In Common: Housing Coalitions for Producing, Owning and Living in London

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27 August 2024

Abstract

The thesis starts with a simple proposition: What if housing were a common? A pre-modern English custom of land ownership and use, the notion of the commons has reemerged in recent architectural debates as a participatory ecology for production, ownership, and use. The thesis explores their transformative value in addressing the much-needed change in London's housing context today. In that sense, grassroots efforts promise not only more accessible housing economies but also architecturally valuable models for owning, sharing, and dwelling. Most importantly, they challenge modern preconceptions that form the foundation of how residents relate to housing, land, and each other. While existing architectural scholarship focuses mostly on hierarchically planned housing, grassroots sharing cultures and their spatial imaginaries remain little studied. The research aims to explore this gap by discussing the relationship of the commons with architecture.

The thesis consists of two parts that employ different but interconnected methods. The first part establishes the theoretical and historical context. A historical case study analysis reconstructs a genealogy of housing commons in London. The second part draws on qualitative methods to discuss the Lewisham-based community land trust RUSS and its inaugural housing project, Church Grove.

The thesis concludes that housing commons are yet to emerge in London. To achieve autonomy, housing projects need to connect with other realms and scales of commoning. This is addressed by the introduction of the term coalitions, which refers to spaces and practices that allow for multiple commoning systems to link up. To support the commons, architectural practitioners and researchers need to embrace more coalitional roles, connecting different actors and local relational networks. Then architectural practice can become a common itself.

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List of Abbreviations

AGM Annual General Meetings

CLT Community Land Trust

ELCLT East London Community Land Trust

GLC Greater London Council

HA Housing Association

LCC London County Council

LCLT London Community Land Trust

LEC Limited Equity Limited Equity Co-operative

MHA Mutual Housing Associations

NEC Non-Equity Co-operatives

RSC The Rising Sun Collective

RUSS Rural Urban Synthesis Society

SICLC Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes

TMO Tenant Management Organisations

Introduction

In recent years, a paradigmatic shift has emerged in the relationship between architecture, economics and law, which opened the possibility for a new social mandate for spatial practitioners. Since 2008, the term *crisis* has been ubiquitous in architectural debates to describe the state of British housing. In global prime markets like London, where homes double as investment assets, housing has long ceased to support local life, livelihoods and well-being. The financialisation is evident in the way residents relate to their homes but also in the way in which housing is culturally and spatially planned and delivered. Housing has been a commodity since early modernity, with Londoners being frequently displaced. The welfare policies of the post-war reconstruction temporarily alleviated the perpetual crisis, until the neo-liberal turn in the late 1970s, and eventually leading to todays unprecedented inaccessibility.[1] One of Margaret Thatcher's most quoted phrases – " no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first"[2] – proved central to the way the public provision of housing was restructured. This ethos remains foundational today in how the home and the domestic are conceived, now entirely dictated by the yardstick of a high-risk, fast-paced, global entrepreneurial ethos.[3] With that, housing, which was inherently social and political by its mandate to organise domestic life, was gradually subsumed by finance.

The neoliberal architect experienced the consequences of this transition first-hand through the type of work that they had to produce. Beyond the intellectual and cultural implications, the political turn had a significant practical impact on organising architectural labour. Municipal roles, once so prestigious and sought by young architectural graduates, gave way to increasingly precarious competitions and private development.[4] While the average architectural worker lost from these developments, having to endure more insecurity through shorter contracts and more competitive fees, this wasn't true for the new figure of the *starchitect*. These role models constituted a new measure of architectural success through the establishment of their artistry and signature style – a perfect embodiment of the self-made economic individual on a global scale. High-end architecture like this often exacerbated social and economic struggles for local Londoners by creating a ripple effect of rising property values. A relatively recent example is One Hyde Park by Rogers Stirk + Partners, which is believed to include 60 units owned by tax haven companies.[5] David Madden and Peter Marcuse discuss the current housing condition in the UK and the United States as *commodification*. That is "the general process

[1] For more details on the privatisation of housing and its impacts on today's crisis, see Anna Minton, *Big Capital: Who Is London For?* (Penguin UK, 2017) and Raquel Rolnik, *Urban Warfare* (Verso Trade, 2019). As defined by David Harvey, *neoliberalism* is a doctrine of economic thought and management which was put into practice by the conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and has subsequently spread around the world through the emergence of international finance institutions. At its very core lies the assumption that everybody will be better off if private ownership, enterprise, and markets are as unobstructed as possible. For a detailed account and definition of neoliberalism, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

[2] Margaret Thatcher, "Woman's Own Magazine", *The Sunday Times*, September 23, 1987.

[3] It was this ubiquity of finance, secured by the state, that was different from the classical liberal tradition of Adam Smith or David Ricardo. For more details, refer to Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 20. A cultural reading can be found in David Harvey, *The Condition*

0.1 Constructon site, London, 2019

by which the economic value of a thing comes to dominate its other uses".[6] Raquel Rolnik uses the term *financialisation* to focus on the financial industry's specific role. Rolnik refers to the work of Manuel Aalbers, describing the condition as "the increasing dominance of financial actors, markets, practices, measurements and narratives, at various scales, resulting in a structural transformation of economies, firms (including financial institutions), states and households".[7] No longer limited to politics, the investee ethos soon trickled down to the individual dweller, reflecting a new culture of ownership and use.[8] Beyond the architectural limitations of "occupying the commodity",[9] there is more at stake. With laissez-faire approaches dictating who can remain in the city and who can't, London is becoming ever more inaccessible, homogeneous and devoid of life.[10] This brings architects to a moment in history when, although architectural *thinking* has never been more concerned with matters of social justice, architectural *practice* has never been more careless. In that condition, architects are presented with an unresolvable problem: on one hand, they must stay competitive to remain in the financialised city; on the other, this requires them to become complicit in reproducing the status quo, contributing to their own precarity and that of others.

At the root of the liberal economic striving for freedom lies, undeniably, the question of ownership. This includes the privatisation of the publics, the dismantling of institutions of civic care and the encouragement of private homeownership. Like Thatcher's vision, individuals have been taking on increasingly more agency, albeit in collectivised forms. The increased precarity and insecurity of the decades of austerity policies drove the neoliberal dweller to pool and govern local resources collectively. Such legal and economic experiments have become a stronghold for residents to build and safeguard local wealth – a condition that scholars have framed through the concept of the commons. The term stands for the possibility of fair participatory ways to use, access and own urban land.[11] For the general public, this definition draws on the fundamental right to access resources essential for people's material well-being.[12] For architecture, such experiments offer a glimpse into what housing might look like if informed by values other than finance. In doing that, the commons provide a site for alternative architectural agency and value, but also one in which the architect is positioned much more precariously than any previous approaches to social engagement in the discipline.

Due to the temporal nature of collective organising scholars differentiate between the terms *common* (refers to the pre-figurative state of collective discontent), *commoning* (its everyday practice of (re)producing shared resources

of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 180. For an architectural reading of neoliberalism refer to Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

[4] Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann, *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[5] "A Tale of Two Londons", Vanity Fair, April 2013, accessed July 23, 2023, https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/2013/4/a-tale-of-two-londons.

[6] David Madden and Peter Marcuse, *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis* (Verso, 2016), 14.

[7] Rolnik, *Urban Welfare*, 30.

[8] Michel Feher, *Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age*, trans. Gregory Elliot (Zone Books/MIT Press., 2018).

[9] Madden and Marcuse, *In Defense of Housing*.

[10] Suzanne Hall, *City, Street and Citizen: The Measure of the Ordinary* (Routledge, 2012); Suzanne M. Hall, "Super-Diverse Street: A 'Trans-Ethnography' across Migrant Localities", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 1 (2015), 22–37, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2013.858175.

[11] Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (University of Cali-

and relations) and *commons* (its final aim and outcome).[13] The participants in this process, or the *commoners,* are diverse fractions making up the collective body with shared stakes. In that sense, the theme of housing commons, as framed by the thesis, involves several distinct audiences. Mostly, it aims to be used by architectural practitioners who are currently grappling with how housing is designed and accessed; commons scholars, for whom it offers to fill the gap between theory and practice; and the general public, who might be already partaking in commons practices without explicitly framing them as such. From all these diverse audiences, architects can gain a lot from reframing practice through the commons theory. Specifically, though reflecting on their shared stakes and embodied positionality in developing the financialised city. Feminist thinkers like Nancy Hartsock and Donna Haraway remind us how central one's embodied experience is for thinking, knowing and practising. Constituting a momentary standpoint, the new subjectivity of the architect must allow for other ways to think and do architecture.[14] What disciplinary shifts need to happen to allow us to embrace and prioritise this positionality in architectural practice? To explore this, we will start by examining the traditional social engagement roles that architects assume to solve housing issues, and then discuss why these roles are no longer sufficient.

Housing as a Universal Right

In the aftermath of the sub-prime mortgage crash in 2007-2008, Stuart Hodkinson reflected on "the return of the housing question".[15] The article discussed one of the critical faultlines in the housing debate – should housing be a matter of a large-scale state intervention or collective action? Regardless of how successful public housing models were in the past, especially in providing material relief for many Londoners, they also had their challenges. The following section addresses some of them in more detail, explaining the choice of the thesis to focus on grassroots initiatives rather than large-scale state solutions as a response to the housing crisis.

Many scholars, practitioners and activists argue that housing is a universal right for all, which should be resolved through decisive state intervention.[16] This recent support for public housing in London partially emerged as a reaction to the many demolitions of former council estates throughout the city. The word "regeneration" has Anglo-Norman roots and has been used since the 16th century, specifically in relation to the economic and social *improvement* of a geographical area.[17] Demolishing parts of the city has been a regular occurrence in the life of Londoners for very long through the practice of "slum clearance". After the Second World War, planning documents started using the term "urban regeneration". In the contemporary context, stakehold-

fornia Press, 2009), 6.
[12] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, 2009), viii.
[13] Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (Zed Books Ltd., 2017), 10.
[14] Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex, and Power : Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 231; Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575–99.
[15] S. N. Hodkinson, "The Return of the Housing Question", *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 12, no. 4 (2012): 423–44. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2013.858175.
[16] John Boughton, Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing (Verso books, 2018); Owen Hatherley, Red Metropolis: Socialism and the Government of London (Watkins Media Limited, 2020); Danny Dorling, *All That Is Solid: How the Great Housing Disaster Defines Our Times, and What We Can Do about It* (Penguin UK, 2014).
[17] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Regeneration", accessed July 9, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161223.

er interests are so skewed that this wording has become a mockery through the devastating impacts that such practices have on the lives, livelihoods and well-being of Londoners. This traumatic and widespread experience includes developers regarding old public housing stock as brownfield sites, local authorities and housing associations unable to maintain them, and a popular political narrative to justify demolition through the scarcity argument – that there are not enough housing units and more need to be built.[18] As a result, retaining post-war council estates has become a cause for tenants, such as the Focus E15 group, and architects, such as Architects for Social Housing. Some of the losses in the redevelopment fight include demolishing crucial architectural heritage, such as Alison and Peter Smithson's Robin Hood Gardens.
While the *financialisation* of London's housing was an outcome of the neo-liberal turn at the end of the 1970s, however, its *commodification* goes as far as western modernity. After the Great Fire in 1666, speculative builders started to increase land returns, similar to attitudes to rural land in England at that time.[19] In that process, housing and its architecture were instrumentalised to "improve" urban land, being framed as an asset through which one can plan ahead and extract value from. Engels would suggest later that housing is no different than any other commodity, that at the core of its question lies class conflict, and that the issue will remain as long as the means of its production are in the hands of the bourgeoisie.[20] However, to be able to reframe housing as a renewable and universally accessible resource, one needs to challenge this understanding of commodity. Such ideas, including modern concepts like scarcity, improvement, ownership and governance, have been normalised as intrinsic to housing since its inception. Historically, they have exposed housing to becoming vulnerable to privatisation, providing a new territory for capital investment. Architecturally, such definitions of housing limit our ability to address non-economic registers, which are crucial to how Londoners relate to housing, each other and their environment. In that sense, the commons allow for a reframing of housing outside the commodity narrative. They offer a new set of values, which Chapter II will discuss in more detail.

The historical conditions in which these political ideas flourished would have never been possible without the material basis of the British Empire.[21] And so, the question must be asked: can the welfare state ever be post-colonial? Or was it a historically and geographically contingent project built on the dispossession of people around the globe? Even if these ideas can be reframed through a post-colonial lens, can they speak to anyone outside the neoliberal west? Franklin Obeng-Odoom offers one of the few decolonial definitions of the commons in the book *Commons in an Age of Uncertainty: Decolonizing*

[18] Anna Minton disproves this argument by showing that building new homes does very little when affordable housing legislation is circumvented by developers, and local residents are rehoused miles away from their social networks and places of employment.
[19] Dan Cruickshank and Neil Burton, *Life in the Georgian City* (Viking New York, 1990).
[20] Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* [1872] (Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers, 1995), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/index.htm.
[21] Swenarton, Avermaete, and van den Heuvel, *Architecture and the Welfare State.*

Nature, Economy, and Society (2021). [22] The work critiques the "western left consensus" for its implications outside the neoliberal west. Along a similar line of argument, Angus Cameron and Penny Travlou demonstrate the urgency of a de-colonial definition of commoning.[23] Their account of commoning threshold spaces in Australian Indigenous architecture challenges the western spatial canon to create new architectural meanings and inclusive spatialities.[24] In *Urban Warfare* (2019), Raquel Rolnik shows that housing crises are not limited to the neoliberal west. Although the problem originated in the UK and the United States, the model was exported to the rest of the world through international institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the UN. More importantly, Rolnik argues that the UK was one of the epicentres of the financialisation of housing, and that its colonial hegemony helped this financialisation to proliferate globally. The reason, Rolnik argues, was the vast amount of surplus capital in the 1990s that could not be subsumed otherwise. In this way, the geographical setting of the thesis is a strategic site within a global housing struggle: London's position in global finance and colonial history makes it a key place to make grassroots efforts more inclusive, scalable and relevant beyond the neoliberal west.

In his original text "The Housing Question" (1872)[25] Engels suggests that the state's role in solving the housing shortage, like any other exchange commodity, is a matter of class conflict and control of the means of production.[26] However, as Chapter I will discuss, exclusion does not occur only along the class axis. In the case of British post-war housing, dwellers were excluded based on race or gender, while housing was conceived and designed with a particular dweller in mind, the white nuclear family. This brings us to another challenge for public housing – its reliance on vertical hierarchies, which can be normalising, exclusionary and devoid of life. In 1968, Henri Lefebvre published "The Right to the City", laying out a spatial critique of the assumption that housing is just a commodity.[27] Focusing on the suburbs of Paris, his work showed that when driven by land speculation and scientific rationality, cities lose older morphologies like squares, streets and monuments, which are essential for urban social life. For Lefebvre, the suburbs might constitute a *city* (formal and vertically designed by the state, planners and architects). Still, they lack what makes a city *urban* (informal and socially produced space in the everyday).[28] Lefebvre also foregrounds one of the most urgent issues for modern planning and architecture in the public sector – their lack of democratic participation. For Lefebvre, solutions to urban problems can only come from their inhabitants, not their planners, and in a reformist, revolutionary act.[29] In *La Production de l'espace* (1974), he

[22] Franklin Obeng-Odoom, *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty: Decolonizing Nature, Economy, and Society* (University of Toronto Press, 2020).
[23] Angus Cameron and Penny Travlou, "Commoning Aboriginal Ethno-Architecture", in *Housing as Commons: Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis*, eds. Stavros Stavrides and Penny Travlou (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 78.
[24] Stavros Stavrides and Penny Travlou, eds., *Housing as Commons: Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 128.
[25] Engels, *The Housing Question*.
[26] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One,* trans. Samuel Moore and Frederick Engels (Progress Publishers, 1848), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/.
[27] Henri Lefebvre, "The Right to the City", in *Writings on Cities,* eds. Eleonore Kofman and Elisabeth Lebas (Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 147–60.
[28] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 84.
[29] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 152.

further elaborates on these ideas to conclude that space is collectively produced in everyday practices and, more importantly, has both representative and reproductive roles within social realities.[30] Drawing on this, built form becomes an open-ended dynamic system of everyday, inherently contested and political processes. This understanding allows us to discuss any urban development politically, beyond its material registers. It also demonstrates the importance of relational networks in the commoning process. Most importantly, Lefebvre's work argues against the shortcomings of more vertical institutional approaches to housing. Although Britain's public housing represented a successful social policy, its tenants grappled with its reductive and universalising methods. Established architecturally through the western Modernist canon, such approaches limited built form to the singular design vision of the (mostly white male) architect. In that sense, the outcomes of that architecture were forcefully *universal*, as much as they were legitimised by the alignment with the political welfare project and shaped by the individual vision of the architect.[31] As will be discussed in Chapter I, housing has always been instrumentalised for political ideology.[32] Can Bisel and Juliana Maxim argue in *Architecture and the Housing Question* (2022) that architecture has been central in the reproduction and legitimising of inequalities, especially along racial and gender lines. In this history, the role of the architect to extract and universalise has been mostly compliant. Therefore, it is urgent to produce a critical account of other ways to think of and practice housing, even if they are outside of architecture. Chapter III addresses this gap by examining several commoning case studies in London.

Housing as a Common

The neo-liberal architectural worker has now reached a point where although contributing to their own precarity, they know no other ways to practice in the financialised city. In that way, the commons are presenting an opportunity to reframe housing, and architecture at large, beyond the commodity narrative. By offering a post-modern reading of a pre-modern custom, the concept could give architects the tools to break beyond the extractive and universalising history of housing and explore alternative sites for architectural practice. The commons have been a very popular topic in architecture in the last decade. Starting from 2012 and the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, the theme "Common Ground" focused on "what we share [...] to coordinate our resources and our ambitions and give more vision to our collective efforts".[33] Outside of architecture, the *commons* were first theorised at the end of the 1960s, in the field of conservative environmentalism on one hand[34] and as a lean management structure on the other, alternative to both the state and the "firm".[35] The term

[30] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [1974], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell Publishers Limited, 1991), 33. In the book, Lefebvre introduces a conceptual triad to frame his analysis of social space. This includes *spatial practice*, which (re)produces both physical space and social relations, *representations of space* and *representational space*, which stand for the spatial embodiment of respectively formal and informal social life.
[31] For a critical account of the notion of the universal, we draw on Michel Foucault's concept of *biopower* and *biopolitics*. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, ed. Michel Senellart (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[32] Miles Glendinning, *Mass Housing: Modern Architecture and State Power–A Global History* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021); Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Routledge, 2014).
[33] David Chipperfield, *Common Ground: A Critical Reader*, eds. Kieran Long and Shumi Bose (Marsilio, 2012), 13. In 2016 TU Delft hosted a conference titled "Constructing the Commons", exploring participatory socio-spatial practices. In 2017, the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism 2017 was titled "Imminent Commons", framing urban commons as a new form of governance. This was followed by "An Atlas of

0.2 Loughborough Farm, London, 2023

Photo by Ivan Matvejevs

was not widely used in architecture until the 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis. Perhaps due to this austerity-related context, scholars often define the term through the notions of the public or the private. Elinor Ostrom, one of the first commons theorists, sees them as an alternative ownership and governance model for both the state and the firm. Stavros Stavrides defines *common space* in a similar way – in relation to public and private space.[36] Torange Khonsari also describes the commons as a field between the market and the public,[37] while highlighting the need to refer to a definition specific to the commons.[38] As the commons predate both the state and the modern concept of private property, they offer an interesting reading of housing as a pre-modern distributed resource. Peter Linebaugh offers a detailed account of the original customary English right to *common* land, which was central to producing and sustaining (material and social infrastructures) to support local life, livelihoods and well-being.[39] More importantly, the commons constituted a pre-private distributed form of land-holding, informing many elaborate agreements relating to use and access, as discussed in Chapter II. Framing housing in this legal history, and freeing it from definitions of either the state or the market, offers more equitable and sustainable ideas for urban development. It also enables new cultures for homes to be owned, planned, delivered and lived in. In that way, housing commons can be defined as collectively owned and governed resources, which are (re)produced through participation and collaboration within a relational social network.

It is no surprise that ideas of the *commons* and *commoning* are mostly excluded

Commoning: Places of Collective Production", an ARCH+ exhibition in 2018. In 2020-2021 The Lisbon Architecture Triennale offered a series of lectures – "Common Field" – which addressed the theme of neoliberalism. After the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems that interest has intensified in rediscovering the freedom of being together, as well as a renewed anxiety for the dire outlook for the world in the climate emergency. The Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture in the United States recently held their 111th annual conference with the theme "Commons – Practices, Processes and Crossovers", directly addressing the pressing issues of inequality and climate change. The European Architecture Students Assembly has also embraced the commons as community-held resources and space. At the same time, the most

from the traditional historiography of housing, Seeing how recently the concept entered the field of architecture.[40] There are a few exceptions, for example, Matthew Johnson who traces the gradual "closing" of the house during enclosures of common and arable land in Britain.[41] The book suggests that the legal restructuring of the rural landscape informed a change in the domestic interior, making it increasingly closed, private and specialised. Another notable example is Colin Ward's informal history of housing.[42] Lastly, although not explicitly related to the commons, themes like the *vernacular* or *collective living* can be regarded as commons-adjacent.[43] To address this gap, the thesis creates a close historical reading of how commoning housing was a site for architectural experimentation.

Towards Commons Architecture

Perhaps due to the lack of historical records of housing commons, architects struggle to frame the theory in ways which can be responded to by design. The commons are inherently grounded in concrete action, horizontality and participation. Nevertheless, most of the commons discussions in architecture remain theoretical, discursive or speculative.[44] Failing to explore the situated experience of architectural practice goes against their nature. Some architecture scholars, like Stavros Stavrides, are skeptical that commoning can be designed and have entirely retreated from the realm of practice. *Common Space: The City as Commons* (2016) discusses both the urban and architectural scales through Foucault's framework of biopower. Through this lens, architecture has been seen as either compliant with the normalising role of institutions or ill-suited to creating the commons. For Stavrides, commoning is an act of emancipation, while design is an inherently vertical hierarchical practice. Common space is not only a material space; it cannot be designed.[45] It can only be claimed through inhabiting space, making it temporal and constantly changing. According to Stavrides, this limits the architect's role to that of a reader and observer rather than a participant.

Although the process of housing commoning can be more emancipatory than the actual formal outcome, some scholars believe that innovating form is as crucial. In "Alternative Models of Tenure: Recovering the Radical Proposal of Collective Housing" (2022) Martino Tattara concludes that even in recent forms of collective ownership, such as community land trust, housing can remain relatively conventional, suggesting that new architectural forms of living together are as crucial as land tenure innovation. In "Promised Land: Housing from Commodification to Cooperation" (2019), this idea is elaborated further to identify three transitions which need to happen simultaneously for new housing design methodologies to emerge.[46] These "countermoves" are

recent London Festival of Architecture defined its theme "In Common" as community-led city-making.

[34] Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", Science, New Series, Vol. 162, No. 3859 (Dec. 13, 1968), 1243-1248. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1724745.

[35] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge University Press, 1990). Ostrom frames the commons as an alternative resource management model to both the *firm* and the *state*. The firm describes an individual entrepreneurial approach, aimed at maximising returns. The state, on the other hand, stands for institutional forms of governance, or a "ruler". Here Ostrom describes a vertical hierarchical management model, which is aimed at maximising collective benefits.

[36] Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (Zed Books Ltd., 2016), 54.

[37] Torange Khonsari, "A New Model for Spatial Practice - Commoning" (Online Lecture, Architectural Association, 2022), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp0R91symwk.

[38] Julie Katherine Gibson-Graham, "Diverse Economies: Performative Practices For Other Worlds", *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 5 (2008), 613–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132508090821.

[39] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capital-*

democratising access to land, *democratising access to the construction industry and interrogating ways of living together.* The last strategy is evident in another Dogma project *Do you see me when we pass? (2019)* offering a more flexible approach to typology and family constellations.

In other cases, formal innovation can have unclear emancipatory consequences. For example, although commoning draws on sharing as a foundational practice, and housing has a long tradition of sharing, not all sharing is commoning. As Stavrides states, the key is to "explore the emancipating potentialities of sharing".[47] As sharing is the building block of commoning, it is sensible to ask how it translates to architecture, specifically housing. In *Spatial Models for Domestic Commons* (2018) Neeraj Bhatia and Antje Steinmuller identify three typologies of housing commons – communes, co-living and co-operatives. Here, the architecture of the case studies speaks of new patterns of private and public, a shift that has emerged due to ever more pressing economic reasons. Grouped under the overarching theme of sharing, the three different types are compared to summarise a range of new strategies in the home. Similarly, Gabu Heindl explores *thresholds* in the domestic space through the Vienna-based work "Urban Commons Research Collective: Intersektionales Stadthaus".[48] This residential project draws on the wordplay between *intersectionality* (Kimberlé Crenshaw's multi-axial definition of discrimination)[49] and the spatial qualities of housing, which can provide various sharing scenarios. In these examples, sharing is expressed formally, and it remains to see how this plays out on an emancipatory level.

Commons might be challenging to design; however, they can be legitimised through architecture. The London-based practice Public Works also explore collective alternatives to traditional land tenure. Their contribution to the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2021 was titled "Ministry of Common Land" and proposed a series of objects illustrating the historical background of the commons. This body of work also includes more practice-based projects, such as Tom Dobson's collaboration with Loughborough Farm. Here, the architect instigated a new development of the scheme and used it to occupy the site to secure the farm's tenure temporarily. The proposed "meanwhile" scheme was strategically used to sign a long-term lease with Lambeth Borough Council and formalise the farm's right to remain on site.[50] This opens the definition of what practice is and how it can go beyond the process of formalising to foreground more subjective and situated experiences of the architect. In this instance, the double-bind nature of the neo-liberal practitioner can be instrumentalised to support the commoning process, as a more commercial

ism: A Longer View (Verso, 2002), 108.

[40] An interesting account is this of Catherine Bauer, who speaks of "bottom up" cooperative strategies, anticipating N. John Habraken's participatory ideas from the 1970s. Unfortunately, these remain only a side commentary. For details, see Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (University of Minnesota Press, 1934). One of the most seminal reviews of Modern architecture, including housing, remains Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980). The work includes many intellectual trajectories which continue to inform national housing standards and architectural imaginaries. To name a few, this includes Charles Fourier's utopian socialism, Ebenezer Howard's *garden city*, William Morris's Arts and Crafts approach, Walter Gropius's ideas of standardisation, Le Corbusier's Dom-Ino house, Karel Teige's *minimum dwelling*, OSA's *dom-kommuna*. Other less architecturally rigorous, but highly influential, critiques of modern public housing include Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space* (The Macmillan Company, 1972); and Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial* [1985] (Hilary Shipman, 1990).

[41] Matthew Johnson, *Housing culture: traditional architecture in an English landscape* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993)

[42] Colin Ward, *Cotters*

development case is used to secure the right of the farm to remain on the site. Although Public Works is perhaps one of the few London-based practices that consistently bridge the gap between commons theory and practice, housing remains largely unexplored.

Commons space might not be easily designed, however, their spatial networks and material processes can. Massimo De Angelis terms this as *boundary commoning*, or Stavrides describes it as *threshold space* – boundaries that connect and separate simultaneously, but most importantly, that are sites for expanding the social network of the commons. In *Unmaking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital* (2004), James DeFilippis suggests that autonomy from global capital cannot succeed unless approached holistically. Only securing housing, work and finance simultaneously can make a meaningful difference.[51] The idea of interdependent autonomy might sound paradoxical at first; however, it is beneficial to discuss ideas around boundary commoning and threshold spaces. While most commons architecture addresses only one issue (housing, food or work), Atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa) is one of the few practices that think of the commons more holistically. The work includes long-term practice-based research embedded in the project's locale and social relationships. In particular, their project R-Urban constituted a network of local production hubs, addressing three areas: food (Agrocité), material production (Recyclab) and housing (Ecohab). Moreover, the project was part of a more extensive network of case studies across Europe, including collaborating with Public Works, who are developing R-Urban Wick in Hackney. Doina Petrescu, the co-founder of aaa, refers to this with the term trans-local, opening up the question of linking locally and across scales and geographies.[52] Similar to the idea of threshold spaces, the project aims to create autonomy through interdependent boundary commoning projects. In this sense, architectural research and practice are embedded within the movement. By doing so, the architect fosters the commoning process.

Architecture has a long tradition of social engagement, including modern and post-modern approaches. Framing housing as commons offers the possibility to build upon this history, recognising the specificity of architectural practice today, and the new social mandate it can have. The work of Public Works and Atelier d'architecture autogérée speaks of an already emerging new role of the architect as a commoner. On the one hand, architecture can legitimise alternative development in the financialised city. On the other, it can link and spatialise different scales and loops together to improve commoning circuits' (re)production and expansion. While architects have always acted on behalf

and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History (Five Leaves, 2002)

[43] A detailed overview of the English vernacular house is provided in Eric Mercer, *English vernacular houses: a study of traditional farmhouses and cottages* (London: HMSO, 1979) and Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren, *The life of the British home: an architectural history* (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2012). Although not strictly focused on Britain, for a historical overview of shared housing, refer to Susanne Schmid, Dietmar Eberle and Margrit Hugentobler, *A History of Collective Living* (Birkhäuser, 2019). Some of these early cooperative housekeeping projects also link to Victorian women's movements. An extended study can be found in Lynn F. Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living* (Macmillan Press, 1988); and Alison Ravetz, "A Domestic Revolution: Poverty, Respectability and Housing Reform", in *Council Housing and Culture: The history of a Social Experiment* (Routledge, 2004). A feminist reading of the evolution of the house in relation to women's roles in the household is Jos Boys et al., "House Design and Women's Roles", in *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, eds. Matrix (Pluto Press, 1984), 55-80.

[44] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 23.

[45] Stavrides, *Common Space*, 120.

of someone else, their criticality to existing power institutions has emerged relatively recently. Conservative laissez-faire policies, following the Modernist welfare project, have created an institutional void in Britain. The coincidence of these political developments with post-modern intellectual principles resulted in a legacy of "socially engaged" approaches.[53] Social engagement has existed previously, for example, in the hierarchically planned Modernist housing. No longer having an institutional affiliation, post-modern social architects started interrogating the power imbalances within their design methods and processes, and more importantly, their positionality and role. This included opening up design decisions to users through participation, engagement and co-design.[54] Some have worked towards demystifying the design process and disseminating expert knowledge as a tool for empowerment.[55] Others have focused on instrumentalising the identity and experience of the designer to identify and fill representation gaps in critical practice and history.[56] More recent strategies have leveraged the privilege of the architect to provide a service in geographies of disinvestment, locally or globally.[57] With the 2008 crisis, grassroots strategies addressed the de-financialisation of housing.[58] In 2011, Awan, Schneider and Till introduced the term spatial agency in their book *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (2011). According to the book, the built form should move away from architectural style and a static finished object. Instead, it should be understood as a continuous process that constantly negotiates the interests of its stakeholders. In that way, architecture is always collective, contested and in progress, while the architect's role continually needs reflection and redefinition. What distinguishes today's social architect from this earlier post-1960s wave is the change in positionality. Unlike previous more deterministic agendas in architecture, today's practice no longer enjoys the same position, departing from an expert standpoint, benefiting from job security and technical expertise. With the growing precarity among practitioners, especially recent graduates, today's architect is closer to the stakes of the neoliberal dwellers to developing an alternative to the financialised city.

To address this new condition, the thesis draws on the concept of *coalition* building. Massimo De Angelis also talks about coalitions in commoning, using the term *boundary commoning*.[59] If the term *boundary* relates to the practice of organising, and the term *threshold* to spaces, *coalitions* refer to the commoner's positionality, reflecting critically on existing social inequalities. In this way, coalitions are not a value-neutral term to describe growth. It is a tactical relationship aware of its operational field into a broader ecology of social movements. The notion of coalitions originated around self-organising during the Civil Rights Movement. It was borrowed later in feminist studies to address inter-

[46] Pier Vittorio Aureli et al., "Promised Land: Housing from Commodification to Cooperation", e-flux Architecture, 2019, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/collectivity/304772/promised-land-housing-from-commodification-to-cooperation/.
[47] Stavrides, *Common Space,*7.
[48] Emre Akbil et al., *Urban Commons Handbook* (dpr-barcelona, 2022), 127.
[49] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss 1, Article 8, 139. http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.
[50] Louis Volont and Tom Dobson, "The Political Intricacies of Common Space: A Rancierian Approach to the 'Public Land Grab', London", *Antipode* Vol. 0, no. No. 0 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12754.
[51] James DeFilippis, *Unmaking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital* (Routledge, 2004).
[52] Corelia Baibarac and Doina Petrescu, "Open-Source Resilience: A Connected Commons-Based Proposition for Urban Transformation", *Procedia Engineering* 198 (2017), 227–239. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2017.07.157.
[53] Dutton and Mann, *Reconstructing Architecture*; Simon Sadler, "Postscript: How and When Was Architecture Socially Engaged?", in

group dynamics and the challenges of identity politics in collective action.[60] London's complex urban environment requires a similar approach. While coalitions draw on identifying shared interests and depart from the "saviour" narrative, they include an awareness of the complexity and the variety of positions within a movement. Moreover, coalitions rely on concrete action, rejecting tokenistic modes of support. They are grounded in practice, similar to the commons.[61] Drawing on these two concepts – commoning and coalition building – the thesis challenges the traditional role of collective architecture. It frames it as the means to accommodate, enable and express a complex and ever-changing multitude of coalitions. Here, the architect's position is that of a commoner who is part of the movement while instrumentalising their difference to achieve change. This leads to the main research questions:

1. What constitutes housing commons in architecture?
2. If housing can be owned, managed and accessed as commons, what new values and potential would this create for its architecture?
3. What is the role of architecture in supporting the formation, resilience and impact of housing commoning practices?

Methodology and Methods

To summarise, commons are participatory relational networks of ownership, production and use, which emerged as a post-modern reading of a pre-modern customary practice. Although there is plenty of theoretical literature on the commons and some on housing-as-commons,[62] there is still no in-depth study of London. What constitutes a more specific gap in architecture is that there is still no clear consensus among scholars on how commons can be a design question. The thesis approaches this gap by exploring the value the commons hold for the new role of the architect, in particular, the recent shift in positionality, from a place of expertise to that of a commoner. This suggests a social mandate for architects which goes beyond determinism, and which is grounded in embodiment, shared stakes, and concrete action is exciting.

The first part of the thesis outlines the theoretical and historical framing. While the historical reading allows for more distance and better reflexivity of the period's specificities, it remains detached from the subject with little transformative capacity on the ground. It also needs to be improved in collecting primary evidence and the embeddedness of the researcher in the context. To address this blind spot, the second part of the thesis uses qualitative methods, drawing on ethnographic research. The thesis borrows such approaches from

The Routledge Companion to Architecture and Social Engagement, eds. Farhan Karim and Farhana Ferdous (Routledge New York, 2018); Penny Lewis, Lorens Holm and Sandra Costa, eds., *Architecture and Collective Life* (Taylor and Francis, 2022).

[54] John Habraken, *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing* [1972] (Routledge, 2021); John FC Turner, "Housing as a Verb", in *Freedom to Build* (New York: Macmillan,1972), 148–75; Colin Ward, *Tenants Take Over* (Architectural Press London, 1974); Ezio Manzini, *Politics of the Everyday* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019); Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till, *Architecture and Participation* (Routledge, 2013).

[55] John Jones, *Design Methods* (John Wiley & Sons, 1992); Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Routledge, 2017); Colin Ward and Anthony Fyson, *Streetwork: The Exploding School* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

[56] Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias* (MIT Press, 1976); Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (Pluto Press, 1984).

[57] Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, Lawrence Chua, and Cervin Robinson, *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2002); Cameron Sinclair, eds. Cameron Sinclair and Kate Stohr, *Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural*

anthropology or sociology to analyse architectural form, processes and social relationships for architectural purposes. The discussion is focused on the case study of RUSS, a Lewisham community land trust, and their inaugural housing scheme, Church Grove. Prolonged fieldwork and a small unstructured sample of interviews are used as an inductive way to refine theory through situated and embodied methods, while visual material records and critiques the spatial dimensions of the fieldwork. Although it has less to do with generating architectural form, a commons framework can enable a new visual reading of existing form. Without attempting to proclaim architecture as more relevant than it is, the discipline offers an interesting perspective on the question of housing. The thesis does not present any findings on typological innovation; however, it speaks to the emergence of a new subjectivity of the coalitional architect.

Chapter Synopses

Chapter I begins with a policy and literature review that traces London's institutional housing framework's gradual emergence. In this history, philanthropic, municipal, and national institutions have dominated the architectural debate, and rightly so, public housing, especially post-war public housing, has been a successful social policy that has improved many Londoners' lives. Even in their most successful days, however, housing institutions have always been not only a social project but also a financial and political one. On the one hand, they laid the groundwork for coupling housing with national and eventually global finance at an unprecedented scale; on the other, how they were conceived and materialised was imbued with normalising and exclusionary principles. These shortcomings of public housing also affected its popularity, which was eventually mobilised by the conservative narrative that supported the privatisation and reduction of welfare programmes in the 1970s. As a result, architects, no longer widely employed by the local authorities, found themselves in the institutional void of the Keynesian welfare state. The neoliberal policies, especially financial deregulation, eventually spread the investee ethos to housing. Following the 2008 crash, today's community-led housing scene started to emerge in London.

Chapter II introduces the commons as an extra-institutional model for owning, sharing, and dwelling, and it is a main theoretical focus throughout the thesis. This section considers the commons from several different perspectives – legal-historical, economic-managerial, political-theoretical and anthropological, which highlights the significance of local social networks by drawing on anthropological theories about gifting and sharing cultures. The chapter provides a working definition of the commons as a participatory relation-

Responses to Humanitarian Crises (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006).

[58] Jack Self and Shumi Bose, eds., *Real Estates: Life Without Debt* (Bedford Press, 2014).

[59] Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*: 287.

[60] Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (Columbia University Press, 1986); Diane L. Fowlkes, "Moving from Feminist Identity Politics to Coalition Politics through a Feminist Materialist Standpoint of Intersubjectivity in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza", *Hypatia* 12, no. 2 (1997), 105–124. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3810472; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 2002).

[61] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century", in. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983); Emma Dabiri, *What White People Can Do next: From Allyship to Coalition* (Penguin UK, 2021).

[62] Daniel Madav Fitzpatrick, "Governance of Mutual Housing in London" (PhD Thesis, UCL (University College London), 2018); Amanda Huron, *Carving out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, DC* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Stavrides and Travlou, *Housing as Commons.*

al network of production, ownership and use, which is based on inclusive, interdependent and regenerative principles. Finally, the section concludes by critically reviewing what "being in common" means in London's multicultural and ever-transforming context. Here, coalitions are introduced as a productive approach to commoning in theory and practice.

Chapter III creates a genealogy by exploring several housing commoning projects around London from the English Revolution until the counter-cultural squats of the 1970s. The case studies include the Diggers in Surrey (1649-1650), the Co-operative and Economical Society in Spa Fields (1821-1823) and Villa Road in Brixton (1972-1978). This historical chapter aims to draw attention to the legacy of London's grassroots housing movements and uncover voices that were not part of the existing architectural canon. Three case studies are explored, representing a claim to the universal right to land access and collective action. In each of these specific periods, housing is contested differently, starting from the emergence of the Early Modern concept of private land ownership in Britain and ending with the counter-cultural critique of post-war housing policies. This part aims to create something other than an expansive continuous account of London's housing commons. Instead, it focuses on a few case studies to reveal their historical context and discuss how built form relates differently to the process of commoning. The chapter concludes with the observation that London's housing commons are yet to be developed. Their autonomy lies in their coalitions with other circuits.

Chapter IV discusses the methodology and methods of the thesis. It introduces the combination of historical and qualitative methods in relation to the main research questions and the existing literature on the commons. The chapter also explores the history of London's housing ethnographies and introduces the qualitative approach, the field, and the practicalities of the fieldwork. Here, the broader context of the case study is discussed by providing a brief historical overview of grassroots organising in the London Borough of Lewisham.

Chapter V focuses on fieldwork with RUSS Community Land Trust (CLT). Their first housing development, Church Grove, leaves us with several concluding observations. Currently, having to face the same financial and legal conditions as any commercial developer, and with limited resources, grassroots housing developments in London struggle to make a large-scale *financial* impact on the market. This is especially limiting for the *architectural* possibilities of such projects. As residents are personally funding the scheme, any

experimentation with architectural typologies affects the property's value, rendering them financially vulnerable. This means that the residential units, the main subject of the struggle, are rather conventional. However, other, more peripheral spaces emerge as much more important for the thesis. Local gathering spaces for knowledge production, recording and dissemination, such as an educational hub and a community garden, remain crucial and become central to the instrumentality of the project. They constitute boundary or threshold spaces where the project opens up to expand its network and create new coalitions. Such spatial provision reflects the CLT's complex governance model and ensures the commons' reproduction. This complexity presents new and exciting opportunities to redefine the importance of architecture in the commoning process.

PART ONE

THE CRISIS,

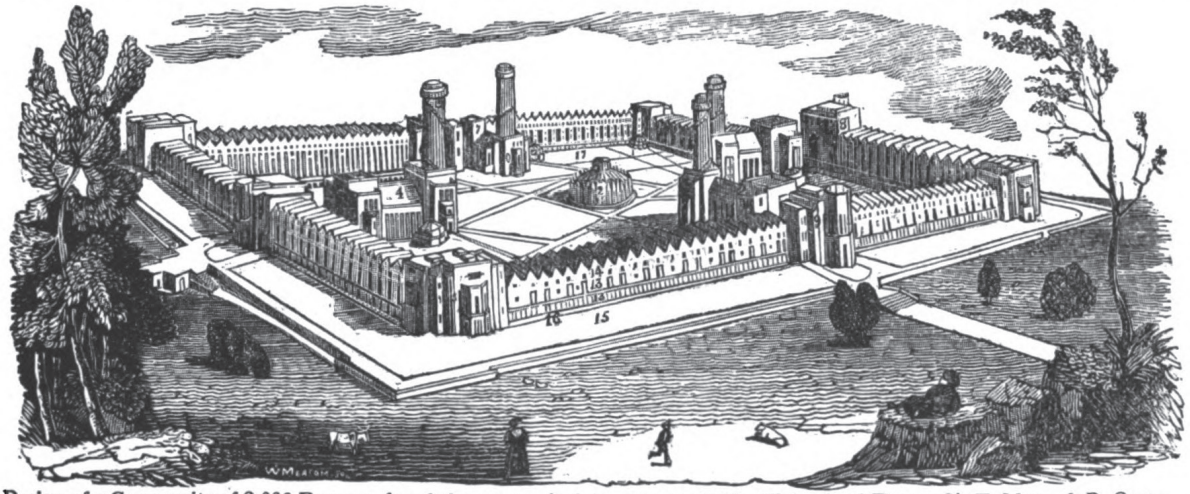
OR THE CHANGE FROM ERROR AND MISERY, TO TRUTH AND HAPPINESS.

1832.

IF WE CANNOT YET RECONCILE ALL OPINIONS,

LET US ENDEAVOUR TO UNITE ALL HEARTS.

IT IS OF ALL TRUTHS THE MOST IMPORTANT, THAT THE CHARACTER OF MAN IS FORMED FOR—NOT BY HIMSELF.



Design of a Community of 2,000 Persons, founded upon a principle, commended by Plato, Lord Bacon, Sir T. More, & R. Owen.

EDITED BY

ROBERT OWEN AND ROBERT DALE OWEN.

London:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY J. EAMONSON, 15, CHICHESTER PLACE, GRAY'S INN ROAD.

STRANGE, PATERNOSTER ROW. PURKISS, OLD COMPTON STREET, AND MAY BE HAD OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1833.

Chapter I. Institutional Voids: London's Public Housing and Grassroots Action

The following policy and literature review will help to trace the gradual emergence of London's institutional framework for public housing. In this history, post-war welfare efforts have dominated the architectural debate, and rightly so, they have been a successful social policy which has improved the lives of many Londoners. Public housing has always been not only a social, but also a financial and political project. This chapter traces its history and shortcomings, including its role in connecting housing to national and global finance and perpetuating normalising and exclusionary practices.

The Housing Crisis

The use of the term *crisis* and the link between pathology and housing comes as no surprise. After all, it was precisely matters of national health that initiated public housing in Britain. Moreover, with housing inaccessibility becoming a global concern, scholars, advocates and activists see it as our foundational and existential minimum human right.[63] London exemplifies this global struggle in the most extreme manner. When this thesis started, in 2018, the median house price in the capital was £487,250.[64] The median annual earnings were £28,345.[65] Even for a couple, an 80% mortgage based on four times their annual income would require almost double the median annual income. In spite of regulations in place to provide affordable housing, it is arguable how accessible this is, with some the highest affordability tier offering only a 20 % discount of the market price. In this hierarchy of affordability, *social housing* is the lowest tier. This stock has been progressively reduced as part of a long process which started in the late 1970s. With social housing stock shrinking, a Local Housing Allowance was introduced by the UK's coalition government in 2008 to support social renting in the private sector.[66] However, as rents kept on rising, this resulted in further deprivation, and tenants were forced to move further and further out of the city. Contrary to the popular stereotype that social tenants are unemployed or on a low income, today they increasingly include people with a steady income.[67] Recent events – Brexit, the pandemic and Russia's invasion of the Ukraine – have only exacerbated these conditions by causing labour and material shortages, as well as increasing the cost of living. Today, six years and ten housing ministers after the research was started, the housing market is even more inaccessible.

In 2019 the design blog *Dezeen* and the architectural think-tank Bee Breed-

[63] Rolnik, *Urban Warfare.*
[64] Land Registry, *Average House Prices by Borough, Ward, MSOA & LSOA*, Land Registry (London Datastore, 2018), accessed March 17, 2020, https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/average-house-prices.
[65] Office for National Statistics, Census 2021, *Earnings by Place of Residence*, Borough, ONS (London Datastore, 2023), accessed March 6, 2023, https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/earnings-place-residence-borough.
[66] Danny Dorling, *All That Is Solid.*
[67] Minton, *Big Capital.*

1.1 Cover page, *The Crisis*, 1832/1833, newspaper (1832-1834) edited by Robert Owen and Robert Dale Owen.

ers launched a competition titled "What is affordable housing?".[68] The publication that was produced included proposals for Hong Kong, New York City, London and Sydney. Some of the more provocative ideas for the UK included unlocking new land for housing by introducing bridges on the Thames or building over Buckingham Palace, framing the housing crisis as a lack of space. Another contribution is LOWE Guardians, who are featured with Studio Bark's project The Shed, that offers a transportable cabin for property guardians, to "mitigate the risks" of squatters in unused industrial buildings.[69] What emerges from competitions like this is the common assumption among architects that the lack of affordability is caused by the scarcity of space, hence, ideas on how to economise and densify space can solve the crisis. Although a fascinating intellectual indulgence, many such architectural solutions remain, at their best, with limited impact. Not only is it impossible for architects to resolve a problem which is essentially grounded in social policy; such proposals can also even be harmful. If such strategies to for densification are embraced by the industry as a new ground on which to expand finance, they can further exacerbate the current housing struggles. The assumption that the crisis can be averted by architects is flawed from the outset. In fact, these recent attempts align strongly with the political narrative that the crisis comes from a stagnant supply. This might have been true in the post-war years, but not today. Housing is critical for both national and international economies. So much so that the outstanding mortgage debt in the UK usually equates to around half of its GDP[70] and global economic growth is dependent on the speculative price increase of housing.[71]

Anna Minton introduces her book *Big Capital (2017)* with a terrifying tour of London's prime real estate. The work describes how such areas often create a ripple effect of gentrification in the city by displacing local residents outwards, breaking up their social networks, livelihoods and ways of being in and relating to the city. Sometimes evictions can be quite literal. Although the planning system has legislation in place to safeguard the urban population from such social cleansing processes, in practice, as Minton demonstrates, loopholes and case-specific agreements allow such rules to be circumvented. One of these is the compulsory affordable housing provision which any development must adhere to. In this context, *re*-developments are especially devastating for both existing residents and the built environment. Apart from destroying valuable architectural monuments,[72] residents are rehoused and compensated with only a fraction of what the new units cost, forcing them to move out.[73] This anxiety, stress and trauma indeed feels like a crisis on the ground, but for reasons very different from stagnant supply. In fact, the idea of the crisis has been incredi-

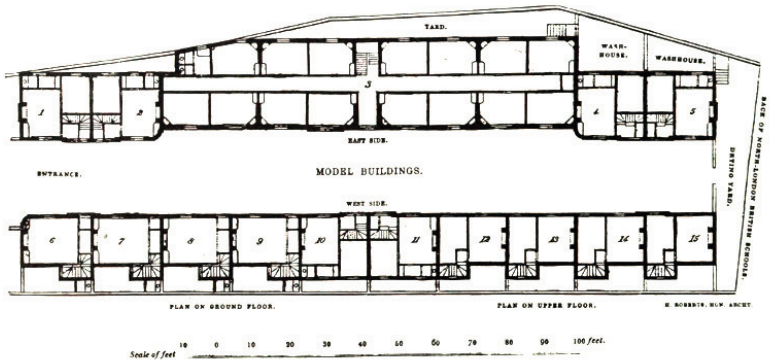
[68] "Competition: Win a Book about Affordable Housing Ideas from Bee Breeders", *Dezeen*, September 11, 2019, https://www.dezeen.com/2019/09/11/what-is-affordable-housing-book-bee-breeders-archhive/.
[69] ARCHHIVE, *What Is Affordable Housing?* (ARCHHIVE BOOKS, 2019), 21.
[70] Neil Monnery, *Safe As Houses? A Historical Analysis of Property Prices* (London Publishing Partnership, 2011), 166.
[71] Matthew Rognlie, "Deciphering the Fall and Rise in the Net Capital Share: Accumulation or Scarcity?", *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, no. 1 (2016), 1–69.
[72] One of the most recent examples includes Alison and Peter Smithson's Robin Hood Gardens Estate. "Bulldozers Move in on Robin Hood Gardens Estate", *Dezeen*, 25 August 2017 accessed March 6, 2023, https://www.dezeen.com/2017/08/25/bulldozers-demolition-robin-hood-gardens-alison-peter-smithson-brutalist-estate/.
[73] Paul Watt, *Estate Regeneration and Its Discontents: Public Housing, Place and Inequality in London* (Policy Press, 2021).

bly instrumental in the very making of these conditions. David Madden and Peter Marcuse argue in *In Defense of Housing (2018)* that the crisis narrative has been used rhetorically to only deregulate further. This narrative, embraced by both politicians and architects, is not only inadequate, but also incredibly harmful. Moreover, as Madden and Marcuse argue, the term implies that there has been a previous normal state of affairs.[74] This chapter aims to demonstrate that, although redevelopment has been happening since the establishment of the planning system and public housing, the financialisation of housing drove such practices to an unprecedented scale. How did London get here, and was there a time when housing politics were not a matter of national emergency? The following section will trace the origin and development of public housing policies in London, as well as their implications for architecture.

The Invention of Public Housing 1890-1919

The concept of public housing emerged as a long, gradual process throughout the 19th century. It began as a response to a national health crisis, as Britain's industrial cities grappled with pollution, population growth, and the lack of infrastructure to accommodate their residents. This resulted in overcrowded and dreadful living conditions and sanitation issues, which eventually led to the frequent spread of disease. Politicians, social reformers and philanthropists turned their attention to the conditions of the working class, appealing urgently for housing reform. John Boughton suggests that seeing welfare as a question of national policy was also underpinned by ideas of racial fitness and securing Britain's imperial supremacy.[75] Culturally, such ideas were drawing on the Victorian obsession with hygiene, the popular belief that diseases spread by *miasma* or "bad air", and the conflation of morality, hygiene and poverty. In 1834 the controversial Poor Law proposed the resettlement of the urban poor in workhouses where they were forced to fulfil a quota of work. Essentially a social cleansing strategy, this aimed to keep the most vulnerable urban population out of sight. In 1842 the Chadwick report established a link between living standards and the spread of disease, creating an opportunity for architects and urban planners to respond to these health concerns. This study also established the beginnings of the first industrial mass housing projects, which at that time were inseparable from the question of class. The general backdrop of housing events included Engels' publication of *The Condition of the Working Classes in England (1845)* describing the St. Giles slum in Bethnal Green.[76] Initially it was the crown, the church or wealthy industrialist who financed these projects. *I*n 1844 the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes (SICLC) was established, headed by Albert, Prince Consort, and the architect Henry Roberts. This partnership delivered the first

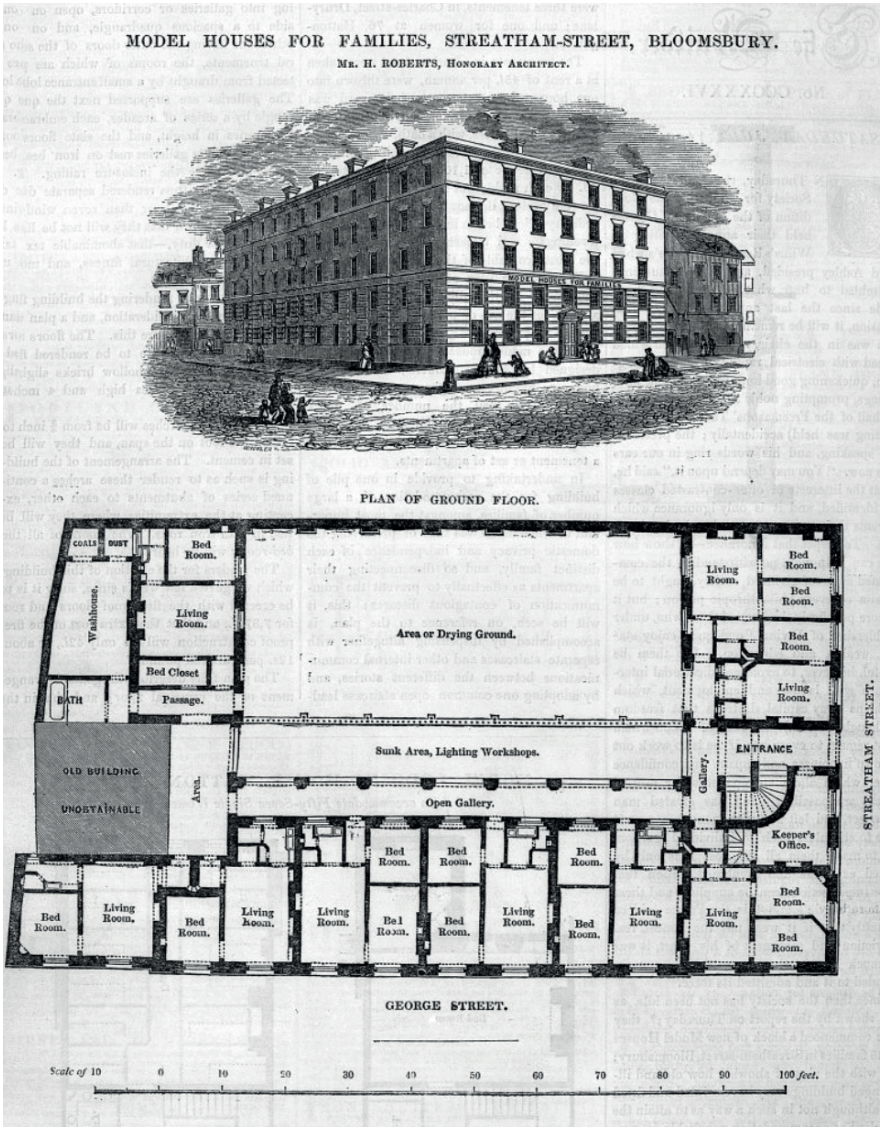
[74] Madden and Marcuse, *In Defense of Housing*, 10.
[75] John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (Verso Books, 2018), 18.
[76] Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* [1845], trans. Florence Kelley Wiscunewetzky (John W. Lovell Company, 1884), 19.



2.1 *The Bagnigge Wells estate of S.I.C.L.C.; their first development in 1844. Henry Roberts architect*

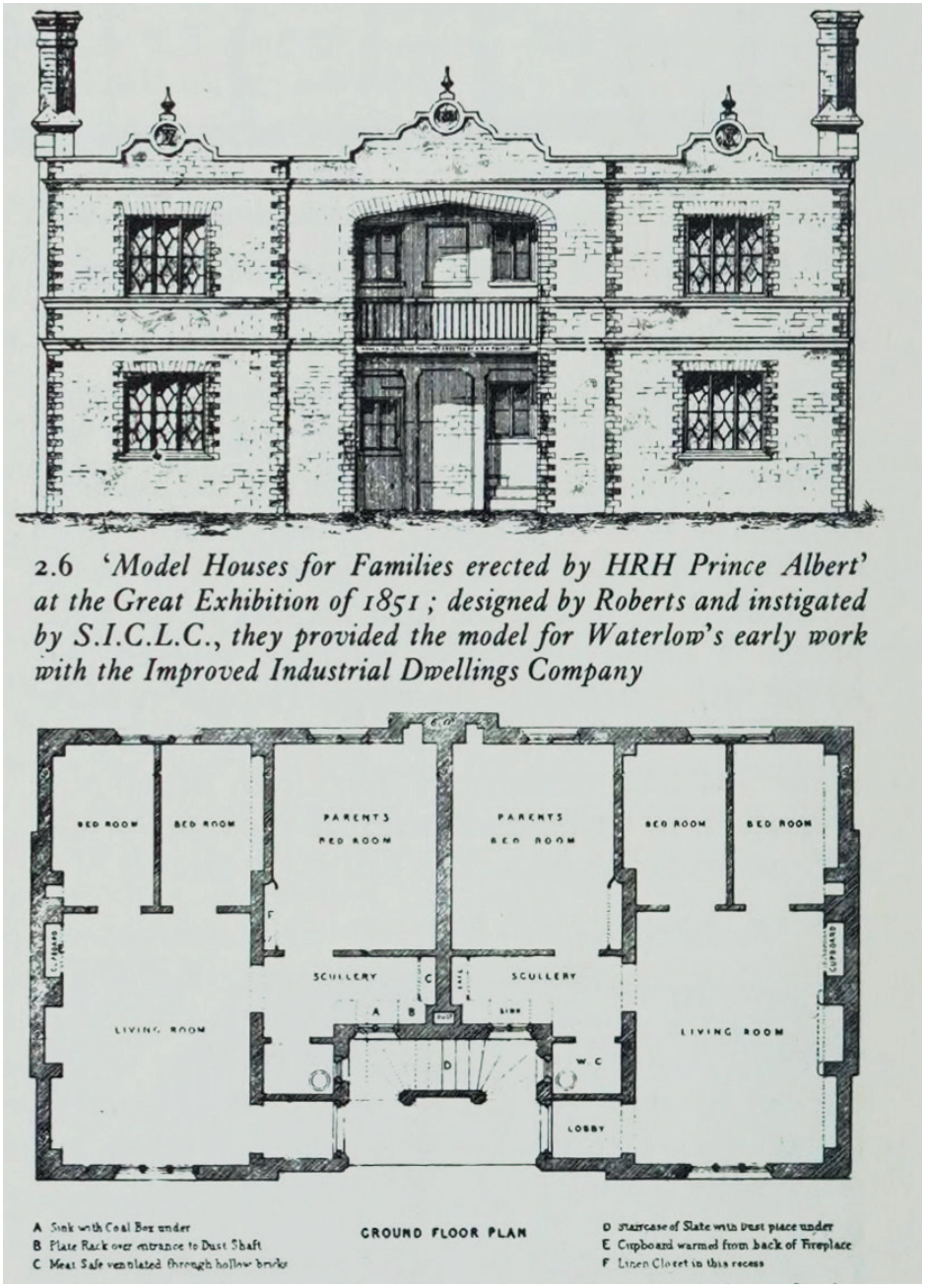
1.2 Henry Roberts, Bagnigge Wells Estate, 1844. In: John Nelson Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: an Account of Housing in Urban Areas Between 1840 and 1914*.

1.3 Henry Roberts, "Model Houses for Families [now Parnell House], Streatham-street, Bloomsbury [London], *The Builder*, 1849.



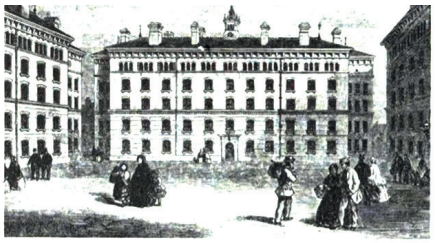
philanthropic housing schemes for working-class Londoners. From the very beginning, the two distinctive typologies, which remain popular until today, were the traditional terraced house and the tenement block. Although not yet clearly pronounced, they were present in the first housing scheme, Bagnigge Wells, designed in 1844 by Henry Roberts and the SICLC. The project consisted of a cul-de-sac with two rows of housing. It used the leftover rear garden spaces to negotiate the build form with the awkwardly shaped site. In that way, Roberts seamlessly linked the scheme to the existing urban fabric. The interior of the building offered several types of self-contained units, which were varying in the degree to which they were sharing sanitary facilities. This included some self-contained single-family houses, which had three rooms and an outside toilet in the back; some shared houses between two families, which provided two rooms with an individual toilet on each floor; and a multi-occupancy building for widows, with individual rooms and shared sanitary facilities. In addition to this, the project included some communal washing spaces at the end of the street. Three years later Roberts proposed an inversion of this scheme for Streatham Street. Here, the outside was clearly defined and strongly articulated as a unified urban block, while the inside was organised around an outdoor courtyard, with a gallery providing access to the flats. All the units were similar in their provision of a living room and two bedrooms, in addition to their own toilets and a shared communal washing spaces. Perhaps the best-known design by Roberts was the Model Dwelling for Labouring Classes (1951) shown at the Great Exhibition. The scheme was presented to the public as a one-to-one mock-up in the Cavalry Barrack Yard near Hyde Park. Here four self-contained family flats were clustered to create a clean, simple detached cottage. The entrance and living room were facing the street, while the bedrooms were hidden away, in the privacy of the back. Moving on from earlier design, such as Streatham Street, the interior here clearly stated a more specific division of rooms, ascribing bedrooms to family members. The architectural historian Robin Evans considers the ambition of these early projects to be not only about the improvement in the material conditions of the working class, but also their morality. In that sense, the architecture of such early schemes instilled largely middle-class values in its residents.[77] Throughout the collaboration between Henry Roberts and the SICLC, the interior of the working-class home was shaped by ideas of the family, along with the health concerns of ventilation and drainage. Here, the autonomy of the individual units was defined typologically by the provision of sanitary facilities, driven by the family status of the inhabitants (widows, for example, need only one room and had to share a toilet). The exterior of these initial housing schemes focused on their presentation to the public sphere. Alison Ravetz reminds us of the Victorian

[77] Robin Evans, "Rookeries and Model Dwellings: English Housing Reform and the Moralities of Private Space", *Architectural Association Quarterly* 10, no. 1(1978), 24-35.



2.6 *'Model Houses for Families erected by HRH Prince Albert' at the Great Exhibition of 1851 ; designed by Roberts and instigated by S.I.C.L.C., they provided the model for Waterlow's early work with the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company*

1.4 Henry Roberts, "Model Houses for Families Erected by HRH Prince Albert at the Great Exhibition of 1851". In: John Nelson Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: an Account of Housing in Urban Areas Between 1840 and 1914.*



4.3 *Peabody Square, Islington, 1865; Darbishire's first plan using corridor access to two- and three-room flats with shared kitchens and lavatories at each end*

1.5 Henry Darbishire, Peabody Square, Islington, 1865. In: John Nelson Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: an Account of Housing in Urban Areas Between 1840 and 1914.*

concept of "respectability", which preoccupied both working- and middle-class Londoners at that time.[78] Its definition remains ambiguous, however, it often accords with Victorian narratives of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. Nevertheless, the concept of respectability is central for the architectural reading of the buildings' relationship to the city on a morphological level, as well as the importance of hygiene and privacy on a typological level. In this way, London's early housing projects cannot be seen separately from existing class hierarchies, especially due to the fact that early philanthropic housing was grounded in ideas of charity, as opposed to later municipal work which was framed as a civil right. In fact, much of these initial cultural ideas, especially the Victorian compulsion to clean and normalise life, will be carried through, both in space standards and housing imaginaries, although later Modern accounts such as Catherine Bauer's will refute the 19th century methods as a "record of failure".[79]

Despite Roberts' ambition the cottage model remained relatively unpopular with investors.[80] At the same time, workers' housing started to be regarded not only as a charitable project but also an investment prospect. In 1863, Sydney Waterlow introduced a development model which presented a profitable opportunity for anyone who wished to invest capital in it. The Improved Industrial Dwellings Company offered a 5% profit on the development of model dwellings. This grew into a relatively popular scheme, now commonly referred to as *five per cent philanthropy*. Irina Davidovici discusses the way philanthropy was materialised in this early housing architecture through the work of the Peabody Trust and the architect Henry Astley Derbyshire. In that way, such schemes were no longer only a way to house and police the poor, but also and economic project. An early example was the Islington estate, built in 1865. Here hundreds of families were arranged in units around long double-loaded corridors, with shared toilets and kitchens at each end. These schemes presented a much more economical development model than the preceding Roberts and SICLC proposals, and on a much larger scale. The way that the blocks were arranged in the city was rather unapologetic. Mostly five or six storeys high (as high as technical affordances of the time allowed), they had a considerable urban presence. More importantly, their design continued to represent middle-class values in shaping the Victorian city. Davidovici argues that the interior of these initial housing projects was an attempt to order reality and organise the social life of the industrial worker around the family, while their humble façades positioned the residents within the existing class system in the city.[81] As pointed out by Robin Evans, this was also the case for the earlier SICLC projects.[82] What had changed here was the shift in scale. No longer an

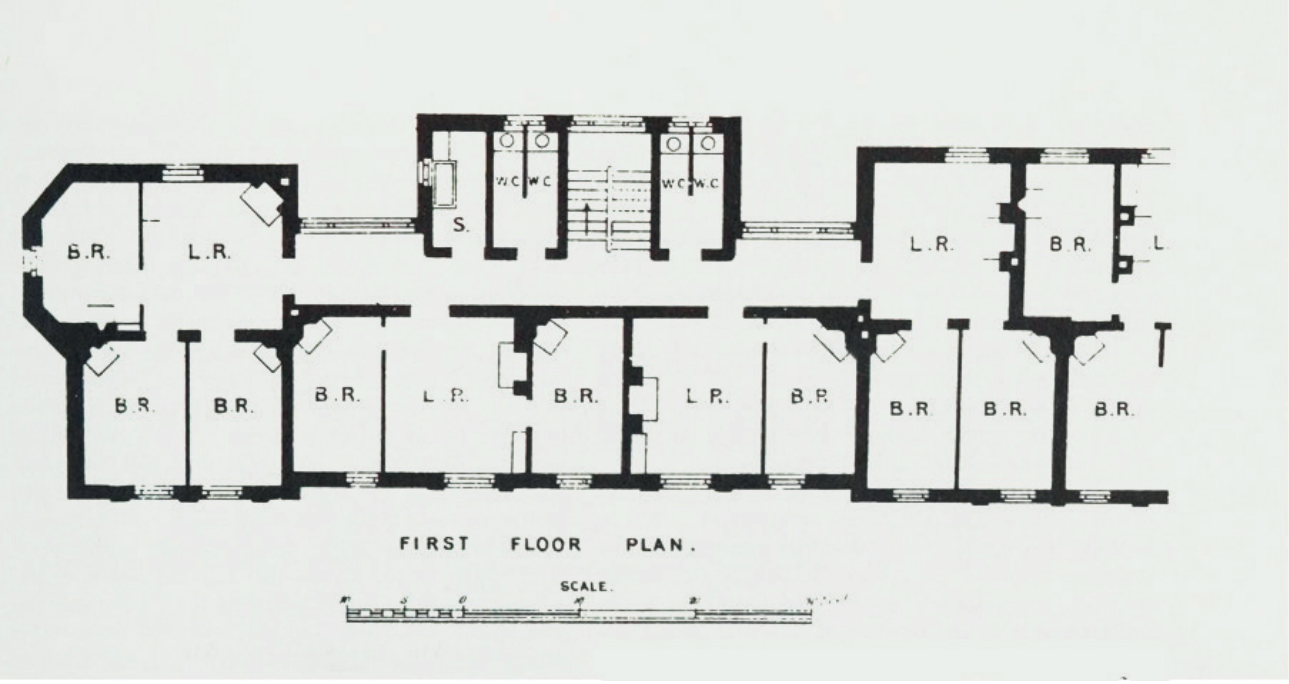
[78] Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (Routledge, 2003), 26.
[79] Bauer, *Modern Housing*. The book confronts the question of land value as a main cause for London's housing question. For Bauer, housing should be public – provided and regulated by the state. To support this argument, the book critiques 19th century byelaw terraced housing as the epitome of land speculation. In addition to that, Bauer advocates for mass-production and standardisation of housing, including the introduction of minimum space standards. This comes as no surprise, as five years earlier in 1929 participants in the CIAM II Congress set out to formulate *Existenzminimum* standards. Through framing housing as a matter of standards and not architectural design, Modern Housing also reframed the role of the architect from a designer to a planner. Here, individual authorship steps back in favour of collaboration in larger teams of architects.
[80] John Nelson Tarn, *Five per Cent Philanthropy: An Account of Housing in Urban Areas between 1840 and 1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), 21.
[81] Irina Davidovici, "The Depth of the Street", *AA Files*, no. 70 (2015), 103–23. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43432933.
[82] Tarn, *Five per Cent Philanthropy*, 44.

occasional building, Peabody were developing *estates* and housing hundreds of people.

Despite these initial housing schemes being seen as a reasonable private investment at the time, they were an economic failure and never managed to provide the returns they promised. However, these early episodes in London's housing history demonstrate that local homes have always been linked to economics and ideas of urban improvement, as well as being sites for political contestation and class conflict. Although housing projects became larger, they still remained unaffordable for many. As a result, they carried significant displacement consequences for the local population. The former practice of social cleansing now was no longer a policy, but an economic pressure. Although this has been a common experience for Londoners since the 19th century, the term "gentrification" was coined only in the mid-1960s, by the sociologist Ruth Glass in the book *London: Aspects of Change (1964).* For Glass, although post-war housing reforms made London more equal "[...]the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes – upper and lower".[83] This was a process of *gentri*-fication where "most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed".

In 1855 the Metropolitan Board of Works was founded to develop and maintain London's infrastructure. With this, poverty and hygiene were no longer linked together and associated with middle-class morals, but instead with the need for minimum living standards, which now were increasingly seen as a matter of a municipal, and later national, duty. One of the most decisive legislative steps in the development of public housing came in 1866 with the Labouring Classes Dwelling Act. This allowed local authorities to purchase sites and build homes, with loans at preferential rates from the Public Works Loan Commission. This gave early municipal authorities the agency to develop housing, alongside the crown, the church and the wealthy philanthropists. In 1875 the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act allowed municipal bodies to redevelop housing they saw unfit for habitation, which is another example of the long history of urban redevelopment and resident displacement in London. In 1884 the report by the Royal Commission of the Housing of the Working Classes confirmed the abysmal state of London's housing and this led to the establishment of London County Council (LCC) and the London borough councils. Six years later, in 1890, the Housing of the Working Classes Act introduced the Local Government Board which, among its other work, developed an early version of affordable housing quotas to replace existing units which had been demolished in the process of development. In theory,

[83] Ruth Lazarus Glass, *London: Aspects of Change* (MacGibbon & Kee, 1960), 3.



1.6 London County Council: Cleeve Buildings, Boundary Street Estate, London, First Floor Plan, 1893-1900. In: John Nelson Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: an Account of Housing in Urban Areas Between 1840 and 1914*

this comprised up to 50% of all units, but in practice, former residents could rarely return, once again: evidence of the existence of Victorian gentrification.[84] This legislative change also permanently established the development of denser tenement schemes across the city, but also made private investment less attractive, as regulations made projects less profitable.

Towards the end of 19th century, municipal housing schemes stepped away from the austere look of the Peabody schemes and turned to more experimental architectural approaches. As Alison Ravetz argues, this was due to a combination of several movements which remain in architects' housing imaginaries to the present day.[85] The LCC's first Architects' Department was full of young and eager Arts and Crafts Movement proponents.[86] One of them was Owen Fleming, who led LCC's first housing project, the Boundary Estate, in Bethnal Green, from 1893 to 1900. The scheme was ambitious. It intended to create over a thousand dwellings in a series of tenement blocks.[87] The overall grouping of the buildings meant that they connected seamlessly to the existing urban fabric: the site was divided into smaller blocks around a garden-circus. This was very different from the Peabody approach, in which estates and blocks were seen as self-contained and isolated. Here, the buildings were laid out to enhance the variety and break down the scale of the massing. Typologically, the plans had minimal internal corridors, and each unit included a designated living room and varying number of bedrooms. Some of the units had self-contained sanitary facilities, others shared ones outside the unit. The double-loaded corridor of the Peabody scheme had given way to more compact circulation space. The buildings themselves had a clearly defined front, facing the street,

[84] Boughton, *Municipal Dreams,* 17.
[85] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment*, 47.
[86] D. Gregory-Jones, "Some early works of the LCC Architects Department", *Architectural Association Journal,* 70 (Nov 1954), 95–105.
[87] Tarn, *Five per Cent Philanthropy*, 132.

1.7 London County Council, Boundary Street Estate, Shoreditch, London: interior of the Chertsey Building, Arnold Circus,1959.

1.8 London County Council, Boundary Street Estate, Shoreditch, London, 1968.

and back, facing the courtyard. This distinction between public and private is also articulated in the internal layout of the building, prioritising apartments along the front. In that sense, Roberts' model house and its front-back arrangement was interpreted on a larger tenement scale here. Living rooms seem to have been given a special importance, as they are placed in more prominent areas of the building, such as corners or bay window features. In that sense, the internal layouts of the residential units were negotiating the more varied exterior and guaranteed for breaks in the scale of the building, while increasing internal comfort. The pitched roof, use of materials and more careful and extensive landscaping are a reference not only to improving the "housing conditions of the labouring classes", but also to improving the city. Sadly, the estate remained financially out of reach for many Londoners.[88]

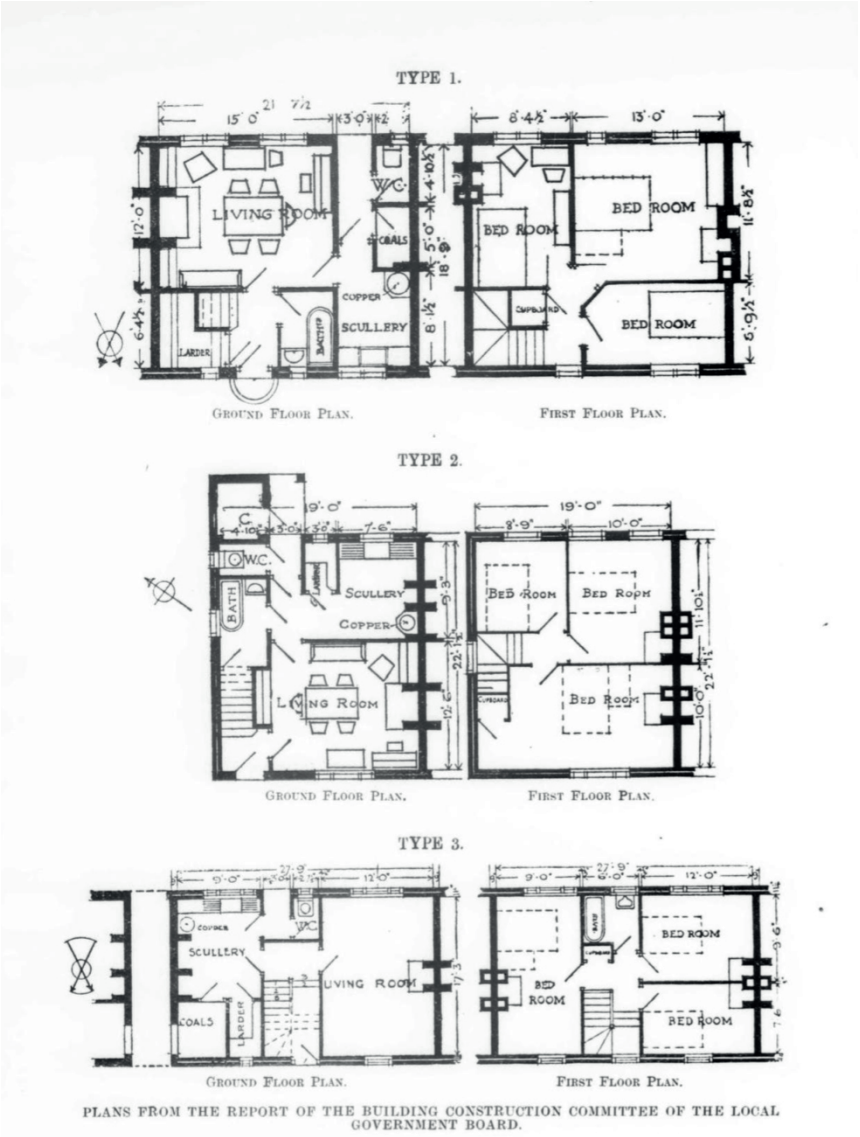
In 1898 Ebenezer Howard proposed the idea of the garden city in *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform.* The work was inspired by the ideas in *Progress and Poverty (1879)* by Henry George, an American land reformer, who argued for the introduction of a single tax on the value of land.[89] This attempted to establish a more equal redistribution of profits from the improvement of the land, a process in which everyone contributed, not just landowners. This was to compensate for the conflicted situation in which the very residents who were raising the value of the land could rarely afford to stay on it. This was based on George's observations on the rapid urban growth in American cities such as San Francisco and New York. Howard's ideas were also based on the work of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), describing a fictional utopian country of the future which, through peaceful economic reform, had managed to establish a totalitarian common order for all. In this way, Howard's ideas were drawing on the bigger questions of land reform, co-operative ownership and women's suffrage. They inspired a vision of a network of bucolic suburbs in London's Green Belt. Before the Representation of the People Act in 1918 only 10% of the population owned their homes, while land ownership was a condition for the right to vote. With this in mind, it is possible to appreciate how democratic Howard's ideas were.[90] Moreover, these ideas reflected a popular "back-to-the-land" movement which offered an alternative to metropolitan pollution and overcrowding, and to Victorian moral constrictions. Finally, a growing women's movement also left its legacy on London's housing history by foregrounding more practical ways of improving women's lives, in particular the centralisation and collectivisation of housework, which was taken on in co-operative schemes of the time.[91] Howard's ideas were put into practice by the architects Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, who, in their book *The Art of Building a Home* (1901) proposed their ar-

[88] John Boughton, A History of Council Housing in 100 Estates (RIBA Publications, 2022), xxiv.
[89] Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* [1879] (Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1954).
[90] Monnery, *Safe As Houses?,* 152.
[91] Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living*, 49.

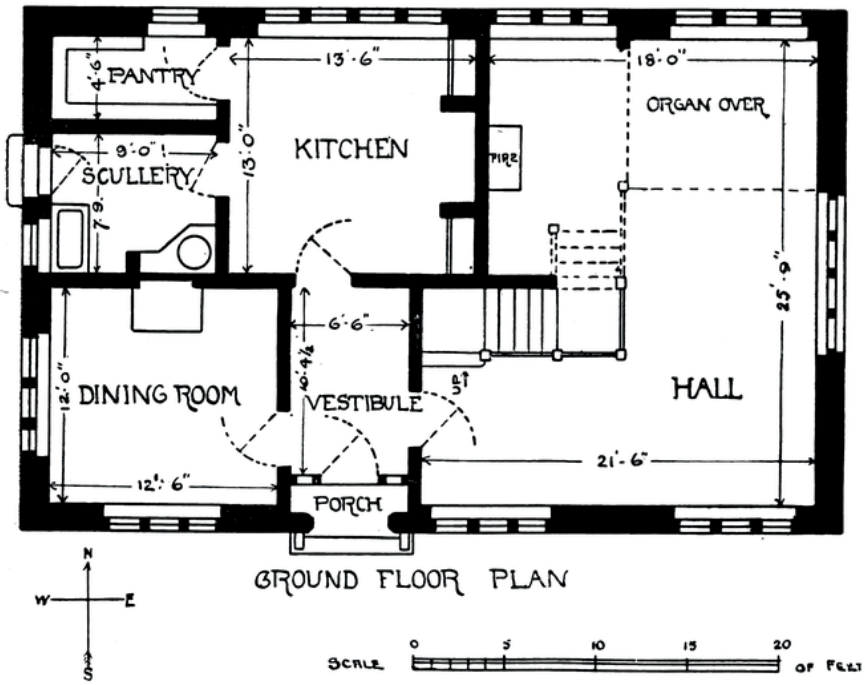
chitectural image of the perfect rural cottage as a product of art, natural beauty and cooperation.[92] Their design for the first Garden City, Letchworth, began to be constructed in 1903. The projects included important considerations of density – while byelaw density requirements were for 41 houses per acre, the Garden City's density was only 11.[93] This allowed for a wider frontage for each house, and more open space, but also the opportunity to imagine new uses for land, such as growing food. In terms of building scale, the Garden City model was the complete antithesis of the London's terraced house. The homes had a wide frontage, a minimum of corridors and rooms along the periphery to maximise light and views to outside. Most importantly, Parker and Unwin had developed very specific ideas about the living room by referencing the medieval hall, giving it as much space as possible, including a double height.[94] As for the exterior of the building, the aim was to break down the scale and create a pastoral, bucolic setting, incorporating stylistic features such as pitched roofs and winding roads.[95] The Garden City returned to the house as an autonomous unit, while speaking of wider ideas of political autonomy of the time. More importantly, these schemes offered a more affordable alternative to the London tenements.[96]

During the second half of the 19th century, the very beginnings of urban housing addressed the poor state in which the majority of working Londoners were living. Initial schemes relied on preventative health concerns and the investment opportunity in urban housing. But at the same time they included ideas about disciplining the poor. While the interiors of the first philanthropist projects were organised around considerations of hygiene and morals within the home, their exteriors were aspiring to the "respectable" character of their tenants and their place in the Victorian city. By the end of the 19th century, London had established a municipal infrastructure which was soon to take on the task of delivering large-scale housing projects. More importantly, the new concept of institutional welfare departed from previous ideas which equated poverty to moral pathology. LCC's schemes, inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, had the ambition of providing tenants with dignified and comfortable interiors. These units were no bigger, but they were more varied in style: along with the fragmentation of the monolithic block to fit seamlessly into the city they formed a vision of an improved urban setting. With Ebenezer Howard's Garden City proposal, translated by Parker and Unwin to the architecture of Letchworth, the spacious stand-alone cottage, set in the bucolic suburb became the new architectural direction for housing. These designs, their interior layout and exterior appearance, were nothing like the speculative terraced house. Their pronounced wider fronts, big windows, pitched roofs and lush

[92] Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, *The Art of Building a Home. A Collection of Lectures and Illustrations* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1901).
[93] Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (Routledge, 2018), 5. The original density considerations were laid out in Raymond Unwin, *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding! How the Garden City Type of Development May Benefit Both Owner and Occupier* (P. S. King & Son, 1912).
[94] Unwin and Parker, *The Art of Building a Home.*
[95] Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, 5.
[96] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, 52.



1.9 Plans from *Report of the Building Construction Committee of the Local Government Board* (Tudor Walters Report), 1918. In: Raymond Unwin, "Housing: the Architects' Contribution", in *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* Vol 26, Issue 3 (January 1919).



1.10 Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, A house in Marple, Cheshire: Ground and First Floor plans. In: Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, *The Art of Building a Home. A Collection of Lectures and Illustrations* (1901).

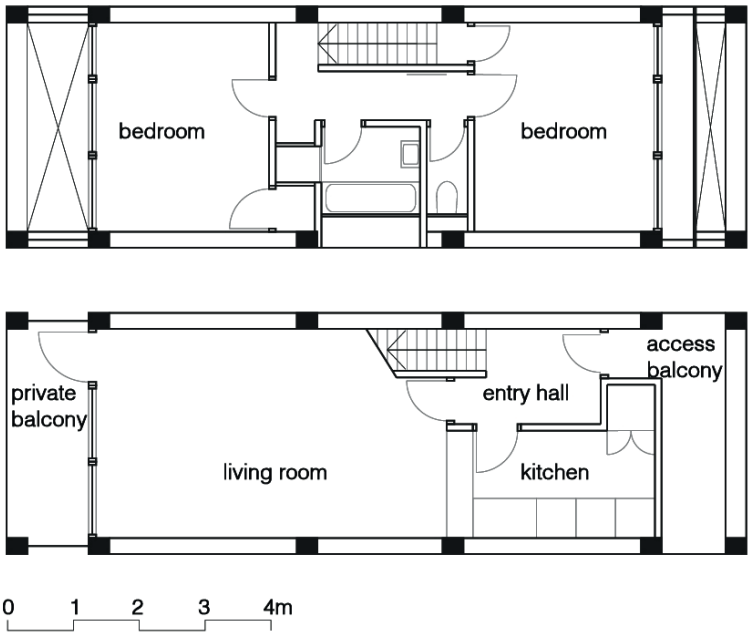
gardens were about to be used in a national intervention which was to make a real change to the lives of working Londoners.

The Rise of Public Housing, 1919-1979

After the First World War, the desire to build "homes for heroes" transformed the piecemeal philanthropic private initiatives, which later became municipal projects, into a unified public strategy on a national scale. In the first half of the century the growth of public housing was slow.[97] However, this period was formative for the completion of an infrastructure for large-scale public provision. The rise of trade unions, known as the "Great Labour Unrest", was decisive. A parallel growth in tenants' organisations led to the 1915 Rent and Mortgage Restriction Act, which established rent control. As fears of general unrest grew, Prime Minister George Lloyd launched the "homes fit for heroes" campaign. The 1918 Tudor Walters Report, which involved Letchworth's architect Raymond Unwin, codified the garden city cottage as the preferred model for public housing. Soon after this, the 1919 Addison Act introduced the first formal state subsidy for councils to deliver housing.[98] Despite these unprecedented political measures, the war and the following recession slowed the supply of both materials and a labour force. This was followed by a more conservative approach, which cut subsidies for public housing and focused on stimulating the private sector. The 1930s saw the rapid growth of the building society movement: building society loans comprised up to 75% of new-build housing.[99] Nevertheless, no significant change was made until after the Second World War. In 1944 a White Paper on Employment Policy applied the Keynesian economic theory to practice.[100] Among other measures, large-scale housing projects were intended to stimulate the economy, create more employment and provide housing for those who had suffered in the war. Housing had never before been a project on such a vast financial scale, nor had it been so closely linked with the national economy. The established pre-war council supply model, now fuelled by an unprecedented scale of subsidies, and the technology to centralise and standardise construction, gave rise to impressive reform. Important policy milestones included the 1944 Dudley Report, which advocated for the sustained quality of dwellings, but also introduced the idea of mixed estates and local community facilities. In fact, what seemed as counterintuitive for architectural innovation – the rigid regulations and the new rather bureaucratic role of the in-house municipal architect – set the beginnings of an unprecedented visionary period for the LCC Architects' Department. Ruth Lang describes how, in this model, architects were placed between "city-scale aspirations and tectonic detail", arguing that this gave them the freedom to create outside commercial pressures.[101] The Architects' Department will later

[97] Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes*.
[98] Kesia Reeve, *Squatting in Britain 1945–1955: Housing, Politics and Direct Action* (Taylor & Francis, 2018), 14.
[99] Monnery, *Safe As Houses?,* 162.
[100] "Great Britain, Department of Employment, *Employment Policy White Paper* (HMSO, 1944), 20.
[101] Ruth Lang, "Architects Take Command: The LCC Architects' Department", Volume #41 *How to Build a Nation* (October 2014). https://archis.org/volume/architects-take-command-the-lcc-architects-department/.

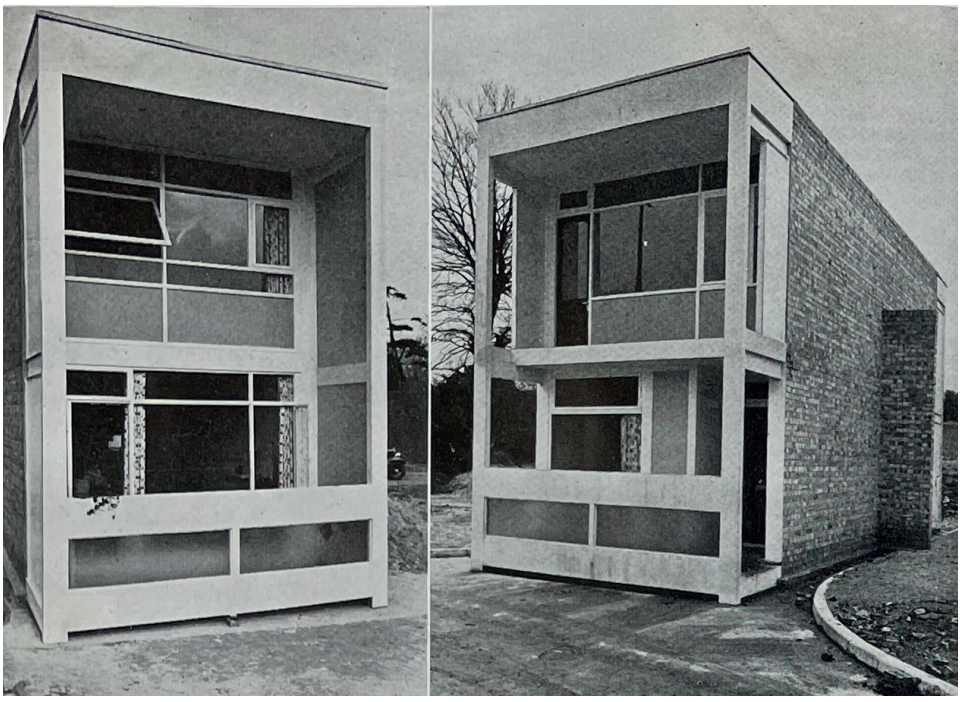
1.11 Model interior of London County Council maisonette, erected at Purley, Surrey, designed by LCC Architects' Department. *Architectural Design*, September 1953.



1.12 Plan of a two-bedroom maisonette in Bentham Road estate. Redrawn by author from an illustration in Sarah Menin and Stephen Kite, *An Architecture of Invitation: Colin St John Wilson* (2005).

be linked to Ernő Goldfinger, the MARS group, and Archigram, to name just a few.

Immediately after the war, there was a new urgent requirement for housing on a much larger scale. The technological advances of mass production, pressing needs of the reconstruction period and sustained Modern interest in the question of housing made the post-war period a decisive point in the history of housing architecture. However, the international Modern scene was just about



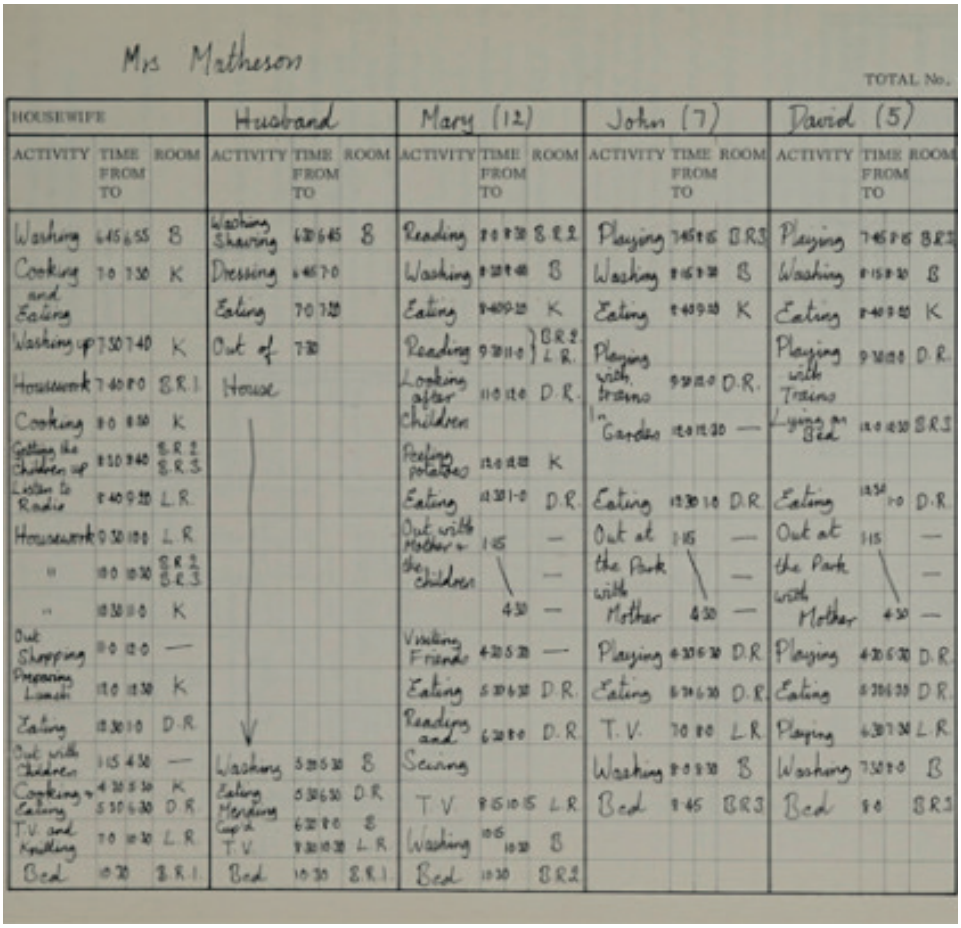
1.13 London County Council (LCC): model of a maisonette erected at Purley, Surrey, designed by LCC Architects' Department. *Architectural Design*, September 1953.

1.14 The London County Council Architects' Department avidly listening to Frank Lloyd Wright's views on the Royal Festival Hall, at County Hall, South Bank, London, July 1950. Photograph by Sam Lambert.

to split, driven by the call of younger generations to introduce more humane approach and consideration for the user. Such disagreements were reflected in LCC with the division between a "soft" and a "hard" camps.[102] A prominent example is of "hard" architecture, which included expressive sculptural forms, austere materiality and technology, was the Bentham Road Estate led by Colin St John Wilson, designed by Peter Carter and Alan Colquhoun and constructed in 1954 to replace a former Nissen hut site. To test out the unusually narrow width of the maisonette unit (3.7m), LCC constructed a one-to-one mock-up, reminiscent of Roberts' model cottage, which was to become a standard layout for council blocks. The design was an explicit reference to Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, with the exception of unit access, which was a single loaded external decking, and the lack of double-height living room, which had to be given up by the architects for an extra bedroom.[103] Here, an unprecedented attention is paid to the interior of the unit, which itself can be described as a vertical interpretation of the traditional terraced house. The narrow and long maisonette provides front and back rooms, with a central services and circulation area. The lower level is dedicated to the kitchen and living space, while the upper one accommodates two bedrooms. The imagery of the lonely mock-up is quite telling for the design methodology of the project. By being designed in isolation, it remains an abstract piece of architecture which is inward looking and completely divorced from its context. With the high-rise becoming a preferred typology, ideas about the street, the garden, and the interior as negotiating privacy lost their importance. Like a domino block, the unit was a mass-produced abstract object which is plugged into a larger structural system to be infinitely repeated. The interior itself, much more open and spacious, was enabled by the new technological developments. The use of columns and lightweight structure opened the plan and allowed for generous views out to the city. The full height glazing replaced earlier punched openings. Privacy was no longer arranged through the front-back orientation, but vertically. The overall mass of the building was not broken down, on the contrary, its appearance was quite monolithic. The maisonette mock-up become a commonplace in a range of block types in London. Today it can be found in different heights, along single or double-loaded corridors.[104] To a certain extent, this approach was reminiscent of the Peabody estates layout, but with some additional standards in place, new technology, new materiality and an increased attention to its interior.

The decisive piece of legislation which followed was Sir Parker Morris's report, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (1961). The document laid out compulsory standards, drawing on the principles of the Modern Movement. Coupled with

[102] Stefan Muthesius and Miles Glendinning, *Towers for the welfare state: an architectural history of British multi-storey housing 1945-1970* (Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, 2017), 41.
[103] Muthesius and Glendinning, *Towers for the welfare state*; Sarah Menin and Stephen Kite, *An Architecture of Invitation: Colin St John Wilson* [2005] (Routledge, 2018).
[104] Great Britain. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Flats and Houses 1958: Design and Economy* (HMSO, 1958).



Mrs Matheson

TOTAL No.

HOUSEWIFE				Husband				Mary (12)				John (7)				David (5)			
ACTIVITY	TIME FROM	TO	ROOM	ACTIVITY	TIME FROM	TO	ROOM	ACTIVITY	TIME FROM	TO	ROOM	ACTIVITY	TIME FROM	TO	ROOM	ACTIVITY	TIME FROM	TO	ROOM
Washing	6.45	6.55	B	Washing Shaving	6.30	6.45	B	Reading	8.0	8.30	B.R.2	Playing	7.45	8.15	B.R.3	Playing	7.45	8.15	B.R.2
Cooking and Eating	7.0	7.30	K	Dressing	6.45	7.0		Washing	8.30	8.45	B	Washing	8.15	8.30	B	Washing	8.15	8.30	B
				Eating	7.0	7.30		Eating	8.40	9.30	K	Eating	8.40	9.30	K	Eating	8.40	8.55	K
Washing up	7.30	7.40	K	Out of	7.30			Reading	9.30	11.0	B.R.2 L.R.	Playing with Trains	9.30	11.0	D.R.	Playing with Trains	9.30	10.0	D.R.
Housework	7.40	8.0	B.R.1	House				Looking after Children	11.0	12.0	D.R.	In Garden	12.0	12.30	—	Lying on Bed	12.0	12.30	B.R.3
Cooking	8.0	8.30	K					Peeling potatoes	12.0	12.30	K								
Getting the Children up	8.30	8.40	B.R.2 B.R.3					Eating	12.30	1.0	D.R.	Eating	12.30	1.0	D.R.	Eating	12.30	1.0	D.R.
Listen to Radio	8.40	9.30	L.R.					Out with Mother +	1.15		—	Out at	1.15		—	Out at	1.15		—
Housework	9.30	10.0	L.R.					the Children			—	the Park			—	the Park			—
"	10.0	10.30	B.R.2 B.R.3							4.30	—	with Mother	4.30		—	with Mother	4.30		—
"	10.30	11.0	K																
Out Shopping	11.0	12.0	—					Visiting Friends	4.30	5.30	—	Playing	4.30	6.30	D.R.	Playing	4.30	6.30	D.R.
Preparing Lunch	12.0	12.30	K					Eating	5.30	6.30	D.R.	Eating	5.30	6.30	D.R.	Eating	5.30	6.30	D.R.
Eating	12.30	1.0	D.R.					Reading and	6.30	8.0	D.R.	T.V.	7.0	8.0	L.R.	Playing	6.30	7.30	L.R.
Out with Children	1.15	4.30	—					Sewing				Washing	8.0	8.30	B	Washing	7.30	8.0	B
Cooking + Eating	4.30	5.30	K	Washing	5.30	5.30	B	T.V	8.5	10.15	L.R.	Bed	8.45		B.R.3	Bed	8.0		B.R.3
	5.30	6.30	D.R.	Eating Morning Cup of	5.30	6.30	D.R.												
T.V. and Knitting	7.0	10.30	L.R.		6.30	8.0	B	Washing	10.5	10.30	B								
Bed	10.30		B.R.1	T.V.	8.30	10.30	L.R.	Bed	10.30		B.R.2								
				Bed	10.30		B.R.1												

1.15 A housewife's diary, 1960s. In Great Britain, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Design Bulletin 15: Family Housing at West Ham* (1969).

1.16 Chart documenting a "typical" day at home, 1960. From Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (1984).

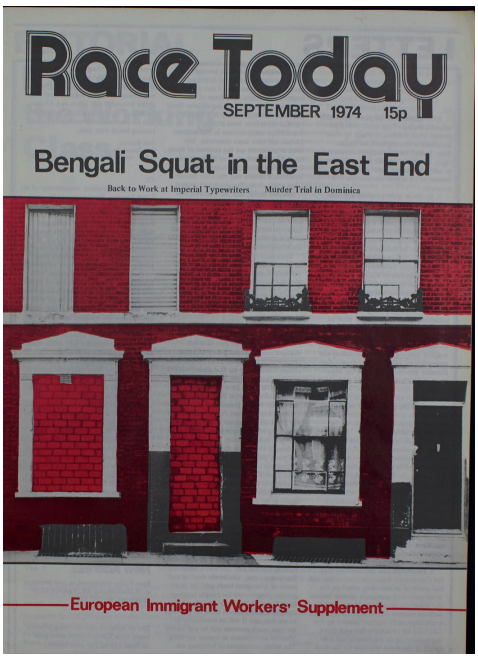
a lift subsidy, and the endorsement of higher and denser developments, the high-rise was to displace the garden suburb as a predominant housing typology.[105] The report set the standard template for all types of housing, not just public schemes. In it, the internal layout of the units was of significant importance for regulating minimum space standards. It was also intended to ensure that the architectural output of the new reconstruction stock, on a vast scale, complied with manufacturing restrictions, linked, for example, to mass-produced furniture. Furniture now needed to be shown on the plans.[106] In that sense, the interior of the unit was just another product which needed national standardisation. From ordering the Victorian city and negotiating the place of working-class Londoners in it, public housing gradually turned inwards, with the ambition to order the life within the family:

> ... living areas in the family home will still be in use for children's play, homework, watching television, sewing and mending, hobbies, entertaining friends, and dealing with casual callers, often with two or more of these activities going on at once [...] The first baby will mean that the mother begins to spend most of her time looking after the child and the house, and for several years, with further children coming along, the family will live with many interrupted nights, daytimes punctuated by rapid visits to the shops and by children's rests, and mealtimes after which the floor needs a good clean [...] Through collections, hobbies and perhaps more homework; through bigger beds and the stage of clumsiness, the children will evolve into young adults, most with incomes of their own; with greater needs for privacy, a larger accumulation of possessions, often noisy ways of passing the time, and for an increasing number a real need for somewhere quiet to work at their further education.[107]

This passage encapsulates a desire to accommodate the entirety of human life into the domestic interior. It reveals the authoritative and rigid workings of the architecture it aspired to produce. The housewife-mother, and consumer, is the main protagonist on the post-war domestic scene. The architecture which "houses the family" is to ease her work and support her in the raising of the children, who are to become consumers and parents themselves. This rising culture of consumption is captured by the increased requirement for storage space (an equivalent of the minimum of one square metre for storage). [108] It is also reflected in the prominence of the topic of refuse disposal.[109] For the first time, the car and parking assume a central importance in the layout of the home.

In addition to the Parker Morris Report, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government issued a range of Design Bulletins. Number 15 titled *Family Housing at West Ham: and account of the project with an appraisal* (1969) was an assessment of a housing project against the guidelines set out in the report.[110] The study collected primary material from the residents, in particular

[105] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, 105. For a more detailed account of high-rise housing, see Muthesius and Glendinning, *Towers for the welfare state.*
[106] Parker Morris, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (HMSO, 1961), 7.
[107] Morris, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 8.
[108] Morris, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 23.
[109] Morris, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, 31.
[110] Great Britain, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Family Housing at West Ham: and account of the project with an appraisal* (HMSO, 1969).



1.17 Left, cover, *Race Today*, September 1974. Right, "Bengali Squat in the East End", *Race Today*, September 1974.

1.18 Martin Walker, "City runs into Race Row over Housing", *Guardian*, 23 October 1975.

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City runs into race row over housing

By MARTIN WALKER

In March, an Irish woman arrived at a Birmingham housing office to collect the keys of a new council house. When it emerged that her husband was black, the housing officer muttered something about the central heating not being ready and offered her another house, in another area.

As a result, the Race Relations Board has now declared that the housing strategy of Birmingham is illegal under the 1968 Race Relations Act. More ominously, the orthodoxy of a decade of British race relations strategy — that racial integration is the goal — is being challenged.

Birmingham makes no secret of the fact that it has "a dispersal strategy." This means that when a black or mixed couple are assigned a council house, the three houses on either side have a small "NC" mark attached in the central housing file. It means "no coloureds," and the object of the policy is to mix the communities, to bring about an integrated society by housing management.

"We want an integrated society," says the Birmingham Council's leader, Clive Wilkinson, "and we don't think a cultural or ethnic community has to depend on a separate living area. The idea of separate communities smacks a little of apartheid."

It was this policy which led that anonymous Irish lady to lodge a complaint before the Race Relations Board. The complaint was upheld. The RRB's conciliation committee has been trying for some months to persuade Birmingham to sign an undertaking which would effectively end the dispersal policy—and involve a lengthy and expensive overhaul of the management system of the largest housing authority in Western Europe.

Birmingham is now trying, by sending a deputation to the Home Secretary and to the RRB to preserve its integrationist policy by changing what it sees as "a technicality in the law." The RRB has been anxious to cooperate. Indeed, in January, the RRB and Birmingham signed an agreement which appeared to permit Birmingham to apply its dispersal programme without breaking the law, by making it voluntary. But this agreement has broken down.

"A dispersal policy has to break the law — it has to mean that some of the available houses simply cannot be offered to black families," says Geoff Wilkins, of the All Faiths for One Race community centre in Handsworth, Birmingham. "And the policy means that blacks spend much longer on the housing waiting list than whites. Add to that the fact that you have to live in Birmingham for five years before you get on the waiting list and you can see how this discriminates against immigrants."

There are other criticisms of the integration policy. The Rev. Basil Moss, provost of the Cathedral and chairman of the Birmingham Community Relations Commission, is studying a sombre report on the policy prepared by the CRC staff. It refers to black families being hounded from all-white housing estates, to black families who simply refuse to go on the housing list because they fear being "dispersed" away from their relatives and their community. It points out that black families are not being "dispersed" across the whole range of Birmingham housing — because of black life-styles and predominantly white social workers, black families are disproportionately allocated to what are euphemistically called "inter-war type estates." This means older, more decrepit houses in undesirable areas.

"Birmingham Council says that they want to avoid ghettoes — well, why cannot they simply distribute the houses on a first come, first served basis? That would also avoid the creation of block communities," Mr Moss argues.

There is, however, a vocal and increasing proportion of the immigrant community which is fundamentally opposed to the idea of integration. They want to live close to their own people, close to their own places of worship, and to bring up their children in an area and an atmosphere which is their own.

"Black couples who have been 'dispersed' abandon their council houses and come back to take a couple of rooms in the black community," says Maurice Andrews, a young black social worker in a Handsworth community advice centre. "This dispersal policy is fundamentally racist — if a black couple want a house they have to go to a white neighbourhood. And anyway, ghettoes are not about black people, ghettoes are about bad housing."

While all of these various viewpoints and arguments are being digested through the long conciliation process of the RRB, Britain's second city is desperately trying to run its housing department in a way which does not break the law. And it is still trying to preserve its commitment to the idea of dispersing families to build an integrated community. This will be the thrust of its presentation to the Home Secretary.

There may just be a glimmer of a solution before the councillors plead their case in Whitehall. Some black community leaders are to hold discussions with the Birmingham council next week, and will propose a compromise. Essentially, their proposal is to maintain the dispersal system, but to have its administration monitored more closely by the elected councillors and by the blacks themselves.

housewives. One of the studies was asking participants to fill out an hourly activity schedules, where all family members had to describe their day. But beyond anything else, the report is preoccupied with furniture, its arrangement and variations, including a catalogue of the pieces. Although documents like this demonstrated some consideration for the experience of the user, their reductive and prescriptive inquiry and application methods remained very authoritative. Their universalising logic and imposition of gender stereotypes were reminiscent of the Victorian philanthropic schemes, only here it was family-based consumption which asserted one's place in the city.

Nevertheless, the scale which these technical affordances brought set Britain on the path to a remarkable welfare policy which after the war had successfully managed to battle housing inequality. Its achievement was provision which comprised up to a third of the total housing stock of the country.[111] Post-war recovery was a top priority on the government's agenda, and sustained public pressure to deliver housing quickly meant that efficiency was prioritised above anything else. This was codified in legislation and professional guidelines, resulting in a very normative and standardised way of thinking about housing. This quantitative approach was indeed very successful in what it set out to do – deliver large quantities of public housing quickly. However, soon other struggles emerged which could not be solved by the efficiency of standardisation. In the 1970s, terms like "ghettoisation" and "integration" became markers of initial attempts to think about multiculturalism, albeit in a very homogenising way. It soon became clear that public housing was more accessible for some than others. On the ground, tenants who were migrants were suffering direct discrimination in mixed estates, something that pushed Bengali residents in the East End to prefer squatting amongst their community than being separately rehoused in mixed estates.[112] In this period, many were structurally excluded or personally disheartened from accessing council schemes. *Housing, Race and Law: The British Experience* (1990) by Martin MacEwen discusses some of the ways in which these exclusions operated, although the Race Relations Act of 1965 had already formally outlawed racial discrimination by that time. Despite the legislation being in place, it was difficult to enforce. A clear example was the Sons and Daughters programme introduced in Tower Hamlets in 1987, which gave applicants with parents living in the borough priority on the waiting list for accommodation. This indirectly excluded newcomers, who happened to be mostly local Bengali residents.[113] Another common issue was that there was no requirement for the council allocation criteria to be made public, which practically allowed decisions to remain obscured.[114] As these exclusions were a criminal offence, there was little evidence to resort to.

[111] Great Britain, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; Homes England, *Housing Statistics, 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022*, 8, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1121042/Housing_Statistics_December_2022.pdf.
[112] Hussain Ahmen Tarek, *The Bengali East End*, Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, 2011; "Bengali Squat at the East End", Race Today, September 1974.
[113] Jennifer Maureen Lowe, "Social Justice and Localities: The Allocation of Council Housing in Tower Hamlets" (PhD Thesis, University of London, Queen Mary College, 2004), 211.
[114] Martin MacEwen, *Housing, Race and Law: The British Experience* (Routledge, 2002), 217.

However, in London's Black Cultural Archives there are newspaper clippings from the 1970s reporting on local authorities' covert practices and exclusionary allocation decisions.[115] As will be discussed later, in many ways grassroots housing projects demonstrate such exclusions through the institutional apparatus in both public and private sectors. This was especially evident for countercultural, queer, Black and Bengali tenants who had to resort to squatting derelict council stock in south and east London. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III.

For MacEwen, policies and practices are "a reflection of ideology and of the power relationships from which ethnic minorities are largely excluded [...] such exclusion is likely to ensure the persistence of racial discrimination as controls clash with countervailing ideology".[116] Discrimination was codified not only in legislation but in the way that housing was conceived and materialised. It is of course obvious to point out that architectural drawing rooms at that time were not representative of London's demographics. In fact, this is a problem that the architecture industry is still grappling with today. At the time, this was reflected in planning documents which focused on prioritising the white nuclear heterosexual family. Normalisation and exclusion did not only affect the ethnicity axis. What was seen as the female half of the nuclear family was expected to assume a primary role as a caretaker and reproductive labourer. Feminist theorist Maria Mies argues that this process of *housewifisation* started with primitive accumulation and is inextricably linked to colonisation and the gradual erosion of female autonomy. Public housing, indeed, embodied these longer historical struggles: "This family emerged in the second half of the 19th century and included "under the specific protection of the state [...] the forced combination of the principles of kinship and cohabitation, and the definition of the man as head of the household and 'breadwinner' for the non-earning legal wife and their children".[117] As the feminist collective Matrix would later point out, during the post-war period these normative binary gender duties are clearly evident in documents of the time, such as the *Design Bulletins: Housing the Family* (1974).[118] Until today single mothers and ethnic minorities remain the most vulnerable in relation to access to housing and economic and social deprivation.[119] They not only remain excluded from access to housing, but, like the paternalism of Victorian housing, continue to occupy spaces which are shaped by, and are shaping, other subjectivities. Although it was a successful social policy and produced some pioneering schemes, the large-scale centralised approach of public housing presented a series of challenges. Ethnic and gender exclusion was embedded in the infrastructure of housing allocation, legal frameworks and architectural blueprints for the public and private housing of

[115] Martin Walker, "City Runs into Race Row Over Housing", *Guardian*, October 23, 1975.
[116] MacEwen, *Housing, Race and Law*, 9.
[117] Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 104.
[118] Boys et al., "House Design and Women's Roles".
[119] Watt, *Estate Regeneration and Its Discontents.*

that period. These issues became evident through their authoritative and universalising template for domestic life, which was tailored to the image of the white nuclear family, and lacking sensitivity towards existing context or local networks of kinship, livelihoods and well-being.

Soon afterwards, public housing also fuelled a debate on welfare provision in both the UK and the United States. Housing in particular became a scapegoat for the Keynesian economic model, culminating with the theatrical demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe estate in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1972. This was followed by Oscar Newman's book *Defensible Space* (1972), which used this very scheme to demonstrate a relationship between the built environment and crime.[120] For Newman, public space needed to be enclosed and privatised to evoke a stronger sense of ownership and care in its users. It is needless to say, that these theoretical contributions were critical to the shaping of the neoliberal position in the housing debate, and to the debate about the welfare state more generally. In Britain it was Alice Coleman's *Utopia on Trial* (1985) that laid out this critique.[121] The work refuted the environmental determinism of Modernist architecture, comparing design to a sliding scale – when it was "bad", it would exacerbate "bad" behaviour. This inherently controversial argument was supported by a "scientific approach", measuring the amount of litter, graffiti, damage and faeces as material evidence of social pathologies. For Coleman, the built environment did not have the power to shape and cure social malaise: however, it was a clear indicator for it. Reminiscent of Victorian worldviews, such narratives remain present in the political housing debate today. In "Out-of-Sync Estates" (2017) Ben Campkin reveals how the term "sink" draws on an enduring belief in environmental determinism, that refers both to the Victorian moral concerns and obsession with hygiene. In a similar spirit, neo-liberal advocates argued that structural questions of deprivation and unemployment can be tackled with increased policing, privatisation and redevelopment.[122]

Neoliberalism, for David Harvey, is a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices."[123] These specific qualities can be observed in the economic and political reforms of the late 1970s, especially of the conservative governments in the UK and the United States, which allowed areas that had previously been regarded as entirely political concerns, such as education, healthcare or housing, to be seen increasingly as market related. Foucault

[120] Newman, *Defensible Space.*
[121] Coleman, *Utopia on Trial.*
[122] MacEwen, *Housing, Race and Law*, 32.
[123] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

1.19 Demolition of Pruitt-Igoe housing project, St Louis, Missouri, 1972.

1.20 Margaret Thatcher handing the King Family the deeds to their council house, Milton Keynes, 25 September 1979. Photograph by Bill Kennedy. *Daily Mirror*, 26 September 1979

argues that the intellectual foundation of neoliberal thought developed around the critique of three post-war conditions – Keynesian policy, social pacts of war, and the growth of the federal administration through economic and social programmes. For Foucault, these ideas occupied the political imaginaries across the spectrum, adopted by both right (against socialism) and left (against the military state).[124] As post-war public housing embodied all three conditions, it became an increasingly strategic site for the neoliberal debate. Curiously, it also became an ideological battle ground for architects. In fact, Post-modern architecture, declared by Charles Jencks to have emerged with the spectacular demolition of Pruitt-Igoe, had a very specific political and economic position. Intellectually, it stood against any universalising, homogenising and normative logic. Politically, this was interpreted by two parallel architectural traditions. Some regarded architecture as an autonomous artistic and apolitical endeavour. A notable example was Peter Eisenman's doctoral thesis "The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture" (1963). Others were filling the institutional void of neoliberalism, culminating with Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till's *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (2011).[125]

The Privatisation of Public Housing 1979-1997

As suggested by housing advocates, today's crisis stared with a range of restructuring measures undertaken by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[126] The most crucial decision from this period was, without a doubt, the privatisation of public housing. This proposal, in fact, had been previously considered across party divisions but it was Thatcher who actually put the idea into practice by introducing the Housing Act 1980.[127] Situated within the wider political agenda of the government at the time, which saw privatisation and deregulation as the means to anticipated economic growth, the Right to Buy allowed public housing tenants to buy their units from the council at a large discount. This was only one of a series of major political measures taken towards reshaping the financing and provision of housing, and, ultimately, the housing market. The Right to Buy represented a more conservative approach to fiscal policies and an end to the expansionary Keynesian model to fight budget deficits. Ideologically, such changes were grounded in the understanding that the market would regulate itself and that any attempt of the state to intervene would disturb its inherent equilibrium. This was also paralleled by a strong endorsement of individualism and the ideological narrative of people "lifting themselves up by their bootstraps". Thatcher also believed in the idea of trickle-down economics. If the wealthy were given a tax cut, the disposable income would trickle down

[124] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79,* 217.
[125] Sadler, "Postscript: How and When Was Architecture Socially Engaged?"; Dutton and Mann, *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices;* Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (Routledge, 2013).
[126] Minton, *Big Capital*; Rolnik, *Urban Warfare*; Dorling, *All That Is Solid*; Madden and Marcuse, *In Defense of Housing.*
[127] Nationwide Building Society, *House Price Calculator*, Nationwide, accessed November 28, 2019, https://www.nationwide.co.uk/about/house-price-index/house-price-calculator.

and improve the wages and the living conditions of the middle and working class – something that economists such as Thomas Piketty continue to disprove.[128] What privatisation actually resulted in was a reduction in the overall social housing stock. Although the initial intention was to set aside part of the budget to supply replacement stock, this was never realised. In addition to the shrinking of the public housing stock, structural changes in the financial sector made mortgages much more accessible.[129] Like public housing allocation, this was not available for everyone, as many were excluded from this due to structural and personal discrimination.[130] The emergence of easily accessible loans (for some), together with the gradual decline of state subsidies, resulted in a new culture of private home ownership, eventually leading to the role of housing today – as an investment asset. From a site for consumption, the home became a commodity itself. In this sense, the neoliberal turn which British politics assumed in the late 1970s and early 1980s was decisive for today's housing landscape. It exemplifies what David Harvey refers to as "accumulation by dispossession".[131] In this process, public infrastructure and resources were enclosed, which eventually led to today's precarious condition. Housing has always been understood in a financial capacity. After the Second World War this happened on a national scale, and after its privatisation, this national economic asset was merged with global finance, opening up possibilities for further speculation.

Financialisation, securitisation and redevelopment 1997-2008

The New Labour government that came to power in 1997 continued some of the conservative initiatives. Public-Private Partnerships remain a popular development model for public infrastructure today. This was especially critical for existing estates, which were now increasingly considered for redevelopment, resulting in the further depletion of social housing stock. The redevelopment approaches of municipal housing from earlier periods were now carried by a strong financial incentive. As in previous cases, such urban interventions resulted in a complete social restructuring of whole neighbourhoods. While housing had been a site for improvement before this, after the 1990s it became a lucrative investment opportunity. Anna Minton and Danny Dorling examine how this became possible despite a range of planning measures to protect local residents.[132] Compulsory Purchase Orders were central in this process. They were introduced for the first time in 1947 with the Town and Country Planning Act, to be implemented in the "public interest" and with compensation in place.[133] However, in the 2000s they became a vehicle for decanting and redeveloping estates, with residents receiving only a fraction of what the new units would cost. Further, the minimum provision of affordable housing,

[128] Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* [2013], trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Harvard University Press, 2014).
[129] Rolnik, *Urban Warfare*.
[130] MacEwen, *Housing, Race and Law*.
[131] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.
[132] Dorling, *All That Is Solid; Minton, Big Capital*.
[133] *Town and Country Planning Act* (HMSO, 1947).

introduced as early as the 19th century, became increasingly avoidable, as developers argued the case for economic unviability. As local authorities did not want to risk projects falling through, developers were allowed to replace the compulsory provision on site with contributions towards affordable housing elsewhere, usually in a less favourable and cheaper neighbourhood. This new re-development model not only reduced the quantity of social housing further, but it also presented a new exacerbated form of gentrification which left residents with little option in terms of protecting themselves but to collectively organise. Neil Smith's concept of the *rent gap* helps to explain the process of gentrification better, and why these more financially driven developments were especially detrimental. According to Smith's theory, gentrification is a combination of declining *actual* economic returns and increasing *potential* economic returns. This emerging gap, between actual and potential, attracts external investment capital in the area. On the ground, these are very traumatic processes which tear apart existing social networks and means of livelihoods and well-being. Paul Watt's *Estate Regeneration and Its Discontents: Public Housing, Place and Inequality in London* (2021) provides a detailed account of the work and devastating experience of London's redevelopment projects.[134]

Since the 1990s, most of the capital which constituted London's housing *demand* has come from global investment. The units which did manage to reach the domestic housing market, before being sold off at global finance forums, were acquired though the now even further deregulated mortgage sector. A decisive step in this period was the introduction of *securitisation.* Securitisation was used as early as the 1970s by banks to bundle together illiquid assets into tradable securities. This allowed borrowing services, which are long-term investments, to be converted into readily accessible cash by the debt being sold onwards to someone else. This led to a further relaxation to borrowing. The wider availability of fast and easy credit allowed the dweller to become a speculator, fuelling rent gaps even further. Now that anyone could become a potential contributor to gentrification, the ways in which finance began to shape the housing landscape finally assumed their current form. In the period between 1990s and 2008 the deregulation and globalisation of the housing market led to today's financialised condition. This exacerbated previously existing housing inequalities to an unprecedented level, with London's population continually uprooted and displaced.

The Aftermath of 2008

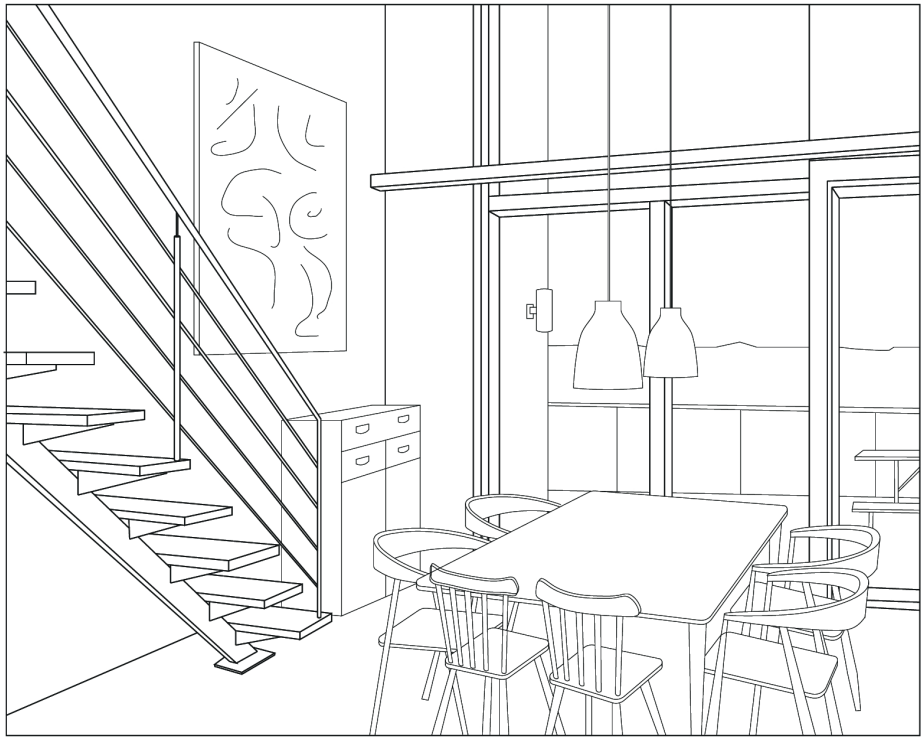
In 2008 classical liberalism's narrative of the self-regulating market proved to be inherently flawed. Sadly, the price was paid by the many who lost their

[134] Watt, *Estate Regeneration and Its Discontents.*

homes, and, following a global economic crash, their livelihoods. This led to an even more devastating wave of austerity measures. With today's unprecedentedly unequal distribution of global capital, and its operation hardwired to increase inequality even further, it is no surprise that speculation and debt become critical for economic growth. Maurizio Lazzarato explains how this plays out through both personal debt being morally rooted, and public debt being externalised onto society by governmental institutions.[135] Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's and Nietzsche's work, Lazzarato argues that the condition of indebtedness merges labour and the moulding of the self in one inseparable process "[...] in the current economy the production of subjectivity reveals itself to be the primary and most important form of production, the "commodity" that goes into the production of all other commodities".[136] The relationship between speculative value and subjectivity is laid out in more detail by Michel Feher in *Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age* (2018). Here, a range of risk-endorsing subjectivities emerge, from politicians, through corporate managers to entrepreneur-citizens. Homes are an extension of the financialised subject in this condition. They have a double role within that context. On the one hand, they ensure the reproduction of the house-as-set by constantly improving it to maximise its exchange value; on the other, this in turn shapes the potential modes of dwelling for the subject to sustain and increase economic growth.

In the aftermath of the crash, redevelopment through public-private partnerships continued, now supported by the narrative of "sink estates". In that period, the criminalisation and displacement of the urban poor, reminiscent of similar approaches two centuries earlier, took an increasingly financial form, on a much larger scale. Moreover, in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, the popularity of platform-based businesses offered a new commodified form of sharing, including the new short-term rental service Airbnb. Initially such enterprises were advertised with a narrative of resilience, sustainability and the democratisation of opportunity, but the core conceptual idea of the sharing economy consisted of renting space while it was "idle". Koen Frenken and Juliet Schor define the phenomenon as "consumers granting each other temporary access to under-utilized physical assets ('idle capacity')".[137] This new-found market emerged around ideas of idle computational power. Yochai Benkler draws a direct parallel between these technological developments and the culture of material goods sharing.[138] However, without regulations or enforcement, these new markets led to even more severe gentrification and displacement of the urban population. They diversified the possibilities for private investment to tap into local housing markets even further and created a

[135] Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (Semiotext(e), 2012).
[136] Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, 34.
[137] Koen Frenken and Juliet Schor, "Putting the Sharing Economy into Perspective", in *A Research Agenda for Sustainable Consumption Governance* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017). http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2017.01.003
[138] Yochai Benkler, "Sharing Nicely: On Shareable Goods and the Emergence of Sharing as a Modality of Economic Production", *Yale LJ* 114 (2004): 273. https://doi.org/10.2307/4135731.



1.21 Redrawn from *Selling Dreams*, video diptych, Bêka & Lemoine, 2016 (25 min + 9 min).

new market for the house-asset.

The scale of the Airbnb impact can be better understood by introducing the concept of Benjamin Bratton's *stack.*[139] The term describes a planetary computational infrastructure operating as thickened geopolitical strata, facilitated by the web. This megastructure creates new territory and at the same time new models for governance of this territory. The example of Airbnb offers an economic model that is facilitated through a digital marketplace, and governed by a platform-specific legal framework. David Wachsmuth and Alexander Weisler elaborate on how this new form of gentrification displaces local residents by facilitating a new type of globalised, geographically preconditioned economic inequality.[140] In this model, the very act of dwelling, the experience of the city and the subjectivity of the host are commodified, along with the unit. If gentrification had previously been experienced by large-scale transformations in the city, now it spatialised through to the quiet interiority of the domestic sphere. The documentary *Selling Dreams* (2016) by Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine provides an extreme example of these developments by telling the story of Mark, an Airbnb user who runs multiple profiles under different personas.[141] Initially starting with the occasional guest, Mark gradually gave in to an obsession for staging Airbnb rentals with fictitious owners, so much that he had to sell his house and move between hotels, to be able to rent out several flats for his business. In this model, the subjectivity of the local resident itself becomes a commodified and carefully constructed "experience", while essentially leading to the displacement of the very same subject from their home.[142]

[139] Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (MIT Press, 2016).
[140] David Wachsmuth and Alexander Weisler, "Airbnb and the Rent Gap: Gentrification through the Sharing Economy", *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 50, no. 6 (2018): 1147–1170. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18778038.
[141] *Selling Dreams*, directed by Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine (Bêka & Partners, 2016), http://www.bekalemoine.com/selling.php.

Mark speaks of some protagonists being more popular than others. As a host, he had to erase himself from the flat as being perceived as "less Danish" and replace all the photographs with a white blond "Scandinavian-looking" family: "We are in Copenhagen, in Denmark, in Scandinavia. People are expecting archetypes. They want to have tall, white, blond, blue-eyed people. [...]It's not about me, it's about them. [...] a family is better. When you rent a big house with a big family, they believe the house is bigger and happier, they will have a bigger *experience* [emphasis added]".[143] This passage is very telling of how racial stereotypes in both housing and urban tourism continue to exist. Moreover, by engaging in this transaction, both landlords and short-term occupants avoid facing the reality that the lifestyle they desire has long since become unattainable. Architecture's role is restricted to that of an ultimate object of exchange, which is to make guests experience the city through the eyes of its residents, but in their absence. Here, social value is not only untaxed: it has to be generated by only pretending to live in the city. The architectural interior is the main backdrop to this performance. For the actual local resident, it constitutes a landscape of precarity, insecurity and risk, where everybody is an entrepreneur with no other alternative than to financialise even further. In doing so, anybody and everybody are bound to reproduce and contribute to the current condition. Airbnb represents an extreme example of speculation, by introducing a new investment opportunity with properties being only sporadically occupied. Richard Dunning and Thomas Moore argue that buy-to-holiday business schemes, together with the buy-to-let or buy-to-leave, contribute to 2% of the housing stock in London being currently empty.[144] As gloomy as this seems, the enclosure of British public housing does not end here.

In their New York study of short-term rentals, Wachsmuth and Weisler conclude that Airbnb causes urban *gentrification without redevelopment.*[145] By subletting one's property to the occasional wealthier Airbnb guests, gentrification occurs with no urban works taking place. What is even more concerning for London is that this strategy has moved away from the tourism sector and is now being used by housing developers, who have started to re-market former council estates as "Brutalist homes".[146] Architecturally, this outcome is more favourable than demolition, however, its social implications are devastating for local residents, as gentrification can now occur with minimal investment. A clear recent example of such development "microsites" is Ernő Goldfinger's Balfron Tower in Poplar. The original LCC social housing scheme was completed in 1967. Like the earlier municipal maisonette design, Goldfinger's open plan and full height glazing staged an interiority which maximised the view to the city, making London a protagonist in domestic life itself. After the

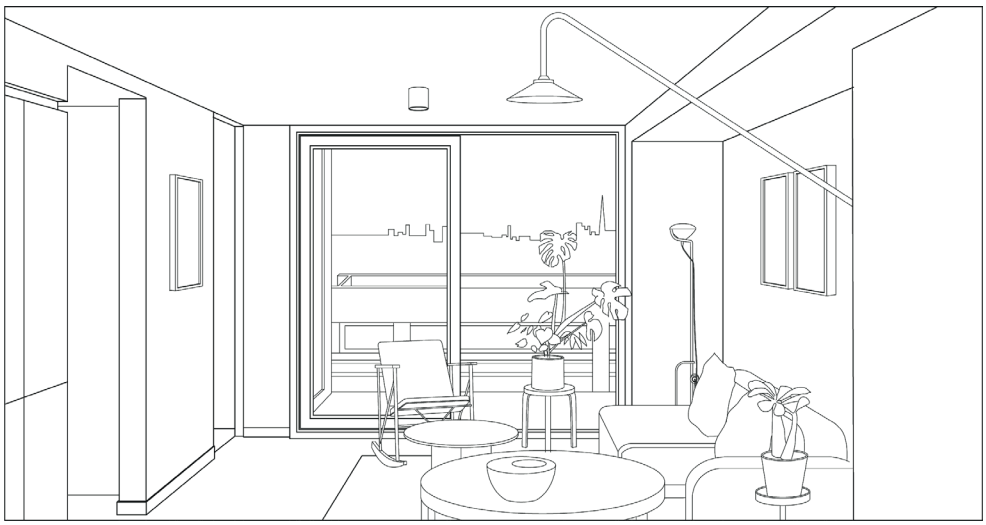
[142] Airbnb defines experiences as "interactive activities hosted by locals, in which guests can truly feel connected to a Host and gain insight into their world". See "Help Center: What doesn't qualify as an Airbnb Experience", Airbnb, accessed August 29, 2023, https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/3089.

[143] Bêka and Louise Lemoine, *Selling Dreams.*

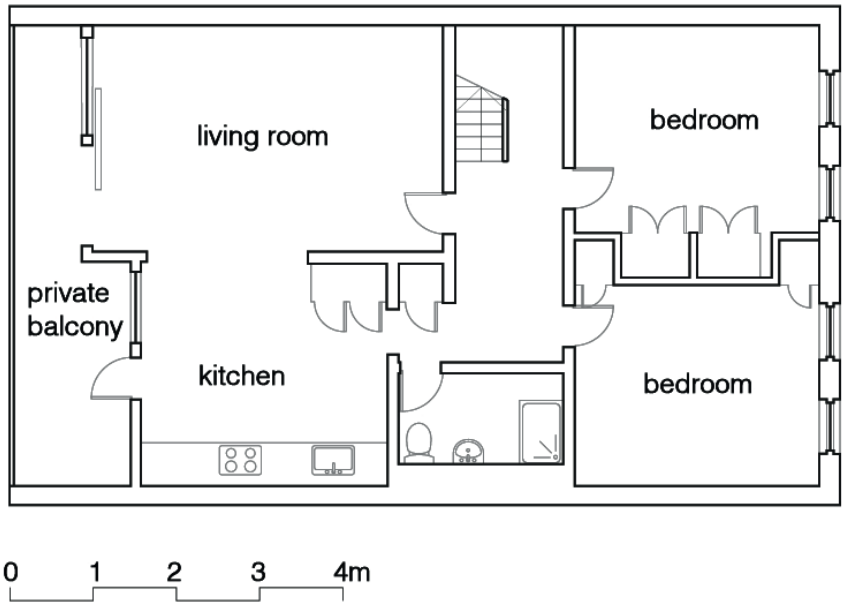
[144] Following a campaign of London's Mayor Sadiq Khan, from 2018 local authorities can introduce up to 300% higher Council Tax charges for empty properties. To define better what classifies as empty, GLA commissioned a report. For more details see Mayor of London, *Defining and Measuring Empty and Under-Utilised Dwellings in London,* Richard Dunning and Thomas Moore (Mayor of London, 2021). Accessed August 29, 2023, https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/defining_and_measuring_empty_and_under-utilised_dwellings_in_london.pdf.

[145] Wachsmuth and Weisler, "Airbnb and the Rent Gap".

[146] The website of the estate agency The Modern House includes a "Brutalist Homes Collection", which listed, among other buildings, the former council owned Trellick Tower and Alexandra Road Estate. "Buy", The Modern House, accessed



1.22 Interior of a refurbished two-bedroom unit in Balfron Tower, designed by Erno Goldfinger, in Poplar, East London. Photograph by Jake Curtis: redrawn by Ioana Petkova.



1.23 Floor plan of a refurbished two-bedroom unit in Balfron Tower, designed by Erno Goldfinger, in Poplar, East London. Drawn by Ioana Petkova.

Right to Buy, Balfron Tower remained partially public, with 99 social tenants in place until 2007, when the ownership was transferred to the housing association Poplar HARCA and the tenants were asked to leave their homes for refurbishment works.[147] The units went on sale recently with no social housing provision.[148] The works, led by Studio Egret West, included the replacement of doors and windows, changes to internal partitions and finishes, car and cycle parking, lighting and landscaping.[149] The second tower, originally designated to community spaces, now includes, among other uses, a yoga room, a flexible working space, a private dining room and a roof terrace. The refurbished interior, where most of the design scope lies, quite explicitly draws inspiration from the period when the building was completed, with its warm natural finishes, soft furnishing, and a pastel colour palette. By doing so, the project capitalises on a sanitised version of London's public housing history, and one which is no longer accessible. The wider impact of microsite interventions like

August 29, 2023, https://www.themodernhouse.com/sales-list/?-price-from=0&-price-to=99999&collection[]=brutalist-homes.

147 A detailed archive of the Balfron Tower case can be found on the website balfrontower.org. The project documents the redevelopment of the building and the stories of its former residents. As of 29th August, more details can be found on https://www.balfrontower.org. The material originates from the doctoral thesis David Roberts, "Make Public: Performing Public Housing in Regenerating East London" (Doctoral thesis, UCL (University College London), 2016).

148 The website includes a viability report by Poplar HARCA from August 2012, which was originally published on the website of the housing association but has been taken offline since. The original doc-

this remains to be seen, however, what is evident is that complex socio-economic urban processes are now much less visible, taking place inside out, in the privacy of the domestic interior.

The story of Balfron Tower concludes the history of London's public housing, which originated as a philanthropic and economic project, later transformed into a social contract to stimulate the national economy, and eventually privatised, and financialised. Each of these four periods carries different degrees of state intervention, as well as different political philosophies. It also reflects the variety of institutional motivations - from matters of national health, through policing and managing the urban population to managing debt. This shift in political values in public housing resulted in the emergence of new architectural approaches – from a way to discipline the poor, through improving the industrial city, or expressing the superstructure of the welfare state, to its final enclosure and quiet interiorised experience. In *Empire* (2000) Antonio Negri and Michael Hart argue that capital is only reactive, and that true creativity lies in collective action. Public housing experiments have ceased with its privatisation. In that sense, breaking the reproductive circle of the home as a financial asset, becomes not only a site for economic, but also architectural, innovation. The thesis will explore that in more detail in Chapter III. by focusing on decisive moments in the grassroots housing history of London, their collective subjectivities and how they reproduce through architectural form.

ument clearly states that there are no intentions of replacing any social rent units on site. As of 20th August 2023, the report is only accessible through the Wayback Machine of the Internet Archive. For more details see Poplar HARCA, *Viability Report* [2012] (The Internet Archive, 2015), 6. Accessed August 29, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20150906133501/http://www.poplarharca.co.uk/sites/default/files/HCA%20Poplar%20HARCA%20AVR%202012%20copy.pdf

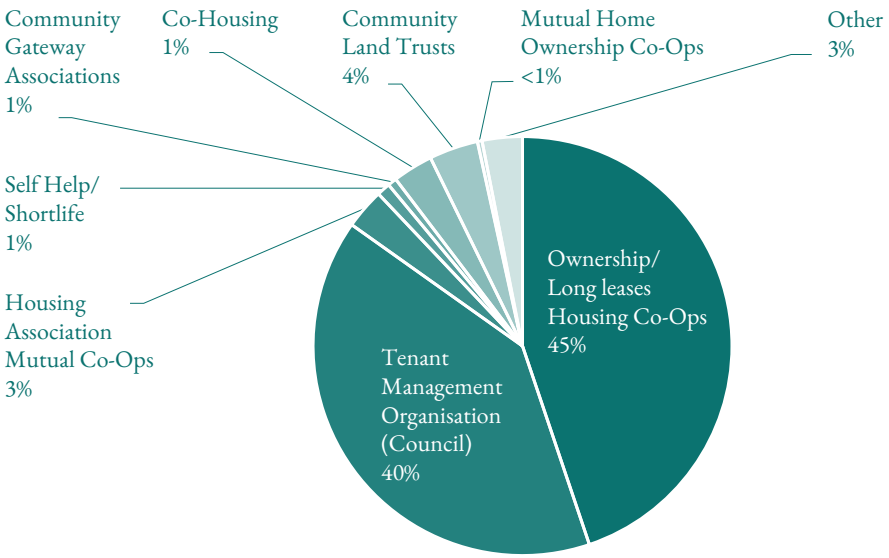
[149] London Borough of Tower Hamlets, *Planning Application Documents* (PA/17/01925/NC, London Borough of Tower Hamlets Planning Portal, 2017), accessed March 23, 2021, https://development.towerhamlets.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=DCAPR_122629.

[150] Maarten Hajer, "Policy without Polity? Policy Analysis and the Institutional Void", *Policy Sciences* 36, no. 2 (2003): 175–95. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024834510939. Hajer introduces the term to argue that policy-making today is happening in an institutional void and as a discursive practice between various stakeholders.

Filling The Institutional Void[150]

Although grassroots housing initiatives constitute an opportunity for housing equality and innovation, they remain underrepresented in the architectural history of housing. In fact, throughout the overview of this chapter, there has been little provision for participatory and democratic modes of development, governance and ownership. As discussed, co-operative housing was briefly successful in the inter-war period, followed by the Dudley Report (1944), that discussed local community provision. Furthermore, several subsequent policies supported co-operative housing initiatives, including the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, followed by The Housing (Financial Provisions) Act of 1948, offering subsidies or loans. Throughout, supply through such co-operative projects remained marginal and always as a part of the private sector. This was to change through the introduction of new policies which emerged in the institutional void of austerity politics.

While Airbnb was gaining popularity in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, a crucial piece of legislation was passed by Parliament which was to subsequently



1.24 Community-controlled housing types in London. Data accessed March 23, 2021.

shape today's London community-led housing scene. The Localism Act 2011 was designed to transfer central government control to local authorities, but more importantly, to communities and individuals. For housing and planning, addressed in Parts 6 and 7, this translated into more responsibility for local authorities, which was then passed on to the *local communities* – a term used interchangeably for local constituencies in municipal, regional and national policies. As a result of the Localism Act 2011, councils gained more control over how affordable housing was allocated and funded, albeit suffering large cuts in public spending in tandem with this.[151] Moreover, Part 5, "Community Empowerment", introduced the "right to challenge", "right to bid" and "right to build". This put local community-led organisations in a position to develop and build housing together with the local authority. Overall, the act was a controversial piece of legislation and its effects remain disputed. Still, one can argue that today's London community-led housing scene was shaped by filling the institutional void which was left by the new austerity housing policies after the global financial crisis.

Defining London's Commoning Landscape

If housing commoning represents a collective political emancipation of housing, one of today's most pressing struggles is financialisation. In that sense, a contemporary definition of housing commoning has to include its de-financialisation – that is, collective legal or economic strategies to establish informal rent or price control. This chapter provides an overview of the current types of community organising. According to a study of community-led housing carried out by the London Federation of Housing Co-ops in 2017, there are 289 projects in the city. The most popular typology is Tenant Management Organ-

[151] Bevan, "The Localism Act 2011: The Hollow Housing Law Revolution", *Modern Law Review*, Vol. 77, No. 6 (November 2014), 964-982. https://www.jstor.org/ stable/43829088

isations, making up 62% of all community-led housing in London, followed by Housing Co-operatives, with 18%, Community Gateway with 16 %, and Community Land Trusts with 1%.[152] Within the wider housing picture, the number of these projects is quite marginal. Moreover, not all community-led housing is de-financialised. Some of them have a focus on tenant/ leaseholder representation, while for others the only aim is to build collectively. For this reason, this chapter concludes with a review of the range of community-led organising typologies that exist in London today and assesses their relevance as potential sites of commoning.

Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) are one of the most popular organisational typologies of community-led housing in London today. They appeared in the 1970s as a way to manage specifically council or housing association stock. In this model, local residents form a management body and agree a legally binding agreement with the landlord. Responsibilities include maintenance, rent collection and allocation. It is possible for TMOs to develop housing too, as in the case of Leathermarket in Southwark. However, this is not their primary function and it is rather unusual, so they are not relevant for the thesis.

Housing Associations (HAs) have historically supported local authorities in the provision of social hosing. They have existed in Britain since the 19th century but underwent significant institutional changes in the 1970s by gaining more importance in the provision of social and affordable housing. The Housing Act of 1974 allowed HAs to be fully subsidised through government grants and loans.[153] From this point onwards they started to displace local authorities as the main social and affordable housing providers. This continued until the 1980s when subsidies dropped, making the organisations increasingly dependent on their own revenue. Originally private not-for-profit organisations, HAs were now increasingly seeking out for-profit activities to cross-subsidise affordable units. As a result, they were increasingly reliant on developing housing for the intermediate market. The boards of these organisations also started to include more business and financial experts, replacing the voluntary trustees from the 1970s. The austerity policies after the 2008 global financial crisis only exacerbated this tendency.[154] HAs are originally private enterprises, but in the case of council housing, residents can make use of their Right to Transfer following the Housing Act 1985, and form *Community Gateway Associations and Housing Association Management Co-ops.* The residents of West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates in Hammersmith and Fulham are using this model as a way to avoid acquisition by a private developer.[155] Phoenix in Lewisham

[152] "Community Controlled Housing in London - Co-Operatives London", *London Coop,* accessed March 23, 2021, https://ldn.coop/housing/community-contolled-housing-in-london/.
[153] Peter Malpass, "The Uneven Development of 'Social Rented Housing': Explaining the Historically Marginal Position of Housing Associations in Britain", *Housing Studies* 16, no. 2 (July 2001), 225–242. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673030120038492.
[154] A. D. H. Crook and Peter A. Kemp, "In Search of Profit: Housing Association Investment in Private Rental Housing", *Housing Studies* 34, no. 4 (July 2019): 666–687. https://doi.org/10.1080/ 02673037.2018.1468419.
[155] "What Is the Right to Transfer?", *West Ken Gibbs Green - The People's Estates*, accessed March 22, 2021, https://westkengibbsgreen.wordpress.com/the-right-to-transfer-s34a/.

is another example from 2007. It is the first Community Gateway Association in London. It manages social housing and develops its own housing stock. However, being community led does not exclude Phoenix from the harsh financial reality of the housing market. Like many similar private large-scale HAs, they rely increasingly on their revenue from non-affordable housing. For this reason, this research will not be focusing on this typology.

Co-housing involves groups of local residents self-organising around building or negotiating empty properties. It has nothing to do with social housing and might even not have much to do with affordable housing. While this type of organising is community led, it does not really de-financialise the housing stock in any way. For this reason, this model is not of interest for the study.

Housing Co-Operatives have a long history in Britain and along with the TMOs are the most popular community-led housing model in London today. They are organisations which enable collective ownership and management of housing. Co-operatives are mostly mutual (each member has an equal say) and are always not-for-profit. The seven co-operative principles include voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community. Slight variations of this type can include what is owned in common, how the scheme is financed, how equity is distributed or what the member's responsibilities are. Within this range, two particular types are interesting for the way their structure enables a certain financial instrumentality within the housing market – Limited Equity Co-operatives and Non-Equity Co-operatives. In the *Limited Equity Co-operative* (LEC) model the individual members own equity shares together. The mortgage finance for individual equity stakes is held collectively, with the percentage of individual equity stakes rising slowly. In that way, members can accrue equity and take it with them when they leave. However, in the case of LECs, the resale price is limited, and is often indexed to the local income instead to the market price of the unit. This is how their stock remains affordable in perpetuity. In *the Non-Equity Co-operatives* (NECs), no equity is owned individually. Once the mortgage is paid off, it is up to the co-operative to set rents and decide how to manage their cash resources. In London there are many cash-rich co-operatives which emerged through government subsidies in the 1970s which were quickly paid off. They are now lending to other co-operatives, as they have secured a substantial reserve.

The *Community Land Trust* (CLT) model was imported from the United

States and gained popularity in London only after the 2008 crisis and the subsequent Localism Act 2011. Even though land trusts were historically present in Britain before, they were not popularised into movements until they were successful elsewhere.[156] Land trusts were used in industrialised and overcrowded Victorian London: Peabody is the best-known example.[157] Despite the abundance of local examples, today's *community* land trust was imported from across the Atlantic. The American CLT model was first applied to practice in 1969 in Georgia, as Black farmers in the South began losing their livelihood to mechanisation, discrimination, and a restructured agricultural sector in favour of large corporations. The project New Communities Inc. was developed as a response to this and grew with the support of the Civil Rights movement. In the UK the model was originally used in the countryside as a way of achieving affordable housing. It later migrated to London as an attempt to ensure that social housing within public-private partnerships does not become privatised.[158] Today CLTs are a vehicle for community-led housing projects across the city. In this model, community assets, including land, are held in *trust* instead of being owned.[159] Although not formal legal entities, CLTs are legally defined as corporate bodies which have very specific purposes and responsibilities regarding community assets held in common – also known as *asset locks.*[160] Therefore, CLTs have to resort to specific legal entities which can accommodate this, or can operate as an *asset lock body.* This includes Community Benefit Societies; Community Interest Companies Limited by Guarantee; Companies Limited by Guarantee which are also registered Charities; and Companies Limited by Guarantee. Subject to format variations, what this "lock" entails is that organisations can manage assets on behalf of the community without enabling their future transfer for individual benefits. In terms of management, CLTs usually have a tripartite board structure, which includes local residents, members and expert stakeholders.[161] Two London organisations have come forward as leading in that respect – the London Community Land Trust (LCLT) and the Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS). These organisations have both managed to secure land from the local authority on the basis of a long-term lease, respectively 125 and 250 years. In both cases, the CLT acts as a steward of the land and offers rent or shared ownership agreements at a reduced market price.[162]

The aim of the section above is to outline the different kinds of organisations and draft an overview of existing organisational types related to housing in Lewisham. Out of these types, three main ones have a de-financialising effect on the housing market. These are the Community Land Trust (CLT), the Limited Equity Co-operative (LEC) and Non-Equity Co-operative (NEC).

156 Matthew Thompson, "From Co-Ops to Community Land Trusts: Tracing the Historical Evolution and Policy Mobilities of Collaborative Housing Movements", *Housing, Theory and Society* 37, no. 1 (January 2020), 82–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2018.1517822. Matthew Thompson suggests that the arrival of this model in Britain was a result of "policy mobility" – a combination of site-specific conditions and global policy trends.

157 Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England* (Longman, 1979). Hardy provides an extensive account of alternative collective settlements in Victorian England.

158 James DeFilippis and Peter North, "The Emancipatory Community? Place, Politics and Collective Action in Cities", in *The Emancipatory City*, ed. Loretta Lees (Sage, 2004), 72–88. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221365.n5.

159 John Emmeus Davis, *The Community Land Trust Reader* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010).

160 *Housing & Regeneration Act 2008*, Part 2, Chapter 1, accessed August 4, 2023.

161 Thompson, "From Co-Ops to Community Land Trusts".

162 Affordability is a very disputed and ambiguous term in the capital. The current Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, introduced new definitions upon assuming office, which he referred to as genuinely afford-

"De-financialised" here is understood as intentionally including built-in features to secure affordability in perpetuity. In the case of the CLT this feature is the trust model and its asset lock. In the case of the LEC/NEC it is the regulations on equity. Despite these typologies seeming distinct, their boundaries often dissolve. It is not uncommon for co-operatives to be nested in CLTs, as they are representing two different scales of a more complex system. In that strategy, a CLT is the overarching body for multiple projects throughout the borough and even the city, as in the case of LCLT.

Similarly, James DeFilippis lays out three different types of collective ownership which can counteract housing financialisation in the United States – Community Land Trusts, Limited Equity Co-ops (LECs) and Mutual Housing Associations (MHAs). Each of them has developed distinct mechanisms to intervene in the housing market. The CLT decouples the building from the land value. The LEC includes capping the units' resale price. The MHA allows only affordable renting, while proactively aiming to acquire more real estate and take it "off the market".[163] Comparing these to the situation in London, there are some clear similarities. More interestingly, the specific policy framework in London has also led to discrepancies, such as the financialisation of MHAs by their shift towards the private rental sector. DeFilippis' book *Unmaking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital* was published in 2004; today the situation might be different for MHAs in the United States. From a London perspective, the CLT, LEC and NEC remain the only three models which are developing their own housing and have a clear de-financialising and local resident control agenda. For this reason, the other housing organisation typologies will not be of interest for the thesis.

From the three types, CLTs are the most interesting, due to their openness and link to the commons, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Although co-operatives are non profit organisations by definition, the CLT provides a more open and coalitional model. Some housing activists I have spoken to during the fieldwork are sceptical of CLTs, due to their similarity to public-private partnerships. What is interesting for us, nevertheless, is that while in the co-op ownership and governance coincide, in the CLT they are de-coupled, replacing ownership with trusteeship and stewardship. This provides a more complex model. Matthew Thompson is a planning scholar from Liverpool who has researched CLTs extensively as a new form of urban governance. For Thompson, London and Liverpool have taken the lead in CLT developments in the UK.[164] Due to their scale and design, CLTs are veery resilient, perhaps because they represent a relational ecology themselves.

able housing. Within that there are various tiers of affordability, including social rent, which is around 40% of the market price, London affordable rent, which is just below 50%, London living rent, which is around 70% and affordable rent, which is 80%. For details see Mayor of London, *Homes for Londoners: Affordable Homes Programme 2016-2023* (Greater London Authority, 2016), accessed August 21, 2023. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/homesforlondoners-affordablehomesprogrammefundingguidance.pdf accessed September 1, 2023, https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/housing-and-land/homes-londoners-affordable-homes-programmes/homes-londoners-affordable-homes-programme-2016-2023.

[163] James DeFilippis, *Unmaking Goliath.*

[164] Matthew Thompson, "From Co-Ops to Community Land Trusts".

CLTs are still at a nascent stage and their numbers are marginal. Currently, there are only few in the city which have just obtained planning permission and are soon to break ground. Apart from their minimal impact, it is important to say that these projects are not providing many units for social housing. In fact, they are all explicitly claiming to be targeting the *intermediate* affordable market. This is very important when one talks about contemporary commoning strategies, as it reveals how unevenly spread they are. It poses the question of who today's housing commons are for, and why are they are not more broadly accessible. Nevertheless, these projects are quite unique in the way they address financialisation, gentrification and local resident control. They challenge the way housing is financed and performs financially, but more importantly, how it is developed, designed and built. Such projects also provide urban infrastructure which is universally accessible and truly common, as the thesis discusses in Chapter V.

In "Austerity urbanism and the makeshift city" (2013), Fran Tonkiss suggests that crises are an opportunity for activism to emerge. Furthermore, Tonkiss argues that such grassroots strategies can exist as either infill conditions or temporary uses. Similarly, John Holloway discusses such revolutionary openings through the idea of the crack or an "interstitial change'.[165] Cracks are structural, but also personal, opportunities. They have the potential to represent alternative markets, but also alternative relationships in how housing is produced, owned, governed: " The cracks, both as spaces of liberation and as painful ruptures, run inside us too."[166] Grassroots projects won't solve the housing crisis. In fact, as the thesis discusses later, in financial terms they remain palliative. However, at a time when subjectivity is the most valuable commodity, they can help in rethinking how homes are valued and in exploring a more ethical and just future for home ownership. Moreover, with architects having become obsolete, and their decisions subsumed by neoliberal efficiencies, the institutional void and grassroots projects present an opportunity to reframe their agency and collaborate towards the development of more equitable and innovative housing methodologies.

[165] John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (Pluto Press, 2010), 11.
[166] Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 64.

Chapter II. In Common: Land, Management, and the Politics of Sharing

The previous chapter discussed how community-led housing emerged through the institutional withdrawal of the Keynesian welfare state. No longer employed by the local authorities, and disillusioned by the neoliberal turn of the industry, architects adopted the commons as a new field within which to reclaim social relevance. This became especially evident in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis, as recession-driven austerity cuts foregrounded the commons as a new type of civic emancipation. As a result, a range of exhibitions, conferences and publications emerged in architectural discourse. Nevertheless, these discussions remained mostly theoretical, grounded in the binary definitions of public-private and struggling to transition to architectural practice. To respond to these disciplinary challenges, this chapter offers a more detailed exploration of the definition and theory of the commons, outside and within the field of architecture.

A starting point for defining the commons could be one of the more popular definitions of the term, proposed by the economist Eleanor Ostrom: the commons are an extra-institutional framework for collective ownership, production and management, which are neither public nor private.[167] But this would be a rather reductive interpretation, used in the field of economics. In fact, the commons have a long historical tradition, especially in pre-modern England, where they were a legal term to designate universal local right to land resources. For that reason, the singular of commons, *common*, is sometimes interchangeably used with land. "On the common" designates a piece of common land. A contemporary reading moved away from this initial meaning to define the commons more broadly: as shared resources, which are essential for human subsistence and survival, such as land, water, air, or housing.[168] But the commons are more than just a passive pool of resources: they are social relational networks which offers political emancipation and autonomy. By presenting a framework for self-governance, they have the potential to provide and close circles of sustainable subsistence economies.[169] Furthermore, such extra-institutional forms of being together are productive, creative and authentic. In *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2018) Silvia Federici states: "commoning initiatives [...] are more than dikes against the neoliberal assault on our livelihood. They are experiments in self-provisioning and the seeds of an alternative mode of production in the making".[170] Here, the *commons* are an ever-changing, collectively produced wealth, while

[167] Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[168] Engels, *The Housing Question*.
[169] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*.
[170] Silvia Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (PM Press, 2018), 89.

commoning stands as the collective action of their constant production and reproduction. Constantly adapting and changing, "worlds of commoning are worlds in movement".[171] Furthermore, the commons are a site not only for material but also for social (re)production. As Federici puts it: "Indeed, if commoning has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject".[172] In autonomist political theory, the *common* stands for being-in-common, as a prefigurative state of collective discontent and action. For Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, the *common* (singular) is the moment in which singularities of the multitude of subjects become into one collective political subject.[173] In that sense, commons have an emancipatory potential to break with existing power imbalances, and perhaps even challenge the neoliberal idea of the home as an asset.

For Marx, the historical foundation for the emergence of the English economic liberalism was to be found in the original enclosure of the commons. This *primitive accumulation* emerged in England between 15th and 16th century through the enclosure of arable and common land.[174] While for Adam Smith the enclosures were a way to improve land productivity, hence returns, for Marx, this process occurred through the dispossession of English peasants and the loss of their customary right to work local land for their subsistence needs. As a result of this process, rural population became increasingly reliant on industrial wage in the city. In "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession" (2004), David Harvey develops the concept of primitive accumulation further by suggesting that it is a recurring event triggered by the capitalist system's failure to manage excessive wealth and labour within a fixed geographical area.[175] Once this threshold is reached, wealth must be invested elsewhere, often through the expansion into new territories, including violent wars abroad, as a means of restoring economic balance. Going back to the original argument of Marx, the original process of "expropriation of the agricultural population from the land" was described as a gradual transformation taking place over several centuries.[176] Some of the decisive historical events for this transformation included the rising price of wool in 15th century, incentivising wealthier landowners to transform arable and common land into private sheep farms. Another important moment was the Dissolution of the Monasteries, which privatised church land. Finally, the Inclosure Act 1773 led to even further reduction of common land. For Marx, it was this long process through which the preceding small landholding free peasants slowly became tenants and eventually industrial wage labourers, with land being increasingly consolidated, commodified and privatised. The comparison between these two early modern land ownership and use models demonstrates how far back land

[171] Stavrides, *Common Space*, 32.
[172] Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World*, 110.
[173] Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (Penguin Press, 2004), 196.
[174] Karl Marx, "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation", in *Capital, Vol. 1* [1867], trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Progress Publishers, 1887). https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm Here Marx introduces the term *primitive accumulation* by referring to Adam Smith's "accumulation of stock and appropriation of land".
[175] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 143.
[176] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 101.

2.1 George Lambert, Hilly Landscape with Cornfield or View of Box Hill from Ranmore Common, 1733. CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0. Photo: Tate.

speculation goes in England. The process of privatisation was also incredibly spatial. The practice of enclosing open fields not only defined private property: the walls had a much more instrumental role in improving the productivity of the land by providing more efficient manuring. Rent speculation had a particular role in this process. In *The Origin of Capitalism* (1999) Ellen Meiksins Wood discusses the relationship between rent and land productivity. By the 16th century, tenants were forced to yield profit competitively, and incentivised to improve the returns of the land, based on market values.[177] Elsewhere in Europe this transition occurred differently. In France, for example, a state apparatus and infrastructure were established to facilitate the taxation of private landowners.[178]

The speculative approach to land was not limited to rural areas. It was soon applied to urban development, particularly in London after the Great Fire of 1666. During the city's reconstruction, the speculative building industry, including housing, thrived. Landlords would lease their land to builders, ensuring quality and land use through the lease and the building contract. Occupiers would then purchase a shell structure and the lease for the land from the builder. In this model, builders would sublease land to others, and occupiers would sublease to other occupiers. Builders sometimes rented out accommodation themselves. Most importantly, land was measured by the width of the house frontage, which influenced plot shapes and the design of London's terraced houses.[179] In that sense, it is not an exaggeration to say that while land has historically been part of the commons in England, housing has not. Nevertheless, the thesis sets out to use the existing theory to explore urban housing, along with new, more ethical and fair forms of producing, owning, sharing and relating to it. The home is a critical site for change. As stated in *Making Homes: Ethnography and Design* (2017): "it is precisely how we habitually live out our lives with the material, sensory, atmospheric and digital configurations of our homes that contributes to the key societal issues that social scientists and designers alike seek to confront".[180] To understand this, much of what architects know about housing architecture needs to be unlearned. What if housing can be owned, managed and accessed differently, like any other environmental resource, what possibilities would this create for its architecture? And how can architects unlearn the modern ethos linked to the history of housing to embrace the commons? This chapter will introduce key theoretical context of the thesis, setting out the main concepts and definitions which will be used throughout the rest of the thesis.

This chapter provides a chronological and thematic overview of the theory

[177] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 56.
[178] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 104.
[179] Dan Cruickshank and Neil Burton, *Life in the Georgian City* (Viking New York, 1990), 115.
[180] Sarah Pink et al., *Making Homes: Ethnography and Design* (Taylor & Francis, 2017), 1.

of the commons. It begins with the commons as land from a legal-historical perspective, through discussing them as a lean management structures from an economic-managerial perspective, and as a political revolt from a political-theoretical perspective. Finally, it concludes by challenging the primacy of economics in commoning to foreground the importance of local social networks through anthropological theory on gifting and sharing cultures. While earlier accounts viewed these exchanges as the result of a single underlying structure, later post-structuralist interpretations recognised various collective constructs. Not all of these constructs are inherently inclusive. In fact, the commons can also be oppressive and homogenising.[181] Therefore, the chapter will conclude with a critical examination of what it means to be in common within the multicultural and ever-changing context of London.

Common Land

The commons were the predominant land tenure model in medieval Anglo-Saxon England. According to it, the land was owned by the king, but was widely accessible for common use, as it was a universal source of subsistence. This included arable land, as well as forests used for timber, foraging and hunting, and pastures for grazing. A kind of medieval universal basic income, this system operated on the principle of hyperlocality. It was organised through the low-density distribution of small-scale settlements, which were self-sufficient and were originally free. In return, commoners had to provide military support and *feorm*, or food-rent.[182] Although some historical accounts describe the transition to the manorial model as a clear reform that followed abruptly after the Norman conquest, there is evidence that this was a more gradual transition and that it had started well before the invasion.[183] Preceding the Norman conquest, increased taxation slowly transformed the commons from something which was predominantly used for subsistence to something which generated surplus value (material resource). In this period, forests were seen as increasingly valuable, as the medieval material world consisted mostly of timber. This included buildings and infrastructure, but also wood for lighting and heating. This, together with the clearing of more and more forests to gain productive arable land, brought English commons under threat. In that sense, the universal subsistence model doubled as a form of medieval environmental protection, securing the reproduction of the resource.

In *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (2009) Peter Linebaugh identifies the historical moment in which the rights to the commons were recognised and codified in legislation. The Magna Carta of 1215 was a critical point for the accountability of absolute rulers. But more impor-

[181] Stavrides, Common Space, 236. Elsa Noterman, "Beyond Tragedy: Differential Commoning in a Manufactured Housing Cooperative", *Antipode* 48, no. 2 (March 2016), 433–452. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12182.
[182] Frank Merry Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 1971), 278.
[183] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 470.

tantly, there was a second charter – a Charter of the Forest, which secured access to common land as a local universal right to subsistence, and of course, demanded protection for the forests. In addition to being codified in law, local commoners had developed everyday spatial practices to oversee the resource. One such example was the custom of "beating the bounds", in which local residents were patrolling the land to monitor and secure its preservation.[184] In addition to this, local customs included assigning use rights to particular parts of the landscape – the owners had the soil and timber, while the commoners had the rights to grazing and gathering wood.[185] Further practices include the ancient custom of *coppicing*, which uses only parts of the wood and not only keeps it alive, but stimulates growth and biodiversity. In that sense, the commons included modes of resource use which are not only non-extractive, but also *regenerative*.

Not all commoners were equally reliant on the commons. Female commoners were especially affected by the growing inaccessibility of these shared resources. The work of Maria Mies was central to a feminist critical reading of the commons. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986) foregrounds the Marxist historical concept of primitive accumulation as the start of the exclusion and precarisation of women. Mies describes this process and the degradation of the environment as two sides of the same culture of patriarchal domination and violence. By prioritising the idea of surplus value over any other regenerative or subsistence concern, women were increasingly excluded and contained within the realm of social reproduction: "[..]the contradictory process, [...] by which, in the course of the last four or five centuries women, nature and colonies were externalized, declared to be outside civilized society, pushed down, and thus made invisible as the under-water part of an iceberg is invisible, yet constitute the base of the whole".[186] The intellectual basis of classical economics and liberalism play an important role in this process. In fact, it is quite obvious how the degradation of the commons links to the liberal economic philosophy of the rational and *in*dependent economic *man*. Popular cultural references for the self-reliance narrative include Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile: or On Education* (1762), Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" (1841), Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), to name just a few. What the thesis argues is that in order to foreground other, more regenerative modes of producing, this radical *in*dependence needs to be re-considered in favour of a radical *inter*dependence – with each other and with the environment. This does not exclude other feminist struggles of women's autonomy over their lives and bodies but aspires to critique the very foundations of neoliberal thought. Maria Mies frames this

[184] Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (University of California Press, 2009), 75.
[185] Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto.*
[186] Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a*

2.2 Thomas Gainsborough, *Cornard Wood, near Sudbury*, Suffolk, 1748. National Gallery, London.

2.3 "How to Reduce All Sorts of Ground into a Square for the Better Measuring of it", illustration from Charles Estienne, *Maison Rustique or the Countrey Farme* (1504-1564). An Illustration from John Norden's Surveior's Dialogue (1618)

2.4 Peter Burrell, *Plan of the Royal Manor of Richmond*, 1771.

discussion in the following way:

> [...]we cannot close our eyes to the fact that capitalism, by focussing on the atomized individual in its marketing strategies has, to a large extent, perverted the humanist aspiration inherent in the concept of autonomy. As the capitalist commodity market creates the illusion that the individual is free to fulfil all her/his desires and needs, that individual freedom is identical with the choice of this or that commodity, the self-activity and subjectivity of the person is replaced by individual consumerism. Thus, individualism has become, among Western feminists, one of the main obstacles for feminist solidarity and thus also for the achievement of feminist goals.[187]

The topic of interdependence has been widely discussed in ecofeminist literature. It is ever more relevant in the current context of unprecedented inequality and environmental degradation. Drawing on Mies's work, Silvia Federici offers an even closer examination of the process of primitive accumulation and the vulnerability of women who depend on the commons.[188] Silvia Federici reiterates that the commons can help us to revaluate qualities and processes which have been long regarded unproductive and of no value by the rational efficiencies of modernity. For architects, this might mean that they need to unlearn the naturalised liberal lessons, and reconcile with inefficiency or prolonged timeframes.[189] As will be discussed later, commoning is not easy. It requires participants to sit with such challenges – but this is also one of its biggest strengths. It is where its resilience rests. This resilience draws on existing relational networks, the expansion of which is discussed by Massimo De Angelis through the notion of *boundary commoning*. These are commoning practices which are venturing beyond the limits of the specific group or project to collaborate with other grassroots initiatives, create local loops of services and products, and essentially "leverage social powers and constitute ecology and scale".[190] Through such relationships,, commons ecologies rely on *meta-commonality* – a type of commonality which "maintains each commons identity and internal commoning, while [...] establishing a new systemic coherence among two or more commons."[191]

For Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, the process of enclosure constituted a type of proto-urban planning. In *Against the Commons: A Radical History of Urban Planning* (2022) this argument is discussed in more detail. Here, for the first time, land was spatially structured to apply a long-term socio-economic and political project: "[...] this structural prerequisite manifests spatially through the creation of territorial orders based on different processes of decollectivisation, disempowerment, and dispossession. Capitalism does not simply occupy space; capitalism is a mode of spatialization".[192] This approach proved formative in how cities were to be conceived and shaped.[193] Sevilla-Buitrago argues

World Scale, 77.
[187] Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 40.
[188] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomedia, 2004).
[189] Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World*, 94.
[190] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 281.
[191] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 293.
[192] Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons. A Radical History of Urban Planning* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 3.
[193] Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons*, 35.

that enclosure presented a type of proto-gentrification, in which the growing gentry were seeking to purchase rural property to secure their social status.[194] This is evidence that today's precarity, population displacement and even gentrification were part of Londoners' experience from the very beginnings of the modern city. At the dawn of English modernity, rural, and subsequently urban, space was conceived and structured through the privatisation and the destruction of the original historical commons. To remind us of this, 3 % of common land has remained so until today. In London some of these vestiges, such as London Fields, survive to be publicly enjoyed as parks, telling us of us older and more ethical ways of owning, sharing and dwelling.[195]

In terms of housing, the commons continue to exist in the architectural imaginary as an alternative to the public-private binary. The privatisation of public housing and the continual re-development of its remaining stock are only the latest chapters in a long historical process. In fact, the commons have never managed to establish themselves as a viable housing alternative, despite the countless struggles throughout history. That is, housing has never been politically emancipated through social systems of relations and participatory processes. As a result, our housing imaginaries remain stuck in mostly modern values and narratives, highlighting the urgency of making housing commons achievable. Both land ownership and regenerative use are crucial when looking for solutions to the "housing question". As previously discussed, the term "urban regeneration" has a historical association with destructive changes in cities, under the guise of improvement. Today, it continues to have devastating impacts on Londoners' lives. Nevertheless, the thesis refers to an alternative understanding of regeneration, focusing on care and reproduction, which originated in the field of architectural sustainability.[196] The term has been borrowed from biology and forestry to indicate the reproductive, healing and replenishing capacities of various forms of life. This alternative use has been introduced in architecture to explore ways of building which are less devastating for us and for the environment. In that sense, the thesis would also like to challenge the modern idea of *urban regeneration* – that is, the social and economic improvement at any price – and embrace a consideration of the term *regenerative,* as something which can be found in a non-modern understanding of ownership, care and, ultimately, *(re)production* of the commons. Challenging today's definitions of urban regeneration and demanding new ones, which are more concerned with safeguarding and sustaining, offer new values in relation to housing. This understanding advocates for an approach that prioritises safeguarding and sustaining the commons (including housing). Just as the natural environment needs regenerative commoning strategies, the thesis argues that

[194] Sevilla-Buitrago, *Against the Commons* 59.
[195] Iain Sinclair, *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report* (Penguin UK, 2010), 7.
[196] John Tillman Lyle, *Regenerative Design for Sustainable Development* (John Wiley & Sons, 1996).

housing, as a common resource, also needs to be treated and imagined in a similar way. The idea of regeneration allows us to imagine ways to relate to our environment other than a one-directional extraction. This poses the question of how one can develop a new understanding of housing which counters any extraction or depletion of shared resources.

Reproduction is also a very critical concept here. The term was introduced by Karl Marx in the context of labour power.[197] Simply put, it designates all the conditions which are needed for social relations to continue to be maintained and recreated in the future. For Foucault, reproduction was linked to biopower.[198] For Althusser, it was a matter of ideology, values and beliefs.[199] For feminist thinkers, it is a way to highlight the importance of reproductive labour (traditionally socially assigned to women). Massimo De Angelis defines reproduction for the commons as "activities which maintain and increase the autonomy of commons [...] including housing".[200] Commons reproduction can be opposed to primitive accumulation or enclosure. For housing, this is a matter of both ensuring the accessibility of housing in perpetuity, and for the devastating impact which urban development has on the environment.

To challenge the naturalised values of individualism, rationality and efficiency, the notion of interdependence needs to be reconsidered. Moreover, it also presents an important safeguarding tactic. Legally, interdependence, especially more bundled models of ownership can be a way to ensure that local residents have a formal say in how urban space is planned and developed. This would create entangled modes of governance and ultimately enable local rights to be retained in the city. Compared to the publics, this would make commons more difficult to privatise. London organisations such as NEF and Unit 38 are already exploring public-common partnerships as a way to safeguard local urban assets, such as the Seven Sisters Market. Finally, regeneration and interdependence were inherent to historical commoning, which was originally rural, de-centralised and hyperlocal. To consider such concepts for the global hyperdiverse setting of London, it is crucial to secure perpetual accessibility and adaptability.

Common Governance

It is no coincidence that the commons appeared in academic debate around the 1970s when the privatisation of public resources sparked a lively debate. Since then, the term has been a key topic across the political spectrum. One of the first revisions of this old English custom is in Garrett Hardin's book *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). The work was a treatise of conservative envi-

[197] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One* [1867], trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Progress Publishers, 1995), 121, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf. In "The buying and Selling of Labour-Power" Marx highlights the reliance of the capitalist model on the perpetual access to labour force. For this to be possible, the working conditions must ensure the industrial worker can keep offering their labour. On one hand this means securing sufficient rest, food, accommodation, appropriate clothing, etc.; and in the long-term, to secure the reproduction of the labour force through reproducing oneself.

[198] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley (Random House, Inc., 1978).

[199] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (Verso Books, 2014).

[200] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 282.

ronmentalism: the argument includes population control as a solution for the scarcity of resources.[201] Drawing on William Forster Lloyd's *Two Lectures on the Checks to Population* (1833), Hardin uses the commons to argue for more state intervention in reproductive rights. Nevertheless, critical accounts of Hardin's work remain limited.[202] For Hardin, if there were no rules to regulate the use and access of shared resources (or population growth), individual actors would act in their own self-interest and eventually deplete the commons. However, an oversimplification like this completely omits the complex rights and obligations linked to the historical concept of the commons. Commoning included elaborate regenerative practices to use and maintain natural resources, as they were a major (and sometimes the only) means of substance for the medieval English peasant. In that sense, apart from its condescending and deeply unethical reasoning, Hardin's argument is also factually incorrect.

As a response to Hardin, Elinor Ostrom produced the well-known book *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (1990), which established the question of regeneration as central to the commoning debate. As a pre-modern form of ownership, the commons include reciprocal and regenerative use. This is enabled through a complexity of rights which are contested and negotiated in everyday practices, building the case for sustainable non-institutional resource governance. Ostrom uses an in-depth case study analysis to support the view that commons-based models of self-management are viable, efficient, long-term institutional alternatives to the state and the firm. The cases are laid out in a comparative manner, starting with a short description of each model, which is followed by an analysis. This concludes by drawing a set of similarities between the projects, leading to the definition of a new theoretical framework for commons-based governance. It is a methodological choice in itself to focus on material resources and efficiency and exclude the social processes. In that sense, Ostrom's common ownership is closer to a modern concept of private ownership than the pre-modern complex bundles of different use rights and duties. In the case of the commons, the social and material aspects were completely entangled. Commoning created and sustained a relational social framework, which could be extremely demanding and lengthy, and sometimes even unproductive. Perhaps seen from the perspective of the public and private sector, the commons do provide the opportunity for institutional withdrawal, and thus a more economical use of resources. However, for the participants they remain emotionally and materially demanding, to the point of limiting how accessible commons actually are. Ostrom's work won the Nobel Prize in Economics. However, although it played a crucial role in theorising and popularising the commons in the global academic debate, the

[201] Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", 54.
[202] David Harvey, "The Future of the Commons", *Radical History Review* 2011, no. 109 (January 2011), 101–107, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2010-017.; Siegfried V. Ciriacy-Wantrup and Richard C. Bishop, "Common Property as a Concept in Natural Resources Policy", *Natural Resources Journal* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1975), 713–727. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol15/iss4/7. Harvey argues that Hardin's tragedy has often been misinterpreted in support to privatisation, when it was only meant to advocate for authoritarian policies on birth control. On the other hand, Ciriacy-Wantrup and C. Bishop suggest that the commons have often been misunderstood. For them, the commons are mostly wrongly defined through private or public property, which oversimplifies the real tragedy – their original enclosure – and conceals the detrimental environmental impacts of these ownership and management changes.

increased focus on efficiencies does not really allow existing classical economic assumptions of ownership, sharing or use to be challenged.

Commons Movements

Beyond land use and resource management, the commons are also widely discussed as social movements. In fact, they are central to autonomist Marxist thought, as they enable extra-institutional forms of governance based on direct democracy and participation. By constituting a practice of production and reproduction of resources and socialities, the commons have the potential to break with modern institutions, including market economies. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri discuss these questions in their trilogy *Empire* (2000)*, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004)*, and Commonwealth* (2009).[203] Here a new collective subject, the multitude, enables a new form of anti-institutional socialism. In that way, the commons are not only a universal given right, but also a right which is actively claimed by a self-conscious oppressed class in a revolutionary act – hence the verb "common*ing*". In the last part of *Commonwealth* (2009), Negri and Hardt reiterate that the common is not merely a physical resource but a "social product", a space where the "multitude" arrives at a shared subjectivity. In doing so, one manages to transfer from biopower to bioproduction. Commoning as collective action is not only reactionary but also creative and productive. Its outcome – the "commonwealth" – entails value which is used and governed by the commoners. The book discusses the condition of a global empire as an all-encompassing political and economic structure. In the post-colonial and financialised context of London, this is crucial to understanding the significance and specificities of local commons and commoning practices.

Massimo De Angelis contributes to the debate with *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (2017). The work defines the commons as autonomous social structures and systems of production, commonwealth governance and use. According to this work, commons are multi-scalar nested systems which originate in situated and localised collective action, but have the political potential to scale up, and eventually achieve, a global post-capitalist future. This handbook of commoning argues that autonomy becomes possible by looking beyond classical economics:

> Commons system could survive with alternative means of livelihood and exchange that are not directly measured in terms of economic growth. This idea is captured by what eco-feminist economists and social scientists call the iceberg model [...]The visible part of the iceberg represents the wage labour officially employed in capitalist systems, while beneath the line of visibility are the vast array of other economies, among them the commons (gift

[203] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2001); Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*; Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*.

> exchange, mutual aid, solidarity, household self-provisioning, associations, domestic labour and care, and many cooperatives).[204]

What De Angelis is referring to is Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson's *diverse economy* model, which creates the possibility for a much broader economic spectrum. The diverse economic space also foregrounds female labour, which has been undervalued and rendered invisible throughout modernity. With its roots in feminist theory, the concept of the diverse economy argues for a new understanding of what an economic exchange might be by formalising alternative practices. Like Ostrom, De Angelis also draws on case study analysis to abstract some main principles. Methodologically, although the book remains mostly theoretical, it moves closer to the subject by working with direct quotes, accounts of conversations, anecdotal episodes and field observations. These ethnographic moments are not sustained throughout the whole case study analysis, nor are they methodologically central to the main modes of enquiry, arguments or conclusion. In doing this, the book maintains a largely theoretical focus. Of course, De Angelis's approach differs radically from Ostrom's. One such important difference is acknowledging the role of social relations for the (re)production of the commons. In fact, De Angelis foregrounds the underlying social relations and knowledge production, suggesting that they are equally important as the production of material resources. Guido Ruivenkamp and Andy Hilton describe this as a shift from "commons as resources" to "commons as relational frameworks".[205] This enables an examination of the difficulties and inefficiencies that are experienced through the immaterial side of commoning, which brings us to the question of how accessible commons really are.

In *Unmaking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital* (2004) James DeFilippis suggests that a post-capitalist future is possible when multiple spheres of our everyday life are simultaneously decoupled from the market economy.[206] In that way, housing, together with work and finance, is part of a more holistic model. Moreover, DeFilippis argues that such transformations are already in progress but are not quite connected yet to enable a post-capitalist reality. Such misalignment makes the commons particularly inaccessible, with participants challenged to achieve autonomy separately in any of these spheres while they are subsumed by the others.

While for some scholars the commons stand for a complete overhaul of the existing political reality, for others commoning is much more prefigurative. In "Beyond Tragedy: Differential Commoning in a Manufactured Housing Co-operative", Elsa Noterman discusses the concept of *differential common-*

[204] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 313.
[205] Guido Ruivenkamp and Andy Hilton, *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices* (Zed Books Ltd., 2017), 1.
[206] DeFilippis, *Unmaking Goliath*.

ing, emphasising the difficult and contested character of the practice.[207] By introducing the concept of *differential commoning*, the work foregrounds the fragmented and individual reality within a seemingly unified social movement. Noterman argues that situated ethnographic definitions of the commons are required to address this gap in the predominantly theoretical literature on the subject. Moreover, the work reveals the paradoxical and difficult realities of commoning. The fieldwork material which supports these arguments is based on a housing co-operative case study in New Hampshire, which formed after the residents of a mobile home park were faced with eviction. It concludes that there is a multitude of positionalities within the collective, as residents organise to retain their homes. Like Noterman, Laurent Berlant explores the threshold of structural change as an already realised revolutionary transformation. In "Infrastructures for Troubling Times" (2016), Berlant values the commons for the possibilities they offer to represent counter-normative spaces, not as places of belonging, but as places of transition towards a better future. Advocating for the potential of staying in the present and exploring the situated experiences of a "structure in constant transition", Berlant argues that the commons provide an affective infrastructure which is already central to unlearning past and current normals to transform reality.[208]

To summarise, the commons as social movements emerge as a post-modern reading of a pre-modern concept of production, ownership and use. So far this chapter discussed the historical origin of the commons in relation to land ownership. These ideas were grounded in the interdependence of rights and regeneration duties, which remain central values for challenging the neoliberal economic ethos of housing today. The chapter also discussed the commons as management systems. Although providing a lean structure, this lean-ness often has to be compensated for by participants, which can enclose the process of commoning. As will be discussed further in the thesis, to address this issue of accessibility, it is crucial to allow for different degrees of reciprocity to meet the variety of vulnerabilities and make the process more widely accessible. In that sense, participation is a balancing act. Finally, the commons also constitute social movements and political means to achieve change. Thinking forward, if they are to be situated and inclusive, participation asymmetries need to be taken into consideration. The thesis draws on all these different strands of literature to define the commons as participatory relational networks of production, ownership and use, which are based on the values of inclusivity, interdependence and regeneration. There is wealth of literature on the commons, but it remains mostly theoretical. To address this gap in architecture, the next section will start with defining the commons in the context of housing.

[207] Noterman, "Beyond Tragedy".
[208] Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (2016), 396. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816645989.

Housing as Commons

As discussed in Chapter I, housing is clearly a site for political contestation. It is embedded in struggles around land, governance and social justice. In addition to this, commons and commoning are inherently spatial. Originally organised around distributed low-density rural settlements, the commons were later enclosed, enabling the spatialisation of economic ideas of land value. As discussed by Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, the rural political strategy of ordering and planning the land was soon translated to the city. Urban space is discussed in more detail by Stavros Stavrides in *Common Space: The City as Commons* (2016) and *Common Spaces of Urban Emancipation (2019).* The work uses case study analysis to synthesise a theory of urban commons. For Stavrides, the commons are very different from the publics. It is the act of production that distinguishes common space: "Whereas public space, as space marked by the presence of a prevailing authority, is space 'given' to people according to certain terms, common space is space 'taken' by the people".[209] In relation to architecture, especially housing, the distinction between public and common is quite easy to make. In Britain, public housing was mostly hierarchically planned and developed. Initially this happened through philanthropic projects, and later through municipal and national, enterprise. While public housing architecture was aimed at shaping a political subject, as discussed, commons entail a much more complex relationship between residents and buildings, and between material and immaterial registers of architecture. For Stavrides, representation is crucial for the process of spatial commoning: "Representations of common space, representations of shared space (as common property of a group, as available common resource, as emblematic of a shared collective identity, and so on), are forms of making common space 'happen'. Before it can even be recognized as such, common space becomes a stake in struggles over representation."[210] In that sense, commons space (in our case, housing) is an object of material practice, but more importantly it also represents, reflects and reproduces intersecting subjectivities.

In 1974 Henri Lefebvre introduced the idea that space is socially constructed in *La Production de l'espace.* For Lefebvre, space, as a product of social relations, exists in three registers – as lived, as represented and as conceived.[211] In fact, where the architectural ambition of public housing failed was in trying to define being-in-common as only one of these registers. In Stavrides's terms, unlike publics, commons are given and not taken. Although the intention was the creation of social welfare, some of these projects became normalising, insensitive to the point of dominance, and discriminatory – in terms of

[209] Stavrides, *Common Space*, 106.
[210] Stavrides, *Common Space*, 210.
[211] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.

both access and underlying assumptions informing the design. In that sense, although securing wider access to housing is absolutely central to the commoning process, there are also other considerations in place. In a subsequent anthology, *Housing as Commons: Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis* (2022), Stavrides states: "Is housing a good to be claimed and distributed in ways dependent upon the characteristics of the corresponding society (capitalism), or is it a set of spatiotemporal relations that crucially shapes social life itself and, therefore, directly affects any challenge to social and urban order?"[212] This passage summarises the commodity versus the commons reading of domestic space. But more importantly, it foregrounds the transformative potential of the domestic, from personal social life to urban social order. Urban environments make a fascinating case for revisiting the historical practice of commoning, as they provide the opportunity for dense relational networks and require regenerative and accessible use of shared resources.

In the 1990s, with the popularisation of the World Wide Web, the debate on the commons was reinvigorated with new ideas about digital sharing. This strand of theory is reflected in *Architecture for the Commons: Participatory Systems in the Age of Platforms* (2021).[213] Here, Jose Sanchez discusses the role of platform technology for connecting and sharing knowledge. These ideas are translated to architecture through the topics of discrete element assemblies and CNC manufacturing. Sanchez distances himself from the architectural legacies of deconstructivism and parametricism to emphasise the participatory character of *variation*. The work is contextualised in the self-built tradition of Walter Segal and Alejandro Aravena. Having discussed the social and legal complexity of the commons earlier in the chapter, technology-centered readings like this seem reductive. Moreover, digital commons alone are often neither inclusive, interdependent, nor regenerative.[214] Like any other tool, it is crucial that their production and governance enable democratic participatory engagement – something which, in the case of digital platforms, might require technical literacy and present another accessibility challenge. Platforms do not equal commons; however, they can be used together with non-digital commoning practices to define and access new forms of blended governance, similar to Benjamin Bratton's concept of the stack.[215] During the pandemic, social distancing forced many commoners to resort to such blended strategies. They were even preferred by some of the more vulnerable participants. Anonymity helped to reduce vulnerability and exposure for stigmatised and marginalised groups. At the same time, online meetings were less demanding and made it easier for participants with daily care and work duties to stay involved. Blended models are here to stay, and it remains to be seen how local residents

[212] Stavrides and Travlou, *Housing as Commons*, 23.
[213] Jose Sanchez, *Architecture for the Commons: Participatory Systems in the Age of Platforms* (Routledge, 2021).
[214] Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).
[215] Bratton, *The Stack*.

can make a better use of them. Nevertheless, following Colin Ward's vision of democratising planning, we can imagine digital platforms as a tool for local grassroots policing and monitoring, a new digital version of the medieval practice of "beating the bounds".[216] In fact, such initiatives already exist. Desiree Fields explores these possibilities in "Uploading Housing Inequality, Digitizing Housing Justice?", listing examples such as the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, Housing Data Coalition and Wem Gehoert Berlin?.[217]

The idea of housing as commons seems well suited to the urban and housing conditions of London. On one hand, this proposition speaks to the urgency of regenerative resources in dense urban environment. On the other, the commons rely on dense social networks. Still, most of the existing literature remains theoretical, making it challenging for architects to apply it to practice. As briefly discussed above, sharing seems to be a popular interpretation of the commons among architects. In many cases, such practices are proposed for their economic benefits, and not emancipatory sharing. For that reason, this chapter challenges will conclude with challenging the primacy of economics in sharing practices.

Economic Socialities

The current literature on the commons illustrates three main areas of focus: the commons as land, from a legal and historical perspective; as lean management structures, from an economic and managerial perspective; and as a political revolt, from a political and theoretical perspective. However, at its core the concept of the commons is about social networks formed by cultures of emancipatory sharing. Here, there is a significant difference between sharing for efficiency and economic benefit and sharing for reasons of political empowerment. While the former reduces the practice to a matter of practicality, the latter involves reproducing the conditions that give rise to these social networks and resources. Sharing will be the focus of the last section of the chapter. To theoretically contextualise commoning as a social practice, and not just as an economic model, the following anthropological overview aims to challenge the primacy of economic exchanges in sharing. Such apparently transactional practices are of critical importance for the relational networks which are sustained by and sustain the commons.

In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) Adam Smith lays out two very important assumptions which are formative for economic liberalism, and thus for neoliberal housing politics. The first of these is the notion of the economic man - an *individual man* making rational decisions. This became the premise for

[216] Ward and Fyson, *Streetwork*.
[217] "Uploading Housing Inequality, Digitizing Housing Justice? | *Public Books*", November 15, 2019 accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.publicbooks.org/uploading-housing-inequality-digitizing-housing-justice/.

classical modern economics and a way to predict social behaviour and plan for economic growth. The other is that of the *invisible hand*, the belief that the market regulates itself and that any intervention on behalf of the state is detrimental to economic growth. But only a few decades after the book was published, scholars began discussing the actual consequences of unregulated economic liberalism, especially in industrial cities. At the turn of the 20th century, the primacy of economic growth was questioned, especially its overriding of more social values. The substantivist-formalist debate originated in the field of economics and later gained relevance in sociology and anthropology. It was based on a distinction between two opposed approaches to understanding economics – a formalist one, which was based on neoclassical economics – individual actors making rational decisions; and a substantivist one, which was based on social relations and cultural paradigms.[218] To challenge the primacy of economic rationality, sociologists and anthropologists started exploring the essence of what holds societies together.

Emile Durkheim, in his seminal work *The Division of Labour* (1893) was preoccupied with the idea of *collective consciousness* – a range of shared values, norms and beliefs. A type of social cohesion, collective consciousness was part social contract, part psychological state. Its equilibrium secured the general welfare and social reproduction of society. Durkheim used the term *solidarity* (social cohesion) which worked differently in rural and urban settings. In the rural cases, the work suggests mechanical solidarity, where everyone is the same and this homogeneity informs the social cohesion. In industrial cities, there is organic solidarity. Here the division of labour has created a new social framework of specialisation, where the society is heterogeneous but relies on interdependence - similar to the relationship of organs in a body:

> Here, then, the individuality of all grows at the same time as that of its parts. Society becomes more capable of collective movement, at the same time that each of its elements has more freedom of movement. This solidarity resembles that which we observe among the higher animals. Each organ, in effect, has its special physiognomy, its autonomy. And, moreover, the unity of the organism is as great as the individuation of the parts is more marked. Because of this analogy, we propose to call the solidarity which is due to the division of labour, organic.[219]

For Durkheim, like Marx and Weber, society is reduced to a holistic model. All these early sociological accounts come from a place of concern with the negative impacts of unregulated economic liberalism on urban life. What is rather problematic in Durkheim's work is the assumption that urban modes of production and social organisation present a more developed evolutionary stage of the preceding rural ones. This evolutionary reasoning can also be found in

[218] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* [1944] (Beacon Press, 1962).
[219] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* [1893], trans. George Simpson (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), 131.

Marx's work, in which capitalism is the necessary stage from which to reach revolutionary liberation and collective consciousness.[220]

Along similar condescending lines, many anthropologists of the time discussed indigenous communities as a way of revealing what they would define as an "earlier stage" of (economic) development. The premise of these early accounts is to take the idea of economics shaping social frameworks and test it on what they wrongly see as a "pre-modern" setting. What this positivist framing obscured is how such encounters allowed scholars to arrive at the more self-reflective analysis of modern western institutions, opening up the debate to extra-institutional practices. One of the first accounts was Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). The work introduces the role of gift economies in holding societies together. Here, gifting is a self-interested exchange which involves an obligation of reciprocity and is deeply ingrained in the social life of indigenous communities.[221] Like Durkheim, Malinowski also expresses the bias of evolutionary perspectives, characterising the Kula culture as "primitive" and out of sync with the times, and these suggestions should be called out as clearly racist. What is useful here is that Malinowski introduces a type of exchange which is highly elaborate but not utilitarian. The work concludes that although the Kula express ideas about ownership and value which are different from European ones at that time, they are nevertheless motivated by an underlying desire for wealth. In this sense, it cannot really be argued that the work is particularly critical of modern economics. Nevertheless, it creates the possibility for other more critical accounts to follow.

The Kula ring inspired Marcel Mauss's *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, originally published in 1925. Mauss asks a simple question: why reciprocate, hence participate in, this totalising system of circulation? Like the preceding scholarly work, Mauss sees the Polynesian gifting communities as an earlier version of the western market economy:

> These phenomena allow us to think that this principle of the exchange-gift must have been that of societies that have gone beyond the phase of 'total services' (from clan to clan, and from family to family) but have not yet reached that of purely individual contract, of the market where money circulates, of sale proper, and above all of the notion of price reckoned in coinage weighed and stamped with its value.[222]

By drawing on Durkheim's evolutionary model, Mauss believes that the study of Polynesian societies can help us to understand some universal underlying principles in contemporary economics. More interestingly, Mauss's intellectual underpinnings also speak of something else. Such encounters with cultures

[220] Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* [1857-61], trans. David McLellan (New York, Harper & Row, 1972).
[221] Bronislaw Malinowski, "Kula; the Circulating Exchange of Valuables in the Archipelagoes of Eastern New Guinea", *Man* 20 (1920), 97–105.
[222] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* [1925], trans. Jane I. Guyer (Routledge, 2016), 59.

and values which were unfamiliar to western audiences until then have been crucial for informing self-reflection, definitions and critiques of western paradigms and institutions. Mauss's work later became the foundation for disciplinary debate about what gifting stands for politically. David Graeber argues that Mauss has been misinterpreted and was actually more interested in exploring an alternative to commodity exchange, rather than the rationale behind it.[223] For Graeber, Mauss was basing the work on the ideas of utopian socialists and the co-operative movement which were gaining popularity in Europe around the time the book was written. For Graeber, in this way Mauss implies a parallel existence of alternative economies within the capitalist framework by suggesting that communism is not a matter of property rights but an everyday practice.[224] In fact, in the book Mauss suggests that in an industrial society, the system of reciprocity can be extended to a form of universal national welfare service to provide social security.[225] As to the question of *Why reciprocate?,* the work answers by introducing the concept of the *hau* – the religious foundation which underpins all reciprocity and its reproduction in indigenous societies. It remains unclear what the term stands for; however, scholars have used it to support the substantivist argument. Marshall Sahlins suggests that the "hau" only confirms that it is culture and religion that are underpin the economies of Polynesian communities.[226]

This view could not be more different from that of Claude Lévi Strauss in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969 [1949]). For Strauss, individuals are self-interested and atomic and what ties them together is a biologically predetermined structure, a subconscious common framework which is carried through in language, law, exchange, the entirety of human reality. This framework is based on a binary model, a *dual organisation* that holds society together:

> The same change in attitudes is beginning to appear in the study of human institutions, which are also structures whose whole - in other words the regulating principle - can be given before the parts, that is, that complex union which makes up the institution, its terminology, consequences and implications, the customs through which it is expressed and the beliefs to which it gives rise. This regulating principle can have a rational value without being rationally conceived. It can be expressed in arbitrary formulas without being itself devoid of meaning. It is in the light of such considerations that the relationships between dual organizations and cross-cousin marriage should be defined.[227]

Within this total system, women and material resources are commodities which are collectively redistributed to secure people's survival and reproduction. Such motivations are not just about physiological needs but might also include power, competition and security. Beyond the misogynist evolutionary

[223] David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (Springer, 2001).
[224] Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*, 227.
[225] Mauss, *The Gift*, 86.
[226] Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Routledge, 2017).
[227] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* [1949], trans. James Harle Bell John Richard Von Sturmer (Beacon Press, 1969), 100.

reasoning, one sees a worldview which to a degree goes against the primacy of economics. But perhaps the most interesting aspect is that it creates the basis for post-structuralist approaches which are extremely important for the theory of the commons and remain relevant for us today.

The question of reciprocity remains central to later anthropology. In 1972 Marshall Sahlins published *Stone Age Economics*, arguing that exchange cannot be understood without its social aspect.[228] Like other economic anthropologists, Sahlins continues to discuss pre-institutional hunter-gatherer societies. But what is really interesting about this account is that, unlike other sources, it starts to reveal how reciprocity is spatialised. For Sahlins, scarcity is a power construct. In that sense, subsistence economies are not only productive but also affluent. They work through "anarchy and dispersion" – a more distributed low-density approach than land use. Sahlins describes a material world that is, like the early Saxon model, produced in a hyperlocal manner and for its use value only. Accumulation (production for surplus) at this point seems to be not even possible within the existing material culture. But one of the most useful contributions of the book for this thesis is that it goes into great detail in describing the technical specificities of different types and scales of sharing practices. And so there are nuances between *pooling*, which enables the dispersed flow of resources and social relationships within a group, and *reciprocity*, which addresses a condition between groups or different members of the group.[229] Elaborating on these nuances of sharing practices makes it evident that not only are there are different types of sharing but also each of these types (re)produce different types of socialities. In this sense sharing is absolutely essential to the establishment and maintenance of any commons-based social system, as well as the expansion of the commons ecology through boundarying practices. Moreover, reciprocity is proportional to proximity (familial and physical). Family members enjoy generalised reciprocity, while strangers receive negative one (even theft).[230] What does this tell us about housing today? The work represents cases of less extractive modes of land use and less sedentary forms of "built environment". This model is carried through hyperlocality and dispersion. Indeed, when talking about housing today, grassroots organising can happen only hyperlocally in terms of both situatedness and scale. Situatedness is crucial for collective action. To self-organise, one needs to care, to know people and to experience a feeling of belonging. As situatedness is easier on a smaller scale, scaling up the movement is a challenge. Hyperlocality doesn't have to mean that an affluent world is an ever more atomised one, but to create socially reproducible systems, scale needs to be considered. Still, the commons need to grow to achieve a meaningful transformation. So perhaps it is a mat-

[228] Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 183.
[229] Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 188.
[230] Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 196.

ter of how to unlearn modern conventions of growth. Massimo De Angelis describes a much more situated and sensitive model of boundary commoning, where disparate commons systems expand to couple to other loops and close supply chain loops to maintain their autonomy. In this model, separate commons retain their identity through *meta-commonality* - a loose collaboration which instrumentalises difference within an ecology of commons. In that sense, although increasing in scale, commons remain embedded and sensitive to the concrete experiences of their participants and the specificities of their locale.[231] Similarly, Stavrides uses the trope of urban archipelagos. Whichever strategy is pursued, if affluence is based on dispersion and low density, dense urban environments make us come to terms with the limits of growth and the urgency of regenerative use.

Hyperlocality and scale are also central to the work of Stephen Gudeman. In *Economic Anthropology* (1998), *community* and *market* are two mutually indispensable multiscalar spheres of a more holistic view of economics. Gudeman eschews any comparative method, advocating for a unique situated account of every economy within a range of many different coexisting ones. It is not about capitalism or its alternative, as they both co-exist. While exchanges are material, this does not prevent them from having a socially reproductive function.[232] In each hyperlocal and specific case, one of the most important elements for the community realm is the base, which is in a way like Durkheim's concept of the collective consciousness (shared values, norms and beliefs), but also includes shared resources. According to Gudeman, the base expresses an identity imbued in all the objects and services circulating through the community. Part of the base – the sacra – has a very specific role for the community's identity and is also not exchangeable. Most importantly, Gudeman emphasises the regenerative nature of commoning – an act of use, production and reproduction – unlike the market, which uses one-directional extraction.[233] A transition from the base to the market constitutes enclosure, while one from the market to the base stands for commoning. Reciprocity is used to extend the base and community, as it starts a chain of obligations. Drawing on Gudeman's work, housing commoning can be read as a redistributive practice. If the introduction of public housing was the creation of a base at a national scale, its privatisation constituted a shift from the base to the market, today's de-financialising projects present a transition from the market back to the base.

There are no commons without the community and no community without the commons. This is why it is crucial to critically reflect on the concept of *being-in-common* and suggest a more inclusive notion which would work better

[231] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 293.
[232] Stephen Gudeman, *Economic Anthropology* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 1998), 52.
[233] Gudeman, *Economic Anthropology*, 28.

with the hyperdiverse and hyperlocal setting of London. In *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) Negri and Hardt set the scene of the contemporary global political arena where the working class (as industrial workers) has expanded to include different subjectivities and geographies: "The multitude, designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common. The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common".[234] Sociologists, anthropologists and political philosophers have long grappled with the issue of defining political common space. Scholars have used a range of terms to describe this – society, community, class, subjectivity, multitude, alliances, coalitions. In this final section, these will be critically discussed to arrive at definitions which can help to frame common housing in London, but also a new role of architecture within that.

The Problem with Being-in-Common

The term *community* has been repeatedly used to indicate the state of being-in-common. This last section will review its meanings, together with other keywords which were used to speak about various types of socio-political groupings. The term *community* was first documented in English around the 12th century. It comes from the Anglo-Norman and Middle French *communité,* meaning joint ownership. Throughout the following few centuries the term expanded in meaning to include today's definition. The word stands for "a body of people or things viewed collectively" or "a shared or common quality or state".[235] At the turn of the 20th century, as London was slowly approaching its current metropolitan outlines, initial sociological accounts defined community as the antithesis of metropolitan social life. *Community and Society (1887) by Ferdinand Tönnies was a seminal work in this respect. A scholar of Thomas Hobbes, and perhaps inspired by Leviathan* (1651), Tönnies considered that scale has an alienating effect. *Community (Gemeinschaft) s*tood for the traditional village scale of the past, while *society (Gesellschaft)* stood for the anonymity of the metropolis. Gemeinschaft relied on organic social relations, while Gesellschaft on mechanical, externally instituted ones. Emile Durkheim, in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) inverts this community-society distinction, arguing that the new urban condition has the potential to foster new socialities – different from tradition, but still with positive social connotations. Karl Marx, in a similar way to Tönnies and Durkheim, saw social relations as part of a bigger structural model. Although the work is focused mainly on the workings and theorisation of capitalism, the idea of a *class* underpins the whole analysis. Carol C. Gould elaborates on this to address

[234] Negri and Hardt, *Multitude*, 100.
[235] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Community", accessed April 14, 2022, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37337?redirectedFrom=community#eid.

three different types of being-in-common – the pre-capitalist *community;* the capitalist *individuality and external sociality* and the post-capitalist *communal individuality.*[236] For Marx, the idea of class is an antagonistic one, implying class conflict. Louis Althusser expands on this. For Althusser, the dominant class shapes state apparatuses to reproduce its dominance. *Ideology* is an indispensable part of this and can include a variety of many unconnected institutions, such as religion, morality, marriage, and many others.[237] It is a holistic system which secures the reproduction of capitalism not only through technical or legal codes, but through individual everyday practices.[238] In that sense, ideology socialises individual subjectivities towards social cohesion, a process Althusser calls *interpellation*.

Post-structuralist thinkers started to challenge totalising social structures. Michel Foucault's ideas of *biopower* and *bioproduction* redefine being-in-common through the concept of *subjectivity.* For Foucault, "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body".[239] Subjectivity is both the state of being a subject, and thus subjugated to the state apparatuses (political or ideological); as well as a way in which this shapes the "modern soul".[240] In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), by tracing the history of penal law Foucault argues that its effects are not only repressive, but result in a positive normalising logic which is partly internalised and self-inflicted by the subject. This is referred to as *discipline,* a type of coercion which is internalised and has strong normalising effects: "These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines'".[241] This suggests a mode of being together not because of a set of inherited similarities but as a political strategy to normalise and subjugate the body. However, this framework also enables the emergence of new modes of being-in-common – a multitude of differences within a political resistance. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* (1978 [1976]) Foucault argues:

> Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat.[242]

The idea of differences within a movement is also discussed in detail in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1988) by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau.

[236] Carol C. Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology: Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality* (MIT Press,1978).
[237] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 53.
[238] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 156.
[239] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan (Random House, Inc., 1995), 26.
[240] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 23.
[241] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 137.
[242] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 96.

The book refutes the idea of class as a homogenous grouping of people and advocates for a more nuanced definition which allows for more difference.

Another seminal account in this discussion is Gilbert Simondon's in *L'individuation psychique et collective* (1989).[243] While phenomenological accounts saw the role of environment as crucial for the genesis of the common, and structuralism was about the underlying framework, Simondon laid out a dynamic and interrelated model which describes an ever-changing relationship between action and structure, individual and collective, by introducing the term "transindividual". This includes the individual and structure mutually and perpetually changing each other. Here, the common emerges when "collective structuration" happens. These ideas were extremely important for the post-structuralist definition of being-in-common, especially for Gilles Deleuze. In *The Coming Community* (1990) Giorgio Agamben explores the relationship between the singular and the universal further. Like Simondon, Agamben sees collective identity as neither fixed nor singular.

In a similar manner, in *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (1996) Gibson-Graham challenge the Marxist notion of class for being too reductive: "It might not necessarily invoke the emancipatory agency of a mass collective subject unified around a set of shared 'interests' but could arise out of momentary and partial identifications between subjects constituted at the intersection of very different class and nonclass processes and positions [...]"[244] Here the concept of *intersectionality* emerges. The term was coined by the Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989). Crenshaw introduced the concept to describe how discrimination exists as a multiplicity of intersecting axes, and that approaching it as a single-axis problem is discriminatory and limiting in itself. Crenshaw drew on legal cases of Black women who were disadvantaged and unrepresented by this singular axis definition. As a result, what this means for organising was placing the most vulnerable and manifold subjectivities at the centre: "If their efforts instead began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit [...] The goal of this activity should be to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: 'When they enter, we all enter'".[245] As subjectivity here becomes more layered and complex, some commoners struggle with different intersecting systems of oppression, normalisation, exclusion and violence. Addressing this complexity is not just a matter

[243] There is no English translation but passages of the original text are included in David Scott, *Gilbert Simondon's Psychic and Collective Individuation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
[244] Julie Katherine Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* [1996] (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 54.
[245] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex", 139.

of academic rigour. In the context of resistance, if some voices remain unheard and obscured within the movement, commoning practices face the risk of reproducing the existing structural violence.

In *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2001) Paolo Virno proposes another alternative term for community: "While one does not wish to sing out-of-tune melodies in the post-modern style ('multiplicity is good, unity is the disaster to beware of'), it is necessary, however, to recognize that the *multitude* [emphasis added] does not clash with the One; rather, it redefines it."[246] Virno highlights the post-structuralist impossibility of unity and suggests that being at the same time a One/Many is the foundation of the multitude. Here the multitude is defined by a non-belonging, and at the same time by constantly produced cultural references of belonging. This constant feeling of not-being-at-home and the reproduction of new "common places" relates to Berlant's account of creating new non-normative modes of being in the world. It goes without saying that in order to develop more ethical definitions of being-in-common, older romanticised narratives of unity have to be unlearnt.[247] Identity politics have long grappled with the question of singularity and unity, and how difference can be instrumentalised towards collective organising and achieving structural change. In *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) Judith Butler asserts: "I am myself an alliance, or I ally with myself or my various cultural vicissitudes". That means only that the "I" in question refuses to background one minority status or lived site of precarity in favour of any other; it is a way of saying, "I am the complexity that I am, and this means that I am related to others in ways that are essential to any invocation of this 'I'".[248] Beyond the complexity of being-in-common with each other, scholars like Butler foreground the temporary differences within oneself.

How can a movement scale up without compromising differences? What is a more heterogeneous but still efficient form of being-in-common? One concept which seems successful in allowing difference to be instrumentalised in the movement is *coalition building*. The idea was originally discussed in the context of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. It addressed instrumentalising solidarity between movements to grow in scale and leverage power. The concept was particularly relevant in feminist debates: in the 1980s, queer feminists of colour Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga embodied the notion of intersectionality and opened a new theoretical field for both feminist and coalitional politics.[249] On the one hand, difference represented a challenge in the movement; on the other, scholars like Crenshaw had exemplified how oppressively unifying it can be, especially legally. While Crenshaw's work

[246] Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (Semiotext(e), 2004), 25.
[247] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2020).
[248] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 68.
[249] Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back* (Persephone Press, 1981).

focused on the discriminatory implications of suppressing the race axis for the sex axis, Judith Butler focused on the sex-gender intersections. Like Berlant, coalitional work here includes staying with the contradictions as opposed to reaching productive resolutions:

> Some efforts have been made to formulate coalitional politics which do not assume in advance what the content of "women" will be [...] They propose instead a set of dialogic encounters by which variously positioned women articulate separate identities within the framework of an emergent coalition [....] an emerging and unpredictable assemblage of positions [...] The insistence in advance on coalitional "unity" as a goal assumes that solidarity, whatever its price, is a prerequisite for political action. But what sort of politics demands that kind of advance purchase on unity? Perhaps a coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions and take action with those contradictions intact. Perhaps also part of what dialogic understanding entails is the acceptance of divergence, breakage, splinter, and fragmentation as part of the often tortuous process of democratization."[250]

To assume this position, one needs to understand that *coalitions are temporal and pre-figurative.* When it comes to shared identity, which is constantly in flux and mutually informing and informed by the being-in-common, sometimes it is more important to create and safeguard the "space" for subjectivities to emerge. In "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century" (1983) Bernice Johnson Reagon argues for the importance of smaller-scale groupings which allow commoners to remain vulnerable and heal:

> Now every once in a while there is a need for people to try to clean out corners and bar the doors and check everybody who comes in the door... And s only the X's or Y's or Z's get to come in. That place can then become a nurturing place or a very destructive place. Most of the time when people do that they do it because of the heat of trying to live in this society where being X or Y or Z is very difficult, to say the least.[251]

This passage leads us to one of the most important qualities of coalitions. They are not entirely open. De Angelis talks about similar boundary rules for the commons. They represent a form of community control over filtering access to participation. This is very specific for each commons case. Some participants require more sensitive environments and such cases are more guarded. Others specialise on the expansion of the commons and remain open. In more case-specific and sensitive scenarios like this, the commons are better suited than publics. Based on participation, they can enable smaller, vulnerable modes of being-in-common. This is one of their most significant strengths. In that way, the commons can facilitate scaling up in a non-oppressive and inclusive way.

Another important aspect of coalitions is that they are also embodied. In *What*

[250] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 20.
[251] Reagon, "Coalition Politics", 357.

White People Can Do Next (2021) Emma Dabiri is sceptical about the term *alliance* and *argues* that coalitions allow for more situated positionalities:

> 'Allyship' being described as a 'selfless act' exacerbates the division, assuming a fundamental and immutable separateness between 'different' 'races', offering charity at the expense of solidarity. Coalition-building, on the other hand, is about identifying shared interests. Through observing movements of the past, we can see that groups far more radical than most of ours today often worked together (but in some cases separately) in pursuit of common goals, in contexts that were much more polarized than at the present.[252]

For Dabiri, allyship can be tokenistic and intellectually based on racial division. Coalitions, on the other hand, are projects where everyone acknowledges the shared stakes – they are based on common interests and concrete action. This framing is especially helpful when thinking about how architecture relates to social movements, especially housing commons. It is central when re-thinking a more supportive role for practitioners.

As architects are still searching for their social relevance in the neoliberal institutional void, the concepts of commoning and coalition-building offer a new possible social mandate for architecture. From the philanthropic housing experiments until the late 1970s, architects enjoyed an unprecedented privilege within the public housing sector. However, this privilege was creating a clear division and removing architects from an engagement with extra-institutional housing organising. With the neoliberal turn, this professional privilege slowly disappeared, together with a growing disciplinary interest in extra-institutional culture. For most of the post-modern social engagement tradition in architecture, spatial practitioners and researchers remained mostly outside of grassroots movements. Today they are offered an opportunity to revised this, as economic and social conditions offer an alignment that has never existed before. Increasingly shared interests and bigger stakes in the fight for housing between architects and residents raise the question of more coalitional approaches to participatory architecture. Such positions are not based on philanthropy, or a saviour complex, but come from actual real shared stakes. In this sense, spatial researchers and practitioners can become part of the movement, while instrumentalising their difference for achieving change.

[252] Dabiri, *What White People Can Do Next*, 14.


S^t. Dunston in the east
S^t. Hellen
S^t Andrew
Billing gate
THE BRIDGE
S^t Mary Overis

Chapter III: London's History of Housing Commons: From the English Revolution to London's Counter-Cultural Squats

How does one begin to construct an architectural history of common housing? That is, housing which is collectively produced, owned and governed, and based on the desire for political transformation? Sharing and commoning are often used interchangeably in architecture, and for this reason, the chapter will start by clarifying the difference between the two terms. It is undeniable that commoning relies on sharing as a main collective practice: however, not all sharing constitutes commoning. To quote Stavros Stavrides, "space-commoning is not, therefore, simply the sharing of space, considered as a resource or an asset, but a set of practices and inventive imaginaries which explore the *emancipating* [emphasis added] potentialities of sharing. Common space is both a concrete product of collectively developed institutions of sharing and one of the crucial means through which these institutions take shape and shape those who shape them".[253] Emancipation is generally defined as "action or process of setting free [...] from restraints imposed by superior physical force or legal obligation".[254] For Stavridees, emancipatory sharing, participants not only engage for the sake of resource efficiency but are also critical and self-reflective of the transformative political capacity of their practice. Similarly, Massimo De Angelis argues that commoning should "problematise sufficiently the relation of this activity of sharing to its environment".[255] Such a sharing culture is instrumental for the participants internally, as it can "reproduce resources and the community that comprises them",[256] but also externally, to achieve wider structural change. Any sharing stripped of its political meaning can make no political claims, nor enable "what commoning essentially creates [...] new forms of collective subjectivation".[257] In such cases, sharing does not constitute a commoning practice.

Housing, by historically containing and ordering the household, as the smallest economic unit, is a critical site for political emancipation. The replicability and scalar nature of the household imply wider stakes towards larger political transformation. Each of the following case studies in the chapter represents a household which is defined in its economic autonomy, but which at the same time is seen as a prototype for wider urban development. In some of the cases, sharing can happen not only within, but also across households. De Angelis gives an example of two types of labour sharing between households – communal labour and reciprocal labour: "While communal labour represents the

[253] Stavrides, *Common Space*, 7.
[254] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Emancipation", accessed July 27, 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/emancipation_n?tab=meaning_and_use#5671166.
[255] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia,* 65.
[256] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia,* 104.
[257] Stavrides, *Common Space,* 107.

3.1 C.J. Visscher, *Londinium Florentissima Britanniae Urbs; Toto Orbe Celeberrimum Emporiumque*. I Hondius, c. 1616. British Library. Courtesy of the British Library

labour that a community of commoners pulls together for particular objectives following their convocation, reciprocal labour is the weaving of the social fabric of a community through circuits of reciprocity. All the forms of what is generally referred to as mutualism, that are not based principally on sharing labour but on sharing goods or money, are ultimately derived from these or are its preconditions (as in the case of resource pooling)."[258] The actual emancipatory essence of commoning draws on the autonomy of labour. Its material outputs are rather secondary. Nevertheless, this chapter, will assume a different view by taking a closer look precisely at the output of housing commoning practices in London.

The following historical overview discusses three cases of housing commoning in London and spans from the English Revolution to the post-Second World War period, approximately two centuries apart. Each case represents a specific way in which housing is framed and instrumentalised within the political project. None of them were based on the legal ownership the land; none of them involved an architect. Nevertheless, they reframed housing as the political prototype for wide social transformation. As inherently antagonistic to the status quo, these examples developed their own definitions of autonomy. The first one dates back to 1649-1650, when a group of farmers in Surrey known as the Diggers occupied a piece of common land. In the context of the ongoing enclosures of the open-field system, the role of their architecture was to formalise their claim to universal access to land. The second case was initiated in Clerkenwell in 1821 by the publisher George Mudie and a group of printers. The Co-operative and Economical Society, in Spa Fields, was the first co-operative housing in London, and perhaps even in Britain. It aspired to make urban life more accessible through co-operative economics. For the third example we turn to Brixton – the Villa Road squat in 1973.[259] This group embodied a form of institutional critique along two separate lines – on one hand they problematised the cultural biases materialised in the architectural form of the house; and on the other, they took part in a new type of city activism against the large-scale redevelopment strategy of the Greater London Council (GLC). By looking at these three cases, the chapter concludes that even though commoning has been a continuous practice in London, the actual commons were never really achieved. Nevertheless, the projects remain as daring examples of how housing can be reshaped to support emancipatory political claims. To put together the following historical accounts, the work draws on various types of documents, such as grassroots periodicals, archival accounts, oral histories, planning documents and secondary sources. Similar histories of grassroots housing movements have been written before. The most notable example in

[258] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 211.
[259] "BBC Four – Lefties, Property Is Theft", BBC, accessed November 1, 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0074s62.

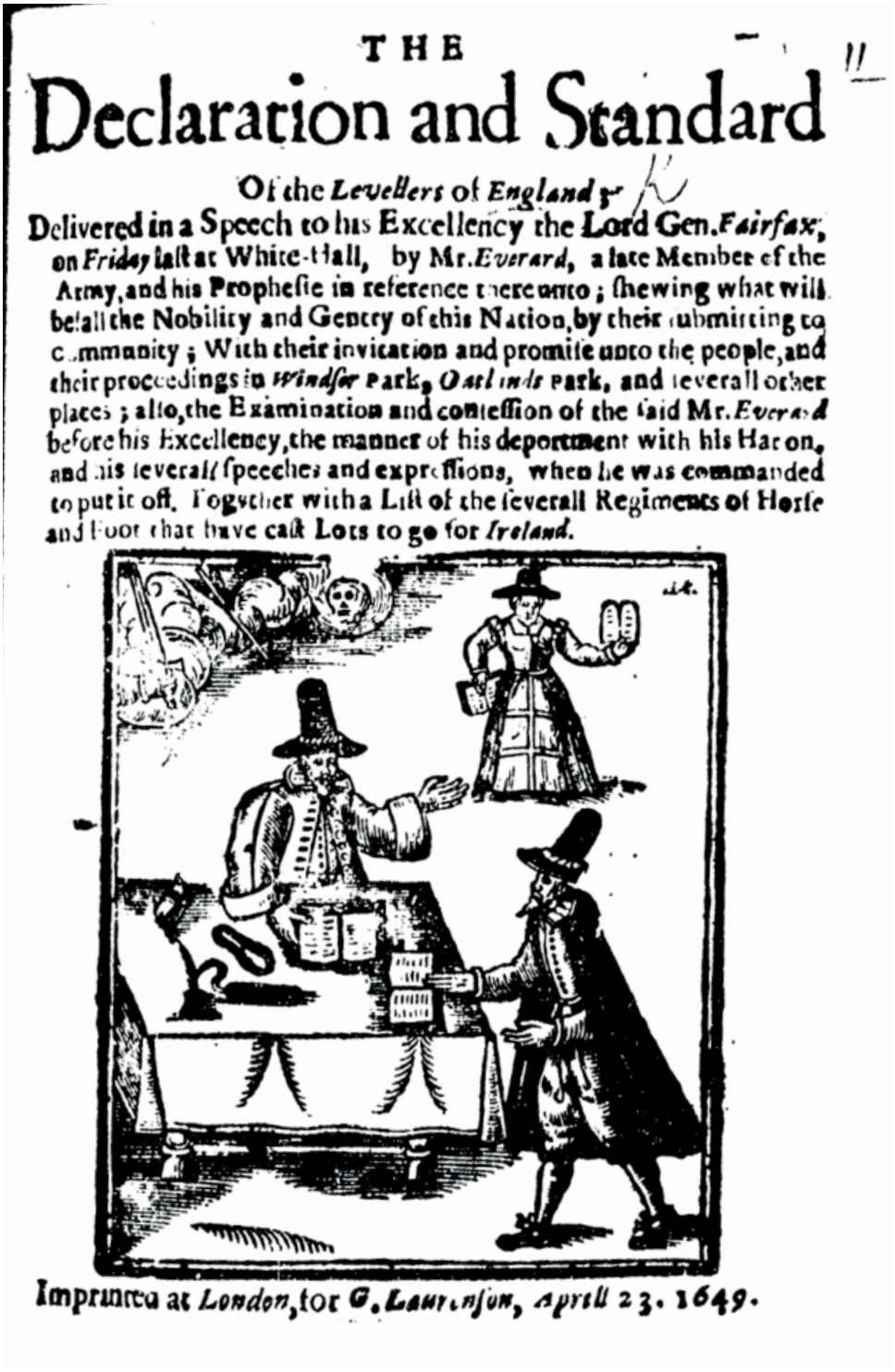
the British context is *Ward's Cotters and Squatters: The Hidden History of Housing* (2002). The work covers a long period, from cave-dwellers in England until 20th century, but doesn't include many spatial details.

The Diggers, 1649-1650

The 17th century was a peculiar time to live in. Christopher Hill writes about this period in the introduction to his book *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714* (1961) as if it were a black box, emphasising the huge difference between before and after. It was a century marked by unrest and civil wars, but also by a radical shift in intellectual thought. This included the emergence of the nascent modern conception of state, property, finance and politics, and more importantly, their interrelatedness explored the first steps towards a modern political economy. Significant works from that time which attempt to grasp these relationships include *New Atlantis* (1627) by Francis Bacon, *Leviathan* (1651) by Thomas Hobbes and *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) by James Harrington.

In 1645 the Archbishop William Laud was executed for high treason. Shortly after, 1649 saw the unprecedented execution of Charles I and the abolition of the monarchy. This institutional crisis was unfolding with the backdrop of another important shift – the rise of a new class of landowners, with land passing from the crown to the gentry. In 1649, the Commonwealth introduced an Act which allowed for the sale of former royal land. As discussed previously, this constituted only a brief moment in a longer period of enclosure and privatisation of both arable and common land, which used to secure farmers' access to subsistence resources. Strips of land were consolidated into enclosed patches with the justification of improving the quality of the soil by limiting the land use to pasture and providing a more efficient way of manuring. The enclosures were a long process, and eventually depopulated the countryside, pushing farmers to the industrial cities. The specific context of the Diggers in the mid 1650s was a long period of inflation, the reduction of cultivated land for food production, a series of bad harvests and the English Civil War, all leading to a severe food shortage. Before the enclosures farmers would secure land tenure and with it access to the shared common, waste land and woodland. But for those who were now landless wage farmers, inflation was devastating.

One of the first accounts of commoning in England takes us to 1649 and Surrey, southwest of London. This same year there were severe food shortages, including the famine in northern England. The situation was exacerbated by a longer process of enclosure and changes in land ownership. As discussed, the


THE
Declaration and Standard
Of the *Levellers* of *England*:
Delivered in a Speech to his Excellency the Lord Gen. *Fairfax*, on *Friday* last at White-Hall, by Mr. *Everard*, a late Member of the Army, and his Prophesie in reference thereunto; shewing what will befall the Nobility and Gentry of this Nation, by their submitting to Community; With their invitation and promise unto the people, and their proceedings in *Windsor* Park, *Oatlands* Park, and severall other places; also, the Examination and confession of the said Mr. *Everard* before his Excellency, the manner of his deportment with his Hat on, and his severall speeches and expressions, when he was commanded to put it off. Together with a List of the severall Regiments of Horse and Foot that have cast Lots to go for *Ireland*.
Imprinted at *London*, for G. Laurenson, April 23. 1649.

3.2 The Diggers pamphlet *The Declaration and Standard of the Levellers of England* showing Gerrard Winstanley refusing to support General Fairfax, 1649.

political turmoil this generation experienced included the English Civil War (1642-1651), the overthrow of the English monarchy with the execution of Charles I, and the subsequent coup by Oliver Cromwell (1653-1658). Naturally, these events must have shaken the grounds of institutional authority. Moreover, there was a deeper political significance to that moment. *Th*e execution of the king represented the end of the Norman lineage, which was seen to have established the manorial system in place of the preceding Saxon common land use model: "William the Conqueror's successor, which was Charles, was cast

out; and thereby we have recovered ourselves from under that Norman yoke; and now unless you and we be merely besotted with covetousness, pride and slavish fear of men, it is and will be our wisdom to cast out all those enslaving laws, which was the tyrannical power that the kings pressed us down by."[260] As a response to the food scarcity, and inspired by the revolutionary spirit of the time, a group called the *Diggers* settled on a piece of common land in St. George's Hill and started cultivating it. The colony was evicted later the same year and had to move to Little Heath, where they managed to stay until the next eviction in 1650.[261] The leader of the group, Gerrard Winstanley, was responsible for their publishing activity, which was used as a main political platform. The pamphlets date back to 1968 and were published and distributed by Giles Calvert, a London publisher known for taking up many other radical political works at that time.[262]

The enclosures spatialised the political, economic and legal transition from the feudal to the modern land ownership model. In the open field system that preceded it, land was divided into narrow strips, which were worked by the local commoners – some for the manor, some for themselves. In addition to that arable land, common land, woodland and wasteland provided further subsistence resources, such as pastures for collective grazing, wood, and foraging. When arable land began to be consolidated and enclosed, the process of privatisation became very tangible for the Early Modern commoner. Walls and fences were initially aimed at controlling cattle density and increasing the productivity of the land through manuring; however, they were essentially demarcating private property and discouraging trespassing.

Within this restructured landscape, the Diggers were very careful about choosing where to settle. The St. George's Hill plot was described as very unproductive.[263] In addition to this, this was common land and former crown land. Within the temporary interregnum, the Diggers were actually laying claim to royal land which no longer belonged to the crown legally. Making this claim was only possible in common and on the common. Winstanley advocated for crown land to be redistributed back to the commoners after the abolition of the monarchy: "Therefore, in that we do dig upon that hill, we do not thereby take away other men's rights, neither do we demand of this court, or from the Parliament, what is theirs and not ours."[264] By choosing to occupy the commons, and not a private area of land, the Diggers addressed a collective claim and social contract. In fact, the Surrey case was only one of many others. Recent historical discoveries point to ten Diggers settlements in total: Surrey (St. George's Hill and Cobham), Northamptonshire (Wellingborough), Kent

[260] Christopher Hill, *Winstanley 'The Law of Freedom' and Other Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 114.
[261] Hill, *Winstanley'The Law of Freedom'*,114.
[262] John Gurney, *Brave Community: The Digger Movement in the English Revolution* (Manchester University Press, 2013), 27.
[263] John Gurney, *Gerrard Winstanley: The Digger's Life and Legacy* (Pluto Press, 2013), 54.
[264] Hill, *Winstanley 'The Law of Freedom'*, 137.

(Cox Hall), Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Barnet, Enfield, Dunstable, Bosworth, Nottinghamshire.[265]

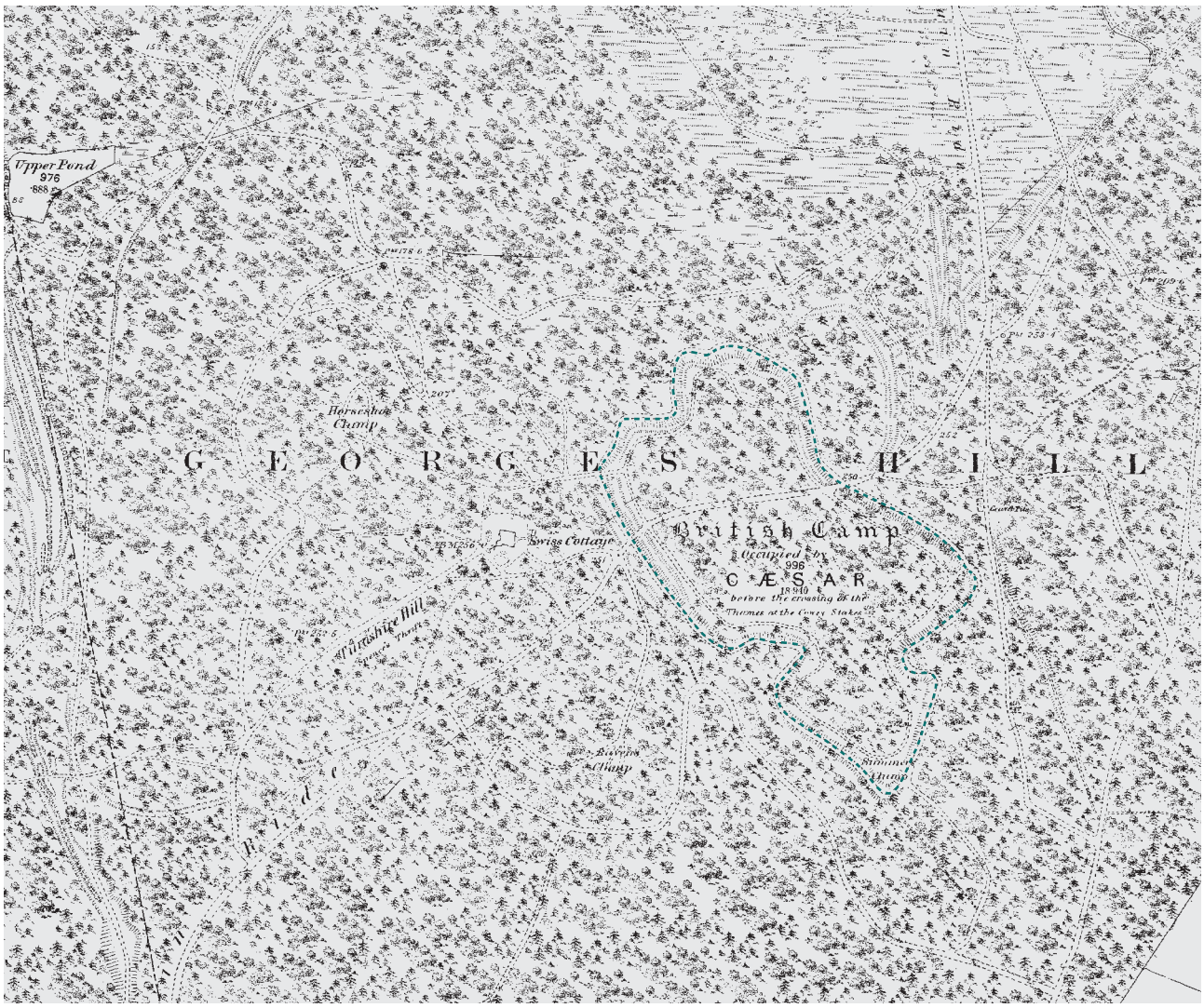
There are limited accounts of the architecture of the colony. However, what is known for certain is that the houses were instrumental in laying claim to the land. Winstanley's pamphlets talk of houses that were built on the common land and were eventually pulled down again by the local authorities.[266] The local villages felt threatened by the Diggers. They were using the common to graze their cows and were afraid the land would be taken over.[267] In that sense, the destruction of the houses was a definitive attempt to evict the group. From this perspective, the house becomes a central object to negotiating claims on land ownership and access. Although the motif of burning the houses repeats multiple times, there is almost no textual description or visual evidence in the pamphlets of what these houses looked like.

Perhaps this kind of response was expected by the Diggers. After all, the first settlement was on the site of a Roman hill fort. These original houses were not intended as temporary structures, the group was there to stay. They had a fair number of belongings: "they set fire to six houses, and burned them down, and burned likewise some of their housholdstuffe, and wearing Clothes, throwing their beds, stooles, and housholdstuffe, up and down the common [...]".[268] After being evicted, and with their houses demolished, the Diggers engaged in a building process which was quite revealing of their relationship to the built environment. The access to common land was central in defining the architectural vocabulary and construction of the built objects. As discussed in Chapter II, timber was the main resource for the pre-modern and early modern material reality: "[...]we went to fetch a load of wood from Slake commons to build a house upon George Hill".[269] In the world of the Diggers, all material substance was regarded in direct relationship to one's labour applied to Earth's (common) resources. Winstanley often used metaphors to describe the land as the Garden of Eden, a place where no scarcity could ever be possible. In *Law of Freedom in a Platform* (1652) Winstanley lays out a blueprint for the Diggers' new order, in which the whole material environment is produced by the commoners. Everyone is to be trained in five types of skills, which Winstanley refers to as "fountains". Working with wood is the "fourth fountain" in which building more broadly is listed as: "ordering of woods and timber trees, for planting, dressing, felling, framing of timber for all uses, for building houses or ships".[270] However, this is followed by a passage which is very revealing of the regenerative relationship of the group with the land: "[...] And here all Carpenters, Joiners, Throsters, Plow-makers, Instrument makers for musick,

[265]Charles Webster, *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (Routledge, 2012), 126.
[266]Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, 1603-1714, 175, 179.
[267] Gurney, *Gerrard Winstanley: The Digger's Life and Legacy*.
[268]Thomas N. Corns, Ann Hughes, and David Loewenstein, *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley,* vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2009), 268. As discussed earlier in the thesis, historically, the term common (singular) was interchangeably used with piece of land for common use.
[269]Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, 1603-1714, 206.
[270]Webster, *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century,* 364.

3.3 Diggers being evicted, poster by Oscar Zárate for the film *Winstanley*, dir. Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo.

3.4 St. George's Hill and the Roman hill fort, c.1853-1904, Digimap.



and all who work in wood and timber, may finde out the Secret of Nature, to make Trees more plentiful and thriving in their growth, and profitable for use".[271] Here it is evident that this is not a one-directional extraction. Notions of management include care and replenishment.

In a time of institutional and economic crisis, as the English countryside experienced planning and gentrification for the first time, the Diggers put forward a model which was a part of a holistic autonomous system. In this model, collective access to land was crucial to guarantee long-term subsistence and access to resources. Here, production was for reproduction only. It was a closed sustainable circle, which also required a more regenerative use of the land. This is very different from the overall trend at that time to improve land by subdividing, privatising and specialising. The Diggers' action addresses a larger-scale issue. It was based on the fact that vast areas of land lay across England that had no legal owner. In that sense, their approach was ahead of their time, as they were reading claims to common land within a legal infrastructure. In it, St. George's Hill represented an important common-law precedent.

Although one can assume that most of the Diggers were local residents, Winstanley had in fact just come back from London. It is no stretch of the imagination to suggest that choosing to move to the countryside was a conscious decision. It is also important to mention that this was also a point in history when the English countryside became increasingly attractive, as the estate became a social signifier for the landed gentry. In this very first wave of *gentrification*, a group of commoners decided to construct their homes from a piece of nearby woods and grow their own food. From today's perspective, there are several issues with this case. An example such as this originated in a low-density dispersed model: a dense urban setting would require a much more intensive regeneration strategy: something which is really urgent but has not quite been developed today. Moreover, in this model not everyone was included. Women were left out of the pamphlet texts.[272]

In the brief historical period of a republican commonwealth in England, and at the dawn of capitalism, the Diggers made a grassroots attempt to grasp and articulate the relationship between political freedom, economic equality and property legislation.[273] The definition of commons here understands land as the prerequisite for political emancipation. As their pre-industrial example demonstrates, access to common land successfully secured alternative autonomous economies in parallel to the market. Here there was no distinction between producing and reproducing. In fact, the house was an extension of

[271] Corns, Hughes and Loewenstein, *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, 356.
[272] Gurney, *Gerrard Winstanley: The Digger's Life and Legacy*, 94.
[273] Hill, *Winstanley, 'The Law of Freedom'.*

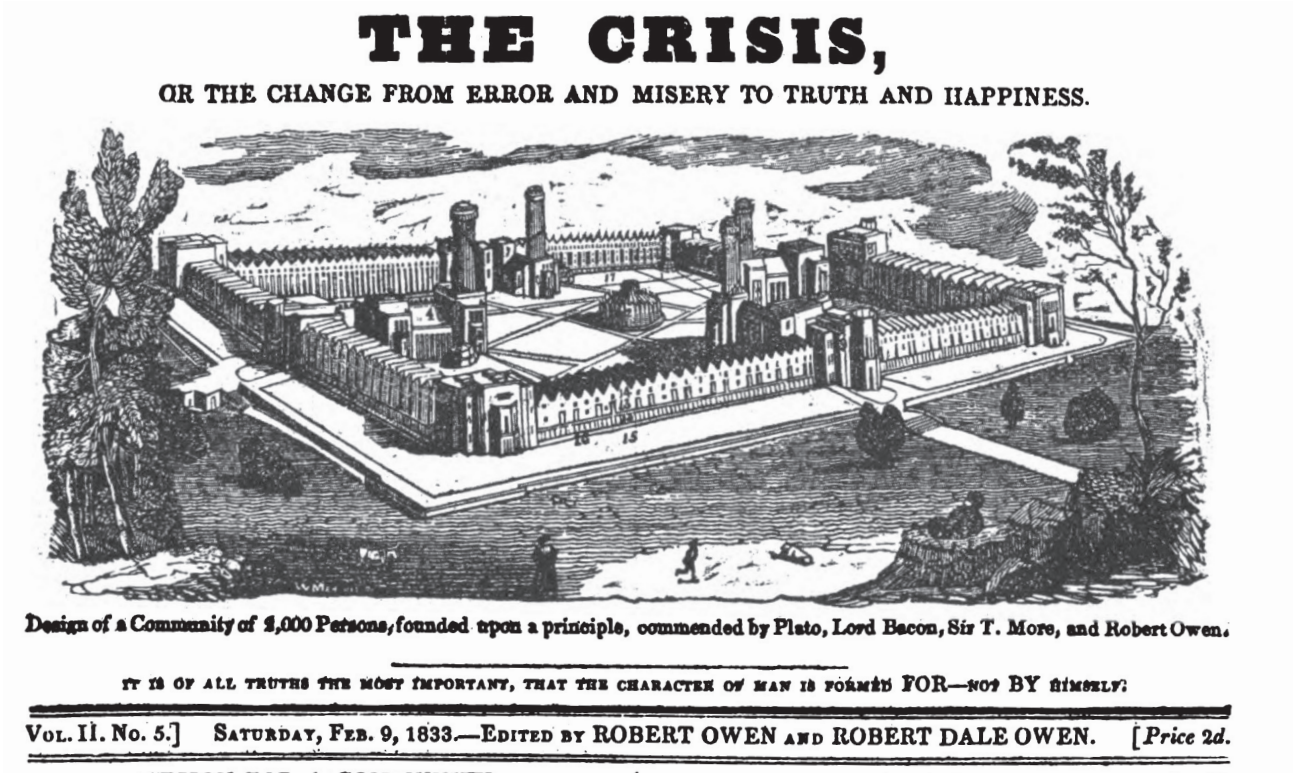
the land, something which was legible in its very materiality. The home was used to claim the land, while at the same time remaining bound to it for its resources, almost growing out of the land. Even though the building process was a communal act, it was at the same time a point for communal dispute. In that sense, the house is a central object for political claims. Its repeated reconstruction and destruction is central for representing and reproducing the common for the Diggers – and perhaps the local villagers, too.

This hyperlocal regenerative model worked very well; however, it relied on a political crisis and legal reform to be realised. In today's London context, this low-density scheme is completely impossible. Moreover, the Diggers' plan was contingent on the growth of the movement. As soon as it met resistance from the local villages, it was evident that their claim struggled to reconcile with other local collective claims. In that sense, they failed to make links to other local commons. Moreover, as noted by John Gurney, the female commoners remained excluded from the revolution. In the end, although speaking to a very simple and straightforward idea – that land is a resource, like air or water, and it should belong to everyone, the Diggers were unsuccessful. They were offering a very holistic and autonomous way of life and at the same time a somewhat radical political claim that there could be a dispersed hyperlocal model for production which would allow for autonomy from the overarching political-economic power systems. This model was also regenerative, as it included a type of use of the land which also ensured its replenishment. However, it failed to connect to other collectivities, and in that sense remained exclusive. This also resulted in the project's multiple evictions, and subsequently its end. Nevertheless, the Diggers have gained a mythologised status in leftist and anarchist theory and history.

The Co-operative and Economical Society in Spa Fields, 1821-1823

The enclosure of the English countryside led to changes in the Victorian urban landscape too. They had a profound effect on London. In this process the landless farming population was forced to migrate to the booming industrial centres and resort to wage labour. The severe overcrowding and poor living conditions which resulted from these developments were particularly evident in 19th century London and were captured in the numerous accounts of "slum journalism".[274] At the same time, in an opportunistic fashion, looking for ways to house the poor was regarded as an investment itself. Most of these projects were financed though the so-called "five per cent philanthropists" – investors who would offer initial capital for community settlements and gain returns from rent. Proposals for improving the "conditions" of the industrial worker

[274] In 1889-90 Charles Booths published an unprecedentd survey of poverty in London. Further examples include Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work and Those That Will Not Work Vol. 1* (Griffin, Bohn, And Co., London, 1861); Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (Frank Cass &Co, 1970 [1875]).



THE CRISIS,

OR THE CHANGE FROM ERROR AND MISERY TO TRUTH AND HAPPINESS.

Design of a Community of 2,000 Persons, founded upon a principle, commended by Plato, Lord Bacon, Sir T. More, and Robert Owen.

IT IS OF ALL TRUTHS THE MOST IMPORTANT, THAT THE CHARACTER OF MAN IS FORMED FOR—NOT BY HIMSELF.

VOL. II. NO. 5.] SATURDAY, FEB. 9, 1833.—EDITED BY ROBERT OWEN AND ROBERT DALE OWEN. [Price 2d.

3.5 "Design for a Community of 2000 persons founded upon a principle commended by Plato, Lord Bacon and Sir Thomas More, and Robert Owen." From *The Crisis,* Vol.II, No.5, 1933.

created a network of settlements around London, culminating with the Garden City proposal by Ebenezer Howard in 1898. Connectedness and proximity to the metropolis were important, in order to lure in both investors and participants. Many of those experiments were advertised in London circulars such as *The Illustrated London News,* or even *The Times.*[275]

At the beginning of the 19th century, material deprivation was regarded as a moral pathology. In 1834 the introduction of the Poor Law aimed to reduce the cost of looking after the poor by resettling them in workhouses in secluded rural locations. In a controversial example, William Booth developed an elaborate multi-scale system for this. In this proposal, the labour colony was the main building block, offering three typologies, depending on the geographical location – the city, the farm and the colonies overseas. The city colonies were a place to recruit; the farm colonies offered a place to train people, with the ultimate aim of shipping poor Londoners overseas. Policies like the Poor Law reflected a popular opinion at the beginning of the 19th century that poverty was a result of a lack of moral standards, and the way to deal with it was through population displacement, and later, moral reformation. At the same time, a new shift in social theory emerged, understanding material deprivation as a result of more structural inequalities, rather than the individual's moral character,[276] which included the work of social reformers like William Godwin[277] and Robert Owen.[278]

Although this presented a step towards more equitable social policies, these

[275] Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England* (Longman, 1979).
[276] Andrew Bennett, *The Hidden Oak: The Life and Works of George Mudie, Pioneer Co-Operator* (n.p., 2016), 35.
[277] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* [1793] (J. Watson, 1842), 8.
[278] Robert Owen, *A New View of Society and Other Writings* [1813] (J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1927), 16.

philosophies gave way to spatial theory of that period which was underlined by a form of environmental determinism. Material scarcity (of the physical environment) had no longer moral implications; however, physical space was formative in shaping human character. This is evident in the projects for shared living by Charles Fourier and Robert Owen.[279] This line of thought set the scene for many architectural approaches throughout the 19th century and beyond. In fact, such settlements start with the industrial village. If in the pre-modern house production was spatially subservient to reproduction, then in its urban counterpart these two functions were completely divorced: the industrial village, such as Robert Owen's Lanark, offered a low-density autonomous housing model which was subservient to the factory as the main place of production.

Throughout the 19th century, urban housing for working Londoners was a key political challenge. Prior to the establishment of the Co-operative and Economical Society, Spa Fields had its own history of riots, reflecting the radical social upheavals elsewhere in the city. The Napoleonic wars which ended in 1815 had devastating consequences for the economy. A year later Spa Fields hosted a meeting of a group of Spenceans, who advocated for land reform and the reinstatement of the common use of land. The event culminated with an attempt to take over the Bank of England and the Tower of London. This was the general climate in which the Co-operative and Economical Society was founded in 1821.

The Spa Fields plan was strongly influenced by the ideas of Robert Owen. The actual project was initiated by George Mudie, a Scottish journalist. An admirer of Owen's work, Mudie began by holding a series of lectures in London with the aim of recruiting members and starting an actual housing co-operative in London. A group of printers responded to the call, and this established the beginnings of the Co-operative and Economical Society in Spa Fields, Clerkenwell. While the group were mainly interested in the economic benefits of co-operative living, their proposal envisaged an incredibly progressive and pioneering scheme, including collectivised housework and childcare, social security and conflict resolution. Their initial vision is captured in a report from their first meeting, laying out the main reasoning, principles and proposals for the co-operative, titled *Report of the Committee appointed at a meeting of journeymen, chiefly printers, to take into consideration certain propositions, submitted to them by Mr. George Mudie, having for their object a system of social arrangement, calculated to effect essential improvements in the condition of the working classes, and of society at large* (1820). The ultimate vision was a site on

[279] Helen Rosenau, *The Ideal City: In Its Architectural Evolution in Europe* (Routledge, 2006).

the edge of the city, which was to offer accommodation for 250 families, and ideally provide some land to allow the group to produce their own food. The families would be the members (subscribers) of the scheme and have ultimate governing powers. The report ends with an appeal for funding, with a total estimated cost of £12,000, to be raised through £100 shares by investors, who would get a 7.5% return. Subscribers could buy shares themselves: however, it is arguable how accessible this was. Such a model was not uncommon for private development in London. What was different in Mudie's plan, however, was that it was the first time a co-operative had come together to propose a project like this. The proposed model would enable anyone to acquire shares, essentially providing an investment in land. Of course, this was completely out of reach for the residents and for that reason they remained excluded from the project, even if they could in theory participate. Nevertheless, this might be the first record of a grassroots movement acting as an urban developer, as well as separating the ownership from the governance of land. No plans for the scheme exist, but the report on the feasibility of the project described it as follows:

> The foregoing Statement of the advantages of the scheme of Cooperation, has reference to a community inhabiting a quadrangular building; the offices, dining-hall, schools, and other rooms for general purposes, either occupying one of the sides, or being placed in the centre of the square. It is obvious, that the advantages of such an Establishment would be greatly increased if a portion of land, even if not more than would be requisite for producing vegetables, find for rearing poultry and the smaller stock of a grass farm, were annexed to it. If sufficient could be obtained for furnishing milk, butter, &c. together- with a portion of the animal food, the advantages would be proportionably great. We are of opinion, that if the Establishment itself were on the skirts of the city, it might be practicable, in the first instance, to rent a few acres in the vicinity.[280]

The model community was based on an earlier example from the *Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor* (1817), published by Robert Owen just a few years earlier. Owen's report described a quadrangular agglomeration of buildings with communal ones in the middle, splitting the enclosed courtyard into two parts. Three sides of the quadrangle consisted of individual terraced houses. Each was to provide four rooms and to accommodate a nuclear family. The fourth side was a dormitory for the older children of families that had more than two children. This scheme was criticised by both radical and conservative wings of the political spectrum, as being too close to the workhouse model, and for lacking economic literacy.

It should be stated, however, that while the quadrangle was an Owenite arche-

[280] Robert Hunt, *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen, Chiefly Printers, to Take into Consideration Certain Propositions, Submitted to Them by Mr. George Mudie, Having for Their Object a System of Social Arrangement, Calculated to Effect Essential Improvements in the Condition of the Working Classes, and of Society at Large* (London : The Medallic Cabinet, 1821), http://archive.org/details/committeeappoint00hunt.

type for rural development, the residential garden square had been a popular urban development blueprint since the 18th century. Grosvenor Square, Canonbury Square, Russell Square and Bedford Square were all offering a piece of wilderness in the city, aimed especially at upper-middle class Londoners. In that sense, Spa Fields, through its suburban location, could be placed in between. What was incredibly new, however, was that the Spa Fields scheme was proposing to use suburban land, which would on one hand *enclose* the square into a courtyard, and on the other *expand* by adding arable land for the residents. Through the development of the city's outskirts, there was the potential for working Londoners to experience a redistribution of resources and increased prosperity through a process of withdrawal and expansion. In that sense, the project was ahead of its time, predating the Garden City movement. However, the architectural proposal still relied on the popular commercial terrace house typology, leaving unchallenged this established mode of urban development (unlike, for example, Parker and Unwin's layouts for the garden city house). Keeping the narrow frontage was too similar to urban development – as if the London terrace was relocated to the countryside to create a fortified refuge for working Londoners. In that way, while the project aimed to convey a sense of autonomy, its underlying rationale remained dependent on the financial logic of urban development. This autonomy excluded the idea of philanthropy.[281] Instead, it relied on direct reciprocity between single family households, clearly contained within the bounds of the townhouse. Here sharing was mutual and confined to designated collective spaces, for example the joined dining room. In the end, the scheme was also not truly inclusive. The report mentions that the group denied housing to anyone who could not afford to provide a minimum contribution set by the co-operative.[282]

The development never raised funds; however, the co-operative rented some accommodation and ran a co-operative store for a few years. All this was documented mainly in the co-operative's weekly circular, *The Economist.* The initial phase included 22 families, settling in houses on the corner of Guildford Street East and Bagnigge Wells Road and sharing a space nearby for communal meals and leisure activities. Although this was just an intermediate phase, the group chose a site which, like their ultimate vision, was located at the outskirts of the city. Within the next fifty years, Spa Fields would be completely urbanised and subsumed by development, but in the 1820s, it was at the edge of London, opposite the Coldbath Fields Prison and the river Fleet, which at the time served as a sewage channel and plagued the area with frequent flooding.[283] Archival maps from 1870 already show that these two corners had been demolished to make way for the Metropolitan Railway.

[281] Bennett, *The Hidden Oak*, 59.
[282] Hunt, *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen*, 11.

3.6 Spa Fields, *London, from Map of London: Made from an Actual Survey in the Years 1824, 1825 and 1826*, C & J Greenwood, 1828. Harvard Map Collection, Harvard Library.

3.7 A farming holiday in an English utopian community, possibly Whiteway Colony, near Stroud, Gloucestershire, c.1910. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of Judy Greenway, from a private collection of photographs by visitors to alternative communities, c. 1900-1920Photo courtesy of Judy Greenway

According to George Mudie, who was living in the co-operative too, member families housed in the initial form of the co-operative enjoyed the benefits of co-operative life, including the informal social security, collectivised childcare and education, a conflict resolution programme, and even a medical practitioner. They were still engaged in working activities elsewhere but pooled money in a general fund which would cover expenses.[284] Unlike the Diggers, here can be seen a clear split between production and reproduction. The cooperation also extended to housekeeping, which was organised by rotation, allowing the female members to work too.

In sharp contrast to the dire living conditions across London, Mudie invited us to imagine the benefits of the productive capacity enabled by the framework of an alternative economic system: "We may immediately place ourselves, by the combination of our powers and our means, in the enjoyment of greater comfort and abundance than we are at present possessed even by our employers".[285] But instead of revolving around communality, cooperation here was described as a form of efficiency and self-help, "haunted by the painful apprehension of being ingulphed in that vortex of pauperism". [286] The Spa Fields co-operative illustrates two important but somehow politically conflicting points, at least from today's perspective. The first was that poverty is a result of a rationally solvable unequal distribution of resources. And on the other hand, that the project was built on the underlying assumption that the poor can raise themselves by their bootstraps, a view which speaks of the underlying liberal economic reasoning informing the project. As to whether sharing is commoning, this remains unclear. On the one hand, Spa Fields manages to make claims imbued by a strong ambition for political transformation and might constitute the very first case of grassroots housing development in London. On the other, the project remains complacent about strongly conflicting political orthodoxies, such as the strong environmental determinism of the proposed scheme. Moreover, the malleability of human character and the disciplining role of architecture are strongly present in both Owen's initial text and Mudie's project. Mudie's list of *social* improvements starts with the spaciousness and cleanliness of the dwellings.[287] With this, housing is clearly articulated as a problem in itself and is a precondition for a series of other social issues. Similarly, although provision was made to make urban life more accessible for co-operative members, in practice, land ownership (in this case shares in the development) was out of reach.

To summarise, despite its shortcomings, the Spa Fields Co-operative and

[283] Bennett, *The Hidden Oak*, 67.
[284] Bennett, *The Hidden Oak*, 66.
[285] Hunt, *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen*, 22.
[286] Hunt, *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen*, 6.
[287] Hunt, *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen*, 21.

Economical Society cannot be dismissed as probably the first grassroots co-operative in Britain, and as such, it is central for the history of the housing commons. As Edward Palmer Thompson argues, the Owenite model's contribution to a commons discourse could be seen in the acknowledgement of the leverage that the working class has in the industrial reality: "Let us remember that the working classes are the creators of wealth."[288] More importantly, rendering the possibility of an alternative economic reality invited a rich history of co-operative experiments. The inclusion of women and collectivisation of housework, as well as the provision of arable land as part of the scheme, were essential commoning ideals which would inform many more projects to come. Where the project was also very successful was in identifying a crack within the existing political and economic reality and carving out the possibility of the commons. The scheme aspired to be completely autonomous: this was closely reflected in the architectural form of the quadrangle of enclosing and turning inwards, by which it remained partly connected to the city. Here, the individual units remained the standard London townhouses, shaped by the economics of urban planning and land development. Moreover, although aiming to achieve a collectively owned and produced urban life, the project's gesture of enclosure are reminiscent of previous ideas of productivity and private property in the English countryside. Despite this grand gesture of closing, which can be interpreted as a desire for economical emancipation from the harsh urban reality, the liberal reasoning behind the project completely assimilates the industrial worker within the existing capitalist financial model. In addition to the formal organisation of the house, this is also evident in the instrumentality of rent, but most importantly, the rationality and efficiency behind sharing. By being overly reliant on the liberal economic thought of the time, it is arguable whether the project could truly achieve emancipation. Spa Fields Co-operative and Economical Society only lasted for three years. The community never realised its quadrangle – however, their co-operative housekeeping model lived on to take other architectural shapes.

Villa Road, 1973-1978

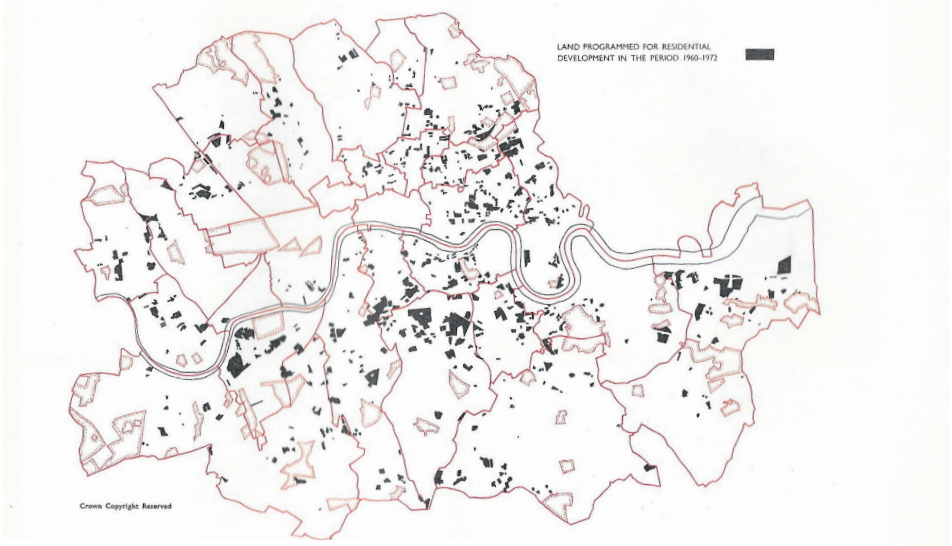
London's severe housing shortage continued to be a problem in the beginning of the 20th century, leading to a series of rent strikes during the First World War. After the war, the Town Planning Act (1919) was the legislative step that allowed local authorities to take on the question of housing. Despite the set of measures undertaken by the government, the sector still could not be stimulated, except for a brief boom in private housing in London around the 1930s. As the war ended and ex-servicemen refused to live with their extended families, the crisis exacerbated. Council housing waiting lists at that time were

[288] Hunt, *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen*, 7.

seven to eight years long.[289] As a desperate measure, young families broke into the deserted military huts. After all, many men were very familiar with living in these structures. After the war these huts were utilised throughout London as emergency shelters on bombed sites. At the same time, there was a well-established practice of requisitioning empty properties to house homeless families. The initial squats can be seen as a critique of the inability of the government, as a new actor, to deliver housing. The high point was a short-lived "luxury squatting" movement in Kensington in 1946, as a group of homeless families broke into a high-end empty property known as the Duchess of Bedford House. These actions were highly visible and made obvious the stark contrast between the available resources and the scarcity on the ground. Many families carried on squatting until the mid-1950s. They were stigmatised for "trying to jump the queue" and had to pay by landing at the very end of council waiting lists. Nevertheless, their contribution to the development of the subsequent housing policies was decisive, as there was soon a significant change in the government's approach.

As discussed earlier, the new welfare institutions of housing took shape around a series of documents which were produced to guide and regulate the construction of the new homes. One of the first attempts to address the design of the welfare state home was the Tudor Walters report in 1918. Its aim was to inform local authorities (which were soon to take on the responsibility of delivering housing), of the layout, design and construction technique of the units. Like earlier building manuals during the war, it emphasised the standardisation of plans, suggesting the desirable number and types of rooms and minimum floor areas.[290] Initially the report outlined six types of houses with three bedrooms and a living room, a parlour, a scullery and a WC. The subsequent Parker Morris report continued the same prescriptive strategy; however, it departed from the concreteness of the floorplan, and assumed a more abstract mode of organising the (nuclear family) life within the home. A following design bulletin titled *Housing the Family* (1974) presented an hourly schedule of how the nuclear family should occupy the house.[291] The prescriptive nature of these documents demonstrates that, although, overall, the British public housing presented a great material relief for many, its universalised and standardised ways were exclusionary. The built form was only one side of the restrictions involved in these homes. Alison Ravetz discusses the contractual and managerial aspect as another way in which dwellers were behaviourally constricted. Initially, the tenants had no say in the furnishing of the flats.[292] Limitations ranged from restrictions in the choice of furnishings, through wall finishes, to the allocation of the units, in terms of both size and site.[293] In

[289] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*.
[290] Parliamentary Papers, Cd 9191 vii, 1918, *Report of the Committee to Consider Questions of Building Construction in Connection with the Provision of Dwellings for the Working Classes in England and Wales, and Scotland* (Cd 9191) (HMSO, 1918), 25.
[291] Boys et al., "House Design and Women's Roles".
[292] Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Routledge, 2013).
[293] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, 118. Ravetz lays out the contractual and managerial restrictions that have existed throughout the history of social housing.



3.8 Land Programmed for Residential Development for the Period 1960-1972.

In: London County Council, *London Plan: Administrative County of London Development Plan 1951: Statement*

3.9 Housing stock in London identified for demolition by the GLC (Greater London Council). In Greater London Council, *Greater London Development Plan: Report of Studies* (1969).

that sense, post-war housing design was reminiscent of Victorian ideas about disciplining the body through its material environment. It also inherited and enhanced the paternalistic attitude that good architectural design could lift dwellers out of poverty. This modern social reform was more inclusive; nevertheless, it came with a price: now everyone was homogenised in the universal dweller.[294] This presented a new terrain for enclosure. The centralised policy approach unleashed a range of critical reactions among architects, who were involved in lively discussions about how to rethink their own role, especially in relation to the agency of the dweller. Two very strong voices came forward advocating for more autonomy for residents – Colin Ward and John Turner. Colin Ward's *Tenants Take Over* (1974) was an anarchist take on the dwellers' agency in housing. John Turner's *Freedom to Build* (1972) and *Housing by People* (1976) reflected Turner's experience of the self-build movement in Peru. Similar ideas also started to emerge in practice. The self-build construction system developed by the German-born London-based architect Walter Segal inspired many similar projects throughout the city. The scheme explored other ways of producing housing as a form of collective social practice, while critiquing the typological limitations of the emerging model dwelling.[295]

Even if post-war housing continued the ideas of the Victorian social reformers on how to house and discipline the body, financially it represented a completely different model. Victorian speculators and philanthropists were relying on fast returns from rising land value, while post-war housing was for the first time mobilised in its large-scale financial capacity and integrated into an expansionary fiscal policy. This new model of city-making, driven by housing, included large-scale demolition of urban areas, initially Victorian slums and later residential areas in which the housing stock was deemed unfit. Many of the demolished houses were in fact in good condition, which made Londoners very critical of this new urban design approach. Under the London Government Act 1963, the Greater London Council was the new overarching body that was responsible for housing and regeneration. In 1960, the LCC published a County Planning Report consisting of 19 chapters, each focusing on specific themes. Chapter 7 of this report was dedicated to Housing and includes various surveys that identified areas for future housing development. One of the strategies discussed was slum clearance, which aimed to densify urban areas.[296] Another strategy was expansion, including the implementation of the New Towns Programme. Subsequently, in 1969, the GLC (Greater London Council) published a Report of Studies that further expanded on these findings. This comprehensive city-wide survey utilised quantitative data and skilfully presents findings through a series of maps addressing various

[294] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture.*
[295] Alice Grahame and Taran Wilkhu, *Walters Way & Segal Close: The Architect Walter Segal and London's Self-Build Communities: A Look at Two of London's Most Unusual Streets* (Zürich: Park Books, 2017).
[296] LCC, *London Plan: Administrative County of London Development Plan* (LCC, 1951), 92.

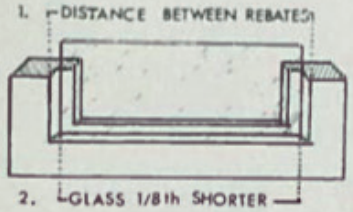
SPARE PARTS

BROKEN WINDOWS

IF YOU ARE STILL WAITING FOR YOUR BOYFRIEND, HUSBAND, OR THE GLAZIER TO COME AND FIX YOUR WINDOW ... then maybe this might help.

The greatest difficulty is getting the glass from the glass merchants or glaziers to your window - in one piece ... Especially if it is a big window, shop around to find a merchant who will deliver. Some ironmongers stock small amounts but they rarely deliver.

1. It is essential to measure for the window pane very accurately. Measure the width & height of window to edge of the rebate (A). The glass must be about 1/8th inch shorter than the distance between the rebates. Also measure both top & bottom of window as it is not always square.

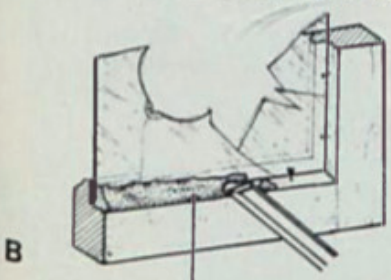


A

2. Start by removing all the loose pieces of glass, wearing some thick gloves. Keep children & pets away in case of splinters.

3. Remove the old putty with a chisel or sharp knife from the rebate side. Do this carefully to avoid damaging the wood. (B).

Sometimes there are laths (thin strips of wood) instead of putty holding the glass. In which case lever the strips off & take out the brads or panel pins. (b). A few older windows are only held in with putty & brads on both sides (a).


B
REMOVE OLD PUTTY

The rebate is usually on the outside of the window, so if your window isn't on the ground floor you have to balance precariously on the window ledge, use a ladder, or take the whole window out... This takes two people, time and patience, so if possible use the ladder or the window ledge...


C

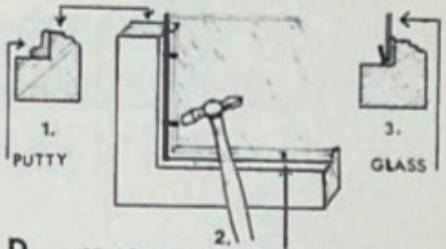
4. Pull out the little brads with a pair of pliers, holding the edges of the remaining glass (C). Tidy up the recess of bits of glass & old putty so that you have clean rebates to take the new glass. To be really professional about it - you should give the rebate a coat of priming paint (dries in approx 1 hr) as the bare wood otherwise soaks up the oil in the putty which renders it dry and it chips too easily.

5. Use the appropriate putty for wood or metal frames. Kneed it well until it is very pliable (otherwise you have to put extra pressure on the glass to get it to sit in the frame). You can add a few drops of linseed oil to the putty if it is really hard.

Press strips into the recess with your thumb to make a bed for the edge of the glass (DI).

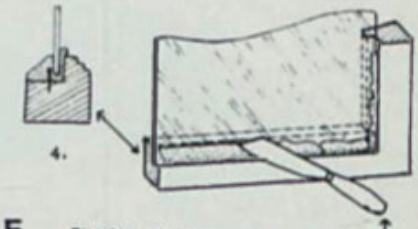
6. Carefully fit the new pane into position by gently pressing round the edges with your fingertips so that it squeezes a little putty over the back of the recess as in (4E). Remove this last of all.

7. Tap a few brads into place, carefully sliding along the glass so as not to break it. (This is one of the most usual ways of breaking the new pane..) (D2) On a large window only three or four brads are needed per side.



D

8. Tuck some putty firmly into the corners of the window with your thumb. Then work the putty as evenly as possible along all the edges. Finally smooth it off with a putty knife, making sure that it is the same level as the back of the recess (E). Trim off any putty squeezed out on the other side.



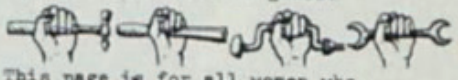
E

The window should now be left for at least 24hrs before cleaning the glass or painting over the putty to match. Always use an oil based paint for windows as emulsion fades in the light and isn't weather proof.
To avoid endless hours of scratching off rough paint edges with a razor blade, run a strip of masking tape or sellotape along the edges of the glass before starting to paint.

MATERIALS.

Glass	Putty
Small Hammer	Pliers
Brads or panel pins	
Putty Knife (or sharp knife)	
Brush	Priming paint
Gloves	Pencil & ruler.

and plenty of newspaper for wrapping up the broken bits of glass.



This page is for all women who, because of their sex, have been denied the facility for learning certain skill skills. As a result we are forced to depend on men to survive in this machine world.
Please let me know of all the jobs, however small, that you want information on. It really is SO much quicker in the long run to do it yourself. It also means that whatever it is it gets done the way YOU want it

Stephanie Gilbert

SHOE REPAIRS

..... or, if your one month old cork clogs look like this, the only thing you can really do is to lay them gently to rest in the dustbin...

This is not to say that I haven't tried. ...When the first crack appeared in the 2nd week, I hopefully reached for the Araldite and, having used up half the packet, and stuck all my fingers together, was successful. However, next week the heels started cracking up. By carefully balancing the clogs on their toes overnight I managed to fill up the holes where the cork had fallen out. But it hardened with bulbous oozes dripping down the sides... In dismay I tried to cover this up by dying the whole cork with leather dye. Once again they looked quite presentable. Unfortunately by this time the suede had streatched dangerously and would only stay on if I wore two pairs of socks. Not to worry... until I stumbled down the tube steps. I padded home in my two pairs of socks, clutching two pieces of shaggy suede and some rather heavy lumps of araldite and cork. ...Once upon a time shoes were made of leather. This is kind to your feet and is even comfortable. In eager anticipation of LEATHER autumn shoes the next issue will be on how to look after them, and successfully repair them, yourself.

urban issues, including housing. The report also discussed new locations for densification and replaced the concept of *slum clearance* with *redevelopment.* Detailed studies were conducted to assess the condition and suitability of the existing housing stock, considering factors such as period, condition, and the availability of sanitary facilities. The report also addressed concerns such as overcrowding and excessive commuting distances.

The subsequent Greater London Development Plan introduced ambitious large-scale redevelopment schemes that often involved replacing older terraced housing with new council housing estates. This new vision was reflected in another publication titled *Tomorrow's London: A Background to the Greater London Development Plan* (1969) by the GLC. This document adopted a more forward-looking approach and emphasised London's global connectivity as a capital city and regional centre, focusing on the need for infrastructural development. Given the central focus on urban growth, transportation and densification were key aspects of the discussions, that aimed to address issues such as congestion and the provision of more and denser housing schemes to accommodate the growing population. Although participation was outlined as one of the major points on the agenda of local authorities, the outcomes of this policies were often devastating for local communities on the ground. Redevelopment usually happened through mass evictions, using Compulsory Purchase Orders to "decant" people from properties that were deemed unfit for habitation.

This housing crisis prompted a widespread squatting movement that, while initially concerned with the immediate material aspects, had wider social and cultural aspirations – to redefine new ways of living together and break through established social conventions. During the peak of the squatting culture in London in 1975 some councils were issuing short-term licences and there were more than 50,000 people living in that way.[297] At this time the movement was self-organised, often through local offices which provided information and housing support or booklets with practical advice. There was a strong desire to explore "experimental ways of living and relating".[298] This excerpt from the East London Big Flame archive illustrates the complex inter-woven legal, spatial and economic structure in those communities:

> We furnished it with stuff from local skips, which we painted up in primary colours, and fixed our posters to the walls: Victory to the Vietcong; Sisterhood is blooming; the classic Che Guevara. We were part of a commune of some seven adults and four children spread across three houses, one squatted, one rented, and one that we owned. Although we kept our own rooms, meals, money, childcare and occasionally sexual partners were shared (though we were much more strait-laced and sober than the student

[297] Wates and Wolmar, *Squatting: The Real Story.*
[298] "Thinking Autonomy", Documents, Activism & Autonomy: stories from East London Big Flame*, East London Big Flame*, accessed March 1, 2019, http://www.eastlondonbigflame.org.uk/files/Thinking%20Autonomy.pdf.

3.10 Clippings from *Spare Rib, Issue 3, 1972*

household who live next door to me now).[299]

Sometimes squats were linked to political organisations such as the British Black Panthers and the Gay Liberation Movement.[300] Today references to the squatting movement can be found in alternative magazines of the period. The feminist periodical *Spare Rib* had a section called "Spare Parts" at the end of each issue, that included illustrated instructions on how to mend a broken window or plumbing advice. *Race Today* featured a few pieces on the Bengali Squats in East London. At the time, the East End was notorious for having one of the most organised and active branches of the National Front. As a consequence of that, more vulnerable communities resorted to squatting, as it was safer than mixed social estates.

Overall, the squatters had diverse social backgrounds. In 1977 Shelter published a study titled *Squatters in London*, by Mike Kinghan, who interviewed 160 participants across various London boroughs. The surveys included a more detailed picture of who the squatters actually were, including household types (the majority being households with children: 61%), the tenure type of last accommodation (the majority came from private renting: 45%), reasons for leaving (the majority because of bad conditions/overcrowding: 20%), reason for squatting (the majority had found nowhere at an affordable rent: 59%), age (the majority were 20-29 51%), sex (the majority were male: 62%), ethnicity (the majority were white: 74%), country of origin (the majority were English: 52%), occupation (the majority were semi-skilled and non-skilled manual: 40%).[301]

Eventually the practice became so popular that it led to owners and council representatives vandalising their own properties in order to avoid squatters settling there. This was called "gutting" and included damaging services to the building or removing floors or roofs to make spaces uninhabitable.[302] Many properties were in a very poor condition and included considerable repairs by the squatters. These areas were a perfect blank canvas for a social and political critique. In fact, Kinghan's tables include a survey of the type of work done on the squatter properties. The most common work was redecorating (55%), followed by replacing windows (38%), wiring (35%) and plumbing/gas piping (32%).[303]

Architecturally speaking, these groups had the unique opportunity to experiment with their space. The illegal tenure, the lack of any financial liability and the fact that most of these structures were already in a need of repair enabled a particular reading of the building substance as something homogeneous and

[299] "Docklands and housing", Documents, Activism & Autonomy: stories from East London Big Flame, *East London Big Flame*, accessed March 1, 2019, http://www.eastlondon-bigflame.org.uk/docklands-and-housing.
[300] Black activist Olive Morris occupied a squat on 121 Railton Road. For more details, see Needle Collective, *Hidden Histories of Resistance: The Diverse Heritage of Squatting in England* (Crimethinc., n.d.), 5. The same street also housed the Brixton Fairies Squat. For more details and interviews with South London Gay Liberation Front members see Taha Hassan, dir. *Brixton Fairies: Made Possible By Squatting,* (London: Laundrette Films, 2014).
[301] Mike Kinghan, *Squatters in London* (Shelter, 1977).
[302] Kinghan, *Squatters in London*, 53.
[303] Kinghan, *Squatters in London*, Table 10.03.

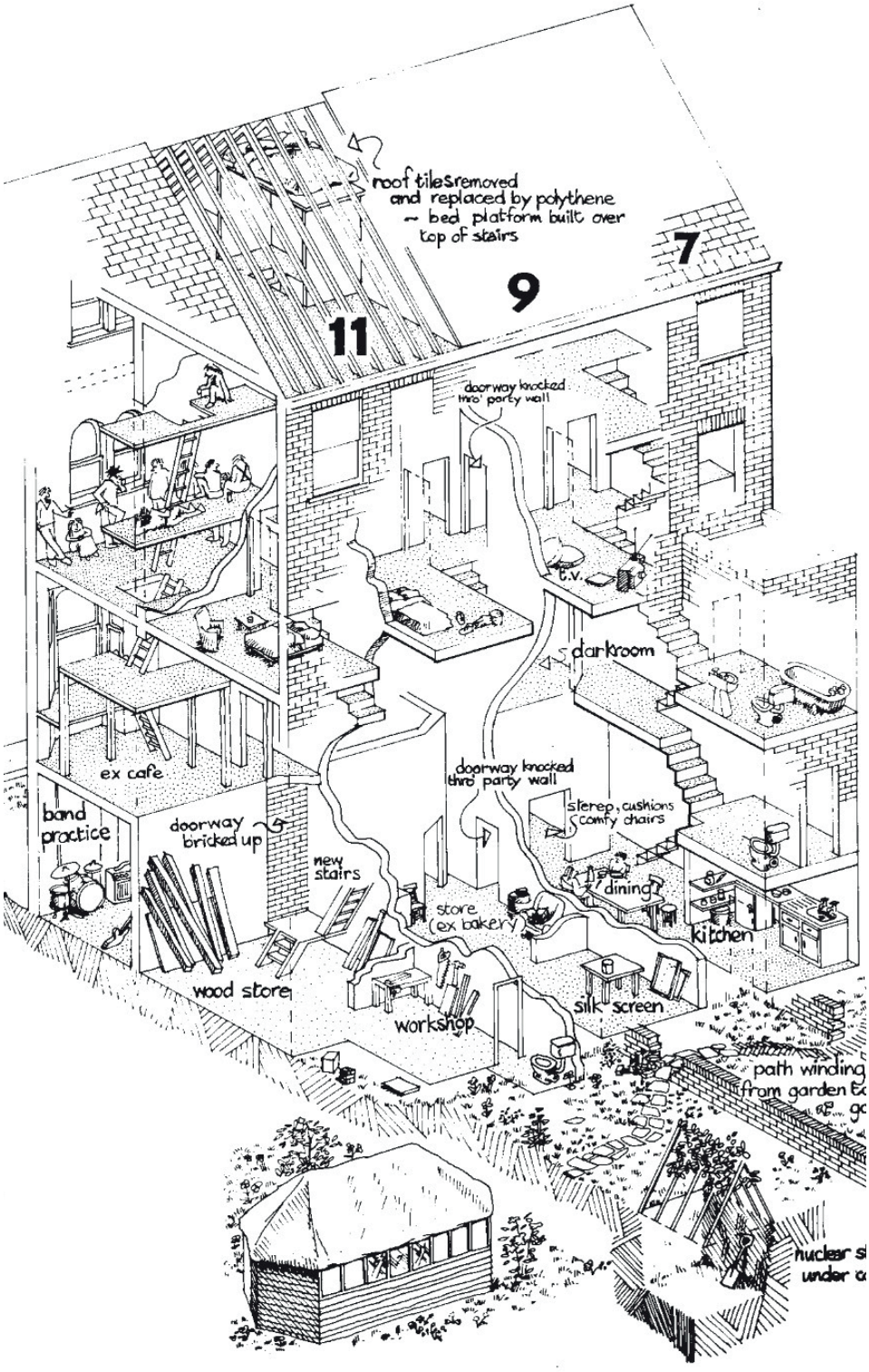
contrary to any property or architectural divisions. Christine Wall describes how this unfolded in Hackney, where in 1969 only 36% of households were occupying properties which were deemed by GLC as fit for habitation.[304] According to Wall, these large-scale empty areas created the physical conditions for feminist and lesbian activists from the area to consolidate in women-only "sisterhood squats".

The British housing policy of the post-war period was undoubtedly a successful social achievement and presented a material improvement in the life of many. At its peak during the 1960s, council housing constituted up to a third of the national housing stock.[305] Nevertheless, the centralised and large-scale approach caused a wave of countercultural critique which materialised in the reappearance of the stranger-shared home. This involved two main lines of critique – the first one was formed around the increasing cases of large-scale urban population displacement, resulting from planning blight and gentrification; the second was aligned with a wider countercultural angle which sought to confront biases materialised in the built environment. The coalitions which were formed around this new type of communality were spatialised along two approaches. On one hand, squatting represented a direct action against the large-scale redevelopment schemes of that time. On the other hand, the shared home was the antithesis of the values instituted by post-war housing.

The London Borough of Lambeth local authority was especially convinced of the new planning style and envisaged that a significant part of Brixton would be redeveloped, including the construction of several 52-storey residential towers.[306] This is how the Villa Road site, which consisted of two rows of Victorian houses, became earmarked for demolition. Nick Anning and Jill Simpson provide a detailed account of how the decanting of the terraces unfolded. After this, activists from the neighbourhood offshoot group of the Lambeth Neighbourhood Council were the first to move into one of the deserted houses in 1973. By 1975 the street included 200 squatters with a well organised legal defence against the council's eviction attempts.

Villa Roaders were united around the idea of re-shaping the living environment, which they believed epitomised the values of both the nuclear family and private property. They believed that to overthrow capitalism, they need to start with their private life and the systematic restrictions that are codified in everyday behavioural patterns. As architectural form was the very embodiment of both speculation and the regulating and shaping of social life within the home, the interior needed to be completely reconfigured. The

[304] Christine Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney", in *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 83 (Spring 2017), 79–97. https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbx024.
[305] Great Britain, Department for Levelling Up, *Housing Statistics, 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022*, accessed 21 August, 2023, 8.
[306] Wates and Wolmar, *Squatting: The Real Story*, 142.



3.11 Andy Milburn, Squatted house (September 1980). In Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar, *Squatting: The Real Story* (1980)

separation of the nuclear family within the confines of the terrace house was at the forefront of this critique. The boundaries of what constituted a home, including privacy and enclosure were challenged and explored. Here sharing was only within the household, however, the limits of this household were radically altered to include complex varying constellations. In that sense, the rows of derelict houses that the council had left behind provided the perfect blank canvas. Commoning here did not constitute a legal claim, nor efficiency from mutual cooperation. It had a strong cultural and political significance. The spatial dynamics of these communities resolved around dissolution and expansion, opposed to the enclosure and seclusion of their 19th-century predecessors. The physical act of co-habitation embodied a form of cultural critique of the types of subjects which were shaped by post-war housing design and materialised in the built form of the home. The case of Villa Road included demolishing partition walls between various terraced houses in order to create a shared single household.[307]

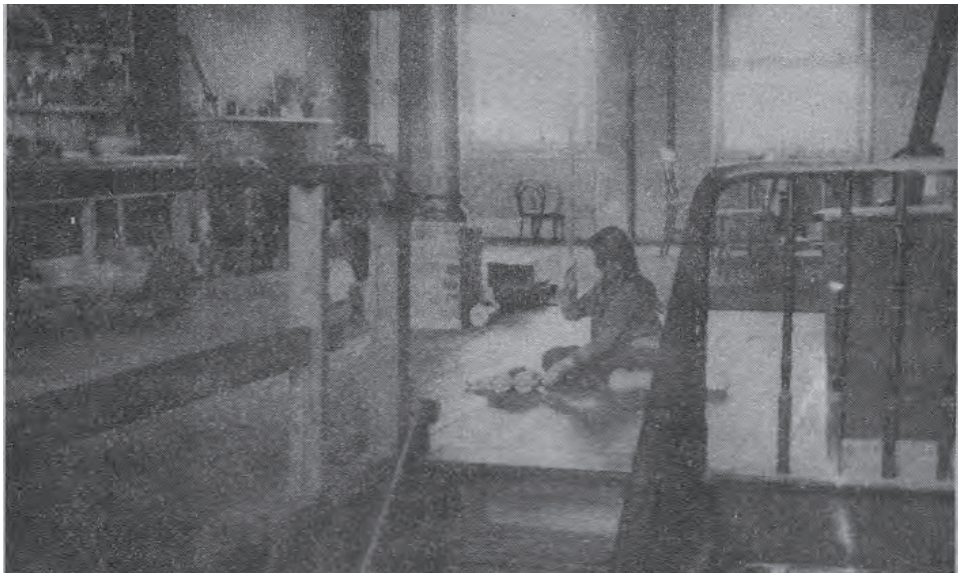
While the interior aimed to critique the values instituted by post-war housing, the exterior was a result of a newly formed urban activism against the large-scale redevelopment planning approach of the 1960s and 1970s. The gaze of Villa Roaders turned outwards when the squatters in a series of houses received county court summonses for possession. This resulted in the barricading of the terraces. Besides creating a physical barrier, the squatters were using the house frontages to publicise their campaign. Their messages were not focused only on Villa Road: they spoke to Londoners in other parts of the city who shared their fear of the destruction of local neighbourhoods.

Squatting practices across London were enabled by the emergence of the large-scale redevelopment of council-owned housing. One can argue about whether social housing would have had the potential to redefine housing as commons within the framework of the newly emerged welfare state if it had included conceiving, delivering and distributing housing through community involvement. What was new during the post-war period was the emergence of a city-wide coherent mobilised community response. The squats were remarkable social and spatial experiments; however, they were not meant to last.

Although all three case studies discussed in the chapter were *commoning* projects, none of them actually managed to achieve a commons model of housing, or political emancipation. The Diggers represented a holistic autonomous and regenerative model, but they are exclusionary on various fronts. Spa Fields was a grassroots initiated form of sharing, however, it drew on the economic

[307] Wates and Wolmar, *Squatting: The Real Story*, 175.

3.12 Refurbished squatted loft space, Winchester Road, Camden, London, c. 1980. Photo by Nick Wates.



3.13 Communal living room/nursery/kitchen/ dining room created by squatters in Winchester Road, Camden, London, late 1970s.

Photo by by Nick Wates.

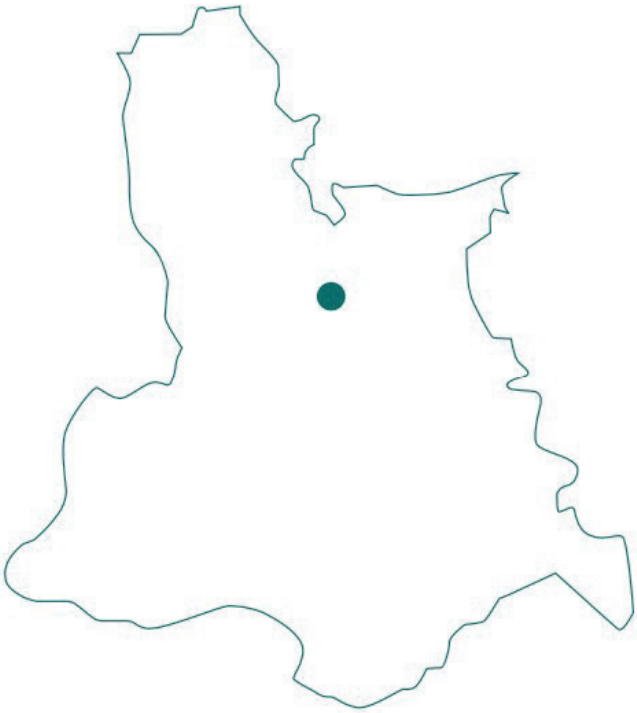
3.14 Interior of squatted terraced house, late 1970s. 3.13 Bottom Left: In Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar, *Squatting: The Real Story*.

logic of commercial development. Villa Road was inclusive, but they were not regenerative or holistic, so remained short-lived. Their greatest achievement was to recognise that the commons terrain had shifted from a focus on land to a focus on the public, representing a new terrain of enclosure. This was very evident with housing, which started even before its privatisation. The unifying, standardising reasoning of Modernism instituted non-inclusive standards. The industrial growth, subsequent neoliberal privatisation of housing and economic restructuring made regenerative ways of building and thinking about housing ever more distant. Architects advocating for self-build and participatory practices were addressing this; however, these approaches were even more taxing for vulnerable groups if they were not holistically integrated into a circular economic work-life system. That is, to go back to DeFilippis, to achieve autonomy, the commons not only need to include housing, but also work and finance.

If the pre-modern model was about access to and care of the environment and its resources, the modern one was about disciplining the body, and the post-modern one about counterculture, where does this leave the commons today, as local housing urgently needs to respond to the global challenges of environmental degradation and social inequality. This will be the focus of the second part of the thesis.

3.15 Villa Road, Brixton, London, 2022. Photograph Ioana Petkova.

PART TWO



Chapter IV. Researching Housing Commons: Redefining Disciplinary Modes of Knowledge

The first part of the thesis defined the commons as participatory social systems of production, ownership and use, which strive to achieve political transformation through collective action. In the context of housing, they were identified as having the potential to tackle the current financialisation by establishing legal or economic forms of price or rent control. Part One concluded with the recognition that in the past, housing commons never existed, and they are yet to be defined and designed in London. This second part of the thesis focuses on contemporary commoning practice. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What constitutes housing commons in architecture?

2. If housing can be owned, managed and accessed as commons, what new values and potential would this create for its architecture?

3. What is the role of architecture in supporting the formation, resilience and impact of commoning practices?

While the historical case study analysis relies on archival and artifactual material, qualitative research uses contemporaneous circumstances for collecting primary source material.[308] This creates the opportunity to capture an immediate experience, to include the presence of the researcher and their own agency in selecting and shaping the evidence. As housing commons are systems of relationships and action, the ability to explore the social nuances of the context, through the researcher's embeddedness, is crucial for creating a case study reading of the practice of commoning, not just its architectural artifacts. For that reason, this second part of the thesis uses ethnography-inspired methods to refine the theoretical definitions of commoning and concludes with an analysis of the final case study, Church Grove. Here ethnographic is understood as the prolonged embedded engagement with a site-specific context through observation and participation.[309]

The origin of the ethnographic method lies in 20th-century anthropology, which aimed to construct a western positivist account of unfamiliar cultures in their "natural environment". However, the contemporary use of the method has managed to progress from these problematic beginnings and is now used as a process for more inductive theorisation, through context-rich details and

[308] Linda N. Groat and David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 16.
[309] Groat and David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, 224.

4.1 Church Grove is RUSS CLT's first housing project, located in Lewisham. Drawing by Ioana Petkova based on Digimap image.

a small sample of unstructured data.[310] In the context of architectural theory, and specifically this thesis, it is used for the collection of in-depth qualitative materials (observations and interviews). They are analysed along with other spatial data, such as documents and spatial interventions, to refine a theory of the contemporary urban condition of commoning. In that sense, the work does not attempt to provide an anthropological or sociological account of the culture of commoning, its meanings and practices. It aims to situate an emerging architectural theory of the commons in a specific social context. This helps to refine and generate theory which is better related to practice and has a stronger transformative potential.

Methodology and Methods

While the first part of the thesis uses historical case study analysis to discuss past commoning projects in London, this second part is based on the specific account of a contemporary commoning project. These two methods are nested in each other to explore different aspects of London's housing commons. They represent different scales, perspectives and objectives, but work together towards laying the foundation for architectural commoning theory. This chapter starts by reviewing some of the existing literature on London's housing ethnographies, as well as discussing the links between the commons and ethnography. Finally, the case study for the fieldwork is introduced and the more technical specificities of the fieldwork discussed. The main focus is on Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) and their first housing project, Church Grove, which broke ground in June 2021. Located in the London Borough of Lewisham, the organisation is well embedded within the long local history of community-led housing experiments, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Although the historical and qualitative analysis work together to explore a continuity of grassroots housing projects in London, the two methods differ in the way they source and analyse information. The historical case study analysis draws on a collection of existing archival and literature accounts which are selected and analysed according to a deductive comparative framework. The fieldwork, on the other hand, draws on first-hand experiences, allowing for a more inductive approach to generate theory before refining the analytical framework for the case study reading. Here, accounts are situated in the present and allow for a much more direct and flexible mode of collecting and documenting, but also include the presence of the researcher. By combining these two approaches, the thesis also combines macro and micro perspectives. Nesting these different methodological approaches is especially helpful when

[310] Groat and David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, 225.

exploring commoning practices, as they are often described by existing scholarship as multiscalar phenomena.

The Commons and Ethnography

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) Pierre Bourdieu introduces the concept of *habitus,* or the idea that individuals are social agents who develop their strategies of everyday conduct around existing social structures with which they are confronted. In that sense, political collective projects such as commoning are positioned in a very particular way. Their striving towards political change, hence their projective transformational ethos, situates them actively between collective agency and structural frameworks. It is this positionality which proves to be central when thinking about the methodological approach.

Parallels between the commons and housing have been drawn before.[311] A most recent example is Stavros Stavrides's most recent book *Housing as Commons: Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis* (2022). However, most of the scholarship does not use situated qualitative methods to research the commons. In the established body of theoretical scholarship on the commons, case study analysis is used to either exemplify a theoretical statement, classify or refine it. This is true of the field of economics and the work of Elinor Ostrom, history and the work of Silvia Federici and Peter Linebaugh, architecture and the work of Stavros Stavrides. Although the work of Massimo de Angelis includes direct quotes, accounts of conversations, anecdotal episodes and field observations, these ethnographic nuances are not methodologically central to the main modes of enquiry, arguments or conclusion. This is not the case for the wider context of political theory, where fieldwork seems to have become increasingly popular, a development which some scholars refer to as the "ethnographic turn".[312]

A large-scale perspective is very helpful in generating theory but remains too broad when discussing issues specific to London's housing landscape. A closer look reveals several important local specificities which remain underrepresented in the existing commons scholarship. As discussed in the preceding historical chapter, urban population displacement is not an isolated contemporary phenomenon, but a repeated part of the local experience. In that sense, one can suggest that foregrounding this precarious condition also unveils a culture of belonging: a belonging which is not so much anchored to a place but punctured by the experience of *dis*placement. This has further implications in terms of the temporality of the make-up and non-homogeneity of what is defined as "local residents". Similarly, Massimo De Angelis states that commoning

[311] Susannah Bunce, "Pursuing Urban Commons: Politics and Alliances in Community Land Trust Activism in East London", *Antipode* 48, no. 1 (January 2016), 134–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12168.; Elsa Noterman, "Beyond Tragedy"; Matthew Thompson, "Between Boundaries: From Commoning and Guerrilla Gardening to Community Land Trust Development in Liverpool", *Antipode* 47, no. 4 (September 2015), 1021–1042, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12154; James DeFilippis et al., "On the Transformative Potential of Community Land Trusts in the United States", *Antipode* 51, no. 3 (June 2019), 795–817, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12154; Stavrides, *Common Space*; De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia.*

[312] Matthew Longo and Bernardo Zacka, "Political Theory in an Ethnographic Key", *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 4 (July 2019), 1066–70. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000431.

groups are not based on location or shared ideological or political beliefs.[313]

An exception is Amanda Huron, who offers a rich ethnographic account of what it means to participate in Limited Equity Co-operatives (LECs) in Washington, D.C..[314] Even more relevant, Daniel Madav Fitzpatrick's doctoral thesis "Governance of mutual housing in London" (2018) discusses London's housing commons from a planning perspective using participant interviews. These two in-depth qualitative accounts are methodologically significant for the thesis. Although they are an important reference in the realm of urban geography and planning, architecture still constitutes a gap. Design disciplines operate differently, as Pink et al. argue in *Making Homes: Ethnography and Design* (2017): "For designers theories are useful when they help create a viable intervention in the world. In design, therefore, theory is particularly useful when it helps frame a problem which can be responded to through design or provides a novel reframing of a problem, which helps identify new opportunities for innovation."[315] The thesis aims to address this by refining the theory of the commons, specifically in relationship to London's housing. This aims to make the theory of the commons more useful for architectural practice by enabling more generative modes of thinking.

This chapter addresses this gap by suggesting to explore the commons and commoning in a more immersive way, by collecting qualitative material. This brings a range of possibilities. First, as the commons are described in theory as a multiscalar phenomenon,[316] looking into individual experiences is central to constructing a more complete perspective, and with that a more holistic analysis of the practice. Second, a more immersive methodological approach can reveal new theoretical frameworks or foreground the challenges embedded in the situated experience of old ones.[317] A good example of this is the tensions that sometimes exist between the political ideology of the commons and the everyday practice of commoners who sometimes refuse any political affiliation – a phenomenon which Elsa Noterman defines as *differential commoning*, and which remains mostly overlooked in the scholarship on political theory.[318] Finally, as spatial references are both literal and metaphorical, entail individual and shared subjectivities, and are grounded in constantly changing social relations, in-depth individual accounts are crucial for completing any spatial analysis. It is impossible to capture the entirety of these subjective housing references, but this chapter will try to reveal an immersive account of some instances.

For Laurent Berlant, the potential of the transitional moment on the way to an

[313] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 124.
[314] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*.
[315] Pink et al., *Making Homes*, 10.
[316] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 89.
[317] Longo and Zacka, "Political Theory in an Ethnographic Key".
[318] Noterman, "Beyond Tragedy".

out-of-reach distant future is even more valuable than achieving the end goal. According to Berlant, the biggest advantage of the commons is their ability to "provide a pedagogy of unlearning while living with the malfunctioning world, vulnerable confidence, and the rolling ordinary".[319] So what would it take to unlearn the view of housing as a financial asset?

Commoning as Knowledge Production

Knowledge is central to the practice of commoning. For Antonio Negri the multitude takes place precisely in the moment when it is possible to express *the common*, the condition for the formation of a collective political subject.[320] From this perspective, the common presents a threshold of collective knowing, which prefigures collective action towards structural change.[321] This threshold requires "knowledge deeply embedded in the logic of transformational practice"[322]. In that way, practice is a way of knowing. Knowledge is a relational network. Étienne Wenger touches upon this through the concept of communities of practice.[323] To act towards change, one needs to know – knowledge is also emancipatory for local residents, who have to navigate the financial or legal expertise to claim their rights. Still, specialist knowledge, in particular, can be demanding. And this foregrounds one of the most challenging conflicts between theory and practice. Knowing and participating requires a significant amount of voluntary labour, which remains impossible for many. The idea includes not only participating in collective social practice of interest, but also building on collective knowledge. In the context of organisations explored in this thesis, where the community of practice overlaps with community of struggle, the agency of the community's knowledge in transforming reality becomes a central theme.

Constructing knowledge can also be a commoning practice itself. As the fieldwork allows for a better understanding of situated choices within a wider structural framework, and the common emerges on the threshold of structural change, the method can provide interesting insights into existing commoning practices. Moreover, its participatory and embedded nature can also create the possibility for the research process itself to constitute a form of commoning, raising questions of collective knowledge production, ownership and governance. A method referred to as 'commoning ethnography' departs from the position of researching by contributing to the development of the movement. In that sense, commoning ethnography has a dual contribution to what is at stake – by practising and by producing knowledge. Eli Elinoff suggests the following definition: "a space of collective learning that gives fuller support to the project of reconfiguring the world by transforming our writing, re-crafting

[319] Berlant, "The Commons", 4.
[320] Negri and Hardt, *Multitude*, 189.
[321] Guido Ruivenkamp and Andy Hilton, *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices* (Zed Books Ltd., 2017).
[322] David Graeber, *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization* (AK Press, 2007).
[323] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

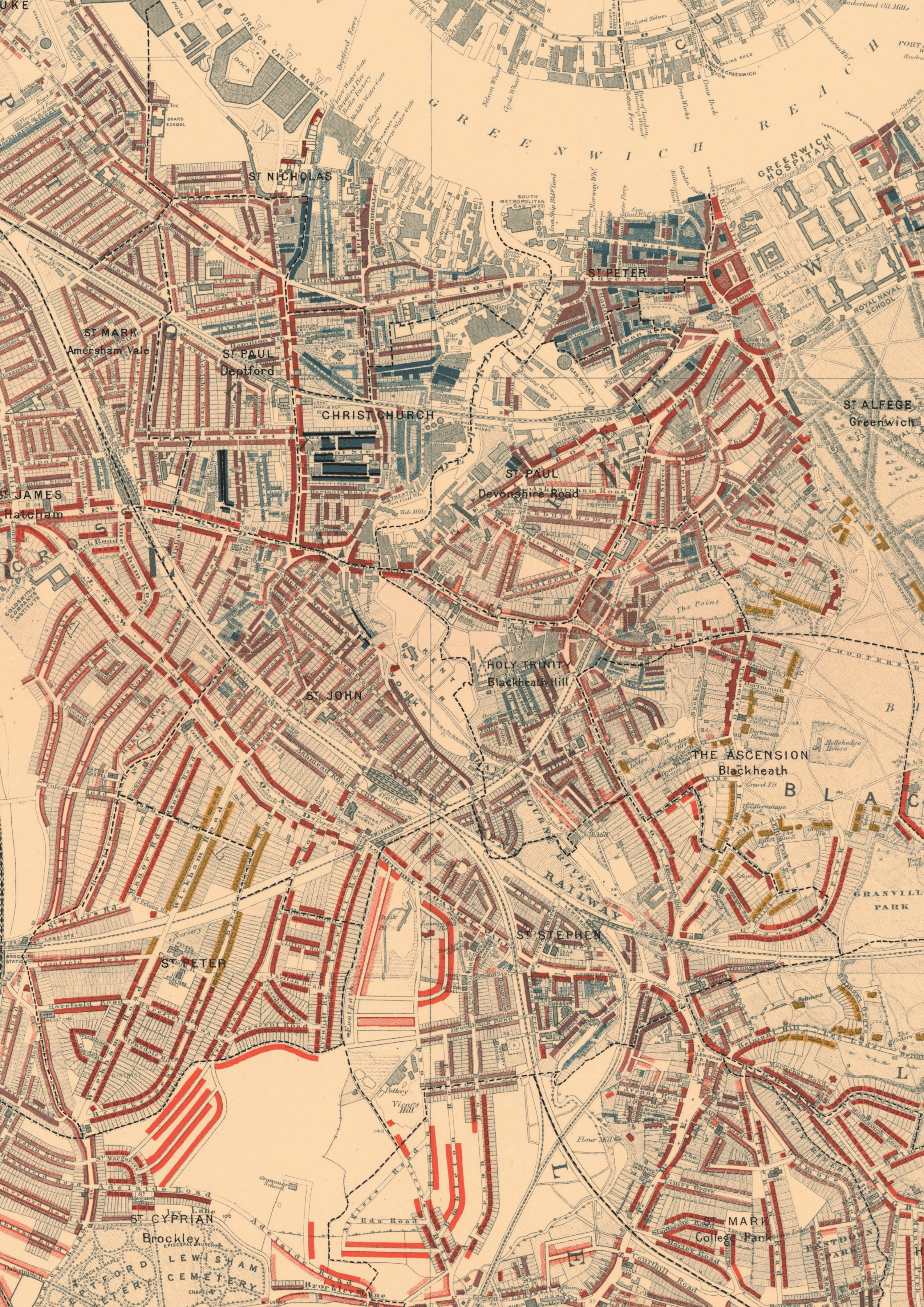
relationships within the communities of praxis that shape our research, and, ultimately, challenging the university itself."[324] Bearing in mind today's housing activism, this raises the question of how spatial research could contribute to the transformative potential in today's and tomorrow's spatialised economic reality.

London's Housing Ethnographies

Although not explicitly related to the commons, London has a rich history of local housing ethnographies. The city's housing conditions drew the attention of numerous social reformers and researchers throughout the 19th century. Similarly, housing was one of the main topics in early ethnographies from the same period in the United States. Popular methods included diaries, surveys, life histories and participant observations.[325] London's accounts, although not yet equipped with what social researchers understand today as ethnographic methods, expanded the known methodological repertoire through participant observation and direct engagement with the subject. From a closer look at these initial pre-ethnographic studies, a relationship can clearly be drawn between the social theory that produced them, the researcher's positionality and their methodological decisions. Similarly, such an analysis will be helpful in understanding how a commons theoretical framework might inform the ethnographic approach and a more coalitional researcher's position today.

Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* came out in 1861. Its introduction opened with the grand statement of providing a "history of a people, from the lips of the people themselves – giving a literal description of their labour, their earnings, their trials, and their sufferings, in their own 'unvarnished' language; and to portray the condition of their homes and their families by personal observation of the places, and direct communion with the individuals."[326] Although the text did refer to quotes from conversations and direct engagement with the subject, their voice was only there to complement the author's statements from the position of a superior research authority. This social positionality which was common in the Victorian era, informed the overall interpretative tone of the work. Firstly, this conveys a sense of a great distance from the subject. Within the analysis of the actual housing described in the text, the dire conditions of the interiors were depicted through an experience of both astonishment and detachment. Moreover, Mayhew's reading of one of the most important social movements of the time, the Chartists, dismissed them as a "dangerous class".[327] Quotes in the text which demonstrate the mobilisation and organisation of that movement were included for nothing more than their factual value: "The coasters think that working-men know

[324] Eli Elinoff and Catherine Trundle, "Welcome to Commoning Ethnography", *Commoning Ethnography* 1, no. 1 (December 2018), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.26686/ce.v1i1.5200.
[325] Tim Hallett and Gary Alan Fine, "Ethnography 1900: Learning from the Field Research of an Old Century", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 29, no. 5 (October 2000), 593–617. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124100129024016.
[326] Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 15.
[327] Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor,* 38.


GREENWICH REACH
GREENWICH HOSPITAL
ROYAL NAVAL SCHOOL
ST NICHOLAS
ST PETER
ST MARK
Amersham Vale
ST PAUL
Deptford
CHRIST CHURCH
ST ALFEGE
Greenwich
ST PAUL
Devonshire Road
ST JAMES
Hatcham
HOLY TRINITY
Blackheath Hill
ST JOHN
THE ASCENSION
Blackheath
The Point
GRANVILLE PARK
ST STEPHEN
ST PETER
RAILWAY
ST MARK
College Park
ST CYPRIAN
Brockley
LEWISHAM CEMETERY
BLAC
GREENWICH STATION
SOUTH METROPOLITAN GAS WORKS
FOREIGN CATTLE MARKET
Adelaide Road
Eda Road
Vicars Hill
Brockley Lane

best, and so they have confidence in us. I like to make discontented, and I will make them discontented while the present system continues, because it's all for the middle and moneyed classes, and nothing, in the way of rights, for the poor".[328] The issue here is not the lack of interpretation but the social theory behind it, which ascribed little value to the grasping of other realities. In that way, although the work did provide a valuable historical account of a segment of the population, their culture, habits, homes and finances, it failed to critically reflect on the social disparities between Mayhew and the main subject of his study. Nevertheless, *London Labour and the London Poor* makes a good case for the strong relationship between the choice of methods and the underlying social theory.

Mayhew was not only socially but also physically distant from the subject. The survey was conducted through a series of visits and with little personal involvement. In that sense, Octavia Hill came a step closer to a contemporary ethnography in *Homes of the London Poor* (1875). Despite not living with the subjects, Hill was situated in closer proximity to them through her role as a landlady and by acquiring "possession of the houses to be let in weekly tenements to the poor".[329] In that sense, one can assume that the observations were based on a prolonged contact with the tenants, allowing a relationship to develop between the researcher and the participants. While she was positioned slightly closer, Hill's work shows a similar paternalistic tone. Again, observations and conversations were quoted only to support the researcher's argument. Moreover, quotes were often used to demonstrate the moral superiority and importance of the social reformer. Spatial descriptions were focused on hygiene and maintenance, implying the respective moral codes of the contemporaneous Victorian social order.

The novelty in these Victorian studies was their embrace of a direct engagement with individuals as a way to create knowledge. However, the social theory which underlay this body of work seems to limit this exploration. On one hand, such pre-ethnographies showcased the role of the strong class hierarchy in shaping the interpretation. On the other, they sought to impose this order even further on the participants by reducing their individual agency in it, and by promoting narratives of self-help and social reform. For these very reasons, such examples show little interest in engaging with a deeper understanding of the world and the everyday practices of the participants, as this is precisely what researchers were seeking to reform. Instead, ethnographic data was used in purely rhetorical terms – as testimony to the researcher's preconceived hypotheses. One needs to keep in mind that such early accounts preceded what

[328] Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 38.
[329] Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (London: MacMillan, 1883), 14.

4.2 Charles Booth, *Map Descriptive of London Poverty*, Sheet 12 South Eastern District, map, 1898-9.

is seen as the beginning of field-based methods, as developed by, for example, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Conversely, one can imagine that studying at the London School of Economics, Malinowski probably came across these first pre-ethnographic attempts to explore issues of urban housing.

In the post-war era London's housing continued to be a topic of ethnographic research. As local authorities pursued two main aims – the quantity of housing and solving London's congestion issues - they came forward with a new Modernist approach to city planning, envisioning London as a place of high-speed motorways and high-rise housing blocks. What were classified as "slums" and older housing stock were often targeted for clearance to give way to these new ideas. East and south-east London were especially affected by the new development plans. Michael Young and Peter Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957) emerged in the context of this metropolitan transformation. The work explored the importance of kinship structures in relation to housing in the Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green, and, respectively, how detrimental rehousing was for the preservation of those familial networks. The book is organised around the beginning and end points of the resettlement journey – Bethnal Green and Greenleigh (a fictitious name for the new suburban housing development). Situated almost a century after Mayhew's and Hill's work, Young and Willmott's position is informed by a completely different approach to social theory which involved a strong critique of the existing institutional and political framework. The main point that *Family and Kinship in East London* was making was that the existing framework is in direct conflict with individual and kinship structures, and that this has detrimental effects on the lives of rehoused council housing tenants. In order to address what has been misunderstood, Young and Willmott presented a more intimate glimpse into the life of these communities. Only by doing this were they able to reveal how local culture and sociality intertwine with the old urban fabric and typologies of Bethnal Green.

Nick Wates documented a later moment of the post-war period of housing history but from the counter-cultural perspective of the squatting movement. Like Young and Willmott, Wates also focused on social networks; however, these were not based on family relationships or proximity, but politically informed commonality. Again, the context of the study was a critique of the new redevelopment plan proposed by the local authorities. Even though Wates did not openly discuss positionality, there was something unique about these accounts in relation to other London housing ethnographies. Wates was personally invested in the movement through the extent in which his life and

career choices were entangled with his role as an activist and archivist of the movement. A recent architecture graduate, Wates' first book was *The Battle for Tolmers Square* (1976): he had lived in the squat himself. In addition to this, and numerous other textual accounts, Wates also worked as a documentary photographer. In fact, this visual work revealed ethnographic insights that were unique for their visual medium, opposed to writing. While *The Battle for Tolmers Square* attempted to convey a coherent historical narrative, the images in *Tolmers in Colour* (2011) managed to evoke a deeper and instant sense of connection with the subject. The viewer was invited to see through the activist's gaze and get a real sense of the "we" in Stavrides's threshold space. In that way, Wates's work comes closer to what later Jeffrey S. Juris terms as *militant ethnography*: "politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried out from within rather than outside grassroots movements".[330] In this approach, researching is both practice and self-reflection, and they both play a crucial role in the development of the movement. Although such methodological choice offers a closeness that is impossible in Young and Willmott's study, for example, Juris points out that there is still a gap between practising and writing research.

Perhaps this gap has to do with how one defines inside/outside, or with challenging the notion of the insider. While a militant ethnography suggests a certain homogenisation with the political collective 'we', more contemporary London-based sociological accounts remind us of its impossibility. Les Back discusses the themes of multiculturalism, race and belonging in London in "Home from Home",[331] confronting the assumptions of universal spatial experience of local reality. Back refers to *From Deepest Kilburn* (1985) by Gail Lewis who, as a young child of ethnic minority, experienced the city as a checkerboard of hostile and safe territories. From the detached Victorian researcher, through the embedded social scientist, the activist, and the reflective listener, this brief historical overview foregrounds one of the main challenges of conducting *commoning ethnographies* in London – although what one refers to as "the field" is collectively defined, shared subjectivities might not always be a possibility, especially when the aim is to create accessible and open knowledge. The notion of coalitions, however, allows for a new, more exciting positionality: one which has its own agenda but is part of a relational network to grow in leverage and resilience. As described earlier, the practice of boundary commoning embraces difference to instrumentalise it in a heterogeneous relational network.

London's housing ethnographies go as far back as the housing question itself.

[330] Jeffrey Juris, "Practicing Militant Ethnography with the Movement for Global Resistance". In S. Shukaitis & D. Graeber, *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations* Ed. S. Shukaitis & D. Graeber, 164–176 (AK Press, 2007).

The ethnographic method is defined by the prolonged embeddedness in a site-specific context. In comparison with the historical method, here, interviewees can be engaged with the design of the study. The thesis explores that by proposing 2 rounds of questions for the collection of qualitative material. The first one was very open and was used to define shared themes across interviewees. The second one linked these themes to specific shared spaces, reading architectural form through a refined analytical framework. Commoning practices do not just produce architectural artifacts. They are embedded in the local social context and speak of political emancipating. In the case of Church Grove, the context itself, the London Borough of Lewisham, is at the forefront of grassroots organising in London. The chapter will conclude with reviewing this local legacy.

Lewisham: A History of Community Organising

Lewisham is at the forefront of London's grassroots efforts to de-financialise housing today. It is home to the community-led Housing Association Phoenix, two CLT schemes which are currently under construction and the only MHOC in the city. What conditions contributed to the borough becoming London's urban laboratory for community-led housing? Lewisham is not currently a particularly popular area for residential development, compared to other parts of the city such as Croydon, Wandsworth, Ealing or Barnet. Its average private rent is currently £1,300 per month, average house price £423,031 and median earnings £33,830, a little below the London average, but the lowest among Inner London.[332] The most recent census shows a snapshot of the borough: a third of its population was born abroad (mainly Poland, Nigeria and Jamaica) with around 46.5% identifying as ethnic minorities. While they provide a general image, these numbers fail to convey any significant insight into how Lewisham came to play such a leading role in today's community-led housing scene.

In the spirit of the post-war centralised planning approach, the London borough of Lewisham took its current shape after the London Government Act 1963 merged the former Metropolitan Borough of Lewisham and the Metropolitan Borough of Deptford.[333] This high-level institutional reform administratively homogenised two areas with completely different but intertwined histories and legacies of community organising. Deptford was home to the Royal Navy dockyard and the associated shipbuilding, storage and supply industries. Lewisham was a bucolic farming suburb for the wealthy, many of whom were initially related to the crown, and were later part of British naval and colonial history. As the expansion of the railway system created the potential for the

[331] Les Back, *The Art of Listening* (Berg, 2007).
[332] Greater London Authority, *Housing in London - The Evidence Base for the Mayor's Housing Strategy* (GLA, 2022), accessed August 21, 2023, https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/housing-london.
[333] Jess Steele, *Turning the Tide: The History of Everyday Deptford* (Deptford Forum Publishing, 1993), 196. In 1960s local Labour MPs reacted to the London Government Act 1963. Deptford at that time was a predominantly Labour borough and merging it with Lewisham was seen as a potentially political intervention.

area to become a suburban haven for well-off Londoners, the formerly rural landscape densified. This stark difference between Deptford and Lewisham also determined the variety of pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial forms of grassroots organising. Deptford's records include episodes of strong workers' movement, including a short Chartist period, while Lewisham's agricultural setting raised disputes around land enclosure and use. Around the time when both administrative regions were merged in the post-war years, another important struggle emerged, as newly arrived West Indian and Polish communities settled in the area. Although having completely different histories, and thus different stakes, they were mutually supportive, building on local coalitions. In addition to this, the borough was home to a strong culture of squatting, co-operative and self-building in the 1970s and 1980s. This includes the first purpose-built UK housing co-operative, Sanford, dating from 1974, and the self-build schemes of Walter Segal. Despite being different, all these episodes of local grassroots resistance contributed to today's forms of community organising in Lewisham. Some of these will be reviewed next, to offer a better understanding of how the links between disparate movements were created by their geographic proximity within the borough.

With its connectedness to Kent and its access to the Thames, Deptford has been a strategic settlement location since the Roman period. At that time, it was an island village among the marshes, accessed through a causeway between today's Westminster Bridge and Old Kent Road. The name of the area comes from the Latin *vadum profundum* meaning "deep fort". With the slow and gradual embanking of the Thames, what was once a former floodplain offered newly reclaimed land. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries the land was transformed by Henry VIII from a fishing and pilgrimage village into a strategic Royal Navy dock.

Lewisham, on the other hand, had a completely different history. Around the 14th to the 15th century it was mostly farming land, described as an open field system.[334] A dispute about the right to common use of land was documented in the 17th century as the crown tried to enclose Westwood Common. This unleashed a lengthy process of resistance among its tenants, led by the local vicar, Abraham Colfe. The conflict lasted from 1605 to 1615 and included organising petitions, using testimonies as proof of tenants' common right to the land, and protests about, and demolitions of, enclosures.[335] Other attempts to enclose the commons were met with similar resistance. Documentary accounts include another case in Sydenham Wells Park where there was an attempt to use the common water source to privately "entertain visitors".[336]

[334] Leland Lewis Duncan, *History of the Borough of Lewisham* (London Borough of Lewisham, 1973), 36. The manorial model combines several different modes of ownership, hierarchically arranged under the monarch. These are the lord's demise; the land held by various classes of tenants, the common and the waste land. The lord's demise included the house, gardens and home farm. The land occupied by tenants included the houses, grouped in a village and organised around the church and the manor house. Each tenant possessed a piece of land which was divided in strips in the common fields, worked on the basis of a trifold system – early crops, late crops, lay fallow. After August, all fences were taken down and the land was used for grazing. Apart from that, the wasteland was used for grazing all year, as well as for foraging, wood, and others. Technically, it belonged to the manor, but they had the obligation to provide it for common use.

[335] Duncan, *History of the Borough of Lewisham*, 55.

[336] John Coulter, *Lewisham: History and Guide* (Sutton, 1994), 24.

4.3 Joseph Farington, *Deptford Dockyard*, c.1794. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

As the flourishing naval industry developed Deptford into a centre for shipbuilding, storage, and supply, the adjacent areas hosted supplementary economies. These included a thriving rope, basket and mat industry, that relied on the conveniently adjacent marshes for raw material. In addition to this, farms in Lewisham would produce and transport food supplies via the local waterways. Providing employment was not the only way in which Deptford influenced neighbouring Lewisham: "In 1642 the typical Lewisham citizen was the illiterate owner or tenant of a small farm. By 1770 the farmers and farm labourers were only one group (and a declining one) out of four that dominated the parish. The others were the manufacturers and their workmen; the merchants and professional men, active and retired; and the tradesmen who catered to the needs of the wealthy."[337] The dark side of the naval history of Deptford was that it was not simply another dockyard, but was one that had links to the British slave trade. The adjacent bucolic area of Lewisham was a blank canvas for the new wealth and the opulent manor houses it financed.[338]

For a variety of reasons, the dockyard started to lose its economic prominence in the 19th century.[339] This led to another urban recomposition of Deptford that resulted from high unemployment, blighted dock areas, slum clearances, workhouses, epidemics. The economic decline was paralleled by a strong political response and working-class organising.[340] The radical political riots in Spa Fields in 1816 started with artisan organising but led to questions of universal suffrage and the working-class Chartist movement.[341] The Chartists were looking for ways to make land ownership more accessible. In order to achieve an "agricultural utopia for commoners-turned-laborers caught in urban squalor", they relied on petitions, mass protests and the development of model settlements.[342] In the 1940s Chartism gained in popularity in Deptford, slowly giving way to other forms of organising, such as the Mechanics' Institute, the Deptford Working Men's Co-operative Provision Association and the Deptford and Greenwich Co-operative Shipbuilders in the 1850s.[343] This merely exacerbated the tension with Lewisham which, after the development of the railway system, became a new suburban haven for the well-off. Some of these structures remain today. While a third of Lewisham's housing stock consists of terraced houses, only a fourth of all housing was built before 1900,[344] leading to the conclusion that today's Lewisham was mostly built from the beginning of the 20th century onwards.

The reconstruction period was paralleled by the relaxing of immigration policies and the opening up of Britain, including Lewisham, to Caribbean

[337] Coulter, *Lewisham: History and Guide*, 18.
[338] Joan Anim-Addo, *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham* (Deptford Forum Publishing, 1995), 30-32.
[339] Steele, *Turning the Tide.* The economic decline of the Deptford dockyards was a long and gradual process. Some of the factors included the government's decision to extend the shipbuilding industry to India in 1814. In addition to this, the Foreign Cattle Market, which was an important employer in the area, suffered from the favouring of the importing of frozen meat in 1898. The expansion of the railway system also challenged the former prominence of water transportation.
[340] Steele, *Turning the Tide*, 127.
[341] Steele, *Turning the Tide*, 130.
[342] John Bryden and Charles Geisler, "Community-Based Land Reform: Lessons from Scotland", *Land Use Policy* 24, no. 1 (January 2007), 24–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2005.09.004.
[343] Steele, *Turning the Tide*, 141.
[344] Valuation Office Agency, *Dwellings by Property Build Period and Type, LSOA and MSOA* (Valuation Office Agency, 2015), accessed March 22, 2021, https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/property-build-period-lsoa.

and Polish immigrants. As in other parts of the city, access to the new housing stock proved to be more challenging for these Londoners. Everyday and structural racism prevented Caribbean immigrants from obtaining stable employment and the opportunity for adequate housing. Newcomers were often housed in other Caribbean or Polish immigrants' homes. The inability to access mortgages meant that the communities resorted to a historical form of organising around housing. This was known in Britain as *building societies* and emerged in the 18th century as a type of informal microcredit fund for those who had no access to a mortgage. A group would collect monthly deposits until they had enough for a mortgage, or part of it. The money would then be awarded to one of them through a lottery. The practice was prohibited for a short period around the beginning of the 20th century because it encouraged speculation. After being reinstated, it then slowly lost its appeal with the emergence of more accessible mortgage options.[345] In the Caribbean context, such informal networks of finance were known as *pardner* schemes.[346] Even those who managed to secure the money through such alternative financing schemes did not find it easy to acquire a home. They were regularly offered homes at inflated prices, or ones which were dilapidated structures, some of which were listed to be demolished soon after the purchase. Some of the buyers had to sublet to others to meet the payments.[347] To address this issue, in 1960 an inducement system was approved by the Housing Minister, Henry Brooke, which, in retrospect, only exacerbated the situation. It offered two sitting white tenants £250 for either of them to leave, selling the house to a Black owner (at an inflated price).[348] This exacerbated an already escalating tension in Lewisham. One of the most flashpoints was "Bloody Saturday" in 1977 when racist and anti-racist protesters clashed, followed by the tragic New Cross fire in 1981.

The pardner system was a good example of how the ideas of grassroots movement were disseminated across various geographies. Similarly, as the pressing issues of structural racism led to strong community organising, new forms of housing grassroots movements may well have been imported to London. It is no stretch of the imagination to assume that, with the focus on the United States Civil Rights Movement, New Communities Inc. and their CLT model might have had a presence in Lewisham. Such a hypothesis would allow for a more complicated, diverse and diasporic reading of grassroots movements in London, and address their centrality in shaping history. After all, historically, CLTs were grappling with similar issues – affordability and local residents' control. As Matthew Thomson argues, their main difference from older organisational structures lies in their outward-facing orientation: they were looking

[345] Esmond John Cleary and Esmond John Cleary, *The Building Society Movement* (Elek Books, 1965).
[346] Anim-Addo, *Longest Journey*; Cleary and Cleary, *The Building Society Movement*. In their early stages during 18th century, building societies were very small and simple organisations. Soon after this they started growing into more complex financial structures through borrowing, lending and diversifying their assets. Respectively, they slowly became regulated and integrated into the new municipal institutions at the end of the 19th century. Finally, those organisations gradually merged into large-scale associations and they lost popularity. Nevertheless, building societies have provided a broad record of financial experimentation, including exploring trust structures, economies of scale and asset management.
[347] Anim-Addo, *Longest Journey*, 100.
[348] Anim-Addo, *Longest Journey*, 113.

for wider coalitions instead of being focused inwards on their members. It is precisely this openness which made the model so easily transferable across geographies and social movements. It is also where its political instrumentality lies. And most importantly, it is what makes the CLT model so important for boundary (coalitional) commoning. As Chapter V will conclude, the design of the organisation is reflected in the types of collectivities and their respective spaces.

Chapter I concludes with the definition of three types of organisations which are currently active in Lewisham and can be identified as commoning practices due to their de-financialising ambitions for housing. These are the Community Land Trust (CLT), the Limited Equity Co-operative (LEC), and the Non-Equity Co-operative (NEC). Each of them bears a set of legal and economic to address London's housing financialisation. While historically London has been the home of many co-operatives, which originated in the 1960s, there are only two community land trusts which are currently delivering housing. These are Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS), based in the London Borough of Lewisham, and London CLT (LCLT), which operates more broadly within London. On careful consideration, Lewisham seems to include all three organisational types, putting the borough at the forefront of grassroots housing development. Three local organisations were approached for the interviews, each representative of a different typology: RUSS (CLT), Quaggy (MHOS)[349] and The Rising Sun (NEC). They are by no means representative of all community-led housing projects, nor of their type. The intent of the fieldwork is not to summarise a general statement of the experience of all collective housing projects. While drawing inspiration from ethnography, the collected material is used for the analysis of the final case study. Having three different organisations contributes to an awareness of certain specificities in RUSS which may not be present in other organisations. For that reason, the following study focuses mainly on RUSS, while Quaggy and the RSC are used to contextualise and support the insights.

[349] The Mutual Home Ownership Society is another model for collective home ownership which is fairly recent in the UK. It is similar to the limited equity cooperatives in the practice that part of the rent goes toward building up equity. However, Quaggy in particular, have chosen not to increase equity together with inflation to improve accessibility for future members.

Field Access

The fieldwork accompanying the research started in February 2021. Overall, it includes around ten informal chats with different actors from London's grassroots organising around the issue of housing. In addition to this, 13 formal interviews were conducted with members of the three organisations, 10 of which were with RUSS CLT participants. The range of the interviews is partially due to the organisation's limited active front. Although there are over 1000 members, the core active group includes the residents, active volunteers,

4.4 RUSS CLT Church Grove project under construction, Lewisham, London, 2022.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the board of trustees and the associates, which, for the period of my involvement, consisted of forty people or fewer. Moreover, I have been volunteering for RUSS in a limited way since February 2021. This period includes regular correspondence with different members and my close involvement with the RUSS school events. The next chapter draws on personal experience, observation, a set of unstructured and semi-structured interviews, analysis of newspapers, journals, web content, planning documents, public events and lectures, archival material and statistical information.

Three Lewisham-based organisations were selected as examples that fitted the definition of commoning in this thesis. It is important to say that, although the commons have been essential as an overarching conceptual idea for the selection, this does not exclude instances when interviewees disagreed with seeing themselves as partaking in a commoning practice. In fact, it is interesting to explore the perception of these theoretical ideas on the ground and how they sometimes can be seen as undesirable, militant, radical or antagonistic by the very people who strive to bring social and economic change. Perhaps, as Berlant suggests, immediate experiences of the very process might be more important than achieving post-financialised housing utopia.

I started my engagement with the field in February 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, which was one of the most significant challenges for the fieldwork. Vaccination had just started to be rolled out in the UK, but the prospect of returning to normal seemed distant. I first heard of the Rising Sun Collective during a public event organised by Community-led Housing London in 2021, as they were looking for funders for their loan stock campaign. After the event, I contacted them with the idea of supporting them by telling their story. Shortly after this, we participated together in a summer school, discussing the counterculture and housing contexts in San Francisco/ London. This shared experience led me to ask for a formal interview. In February, I contacted Quaggy, but unfortunately received no response. However, given that RUSS and the Rising Sun Collective had agreed to collaborate on the research, I decided to make another attempt. After an online introduction, Quaggy eventually agreed to participate. I came across RUSS in 2017 during an Open House visit to Walter Segal's self-build scheme on Walters Way and Segal Close in Lewisham. I have been a member ever since. In addition to closely following the development of Church Grove, I also had the chance to take part in its training programme in 2019, RUSS School. The course was an introduction to the process of starting a community-led housing development. My relationship with the organisation developed further with my close involvement as a volunteer since February

2021. Although I had been a member since 2017, it was difficult to participate more actively in regular meetings, as they had taken place in local venues in Lewisham for many years. However, during the pandemic these meetings were held online, making participation more accessible. The volunteer role, revealing my research intentions, also allowed me to be more involved. Interviewees were recruited via the "snowball" method – they were recommended to me by my initial contacts in the organisation. The overall size of active participants in the organisation is not very big. Volunteers usually help after hours. As a result, although officially there are 60-70 volunteers according to the RUSS records, I came across a core of only 40 active participants. Due to the demanding nature of volunteering, members often take breaks.

Volunteering included helping with the maintenance and upkeep of the hub, but more importantly, with the RUSS School – a five-step course on how to start your own CLT – Group, Site, Plan, Build, Live. At about the time I started volunteering the first residential project, Church Grove, was breaking ground. The project provided a convenient topic of conversation for discussing housing with the interviewees, allowing us to avoid sensitive subjects such as their personal living situations. Some of them were in precarious situations, but they still found the time for a conversation, which is only a testament to their generosity and dedication. RUSS is almost entirely a volunteer-led organisation. This is crucial for the timeline of decision-making and the high turnover of people. Other sensitive areas of the project included a group of local residents, in particular two households on the street, which were very vocal about their opposition to the project. Not including their voice in the thesis remains a significant blind spot for the work. However, the risk of intervening in quite a fragile network of pre-existing local relationships and the fragility of my own relationships, influenced my decision not to pursue this material further. I had already become part of RUSS. This made it challenging for the thesis to serve as a reconciliation "space". To compensate, particular care has been given to examining an objection response letter, part of the planning application, in which formal concerns are addressed. Another omission is that I did not have the chance to interview any of the social tenants in the scheme, as they are yet to be assigned and this will be taken into consideration in the following analysis. Despite these gaps, each interview was a moment of encounter and reflection, connecting people and weaving together new relationships.
In addition to observations and archival material, the interviews were used to reframe the theory of the commons to be used further in the analysis of the final case study of the thesis, Church Grove. This will be discussed in the next chapter of the thesis.

Interview Process and Design

The interviewees were chosen to reflect the structure of the organisation (see Appendix A). They included members, residents, school volunteers, and attendees. Prior to the first round of interviews, the interviewees were provided with a set of questions and the historical overview of the thesis on grassroots organising around housing in Lewisham. The chapter was used to discuss continuity between recent and historical projects. The first phase of interviews followed an inductive method. While having initial guiding research questions, these conversations were approached very openly, in order to leave space for the interviewees to talk about their own stories, experience and future plans. This unstructured approach opened the possibility for the interviewees to lay out what was important for them. In the first pilot phase of formal interviews, open-ended questions were used to relate to the past, present and future (see Appendix B). This rather broad approach allowed the conversations to remain open and identify recurring topics which could be refined through the questions for the second stage of interviewing. These included financialisation, knowledge, space and autonomy. The second phase included semi-structured interviews with more specific questions (see Appendix C). They bridged the emerging themes from the pilot and prompted participants to discuss more spatial references. The analysis of this material was spatially structured according to key collective spaces in the project which had been brought up in the interviews. Prior to all the conversations, the interviewees received the consent form which explained the context of the interviews and the various stages of approval and gave them the opportunity to have a say in the final analysis of the qualitative material. Such routine ethical practices were critical for my relationship to the interviewees. In addition to sharing a version of the historical material, the consent process was designed to be approved only after the final analysis was shared with the interviewees, offering further editing opportunities. This created and sustained new social relationships between me and the participants.

Anonymity has been limited, due to the nature of the research. The small number of collectively owned and governed housing projects in Lewisham makes participants easily identifiable. Moreover, anonymising buildings like Walter Segal's self-build schemes in Lewisham would mean excluding central architectural legacies. This can be a missed opportunity for gaining leverage by celebrating and popularising successful schemes. The question of whether interviewees wish to remain anonymous or prefer to be named as collaborators was addressed by circulating a final draft of the interview analysis.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Access issues with other organisations might relate to their openness to participation. Organisations like London Community Land Trust have very strict rules about their members being local residents and community leaders, and are protective of their privacy. On the contrary, RUSS is very open, allowing anyone to participate as a volunteer. Although not having lived in Lewisham, having lived in London for almost a decade I have also experienced the insecurity of the housing market. Skyrocketing rents, dubious landlords, redevelopment, an increasingly out of reach prospect of ownership. Despite being in a privileged position, as a spatial practitioner and educator, as a single woman on a median income, I could come nowhere near an average one-bedroom price of £300 000, despite the fact that I am almost in my mid thirties, have a higher education degree and almost a decade of professional architectural practice experience. This would not be a problem if the rental market provided more security for tenants, but sadly this is not the case. On the other hand, having worked in the construction industry in East London from 2016 to 2022, I have most certainly contributed to the displacement of local residents. Nevertheless, this training was beneficial to the research. London's housing struggle unfolds around the strenuous efforts to fight for the right to claim, occupy, shape and govern space, giving these political issues a strong spatialised expression. Conversely, even if the research is theory based and not directly situated in architectural practice, it is focused strongly on looking at the political economy in which both architectural practice and thinking take place. By elaborating on the socio-spatial condition and its alternative economic imaginaries, the work indirectly invites new ways of both practising and thinking architecture. Although my interaction with the organisations has never been in the capacity of an architectural professional, this experience has been decisive for my presence. Interviewees often leaned towards discussing architectural questions without me explicitly asking. Moreover, some of the members of these organisations had an architectural background, which contributed to the development of the relationship by connecting on multiple levels. This put me in the position to be an outsider geographically while being an insider professionally.

This chapter has primarily discussed the methodology employed throughout the thesis. While Part One uses historical case study analysis of commoning projects in London in the past, Part Two turns to qualitative ethnography-inspired methods to refine the analysis of the final case study, Church Grove. These two methods, despite their differing scales, perspectives, and objectives, complement each other and explore various aspects of London's housing com-

mons. The chapter begins with an overview of the method, including a review of the existing literature on housing ethnographies in London and an exploration of the relationship between the commons and ethnography. Finally, the context of the fieldwork and its methodological practicalities are introduced to transition to discussing the interviews in the next chapter. Although the thesis aims to set the stage for architectural practice, its contributions remain mostly theoretical. Within the limited scope of the doctoral thesis format, a more practice-based approach remains unattainable; however, exploring such methods in future would offer an exciting next step for the research.


RUSS
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Chapter V. Church Grove: Towards Coalitional Architecture of Housing

The historical chapter laid out three commoning projects – the Diggers in Surrey (1649-1650), the Co-operative and Economical Society in Spa Fields (1821-1823) and Villa Road in Brixton (1972-1978). It concluded that although London has a long history of *commoning* practices, housing *commons* – that is, the political emancipation of housing – never arrived. The current hyper-financialised urban condition, however, provides a unique opportunity for a new alignment between housing movements and architecture. With the ubiquity of finance, and with architecture looking for social relevance, such coalitions might provide a new site for architectural experimentation. This chapter turns to Lewisham as one of the leading local authorities in London where grassroots housing development is taking place. Three main types of organisations were identified as relevant to housing commoning due to their response to the financialisation of housing – the Community Land Trust (CLT), the Limited Equity Co-operative (LEC), and the Non-Equity Co-operative (NEC). Parallels between the commons and collective ownership vehicles were drawn before in the account of the theory of the commons given above.[350] While such accounts offer comprehensive systematic analysis and frameworks to understand commoning practices, architectural applications to these remain mostly theoretical or limited to small-scale interventions. This hinders its practical impact and real-world transformation in the realm of architecture. The thesis aims to address this gap and explore a more in-depth understanding of what an architectural mandate could look like in the context of the commons. The chapter starts with three Lewisham organisations - The Rising Sun Collective (RSC, which is a non-equity co-operative), Quaggy (a mutual home ownership society), and Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS, a community land trust). It will introduce these actors, summarise the shared experience across all the organisations, and focus on a closer spatial reading of RUSS's first residential project, Church Grove. RUSS's multitude of stakeholders and its outward-facing nature make it a suitable case through which to explore the new coalitional role of architecture in housing movements. This final chapter uses qualitative methods to reveal some of the commoning experience, values and meanings of the project; it discusses how the experience is reflected in architecture; and it poses the question of how architects can become coalitional actors themselves.

[350] Bunce, "Pursuing Urban Commons"; Noterman, "Beyond Tragedy"; Thompson, "Between Boundaries"; DeFilippis et al., "On the Transformative Potential of Community Land Trusts in the United States"; Stavrides, *Common Space*; Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*; Irina Davidovici, "Hybrid Commons: Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis", in *Housing as Commons: Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis*, eds. Stavros Stavrides and Penny Travlou (Bloomsbury, 2022), 111. Some exceptions which use prolonged fieldwork include Daniel Fitzpatrick's doctoral thesis "Governance of Mutual Housing in London" (2018) and Amanda Huron's book *Carving out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, DC,* however, neither of them discusses the commons as a spatial phenomenon.

5.1 RUSS CLT Church Grove project, Lewisham, London, 2022.

Non-Equity Co-operatives: The Rising Sun Collective

The Rising Sun Collective (RSC) is a newly formed Non-Equity Co-operative in Lewisham which is to house 9-18 members. This form of collective ownership has the traditional one-member-one-vote structure, where residents do not accrue any equity in the property. Once the mortgage is paid off, it is up to the co-operative to set the rent. They can decide to collect the minimum to cover running maintenance and management costs or set it higher and build up a reserve. Interviewees have observed that some of the older co-operatives in London, like Nettleton Road Co-operative, have managed to reduce their rents significantly, while others, like Sanford, decided to accrue a reserve to fund other co-operative initiatives. RSC's initial members are a group of musicians and recent graduates from Goldsmiths College, University of London. They have been occupying an eight-bedroom property since 2015. This includes a converted former pub with a garden and a studio space in the basement.[351] The Rising Sun was a functioning public house, from 1867 until at least 1982. Pubs have been linked with housing for a long time: the early pubs included residential space.[352] The Rising Sun was converted to residential property in the late 1990s.[353] The building still has some of its original features, like its high ornamented ceiling and the old keg equipment. The RSC campaign started when the collective received an eviction notice. Having lived there for five years, they decided to raise funds, buy it off and start a housing co-operative for artists.

Mutual Home Ownership Societies: Quaggy

Quaggy is a very small, nascent housing co-operative in New Cross. It is named after the south-east London river that flows through Lewisham. It occupies a shared five-bedroom house. The project is a Limited Equity Co-operative (LEC) which allows members to accrue equity through mortgage repayments. However, the resale prices of the shares are "limited" – that is, capped – most often to local incomes. In that way, when they leave, members can take some of their investment back, but not at the equivalent of the market value of their shares. Quaggy's founder, Jack, previously lived in Sanford, the first purpose-build co-operative in the UK (1974). An older organisation with a generous cash reserve, Sanford supported both Quaggy and RSC with loan stock. Kareem, RUSS's founder, was also a resident of Sanford, evidencing the existing links between grassroots organisations in Lewisham. Unlike Sanford, Quaggy is not purpose built. Its members bought an existing property and converted the garage into a fifth bedroom.[354]

[351] The Rising Sun Collective, "The Rising Sun Housing Co-Operative LTD Loan Stock Info Pack".
[352] Nathan Booth, "Drinking and Domesticity: The Materiality of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Provincial Pub", *Journal of Victorian Culture* 23, no. 3 (April 2018), 289–309. https://doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcy023.
[353] London Borough of Lewisham, *The Change of Use of the Public House at 69 Dennetts Road SE14 to a Residential House,* 97/041688 (London Borough of Lewisham Planning Portal, 1997), accessed July 22, 2023, https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=_LEWIS_DCAPR_25108.
[354] London Borough of Lewisham, *Lawful Development Certificate (Proposed) in Respect of Alterations to the Front Elevation to Remove the Front Garage Door and Install a New Bi-Folding Door at 32 Knoyle Street, SE14, to Accommodate the Conversion of the Garage to Habitable Accommodation | 32 KNOYLE STREET, LONDON, SE14 6HW,* DC/20/117994 (London Borough of Lewisham Planning Portal, 2020), accessed March 23, 2021, https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/simpleSearchResults.do?action=firstPage.

Rural Urban Synthesis (RUSS)

Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) started with two neighbours and friends – Kareem Dayes and Alice Grahame. They were both residents of Walters Way, a popular self-build scheme in Lewisham from the 1980s. RUSS was established in 2009. As its original team came from Walters Way, they were interested in applying the self-build method to a larger residential development. The project started with a student loan and was headed by Kareem, who was initially looking for land in the countryside to allow for some growing space. Eventually, one of the members identified the Ladywell plot, south-east of Lewisham Station, through family nearby. Owned by the London Borough of Lewisham, the site had become derelict after the demolition of a school building in 2007.[355] It is located at the end of Church Grove Street, bordering the Ravensbourne river on the north. RUSS won a bid for it in 2015 and started to recruit future residents in Lewisham the year after. The lease for 250 years was officially signed with the council in 2020, while construction started in 2021. It is to be completed by the end of 2023.

The original American CLT model has a tripartite split which involves the residents (leaseholders), the local community (general stakeholders) and the local authority (public stakeholder).[356] In the case of RUSS, the leaseholders are the future residents of Church Grove. The general stakeholders are the members and volunteers. The London Borough of Lewisham is the public stakeholder. Currently, the trust is directed by a board of trustees on which residents are represented. In that sense, compared to the one-member-one-vote principle of the co-operative, which reflects their direct participation, the CLT has a more representative character. However, as Matthew Thompson argues,[357] this structure enables the model to be more outward facing. The freehold is usually held by the trust, and the leasehold by the residents. Church Grove is financed by a mix of grants, loans, and the private investment of the future residents. The shares in the development are split between the residents and the CLT, with RUSS keeping a minimum amount in all the units to secure a say in the future of the scheme. Residents can accrue equity but, to secure affordability in perpetuity, the resale price is capped to local income (following the LEC model).

Common Themes

This chapter focuses on the experience of housing financialisation and the practicalities of collective organising. Most of the material comes from a series of qualitative interviews which were conducted in two rounds. The first of these was open ended and aimed to identify common threads among all three

[355] London Borough of Lewisham, *Church Grove Project Design and Access Statement* [2017], Architype (London Borough of Lewisham Planning Portal, 2018), 4, accessed July 22, 2023, https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/files/88A3ECFDBDD804C6002FADA28882732F/pdf/DC_17_104264-DESIGN_AND_ACCESS_STATEMENT-681073.pdf.

[356] John Emmeus Davis, *The Community Land Trust Reader* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010).

[357] Thompson, "From Co-Ops to Community Land Trusts".

organisations, RSC, Quaggy and RUSS. The second explored the common themes against the case study of RUSS's first residential development, Church Grove. The initial focus on all three organisations aimed to establish a context in which RUSS could be discussed, but it also highlights the CLT specificities in relation to the more traditional co-operative model.

The first round of interviews was fairly open. They took place around the loose framing of the past, present, and future of the housing projects. Through these conversations, a few themes emerged across all three organisations - financialisation, knowledge, space and autonomy. The next section of the thesis will focus on these shared themes, map them against the theoretical literature on the commons, and explore how they are reflected in the architecture of Church Grove.

*Financialisation was present throughout all our conversations. F*inance remains central to the decision-making process across all organisations, dictating, for example, the size of the group, the spatial use or interventions. The group would often consider developing extra rooms as additional revenue streams. RSC had plans to convert the loft, as did Quaggy, who managed to fit an extra room in the garage of their property.

For participants with no savings, informal lending networks are the only way to secure a deposit. Whether this is families, friends or older cash-rich co-operatives, to state the obvious, these decisions are also driven by investment security. However, in the entrepreneurial ethos of the financialised city, grassroots developers cannot afford security, which leads to a conflict. Jack is one of the founding members of Quaggy and a former tenant of Sanford. He[358] shares his impressions from setting up the loan stock programme at Sanford, a programme which helped both Quaggy and RSC to raise their deposits: "And so they say, well, I don't know whether this is a financially sound project, and therefore I don't want to lend the co-op's money to it. And people are [...] quite conservative in how they would invest their money because they're aware of it not being their money personally, it belongs to a bigger group of people." Sometimes this conservative investment approach prevails over ideological or political decisions about who to fund.

Finance is also critical to recruiting participants. RSC had formed a strong collective long before the project; however, for Quaggy recruiting was a different experience. Their limited resale agreement became a challenge when looking for members. Jack says: "[...] the reason we have this equity accumula-

[358] Preferred pronouns used where confirmed by participants.

tion model is so that people don't feel that they're just throwing their money away. And you can feel that in a co-op as much as you can with a landlord." For some members, the lack of control over their investment meant that if they needed to leave the co-operative in the future, they might not be able to stay in the same area. Limited equity, in that sense, can be experienced as vulnerability as much as emancipation.

Matt is a Board Associate who used to be the Chair of the Project Board for several years and also a Trustee. He has been involved in the organisation since its very early stages. He speaks about the challenge of running a grassroots project and having to think about housing as any other commercial developer would: "[...] So it meant we got more homes, which helped us balance our books. Because more homes benefit more households as well ". To be able to provide affordable housing in perpetuity, RUSS have to comply with the harsh realities of the sector, such as the shortage of land in London, lender requirements and the rising cost of materials, as any commercial developer would. In that sense, although all organisations were identified as a contemporary commoning practice due to their de-financialising ambitions, in reality they remain limited in their financial impact.[359] Levent Kerimol has been working on grassroots housing projects across London for some time. He is a founder of the platform Community Led Housing London, which has been providing support and consulting for local groups, including liaising with local authorities and funders. Levent reflects on where grassroots housing sits in relation to other sources of supply in the sector: "So, yeah, I think the other bit of structural change that we could see... is not so much about housing delivery, and numbers of new homes built, and it's about empowerment, and ownership, and control, and things like that, then maybe that's a different kind of question". Although all three projects include strategies to counteract the financialisation of housing, none of them had managed to make a significant large-scale impact or provide a significantly more economic plan for delivering housing. Instead, emancipation is experienced as empowerment or gaining local control. The chapter will later explore how this empowerment is experienced through the case of Church Grove.

Insecurity emerged as the primary way in which the financialised city is experienced. Most often, this includes the anxiety of displacement. To dis-place means to "remove or shift from its place; to put out of the proper or usual place."[360] Many scholars of urban studies have demonstrated how traumatic displacement is on a personal level, as well as what it means for cities in general.[361] Sometimes displacement can be caused by not feeling reflected in the local

[359] A fixed equity of 80% for 1 bedroom flat in Church Grove, for example is £274,500, roughly corresponding to the median selling price for a one-bedroom flat in the area of around £340,000. These estimations are based on sales in the last five years: https://www.rightmove.co.uk/house-prices/se13-7uu.html?propertyType=-FLAT&soldIn=5&radius=0.25&page=5

[360] London Borough of Lewisham, *Church Grove Project Design and Access Statement.*

[361] Anna Minton, *Big Capital*; Watt, *Estate Regeneration* Madden and Marcuse, *In Defense of Housing*; Rolnik, *Urban Warfare.*

demographic. Some interviewees told us of local residents having the financial capacity to stay in gentrified areas but often feeling out of place. Outpricing is a slow and gradual process of experiencing insecurity. Eviction notices are sudden, as in the case of RSC. For them, although the NEC model does not allow the accruing of equity, it still provides more security than the private rental sector. Jack shared the same impression – it is much more difficult to evict someone from a co-operative than from privately rented accommodation. In fact, security does not necessarily need to be achieved through ownership. Sometimes a secure rental sector can be as secure as private ownership. This assumption is at the core of the non-equity co-operatives, which challenge the very notion and primacy of ownership and come close to the idea of *trust*. This speaks to the work of Ralph Borsodi, who, similar to the Diggers, suggests that some resources, such as air and water, and land, should not be owned but only entrusted.[362] Nevertheless, when NECs like the RSC are funded privately, founding members are exposed to a considerably higher risk.

Knowledge emerged as one of the most crucial common resources to be produced and shared to pursue an emancipation from the prevailing housing conditions. As discussed in Chapter II., through the work of James DeFilippis, autonomy can only be achieved when multiple circuits of commoning are decoupled from finance. However, in practice, delivering housing is an incredibly complex task, consisting of a range of highly specialised circuits of production. Because housing is a highly specialised field, direct participation requires vast knowledge and experience. Familiarising oneself with it can be incredibly taxing, and impossible for many non-professionals. Moreover, such initiatives are run on a voluntary basis, making the process of acquiring knowledge even more challenging.

Some groups, like Quaggy, address this by limiting their scope to just the financial and legal realm, but even this includes unmanageable amounts of free labour. Jack talks about reinstating professionalised shell co-ops as a possible solution: "[...] if you start from scratch each time, you do have to sit in hundreds of hours of meetings. And that's, as I say, it's too much to ask of a lot of people [...]". Professionalisation would remove much of the legal and financial strain from founding a co-operative; however, this means that the group would be formed after the organisation, and possibly the building, limiting direct involvement in the governance structure or the architecture of the project. Another potential solution can be to provide training. This would add a vocational component to the project and turn these roles into formal employment. Funding is the main issue here, but in addition to this, some interviewees

[362] Ralph Borsodi, "The Possessional Problem", in *The Community Land Trust Reader*, ed. John Emmeus Davis (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010), 134.

were against formalising one's right to collective action. Sofi is a RUSS trustee, housing researcher and activist, who reflects on professionalised roles: "[...] I wouldn't take it [...] Because I wouldn't pause my whole life to build a house [...] I should have a right to housing anyway. And why is it that other people don't have to, like, give up their jobs for two years even, like, part-time to build something that they should have". If housing is a universal right, contractually formalising struggle means normalising and accepting the injustice.

RSC relies on the expertise of organisations like Community-led Housing Hub, Radical Roots or their architect friend for advice. Even then, it was a colossal effort to get the project off the ground – identifying the type of organisation, spatial interventions and legal and financial options. To cope with this strain, it has also developed an internal way of gauging and distributing workloads for those who are more available. Scott Bowley is a former Goldsmiths graduate, a young musician and one of the founding members of the collective. He speaks about the vulnerability of being a young artist: "[...] you need to allow that art to happen and give space for it [...] if someone is really busy working on an album or doing gigs, once they finish that tour, then maybe they've got more time to get involved in the more sort of day-to-day-running-of-the-house stuff." RSC have developed a participation model where workloads are not spread evenly but distributed in a more flexible manner. Less active members have limited direct participation in this adaptive strategy, where those who are more active take the lead temporarily.

A similar split between beneficiaries and management is formalised in the CLT governance model. Here, residents are the beneficiaries, while the management is carried out by the board of trustees. Residents are represented on the board by constituting one part of it. The rest consists of non-resident trustees, some of whom are recruited for their expertise, and who are expected to act according to the values of the CLT. They are *entrusted* with the management of the land for the common good of the present and future beneficiaries. Recruiting volunteer experts from the housing sector and construction industry might provide an interesting case for expanding commoning circuits. However, in practice, the voluntary nature of running a grassroots development is challenging. Even experts are finding it difficult to navigate the same conditions as any commercial developer, but with fewer resources, and more pressure in terms of managing collective funds. In addition to the demanding nature of the trustee roles, some interviewees remain sceptical of such an uneven distribution of responsibilities. Jack finds the board aspect of CLTs too removed from direct democracy principles: "[...] some of the CLTs [...] could end up perhaps going

in that direction, and becoming huge organisations that aren't really particularly democratically run [...]". Indeed, by having a more active front for the organisation, CLTs can have hundreds of beneficiaries. If it is not reflected in the governance structure, this unrestricted growth can make participants feel removed from its governance. In the end, it all comes down to how participation is defined by the participants, and, of course, whether they have a say in changing the organisational structure.

Space also emerged as a common resource – a subject of emancipation, but also instrumental for the (re)production of different types and scales of collectivity. The desire to have control over and transform space was a central theme in all three organisations. In a transient city like London, where residents are constantly displaced, collectivities are hard to achieve. This also means losing important situated knowledge and making projects even more strenuous. Grassroots organisations are especially vulnerable to this transience, as they usually take more time and effort due to the voluntary labour and group decision-making involved. Eligibility criteria, rulebooks or constitutions may define who is included in the collective; however, collectivities emerge *around* but also *through* space. In that sense, space is not only a subject of the common project, something to be emancipated from finance. Sharing space can enable social relationships. This can happen through designing and building together; through providing assembling opportunities for collective conversation and decision-making, or through co-habitation. Reciprocity in such spatial sharing practices can vary too, just as pooling and sharing can correspond to different types and sizes of groups. In the context of housing, some spaces can address the resident collective, while others speak of the desire to connect to other organisations. Stavros Stavrides describes spaces which do both as *threshold spaces.* On the one hand, they define the collective internally; on the other, they enable wider coalitions externally.[363] As will be discussed further on, the importance of such spaces for the organisation depends on their definitions of autonomy and their reliance on other coalitions to achieve it.

Quaggy's story started from Sanford's eligibility criteria. Because the co-operative accommodated only single members, Jack decided to found a family-based collective living alternative. With the housing stock strictly limited to the normative nuclear family unit, adaptability was the main priority of the group. In that sense, Quaggy's struggle transformed from an eligibility issue to a typological issue. Originally hoping for several scales of shared spaces (within families and between families), they had to discard them altogether. Jack explains how they had to give up their communal space for another bedroom: "[...]

[363] Stavrides, *Common Space*, 5.

people who wanted families mostly felt that they wanted some family space as well as the shared space. So their own sitting room, at least. And we just realised that we couldn't accommodate that very easily [...] So, you know, part of the problem with recruiting was definitely that we became limited in what we saw ourselves being able to buy". Originally hoping to provide different scales of sharing within a multi-family unit, they had to resort to the traditional private-bedrooms-communal-living-room layout. Nevertheless, the desire to transform prevailing residential typologies implies that housing commons can provide a new and more exciting basis for architectural experiments.

RSC were grappling with another spatial issue in London – the lack of affordable music venues in which to produce, record and perform. Scott states: "[...] we were sceptical that we would find a place that was big enough for all of us, because there were eight or nine of us at the time looking, and where we could be loud, and where we could build our own studio and do all these things we've been dreaming of [...]" Affordability was of major importance, but RSC also needed an atmosphere of homeliness, care and comfort, which speaks to the struggles of young artists:

> I think this place is able to offer something quite unique. Because you can come here as an artist, and you can make a track in a studio, you can write it, you can record it, can mix it, you can master it, you can then rehearse it in the basement space next door, you can then organise a gig in the same space that you've been rehearsing it. And you can invite down all your friends and people that you feel comfortable with, and press and label scouts, and all the important people, all the right people for that to be a success, and have a really comfortable gig [...] It's just a completely different dynamic.

The basement is at the heart of the RSC's project. It is a threshold, speaking of the (re)production of the collective as a group, while inviting connection with the outside world. Sound engineered and soundproofed, the basement is also negotiating its use with the neighbours and the wider creative community. As it is central to the project, RSC are considering formalising its use in the future through a membership agreement, making sure it will remain a space for creatives. Scott speaks of the legacy of the RSC: "So I like the idea that it will still always be evolving, but I hope that it will always stay creative focused, at least and not just, you know, be another house with a massive basement space that's just being neglected. You know, that'd be a shame." Like Quaggy, RSC had a small-scale spatial intervention which nevertheless managed to make the basement instrumental for the collective and their project.

RUSS had a much more ambitious vision, which resulted in the provision of 36 residential units and a range of auxiliary collective spaces. But perhaps the

most important features of the project come from the coalitional potential of the CLT. Unlike co-operatives, which are organised through a one-person-one-vote principle and relatively closed, community land trusts distribute governing powers between different types and sizes of groups. By design, CLTs reconcile private, communal and public interests which are usually conflicting. In that sense, by design, CLT collective spaces are threshold spaces. The residential units aside, Church Grove provides a range of common spaces, which will be discussed in more detail at the end of the chapter.

Autonomy was described across organisations as the ability to avoid the prevailing housing conditions, be it finance, insecurity or lack of local control over the built environment. In a complex context like London, where many local interests are superimposed over a single piece of land, autonomy, in its traditional sense of independence, is no longer viable. Existing urban entanglements start from the very double bind of grassroots development's relation with gentrification. On the one hand, there is the desire to develop outside of the market; on the other, there is the realisation that every development is reproducing the very same condition. Most organisations remain aware of this: for example, RSC partner with local businesses in organising events. Implicit exclusions are sometimes not that obvious and easy to miss. A good example is the minimum period of local residency, which is a popular eligibility criterion for grassroots housing across London. Reminiscent of Tower Hamlets' Sons and Daughters programme of a few decades earlier, this can be exclusionary for households who had to move around a lot, or for recently arrived immigrants. Sofi reflects on these shortcomings: "We're not the only group of people that are on the sharp end of the housing crisis. Absolutely not. But we're – young people are automatically excluded. I'm from Lewisham. I still have family there. I go there all the time. Not RUSS, but there are other CLTs where I wouldn't qualify for housing, because I haven't lived there in the last five years. So that's a big barrier." Minimum residency periods are especially challenging in a place like London, where displacement is so widely spread. This is true on a local, but also on a global, scale. Immigrants are more vulnerable and prone to be excluded. Interviewees have noted that RUSS had proactively engaged with such local stakeholders through established networks such as religious institutions when recruiting residents. Moreover, RUSS's eligibility criteria is more loosely defined by "a strong connection to Lewisham",[364] relying rather on their guiding principles, which aim to reflect the local makeup of the borough.[365] Still, in the financialised city, autonomy can never be about independence and self-sufficiency.

[364] "Flats Available – Applications Invited", *Rural Urban Synthesis Society* (blog), December 13, 2020, https://www.theruss.org/apply-for-a-home/.

[365] London Borough of Lewisham, *Church Grove Project Design and Access Statement*, 5.

In fact, autonomy is paradoxically only possible through interdependence. To secure their right to the city and fight against being displaced, many organisations resort to the value of interdependence as an entanglement strategy. The extent to which these relationships are formalised varies. The CLT and its coalitional model provides an extreme version of this, but in fact, all organisations rely on external coalitions. Although Quaggy is not involved in any public outreach, it is linked to a network of grassroots organisations across London, like Sanford, or the Field. RSC are relying on a network of financial support organisations, friends and family, in addition to being connected to the wider neighbourhood through ongoing events. Chloe Curry is a young artist who lives in the neighbourhood and often spends time with the collective. She speaks of the importance of external coalitions: "[...] We just wanted to open the door, really. And I think that kind of nature of the Sun, is how it has so many wider reverberations in society, the open door." For RUSS, coalitions include developing a good relationship with the local authority. The group won a Competitive Tender bid and secured the land from the London Borough of Lewisham by signing a 250 year lease. Besides engaging with the local authority, RUSS mobilised wider support, with over 1000 members. This happened over more than a decade with a lot of effort and public outreach, most significantly between 2014 and 2016, when the group was securing the site and recruiting future residents. Finally, to secure control over the private units in perpetuity, they kept a minimum percentage of the leasehold shares in each property. Building on such interdependencies was crucial to reduce cost but also to safeguard who has a say in its future. This definition of autonomy constitutes the very core values in commoning practice, but also alternative models for growth. Here scale is not about replication and vertical hierarchies, but about the horizontal linking of disparate circuits of commoning. Although all organisations rely on external support, the CLT is the only type which has formalised this in its governance structure. This inherent specificity makes them an interesting site for exploring coalitional approaches in housing, which will be the focus of the rest of the chapter.

To summarise, so far the chapter has revealed that London's grassroots housing is not cheaper, not more secure, and sometimes with limited participation and accessibility. However, these projects provide a new definition of autonomy in the financialised city. This definition departs from the traditional understanding of autonomy as self-sufficiency and focuses on the (re)production of local commoning networks to achieve political emancipation. The CLT as a relatively new form of collective ownership exemplifies these coalitional principles very clearly. The chapter will now explore the new values of housing

commoning practicecs, how they are materialised in architecture and what new architectural mandates they allow for in the struggle for housing justice.

RUSS CLT

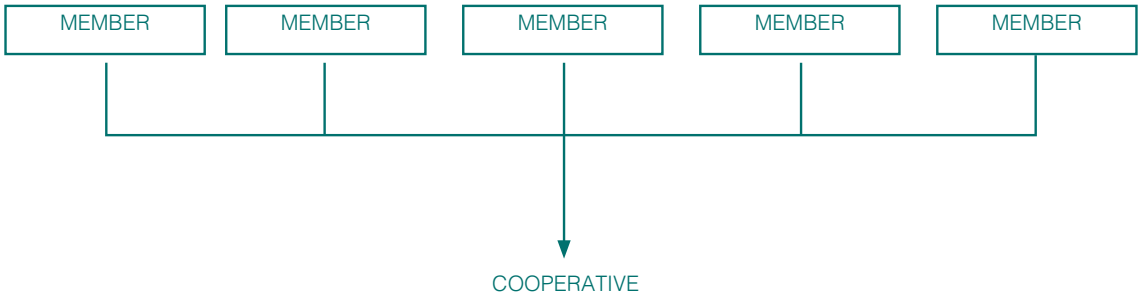
Church Grove was founded under the umbrella of RUSS. The founding members were former residents of the legendary Walters Way self-build project in Lewisham. Having this as a precedent, RUSS wanted to develop a bigger and denser scheme, but also to have a stronger focus on the relationship with the land, local residents, and an educational programme on grassroots housing development. Unlike other organisations, RUSS went through the actual process of developing the housing scheme. The group was sustained for over a decade before the building was completed. Throughout the lengthy process of developing the project, it was the structure of the CLT which enabled the changing circumstances and external help to keep the project going, while holding the multiple actors together. There are several roles in the organisation – the members, the volunteers, the trustees and the residents. For each of them accessibility and participation is defined differently.

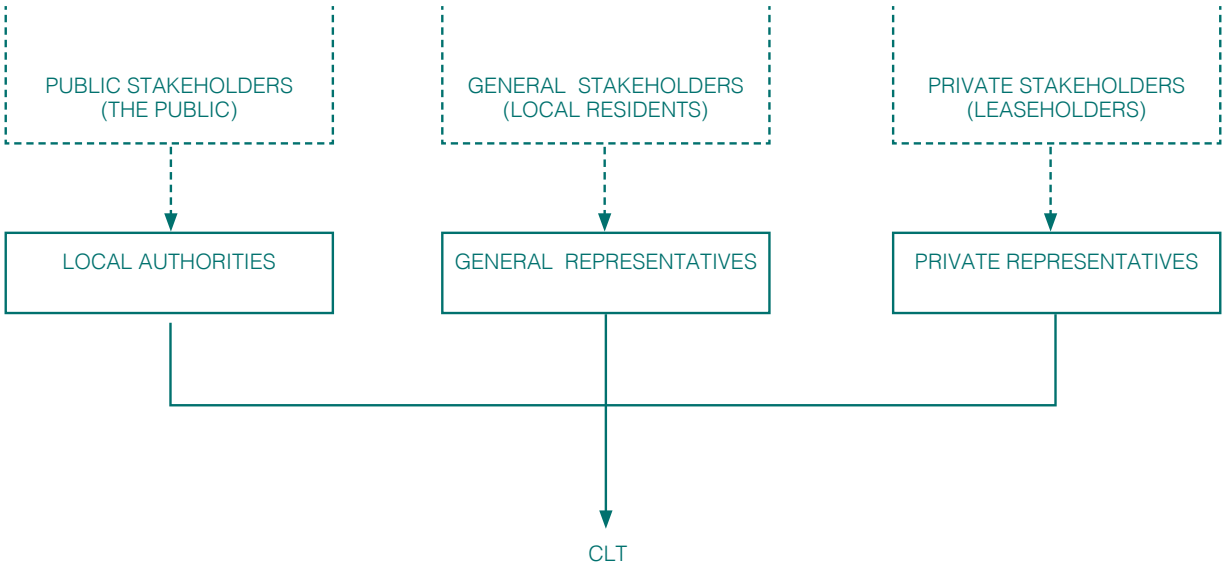
Membership of RUSS is the most accessible role in the organisations. To become a member, anyone can donate a pound and sign up. Members take part in the Annual General Meetings (AGMs). In theory, they can vote for any major decisions and can overrule the board. In practice, few are actively engaged. In that sense, although being a member is the most open and most accessible type of participation that the CLT offers, their practical involvement remains limited.

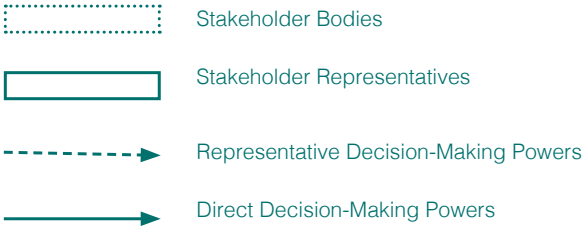
RUSS's trustees and volunteers, on the other hand, constitute a much more engaged part of the organisation. They have a central role for the governance and decision-making process, while non-trustee volunteers run the day-to-day side of the organisation. There are currently 60-70 volunteers, 11 of which are trustees, which are the decision-making front of the organisation.[366] The amount of voluntary work required remains the most challenging barrier to participation. Their time saves a lot of resources for the already stretched organisation, as it reduces the amount of work needing to be outsourced. However, this more active core of the organisation struggles to keep up with the amount of work, leading to burnout and the knock-on effect of a quick turnover. Such jobs could be professionalised, provided that the resources are there; however, the additional cost aside, this could lead to less diversity overall, especially as the building industry sector is not diverse.[367] For some participants, as discussed, this would be regarded as a step away from the

[366] "Trustee Recruitment Briefing Pack", 2022, 5, https://www.theruss.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/RUSS-Trustee-Recruitment-Pack-2023_rev-1.0.pdf.

[367] Mayor of London, *Good Growth by Design: Supporting Diversity* (Greater London Authority, 2021), accessed 21 August 2023, https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ggbd_forward_plan.pdf.


MEMBER
MEMBER
MEMBER
MEMBER
MEMBER
COOPERATIVE


PUBLIC STAKEHOLDERS
(THE PUBLIC)
GENERAL STAKEHOLDERS
(LOCAL RESIDENTS)
PRIVATE STAKEHOLDERS
(LEASEHOLDERS)
LOCAL AUTHORITIES
GENERAL REPRESENTATIVES
PRIVATE REPRESENTATIVES
CLT


Stakeholder Bodies
Stakeholder Representatives
Representative Decision-Making Powers
Direct Decision-Making Powers

emancipatory values of local organising.

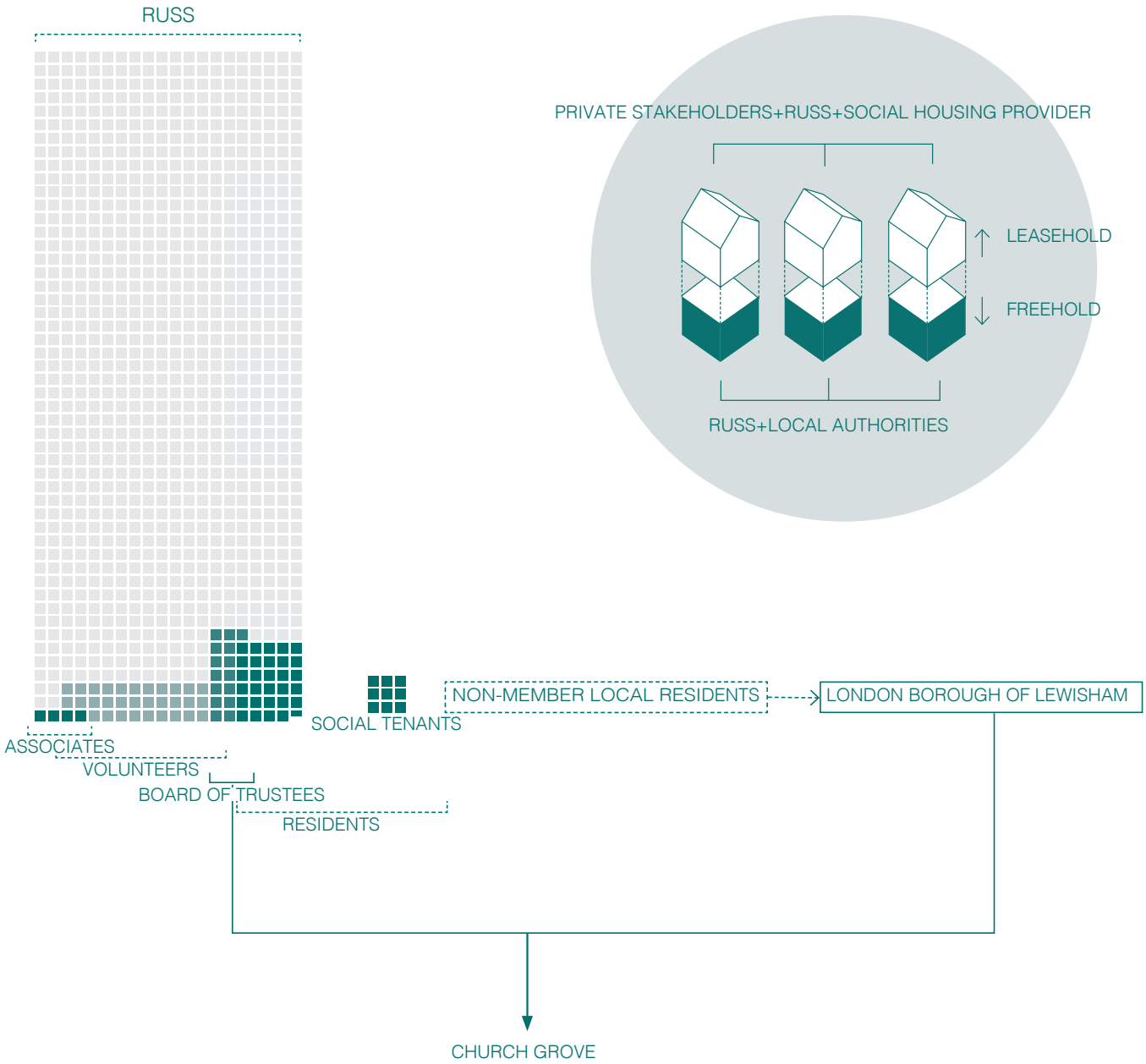
RUSS's residents represent another interest group in the project. Although the CLT model enables a smart way to relieve them of the labour, they remain vulnerable in several ways. Ellen is a writer, theatre-maker, environmental and housing activist and a former local political candidate. In RUSS they have been a representative of the residents' group on the Project Board and the Board of Trustees. Ellen shares how the lengthy project timeframe impacts the residents' group:

> ... some of those people had to leave because their circumstances have changed [...]So that's really difficult. So there'll be someone in the group who will sort of say, oh, but we already talked about this, we already decided this, we've done all this work. But the new people who are joining didn't know how to make those links [...] that's great as well, because there can be a new energy of people coming in [...] this is what we've inherited at this point, so we have to, or sometimes you can then re-think it, but if everything is open for renegotiation, then there's no progress.

Many of the latecomers were not involved in the co-design process of the scheme, which took place in 2016 and was led by Jon Broome Architects and Architype. Long timeframes are especially challenging for residents who are in immediate need of housing or when someone's family circumstances change. Interviewees have mentioned that one resident had to withdraw from the project, as it took so long that their children had moved out and they had to downsize. The long and strenuous timelines exposed the group to further cost and regulatory changes. During the time in which Church Grove was developed, Grenfell, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic happened, all adding to the financial uncertainty of the project. In fact, these changes led to many value engineering decisions which compromised the initial co-design vision of the group.

To summarise, after revealing the explicit issues related to eligibility criteria in general, the chapter has examined the more specific challenges for RUSS's members, volunteers, trustees and residents. The very underlying conflict of participation and accessibility remains, and before housing is financially emancipated, universal access cannot be achieved. This suggests that if the *commons* are a universal model, *commoning* is not. In that sense, commoning is not yet what De Angelis describes as an inter-class phenomenon. Although grassroots projects can provide alternatives to commercial housing through grassroots development and governance, the projects are still far from achieving universal participation or complete emancipation from finance. This, however, in no way undermines the efforts and significant progress local collectives have

5.2 Comparative decision-making processes in cooperatives and CLTs


RUSS
PRIVATE STAKEHOLDERS+RUSS+SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDER
LEASEHOLD
FREEHOLD
RUSS+LOCAL AUTHORITIES
SOCIAL TENANTS
NON-MEMBER LOCAL RESIDENTS
LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM
ASSOCIATES
VOLUNTEERS
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
RESIDENTS
CHURCH GROVE
Stakeholders
Duration of involvement
Stakeholder Bodies
Stakeholder Representatives
Representative Decision-Making Powers
Direct Decision-Making Powers

achieved.

The RUSS split of beneficiaries (represented) and trustees (representatives) constitutes its own reciprocity model to address the imbalances of participation and accessibility. Trustees are entrusted with directing and monitoring the organisation, while beneficiaries are consulted. At the moment, RUSS only manages Church Grove, unlike other CLTs in London (London CLT), who run several projects across the city. The representative nature of the CLT structure allows for unlimited growth, something that interviewees are sceptical about, due to the implications of organisational size on direct participation. However, at the moment this is not a concern for RUSS, which has 30 residents and 60-70 volunteers.[368] What is less discussed, however, is that the trustee role enables professionals from the building industry to apply their specialism to another, potentially less financialised, context. RUSS attracts many architects who are to be found in various roles across the organisation.[369] Architect-trustees have been critical for the completion of the hub and the residential scheme. Trustee roles are not limited to architects; however, knowledge and experience in housing development is welcomed.[370]

In theory, architects have many reasons to participate in such projects. They can reclaim their social relevance, emancipate themselves from financial values in architecture and experiment with alternative modes of practice. Al is an architect-trustee who has been recruited at a local dads' reading group. They speak about their initial reaction to joining the project: "I thought, wow, this is fantastic. The work they're doing – it's really great. I was quite interested also, because [...] there's a lot of work to be done. I felt I could be useful [...]". In practice, the role is more challenging. It requires embracing the vulnerability of volunteering, and challenging traditional contractual relationships. The trustee role includes 10-12 hours of volunteering per month, while the very nature of the service is different than in traditional practice. Responsibilities do not include designing, but do involve monitoring and strategic direction. The architect-trustee's values go beyond generic professional codes to respond to the ubiquity of finance in the built environment. At the same time, architects have different experience from that of developers. This is a learning curve for them as well. James, another critical architect supporter of the project, says: "I mean, the fact that it's taken so long, has meant that, you know, the kind of cost of planning and all this stuff and finding your way through, it has been astronomic, I mean, completely uneconomic [...] there are a number of reasons [...] lack of expertise on our part [...] I'm an architect, but I'm not a developer. And we've had to find our way through all that. And it's taken time

[368] Fieldwork notes by the author from a discussion with RUSS volunteers.
[369] This claim is estimated through my volunteering experience in RUSS. Out of twenty participants I got to know, five were architects (including myself). This indicates around 20% were architects, which is significant; however, it is possible that this approximation is biased through my academic and practice background.
[370] Rural Urban Synthesis Society, "Trustee, Recruitment Briefing Pack" (RUSS, 2022), https://www.theruss.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/RUSS-Trustee-Recruitment-Pack-2023_rev-1.0.pdf.

5.3 RUSS CLT Church Grove governance diagram.

and cost money". The architect-trustee demonstrates that coalitional roles for architects in housing movements already exist. To discuss what their mandate is, exactly, the rest of the chapter offers a close reading of Church Grove and explores how the themes raised in the interviews have been materialised in the co-designed scheme.

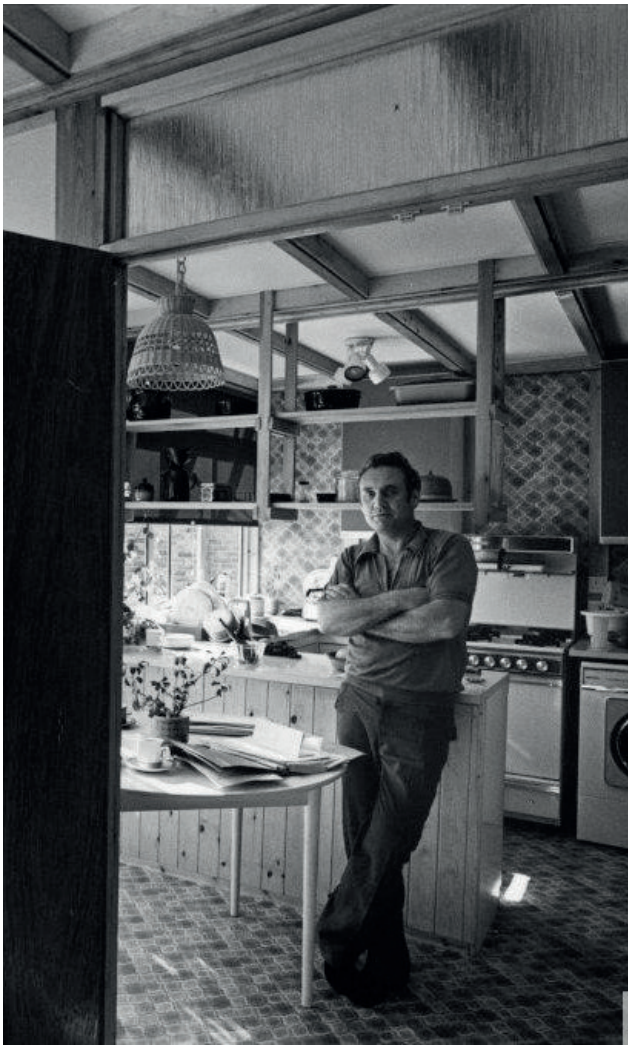
Walters Way and the Segal Legacy

RUSS's founding history starts with another renowned housing project in Lewisham – Walters Way – a self-build scheme designed by the architect Walter Segal in the 1980s. Although his professional trajectory was closely linked with canonical Modernist figures like Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno Taut, and Walter Gropius, Segal was more interested in the timber frame system, a line of enquiry that includes Richard Neutra's and Rudolph Schindler's interpretations of the American balloon frame. Drawing on the British context, William Morris's self-building ideas were also central for Segal's work.

In 1944 Segal began teaching at the Architectural Association in London. Three decades later, in 1974, he talked at an event there, the Dweller Control Housing Group meeting.[371] This was organised by John Turner and attended by Colin Ward, who at that time was working towards developing a network of educational nodes across the UK in the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). [372] The aim was to demystify and encourage citizen participation in the built environment. At the Dweller Control Housing Group meeting the suggestion came up that a community pavilion (what actually RUSS's hub came to represent) might be useful to introduce the "Segal method". This eventually led to initiating a self-build social housing scheme in Lewisham. It was Colin Ward who introduced Walter Segal to the Deputy Borough Architect, Brian Richardson. This is how Walters Way and Segal Close originated. The two schemes are the better-known examples of the method. Its open-source ethos led to the proliferation of its distinctive façade throughout and beyond London. There are more than ten similar projects in the city and two hundred worldwide, according to Ian White's archive.[373] The Architecture Foundation's recent documentary *Nubia Way: A Story of Black-Led Self Building in Lewisham* captures the story of another one of them from the 1990s.[374]

The Segal method is a simple and cost-effective approach to designing and building detached houses. It provides step-by-step guidance on general arrangement of layouts, technical detailing, and construction sequencing.[375] The original prototype was built in just two weeks in Segal's garden, impressing

[371] Alice Grahame and John McKean, *Walter Segal: Self-Built Architect* (Lund Humphries, 2020).
[372] Ward and Fyson, *Streetwork*.
[373] "Walter Segal Buildings", accessed January 10, 2022, http://www.segalbuildings.me.uk/.
[374] Nubia Way: A Story of Black-Led Self Building in Lewisham, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiPKJf-3H2kQ.



the local authority with its speed and affordability. The method allows much of the work to be done without prior experience, using off-the-shelf products and basic carpentry training. The post-and-beam primary structure is braced and completed with two layers of non-structural panels filled with thermal insulation. These panels are fixed with timber battens, giving the houses their distinctive façades. This post-and-beam approach minimises the need for extensive ground and foundation work, while the non-structural walls allow for flexible layouts. The minimal footprint makes the design suitable for a variety of sites. The modular system, combined with carpentry training, enables self-builders to maintain and modify their houses over time. These guidelines provide greater freedom in unit layout and quality, addressing previous criticisms of public housing. In that sense, the idea of the *method* speaks of an architect's role which is to provide design instructions and guide self-builders if they require it. How the knowledge is interpreted and further utilised falls outside the architect's responsibility. Walters Way was the second development after Segal Close. While the initial scheme included seven houses, Water's Way increased this number to thirteen.[376] The structures were arranged around a cul-de-sac on a hilly and densely overgrown site, where elevating the houses from the ground was appropriate, avoiding the need for any earthworks. Although in both projects the development emerged around the spine of the street, the design was very different from that of the traditional terraced house approach. Instead, the houses were completely detached and self-standing, with seemingly little alignment to each other and some generous open space around each. The massing and layout were left to the self-builders, within the limitations of the materials and the modular system.

[375] Jon Broome, "Segal Method", *Architects' Journal* 184 (1986): 31.
[376] Alice Grahame and Taran Wilkhu, *Walters Way & Segal Close.*

5.4 Walter Segal meets self-builders on site at Segal Close, Honor Oak Park, Lewisham, London, 1988. Photograph by Phil Sayer.

5.5 Bottom left: Walter Segal meets a self-builder on site at Honor Oak Park, Lewisham, London.

5.6 Bottom right: Self-build houses, Elstree Hill, Bromley (formerly Lewisham), London: Ken and Pat Atkin's house (Type 6), the kitchen and living room with Ken Atkins

Church Grove

The Church Grove scheme consists of two blocks of terrace-like units, reflecting the urban patterns on both sides of the street. The central gap in the massing, in line with the street, is to allow public views and access to Ravensbourne river at the north border of the site – a result of the public consultation process.[377] Although obstructed by the garden of the neighbouring plot, the gap remains a grand gesture of the scheme. In addition to the gap, the massing follows the river and is set back from the existing residential developments. Its height was also partially reduced. The orientation was changed to be perpendicular to the street and to allow an even better public view of the river. One of the most prominent elements is the scheme's external circulation, which takes over most of the façade. This is reminiscent of British deck-access council housing estates. Whether for cultural, economic or environmental reasons, the planted walkways obscure the terraced house typology and articulation

of the units. The bedrooms are mostly on the north side, facing the river, and providing a north-south gradient of privacy. A bridge connects the project in both a practical and symbolic sense. It frames the garden and links the mutual walkways of the two buildings. All this is set in a generous and meticulously designed landscape, including recreational, biodiversity and growing areas. In addition to the main blocks, the hub, which was constructed first on site as a temporary structure, will remain in place.

As introduced earlier, Church Grove includes a complex model for funding and ownership, reflecting the elaborate governance structure of the CLT. The land belongs to the Borough of Lewisham and was leased to RUSS. RUSS's fundraising efforts supported the development and its running costs. In addition to these grants and loans from the council, social and green lenders, some of the funding is raised through the private investment of the future residents. Church Grove has several types of tenures – fixed equity, shared ownership, affordable and social rent.[378] Depending on the tenure, RUSS retains a percentage of the shares. This is the case even for the fixed equity tenure, to ensure the organisation has a say in the future of the scheme. To secure affordability in perpetuity, leasehold equity is capped at local income, not market price.

Walters Way was central to the establishment of RUSS and Church Grove, leading to the strong continuity of people and architectural ideas. RUSS was founded by Kareem and Alice, Walters Way residents. Moreover, Jon Broome, one of the Walters Way and Segal Close architects, was central to the development of Church Grove, especially to the co-design process. This continuity included knowledge transfer and enabled the Segal method to be adopted from the detached houses of Walters Way to the multi-storey typology of Church Grove. Here, a mix of procurement types enables self-builders to engage after the shell is completed by a contractor, using the method as an incremental infill strategy. However, in tracing Church Grove's trajectory, it becomes clear that the current financial context makes self-building very difficult. Although the initial planning documents of Church Grove were very much inspired by Segal's method, the final design underwent significant changes, mostly due to changes in cost and regulations.[379] The original sustainability strategy was for the use of renewable materials for the structure and cladding, as well as an ambition to reach Passivhaus standards.[380] The primary structure of the building, originally timber, had to be replaced with concrete and the number of the self-build units minimised, as it became uneconomical for residents to complete the fitout themselves.[381] All these changes raise the question of the historical contingency of the Segal method. With its economic benefits no lon-

[377] London Borough of Lewisham, *Objection Response Letter*, Rural Urban Synthesis Society (London Borough of Lewisham Planning Portal, 2018), accessed August 1, 2023 https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=_LEWIS_DCAPR_92166

[378] Rural Urban Synthesis Society, "Church Grove - Offer", *RUSS*, 2021, https://www.theruss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Church-Grove-Offer.pdf.

[379] Church Grove was granted planning permission for the original Church Grove scheme in 2018. All the following changes, and the reasons behind them, are described in the Design and Access Statement of the Material Amendment Application for Church Grove. For detailed information on the change of cost and fire regulations, see Lichfields, "Church Grove Planning Statement Addendum, Minor Material Amendment," 2020, 4.

[380] London Borough of Lewisham, *Church Grove Project, Addendum To Design and Access Statement, Part 1,* Shepheard Epstein Hunter, DC/20/119250 (London Borough of Lewisham Planning Portal, 2020), 49. Accessed August 04, 2023. https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=_LEWIS_DCAPR_107171.

[381] London Borough of Lewisham, *Church Grove Planning State-*


Greenstreet Hill
1.
Walters Way
2.
3.
Segal Close
Horniman museum
4.
Longton Ave
5.
6.
Nubia Way
7.
Elstree Hill
8.
Church Grove

ger pertinent, new themes of this legacy emerge in the Church Grove project. As foregrounded in the interviews, new definitions of finance, participation, autonomy and growth are reflected in the built environment. They become even more evident through a comparison between Church Grove and Walters Way.

On the one hand, Walters Way emerged as a municipal autonomist social housing project in the late 1980s. It was initiated, managed and funded by the council as a new alternative to delivering social housing. On the other hand, Church Grove, emerged in the spirit of austerity of the Localism Act. It was a public-common-private partnership which was initiated by local residents, funded by local authorities, charitable organisations, social and green lenders, and the residents; and has a mix of tenures. In Walters Way autonomy was understood as self-sufficiency and the democratisation of the building industry. In particular, self-building also included a critique of the top-down housing delivery models of council housing. Participation was crucial for mastering the building method. So much so that the architect was almost entirely removed from the building process. In this model, individual and private effort followed a step-by-step system and could individually decide on the design, detailing and finishing. This autonomy culminated in the decision to suspend the house from the ground. Detaching the houses enabled and embodied self-sufficiency, not only in relation to the other buildings, but also within the site. This also liberated the method from the need for an architect to contextualise the buildings. Autonomy also facilitated the use of off-the-shelf materials and required only initial basic carpentry training. In fact, this radical self-sufficiency and the replicable façade appearance is the most prominent common feature of the project. This is the furthest the scheme went in *representing* a collectivity, even though the initial groups of Segal Close and Walters Way often talk about the conviviality around the self-building process. This also demonstrates that democratising construction is only one aspect of the commoning. To recall Stavros Stavrides, while more democratised principles of building can be instituted through design, commoning cannot. In that way, the mandate for architects in commoning processes starts only after a collective has emerged.

Church Grove, on the other hand, was founded through an entirely grassroots initiative. A range of collectivities were already in place well before the project. The spatial features of the scheme are only (re)producing these existing collectivities, internal and external to the CLT. Here autonomy is not self-sufficiency but is defined through interdependence and securing the right to stay. This includes involving the local authority, building up wide public support, opening

ment Addendum, Minor Material Amendment, Lichfields, DC/20/119250 (London Borough of Lewisham Planning Portal, 2020), 5. Accessed August 04, 2023. https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=_LEWIS_DCAPR_107171.

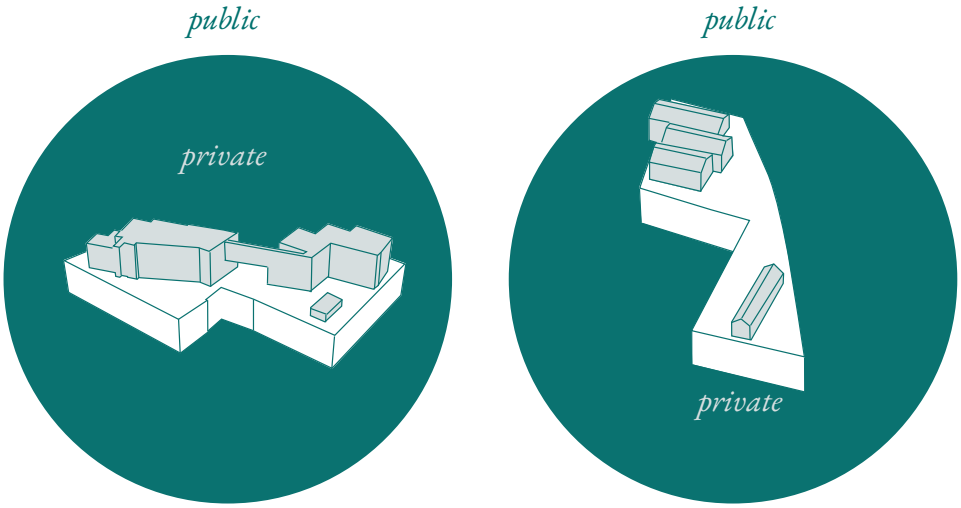
parts of the site to the neighbourhood or running education sessions with other grassroots organisations. In this new definition of autonomy, participation remains central; however, it is not only restricted to self-building. It extends to the complex negotiation of interests through collective ownership, governance and use of the scheme.

In comparison to Walters Way, Church Grove members were less involved in the design and build process. Instead, they chose a co-design approach. In an original scoping session in 2016 called "Festival of Ideas", four main themes were identified by the future residents – Site, Landscape and Gardens; Character of housing and Materials; Internal Layouts; and Sustainability. The concept for the scheme emerged over six following sessions, four addressing the themes raised by the residents and two additional feedback meetings. In this process, architects took the lead, preparing options and iterations informed by collective feedback. In that sense, the co-design method replaced the self-build approach and positioned architects differently. To compensate for the reduced participation, architect-trustees were tasked with monitoring the process from the CLT side. This difference in the design process also led to Church Grove embodying a finite architectural form, while Walters Way included the possibility of variation to emerge after the completion of the project. This was possible through the pedagogical ambitions of the Segal method, equipping residents with the skills to transform the built environment in perpetuity (of course, within the limits of the modular technique). The low-density nature of Walters Way also allowed for these future interventions to happen. Church Grove, on the other hand, formally appointed experts to design and build the shell of the multi-storey residential building, with self-builders completing the internal fitout. Those two different architectural contexts also support different definitions of growth. In Walters Way, it is the replication of the construction method, on site and beyond. In Church Grove, it is facilitating the (re)production of external coalitions, including various knowledge exchange events like the RUSS School, and round-table discussions with local organisations and consultants.

Common housing projects are unique buildings, embedded within the specific spatio-geographical and socio-political context. While *localism* has become a prominent concept in austerity jargon to replace welfare provision with the voluntary sector, [382] and the term *trans-local* has been discussed within the context of the commons,[383] *hyperlocal* has received less attention. The term *hyperlocal* emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the realm of digital technologies, to describe a news feed that is specific to a particular locale and driven by

[382] Shaun SK Teo, "Localism Partnerships as Informal Associations: The Work of the Rural Urban Synthesis Society and Lewisham Council within Austerity", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 46, no. 1 (2021), 163–78. https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12412.
[383] Doina Petrescu et al., "Sharing and Space-Commoning Knowledge through Urban Living Labs across Different European Cities", *Urban Planning* 7, no. 3 (August 2022), 254–273. https://doi.org/10.17645/up-.v7i3.5402.

5.7 Location of buildings in Lewisham, London, built using the Segal method.



5.8 Public-common-private space. Diagrams by Ioana Petkova.

Church Grove, Lewisham

Loughborough Farm/ LJ WORKS, Lambeth

social media. In some of these cases, the hyperlocal is also associated with populist far-right movements. In the context of commoning, it can be understood in both spatio-geographical and socio-political senses. At a spatio-geographical level, the hyperlocal represents the smallest scale. At a socio-political level, it represents the singular subject, their situatedness and experience. In the context of the commons, the thesis defines the hyperlocal as the universal right of the resident of a spatio-geographical place to challenge overarching territorial hegemonies. It is precisely this hyperlocality which gives architecture its more traditional mandate in grassroots urban development. While the modularity of Segal's method means that it can be anywhere, and done by anyone, in the common space, hyperlocal relationships call for more situated design processes. This condition emerges between the financialisation of the private (units) and the universality of the public. It includes a range of spaces which (re)produce collectivities of owning and governing together. They start from entering the site to the front door of the residential unit. They represent a new direction for shaping the built environment and rethinking how residents relate to each other and urban land.

For Fran Tonkiss such moments constitute glimpses of the possible city.[384] They emerge through the post-recession condition of abandoned space, between the public and private spheres, to challenge traditional urban development in its use, timeframes and value. The so-called *austerity urbanism* emerges as a piecemeal strategy of interstitial land leftovers, which are usually discarded as worthless. However, within a wider network, they provide a more wholesome grassroots alternative to the financialised city. In London, such initiatives

[384] Fran Tonkiss, "Austerity Urbanism and the Makeshift City", *City* 17, no. 3 (June 2013), 312–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2013.795332.

usually rely on land donations, mostly leftover sites which developers discard as not profitable. Such high-risk zones, like contaminated or awkward sites, are the new emergent territory where community land trusts are starting to settle.

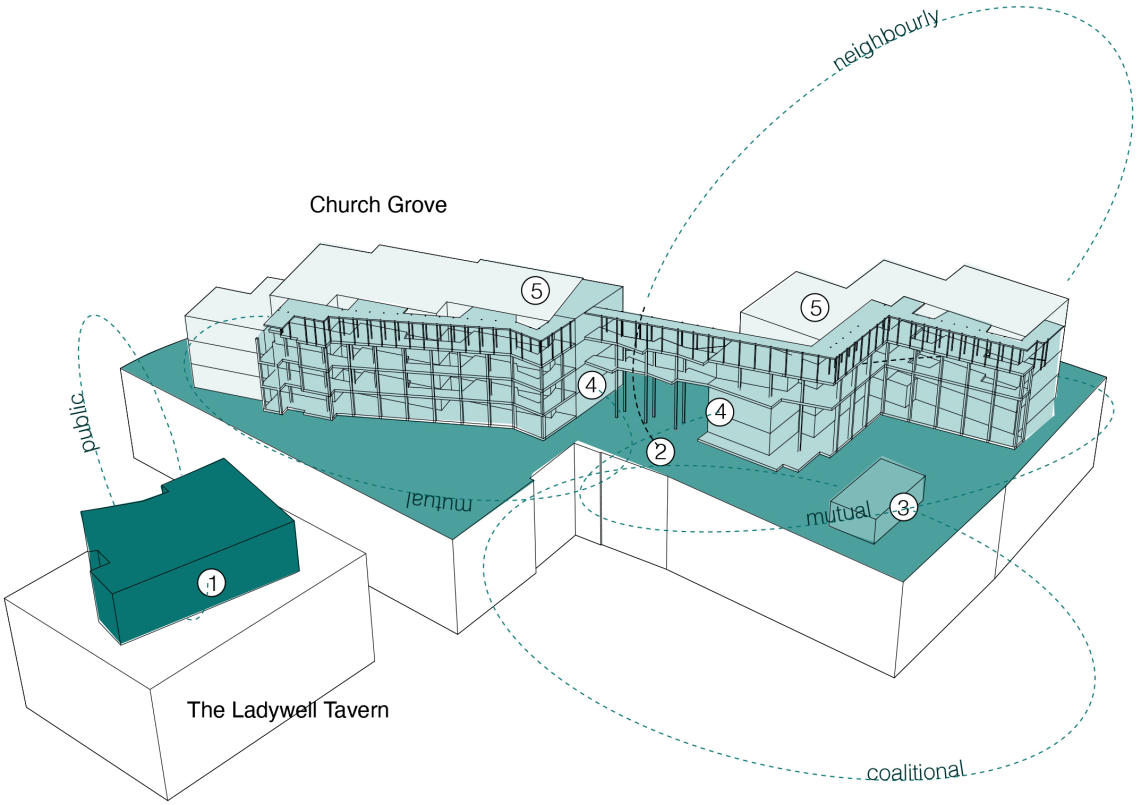
These common gaps in the city, their emancipatory potential and social relevance, raise questions of shared stakes between local residents and architects. They give traditional architectural roles their mandate to develop the common city in the hyperlocal awkwardness of its territory. In fact, both established CLTs in London - RUSS and London CLT – include architects in important leading roles.[385] This condition renders architecture and commoning mutually dependent. If commoning practices remain sites for housing innovation and present us with new values for a stronger relationship to local residents, local land and local emancipation from finance, how are they reflected in the architecture of the grassroots projects? This will be discussed further though the example of Church Grove.

Church Grove as Common Space

In the gap between the private and the public, Church Grove has created a range of common spaces. They represent a spectrum of situated collectivities throughout the project, including the *neighbouhood* gardens, the *coalitional* hub and the *mutual* launderette, office, guest room and walkways. This project is just one example out of a network of common gaps throughout the city, which are not defined by the public-private binary, but have their own history, actors and values.

Public spaces have an important role within grassroots organising; however, they have several challenges. Pubs, for example, have been critical spaces of assembly in the city. Like building societies, which were historically founded in inns, housing movements still have a strong link to local pubs. This was also the case for RUSS, which originally ran work meetings and AGMs there. The Honor Oak Tavern was one of the earlier spaces around the corner from Walters Way and Segal Close. As RUSS acquired the Church Grove site, the location shifted to the Ladywell Tavern. Even after completing the hub, the local pub is still a popular place to go after meetings. Nevertheless, although public space is important, it can exhibit qualities of exclusion. As argued by Les Back in "Home from Home", public space is not always understood in a positive way. Unlike publics, commons entail the possibility of safeguarding more situated collectivities than the general public, as common spaces are not universally open. In addition to their exclusionary character, public spaces are given and not created, which can prove limiting in how they are used and

[385] While an overview of all RUSS trustees to date speaks of only three out of 44 being architects, two out of six Chairs were architects. This is true of the current Executive Director of London CLT Oliver Bulleid. For more details on RUSS's Board of Trustees, see RUSS, "Board of Trustees", accessed July 23, 2023, https://www.theruss.org/about/russ-trustees/. For further information on London CLT, see London CLT, "Team", accessed July 23, 2023, https://www.londonclt.org/team.



5.9 RUSS CLT project, Church Grove: boundary spacesBoundary Spaces

shared. Moreover, publics are more vulnerable to processes of enclosure and privatisation than the commons. Finally, they are universal and not representative of situated subjectivities and collectivities. Although public spaces are crucial for grassroots organising, common space provides more specific, sheltered and democratic ways of being together. Church Grove has a series of such spaces which define disparate internal groups within the project, while at the same time creating the opportunity for external coalitions. The gardens speak to the neighbourhood, the hub to wider housing movements, the launderette, the office, the guest room and the walkways to the residents' group.

The Gardens

The gardens are a crucial feature for the commons, at the scale of the *neighbourhood,* as the Rural Urban Synthesis Society's vision seeks to reunite the city-nature dichotomy. The site was formerly farmland until the 19th century, when the first housing developments in the area emerged.[386] The original RUSS vision, to achieve food autonomy, reinstates this historical use. Although Church Grove are far from being self-sufficient, the design includes biodiverse and local planting, edible landscapes and some growing beds. It also offers a playground, public growing areas, socialising spaces, and more private gardening opportunities for residents. In doing so, a range of varying

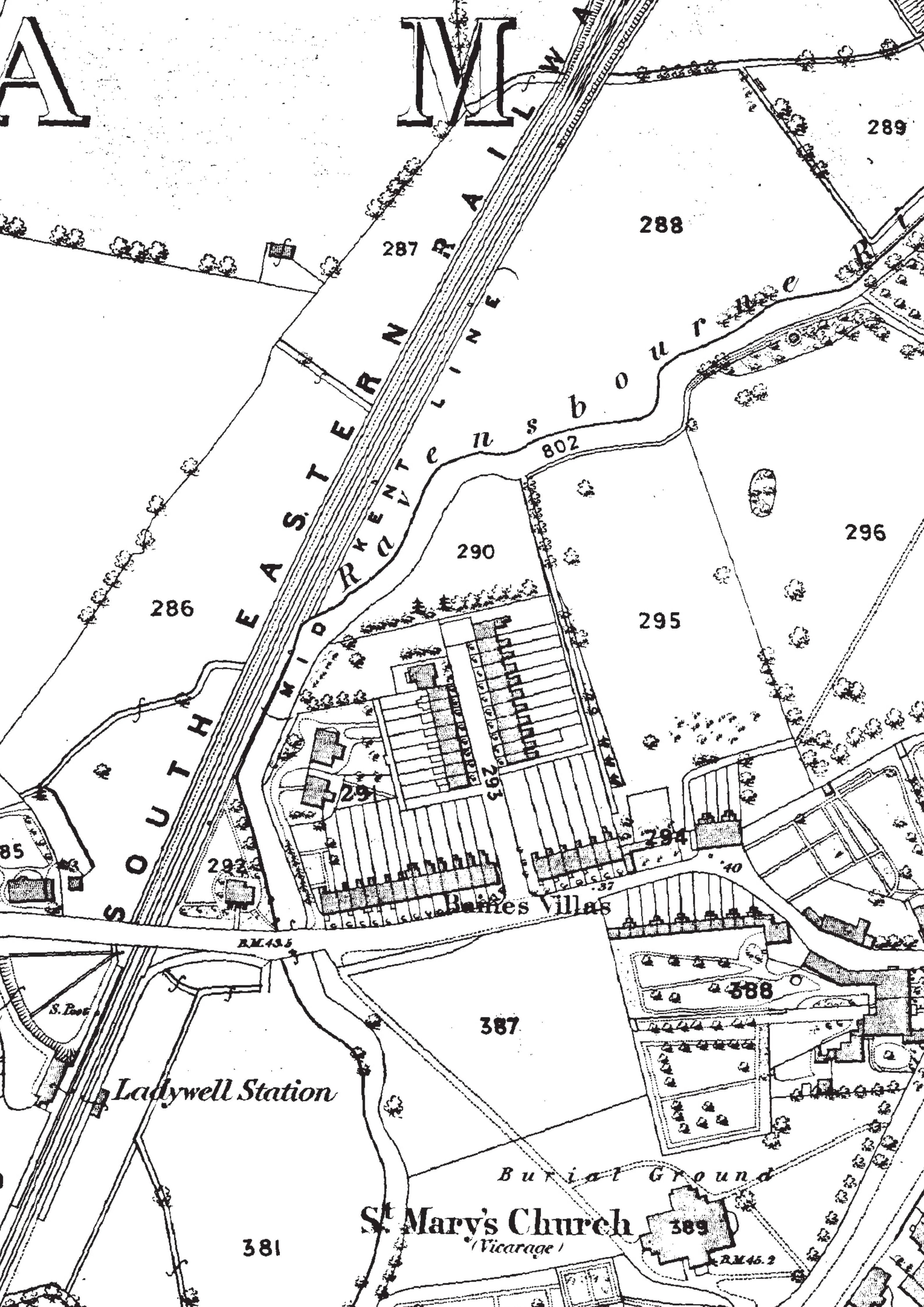
[386] London Borough of Lewisham, *Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*, Gordana Baljkas, DC/17/104264. (London Borough of Lewisham Planning Portal, 2017), 14. Accessed August 04, 2023. https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=_LEWIS_DCAPR_.

communal and private facilities are introduced to the scheme. The most open ones enable access to the river and provide growing beds around the hub for the wider neighbourhood. The most private ones are used by the residents of Church Grove and are located at the back of the site. The landscape has been at the heart of local negotiations for the use of the land. This has been a central theme in the project since its very beginning, internally to the CLT, and externally to local neighbours. Church Grove residents raised the "landscape and gardens" as a core requirement since the very first co-design meetings.[387] The landscaping includes an elaborate layout with a variety of uses and degrees of privacy. The most prominent feature is the "public growing areas" which provide open access for local people living nearby. Their central position aligns with the public void through the massing, finalised after the response to a public consultation.[388]

By offering spaces for residents outside of the scheme to garden in, Church Grove also invites others to lay claim to the local land. Sofi speaks of that offering: "[...] I wonder how other people who are maybe more kind of in more disadvantaged housing situations might get to use those spaces. I don't know if there's a plan for that. And even if there's a plan, I don't know how accessible it is to those people. ..." Unlike other collective spaces in the project, the gardens enable a way in which local land can be more directly governed. Stakeholders who might otherwise feel unrepresented in the decision-making process are still offered a say on the local area. By gifting the garden to the wider neighbourhood, past conflicts can be resolved and new coalitions can emerge. In that sense, the offering addresses local governance gaps spatially, by opening parts of the site to be developed and shaped by the neighbours, too. This is impossible to do with public space. Because it is not owned by any particular party, public space is no-one's to offer, and in that way is limiting for local reciprocities.

Gardening could also enable a certain proximity to the land, which is rare in urban environments. Obi is trained as an urban planner and volunteers for RUSS. She reflects on the way she connects to the land through drinking locally grown tea: "[...] I'm not very familiar with growing [...] But it felt very nice when I went to the meeting ...] she was: you could just get some mint from the garden and [...] it just felt like it's one of those small things that ground you in the locality that you're in". The question of land use and development is at the heart of the history and theory of the commons. Using the land not only to develop it but also to grow food reflects this historical link. The groundedness also helps not only to demystify not only an obscured

[387] London Borough of Lewisham, *Church Grove Project Design and Access Statement.*



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Barnes Villas
B.M. 43.5
S. Post
Ladywell Station
387
388
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389
Burial Ground
St Mary's Church
(Vicarage)
B.M. 45.2

relationship with finance but also to unlearn and challenge modern concepts of land resources, especially in urban environments. Matt explains how his camping experience changed the way he thinks about urban development and sustainability, and framed the ambitions for Church Grove:

> [...] we go camping quite a lot, and so we rely on that camper van for water, and power. That's it. That's all we've got. And it makes you quite conservative, quite careful with the resource. And we forget all that when we come home. And I think I want to remember that more by being in a home, I think there is a finite supply. It's not massive at this utility. So yeah, I think more sustainable, little bit more in tune with the materials that are available.

The embodied experience of living off the land has the transformative potential to make us think differently about our home. This also speaks of the emergent new values and the culture of environmental regeneration in projects like Church Grove. Here, the relationship to the land is not only one of enjoyment or extraction, but also of active regeneration. Unlike public green infrastructure, which is managed by local authorities and given to the public, Church Grove's gardens offer a participatory mode of engaging with the site. They also enable a (re)production of social relationships – growing food is seen as a social event, while the upkeep of the hub's garden has been an annual happening as volunteers and residents come together. As discussed earlier, RUSS is hoping to use this new landscape to build a stronger relationship with the local neighbours. In that sense, the gardens touch upon multiple commoning values – connection to local people, local land and local emancipation.

The Hub

The hub is the main collective assembly and educational space in the project. It is used for internal meetings, but is also open for other grassroots collectives, making it of coalitional importance. The hub is the pilot project for the self-build component of Church Grove. It was the first structure to be completed on site, initially to be recycled upon the provision of a permanent community centre in the residential building. Eventually, RUSS decided to keep it. Without the financial restrictions of the residential building, the hub managed to truly embody the original design vision of the group. The hub is a self-built structure, but it is not in the process of continuous construction that its adaptability lies. It is rather in the flexibility of the finite permanent space. The structure provides a big open space which easily accommodates different uses. It was planned to be big enough to host the residents' group of around thirty people. In addition to the main space, the hub has a toilet, a small kitchenette and a storage space. Flexibility is a prominent theme, as the space needs to work between a range of different uses and assemblies. This includes internal

5.10 Church Grove, Lewisham, London, 1880s.

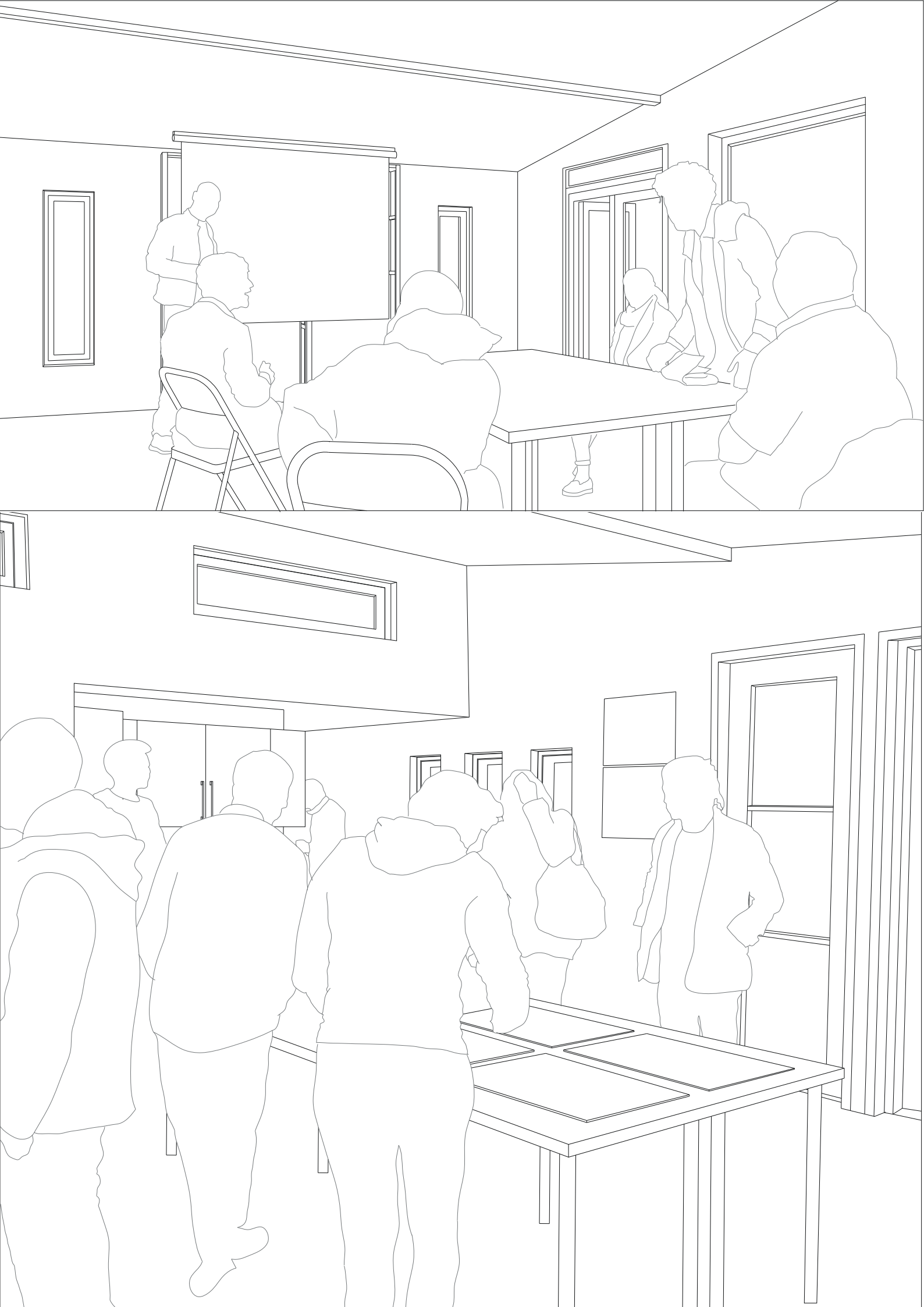
5.11 Hub at Church Grove RUSS CLT project, Lewisham, London, 2022. Photo by Ioana Petkova.

5.12 Hub interior at Church Grove: RUSS School (top) and Open Day (bottom) RUSS CLT project, Lewisham, London, 2022. Drawing by Ioana Petkova.

and external meetings, public events, RUSS's educational programme, local community events, and others.

The hub not only provides assembly space for other grassroots groups, but it is one which is grounded in local governance history. A similar structure for assembly and education was originally proposed in the Dweller Control Housing Group meeting at the Architectural Association in 1974. The hub even expands on the original method by using reclaimed and donated materials. In that sense, the structure builds on the local history while asserting its own identity and the values of circular design.

As with the creating of the gardens, the act of constructing and maintaining the hub is crucial for sustaining local coalitions. Its completion had an invaluable significance to the reproduction of RUSS as organisation. Matt recalls a moment when the residential scheme had to lose some of its original visionary features, and participants had reached their limits: "[...] we had challenges with tenders and costs, but we built the hub. And it really energised us, I felt as an organisation. [...] And so at the time, felt like it was a little lift everybody needed". As it is a pilot of the self-build housing projects, the hub embodies knowledge, but it also serves as an educational centre. It is where the RUSS School course takes place. The experience of Church Grove has been broken down in five modules which follow a process from forming the group to completing the building: Group, Site, Plan, Build, Live. These include practical advice on how to start, run and manage a housing project: some of the topics include how to look for residents, land, how to address planning issues and the cost of



going through this process.

Knowledge is a leverage, but not only for streamlining legal, financial and construction processes. For local authorities who wish to be supportive of grassroots projects, any evidence of knowledge is a guarantee that the project will be followed through. The role of the council is crucial; however, it is politically very risky, as local authorities are under pressure to deliver large quantities of affordable housing fast. The lengthy process of grassroots development is a liability. In addition to this, supporting self-build projects can be seen as retreating from the council's housing duties. With this environment of insecurity, knowledgeable, longstanding actors like Segal's original self-builders or Jon Broome guarantee the credibility of the project.

The hub supports housing commoning in several ways. On one hand, it is an educational centre helping participants by structuring the Church Grove experience into a practical course. On the other, it serves as an inspiration for new groups. Finally, it represents situated knowledge that can be leveraged in negotiating with local authorities. Like the gardens, the hub speaks to its relationship with local land in several ways – by referring to local self-build history, by representing and hosting commoning practices, and by providing political leverage.

The Laundry, the Office, the Guest Room and the Walkways

Church Grove has a set of *mutual* spaces which are used only by the residents. Their role is, to some extent, for efficiency of space and pooled resources, but more importantly, they address a mutual scale of collectivity amongst the residents. Lucy, a RUSS School attendee, reflects on the advantages of socialising which accompanies the economic agenda:

> That means that you can have a more efficient layout of your own home, because all of that is elsewhere. But also, there's the added benefit that in that process of walking to the laundry, and perhaps bumping into people, you know, in that space, you're getting to know neighbours that you might not know. So there's that kind of mixing that you wouldn't normally have, if everybody's inside.

Shared laundries have been popular in London co-operatives since the beginning of the 20th century as a way to reduce housework.[389] In more recent collective housing projects, they are foregrounded for their social affordances.[390] This relates to another concern many have shared – their disconnect with neighbours in their current places of residence. Obi explains: "they might find it easier to [...] overcome the very [...] separated existence. But for me, the

[388] London Borough of Lewisham, *Objection Response Letter.*
[389] Pearson, *The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living.*
[390] A good example is the Nightingale model in Australia, where laundries/drying roof terraces are often shared to cut energy costs and promote socialising between residents. "Completed Nightingale Projects", *Nightingale Housing,* accessed July

times I get to speak to people I live near, it was really just. like, if [...] I collected a delivery for them [...] " Above the laundry some of the other mutual spaces are stacked at the west end of the East Block. There is a shared office space on the first floor and a guest room on the second floor. Like the efficiency of the communal laundry, having an office or a guest room wouldn't be viable unless resources were pooled together. But as discussed, efficiency is not the main reason for this additional provision. Unlike the hub, mutual spaces are mostly specific in their use and integrated as part of the residents' daily routines. But more importantly, these spaces are interwoven with the main circulation route, or the walkways, ensuring that encounters happen. Like doing laundry, entering or leaving one's home is linked with a shared outdoor space. A reference to post-war London estate circulation, the extra wide walkways were conceived in the initial co-design sessions. Matt tells us a bit more about them:

> [...]to be fair the original residents wanted it's like do you just want a walkway so it takes you to your front door and then you go in your flat and shut the door, and that's it? Or do you want a bit more space, maybe you can sit out there with your morning coffee, and you might see your neighbour go to work or college? And you know, we need to pay for that. But that's the other plan. And everybody said, Yeah, we want the other plan. [...]

In addition to having a horizontal connection, some walkways have cut-outs in the slab, maximising light, but also offering a vertical link to neighbours from other floors. These leftover spaces around the unit entrance are one of the most remarkable features of the scheme. They allow for more generous entrance areas with removable partitions which are designed to adapt for different scales of socialising between units.

The mutual spaces remain very specific in their function and the collectivities they reproduce. Unlike other shared spaces in the project, they are seemingly apolitical and quotidian, but highly social, and absolutely essential for the commoning project. Although they represent a rather flat reading of conviviality as bumping into each other, and not using sharing in its emancipatory capacity, these mutual spaces are the most typologically inventive parts of the project. They have the potential to break with established residential layouts and routines and offer a more collective form of living together.

The Units

Finally, Church Grove includes 36 residential units. Their bedrooms, the most private areas of the units, have a view to the back of the site and the Ravensbourne river, while being accessed through the shared walkway. Although used privately, units are held in common as the main political objective of the project. Nevertheless, they remain the part of the design most restricted by

5.13 Layout of units, Church Grove RUSS project. Drawing by Ioana Petkova.

finance. The original aspiration to provide a Passivhaus standard couldn't be achieved. The use of structural timber had to be dismissed too, because of the rise of material cost due to Brexit and the pandemic. By replacing structural timber with concrete, the future adaptability of the project was affected too. The self-building component, a strong architectural reference to participation and the local history of alternative housing, also had to be reduced. In fact, the self-build units did not prove much more economical than the commercially delivered ones, making it logistically and financially difficult to fulfil the original vision of the project.

Self-building is one of the most important themes for RUSS, as it links to the local history of Segal's schemes. It also provides an opportunity for more direct participation by literally shaping the built environment. For some interviewees, this coincides with both wellbeing and affordability. According to Charlie, a former RUSS volunteer, having a say in the choice of materials can lead to an increased energy efficiency and more affordability of the cost of living: „[...]And the affordability in terms of that aspect enables them to live a different kind of lifestyle, you know, if you're not spending a lot of money warming up your home, you can put that money away for something else, you know, for you to get on with your life [...]" The self-build method ensures a better aging of the building fabric, but also better maintenance and a say over

the built environment. The ability to alter one's home, or flexibility of the unit, was raised by other interviewees. Sofi believes a home should ideally be able to transform within one's lifetime:

> [..] I'd build it in a way that it, yeah, it was adaptable. Like I could change the number of rooms or I could like live upstairs or downstairs. I could think about age. I could think about family members that come and stay. I can think about extending my own family. I could think about, if I did want to, like leave temporarily and like go explore living somewhere else. I'd think about like how it could be adapted for someone to, like, rent.

Sadly, finance got in the way of Church Grove's aspiration for the units to represent ideas of local governance through sustainability and adaptability. In that sense, the hub was much more successful in these aspects, something that has often been expressed to me with a lot of regret during and outside the interviews. Although the common spaces of the project embody a range of collectivities and new values, the units remain the area of the project which is most restricted, both financially and architecturally. With self-building no longer financially viable for all residents (a number of units succeeded in a full self-fitout), and typological experimentation being restricted by lenders, property values and our own financialised imaginaries, a question is justified – can housing ever become commons? Maybe once the units are paid off and the resale prices are capped, residents will be less restricted and able to experiment. Or maybe, the units will never be de-financialised and will become a vehicle to develop more common gaps between them and the public space.

Minding the Gap

The chapter starts with introducing three collective ownership organisations as contemporary housing commoning strategies in London. Their shared experience includes the themes of financialisation, knowledge, space and autonomy, which are explored in more depth in the study of RUSS's first residential scheme, Church Grove. While the project remains financially constricted, and direct participation is challenging for many, it provides some emancipation through a new understanding of autonomy, which is not based on individual self-sufficiency, but on an interdependent complexity of coalitions. Places like the gardens, the hub, the laundry, the office, the guest room and the walkways embody these new values by providing a spectrum of common spaces for a variety of collectivities across the project.

At the scale of the city, between the restricted private and exclusionary public space, a new common sphere emerges, which is not defined by past paradigms of public or private. It is a space with its own history, values, agents and logic.

5.14 The Remakery, a community maker space, 2023. Photo by Ioana Petkova.

In the common space, architecture cannot be streamlined, unlike legal or financial matters. Here space is hyperlocal and specific. In that sense, democratising lies less in the actual design and physical construction of the space, and more in having a say in the values it embodies. These common gaps need architects as much as architects need them. Here, we are given the double mandate of social relevance. On the one hand, in their traditional role as appointed design service providers. On the other in an advisory capacity and in the more coalitional role of the architect-trustee.

Architects still struggle to apply the commons theory to practice. Some suggest that commoning cannot be designed. Others equate sharing with commoning. There are proposals for expansion of the scope of the discipline as a way of emancipating it from financial restrictions in the building industry. Apart from these theoretical observations, academics also set up and run research project as pilots of circular self-sufficiency. However, most proposals remain limited in scale and impact. The CLT Network recently published a report, "State of the Community Land Trust Sector 2023",[391] suggesting that a potential 300,000 homes can be delivered through coalitions with housing associations, private developers and councils. The report does not specify a timeline; however, it includes 350 active CLTs across the UK with 200 forming

22, 2023, https://www.nightingalehousing.org/projects/completed.

[391] Community Land Trust Network, "State of the Community Land Trust Sector 2023", 2023, https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/wp-content/up-

as we speak. In that sense, sharing resources and linking multiple commoning loops might be closer to practice than one might think. To be better equipped for the urgency of developing a city-wide commoning strategy, architects must unlearn modern orthodoxies of housing, land and generic collectivities, or public-private binaries. Common space has its own hyperlocal deep history of housing, building on the multitude of local struggles which took place alongside more conventional accounts.

Conclusion

From all the repertoire of the built environment, housing is the most ubiquitous way architecture shapes everyday life, making the home the most radical site for experimentation. Here, everyday domestic practices and rituals present an opportunity to reconstitute the relationship with each other and the environment. Despite the home being commonly perceived as the space of ultimate privacy, British housing has been a modern political project from the very start for both its architects and dwellers. This becomes most evident in the first philanthropic and municipal efforts at the end of the 19th century and later as the national effort to house the war heroes. However, with the neoliberal turn in the 1970s, politics started losing significance and were gradually replaced by finance. This inevitably changed the way that architecture was both practised and occupied. With housing becoming an investment and speculation asset, its cultural, social or aesthetic registers faded – a loss perceived in architectural practice too. Flora Samuel argues that in the recent history of the British construction industry, design value has been mainly understood through quantitative performance indicators, rendering social, cultural and knowledge skills invisible.[392] All these developments placed the average architectural worker in an unresolvable conflict. To remain competitive in the financialised city, they must contribute to increasing speculation and eventually their own precarity and displacement. This double bind of practice has led to an unprecedented historical moment where architects align with grassroots collective action to develop alternatives to the financialised city. This new subjectivity also brings for new architectural agency and value.

The research is driven by the simple question – what if housing were a common? To explore this, the work turns to the theory of the commons as relational systems of collective production, ownership and governance. The thesis starts by describing the emergence of the current housing crisis. Chapter I presents a critique of public institutional housing by illustrating its shortcomings. Although a material relief for many, and comprising up to a third of the overall housing stock in Britain by the 1980s,[393] public housing was exclusionary along race and gender axes. Its centralised and nationalised nature made it vulnerable to easy and fast privatisation at the end of the 1970s, leading to the post-2008 recession and the current grassroots housing scene. While the beginning of the thesis focuses on the practicalities of public housing delivery, Chapter II lays out the theoretical context of the commons. It defines them as participatory sharing systems of production, ownership and governance,

loads/2023/03/State-of-the-Sector-2023-FINAL.pdf.

[392] Flora Samuel, Why Architects Matter: Evidencing and Communicating the Value of Architects (Routledge, 2018).

[393] Great Britain, Department for Levelling Up, *Housing Statistics, 1*

which are grounded in the values of inclusivity, interdependence and regeneration. This part also explores the social implications of sharing and the emancipatory role of such practices in the commoning project. Chapter III constructs a history of housing commoning in London, starting from the 17th century and the Diggers and ending with the 1980s squats. Throughout this history, commoning stakes have changed, as have spatial strategies and imaginaries. This overview concludes that although there are many instances of commoning, the actual political emancipation of housing was never really achieved. Chapter IV discusses the methodology and the methods of the thesis in more depth. It introduces the qualitative perspective of its second contemporaneous part and narrows the focus to Lewisham, a London borough at the forefront of grassroots housing developments. Finally, Chapter V discusses the fieldwork material. It introduces several types of collective ownership of housing to contextualise and focus on the main case study, Church Grove, led by RUSS CLT. This last part concludes that, contrary to existing theory, commoning is hindered by an underlying unresolvable conflict between direct participation and accessibility. Commoning is also not particularly more economical. Church Grove's financial restrictions were the reason why the group had to give up some of their initial sustainability ambitions. Nevertheless, the project provides an alternative to commercial developments by instating local values. These are mostly defined by the connection to the local land and residents, and the desire for financial emancipation. A range of common spaces reflect these values and are ascribed to different types and scales of collectivities within and beyond the project, despite the residential units being both financially and architecturally restricted. In that sense, the thesis ends by proposing a city-wide theorising of the commons as a network of gaps, which emerge between the private and the public space around grassroots developments. They are sites for more equitable and sustainable development innovation, where non-financial local values are embodied.

An important outcome of the work is articulating the private-common-public relationship in the financialised city. The common has traditionally been defined as the opposites of both the public (state) and private (market). However, the thesis proposes to reframe this through the idea of radical interdependence. Similar claims have been addressed in the doctoral thesis of Daniel Fitzpatrick, who argues that autonomy is only possible within the support network of other organisations.[394] This also speaks to the work of James DeFilippis, who suggests that emancipation can only be achieved when the disparate realms of housing, work and finance are linked and politically and economically decoupled altogether.[395] Or Dogma's ideas on the relationship between

April 2022 – 30 September 2022, accessed 21 August, 2023, 8.

[394] Fitzpatrick, "Governance of Mutual Hous-

democratising housing and access to the construction industry.[396] Coalitions, or what Massimo De Angelis describes as boundary commoning, are of critical importance for the success of such projects. However, circuits are mainly discussed between grassroots organisations. In that way, architects organising is just adding another circuit.[397] However, the thesis shows that these coalitions are a critical way to reinvent the relationship between the private, common and public. To discuss these ideas in practice, the thesis uses the example of the community land trust, a typology borrowed from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, but that has only recently been applied in the UK housing context. Unlike older co-operative models, which were very simple, grounded in private ownership, and predominantly inward looking, the CLT model offers a more coalitional and outward-looking perspective. The thesis argues that, architecturally, the condition of entanglement which coalitional practices provide could lead to different values being expressed in the city, which can transform our connection with land, housing, and each other.

To explore possible alternatives, we can turn to Zürich, where collective ownership and governance of housing constitute 5% of the entire stock through the co-operative model. The broader context of this success includes a secure and affordable rental sector, which comprises 57% of the stock.[398] In Britain, these figures are reversed – in 2021, rented accommodation constituted 37% of housing, and private ownership 63%.[399] Irina Davidovici argues that the Swiss co-operative model is so successful precisely due to the secure rental sector and the coalitional rather than oppositional relationship with the local authority.[400] In that sense, affordability is important, but so are demands to challenge the norm. With a formalised need to diversify the typological repertoire of collective living, Swiss housing experiments such as cluster or flexible apartments are not unexpected. Although containing an inherent critique of the national housing supply policy, the Swiss model proves that commons can exist simultaneously *with* and *against* the publics. Considering current grassroots projects in London, the Community Land Trust Network estimates a funding gap between £39m-£60m needs to be filled to complete current initiatives.[401] Most of this funding is expected through government affordable housing programmes. Despite public housing having its own challenges, the common-public relationship must be reconsidered to offer less antagonistic models. Perhaps this is a bigger question of political culture, as Switzerland has a long history of active participatory democracy.[402]

The Anglo-Saxon context, on the other hand, being traditionally more economically liberal, makes it an interesting site to explore the relationship

ing in London".
[395] DeFilippis, *Unmaking Goliath.*
[396] Aureli et al., "Promised Land: Housing from Commodification to Cooperation".
[397] De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia.*
[398] Davidovici, "Hybrid Commons", 111.
[399] Office for National Statistics, Census 2021, *Subnational Estimates of Dwellings and Households by Tenure, England* (ONS, 2023), accessed August 21, 2023, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/researchoutputssubnationaldwellingstockbytenureestimatesengland2012to2015/2021.
[400] Davidovici, "Hybrid Commons".
[401] Tom Archer and Catherine Harrington, *Delivering The Community Led Housing Pipeline In England,* Community Land Trust Network, Community Led Homes, (Nationwide Foundation, 2021), 4. Accessed 21 August 2023. https://nationwidefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Delivering-the-Communtiy-Led-Housing-Pipeline-in-England-FINAL.pdf
[402] Wolf Linder and Sean Mueller, "Consensus Democracy: The Swiss System of Power-Sharing", in Wolf Linder, ed., *Swiss Democracy: Possible Solutions to Conflict in Multicultural Societies* (Springer,

between the commons and finance. With architects experiencing the double bind of practice, the imperative for autonomy is more relevant than ever. In the case of RUSS, the project was primarily financed by residents' mortgages, while supported by voluntary labour. Residents, trustees and volunteers were not compensated for their efforts while sustaining themselves in the financialised city. This financial vulnerability raised the stakes for design, calling for additional considerations and care, taking primacy over design. As discussed in the last chapter of the thesis, the value of the units represented some financial security, which was eventually reflected in design compromises. Brave concepts like Dogma's party wall would be more challenging in this context, as their architectural form skilfully escapes the logic of both private ownership and finance. To be able to offer affordable housing in the future, RUSS had to end with more conventional layouts. This was done with the vision that resale caps would potentially have a long-term impact on future generations of Londoners. Nevertheless, although housing currently being rather conventional, it helped to develop more unconventional spaces around it. In that way, the commons do not only have to exist with and against the publics but also with and against finance.

The complicated relationship between the commons, the state and the market makes an interesting case for the dual nature of architectural practice today. In examples like RUSS, architecture has its place through more traditional (commercial) services, while requiring new specific skills for the coalitional side of the architect-trustee. Sometimes these two sides work together to instrumentalise architecture in the commoning process. A good example is Public Work's project with Loughborough Farm, where the architect uses a commercial development to safeguard a community farm's right to stay on the site. Donna Haraway sees this splitting of one's self as a strength: "the split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history."[403] In that way, the commons become a place where the neoliberal architect can recover from their structural vulnerabilities and find a new agency.

The coalitional experience raises the broader question of what is considered architectural practice. Flora Samuel creates a taxonomy of the social architect's value, which can be summed up in three main directions: producing artefacts of knowing, spatialising change and creating pedagogical models.[404] While these types of social work reflect shared stakes between architects and users to transform reality, these actions do not always share positionality. In that way, the coalitional architect offers something special. Being able to shift between

2021), 167–207. https://doi.org/10.1007%2F978-3-030-63266-3_5.

[403] Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Fem-

the expert and the commoner, they can instrumentalise the embodied difference between these standpoints. With this rather affective register of architectural practice, architecture's social agency can go beyond its long tradition of social determinism. The thesis ran out of time and space to explore this further, however, practice-based methods and more focused research on the experience of architectural practitioners would offer an interesting unexplored territory.

Beyond a site for the exploration of new architectural subjectivity and skills, the thesis argues that commoning projects are a site for architectural innovation. They have existed as long as housing has, often critiquing conventional architecture. They provide a history where non-architects instrumentalised and innovated housing, challenging the mass housing tradition in architecture, and its long-standing traditions of using collective housing for economising or disciplining. By providing a local history of the commons, the work addresses the existing gaps in housing historiography, which helps in reading contemporary commons space within a tradition of grassroots projects. This history is one without architects; and recording it is essential for both learning and unlearning modern notions of owning, producing and governing housing, benefitting both grassroots and architectural actors.

The conclusions of the thesis are by no means exhaustive or generalisable for the London context, not even RUSS CLT. Many participants had to give up along the way, as the process was too lengthy. Their voices could not be included in the work, as my involvement spanned only the project's construction stage. Other participants, such as the discontented voices, are also omitted due to the sensitive nature of the topic and my relationship to the project. Finally, the social tenants, who were not part of the project during my fieldwork, also remain unrepresented. Moreover, due to the busy and stressful nature of volunteering, many participants could not be as involved in the thesis as anticipated. In that sense, a more detailed exploration of how to design more sparing data collection tools might be an exciting direction to engage more traditional disciplinary tools, such as visual representation methods. Other limitations include my volunteering, which took place after the construction of the hub, which was completed just before the pandemic, and before the finalisation of the gardens, which is the central space where local collectivities and relationships to land are (re)produced. Future research might address these limitations by capturing a later and more established moment in the development of the community land trusts, and generally grassroots housing in London. At that moment, the work concludes with identifying urban conditions across the city and provides a theoretical framework and historical foundation practice to

emerge.

Today, housing is still not a common, and not wholly emancipated. Relying on the private capital of the future residents, such projects can, at best, make housing just about "affordable". They may not be as formally pronounced as some of their precursors, like Villa Road. Still, they bring architects and residents closer to emancipation by providing a canvas for future experimentation. Currently, the most crucial spaces where this takes place are not the housing units nor public space but a range of shared spaces that link up different scales and types of collectivities around the project. For RUSS, the neighbourhood gardens, the coalitional hub, the communal laundry, the office, the guest room and the walkways remain critical features of the project where the more coalitional definitions of sharing occur. In the meantime, the financialised unit assets can provide the vehicle to create pockets throughout the city, which could be seen as true commons. Most importantly, by challenging modern institutional definitions of production, ownership and governance, they exemplify more equitable and sustainable models of city-making. Architects are positioned very specifically within this process, being able to reframe their own agency and explore new forms of practice. Here, they navigate between subjectivities to partake in reclaiming the financialised city.

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