’s London” 1969-1975, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives, 2.

more like a community centre anyway, everything goes on there.’¹⁷⁹ This exchange is followed by a montage of precisely the ‘everything’ that goes on at the church: dancing classes, the local Girl’s Brigade (known colloquially as ‘Brownies’), amateur dramatics, as well as more conventional practices like Christian mass. At another point, Tom and Sally meet their respective families in the Pyramid Club (the local pub). These sequences play out as a series of sequential ‘flash-backs’, a device rarely used in the public information mode and more common in ‘fictional’ narrative cinema.

Lebas describes *Living at Thamesmead* as illustrative of ‘hyper-institutionalised family life.’¹⁸⁰ This institutionalisation is underscored by the informational speech of its teenage residents, as if they are unable to give voice to anything beyond the central tenets of local authority policy. The film can be located along the arc of municipal filmmaking that Lebas reads in terms of nascent sound technologies and the deployment of voices. In pre-war silent films, she argues,

The images speak for themselves as vox populi; each spectator’s commentary is to himself or herself as an inner vox Deus. The influence after the Second World War of Ministry of Information documentary sound films on municipal films, with their Griersonian notion of the ‘average man’ and the BBC’s promotion of the ‘people’s war’ through the use of working-class friendly regional accents, represents a shift in mode of address to their spectator-constituents and new tensions between local and national identity.¹⁸¹

The civic voice in municipal cinema functions not only as a site of labour or appropriation, but as the site of a privileged white working-class perspective, which speaks from its position within the security of the local and national government policies that foreground the sanctity of the nuclear family, yet one with pretensions to betterment in terms of property ownership. In *Living at Thamesmead*, the emergent working-classes speak only by means of informational sound-bites and ventriloquise local authority

¹⁷⁹ Although remaining off-screen, dialogic commentary is also put to work in another municipal film from the period: *Barbican* (Stephen Cross, 1969), commissioned by the City of London Corporation.

¹⁸⁰ Lebas, *Forgotten Futures*, 71.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

policy, move only the spaces provided by architectural design and aspire only to reproduce, after much antagonism, in the spaces allocated to them.

III. Gender norms and municipal space

As early as 1963, the LCC—then in its final years—had pondered the possibility of producing a film about the Council’s ‘housing operations’. A report by the Director of the LCC Housing Committee concludes, however, that such a project was beyond the Council’s financial remit.¹⁸² In 1965, the GLC revisited the idea of using cinema as an effective policy tool. A report suggested that the ‘council and departments should aim to build up a series of information films each designed to engender public interest and support for some aspect of the GLC’s service to Londoners.’¹⁸³ Unlike what was commonplace in other large industrial or government organisations, the report recommends against the formation of an internal ‘film unit’, ‘since the requirements of various services will call for a variety of treatments and styles.’¹⁸⁴ A variety in treatment and style, however, did little to offset the entrenchment of social norms in GLC films. In one treatment written for the GLC film *Everybody’s London* (1971), director John Pitt highlights facets of the representational strategy of the GLC Public Relations Branch typical in their depictions of women and the division of gender roles. Housing, Pitt suggests, would make ‘the most natural topic with which to begin’ the film’s opening section—it plays, he claims, an important role in ‘the planning of an integral society.’¹⁸⁵ Pitt’s identification of the relationship between the household and the social, as well as spatial organisation, of the urban community is crucial. His articulation of the domestic space and the gendered roles therein are faithful reflections of the GLC’s social politics. Pitt points out that across the various GLC departments—Health and Safety, Housing,

¹⁸² ‘London County Council, Housing Publications Housing Committee, Report (22 March 1963) by the Director of Housing’, GLC/DG/PRB/22/093, Publications Housing Policy, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

¹⁸³ *The Future Public Relations, Advertising and Market Research Requirements of the Greater London Council*, 49-50.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ John Pitt, *The Greater London Council: A Film Treatment* (London: Gerard Holdsworth Productions LTD, 1974), GLC/DG/PRB/22/60, File 1, ‘Proposed Film “Everybody’s London”, 1969-1975’, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archive, 5.

and Recreation, for example—there ‘is much visual and aural material capable of being collated and arranged so as to give a general picture of GLC involvement in the ‘domestic’ area; yet expressed in subjective terms, either by the participants themselves, or by those people (i.e. rate-paying Londoners) on whose behalf all the activities witnessed are being carried out.’¹⁸⁶

Pitt’s comments on the civic nature of the production and exhibition of municipal cinema recall an observation made by Lebas, that municipal films ‘are political films’ by which ‘a local representative state institution with its own historic life claims the film as its own, and gives itself the authority to claim the community it represents also as its own.’¹⁸⁷ In his script treatment, Pitt deploys mothers as immovable markers of domesticity:

From the ‘bridging device’ into a representative selection of the front doors, windows, and other views of GLC homes (without undue emphasis on high-rise flats); then to women, the personification of the home – women alone and silent, women talking, talkative; women outside their homes, inside shops, along streets and shopping precincts [...] The general background noise is punctuated at times by what they, and others, are actually saying. Some of this is general, some is to do with the GLC, or rather the effect for good or otherwise which the GLC has, in their opinion, on themselves and their environment.¹⁸⁸

Pitt’s treatment accords with Lebas’ claim that municipal films ‘expanded and redefined the political and territorial boundaries of local civil society’ while ‘channelling social resistance and needs into model behaviour that projected a consensual and attainable future, all of it belonging to the municipality.’¹⁸⁹ In short, municipal cinema assimilates the social and political heterogeneity of its citizenry, recodes its

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Lebas, *Forgotten Futures*, 38.

¹⁸⁸ Pitt, *The Greater London Council*, 5.

¹⁸⁹ Lebas, *Forgotten Futures*, 38.

unassimilable elements, then projects this reorganised civic experience using strict formal techniques, or, as Lebas puts it, ‘realism as familiarity.’¹⁹⁰

This contestation of the municipal plays out clearly in *Somewhere Decent to Live*. GLC policy, which puts the onus on the stability and reproduction of the nuclear family, usually dictates that women tenants play out their social roles as citizens and voters through the performance of motherhood and housewifery. One Public Relations Branch press release from August 1967, in fact, celebrates four mothers who ‘star’ in the film and ‘give their views on the problems and joys of obtaining a decent home.’ Anthony Fletcher, the Vice-Chairman of the GLC Housing Committee is quoted in the film’s press release and gives praise to a ‘thought-provoking’ and ‘stimulating’ documentary. He goes on to say that ‘Much of the film’s appeal[...] lies in the fact that ordinary Londoners are talking about their problems – people living in bad homes, and people whose lives have changed for the better since they have been rehoused in decent homes’.¹⁹¹ All voices ultimately articulate the same argument with varying degrees of cohesiveness, yet the film itself argues from a somewhat anachronistic notion: that only the working-classes lived in public housing. Since 1949, local authorities had encouraged middle-class families to move into municipal dwellings in the hope of creating ‘mixed communities’. The paucity of adequate housing for London’s labouring classes in the late 1960s is, arguably, an indictment of the proto-‘trickle-down’ gesture of the socialist government twenty years previously.

These voices of analysis and complaint are always disembodied; they are off-screen and ask the spectator to evaluate who they may or may not be by the register and pronunciation of their voice and the remit of their vocabulary. That is to say, these voices encourage and confirm the viewer’s prejudices with regard to class. Moreover, they are always the voices of housewives or those of ‘experts’, decipherable by the subject of their dialogues: money and functional space for the former; design and planning for the latter. This combination is not accidental, but rather an expression of an historical relationship played out between the state and the home. As Lebas points out, after the Second World War public relations departments ‘took to promoting municipal assets and services and the local labour

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 38-42.

¹⁹¹ ‘Mothers ‘Star’ in GLC Housing Film (1 August 1967), GLC/DG/PRB/35/002, Press Releases, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archive.

force on behalf of business interests with outside investors and government departments as audiences in mind.’ In general, she observes,

[...] the focus changed from showing what people were entitled to and could do to live differently to showing how professionals were about to change their lives[...] In pre-war films, the Medical Officer of Health (MoH) or the doctor was the authority figure that taught parents to look after their bodies; in post-war films it was the borough engineer, the architect or the planner who oversaw the workings of the environment and the assigned places of individuals within it.¹⁹²

The accommodation of London’s white working classes and the representation of their reorganised private lives were arguably part of an economic strategy bolstered by a cultural campaign that sought to dissent against the changing nature of London’s economy. *Somewhere Decent to Live* claims that selection policy for the 25,000 new homes built by both the local authorities and private developers each year was based on general ‘needs’ being met. Emphasis on the reproduction of family life would appear to narrow that field: single men and women, the homeless, economic migrants, the elderly and those who practiced alternative or outlawed forms of urban occupancy—Gypsies, homosexuals, squatters—were not taken into account.¹⁹³

Following a white-on-black subtitle that reads ‘Tenants’ Action Sept 22–Nov 19 1968’, the montage in *Not a Penny on the Rents* utilises footage from street demonstrations that zoom in on banners referring to the represented GLC housing estates: Maida Vale, Fanshaw, Hereford, Warwick, South Oxhey, St. Helier. A man’s voice claims that where once tenants were ‘lucky’ to take occupancy of a GLC dwelling, now ‘it’s like living under a bad private landlord’, given the rate of rent increases and

¹⁹² Lebas, *Forgotten Futures*, 18.

¹⁹³ Curiously, Ruth Glass also makes no reference to these forms of dwelling in her seminal 1964 study on transformations in London, only to what could be articulated as *legitimate* forms of precarious dwelling. This can be explained in part by Glass’ approach to the issue, which considers changes to legislation and economic transformations associated with immigration and deindustrialisation. Nonetheless, her identification of those who dwell beyond the security of the Welfare State is notable for its omissions: those who do not *rent* or those who do not yet form distinct or visible enough social categories.

decrease in maintenance. These declarations counter those of the patriarch in the GLC's *Somewhere Decent to Live*, in which the council are held up as an exemplary landlord who privilege the white working-class family. Children, too, are depicted as an integral part of the demonstration, portrayed as they march with their own smaller banners. Another significant banner represents the 'Barricade Babes' from the Suffolk Estate in Hackney and exclaims 'We Closed Regents Row'. In this visual and political rhetoric, the lives of women are integrated into a political circuit wherein opposition to housing policy is managed by community housewives. These developments are voiced in the film by one woman who notes that 'when we heard about this rent increase, I just put my coat on and went around to see what the rest of the neighbours thought about it and I got such a good response I started up our tenants' association. And then we amalgamated with all the others and this [the demonstrations and rent strike] is the result.'

GLC documentation of the period univocally highlights the efficacy of the rent strike. In its public struggle against rent strikers, the Council made great efforts to highlight exemplary tenancies in the print media. In January 1968, the Public Relations Branch issued a press release claiming that 'Mrs Clara Eliza McBrown, aged 88, of 37 Durham Hill, Downham Estate, Lewisham' died leaving a set of twenty-nine impeccable rent books with only one shilling in arrears over a forty-one year period. The statement proposes that McBrown's rent books, 'together with her perfect tenancy file should be placed in the archives as a memorial to a tenant who will not go unmourned by the GLC.'¹⁹⁴ The selection of this tenant's exemplary behaviour as an act to be publicly celebrated is a pointed performance of municipal public relations. The press release offers an awkward counter-narrative to the blanket coverage given to the GLC's transformation of tenants into owner-occupiers and to the rent strike itself.

¹⁹⁴'Memorial to 'Model' GLC Tenant' (22 January 1968), GLC/DG/PRB/35/003, Greater London Collection, London Metropolitan Archives. The statement is of particular interest at this juncture, given other press releases issued by the Council that promote the transformation of tenants into owner-occupiers. See 'Overwhelming Response to GLC Invitation to Buy Council Houses' (28 June 1967) GLC/DG/PRB/35/001, Press Releases; '1000 GLC Tenants Hope to Own their Council Houses Soon' (14 September 1967) and 'Harold Hill Man First GLC Tenant to Buy Council House (2 October 1967), GLC/DG/PRB/35/002, Press Releases; 'GLC Tenants to Buy their Council Estate' (14 July 1971), GLC/DG/PRB/35/014, Press Releases; 'GLC to Sell Another Housing Estate' (26 April 1972), GLC/DG/PRB/35/016, Press Releases, 'GLC Sale of Council Houses—Success Story 10,000th Sale to be Celebrated' (17 July 1972), GLC/DG/PRB/35/017, Press Releases, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

One document responds to early dissent in London and discusses a recent Council report (4 July 1967) wherein the GLC Housing Committee ‘strongly advocated’ a ‘common rent structure’ across the Greater London boroughs. This reorganisation of the economic base of tenancy in London saw a rate developed whereby those living in similar accommodation in different boroughs would pay similar rents.¹⁹⁵

Not a Penny on the Rents challenges GLC rhetoric around this restructuring, fixed in both social and economic terms. The montage incorporates the social and cinematic activity of women such as the ‘Barricade Babes’ into the footage of political activity and, in doing so, portrays the political activity of the rent strikers as one that looks to traverse the gendered divisions offered in GLC cinema. Over footage of one demonstration, in which the ‘Barricade Babes’ banner is depicted among others from housing estates, a man’s voice lists the ‘three things that don’t do the tenants any good’: land speculations, profits on building and money-lenders. However, the mobilisation of a group of ‘babes’ problematises the action undertaken, especially given the pejorative connotations of the word—infantile, immature, naïve or the addressee of patronising affection.

In *Squatters*, the depiction of women has even less pretension towards progressive representation, as it relies on depictions of municipal space quite common in GLC cinema. The sanctity of the family and moral gestures—the physical assault of a pregnant woman reported in the film—could be construed as manipulative. This occurs, in part, due to the use of a male voice-over in *Squatters*. The deployment of such an atypical ‘element’ in the cinematic technique of Cinema Action jars with the attempted equalisations of footage and soundtrack offered in *Not a Penny on the Rents*. In addition to the woman whose testimony establishes the film’s voice-over commentary, the case of Maggie O’Shannon (an absent referent in the film) and the story of Olive Mercer (portrayed as a mother for whom sympathy is elicited by the claim of the aforementioned assault and subsequent miscarriage at the

¹⁹⁵ ‘GLC Leader Calls for One Rent Standard for All Council Tenants’ (27 June 1967), GLC/DG/PRB/35/001, Press Releases. See also ‘GLC Housing Chairman Worried that Tenants will be Deprived of Rent Rebate’, ‘GLC Tenants Not Paying Increase Receive Letters’, (23 January 1969) and ‘GLC Withdraws Possession Order’ (25 April 1969), GLC/DG/PRB/35/007; ‘GLC Rent Increase Proposed’ (27 November 1969), GLC/DG/PRB/35/009; ‘GLC ‘Newspaper’ to Help Tenants Claim Rent Rebates’ (18 September 1972), GLC/DG/PRB/35/018, Press Releases, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

hands of a brutal man), the film lacks the presence of a woman's voice figured in an active manner (as in *Not a Penny on the Rents*). Men, too, complain about the inadequacy of the GLC and the changes in housing policy that have led them to become squatters and defend their position, but they are also the voices of militancy and historical exposition. For example, one campaign member recounts a particularly violent eviction in which he claims the squatters fought back against teams of bailiffs armed with bricks, helmets and dustbin lids for shields—he paraphrases the Forcible Entry Act of 1381, still in use in 1969: 'Nobody shall take possession of land whether rightfully with stronghand or multitude of people.' The activist declares that the central tenet of the campaign is 'propaganda by deed', an anarchist principle developed in the writings of Carlo Pisacane and Mikhail Bakunin. He goes on to discuss the notion of 'dual power', another anarchist principle conceptualised by Pierre Joseph Proudhon and popularised by Lenin. Squatting, the activist argues, is merely the start of a larger development that will grow once solidarity with construction workers is attained.

As with other challenges to urban planning and housing, such as rent strikes, homelessness and resistance to the clearing of old housing stock, squatting was of great concern to the GLC throughout the late sixties and into the seventies. As historian of housing Colin Ward points out, after a spate of High Court injunctions against squatters of London's hotels and luxury flats in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, urban squatting 'continued quietly, especially as local councils acquired vast tracts of urban housing and left it empty for eventual comprehensive redevelopment.'¹⁹⁶ Thus, Ward argues, urban squatting 're-emerged as a public issue in 1968 thanks to two activists, Ron Bailey and Jim Radford, who had been busy agitating against the failure of local authorities to comply with their statutory duty to the homeless, trying after long and bitter campaigns to draw public attention to conditions in hostels for homeless families.'¹⁹⁷ Ward suggests that, in the context of the squatting campaigns of the 1960s, campaigners sought to challenge the ways in which municipal socialism had become compromised by economic liberalism. Campaigners upheld the defence of municipal socialism as a vital part of a political strategy to promote empathy and moral duty, and to denounce the powerlessness and poverty created by entrenched socio-economic structures.

¹⁹⁶ Colin Ward, *Cotters and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2009), 160-61.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

These structures can be read underneath the ventriloquisms and narrative drive of *Living at Thamesmead*, where the sex lives of its adolescent estate-dwellers bubble away. A series of scenes in the film illustrate Sally's and Tom's attempts to both reaffirm and reproduce those economic and gender norms through cultural and sexual practices. In one scene—another flashback—Sally watches Tom play in a football match outside. Later, they are play-fighting. Tom trips Sally up, falls on top of her and leans in to kiss her as the camera takes his place and blurs as it zooms in on Sally's pursed lips (viewers are clearly encouraged to identify with Tom). As the picture refocuses, long after their embrace or so it seems, Sally is heard talking about Tom's father. This sequence is the first of many to depict the sexual frustration of the young couple. Another scene portrays Tom trying to kiss Sally against a wall featuring chalk graffiti of a heart bearing a Cupid's arrow between their names. 'Tom', says Sally, 'someone might be looking.' Sally's frigid caution ironically contests a claim made by Oscar Newman, who claims in the BBC documentary *The Writing on the Wall* (see Chapter IV) that modernist housing estates are dangerous due to their lack of windows facing into communal areas and too many secluded walkways. Yet another scene portrays Tom and Sally kissing on the sofa in Tom's family living room, where they are interrupted by Tom's younger siblings and then his father when he returns from the pub. The final scenes depict Tom and Sally walking across the pedestrianised estate to the housing office to apply for a home on Thamesmead. As in Lloyd Reckord's *Dream A40*, where sexuality is regimented between public and private space, the Thamesmead estate becomes a de-eroticised landscape, or at least a landscape in which the performance of teenage sexuality is disparaged or even proscribed physically and morally, anywhere except in the domestic space (this is also the case in *Dream A40* and the Wolfenden Report of 1957, to which that film responds). This is *Living at Thamesmead's* clearest echo of Victorian municipal concerns with venereal disease and efforts to 'cleanse' London of vice and prostitution.¹⁹⁸

Through this precise narrative structure, *Living at Thamesmead* presents the estate as a well-organised space that provides everything for the rate-paying Londoner, that there is no need to look beyond its boundaries or seek social change. This assumption almost chimes with Ruth Glass' fears that

¹⁹⁸ For an historical account of this tendency, see the chapter 'Cesspool City', in Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago, 1991), 26-46.

Abercrombie and Shaw's famous graphic illustration of London designed in 1944, which represented the city as a series of interlocking organic cells with civic nuclei was, in the reality of sixties London, a rigid cast of segregated districts.¹⁹⁹ *Living at Thamesmead*, in this respect, may be viewed as the visual depiction of the solution to the urban problems presented in *Somewhere Decent to Live*.

IV. Conclusion: making the cinematic public

From its inception in 1965, the GLC campaigned rigorously for its right to govern Greater London (composed of twelve 'inner' and twenty new 'outer' boroughs, but not the semi-autonomous City of London), which, after incorporating large parts of surrounding counties, had become twice the size of its predecessor, the county of London (comprised only of 'inner' London and the City of London). Of central importance to this campaign would be the efficacy of the Council's communications with its electorate. This concern is laid out clearly in a report on public relations and publicity published in October 1965:

[...] The method of communication with each target group should use all the techniques of publicity available - local GLC offices, GLC publications, exhibitions, films, TV, and broadcasting, press and advertising - and they must be co-ordinated. [...] Advertising, public relations and research work must be co-ordinated and inter-supporting. If they are used separately and without co-ordination, results are more likely to achieve far less than maximum effect.²⁰⁰

For the GLC, nothing less than total media coverage would satisfy its quest for political legitimacy and spatial hegemony. The author(s) of the report speculate on the possibility of working with the BBC as

¹⁹⁹ See Ruth Glass, 'Introduction: Aspects of Change', in *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), xix.

²⁰⁰ *The Greater London Council Report on Public Relations and Publicity* (London: Pritchard, Wood and Partners, 1965), GLC/DG/PRB/37, London Metropolitan Archives, 4. At this moment, the GLC was faced with not only a struggle for legitimacy, but with a desire to forge a recognisable profile or brand. The same document deals with the importance of a uniform public insignia, such as those used by Shell, Penguin or British Rail.

one potentially effective means of achieving this goal through moving images. The subject of film comes up not only with regard to public relations or publicity: it is considered central to a number of departments inside the GLC. As stated above, GLC filmmaking was part of a communicative circuit that included press relations, TV, written publications (pamphlets, brochures), exhibitions (such as the Ideal Home Exhibition, an annual event held since 1908), public talks and recruitment. As one report motions, 'Planning would be an obvious subject for a first-class film - especially the launch of the first overall [development] plan'. Additional plans for the use of a film 'specifically about the present and future development of London transport and roads' were also floated. The same document suggests that, as with planning, 'films and exhibitions will have an important role in projecting' the work of the Architects' Department.²⁰¹

This agenda set the tone for the GLC films I have examined. *Somewhere Decent to Live*, for example, keys into an established liberal tendency in British documentary that deploys testimony from tenants and informational insights into the workings of the commissioning organisation in support of the latest municipal campaign to rid London of its 'inadequate' housing. The second part of the film, in which the narrator offers solutions to the problems laid out in the first part, mobilises testimonies that support the perceived success of industrial displacement and the construction of tower blocks. In one scene, a man's voice claims that he and his family agreed to move into a council flat without even viewing it first, for, as the voice points out, he knew the GLC would not move his family into a 'dilapidated' house. Understood in the context of films such as *The Block* (Paul Watson, 1972, see Chapter IV) and studies into housing, such as Elizabeth Burney's on immigration, a hierarchy of social groups becomes clear: dilapidated or 'patched' housing in slum clearance districts was frequently used by the GLC to house 'less deserving' tenants.

The formation and evolution of the municipal subject at the heart of Elizabeth Lebas' seminal study of municipal cinema is deeply complicated when considered in terms of housing and its representation in radical filmmaking. Indeed, as Lebas points out, local authority cinema 'gives up the

²⁰¹*The Future Public Relations, Advertising and Market Research Requirements of the Greater London Council* (London: The London Press Exchange, 1965), GLC/DG/PRB/37, London Metropolitan Archives, 13-22. Notably, where the work of the Architects' Department is considered worthy of explication through cinema, the Housing Department itself is not thought compatible with the medium.

way in which strategies of social, economic and political amelioration play out in the lives of the citizenry,²⁰² but in order to trace such a trajectory, certain assumptions must be made about who that citizenry are and multitudinous identities must be dealt with. That is to say, where local authority cinema yielded narratives of amelioration, I would argue that radical collective filmmaking responded with narratives of dispossession and exploitation. If the foregoing analysis uses two facets of minor cinema to highlight the complexity of London's municipal politics in the long sixties, then it must also be said that that complexity cannot be fixed by the camera's gaze.

²⁰² Lebas, *Forgotten Futures*, 6.

CHAPTER IV

THE BBC, SOCIAL HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING

I. Introduction

In her detailed study of municipal cinema *Forgotten Futures*, Elizabeth Lebas suggests that the development of regional television in Britain after the Second World War effectively replaced municipal filmmaking.²⁰³ In response to Lebas' claim, this chapter considers the depiction of public housing and town planning in London and the ways in which the BBC portrays its own role in social organisation. I will discuss four documentaries commissioned by the BBC: *I Love This Dirty Town* (Ron Parks, 1969), *The Smithsons on Housing* (B.S. Johnson, 1970), *The Block* (Paul Watson, 1972) and *Horizon: The Writing on the Wall* (John M. Mansfield, 1974).²⁰⁴ These television films (works of minor British cinema neglected in scholarship on both national cinema and the BBC) display formative and significant tensions between the BBC and the GLC's housing and town planning policies in London after 1968. This chapter will discuss the significance of these films as historical and political documents as well as the peculiarities that underline their public reception in Britain. Beyond initial responses in newspapers and BBC Audience Research questionnaires following their original broadcasts, popular commentary on these programmes has waned considerably. Surveying their reception is in this context illuminating, since the films produced by the BBC—as a new form of civic

²⁰³ Elizabeth Lebas, *Forgotten Futures: British Municipal Cinema 1920-1980* (London: Black Dog, 2011), 18.

²⁰⁴ In this chapter I use the terms 'film' and 'programme' interchangeably, as my analysis necessarily isolates the cinematic works under discussion. In his study of television published in 1975, Raymond Williams argues that, in 'all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence and flow.' For Williams, a 'book or a pamphlet was taken and read as a specific item. A meeting occurred at a particular date and place. A play was performed in a particular theatre at a set hour. The difference in broadcasting is not only that these events, or events resembling them, are available inside the home, by the operation of a switch. It is that the real programme that is offered is a *sequence* or set of alternative sequences of these and other similar events, which are then available in a single dimension and in a single operation.' See Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 1990), 86-87.

cinema—had an even wider catchment of viewers than GLC cinema, with great potential to sway public opinion towards municipal housing and the local authorities who commission its construction.

These films are united by their presentation of a critical position against local authority housing and planning policy. Each deploys a number of voices to probe the complexity of housing policy, yet ultimately end up in the same place: the condemnation of central authority governance, the legacy of campaigns such as those documented by Cinema Action. The earliest film I discuss, *I Love This Dirty Town* (Ron Parks, 1969), emerged as the political waves receded—were beaten back—from the high-watermark of May 1968. It claims to serve as a warning that the burning buildings of Detroit, Chicago and New York City may not be distant news in Britain for so long, if town planning policies that segregated citizens continued along their current path in Britain. The film is notable for its relative lack of interviews with tenants, a common feature in BBC housing documentaries including the other three discussed in this chapter. Instead, the film’s narrator Margaret Drabble²⁰⁵ castigates ‘obsessive’ local authorities, the paternalism of town planners and the ‘egotism’ of municipal architects. ‘Planners are so paternalistic’, she comments, ‘don’t they know that a lot of people have plans of their own, even have self-interest, even want to better themselves.’

The Smithsons on Housing (B.S. Johnson, 1970) views architects from the opposite perspective.²⁰⁶ Rather than berate and blame architects, town planners and councillors for developing unused, dangerous or even ‘ghettoised’ public spaces, Johnson’s thirty-minute film celebrates the work of his friends Peter and Alison Smithson, the architects who conceived the Smithdon High School in Hunstanton, Norfolk, the *Economist* building in Piccadilly, Central London and Robin Hood Gardens in Poplar, East London. It is the latter, a public housing estate built to replace cleared Victorian housing stock, that forms the subject of Johnson’s film. The Smithsons are shot in close-up discussing their work in a monotone voice, an issue noted in BBC’s Audience Research Department in its survey of public

²⁰⁵ Drabble is a British novelist whose works include *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), *The Millstone* (1964) and *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967).

²⁰⁶ B.S. Johnson was a writer of innovative novels, such as *Albert Angelo* (1964), *The Unfortunates* (1969) and *House Mother Normal* (1971). In 1972, Johnson co-edited the collective novel *London Consequences* with Margaret Drabble.

responses to *I Love This Dirty Town*.²⁰⁷ Both films, moreover, were disliked by BBC management and were subsequently refused repeats on television.²⁰⁸

The Block (Paul Watson, 1972), depicts the plight of the residents of Chaucer House, a half-way house in Southwark, South London. In a review for the *Daily Telegraph*, Richard Last describes the film as “‘Cathy Come Home’ for real’ and its social subjects as ‘the ultimate underprivileged.’²⁰⁹ Of the four films discussed in this chapter, *The Block* was the only one to broadcast on BBC1, rather than the ‘minority interest’, ‘specialist’, channel BBC2.²¹⁰ Consequently, the film was viewed by 13.6% of the UK population and its public reception was mixed to say the least. The responses to the film documented in BBC audience reports and media commentary provide a fascinating insight into British perceptions of the Welfare State, homelessness, poverty, suicide and the consequences of redevelopment in the early seventies. The BFI Mediatheque synopsis of the film describes Watson as a ‘pioneer of the fly-on-the-wall’ technique, who carefully frames the narratives of a handful of Chaucer House residents in order to pierce the dense fog of council procedures and regulations.²¹¹ Prominence is given to characters such as Edie, a young tenant twice abandoned by the fathers of her children and John, the leader of the Chaucer House tenants’ association as well as the film’s *de facto* protagonist.

The Writing on the Wall (John M. Mansfield, 1974) was part of the *Horizon* series and similarly employs a partisan diegetic voice in the form of Professor Oscar Newman, author of *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City*. Newman’s voice is pitted against that of the narrator Paul Vaughan, as well as numerous tenants marshalled to offer their testimonies on public housing both past and present. Like *I Love This Dirty Town*, Mansfield’s film challenges British town planning and housing policies through the lens of North American housing and town planning policies.

²⁰⁷ *I Love This Dirty Town*, File VR/68/21, Folder R9/7/97, Audience Research Reports, BBC Written Archives.

²⁰⁸ Both *I Love This Dirty Town* and *The Smithsons on Housing* were ostensibly lost to the public audiences until placed once again in the public domain through internet sources, such as the BBC’s ‘iPlayer’ and YouTube.

²⁰⁹ Richard Last, “‘Cathy Comes Home’ becomes real’, *Daily Telegraph* (20 September 1972), 13. *Cathy Come Home* (Ken Loach, 1966) was broadcast as part of the BBC’s *Wednesday Play* series. The film is notable for its docu-fiction techniques and subject matter that brought homelessness and housing issues to a mainstream audience.

²¹⁰ See *Sound and Television Broadcasting in Britain*, Central Office of Information Reference Pamphlet (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1966), 13.

²¹¹ BFI Screen Online entry for *The Block* (Paul Watson, 1972), <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1220375/>.

With Newman's claims that modern architecture and high crime rates go hand in hand, Vaughan asks over one shot of the sprawling and just completed Aylesbury estate in South London, 'imagine your home is on this corridor. Who might be waiting for you in the shadows?' The perceived barbarism of modern architecture pervades *The Writing on the Wall*. Given the scope of the BBC's television network, it is clear that such perspectives had the potential to persuade millions of British viewers that housing estates such as the Aylesbury were 'muggers' paradises' well before the term gained political currency.

By 1966, the BBC's flagship television service BBC1 was available to over ninety-nine per cent of the British TV licence-paying population. BBC2, the latest addition to the Corporation's vast communications portfolio, lacked anywhere near as much coverage. These claims are put forward in *Sound and Television Broadcasting in Britain*, a 'reference pamphlet' published by the Government's Central Office of Information (COI). BBC2, the pamphlet observes, was 'at present available only in certain regions of the country but it is spreading rapidly and is expected to reach some two-thirds of the population by the end of June 1966.'²¹² The pamphlet goes on to claim that the introduction of BBC2 to the domestic service 'has led to greater opportunities for the provision of programmes for minority interests or specialised needs [...]'²¹³ It is notable, then, that three of the four films I discuss in this chapter were broadcast on the BBC's fledgling service. As mentioned above, only *The Block* benefitted from transmission to a national licence-paying audience and, as audience research reports show, stirred a polarised response from viewers.²¹⁴

The BBC domestic service can be situated historically as just one node in an extensive post-imperial or, arguably, neo-colonial international communications network. Other services detailed in the COI pamphlet include the World Service (formerly the Empire Service), services broadcast in Africa, the Middle East ('Arabia'), the East (from Iran to Burma), the Far East (China, Vietnam) and Latin America. At the time of the pamphlet's publication, the BBC broadcast its services in twenty-two

²¹²*Sound and Television Broadcasting in Britain*, Central Office of Information Reference Pamphlet (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1966), 13.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *The Block*, File VR/72/548, Folder R9/7/119, Audience Research Reports, BBC Written Archives. I will comment upon these reports in Section IV.

languages outside of Europe.²¹⁵ The documentaries discussed herein reflect the international scope of BBC programming. *I Love This Dirty Town* attempts to translate the work of North American architectural critic Jane Jacobs into a critique of both local and national British town planning policies with mixed results. *The Smithsons on Housing* discusses the work of Alison and Peter Smithson, the preeminent British exponents of Brutalism, a high modernist architectural aesthetic developed in response to the work of European architects such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier.²¹⁶ *The Writing on the Wall* features Oscar Newman, whose theories of crime and public housing are central to the film's argument. Only *The Block* sits in distinction to the international exchange evident in the other films. Narrowly focussed upon a single housing block in South London, the film probes the specificity of London's social and spatial transformation in the early 1970s.

Drawing on an extensive collection of archival materials, I will discuss in detail the production and reception of these films, as well as the formal techniques by which they convey their concerns for the state of housing and social organisation in London. The volume of archival resources available on these films differs greatly, yet the selection of films for this chapter hinges on two shared principles: periodisation and the cross-pollination of ideas in each. Section II will focus almost entirely upon *I Love This Dirty Town* whereas, due to a wealth of BBC documentation and public media, the final section focusses heavily on public responses to *The Block* and *The Writing on the Wall*. Although there is a relative dearth of archival material on *The Smithsons on Housing*, what does exist is illuminating and, as I will argue, the film is very much part of this historical moment in BBC filmmaking. These films gives precious insights into the BBC's interest in and approach to the aesthetic and political questions thrown up by the redevelopment of London in the 1960s and the concomitant reorganisation of the city's population.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 14-15.

²¹⁶ Brutalism was first discussed in depth in the architectural mainstream by Reyner Banham in his seminal article 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Review* (December 1955), 354-61.

II. London as an aesthetic question

I Love This Dirty Town began production in August 1967 under the title ‘The Death and Life of Great Cities’, an homage to Jane Jacobs’s celebrated 1961 historical study *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: The Failure of Town Planning*. In his original proposal to BBC Head of Television Arts Features Stephen Hearst, producer Ron Parks opens with an image, not of British cities in crisis, but of the race riots that swept across the United States throughout the 1960s. For Parks, ‘the tragedy of the ghetto riots in the United States is a multiple one.’²¹⁷ Without giving specific details, or accounting for the momentum and political force gained by the American civil rights movement, the producer cites the ‘total breakdown of the social, economic and administrative workings of the cities themselves’.²¹⁸ Instead, Parks offers only a wispy response to the riots—if the cities are dying, he states, ‘then there’s no real argument against burning the buildings.’²¹⁹ Speaking in *The Block*, GLC Planner David Eversley echoes this sentiment and suggests that festering at the heart of unemployment and disadvantage in Britain was a worrying lack of opportunities for betterment and ‘no choices to make.’ Curiously, however, Parks ignores the specificity of the urban problems he proposes to build a documentary film around. Jacobs’ polemical study was published in 1961, a year before the Ole Miss Riot at the University of Mississippi. It therefore predates the riots to which Parks responds with reference to Jacobs’ observations.²²⁰

In his proposal, Parks omits crucial events in recent British urban history that parallel the American riots, such as the Notting Hill and Nottingham race riots of 1958, the most significant breaches of public order witnessed in Britain since the Battle of Cable Street in East London in 1936, where East End Jews, Oswald Mosley’s Blackshirts and the Metropolitan Police fought pitched battles.

²¹⁷ Ron Parks, ‘The Death and Life of Great Cities’, Proposal to Stephen Hearst (14 August 1967), Talks, *I Love This Dirty Town*, File 1, BBC Written Archives.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ London is seldom mentioned in Jacobs’s book. There is a brief discussion of Ebenezer Howard, the author of *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* and the eighteenth century writer James Boswell is cited. The ‘self-destruction of district diversity’ Jacobs identifies in 1950s New York City, she also observes in London and, finally, Jacobs quotes at length a 1958 article written by H.B. Cresswell for the *Architectural Review* in 1958, although the piece focusses on Cresswell’s childhood in London in the 1890s. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: the Failure of Town Planning* (London: Penguin, 1972), 262.

These omissions are all the more striking in light of Parks' suggestion in his proposal that there was 'a parallel situation in Britain' where 'the ethnic factor must be considered.'²²¹ Parks conflates the problems then faced by Anglo-American society as a whole with 'the problems of cities' and lists them as 'traffic jams, pollution, slums, delinquency, shortages of hospitals, schools and police.'²²² Echoing Jacobs and Oscar Newman, Parks argues that 'orthodox town planning over the last half century is now seen to have failed to respect and understand how cities work in real life.'²²³ By 'orthodox', Parks appears to mean architecture of the modernist or brutalist variant and wholesale urban redevelopment. Public reaction to this failure, he suggests, manifests 'indirect[ly], yet eloquent[ly]' as 'vandalism, increased serious crime, suicides, emigration to the South East of England or to another country altogether.'²²⁴

Consequently, Parks proposes 'a documentary that would stir up a common man's interest in what sort of city might be worth living in', a 'programme about democratic protest' that 'would completely ignore planning theories spoken by wise men.'²²⁵ For Parks, the argumentative aim of the film is to 'bypass any conscious discussion of aesthetics' in favour of 'ordinary scenes', and to 'expose the role of groups and individuals in cities' while 'exposing diversity within neighbourhoods.'²²⁶ However, the archived letters from Parks' production team to various local authorities and utility companies at once undermine the producer's desire for authenticity and underscore the perception of different British cities as effective filming locations. There are many requests, for example, for the turning on and off of interior lights in office buildings and for access to private commercial or industrial spaces. The sociological questions emphasised by Parks in his proposal cannot fully unburden themselves of the aesthetic questions raised by cinematic production.²²⁷ Moreover, shooting schedules demonstrate a preference for locations in the more affluent, postcard districts of London: Putney, Fulham and Hangar Lane in the West of the city; Euston, Piccadilly and Leicester Square in Central London.²²⁸ The film's

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ See External Correspondence section in Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 2, BBC Written Archives.

²²⁸ See Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 2, BBC Written Archives.

final credit sequence, too, would be shot in a BBC studio. One order sheet lists props for the shoot: dustbins, kitchen detritus and a cat, in addition to the winch system required to ‘entice’ the cat towards the bins. Other props include ‘genuine’-looking cards ‘for butting in windows to advertise house guests.’²²⁹

In a follow-up memorandum to Hearst, Parks identifies ‘playwrights, sculptors, theatre impresarios, actors and novelists’ as key to articulating his ideas on urban Britain.²³⁰ Rather than describing the performers of these vocations as a relatively minor, yet privileged cultural group in British society, Parks promotes them as spokespeople for a historically and politically diverse series of ‘grass roots protests’.²³¹ For Parks, ‘these are the people we normally would expect to have close contact with the every day world and a heightened response to it.’²³² Another document lists the writers and artists Parks identifies as representative of this perceived resistance to local authority town planning. Liverpoolian sculptor Arthur Dooley, dramatists Ann Jellicoe and Joan Littlewood and expatriate North American novelist Mitzi Cunliffe (who all feature in the film) are listed to speak ‘on’, respectively, ‘Liverpool destruction’, ‘the economic value of culture’, ‘Fun city and Cumbernauld slum’ and ‘Brighton and communal art’.²³³ Other notable figures listed that do not appear in the film include: Richard Hoggart ‘on anything’, Ian Nairn, Spike Milligan ‘on carving in Kensington’ and Charles Chaplin ‘on Lambeth Walk Market’.²³⁴ More in-depth documentation also exists on individual speakers. Dooley, for example, is identified as an ‘extremely talkative [...] gutsy full-blooded character who does feel more strongly that because of planners and imported architects Liverpool is in danger of being strangled.’²³⁵ In another profile, Mitzi Cunliffe is sought after as a friend of Jane Jacobs and sympathy towards the ‘general concept of her [Jacobs’] book.’²³⁶

²²⁹ ‘Order Sheet for Props’, Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 1.

²³⁰ Ron Parks, ‘Memo to Head of Arts Features, Television’ (14 December 1967), Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 1, BBC Written Archives.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ ‘Artistes – Town Planning – 6358/0016’, Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 1, BBC Written Archives.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ ‘Profile on Arthur Dooley’, Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 2, BBC Written Archives.

²³⁶ ‘Profile on Mitzi Cunliffe’, Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 2, BBC Written Archives.

In a letter to Ann Jellicoe, Television Arts Features Research Assistant Anne James emphasises Parks desire to work with Jellicoe: ‘the reason Mr. Parks is anxious to have the opportunity of talking to you is that he feels that as a writer you would be even more aware of the value of city life – of the entertainment and cultural facilities that a city can offer, theatre, films, popular culture [...]’²³⁷ In order to persuade Joan Littlewood to appear in the film, Parks wrote personally to the playwright:

I want to feature the people who are involved and living in cities; the people who use them and need them and help to generate the life and atmosphere that goes to make up a big city. I am anxious to involve you in the programme because I want to get comments from people who write or produce artistic interpretations of life—of neighbourhood life, of social problems—in fact who perform a valuable function practically as unpaid sociologists.²³⁸

As I demonstrate in the next section, *I Love This Dirty Town* does not pay much attention to the views of subsidised tenants—they are always *spoken for* by the ‘unpaid sociologists’ hired by Parks. On one hand, the easy deferral to the views of the noble tenant—whom the good liberal viewer must trust without question—can often obscure the complexity of public housing and its attendant social problems. On the other, the film’s production files demonstrate that Parks begins from a somewhat generalised perspective and the film never quite recovers from that, in spite of the efforts of Park’s ‘sociologists’.

The lack of production documentation on *The Smithsons on Housing* sadly veils the formal decisions and the apparent dissonance between Johnson and the Smithsons. The short film celebrates the couple’s international reputation and acts as a kind of propaganda piece for the construction of the GLC-commissioned housing estate Robin Hood Gardens, designed by the Smithsons. In a letter to the GLC’s Director of Housing, written in anticipation of the documentary’s broadcast, Johnson enthuses about the work of the Smithson’s and commends the GLC for commissioning the architects:

²³⁷ Anne James, ‘Letter to Ann Jellicoe’ (16 February 1968), Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 1, BBC Written Archives.

²³⁸ Ron Parks, ‘Letter to Joan Littlewood’, (20 February 1968), Talks, I Love This Dirty Town, File 1, BBC Written Archives.

I think what the Smithsons are doing at Robin Hood Lane is very exciting on both the architectural and human levels, and I would like to congratulate the GLC on an act of courage and foresight which I feel sure can only be good for the future of architecture in London and indeed the country as a whole.²³⁹

The letter offers a striking insight into Johnson's thoughts on architecture and, interestingly, British cultural values. That he considers the 'courage and foresight' of the GLC 'good for the future of architecture in [...] the country as a whole' underlines a nationalistic bent in Johnson's thinking that complicates the international outlook of the Smithson's architecture. Johnson held the architect couple to a strict set of stipulations with regard to their performances in the programme. A surviving fragment of production paraphernalia lists these stipulations in a kind of verse sketch:

Not what you are saying - but way you are saying it
You are *NOT* talking to yr architectural mates
But to a lay audience - don't complain if they smash yr building up
Because you
haven't explained it in terms *they* understand

either you discipline yourselves or I do the cutting
And *persuade* the audience - as we talked of - by personality²⁴⁰

If Johnson is convinced of the Smithson's social value and importance, he seems very doubtful of their ability to communicate that value in the film. This instruction is a valuable addition to scholarship on *The Smithsons on Housing*, yet sadly a rare one. The absence of documentation will

²³⁹ B.S. Johnson, 'Letter to Director of Housing, GLC' (8 December 1969), Talks, The Smithsons on Housing, Production Files, BBC Written Archives.

²⁴⁰ B.S. Johnson, cited in Jonathan Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant: the Story of B.S. Johnson* (London: Picador, 2004), 285.

also plague the researcher of both *The Block* and *The Writing on the Wall*. This is where the importance of a wider research field that includes the GLC's municipal governance or the various social housing histories of London really becomes clear. Indeed, *The Writing on the Walls* draws a great deal of its discursive current from Newman's studies, such as his celebrated *Defensible Space* monograph. But housing estates such as the Aylesbury and its sibling the Heygate were viewed at the time as necessary solutions to the twin problem of faulty high-rise structures, such as the collapsed Ronan Point, and the rise of applicants to municipal housing lists. One GLC press release from 1971 claims that the 'number of London Borough Council's housing lists has risen 10 per cent in the last five years despite 88,606 families being rehoused since 1965.'²⁴¹ The subject of *The Writing on the Wall*, the Aylesbury estate in Walworth, South London, became one of the largest housing estates in Europe and provided accommodation to approximately 7500 people, but nonetheless made barely a dent in the housing lists and many remained in dire housing conditions.

Films such as *The Block* and articles in journals like *New Society* documented the GLC's management of homelessness and the more complicated aspects of public housing policy. *The Block* frames a relatively simple tension between the residents of Chaucer House and the GLC Housing Department, but the reality of homelessness in London as portrayed in GLC documentation presents a more complex picture of redevelopment, squatting, homeless shelters and 'cardboard cities' in the city.²⁴² In an article for *New Society* titled 'The Working Dosser', Paul Harrison uses interviews with a man called Sean O'Neill—the 'working dosser' of the title—and other homeless men to depict the state of low-rent dwelling in London. One disabled labourer accuses the Salvation Army (the 'Sally-Ann') of exploiting its boarders. 'All they want is your fucking money,' he says, before claiming that he would rather 'sleep in the trees in St. James' Park' as, in the Salvation Army hostel, 'the stench of the human body is 'un-fucking-bearable.'²⁴³ The re-opening of the Charing Cross Hospital in Central London as a GLC homeless shelter saw the local authority begin to separate, as Harrison points out, 'the decent

²⁴¹ 'Housing Waiting Lists in London' (14 July 1971), GLC/DG/PRB/35/014, Press Releases, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

²⁴² See the folder 'The Homeless in London', GLC/DG/PRB/22/74, Greater London Council Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.

²⁴³ Paul Harrison, 'The Working Dosser', in *New Society* (4 July 1974), 25.

working man trying to get back on his own feet' from 'the unemployables'.²⁴⁴ Responsibility for this task fell on to the shoulders of Gordon Luscombe, who is reported in the article as claiming, 'some of them [the homeless] think it's an easy touch, they tell you they work at so and so and you find out it doesn't exist. I have to tell them hard shit man, there's the Marmite or the arches for you.'²⁴⁵ *The Block*'s focus on just one aspect of the nature of subsidised dwelling in London obscures the depths of the problem. As I will discuss in the next section, each programme necessarily constructs a simplified portrayal of the city and reconstructs London's social and economic spaces in accordance with its own narrative logic.

III. Testimonies of redevelopment

In one scene in *I Love This Dirty Town* the narrator Margaret Drabble asks over footage of a street sign for Onslow Square in the 'royal' London borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 'if cities are so inferior to the suburbs then why do so many people pay heavily for the privilege of living here?' Drabble argues that the social privileges of city life are a price worth paying for. In contrast, the montage implies that only those who live in affluent enclaves pay for such privileges. This implication ignores not only the reality of living and renting in London in the 1960s, but also the findings of a clutch of contemporaneous studies produced by Ruth Glass and other social scientists, such as Elizabeth Burney (see Chapter I). Exorbitant rents, these studies argue, are a fact that all city-dwellers contend with, many for no comparable privilege whatsoever. First broadcast on BBC2 in January 1969 during the Saturday evening slot, *I Love This Dirty Town* holds local authority town planners and architects to account for the social and spatial imbalance in the organisation of British cities. As I will discuss in Section IV, the BBC Audience Research Department produced reports for almost all programmes broadcast on its television service. The report produced following the broadcast of *I Love This Dirty Town* states that

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Cited in *ibid.* 'The Marmite' refers to the Marmite Factory, also known as St. Mungos, a free night shelter in Vauxhall, South London, which provided a free breakfast to boarders. The Charing Cross Hospital shelter was run by volunteers from St. Mungos. The GLC paid for heating and lighting. Also of note at this time is the existence of Cardboard City, a homeless community in Temple Gardens, Central London, that would later move to the lower part of the Bullring in Waterloo, Central London (now the site of the British Film Institute IMAX).

Park's programme was viewed by 1.7% of the 'UHF public' (the sum of BBC and ITV audiences), with average BBC audiences at 29%.

Not long into *I Love This Dirty Town*, the theatre director Joan Littlewood cites a woman on the fifteenth floor of an undisclosed tower block 'going mad from loneliness and panic' and criticises the aestheticism of Cumbernauld in North Lanarkshire, Scotland and Chandigarh, even further afield in Northern India. Aided by footage of a coruscating housing block shot from ground level, Littlewood's assertion is persuasive if merely the flipside of an ongoing struggle with Greater London Council (GLC) public relations. Two years before Park's film, the GLC commissioned a film on the work of its Housing Department which appeared as *Somewhere Decent to Live* (Ronald E. Haddock, 1967, discussed in Chapter III). The commentary of this film makes a very different claim to that made by Littlewood as it portrays one elderly woman who claims that living in a tower block makes her feel 'like a princess'. Claim and counter-claim did little to deepen public understanding of this new kind of dwelling, which both films gave before being vanquished to the archive. The sculptor Arthur Dooley claims with deadpan mania that the perceived architectural policies—what he describes as 'design over humanity'—pursued by British local authorities are reminiscent of Nazi Germany. Drabble pursues Dooley's line of commentary as she dismisses Britain's large Corbusian municipal housing developments as 'monuments to one man's ego.' Drabble defends this position as a necessary rejoinder to the local authority planners 'who attack our cities'. These planners, she claims, should be seen as little more than 'local councillors who want to be remembered'.

In a rare turn to castigate private development, Drabble asks over footage of the recently-completed Martin-Mealand office buildings on London Wall in the City of London, 'What's the difference between one ghetto and the next?' Without intention, the question bears the heart of the commentary's disingenuous nature. In doing so, the film conflates a relatively unused albeit functional space in London's financial district with a racially-determined, legally-sanctioned urban-historical category that signifies a site of social prohibition. The re-coding of the term 'ghetto', which comes to signify 'empty' or 'underused', is significant. In a later scene, the commentary argues that a children's playground has also become ghettoised, on account of its early closing times. The rearticulation of 'ghetto' is one more example of the easy manner by which the documentary, as well as Parks in his

preparation for the filming, extracts general concepts from historically specific phenomena. *I Love This Dirty Town* does not fully come to terms with the cultural transformations occurring in 1960s London, such as the social reality of race and immigration, or indeed with the real and pressing need to house London's labouring classes who, after twenty years of the Welfare State and the increasing rationalisation of inner-city space, had become arguably more dependent on local government than ever before. This failure is typified in a sequence where 'the people' are equated with an urban activist group from the professional classes called the Richmond Society. When faced with GLC plans to build a road 'through the heart of Richmond', Chairman George Cassidy reports that two architects who belong to the Society suspended their paid employment for three weeks in order to orchestrate a campaign to defeat the Council. That the Society is based in Richmond—an historically affluent quarter of London—and featured two architects who could dedicate three weeks without pay to their campaign underscores to a considerable degree the social imbalance in London's spatial organisation and economic capital.

In *Urban Fortunes*, a study of the impact of the 'free market' upon the phenomena of urban renewal and development in the United States, John Logan and Harvey Molotch eloquently tease out the consequences of a rhetoric that reduces a city to its affluent communities. 'Though they need it least,' they argue, 'residents of affluent areas are more likely than others to join community organisations, and to have organisations that achieve unity and become effective.'²⁴⁶ Logan and Molotch pit 'well-organised homeowners' against 'well-financed developers' in a battle for 'the bonanza that can result if opposition can be overcome.'²⁴⁷ Logan and Molotch do not, however, attribute these differences to 'race, class, or ethnic groups, but to the larger set of interrelated advantages of wealthy neighbourhoods, which contribute to the successful mobilisation: financial and political resources, residential stability, social homogeneity, and an array of organisations long in place.'²⁴⁸ This is to say, when 'defending their turf, the rich don't have to invoke their own use values. Instead, they can enthusiastically argue that preservation of their neighbourhood is consistent with the needs of the whole

²⁴⁶ John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: the Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 135.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

city[...] And given the propensity of the affluent to choose their neighbourhoods well and then lavish money and attention on them, their arguments are not without a grain of truth.²⁴⁹

I Love This Dirty Town frames the swashbuckling defence of ‘their turf’ by the Richmond Society by way of *people taking cities back for themselves*. The film’s argumentative case for those Harvey and Molotch call ‘the poor’—embodied in the film by Dooley’s victims of ‘design over humanity’ and Littlewood’s lonely, anxious tower-block dweller—is thus structured by the Richmond Society’s campaigns. The commentary implores the kind of egalitarian, more self-interested urban practice exemplified by the mobility and wealth of home-owning groups such as the Richmond Society for all city-dwellers, oblivious to the social reality that determines ‘tenants’ as ‘the poor’. *The Smithsons on Housing* makes no such case for the wealthy. Instead, the film makes a liberal case for ‘the poor’ and their housing needs although, as is the case with *I Love This Dirty Town*, no member of this social class is given a substantial voice in the film. In this respect, the documentary possesses some of the qualities demonstrated by the housing films of the GLC. In fact, *The Smithsons on Housing* might be considered as a sympathetic addendum to the canon of GLC filmmaking with its triumphal portrayal of the GLC’s housing policies as well as the celebration of its commissioned architects.

The film itself is a curious blend of instruction, explanation and a meticulous investigation of the forming spaces of the Robin Hood Gardens estate in Poplar, East London. After a brief establishing shot of the estate under construction, Alison Smithson, shot in close-up, articulates her perspective on British housing policy. The architect states that the very process of building new public homes might be a misjudged policy, that, in fact, with so many old and vacant buildings in London perhaps the architects job should be to make amendments to those instead. Both Alison and Peter are shot in dead-eyed close-up as they address the camera directly. Both articulate their ideas with a deep lethargy and clearly struggle to deliver their lines with frequent glances downwards at their scripts. BBC directors noted this lethargy in their responses to the programme. In addition to the close-up talking heads of the Smithson’s, Peter goes into great detail in order to explain the numerous spatial forms used to create a ‘stress-free zone’ inside the estate and the functions thereof by use of an architectural model not entirely distinct from the one shown in Robert Vas’ *The Vanishing Street* (see Chapter I). Shot eight years

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

previously, Vas used the architect's model to demonstrate the loneliness of tower-block dwelling, as a plastic model peered silently from a top-level balcony. In *The Smithsons on Housing* it is the estate itself that is isolated in the architect's office as Peter explains away any sense of the organic spontaneity lamented in Vas' elegy.

Both *I Love This Dirty Town* and *The Smithsons on Housing* as well as *The Writing on the Wall* use the televisual form to make arguments about housing policy that speak for the working-classes they take as their object. This formula is inverted to a large degree in *The Block*, which puts the relatively unseen poor of the other films centre-stage. *The Block* was first broadcast on BBC1 in September 1972, part of the channel's Tuesday's Documentary series. The audience report claims that the programme was viewed by 13.6% of the 'UK population'—double the average viewing figure for BBC programmes at that time. In total, 265 viewers responded to the Audience Research Department's questionnaire—a sizeable 15% of viewers. I would suggest that Watson's film made an historically significant intervention in the discussion of poverty going on in London at the time. By carefully framing a sympathetic narrative around the lives of Chaucer House residents, the film interweaves stories of resistance and discordance at great risk of undermining the sympathies of viewers. I do not think, however, that the depiction of protest in *The Block*—two important choric scenes that bookend the programme—is a case of claiming verity, but rather a deliberate counter to depictions of the working and unemployed poor as apathetic and helpless in local authority and state cinemas, as I discuss in the previous chapter.²⁵⁰

I would like to consider, in addition, the formal technique or style of *The Block* in terms of its two central themes: the economics of redevelopment, and health as a marker of social organisation. After an establishing shot facing North-East towards Tower Bridge from Southwark, *The Block's* narrator Peter Myers describes Chaucer House as a 'half-way house'—short-term accommodation for homeless families. Myers then points out that ninety-six families with two hundred and forty children live there. He claims that the closure of hostels in affluent West London boroughs led to an eastward 'drift' to 'the poorer boroughs' of Southwark and Lambeth. Southwark Council, he continues, failed in

²⁵⁰ The voice-over in the final scene is a carefully scripted moment. The narrator Peter Myers states that the barricades and small fires amount to 'a pathetic riot', with pathetic carrying an evocative double-meaning: both pejorative and empathic.

its duty to rehouse families, with some residents of Chaucer House having lived there for two years. Footage of demolition is mounted against a commentary that claims private developers have put pressure on borough councils to sell them valuable land currently occupied by homeless shelters. Myers accuses Southwark Council, who own and administer Chaucer House, of failing in its duty to rehouse families. This commentary all comes at the beginning of the film, its early moments focus on conveying as much information as possible to its audience.

The Block goes to great lengths to visualise the bureaucratic processes behind the administration of Chaucer House, which one volunteer social worker describes as a ‘revolving door’. Watson frames these acts of local governance by focussing on specific interactions between residents and social workers, for example, in the scenes featuring Mrs Howard and the housing clerk who deals with her application for more secure dwelling. Footage of clerks and secretaries—all women—demonstrates the labour and laboriousness of these processes and, due to the council’s backlog of tenants in need of housing, every case is declared ‘urgent’. The soundtrack, in support of the visual argument, shifts from the conversation between Mrs Howard and the clerk into a mess of voices, a din, a babble. Why such a technique is deployed in a sequence that features only women is curious, for the scene uses sound to articulate the complexity and difficulty these workers face, yet the depiction of a this gendered space of exchange alludes in a pointed manner to enshrined clichés about excessive female verbosity. The domestic space is also figured as a space of instrumental labour, with a litter of signification akin to the bureaucratic scene portrayed by Watson. Where the scene with Mrs Howard deploys voices to highlight the complexity and difficulty of the bureaucratic process, domestic scenes often use objects to mark the lack of perceived spatial norms, or what might be termed correct dwelling.

There are, for example, refrigerators in bedrooms, tin baths in kitchens, large metal dustbins on interior landings and toilets in gardens. Watson illustrates this further through the juxtaposition of footage of two generations of the same family. This illustration suggests a rigid stasis in class relations, with both generations dwelling in very similar ways, regardless of the stated claim that the patriarch of the younger family has a ‘good job’. Class relations and the economics of redevelopment are summed up succinctly in one sequence, in which GLC Planner David Eversley discusses unemployment and disadvantage in the city:

[...]a large section of the population can't better itself at all, there's no point making an effort. These are people who've got no choices in life to make and that worries us. We talk about the quality of their lives—well it's just about bearable. They're not actually suffering, I suppose, they have no choices to make. Now, this is a great disadvantage for the areas they live in, because people who have no choices to make, who don't spend very much, who live on a minimum, they don't attract the private investor, you don't get people wanting to build new shopping centre. You don't get good professional services—you don't even get the best public services.

Eversley's rhetoric spoke to the paternalism demonstrated by Southwark Council in dealing with its residents. Betterment is held up as an incentive to make an 'effort', but the means obscure the end. Social betterment, improvement, progress: all are underlined by economic achievement—employment, salary, success. The local authority planner considers improvement in terms of choices, too—choice equals betterment. Choice is engendered by the kind of 'effort' Eversley refers to earlier. Finally, he cites private investment such as shopping centres as exemplars of 'choice'. The people of Chaucer House are refused active participation in the cycles of capital that underscore class relations in London. This, in turn, makes the residents of Chaucer House an unpredictable mass excluded from social practices so central to the operation of both British liberal economics and the Welfare State (the latter an unwilling participant in that circuit of exchange). This unpredictability is met with a heightened form of repression, articulated most poignantly in the film when, over footage of broken windows, John claims that the social services have been spying on single women tenants thought to be 'co-habiting' with lovers. The result of these accusations is typically the withdrawal of state benefits until the tenant can prove that she does not live with a partner.

Towards the end of the programme, Myers states that 'bureaucratic jargon' has negated 'the usefulness of the Welfare Service.' This idea considered in light of Eversley's comments suggests that jargon is the necessary language of a service that looks towards only the social amelioration of those on

the lower end of the class scale, a specialised language that creates a deliberate distinction.²⁵¹ As Lebas points out, in pre-war municipal filmmaking, it was the government's Chief Officer of Health who taught citizens how to care for themselves—health was a medical issue. In post-war municipal filmmaking, of which BBC television is central, health became an issue of housing. In a housing film such as *The Block*, traces of pre-war municipal governance persist. Striking among the frequent illustrative statements delivered by Myers is the claim that pneumonia, pleurisy and gastroenteritis are behind the relatively high infant mortality rate in Chaucer House. The following sequence edits together footage of the funeral procession of one infant and Edie's preparation for an abortion, shortly after recovering from her third suicide attempt. Edie is one of the central figures in *The Block*. She lives there alone with two children fathered by different men who each abandoned her. The montage suggests that not only does disease lead to death or abortion, but reflects upon the question that working-class attitudes towards sex ask of the nuclear family and living conditions. With subtlety, the film frames young working-class men as mobile and promiscuous—an inversion of the Victorian perceptions of urban disease noted by Elizabeth Wilson (see Chapter II). In this modern reframing of gender politics, however, women nonetheless continue to suffer prohibition while men are exempted from the consequences of their actions.

In one of many interview sequences with John, the Chairman of the Tenants' Association, he claims that the GLC has neglected the health of the residents of Chaucer House. In response to this, the Southwark Council Medical Officer states that facilities are available, but residents do not use them. The film deploys another tenant to refute this counter-claim. The tenant, framed in medium-shot through an open window claims that the health facilities are not available to residents in an appropriate fashion. This interview refers specifically to a supposed 'drop-in' mobile health van that requires residents to make appointments. As with unemployment payments, council officers control the

²⁵¹ Hugh Manon opposes jargon to slang, which 'decodes as warm, rich, and excessive—a harmonic distortion in language, a deliberate and sometimes gross attempt to overdrive the normal channels. In slang,' he continues, 'the speaker wears her enjoyment on her sleeve and tacitly invites others to share in it, to circulate it. In contrast to this, jargon is usually understood as cold, alienating, wall-like. Far from an invitation to the party, jargon opens the door just enough to let the recipient know that someone is home, then slams it in their face.' Hugh Manon, 'The Jouissance of Jargon', *World Picture Journal*, no. 1 (Spring 2008), http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/World%20Picture/WP_1.1/TOC.html.

administration of medication. In another scene, shot in close-up, John's unnamed wife explains that she receives medication for depression. Elsewhere, Myers' commentary describes the 're-emergence of Ricketts' disease. In response to Lebas, I would suggest that BBC programming has to some degree replaced municipal filmmaking, but the figure of the health official—now subsumed by the contemporary civil servant—still lurks with some considerable influence throughout post-war moving images concerned with civic life in London. Indeed, town planners and architects appear to challenge the outright authority of health workers in post-war municipal filmmaking, but analyses of post-war municipal films should not ignore the persistent appearance of health workers as a marker of an entrenched paternalistic attitude towards London's poor in this period.

These issues resonate with *The Writing on the Wall*, in which Oscar Newman claims that it is not planners but architects who have failed in their duty to the public: 'the real problem with the architectural profession is that it has let us all down.' For Newman, bold modernist housing design disrupts the formation of civic virtues, such as pride and responsibility, even 'self[-identity].' First broadcast on BBC2 in February 1974, *The Writing on the Wall* was viewed by only 1.6% of the 'BBC2 public', a number well below BBC and ITV averages. Part of the *Horizon* series, the film deliberately fails to present a singular argument or perspective on public housing.²⁵² Nor does the film hold itself up as an emblem of Newman, whose ideas and claims the film at once frames and questions. Through a number of formal techniques, the film challenges and even undermines Newman's studies on the relationship between public housing and crime, and his attack on modern architecture. Where *I Love This Dirty Town* is committed to depicting British cities through the lens of Jane Jacobs' town planning critique, *The Writing on the Wall* extends its visual remit to include the North American cities of New York, St. Louis and San Francisco. However, where the former film applies Jacobs' thesis to a variety of

²⁵² The *Horizon* series launched with the following mission statement in May 1964: 'The aim of Horizon is to provide a platform from which some of the world's greatest scientists and philosophers can communicate their curiosity, observations and reflections, and infuse into our common knowledge their changing views of the universe. We shall do this by presenting science not as a series of isolated discoveries but as a continuing growth of thought, a philosophy which is an essential part of twentieth century culture.' The first programme focussed upon the ideas and work of R. Buckminster Fuller, the inventor of the Geodesic Dome. See BBC Press Office, '40 Facts for Horizon's 40th Birthday', http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/08_august/19/horizon_facts.shtml.

British cities, the latter considers Newman's study only in terms of London, especially the recently completed inner-city Aylesbury housing estate in Walworth, South London. What is clear, however, is that both films fail to imagine London on its own terms, only in terms of another city: New York, St. Louis, Los Angeles.

The anonymous 'voices' of *The Writing on the Wall* deliver three distinct categories of commentary. The first is Newman's, which presents a coherent argument throughout and draws upon his recent study of urban America, *Defensible Space*. An eloquent rhetorician and the programme's *de facto* presenter, Newman is introduced in medium-shot standing on a flat New York City rooftop. As he begins to describe the condition of and problems with the city's housing projects, the montage cuts to footage of project blocks using both aerial and ground shots, often mobile and shot from either a car or helicopter. The design of modern architecture, Newman claims, is central to high crime rates in and around American housing projects. As is typical with arguments critical of modern architecture, the architectural theories and practice of Le Corbusier are cited as the origins of this doomed tendency in the design of public housing.²⁵³ After a brief introduction to the Aylesbury estate, the discussion and montage returns to the U.S. and the widely discussed Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis.²⁵⁴ Newman's discussion of Pruitt-Igoe is accompanied by footage of the abandoned project, all broken windows, weeds, rusted play equipment and barbed wire. The film also discusses the Van Dyke and Brownsville projects in Brooklyn. The film shows footage of neighbouring projects to illustrate Newman's claims that low-rise blocks lead to lower crime rates than high-rises—radical design, he argues, stigmatises through difference. Citing the less bold, greener and relatively suburban Pollard's Hill housing estate in Merton, South London, Newman notes, 'these tiny back-yards may not be *your* concept of utopia, but they're a happy alternative for families used to living fifteen stories up.'

However, Mansfield often opposes testimonies from residents of the various housing projects and estates to Newman's hypotheses. For example, after Newman's discussion of Pruitt-Igoe, an African-American woman claims in an interview that the large housing project was once a decent place

²⁵³ See, for example, the relative 'success' of the Barbican estate in the City of London—arguably the most brutal of brutalist structures—to observe an unusual lack of criticism towards Le Corbusier's ideas.

²⁵⁴ A recent documentary *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History* (Chad Friedrichs, USA, 2011) challenges received ideas on the project and its tenants.

to live, where, she says, tenants lived with 'pride'. Testimonies from residents of the Aylesbury estate are also offered, which do not so much undermine Newman's claims as disturb their cohesion. In fact, the film's rendering of their reactions does appear to support Newman. One unnamed housewife describes the fear of allowing her youngest son out to play due to his journey to the play-space being fraught with dark, dangerous stairwells and an elderly tenant who bemoans the lack of privacy due to high density and yet another young woman describes the estate as 'like a prison... all concrete.' But this support is challenged by other contrasting reports, such as from a retired woman who describes the estate as 'heaven'. Not afraid to put his money where his mouth was, Newman also participated in 'improvement' projects, where his ideas were used to create clear physical markers of privacy in areas afflicted with crime and poverty, such as Clason Point in the Bronx, New York City. However, in one interview scene, a group of local teenaged boys from Clason Point claim that the addition of 'defensible space' to the neighbourhood had amounted to little more than 'window-dressing' and had little effect on the neighbourhood. They suggest that it is the people of the neighbourhood that needed to change as much as the physical environment. These boys articulate Newman's misunderstanding or even ignorance of material and social conditions beyond a simple recognition of social status.

The deliberate manner in which *The Writing on the Wall* uses testimony from the residents of housing projects and estates is further complicated by the inclusion of a third category of voice in the programme. In addition to the portrayal of Newman and various dwellers, Mansfield frames the claims made by the film through a voice-over narration performed by journalist and radio presenter Paul Vaughan. The use of a voice-over diminishes Newman's role to that of a contributor to the programme rather than the presenter he appears to be at first. Vaughan observes that *The Writing on the Wall* is an 'investigation' that seeks to question 'if some modern housing actually encourages people to commit crime'. Loaded aesthetic markers such as 'ugly', 'anonymous' and 'dull' are articulated by the commentary and when the montage shifts to the Aylesbury estate for the first time, Vaughan asks the audience over footage of a communal walkway, 'imagine your home is on this corridor. Who might be waiting for you in the shadows?' Given the weight and significance of the testimonies offered by the residents and given that they are marshalled into service of the programme's claims, it is striking that the authorial voice-over is undermined in much the same way as Newman's voice. The testimonies suggest,

with force, that architectural design has little to do with crime rates at all—that the same issues around poverty, social mobility and the density of public housing, social and economic issues, pervade, regardless of the cosmetic ‘window-dressing’ championed by Newman.

IV. The public life of programmes

BBC audience reports offer selective yet balanced insights into the public perception of the programmes discussed above. They each gather together responses from viewers according to the way they share concerns about a programme. To give one substantial example, the report produced for *I Love This Dirty Town* begins:

[...] mixed response from small sample, depending largely on their feelings about the programme’s implications. A good many were wholeheartedly in agreement, welcoming a programme that should make people more aware of what was happening to many of our cities and towns. ‘This should be shown to all planners and architects’, one such viewer observed, for instance. Another (for whom it proved ‘something of a shock’, but salutary) felt that the programme was successful in ‘pin-pointing a reality that is being either ignored or missed’; according to a third, it was ‘thought-provoking and certainly stimulated interest in town planning’.²⁵⁵

This is a typical example. It indicates the overall reception—positive/negative—of the film and uses specific examples to illustrate this mood. The report for *I Love This Dirty Town* continues its careful unpacking of the programme’s reception as it states that there ‘was noticeable feeling, however, that, although it was possible to agree with much that was said, the approach was rather one-sided and unrealistic, and the subject was not explored constructively or in sufficient depth.’²⁵⁶ Quotes from viewers support these general observations:

²⁵⁵*I Love This Dirty Town*, File VR/68/21, Folder R9/7/97, Audience Research Reports, BBC Written Archives.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The arguments were rather over-stressed against the town planners' (viewers observed, for example); the programme also 'highlighted the present day problems without suggesting how they could be solved' and little account was taken, of the rapid growth in population and the fact that slums had to be cleared and people housed. To one or two, in fact, the viewpoint seemed rather 'middle-class', 'smug' and 'naïve' (forgetting 'the squalor of our Northern cities', it was pointed out) and a few dismissed the programme as disappointingly superficial in treatment, boring and illogical. In addition, several could discern no 'connecting thread' or 'purpose' in it. They were not clear what it was meant to prove and object that 'it got nowhere'.²⁵⁷

The report pays attention to the vocal delivery of Margaret Drabble, who 'spoke the narration well, many of the sample evidently thought.' The report makes reference to Drabble's 'pleasantly-pitched, clear voice', which 'created an atmosphere with her voice that brought over the truth of the pictures'.²⁵⁸ Another observation sets contrasting views against each other: "Margaret Drabble's rather detached, low voice did little to promote intense interest; the other speakers were more stimulating". A small group were put off by, as it seemed to them, her "bored" and boring "monotone", making a "not very inspiring" narration even less interesting.²⁵⁹ Respondents mention formal technique in passing, as the report claims on behalf of its viewing sample that the montage and soundtrack 'apparently left little to be desired, apart from isolated complaints that some sequences moved too rapidly, that there was too much background noise and that the general effect was rather bitty. There was praise from the more appreciative part of the sample for the excellent and very telling photography'.²⁶⁰

Although B.S. Johnson went on to script *Not Counting the Savages* (Mike Newell, 1972) for the BBC's Thirty-Minute Theatre series, internal responses to *The Smithsons on Housing* were unfavourable and meant that Johnson would not produce TV again. A number of proposals were

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

rejected following a correspondence between Johnson and the BBC's John Drummond, who pointed out that *The Smithsons on Housing* 'aroused extremely strong feelings' at the BBC. Drummond commented on 'a fairly high-powered attack on it [the film] by the Controller who felt that one had simply not solved the problems of presenting sympathetically the opinions of people [the Smithsons] who are basically unsympathetic.' In contrast, Drummond presents himself and Head of Television Arts Features Stephen Hearst to Johnson as the programme's defenders, and claims that they both felt 'that the programme was a very clear and competent expression of the Smithsons as they are.' Drummond reasons that 'to ignore people whose views are important simply because they are not 'very nice' is ducking our responsibility', yet concedes, 'it is also important that they should be presented in a way that holds the audience, and what has personally depressed me is the number of my colleagues who told me they didn't stay with the programme to the end.'²⁶¹ Johnson's courteous, apologetic reply would signal the end of his BBC production career. After thanking Drummond for his 'honest letter', Johnson admits that 'no one knows better than I do that THE SMITHSONS ON HOUSING was boring to anyone without a special interest in architecture. I must (and do) take full responsibility for that.'²⁶² Citing a difficult working relationship with the Smithsons, Johnson claims: 'that the film disappointed me was almost solely due to not getting the full cooperation the Smithsons promised me at the beginning and my friendship with them has suffered severely as a result.'²⁶³ The awkwardness registered in the programme by the Smithsons also underscores the difficulty experienced by the architects during the programme's production.

Of all the programmes discussed in this chapter, *The Block* received the greatest number of responses, both institutional and public. The BBC Audience Research Report opens with the suggestion that, 'whatever their opinions about the method of approach and the resulting picture of dire poverty, the majority of viewers found this an extremely interesting and compelling film.'²⁶⁴ The report provides an insightful interpretation of polarised public reaction, as representative as the audience report genre permits. By focussing on the residents of one particular housing block, some viewers found

²⁶¹ John Drummond, 'Letter to B.S. Johnson' (21 July 1970), 'Talks: The Smithsons on Housing', BBC Written Archives.

²⁶² B.S. Johnson, 'Letter to John Drummond' (26 July 1970), 'Talks: The Smithsons on Housing', BBC Written Archives.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ *The Block*, File VR/72/548, Folder R9/7/119, Audience Research Reports, BBC Written Archives.

that ‘the problems of those living below the poverty line could be studied in detail.’ This, the report points out, ‘made the programme “more compelling”, it was felt, and brought home more clearly what such an existence entails’.²⁶⁵ In contrast, other viewers found the film’s perspective too narrow. The report states that ‘as many of those reporting[...] said they would have preferred a broader view, including a wider selection of cases in order to give “a more general view of the pattern of poverty” – and a truer one, some felt.’²⁶⁶ Moreover, ‘there was a fairly widespread feeling that the people featured in this programme were not representative of the poor as a whole, but consisted mostly of “shiftless”, “inadequate” types, to a considerable extent responsible for their own plight.’²⁶⁷

Many viewers are sceptical of the Chaucer House residents featured in *The Block*. As the report points out, some felt that ‘these people were making no effort to help themselves’ escape the impoverishment they had come to occupy. The report frames a general complaint wherein viewers felt that ‘the disabled and the old should have been included, and others ‘reduced to poverty through no fault of their own’, or people who ‘live respectably’ on equally low incomes.’²⁶⁸ One viewer puts it quite simply: ‘you picked the wrong people’.²⁶⁹ According to the report, the audience sample felt in general that the programme was balanced and reflected the work of the local authority, Southwark Council, in a fair light, with all parties—residents and civil servants—viewed as victims of bureaucratic ‘red tape’. In contrast, others objected that Watson’s film performed a ‘slight bias’ in favour of the residents, ‘sometimes suggesting that “the enormity of the problem” confronting the welfare services and the local council was not sufficiently emphasised and that the programme seemed too obviously trying to arouse compassion for people who “could have avoided at least part of their misfortunes”’.²⁷⁰ Where three quarters of the audience sample were ‘not surprised at the plight of these people’ owing to their own experiences of the economic situation in their own regions, one quarter registered as “deeply shocked”,

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

“appalled”, “astonished”, [and] “devastated” at finding people should be living in such conditions (“almost unbelievably in 1972”).²⁷¹

What is most interesting is that, aside from responses to *The Block*'s overall structure, virtually no attention is paid to the programme's formal techniques or cinematic specificity. In addition, the accuracy of factual claims made by the programme remains uncontested. Responses in the print media fare little better. In his review for the *Daily Telegraph*, Richard Last comes to terms with the empathic demands the documentary makes of viewers. ‘By its end,’ he writes, ‘I was unsure who had greater claim on my sympathy: the homeless caught in a spiral of poverty, humiliation and hopelessness, or the petty officials trying, Canute-like, to deal with them.’²⁷² Implicit reference to form is made as Last describes the portrayal of an irreconcilable opposition between the residents of Chaucer House and the civil servants who administrate the residents economic and social lives. Dealing with the issue of form more explicitly, Last suggests that ‘Mr Watson’s own technique of rapid cutting from scene to scene, brilliantly effective as television, sometimes tended to take precedence over the human considerations.’²⁷³

In his review for the *Times*, Stanley Reynolds elects to opt out of aesthetic concerns altogether: ‘It hardly seems right to sit and deliver artistic judgement on a documentary which spelled out in such heartfelt and moving terms the seemingly hopeless plight of homeless families in temporary council accommodation.’²⁷⁴ Yet Reynolds good-mannered liberal conduct towards *The Block* is underscored by the very aesthetic discussion he seeks to avoid. With reference to the programme's portrayal of the residents and social workers of Chaucer House, Reynolds notes that ‘people on all sides, the tenants and the bureaucrats, talked before the camera with an amazing fluency and lack of self-consciousness. The tenants with insecure social histories and records of debt, were seen battling with unemployment, illness, apathy, and bureaucracy, while the hard-pressed officials struggled to cope with the giant ramifications of a system which no longer seems to correspond to real social need.’²⁷⁵ Recognising, as he does, the ‘amazing fluency and lack of self-consciousness’ of the residents and civil servants portrayed in

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Last, ‘Cathy Come Home’ becomes real’, 13.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Stanley Reynolds, ‘The Block, BBC1’, *Times* (20 September 1972), 7.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

the film, Reynolds articulates *The Block's* aesthetic concerns in spite of his protestations to the contrary. This is not to castigate the reviewer for contradicting himself in what is essentially a potted-recap of the programme for readers of his newspaper column, but to highlight the way in which the depictions of 'fluency' and 'lack of self-consciousness' are assumed as given rather than judged, as they ought to be, in terms of formal technique and narrative or even associative structure. Reynolds summarises the programme as 'harrowing but one must hope inspiring'.²⁷⁶ To a large extent, his review underemphasises the importance of formal technique in achieving these empathic ends.

The Writing on the Wall also provoked debate in the press and from viewers who responded to the Audience Research Department's questionnaire. The report points out that 'all but a few of the small sample evidently watched this programme with considerable interest, usually agreeing that Professor Oscar Newman had demonstrated very convincingly the link between housing design and vandalism and crime.'²⁷⁷ On this evidence, audiences appeared to have missed the counterpoint to Newman's simplistic account of urban crime offers. In general, audiences concurred, 'Professor Newman was a very sympathetic and able speaker[...] presenting his theories clearly and objectively, making his subject interesting (exceptionally so, according to quite a number) and easy to listen to'.²⁷⁸ Another summary states that, due to Newman's persuasive performance, 'the result was a fascinating, thought-provoking programme, rather disquieting according to some, confirming the already-formed views of others, and winning over at least one or two, who had previously been disposed to doubt the effect in this way of environment on human behaviour.'²⁷⁹ Only a small number respond negatively, with 'only isolated viewers' offering 'any real criticisms, finding the programme boring, or disagreeing with what Professor Newman had said.'²⁸⁰

Press responses were similarly taken with Newman's views in the programme. Mary Malone in the *Daily Mirror* tabloid believed that the programme 'could well make us walk outside this morning

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ *Horizon: the Writing on the Wall*, File VR/74/106, Folder: R9/7/127, Audience Research Reports Television General Chronological January and February 1974, BBC Written Archives.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

and take a hard look at our own homes.’ ‘Modern architects,’ she concurs with Newman, ‘have been so busy competing for prizes that they have left people out of their designs.’²⁸¹ Stewart Lane in the left-wing *Morning Star* applauds an ‘absorbing programme’ and notes that Newman ‘justifiably accused architects and planners, both here and in the US, of designing for awards rather than people’.²⁸² A cynical *Daily Mail* review cheers ‘a disastrous night for radicals in politics and architecture’, with the reviewer describing Newman as ‘a wearily commonsensical American expert in repairing prize-winning housing’ and holds Newman up as a champion of private property. This solution, the review claims in its own pointed form of double-speak, ‘infuriates egalitarian crusaders and has a magical way of encouraging ordinary people to feel they have homes rather than cells.’²⁸³ Richard Last in the *Times* commends one of the ‘best editions’ of *Horizon* ‘for some time’. Enthusiastic in his response, Last declares, ‘it was one of those programmes where you find vaguely formed beliefs presented as scientific argument, and with all the weight of an expert’s authority.’²⁸⁴ Newman, he states, ‘proved that what people miss is not just the convenience and contact of normal living, but the feeling of personal identity.’²⁸⁵

V. Conclusion

Moving in succession through the methods and techniques of pre-production, production, cinematic style and reception, this chapter has traced the fascinating evolution of BBC programmes produced at a crucial moment in the civic history of London. In the case of *I Love This Dirty Town*, I have been able to trace the evolution of this documentary from Ron Park’s initial proposal to the BBC to its carefully framed reception by way of its audience research report. In doing so, the vagaries of the film’s production and reception (the latter of which, as I suggest earlier in the thesis, is as much an effort of production) come to light and offer new ways to read its images. In the case of *The Smithsons on Housing* I have not been so lucky. Little exists on the programme’s production and it seems Johnson’s

²⁸¹ Mary Malone, ‘The way up to crime’, *Daily Mirror* (12 February 1974), 8.

²⁸² Stewart Lane, ‘Murderous warning for cities’, *Morning Star* (13 February 1974), 9.

²⁸³ ‘The high price of living in those ivory towers’, *Daily Mail* (12 February 1974), 28.

²⁸⁴ Richard Last, ‘Tower block life as loss of identity’, *Times* (12 February 1974), 18.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

film slipped below the radars of the mainstream press. An audience research report was indeed produced, but has subsequently been lost according to the BBC Written Archives. Given the animosity the programme faced from BBC management following its broadcast in 1970, the report would make for fascinating reading. I can only speculate upon whether or not the programme's likely very small audience concurred with the views of the BBC hierarchy. What the analyses of *The Block* and *The Writing on the Wall* lack in production notes, they provide abundantly in terms of reception.

These films, broadcast over a period of five years, offer unique, historically specific, perspectives on redevelopment, public housing and social reorganisation in London as the sixties swung torn and frayed into the seventies. These films present the city in all its veracity, yet always, necessarily, aestheticise its civic spaces. The selection of those people who appear in the films reflects attitudes towards London in a striking manner and each highlights the difficulty of representing civic experience. White working-class tenants are portrayed as unquestionable markers of honesty, cultural producers stand in and speak for citizens and academics awkwardly overlay rigid theories of urban change and conflict onto ever-changing situations. Finally, public responses to these television programmes demonstrate a striking lack of attention to cinematic form as a vessel of argument or commentary. Given that the study of cinema would not enter the educational mainstream for over a decade, this is hardly surprising and the patterns of response are, ultimately, quite predictable, as they vacillate between judgements that work from opposite perspectives—good/bad—rather than dialectically. If anything, these responses highlight the almost unsung importance of moving images in this phase of London's civic history, which were at once ubiquitous and transparent, taken only as passive reflections of the city's social and spatial redevelopment rather than active hands in its remaking.

CONCLUSION

This thesis stages not only a crucial intervention in the field of British film studies, but also petitions for the importance of minor cinemas and the people they represent in the social history of London. I have shown that the various films produced by the BFI, the GLC and the BBC--along with independent productions by Lloyd Reckord and Cinema Action--are significant artistic achievements as well as important historical documents which demonstrate the vital role that London's minor cinemas have played in the context of municipal governance. By re-inscribing these long-neglected films into contemporary scholarly conversations in the field of film studies, I have shown that they also contribute to our understanding of London's physical and civic reconstruction in the long sixties.

The bountiful archive that has informed my argument enriches the interdisciplinary tensions and dialogues I have shown excavated in the period. The thesis certainly responds to an extant conversation around a relative handful of well-known 1960s films, but presents a 'minor' counterpart that grounds depictions of London through different periods marked by post-war reconstruction and social reform. My approach owes much to reviews and audience reports that tend to privilege character and story over more scattered aesthetic questions. I have, to give a few examples, paid close attention to Don Levy's desire to shoot 'real', 'impossible' locations to give *Herostratus* 'the quality of the actual places', Gordon Gow's praise of Lloyd Reckord's realistic depiction of homosexuality in *Dream A40*, the use of testimony in the cinematic contestations of the GLC and Cinema Action and reviewer Stanley Reynolds' flat out refusal to consider *The Block* in aesthetic terms when faced with the cold realities of homelessness, disease and abortion. Taken together, these films impel an investment in the wider social narrative which I have argued they both reflect and produce. This impulsion is even stronger in films such as *I Love This Dirty Town* and *The Writing on the Wall*, which both fail to seriously address the significant role that municipal social and housing policies have played in urban planning and the architecture of London.

The reports and reviews I have discussed demonstrate emphatically that knowledge of cinematic form has rarely been a condition for talking about movies. However, most of the films I have discussed have rarely been thought about in the context of, say, *Performance* (Donald Cammell and

Nicolas Roeg, 1968), *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) or *Blow Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966). Yet, in terms of subject matter, production costs and critical reception, the archival documents provide great insight into the broader economy that gave rise to films such as *Ten Bob in Winter*, *Squatters* and *The Writing on the Wall*. British cinematic history has positioned films such as these as minor, in comparison to the more contemporaneously fashionable, large-budget and now-canonised films of Roeg and Cammell, Powell and Antonioni mentioned above. The minor films I discuss have been labelled ‘ambitious narrative’, ‘experimental’, ‘short’, ‘observational’, ‘free’, ‘direct’, ‘activist’, ‘antagonist’, ‘political’, ‘propagandist’, ‘municipal’, ‘documentary’, ‘regional’, ‘televisual’ or not cinema at all, but what I have shown clearly is that these films generated fascinating discussions that are recorded in the recesses of the archive and had an enduring impact on the public. Each represents the consequences of redevelopment on the diffuse minority cultures in the city and I have shown that it is crucial to scrutinise the ground on which those representations stand.

The Block, for example, offers unique insights into the history and change in the nature of poverty in London. Its impressive viewing figures suggest that the film made a direct intervention in ongoing conversations around homelessness and housing policy. Its representation of ‘the poor’ as active players in their own lives extended the work begun by collectives such as Cinema Action into the mainstream, and its depictions of bureaucracy and the luckless Edie contested representations of municipality offered by the GLC as well as the revamped Victoriana of *Herostratus* with its fixation on women’s promiscuity.

The materials held in the GLC public relations archive I have cited bring to light the complexity of the council’s relationship to film. I have also highlighted the tensions between the relative narrative simplicity of the films I discuss and the complex social realities they portray, which are marked by difficult questions of class consciousness and cultural stereotyping. Although each of the GLC, BBC and Cinema Action films depicted a web of administrative process and self-interest, as well as collectivist ideals, the polemical register often masked a deeper intricacy, a murky reality in which the lines of the argument blend and fade. In order to present such ramifications, exhaustive archival research was not simply attractive, but necessary, for the political significance of minor London cinemas is simply too great. The form of civic politics presented by the BBC is notable for its plurality although, as Elizabeth

Lebas has argued, the television film is the ostensible successor to the municipal film. I have shown that these films marked a watershed in the political consciousness developing in some areas of London. Tenants were portrayed speaking for themselves, rather than merely parroting local authority housing policy. Filmmakers, meanwhile, had begun to undermine the opinions of experts, the roots of a cynicism echoed decades later in BBC housing films dealing with their own respective housing crises.

By the 1960s, many on the Left believed municipal socialism had become deeply corrupted by economic liberalism. This corruption limited the British welfare state to an ameliorative role that left its various institutional bodies capable only of quelling the harshest consequences of class inequality in London, a perspective both shared and portrayed by many minor films. I have presented this relationship in terms of a contestation between the GLC and activist filmmakers, but this contestation is visible throughout all films discussed in the thesis. This contestation can be summed up in terms of the GLC's conflicting focus on solving economic problems such as unemployment and productivity, and the potential of municipal socialism as an active force of change. The GLC's principal task to address the problems caused by a shrinking economy ultimately reduced the institution to gestures of facilitation. I have shown how GLC films reflected this limitation in their optimistic representations of a more comfortable existence, in which the root causes of the social and economic issues that touched London went ignored. As I have discussed, activist cinema sought to retrieve the coordination of municipal activity from the GLC, to varying degrees of success. Where citizens had been assimilated into predictable behavioural patterns and repackaged as model tenants in GLC cinema, films such as *Not a Penny on the Rents*, *Squatters* and *The Block* offered portrayals of complex characters taking their lives into their own hands.

The depictions of London I have discussed are, to all intents and purposes, visions of municipality either dreamed up by the GLC, or negotiated between filmmakers, institutions and funding bodies, as in the cases of the BFI and BBC. Hard-working, essentially decent tenants, or in the very least the idea of them, sit at the heart of this vision. These films visualise a forked 'civics'. Characters dwell, shop and move without friction through the city's pre-worn passages, yet dissonant acts are clearly visible in the 'wrong' dwelling of Max in *Herostratus*, Nicholas Wright's 'bad gay' in *Dream A40*, in the declarations of the activists in *Squatters* and the rioting residents of Southwark House in *The Block*.

This contestation of municipal politics pivots, as the term implies, between conservatism and civic consciousness, on tensions between, on the one hand, the representative branch embodied by the institutional practices of the GLC, BFI and BBC which are reflected in the ideas of figures as diverse as Ron Parks, B.S Johnson and John Pitt, and, on the other, the direct manner embodied in the portrayals of counter-civics listed above. I have argued, moreover, that terminological distinctions, such as ‘political’ or ‘municipal’ are far from fixed and may even blend in unexpected ways. Peter Wollen’s description of ‘agitational’ cinema—historically specific cinema produced for the needs of a ‘specific limited audience’—for example, maps neatly onto Lebas’ definition of municipal cinema as ‘local films for local people[...] of little interest beyond their community.’ Although the films of Cinema Action did not assimilate social resistance in the same manner as the GLC did, both groups claimed to belong to and be in service of the municipality.

I have also shown that Lebas’ definition does not accord well with the expectations the GLC had of its own films which, by the mid-sixties, had developed internationally in scope. The problem is one of perspective, of viewing the GLC as a local authority like any other, rather than an institution which modelled itself on international organisations like Shell Oil and took great care to develop its corporate ‘brand’. The reality of GLC cinema is more accurately reflected in definitions of ‘propagandist’ film offered by both Wollen and Robert Vas, as well as those trumpeted by Head of BBC Documentary Paul Rotha: a broad politics aimed at a wide audience, a medium of both power and responsibility. The role of moving images was crucial to the governance of London in the long sixties, but where the GLC focused, necessarily, on images of its own investments in physical redevelopment, an accurate social picture is harder to piece together and without doubt scrutiny of the margins of accepted narratives about the history of London yields the greatest results. For my part, I have shown how activist cinema directly responded to the GLC’s housing policies and illustrated the centrality of minor cinemas to the contestation of municipal London.

Immigration, homelessness, homosexuality, prostitution, protest, even the turmoil of adolescence: these forms of urban ‘promiscuity’ or ‘unruliness’ bore real importance to the GLC’s assimilative drive that began upon its formation in 1965 and manifested in the most fascinating ways in the minor cinemas of the same period. Narratives about minority social groups and cultural practices—

films of escape dressed up in refuge, fantasy and mythology—were at once nurtured and tucked away by the BFI under the guise of its Experimental Film Fund and Production Board. I have discussed in detail how the BFI took part in its own aesthetic reconstruction of London at a moment when the city appeared to be shifting wholesale, and argued that this activity mirrored the conservatism at the heart of the city’s municipal reconstruction and limited the potential social impact such remarkable narratives could have made. The lack of distribution poses a problem of visibility today and underscores what I have discussed in terms of a writing out of history of these films, that despite London’s status as a hub of economic migration (something clearly portrayed in the BFI films through characters such as Sandy in *Herostratus*, Paul in *Ten Bob in Winter* and the unnamed protagonist in *Refuge England*), a distinct politics of exclusion was palpable and the indelible print of white, male institutionalism evident. This politics extended into the major features of the period, which focussed on the narratives of white London: *Performance*, *Clockwork Orange*, *Blow Up*, *Peeping Tom* and *The Servant*, to name a few. The Experimental Film Fund—its institutional politics and ability to shape the culture of the city, personified by Michael Balcon, who traversed the politics of both the minor funding body and major bodies such as Ealing Studios—played a crucial role in the figurative reconstruction of London at a time when the intangible aspects of civic life were as unstable as the physical layout of the city itself. And the social transformations occurring in London in the long sixties would continue to shape the identity of the BFI in later years.

Ultimately, minor London cinema in the long sixties should, by necessity, be considered and appreciated in its own right, and that an understanding of this obscured history of filmmaking also enriches our understanding of the history and study of British cinema. And where I myself have both defined and defended the term ‘minor’ (therefore implying a ‘major’ counterpart), I am also aware that the term does risk reifying and preserving these films as a footnote in the developing story of British cinema. For this reason, I would like to emphasise that discussions of post-war British institutions and social history, as they are unfolding within film studies and beyond, need to enter in a sustained dialogue with parallel research in architecture, cultural and urban studies, and literature. My ultimate aim is to initiate a conversation about the intersections between social history and film history wherein, to borrow

the words of Walter Benjamin, the distinction between 'major' and 'minor' is lost. Considering the minor cinemas of London is a step in that direction.

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