Brutal Youth: Colin MacInnes and the Architecture of the Welfare State

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Abstract

Colin MacInnes' London trilogy is known for its prominent focus—unusual in British fiction of the time—on class and racial conflict in mid-century London. Comprised of *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959), and *Mr Love and Justice* (1960), the trilogy plots the complicated enactment of the new welfare-state's reconstruction strategies from the post-war resurgence of slum clearance, to the forced evictions of suburban migration, to the development and erection of alienating council flats. In doing so, MacInnes offers a distinctive take on Londoners' responses to these strategies, demonstrating the way mindful urban planning was shouldered aside by quixotic and hurried resolutions. As part of a vibrant wave of mid-century British writing sensitive to issues of class, race, and gender, MacInnes' fiction scrutinized post-war urban displacement as it happened and without any of the benefit of hindsight. This article, then, highlights the distinctively nuanced perspectives that socially-attuned and class-conscious literature can offer in terms of understanding the tangible impact of space on social stratification.

Keywords:

Architecture, Gentrification, Immigration, Rehousing, Colin MacInnes, The London Novels

Introduction

In a 1971 letter to his publisher, British author and journalist Colin MacInnes floated several potential topics for future writing projects. One topic, listed simply as 'Urban Architecture,' offered to contrast the living spaces of London's post-war architects and planners with the kinds of living spaces they designed and produced for the working poor. Ever the proponent for the marginalized, MacInnes' proposal was transparently caustic, with him remarking that 'I would guess many [developers] live outside the areas they are 'improving'.' (MacInnes 1971). Ironically, the hypothetical questions raised in his proposal were the kind of questions that his early novels had already addressed. Questions such as do modern tower blocks 'become vertical urban slums faster than the older houses they replaced?' and 'What is the social life, if any, in a block holding 200 or more families?' MacInnes' London trilogy not only responds to such concerns but reveals the capacity for the journalistic style of fiction popularized in the late 1950s and early 1960s to offer both critique and analysis of architecture and urban development. Comprised of *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959), and *Mr Love and Justice* (1960), MacInnes' trilogy voiced the concerns of displacing urban communities four years prior to sociologist Ruth Glass' coining of the term 'gentrification' and its entrance into the cultural lexicon. As part of a vibrant wave of mid-century writing sensitive to issues of class, race, and gender, MacInnes' fiction confronted post-war urban displacement as it happened and without any of the benefit of hindsight. This article, then, argues for the uniquely

nuanced perspectives that socially-attuned literature can offer in terms of understanding the tangible impact of space on social position and subjecthood.

MacInnes' trilogy is perhaps best known for its prominent focus on class and racial conflict in mid-century London. In all three texts, gritty, urban realism merges with the immediacy of journalistic observation to provide a socially adroit and experiential reflection of a particularly turbulent moment in British history. Yet, since the trilogy is also preoccupied with concerns of geography and space, there is work to be done to fully articulating MacInnes' skepticism of mid-century urban planning and the post-war rehousing programs informing the narrative's more overt themes.[1] The trilogy elucidates the complexities of the new welfare-state's reconstruction strategies, from the post-war resurgence of slum clearance, to forced evictions and suburban migration, to the development and erection of alienating high-rise flats. In doing so, MacInnes offers a charged perspective of Londoners' responses to these strategies, underscoring the way conscientious planning was shouldered aside in favor of quixotic and hurried resolutions. While MacInnes' trilogy heralds the need for social change, it also indexes the complications associated with imposing structure onto a dynamic metropolis, suggesting that even the author's pluralistic sympathies are innately unsustainable.

The setting of the three texts recount the development of British post-war reconstruction by not only narrating the experiences felt by Londoners at the time, but also through the spatial movements that the texts produce in relation to the city. *City of Spades* addresses issues of racial prejudice and tension surrounding the wave of immigration from the West Indies that followed WWII and continued into the 1950s.[2] The story, largely set within the slums of the capital, stages the initial phases of urban gentrification, yet posits a hopeful, pluralistic London through the integration of two diverse characters. Here, MacInnes moves the reader into the city and down into the sanctuary of subterranean demimondes to simulate the mid-century immigrant experience. *Absolute Beginners* picks up where *City of Spades* left off, introducing a diverse series of teenage characters in search of a new, similarly progressive way of living in the urban metropolis. The text advances analogous concerns of race and class put forth in the first novel while portraying citizens who are increasingly alienated by their environment—be it in their own war-torn neighborhoods, or through displacement into the newly-constructed high-rises on the outskirts of the city. Here, MacInnes' narrator is granted a superior mobility, and the text depicts the horizontal movement out of the city toward the peripheral tower blocks of the mid-century building boom. In *Mr Love and Justice*, the narration moves into the tower blocks themselves, and what follows is a stark plummet down the ladder of social status. Here, MacInnes dramatizes the reality of the rehousing experience posed as a solution to the city's social problems, underscoring the way that such environments only serve to perpetuate the same concerns they sought to eliminate. All three texts represent a city that is struggling to regain its footing following attacks from the war, but one that also enunciates its unique position as poised for reconstruction—both socially and topographically speaking. Given this, the trilogy recounts a milestone in British urban history.

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[1] Thrift & Williams (1987, p. 19) registered a lack of critical analysis around the intersection of space and class, yet progress has been made in the social sciences. Literary analysis, however, is only just beginning to catch up.
[2] It is worth noting here that that the racialized use of the term 'spade' emerged in the Harlem Renaissance, with Claude McKay's novel *Home to Harlem* (1928) using the phrase to reference Black people through slang (O'Conner & Kellerman 2009, p. 128). Although there is good reason to believe that MacInnes fetishized Black identities—specifically given his sexual preference for young black men—both his fiction and nonfiction articulate his full support of a diverse Britain in the post-Windrush era. Despite this, contemporary readers have condemned his use of the term and questioned his motives for doing so vociferously.

As Bentley (2003b, p. 149) points out, MacInnes is a relatively marginalized writer, often omitted from surveys of 1950s writing. In addition, criticism of the trilogy tends to centered on the more evident themes of race and class in his texts, emphasizing plotlines and offering supplementary hypotheses as to why MacInnes is ignored (Blodgett 1976; McKinney 2006). McLeod (2007) reads *Absolute Beginners* by assessing the role of the Thames in the text, locating the river as a metaphor for the fluidity and dynamism of London's citizenry by drawing connections to MacInnes' own insider/outsider status. Bentley (2003a) examines MacInnes' narrators, showing how the author develops an idiosyncratic subcultural voice through *City of Spades'* creative interplay of narration as well as through the slippage of vernacular in *Absolute Beginners*. In a parallel article, Bentley explores the tension of MacInnes' writing on race, noting how his work 'provides an attempt to record or 'speak' in the authentic voice of a 1950s black subcultural identity' while acknowledging that 'this representation stems from a white cultural perspective, resulting in a paradoxical artificial construction of an 'authentic' black voice' (2003b, p. 166).[3] Goulding (2010 online) argues that MacInnes' stylized representation of the Notting Hill riots is lacking, mainly due to the text's insensitivity to the diversity of experience, claiming that the author 'is unwilling to acknowledge the economic and intra-racial background tensions and see the riots as merely Anglo-Saxon hostility towards the colored.' However, it should be noted that MacInnes' clouding of certain historical facts is part of the novel's stylization, allowing for the development of the journalistic voice rather than that of the voice of the historian—a voice that MacInnes specifically delegates to the narrator's father as a means to signify the paralysis of nostalgia.

Two recent articles consider the trilogy in terms of topographic shifts, both suggesting how MacInnes' writing replicates the kind of fluidity and dynamism of the city itself. Wiseman (2015, p. 35) argues that MacInnes celebrates the city as a palimpsest, a portrayal 'that is by turns sentimental, romantic, dreamlike and unapologetically subjective.' The kind of changes underway, Wiseman suggests, allow MacInnes to paint the city's instability as 'a sign of a healthy cosmopolitanism that should be valued above all other aspects of the city' (2015, p. 44). In this regard, MacInnes' appreciation of the diversity is foregrounded but perhaps at the expense of the trilogy's sharp critique of social cleansing and urban displacement. Derdiger (2016) explores the connection between architectural development and MacInnes' work more explicitly, focusing specifically on the way British post-war redevelopment aimed to capture a sense of hope identifiable in MacInnes' writing. Yet, Derdiger's article is limited to *Absolute Beginners* and its naively optimistic narrator, linking the utopian ethos of Brutalist architecture to the development of council housing projects. The ethos of Brutalism as developed by Alison and Peter Smithson, however, was quite removed from the kind of housing actually produced by the London County Council during this time. Furthermore, MacInnes' skepticism of new architecture was laid bare in *Mr Love and Justice* as well as in texts like *London, City of Any Dream* in which his assessment of Brutalist-derived architecture was unambiguous. Still, Derdiger is right to draw such links between MacInnes' work and architecture as evidenced by the texts' representation of space as well as representation seen in his nonfiction and correspondence. Yet, there is still a need to tend to the root concerns of racial and class tension prominent in 1950s and 1960s London: the flawed handling of urban planning and division—a topic to which MacInnes gives us more than enough to chew on.

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[3] Bentley's (2003b) analysis goes deeper than most in terms of race in MacInnes' work, as critics tend to simply acknowledge MacInnes' investment in the topic but stop there. However, MacInnes' personal dedication to issues of race and class is complicated, and, although it should not be overlooked when discussing his work, its complexity situates it as beyond the purview of this particular article.

It should be noted that MacInnes' own relationship to the city plays a key role in comprehending these texts in that, despite being born in war-torn South Kensington, he lived in Australia from the ages of five to sixteen, which, upon return, placed him into a uniquely insider/outsider role. Consequently, his relationship with the city was both one of love and hatred, emphasized through his recollection in Erwin Fieger's *London, City of Any Dream* that 'Beneath the hard, wide Australian sky, and living a far less pampered life than in the tottering fastness of bourgeois Kensington, I was taught to despise the ancient mother town . . . and I partly succeeded in doing so' (Fieger & MacInnes 1961, p. 13). This incongruity is echoed in several of his characters but can also be registered through the uncertainty the trilogy expresses toward the direction in which London is progressing. While MacInnes makes his sympathies known throughout, the texts allow space for hesitation, both expressing hope for the rehousing plans underway as well as suspicion of them. As such, the novels might be read as MacInnes' exercise in working out his relationship to the city inasmuch as the city appears to be working out a relationship to its own citizenry.

Throughout the trilogy, MacInnes illustrates that, within Britain at the time, there was a tacit and complex desire for transformation—a concern that is distinctly observable in *Absolute Beginners* through scenes like the narrator's initial meeting with Mickey Pondoroso, a Latin-American immigrant stationed in the capital who studies 'the British folk's ways in the middle of the century' (24).[4] This transformative desire is made evident when Pondoroso asks about the country's 'position,' referring to the decline of the British Empire and attempts to rebuild a sense of cultural identity, to which the narrator responds that 'her [Britain's] position is that she hasn't found her position' (26). The immediacy of this wish for a new England permeates the trilogy through continual references to dire conditions, such as the narrator's subsequent description of Napoli: 'I tell you, you've only got to be there for a minute to know there's something radically wrong' (47). Whereas each novel speaks to discrete aspects social instability, what is most consistent is the chronological recounting of the shift taking place in relation to London's urban development. In this sense, the author establishes his representation of the evolving cityscape as a barometer through which to evaluate the successes and failures of London's post-war reconstruction plans.

Yet, upfront, MacInnes expresses a noticeable ambivalence toward the nature of these plans, articulated through various characters' responses of optimism that are then contrasted with a grim reality of the way developments emerge. For example, the narrator's father in *Absolute Beginners* expresses assurance, stating, 'Just look at any of the 1930s buildings! What they put up today may be ultramodern, but at any rate it's full of light and life and air. But those 1930s buildings are all shut in and negative' (35). However, this optimism is clearly undermined by the depiction of the alienating high-rises that form the oppressive backdrop in *Mr Love and Justice*. MacInnes expresses this sentiment in his nonfiction also, noting in *London, City of Any Dream* how 'in all this building of rural New Towns to take the superfluous Londoners, and of semi-skyscrapers all over the central areas, there has been a deep social error that may prove fatal unless checked in time' (Fieger & MacInnes 1961, p. 24). As urban spaces and architectural progress take on such a central role in the trilogy, it is helpful to gain a historical sense of how such an urgent desire for transformation emerged, and how rehousing programs were implemented in a manner that originates such ambivalence.

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[4] For the sake of clarity, all page references to *City of Spades*, *Absolute Beginners*, and *Mr Love and Justice* come from *The Colin MacInnes Omnibus* (2005) in which all three texts are collected.

The Need for a New London

The damage incurred through the WWII bombing of London, and the subsequent need for housing reconstruction that followed, initiated a shift in approach toward a more immediate mode of urban planning than what had come prior. From 1940 to 1941, air raids conducted by the German Luftwaffe had targeted several British cities, but it was the capital that received the most concentrated damage—specifically the attacks that began on September 7th in which the city was bombed for the next 76 nights with only a single day of respite. In London alone, the bombing resulted in more than 20,000 deaths, and by October of that same year, the Blitz had left 25,000 citizens homeless and seeking shelter. The initial damage was felt most notably in the East End of the city, but by September, the attacks had moved West, spreading out into suburban areas, and culminating in the most expansive attack on October 15th. This devastation produced an instant need for reconstruction, the responsibility of which fell into the inadequately-equipped hands of local authorities, who, beginning with a series of makeshift shelters, failed to consider any long-term solutions beyond what was immediately required. But as these shelters barely even scratched the surface of the problem, post-war development began to look toward new agendas and strategies for rapid rehousing and repair within the capital.

At the time of this bombing, slum-clearance projects were ongoing, addressing rising concerns of over-congestion and pollution. Increasing through the 1920s, they culminated in the 1930 Slums and Housing Act, which saw the establishment of a systematic agenda of clearance that lasted up until the beginning of the war. Fundamentally philanthropic, the galvanizing of slum-clearance programs coincided with the emergence of Liberal welfare reforms indicative of the shifting tide of British politics in which the conventional wisdom of 1930s laissez-faire economics gave way to the more socialist and left-leaning trajectory of Clement Attlee's Labour Party (1945-1951). Stemming from the 1942 Beveridge report, the kind of post-war altruism that formed under the new governance spoke to the national desire to preserve a communal British spirit. As Bullock (2002, p. 11) observes, reconstruction as a municipalized project was underway in other areas like education and health reform, so architectural reformation offered a tangible, material response to rebuild the physical landscape while addressing the more abstract notion of a national identity. This was to be accomplished through an itinerary of reconstruction where architectural planning would encompass the conservation of the past and merge it with progressive, forward-thinking design to reaffirm Britain as a leading world power.

City of Spades and Strategies of Gentrification

City of Spades tells the parallel stories of Johnny Fortune, a newly-arrived eighteen-year-old Nigerian meteorology student, and Montgomery Pew, a twenty-six-year-old white welfare worker, recently appointed to the role of Assistant Welfare Officer in the Colonial Department and in charge of handling Fortune's case. MacInnes places these counterpart narratives in alternating succession to contrast the two characters' experience of the city, but also to register a number of potential similarities, suggesting how two seemingly-different worlds might integrate—a gesture that denotes the author's desire for a culturally progressive London in contrast to the racial tensions that existed. In this first text, racial integration is addressed in a frank manner, forming the central component of the narrative through the technical choice of splitting the narration along color lines—one that might be read as emblematic of the desire to progress to a more pluralistic identity. Yet, for all its emphasis on the problems of racial integration, it is difficult to read this text without considering the role that the urban

environment plays in perpetuating such anxieties of difference, as well as the creation of spaces in which assimilation might occur. Indeed, MacInnes uses setting as a mechanism through which to examine the two narrators' experiences of the city by placing them both into new, alien environments: Fortune within an unfamiliar milieu that will inform his questionable vocation; and Pew, within a new vocation that affords him access into a new social world. In this sense, both are topologically balanced in the narrative, but also in the form of the text itself. However, as MacInnes demonstrates, even when the narrators' paths cross and their experiences conflate—as made perceptible in the closing scene—the balance is considerably tipped in Pew's favor, corroborating the narrative's prominent critique of racial inequality.

In this text, MacInnes paints a vivid picture of reconstruction's inability to address the needs of its populace, signaled early in Fortune's portentous disappointment with the reality of post-war London: 'And I must say at first it was a bad disappointment: so small, poky, dirty, not magnificent! Red buses, like shown to us on the cinema, certainly, and greater scurrying of the population than at home. But people with glum clothes and shut-in faces' (13). Many of the tenements are described as reduced to rubble, whereas others are in states of severe dereliction. Despite this, a number of these bombed-out buildings are still inhabited by key figures of the criminal underground that Fortune becomes associated with: Billy Whispers' dilapidated Brixton home is surrounded by urban decay, 'much like one tooth left sticking in an old man's jaw' (26), and the home of Muriel and the Hancocks—largely anonymous within the uniform tenements of Maida Vale—is also depicted as crumbling to the ground. At the time of the novel's setting, slum clearance had long since been interrupted by WWII, and pocket areas of the city marked for assistance through repair or rehousing were abandoned in lieu of the high-rise building boom generally considered a more expedient and economical method of addressing the issue.

Hanley (2007, p. 51) posits that early attempts at slum clearance were mostly altruistic, in which 'two generations of slum dwellers were lifted from cellars and tenements into seemingly vast new houses that lengthened their lives and transformed those of their children.' The significance of this moment, she adds, is that it provided a glimpse of the London City Council acting in a way only previously seen by charities in that the wellbeing of the city's inhabitants was of utmost importance (2007, p. 56). However, a mid-century swing toward a more conservative governance with market-driven economics in mind shifted clearance policies away from philanthropic ideals toward a more entrepreneurial project in which possible commercial development plans could also be taken into consideration while attempts were still being made to rehouse. Marcuse (1986, p. 154) traces the social effects of such a shift, noting that 'Both abandonment and gentrification are directly linked to changes in the economy of the city, which have dramatically increased the economic polarization of the population. A vicious circle is created where the poor are continuously under pressure of displacement.' He continues to note how 'abandonment of an entire neighborhood occurs when public and/or private parties act on the assumption that long-term investment in the neighborhood, whether in maintenance and improvements or in new construction, is not warranted' (1986, p. 154). The result was that, rather than repairing obliterated neighborhoods for repopulation by their original inhabitants, approaches emerged by which to bleed an area of both inhabitants and cultural identity—especially in areas deemed desirable for future commercial interest. Withholding assistance based on bureaucratic process, it seemed, would do the trick. For MacInnes, this deprivation (a theme that all three of the novels respond to in various ways) was tantamount to the demise of the city's spirit in that the effect of gentrification—be it through abandonment or displacement—'is to deprive the city of its heart-beat' (Fieger & MacInnes 1961, p. 25). Yet, the setting that MacInnes presents in *City of Spades* appears not only abandoned, it seems that

through the implementation of various forces, social cleansing has begun in that the inhabitants are forced to go elsewhere or simply die where they are.[5]

One way this process seems to occur is through the funneling of significant amounts of incoming migrants into such areas as a means to overcrowd them and to stoke antagonism.[6] Fortune's arrival into the city, despite his ability to pay for better accommodation, places him straight into a welfare hostel that Pew describes as 'quite dreadful,' to which the upper-class BBC journalist, Theodora Pace adds, 'It probably is. All hostels are. They're meant to be' (35). This premeditated unpleasantness is underscored when Pew informs Fortune that the reason he would not find any other accommodation is because of racial prejudice still rampant at the time (17). Furthermore, as a region designated for both abandonment and overpopulation, it necessitates forms of escape. Fortune's friend Hamilton, for example, has fled the area and now lives in the suburb of Holloway in a quiet residence owned by another Nigerian. But the triumph of his 'escape' is undermined as we learn that, upon leaving, he took his prior escape mechanism along with him—the heroin addiction he had developed while in the city. In this sense, drugs mark a getaway for those who cannot physically escape the squalor and hopelessness. Furthermore, demimondes arise in the shape of underground clubs and other leisure spaces such as The Sphere, The Moorhen, and The Cosmopolitan dance hall—all spaces that Pew suggests Fortune avoid as a way to stay out of trouble. Yet these are spaces that are also rendered unstable as part of clearance endeavors, prone to police raids and shutdowns due to 'moral degeneracy' (122), metaphorically aligning them to the crumbling environment in which they operate. Consequently, even refuge within self-created sanctuary is under the thumb of the forces of gentrification bearing down upon it.

MacInnes advances this theme of abandonment and entrapment throughout the trilogy, but in *City of Spades*, it is most noticeable in portrayed attempts to displace the migrant characters resulting in a disheartened Fortune's return home at the novel's close. But this urge to displace is not limited to characters who bear the brunt of racial prejudice; even Pew himself experiences the imminent mechanisms of gentrification and capitalist growth within parts of the city marked for commercial redevelopment. Lund (1996, p. 42) indicates how the 1957 Rent Act sought to deregulate rent control within desirable neighborhoods as an experiment in free market economics, and this is reflected in Pew's recounting of the legal battle he and Theodora faced when attempting to remain in their Regent's Park flat in which the landlords viewed them 'like twin birds in an abandoned dovecote, and sat waiting . . . for our deaths—or for some gross indiscretion by which they could eject us' (33). As Wood (2012, p. 48) states, following the Rent Act, the humane treatment of citizens took a sharp turn away from the philanthropic aims of pre-war rehousing plans, instead becoming embroiled with potential commercial redevelopment led by 'an increasing reliance on the private sector and market forces.' Therefore, MacInnes makes it apparent that the transformation of the city at the hands of malevolent developers is color blind, and that inner-city areas suitable for future commercial

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[5] During the time of MacInnes' writing, the term 'gentrification' was not yet in common usage. Although the practice can be identified throughout history, it was not until the mid-1960s that the term was codified by British Sociologist Ruth Glass while writing about then-contemporary London—specifically the displacement of the working class to Islington. Thus, MacInnes' depiction is impressive considering that the phenomenon had yet to be reified, granting these texts an additional notion of import in that they exemplify the experience of gentrification that Glass developed.

[6] This trend is recognized by Williams (1986, p. 60) who remarks that neighborhoods that experience these waves of immigration become 'host communities, serving as models for assimilation into the country.' This leads, however, to a degree of antagonism in that both the neighborhood and its local politics are essentially reconstructed. This is most prominently shown in *City of Spades*, but it plays a central theme to the tensions that undergird MacInnes' concerns.

development, exercise this displacement regardless of ethnic make-up. This, of course, can be understood as another gesture of racial integration on behalf of the author in that it breaks down the racial divide, forming instead an 'us against them' approach between the disenfranchised citizens and the larger establishment.

These impulses to leave the city with no concrete options of where to go permeate the text, resulting in the development of zones of perpetuated crime such as Brixton, the East End, and Fortune's place of residence—The Immigration Road that he describes as 'the queen of squalor' (113). Furthermore, they result in the disillusionment that MacInnes traces from the transition of Fortune's buoyant optimism to the breaking of his spirit following his imprisonment in which he emerges 'a rather bitter and less kindly person' (233). MacInnes' depiction of this entrapment (most prominently demonstrated in *Mr Love and Justice*) is conveyed through the desperate acts committed by many of the characters that keep them within a vicious cycle of criminality, but is perhaps most poetically rendered when Fortune and Muriel briefly 'escape' from the city on a boat ride up the Thames, taking in privileged views of London from outside of the slums, only to be bluntly reminded by the boat's operator that they will be returned exactly where they came from once their ride is over (106).

Structurally, *City of Spades* dramatizes the way redevelopment has turned to a strategy of abandonment by keeping the narrative perspective grounded within the slums themselves. At this time, high-rise development as a proposed solution to many of these issues had long been in effect, but the novel keeps their depiction largely hidden in order to further amplify the impression of limited windows of opportunity. Yet, the notion of the urban environment in a transitional and progressive state is unmistakably foregrounded through the text's stressing of racial integration via the assimilation of the two disparate characters' worlds. This conflation is most saliently observed in one of the few depictions of architectural progress in which MacInnes' own ambivalent relationship to redevelopment can be identified as concealed within a passage narrated by Pew:

> The eighteenth-century houses looked graceful, mouldering and aloof. Beside an electric power station, that had intruded itself among them, I stopped: and wondered whether the time had now come to 'cut out', as Johnny Fortune might have said, from the society of the Spades. *They* were wonderful, of course— exhilarating: the temperature of your life shot up when in their company (152, emphasis added).

Here, MacInnes renders his subject ambiguous, with the reader left unsure if 'they' refers to the eighteenth-century houses or the inhabitants of 'the society of the Spades.' Given his interest in spatial manifestations of class, the conflation does not seem accidental.

> But if you stole some of their physical vitality, you found that the price was they began to invade your soul: or rather, they did not, but your own ideas of them did—for they were sublimely indifferent to anything outside themselves! And in spite of their *joie de vivre*, in any practical sense they were so impossible! 'They're dreadful! They're just quite dreadful!' I shouted out aloud, above the slight hum of the dynamos (152-3, emphasis in original).

As the paragraph continues, so does the conflation in that Pew appears to be discussing the society, but it also reads as a commentary on the way post-war housing emphasized surface and over substance. Given that this passage is bookended by references to technological

development, MacInnes renders the paragraph's subject intentionally ambiguous by switching the focus from architecture to Fortune to the members of the society, making it difficult for the reader to comprehend whether or not Pew is thinking about the integration of post-war rehousing, or the assimilation of immigrant races into a new conception of the city. Given that Pew's job has provided him with a privileged opportunity to mingle with ethnic cultures, in addition to his own experience of the incipient forces of gentrification, MacInnes' conflation of the two subjects as signifying the need for progressive change is undeniable. By maintaining this slum-based perspective, what City of Spades hints at but does not portray with the same clarity that the subsequent novels do, is the appearance of a rehousing strategy—the result of an intense bureaucratization of urban development that leads to the advent of a new style of architecture—one whose characteristics, for better or for worse, will transform the experience of London.

Absolute Beginners **and Bureaucratic Utilitarianism**

Prior to the Labour Party's majority rule, the country saw little support for urban development, due in part to Winston Churchill, who viewed extensive reconstruction as futile while the war was still in effect. Yet pressure from the public, charity organizations, and the drafting of the 1940 Barlow Report,[7] led to the implementation of a central planning commission whose specific role was to address the city's post-war devastation and develop new solutions immediately. Given the public's new emotional investment in redevelopment as a way to renovate British character and demonstrate bureaucratic welfare-state ideologies, the Barlow report also led to the appointing of John Reith and the Ministry of Works—a department specifically focused on the appropriation of property and Government building projects,[8] who, for guidance, turned to a variety of reconstruction and development groups comprised of disparate individuals from an array of professional backgrounds (Bullock 2002, p. 12). With each group bringing an assortment of ideas to the table, a funneling of creativity led to the circulation of pamphlets, resulting in the 1943 establishment of Reith's Ministry of Town and Country Planning—that Bullock (2002, p. 14) recognizes as the most developed bureaucratic expression of a national planning system at that time.

1942 saw the creation of the Dudley Committee—a program ushered in by the Minister of Health seeking to evaluate living conditions and post-war housing standards in concert with national planning strategies. Housing redevelopment was reevaluated in consideration of botched plans following WWI in which strategies of urban planning had failed, largely due to an inability to sufficiently consider topography in relation to reconstruction, resulting in criticism that 'new housing . . . lacked any vestige of community' (Bullock 2002, p. 16). With large sections of the populace in desperate need of rehousing, combined with a new focus on spatial logistics and infrastructure, pragmatic solutions of prudence and speed were once more stressed as priorities for Reith's disparate think-tank, which inevitably failed to produce any cohesive solution (Bullock 2002, p. 19). All of these mounting concerns would need to be addressed as a whole—and the best approach to do so, it seemed, would be through the implementation of an all-inclusive state-run urban redevelopment program that favored inexpensive, swift construction, could alleviate the mounting pressure of mass-rehousing, and

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[7] Formed by Neville Chamberlain in 1937, the 1940 report of the Barlow Commission on the Geographical Distribution of the Industrial Population was, at least in part, responsible for an investigation of urban density that inevitably influenced governmental intervention and instigated a system of planning to address post-war concerns. In other words, it signified a new bureaucratization of rehousing strategies.
[8] This was later to be renamed as the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works in 1962.

whose form would mirror the British papulation's desire to appear traditional as well as forward-thinking.

As the war drew to a close, discussions in the field architecture had turned toward to more utilitarian concerns, partly due to an emerging tension between an older generation of architects and a younger school that drew its inspiration from forward-thinking and avant-garde designs. Amongst these younger architects was the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS), founded in 1933 and affiliated with (and later thought to be the British wing of) Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne, or CIAM (1928-1959)—itself a collective of international architecture and planning congresses. The MARS group subscribed to the utilitarian and functionalist ethics laid out by the work of CIAM forerunners, Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, focusing on material, production, and standardization—a machinic approach that stood in stark contrast to the more hand-crafted architectural design that had existed prior. Although many of the group's large-scale plans never made it beyond the proposal table, their affiliation with the editorial board at the *Architectural Review* allowed for several independent ideas to go into circulation, raising questions about what the new British architectural design should resemble. So, prior to incipient gentrification depicted in *City of Spades*, a notable shift can be determined from a government whose involvement with redevelopment had been lax to the development of an overly-bureaucratized series of redevelopment programs that looked toward avant-garde planning and utilitarian design for inspiration. Consequently, architectural enterprise appeared as the resolution to a number of the country's problems through strategies of rehousing that, over the next two decades, would move the citizens of war-torn London up and out of the city center.

In *London, City of Any Dream*, MacInnes discusses Hampstead and Highgate—topographically elevated regions situated about five miles northeast of the urban center, noting that, despite the cleaner air, 'The Thames is far away: distantly visible . . . as a silver, winding nerve; and far away from the river a Londoner may lose his center of human gravity' (Fieger & MacInnes 1961, p. 27). MacInnes, clearly, is skeptical of potential alienation of urban displacement, but 1962—the year that Fieger's book was released—represented the mid-point of London's high-rise building boom, marking MacInnes' pointed criticism of rehousing programs as relatively prescient given that the country's collective hatred of such buildings had not yet fully calcified. While MacInnes' aversion to the London City Council's development plans was fully realized, for much of the country, the jury was still out as to how effective they would be. Consequently, reading the trilogy simulates not just the trajectory of government rehousing programs, but also the course of public expectation from the buoyant optimism of governmental solutions to the nightmarish result of such solution's implementation. Despite the urban abandonment of *City of Spades*, there is a sense of hopeful optimism that permeates various characters and continues on into *Absolute Beginners*, before arriving at the suburban desolation of *Mr Love and Justice's* concrete city. The displacement into mass housing—housing that Hanley (2007, p. 11) labels as 'holding cages for the poor and the disenfranchised'—is chiefly what MacInnes tackles in this intermediary text; yet he expresses a degree of optimism that speaks to a conceivable pluralism of London-in-transition through the use of a naïve, but hopeful voice in the form of the narrator. Whereas the spatial perspective in *City of Spades* is relatively myopic, here the reader is given a new standpoint that is as fluid and dynamic as the 'winding nerve' of the Thames itself.

In *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes shifts to a more traditional narrative role of the single narrator, yet the voice he establishes in this text is especially striking in that it signifies a form of youth that is ultimately hopeful and optimistic of a future London where integration has

become the norm. A central theme, as indicated in the book's title, is the transition from one state into the next, portrayed most prominently in the unnamed narrator's evolution from the status of a teenager to an adult. Furthermore, the narrator has the ability to move sinuously through various regions of London that might ordinarily be considered dangerous or problematic given the tension in the air at the time. However, marking once more the most consistent representation of transition within the trilogy, *Absolute Beginners* speaks to the bildungsroman of the city itself, focusing on territory, displacement, and the alienation that results.

In contrast to the ground-level perspective of *City of Spades, Absolute Beginners* opens with an especially striking depiction of elevation, in which the protagonist and his friend Wizard are given a privileged perspective over the city:

> But twisting slowly on your bar stool from the east to south, like Cinerama, you can see clean new concrete cloud-kissers, rising up like felixes from the Olde Englishe squares, and then those gorgeous parks, with trees like classical French salads, and then the port life down along the Thames, that glorious river reminding you we're on an estuary, a salt inlet really (11).

Considering its prominent place at the outset of the text, this passage is telling of the city's own coming of age in that the juxtaposition of new construction amidst the old is already underway, with the author registering an initial ambivalence through his description of the new high-rise developments as 'felixes'—otherwise known as VB-6 missiles. Furthermore, through the use of 'Cinerama,' this perspective—essentially elevated and outside of the city itself—infers the kind of alienated distancing that forms a dominant complaint among those rehoused into the 'concrete cloud-kissers.' Yet this passage also registers two separate ways of experiencing the city: when on the ground, it is a network of zones whose demarcation forms a territorial map of regions; but when viewed from above, those regions dissipate in favor of a more expansive survey of an unbroken, inclusive city that echoes Michel de Certeau's 'Walking in the City.'[9] That the narrator experiences this deterritorialization early in the text denotes his own role as a figure who, when on the ground, can move from zone to zone with ease and whose documentary eye allows for a new perspective that is basically at street level but also has the capacity to sweep across the city, surveying the territories as a whole. In doing so, the narrator represents the author's conception of the contemporary flaneur through his forward-thinking approach to urban life.

In the same text, MacInnes further develops his emphasis of marked territory in a manner that speaks to the subdivision of the city for rehousing and gentrification purposes. Pimlico, conveyed as the 'dear old ancestral home' that the narrator no longer wishes to visit, is described as being 'killed off' through abandonment: 'It's dying, this bit of London, and that's the most important thing to remember about what goes on there' (45). But not only has the region been left to rot, MacInnes' account suggests that it has been hemmed in by surrounding modernity. Describing the triangular intersection of the rough Harrow road, the Grand Union canal, and the railroad out of the city, the narrator remarks that:

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[9] 'Walking in the City' is a chapter in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) in which de Certeau distinguishes between the experience of the city on the street level and one's ability to take in a city as a whole, be it through a map or a bird's eye view. For de Certeau, street-level navigation relies upon a series of cultural transactions that impinge on one another.

These three escape routes, which are all at different heights and levels, cut across one another at different points, making crazy little islands of slum habitation shut off from the world by concrete precipices, and linked by metal bridges. I need hardly mention that on this north side there's a hospital, a gas-works with enough juice for the whole population of the kingdom to commit suicide, and a very ancient cemetery with the pretty country name of Kensal Green (46).

Clearly, this mirrors the transition in slum-clearance policy from the philanthropic project of the early 20th century, to the mid-century notion of designating areas for financial gain through passive gentrification. Given the Dudley Committee report's stressing of the need for infrastructure in redevelopment, Pimlico might represent an ideal location for the construction of council housing due to its links to the aforementioned transportation. Yet, as the novel depicts, this is an area that has simply been left to die, presumably taking its inhabitants along with it. However, whereas the bulk of *City of Spades* was very much tailored to a similar world of decay, the mobility of the central character in *Absolute Beginners* offers the additional view of gentrification already underway within the capital such as Suze and Henley's new Bayswater home in 'a trio of Victorian bourgeois palaces that have been made over into flatlets for the new spiv intellectual lot' (88).

Absolute Beginners also illustrates the way that some of the city's residents are displaced through rehousing policy, underscoring the psychological trauma and alienation that accompany such a process. When the narrator heads to the river to 'get a breather,' he stands in close proximity to a new development that he describes as 'high blocks of glass-built flats, like an X-ray of a stack of buildings with their skins peeled off' (41). And it is here that the narrator meets Edward the Ted—a disenfranchised Teddy Boy, enervated by the separation from his gang following the 're-owsing' of his mother into the new tower blocks. As the narrator interrogates Edward in true documentarian style, we learn that his old gang had been disbanded, decanted into the various new developments emerging around the city. MacInnes takes this opportunity to describe the once fearless Teddy Boy as broken down: 'At this point, our valiant Edward looked scared, and glancing about him at the flat blocks, which towered all round like monsters, he said, 'The click's split up'' (43).

Through a continued representation of neglect, even the character's own adopted home of Notting Hill is primed for redevelopment—the kind of redevelopment that today makes it one of the most exclusive post codes in the city. In contrast to Suze's fully gentrified home in Bayswater, the narrator describes his 'Napoli' as being in a state of disrepair that renders it almost uninhabitable: 'huge houses too tall for their width cut up into twenty flatlets, and front facades that it never pays anyone to paint, and broken milk bottles *everywhere* scattering the cracked asphalt roads like snow' (47). Yet it is the narrator's ability to poeticize such dereliction that echoes his privileged stance as both within and above the city through his journalistic outlook. And it is this progressive (albeit naïve) outlook—clearly a metaphor for integration—that charges him with a degree of fluidity, allowing him to pass from space to space unlike many of the other characters such as Edward the Ted, or even his own family, who are basically forced to leave or are trapped and left to die (as is the case with his father) within the confines of their demarcated zones.

This progressive fluidity, then, echoes MacInnes' hopes for a recuperation of his own experience of London. As the narrator reflects on his love for the city despite its negative aspects, he remarks that mobility comes through a form of mastery: 'if you can get to know

this city well enough to twist it round your finger, and if you're its son, it's always on your side, supporting you' (80). Derdiger (2016, p. 58) argues that *Absolute Beginners* 'represents London in the late 1950s as a site of a newly vertically built environment that enables potentially revolutionary physical as well as cultural mobility for a multiethnic and sexually diverse urban population' adding that the text 'revises interwar metropolitan writing and modernist tropes such as the flaneur to represent the promises of a newly mobile experience of London life.' Yet the narrator of *Absolute Beginners* seems to be somewhat of an anomaly, as a number of the characters represented—at least the characters who have transitioned out of youth—are clearly disaffected by their environments. MacInnes develops this disaffection much more in *Mr Love and Justice*—a text that sets mid-century rehousing and grim, institutionalized high-rise living as the target of its critique.

Cutting Corners: The Rise of Welfare-State Architecture

The initiation of an explicitly utilitarian design aesthetic within mid-century rehousing projects reflects the authoritative role established by the MARS group in the 1940s, but the thrust and dissemination of these designs is due, more so, to the group's association with the aforementioned CIAM—undoubtedly the most prominent and influential organization leading the way to a socialist model of architecture. Founded in 1928, CIAM spearheaded a turn away from the formal aesthetics of prior architectural movements, promoting instead what Frampton (2007, p. 269) lists as a pragmatic program of 'building rather than architecture' whose quality of construction was based not on craftsmanship per se, but on 'the universal adoption of rationalized production methods.' Yet, throughout its lifespan, CIAM drifted back toward an academicized heritage of formal canonicity, shifting away from initial socialist sympathies surrounding the quality of living standards to a conscious emphasis toward larger-scale city planning and into a final stage that, returning to a focus on formal design, sought to address the problem of the aesthetic sterility that grew out of the overly-serviceable and functionalist design. Throughout these shifts, CIAM's membership grew divided between those who favored the return to a more erudite 'establishment' approach, and those who viewed this return as a betrayal of early CIAM's socialist inclinations. The latter group, led by Alison and Peter Smithson (as well as Aldo van Eyck), whose critique held that later CIAM's focus veered too far from the emphasis on community and 'belonging' (Frampton 2007, p. 271), headed the schism of CIAM that resulted in the formation of the Team X splinter group and eventually developed into the parallel architectural movements of Dutch Structuralism led by Aldo van Eyck, and the New Brutalism, led by the Smithsons.[10] But it was the prominent centrality of these splinter groups' ideas, circulated in leading journals of the time, that hypothesized a return toward architectural solutions to solve social problems—a concern that CIAM had clearly moved away from in its later years. Thus, the basis for the government-sponsored new architectural style drew inspiration from Team X, as it appeared that the Smithsons and van Eyck's designs spoke to analogous social concerns facing mid-century London: the concerns of mass rehousing; of the aesthetics of a modern identity; and of desire to reshape the social landscape in a more communal, assimilated manner. However, it is also during this period that

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[10] Banham (1966) offers an expansive discussion of the way the Brutalist mode can be read as two sides of the same coin, tracing the development of the Smithson's ideas as they began to emerge in *Architectural Digest*. He reveals the way Brutalism finds its inspiration less in the mechanical organization of Le Corbusier's social units, and more in primitivism. Whereas Le Corbusier's Unité focused on the self-enclosed plasticity of the social condenser model (see footnote 13), the Brutalists considered the way their designs would interact with an existing milieu—an impetus conveyed by the Smithsons (1957, p. 113) in a contribution to *Architectural Design* in which they exclaimed that 'From individual buildings, disciplined on the whole by classical aesthetic techniques, we moved on to an examination of the *whole* problem of human associations and the relationship that building and community has to them.'

political investment in philanthropic redevelopment became destabilized in anticipation of the switch in governance back to more conservative, market-driven imperatives.

The architectural style of the high-rise that emerged during this time references the utilitarian traits of Le Corbusier's plans established in CIAM but refracted through the more Brutalist lens of the Smithsons. Dunleavy (1981, p. 57) indicates how, after 1945, innovation in rehousing design lost its importance in favor of a more pragmatic, massifying program of 'social responsibility' in which the design itself was thought to produce 'desired forms of social behavior.' These designs, Dunleavy adds, respond to a kind of housing that 'made no pretension to any significant architectural qualities' (1981, p. 57), and can be characterized as subscribing to the Brutalist mode of the Smithson's manifesto. Here, design is posited as unobtrusive by a repetition of geometry, in addition to expansive use of plain cement—not dissimilar to the designs that came from early CIAM. But, whereas earlier plans emphasized the sublime qualities of monumental cement, Brutalism sought a more transparent approach through minimalist aesthetics as a way to shift the emphasis from the buildings themselves to the kind of social relations they might foster. Banham (1966) suggests that the Brutalist style that developed—the aesthetic most clearly identifiable in much of the high-rise development of the post-war rehousing boom—is constructed on a series of social ethics, perhaps even more so than a specific formal approach. However, as shall be seen, when placed into the hands of council developers whose interests resided primarily in profit, such ethics were left behind leaving only the aesthetic to remain, resulting in buildings that proved to be woefully inefficient on a multitude of levels.

In January of 1955, as the result of a changing of the editorial guard, Alison and Peter Smithson's previously-scorned proposals of 'New Brutalism' were published in *Architectural Design* for the first time. Etching out a subcultural relationship to the dominant architectural model of social housing, the Smithson's manifesto encouraged a review of the socialist contribution of the International Style of Le Corbusier and CIAM, reiterating the redundancy of form alone, and calling for a return to early CIAM's ideologies. The Brutalist manifesto expressed frustration over the old guard's privileged role in the world of architecture as the 'establishment' and argued for the development of a modern style in which moralist and socialist attitudes could be integrated within the design itself. Banham (1966, p. 47) shows that, ironically, this integration of a strikingly-austere minimalism has its origin in poverty: 'they saw, in Mediterranean peasant buildings, an anonymous architecture of simple, rugged geometrical forms, smooth-walled and small-windowed, unaffectedly and immemorially at home in its landscape setting.' Further, the term 'Brutalist'—initially penned by Hans Aplund in response to housing plans by Swedish architects, Bengt Edman and Lennart Holm—is difficult to separate from the primitive sensibilities of Art Brut and Arte Povera, characterized also by Brutalism's reliance on béton brut, or unfinished concrete. In this respect, the Brutalist ideology can be read as a manner by which to merge the high art of the modern architectural style, with the everyday functionality and usage of common society—an impulse established by the Smithson's prominent role in the 1953 exhibition, *The Parallel of Life and Art* in which mass and high culture were intimately intertwined. While the incorporation of the Brutalist focus on minimal materials and béton brut facades, combined with the utilitarianism of Le Corbusier's Unité[11] both signified the architectural schism taking place at that particular

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[11] The Unité d'Habitation is a modernist residential housing unit built close to Marseille at the end of the 1940s. In this design, Le Corbusier internalized his larger ideas for total urban planning, compressing them into one building. Designed to house all the amenities that habitation would require—including internal walkways designed to substitute the social space of streets—the Unité still functions and is considered a desirable place to live, but mainly due to its namesake more than the design itself.

moment, it also finalized the move toward an efficient and expedient agenda for the City Council's rehousing needs through the development of buildings constructed from prefabricated materials, demonstrating an austere utilitarianism which vetoed any flourish that might be identified as decorative. Alton West (1959) and the Loughborough Road Estate in Brixton (1953-57) best demonstrate these designs: futuristic, yet featureless cement slabs whose aesthetic basis can be understood as clear articulations of a Brutalist twist of the Unité. Whereas Le Corbusier sought to make his buildings machines for living, many of the Council's adaptations of the Brutalist aesthetic might be visually interpreted as little more than the packaging that a Corbusien machine might arrive in. And it is here that MacInnes' sociological concerns for such developments are laid bare in that the reader is moved from an environment in which these structures emerge on the periphery, to ones they are forced to inhabit.

Mr Love and Justice as Architectural Critique

Continuing the trajectory of *City of Spades* and *Absolute Beginners*, *Mr Love and Justice* depicts the move from the urban center to elevated, suburban high-rises in order to index the kind of problems they produce. The story deals with similar issues raised in the first two texts, but interrogates the role of race and identity within criminality by offering a white protagonist who succumbs to a corrupt world as a way to escape the mindlessness of his life. Loosely based on the experiences of MacInnes' friend Terry Taylor, the novel explores the binary of pimp and policeman by mobilizing the same structure of the alternating narrative used in *City of Spades*. In *Mr Love and Justice*, role reversal is prominent as the aptly-titled characters develop and their narrative paths converge with Mr. Frankie Love becoming increasingly attuned to social justice while Edward Justice attenuates his own sense of the law to accommodate his love for a woman from a well-known criminal family. As the story unfolds, the two men end up in what Gould (1983, p. 150) terms a 'shoot out' in which the characters are figuratively equalized as they find themselves to be neighbors in the same high-rise estate, equally alienated from the city.

In this text, MacInnes moves the action out of the city and into the vertical streets of the high-rise to place the reader into the role of the displaced protagonists to show how life within urban renewal programs can be uniquely grim and imprisoning. Here, the Teddy Boys of *Absolute Beginners* are institutionalized as corrupt and abusive police officers whose role is not to prevent crime, but to perpetuate cycles of it as job protection. For example, the detective-sergeant responsible for Edward's training prioritizes quantity of arrests over the quality of the conviction, noting that 'the longer you can keep a prisoner from his lawyer the better it's likely to be for your particular purposes' (98). His justification for this is apt given the novel's expansion of the homogenizing effect introduced in *Absolute Beginners*. Whereas prior, an intra-class social hierarchy may have been more pronounced, within urban redevelopment, a degree of leveling takes place in which disparate individuals seek to dominate one another as a response to the kind of subjugation experienced by all: 'you're alone in a cell with a man who you know for certain is evil and anti-social, well, you must establish your moral right to prepare him for punishment as best you can' (99). And establish a moral right he does, punching a harmless suspect 'five or six times very hard in an extremely dispassionate manner in the stomach' (54). Through the harmonizing of Love and Justice, the text highlights this point by presenting two incongruent characters who, under the auspices of the same environmental change, become increasingly indivisible. In aligning them as such, MacInnes moves his critical focus away class difference as the cause of social tension, instead allowing for a clear interrogation of space—specifically space created by woefully-inept bureaucracies whose motivation is one of quick, cheap fixes in which gentrified masses can be cleared from

commercially viable areas under the auspices of social assistance. Consequently, the final novel in the trilogy addresses social deviance, but shifts the focus away from the criminals themselves to illuminate the role that environment and government influence have in creating and maintaining a system of criminality.

Much of the rehousing development of this time was centered upon utilitarian repair work and reconstruction of existing structures that survived the Blitz, yet it was not until the 1950s that the influence of prominent architectural debates could be readily identified (Bullock 2002, p. 83). As a way to try and bridge the divide between a traditional British style and a forward-thinking aesthetic, initial post-war redevelopment projects featured in *Architectural Review* consisted of tenements that sought to merge the traditional British picturesque countryside with rows of three-story modernized blocks characterized by repetition of features and an austerity seen in Swedish modern architecture. Lionel Brett, skeptical of Le Corbusier's Unité, posed the question in a 1949 issue of *Architectural Review* asking how such a merging of tradition and modernity might translate into the monumental. Answering his own question, Brett praised the expansive designs of Pimlico's Churchill Gardens (1948-1950) and Finsbury's Spa Green Estate (1946-1950) as maintaining a modern aesthetic but diverging from the single-level repetition of Le Corbusier's plans, further delineating what would become a blueprint for post-war rehousing design (Bullock 2002, p. 89). Bullock adds that the distinction between pre-WWII developments such as Berthold Lubetkin's Highpoint (1935) and Spa Green is indicative of the shifting directions of modern architecture, with an increased emphasis placed on new materials and a greater sensitivity to tradition expressed in the use of surrounding land (2002, p. 89). But it was the 1949 reformation of the Housing Division of the City Council's architect department—with the development of the Ackroydon Estate in Wimbledon (1950-1953)—that served as the prototype for mid-century high-rise rehousing projects, crystalizing in the 1958 creation of Alton East Estate at Roehampton—widely considered to be the pinnacle of post-WWII rehousing. Constructed in two waves, with inspiration taken directly from Le Corbusier's Unité, the design, equal parts Soviet and Brutalist-inspired, incorporated monumental and austere towers within proximal location to the picturesque Richmond Park. Accordingly, both Ackroydon and Alton East received enthusiastic praise in *Architectural Review,* and the final model for mid-century social rehousing projects took form.

As part of the novel's attempt to socially equalize the two characters, MacInnes outlines supplementary reasons for the kind of displacement experienced by the disenfranchised characters of the first two texts. For example, because of the potential controversy that could emerge from their relationship, Edward and his fiancé are forced to find a sanctuary away from his beat,[12] opting for a new suburban development which, for them, is a step down on the social ladder: 'The flats the girl had in mind were of more recent construction—one of those countless anonymous 1950 blocks which, in spite of their proliferation, have as yet entirely failed to transform London from what it still after years of bombing and re-building essentially remains' (70). Ironically, this turns out to be the same building that Frankie Love and his prostitute girlfriend opt to move into as a social step-up—an aspect of the text that, at least momentarily, appears to move toward the social condenser model of pluralist existence that MacInnes is invested in through his emphasis on the proliferation of the high-rise estate.[13]

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[12] Interestingly, this is not dissimilar from the subterranean enclaves formed in *City of Spades*, only the oppression that Edward faces is institutional and classist in that his fiancé is deemed substandard by the dictates of his environment.

[13] The Soviet Constructivist style, based largely on ideas of avant-garde Russian aesthetics, is perhaps best summarized in the words of Alexander Bogdanov who posited that one of the driving forces of the Soviet style was 'to forge a new cultural unity from the material and cultural exigencies of communal life and production'

Despite the early optimism of the planning stages, concerns about the way high-rise construction might fail to meet intended goals arose in tandem with the buildings themselves. Essentially beacons of modernism-lite, the physical manifestations of progressive British architecture that emerged in the building boom from 1950 to 1970 were almost universally derided.[14] Essentially beacons of modernism-lite, the physical manifestations of progressive British architecture that emerged in the building boom from 1950 to 1970 were almost universally derided. This suggests a severe disconnect between the designs developed through the lineage of CIAM's socialist ideology, and the expedient, capitalistic implementation of such designs in which cosmetic features were adapted but the ethical considerations of social function were broadly disregarded as a means by which to cut corners. Dunleavy (1981, p. 84) states that the cost of construction of high-rise housing was commonly known to be astronomical prior to this development, but with the adoption of the minimalist and prefabricated aesthetics of Brutalism, costs were expected to drop. Yet one of the problems that emerged was that the design and construction of this new form of architecture cut material costs in areas where material costs should not have been cut. One of the most prominent buildings erected during this wave of construction was Ronan Point—a 22-storey block built in 1966 that borrowed many of the principles and aesthetics of the inexpensive 'streets in the sky' philosophy adopted by the London City Council. Only two years after its completion, a kitchen explosion caused a separation between the structural joints that connected the walls to the floors, and part of the building collapsed killing four people and injuring seventeen more. Although reconstructed using stronger supports, the building was demolished in the years that followed—an ironic reflection of the failed regeneration policies following WWI in which superficial repairs were enacted in lieu of long-term planning. But the similar design flaws associated with this wave of construction that left many of the buildings in states of physical dilapidation were a minor concern in relation to the social effect of alienation that the rehousing projects ushered in.[15] As Dunleavy (1981, p. 95) continues to report, almost half of the citizens rehoused in London's development program would have moved back to the slums if given the chance. This is due in part to the physical conditions of the space and the dereliction that followed—a state that Hanley (2007, p. 103) refers to as 'mass-produced barracks.' She adds that, 'Experimenting with new building techniques in the 1950s and 1960s—a time of fecund optimism and a pervasive belief that science and technology would solve the problems inherent in trying to feed and shelter the world's growing population—was tantamount to experimenting with lives' (2007, p. 105). And in this respect, the towers became inverse panoptic totems—beacons of imprisonment whose physical façade would depict the misery that developed within as the béton brut exterior transformed from clinically clean to the dull, gray, and partially-rusted tone of neglect.

(Frampton 2007, p. 160). With their country in a similar state of impoverished destruction following the Russian Civil War (1917-1922), ASNOVA (Association of New Architects)—a rationalist avant-garde professional group from the Vkhutemas school—developed a series of designs that merged pragmatic rationality with futurist thought. Their modernist projects from 1923 to 1935 sought to 'reconstitute the American skyscraper in a socialist form' through the preoccupation and inclusion of 'workers' clubs and recreational facilities designed to function as new 'social condensers'' (Frampton 2007, p. 172).

[14] Leonard Downie Jr., while on leave from the Washington Post, wrote several articles on the state of British architecture during the 1970s.

[15] It is worth noting here the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in which a 1967 Brutalist-style housing block erupted in flames as the result of lax regulation and the kind of corner-cutting associated with mass housing construction of the time. 72 people are known to have died in the fire, and the incident is emblematic of the way low-cost development was favored over safety. Even the aftermath of the incident serves as a reminder of the way class and space intersect, often in tragic ways.

The concerns that MacInnes raised to his editor in 1971 about the state of modern architecture were clearly on his mind in 1960 in that *Mr Love and Justice* paints an equally grim picture of the estate that both Frankie and Edward move into, positing it more as social experimentation gone awry. Edward describes Kilburn as 'equivocal' noting that 'As you walked through its same and peeling (though un-slummy) streets, the facades of the houses hinted, somehow, that all was not as it seemed behind those faded doors and walls' (69). He adds how this façade has become a 'chief feature of whole chunks of mid-twentieth-century London—as, indeed, of many of its inhabitants' (70). Once Edward and his fiancé move in, he begins to notice that his neighbors keep to themselves, describing them as 'potential inhabitants of some vast, imaginary jail' (70). Similarly, when Frankie and 'his woman' move in, nobody questions their unmarried status, with his observation that 'this state of affairs was far from unusual among the tenants as a whole' (74). Whereas this plot structure serves to unite the two protagonists on the same plane, it is also indicative of the way that MacInnes anticipates Hanley's claim that high-rise estates are essentially holding cells for a city's outcast populace. Toward the end of the text, MacInnes advances this notion more explicitly by describing the actual prison cells that hold Frankie as mirror images of high-rise construction: 'And these places are, to be sure, rebarbative enough . . . the nastiest thing about them being not that they have locks and bars, but that they are so utterly, fundamentally *utilitarian*' (148, emphasis in original). MacInnes' conflation of prisons with high-rise developments is unavoidable when the narrator—representing at this point the merged characters of Love and Justice—describes their alienating capacities as 'making escape impossible to the prisoner and of filling his soul with lonely terror and foreboding' (148). The imprisonment felt, in this situation, can be read as little more than a geographically-displaced version of the same alienation and disenfranchisement of the environs of both *City of Spades* and *Absolute Beginners* that stems from perceptible limits placed on social mobility, resulting in the turn to alternative social choices as an escape, signified by Frankie's experience of monotony in which 'time hung heavy on his hands and much ingenuity had to be expended in wasting it without total boredom' (57).

Conclusion

That the Smithson's architectural aesthetic was, in part, inspired by Mediterranean primitive hovels is both ironic and tragic given the kind of development sanctioned by the London County Council. As Dunleavy contends, the tendency for residents to go outdoors and socialize is what was greatly diminished in these buildings, resulting in an increase in respiratory problems. Mental health and emotional wellbeing was also hampered by the forced proximity of strangers in tandem with extreme elevation; and general safety became a concern for many residents whose children had little space to play except within the elevators or stairwells of the building itself. Given the design's original intent to produce a more contented populace, when Banham remarks that Brutalism was more about ethics than a specific aesthetic, it becomes clear that what was incorporated into the rehousing plan was an aesthetic façade alone—a cheap, technological Band-Aid for a grand-scale social problem. Alienation from the city itself was amplified by the fact that many of the buildings constructed lacked basic amenities and the availability of resources such as public transportation and spaces of leisure. Consequently, vandalism and crime—the telltale signs of social and cultural neglect—soared, marking many of the developments as inherently dangerous, sealing the inhabitants within their flats. The cold, unwelcoming aesthetic of the designs only furthered this alienation, and, as Dunleavy (1981 p. 98) remarks, 'Loneliness and social isolation [were] perhaps the most frequently cited adverse aspects of high-flat life.'

Whereas MacInnes' trilogy often conveys his skepticism of mid-century rehousing through imaginative fiction, in *London, City of Any Dream*, he drops all pretenses, condemning the shift from its philanthropic beginnings to free-market development stripped of cultural accountability. Following a lengthy survey of London's architecture that was razed for commercial development rather than restored for cultural sanctity, MacInnes maligns developers as vandals, holding them accountable for larceny of the city's spirit. Yet, as MacInnes often describes the city as a highly organic space, at times appearing to respond to its own citizens' desires, it would seem that attempts at any extensive structured organization associated with pragmatic urban planning would prove challenging—hence the kinds of disenfranchising problems symptomatic of high-rise and council estates to this day. But, given this, the question must be raised as to how MacInnes' own inimitable desire for a framework of pluralistic transformation could be read as distinctive? Whereas the malevolence of indifferent commercialism would be negated, any attempts at imposing structure onto a city as diverse as London will be bound for similar difficulties.

Author Bio

Simon Lee recently received his PhD from the University of California, Riverside, where he researches and teaches 20th and 21st-century British literature. His scholarship explores the ramifications of space and environment on class consciousness and his new book project, *Working-Class Heroics*, centers on the aesthetics of the kitchen sink realism movement of the 1960s. He has published on authors such as John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, Shelagh Delaney, Nell Dunn, and Colin MacInnes in addition to publishing essays and articles theorizing working-class writing. He is currently developing articles on censorship in the British New Wave and the role of nostalgia in Sid Chaplin's Newcastle novels.

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