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# Introduction

IMAGINE YOU ARE sitting in the window seat of a plane beginning its descent into Heathrow Airport. As the plane comes in to land, it flies low over the entire length of London, from east to west.<sup>1</sup> If it is a clear day, it is possible you will be able to see many of the types of spaces whose history this book sets out to tell. First, on the eastern fringes of London, on a marshy, southern bank of the Thames, you may be able to make out a labyrinthine cluster of concrete walkways, imposing tower blocks, and square artificial lakes. This is Thamesmead, a vast public housing project initiated by the Greater London Council, and announced as a triumph of architectural and social engineering. Shortly after its first residents moved into their new homes at the end of the 1960s, the Greater London Council commissioned a documentary about their lives.<sup>2</sup> At one point the film shows a small group of young children gathered in the classroom of a brand-new school erected on the grounds of the development. The children were milling around a graying cube of papier-mâché about two feet high, being encouraged by a beaming teacher to design their own housing project similar to Thamesmead. To Britons alive today, this image of a group of children, happily ensconced within a newly minted utopia and encouraged by a teacher to play modernist planner for the afternoon, seems to belong as much to a lost *ancien régime* as a Napoleonic battlefield or witchcraft trial.

A few seconds later, as the plane continues its course, it will approach the East End of London, an area of former docks and factories that has been transformed by more than thirty years of intensive urban regeneration. The epicenter of this new landscape is the Olympic Stadium, built for the 2012 London Olympics and now, to the horror of many of its fans, the new home of West Ham Football Club. Just to its north, almost the same size as the stadium and built at the same time, is Westfield Stratford City, a monumental shopping mall, one of more than a hundred similar malls owned by the Westfield Corporation across Europe and North America. The mall is a glowing, angular cube, peppered with shards of decorative glass. Inside its cavernous, brightly

lit atriums, more than 250 stores and 65 restaurants face off along miles of concourses. There is a cinema, bowling alley, twenty-four-hour casino, “bio-diversity playground” for children, and concierge service tailored toward elite visitors. It is one of the biggest of its kind in Europe.

Seconds later, and just a mile farther east, the plane will pass over a development that looks from above like a large, red-brick, nineteenth-century factory that has been carefully scrubbed clean. This is the Bow Quarter, a colossal gated housing development that was retrofitted on the grounds of a former match factory and opened in 1988. The match factory, which closed in the late 1970s, was once the stage for the successful 1888 matchgirls’ strike, a canonical event in the annals of British labor history. That year, hundreds of young women rebelled against the brutal working conditions imposed by Bryant and May, a rapacious match-manufacturing firm with factories across the country (and later the world). The women had been working fourteen-hour days, shrouded in toxic clouds of white phosphorous and suffering from disfiguring health conditions. Behind its high walls, the transformed factory has been broken up into more than seven hundred apartments as well as a swimming pool, gym, and restaurant. During the 2012 Olympics, the Bow Quarter became central to the controversial counterterrorism operation that accompanied the games after it was decided that an antiaircraft missile battery would be fitted onto the development’s roof. The matchgirls strike is commemorated by a small blue plaque, which sits beside the development’s tall security gates.

As the plane passes farther west, flying over central London, the curvature of the Thames now fully in view, these types of spaces repeat themselves with gathering intensity. High-density housing estates built in the mid-twentieth century still permeate the city, appearing in stripes through Wandsworth south of the river, gathering in spiked clusters in Fulham and Notting Hill west of the city center, and lining the arterial roads that fan out to the north. These estates persist, despite wave after wave of privatization and demolition. They are interspersed with private, comprehensively planned, high-end residential developments, a substantial number of which will be younger than the jet you are sitting in. Many of these new developments are empty and silent, owned as investments by distant millionaires who will never set foot in them. If you are landing at night, many will be eerily unlit. The flight path may take you directly over the now-defunct Battersea Power Station, a grand 1930s municipal building whose surplus energy was once preserved and used to heat hundreds of nearby homes. It is now almost invisible, obscured beneath a choking tangle of apartments built for the rich. If you take a more northerly route, you may catch a glimpse of what was once the Enfield Royal Small Arms Factory, a government-managed armory built in 1816 that once churned out hundreds of thousands of guns for distribution across Britain’s empire, and from 1989 on

was repurposed as a private housing development. The flight path might also take you over Westfield London on the western fringes of the city center, a shopping mall almost identical to Westfield Stratford City, which is owned by the same international property developer. In 2014, Westfield London, a product of US suburbia, fell victim to an unsanctioned eruption of a different kind of globalization when it was stormed by hundreds of Black Lives Matter activists who staged a “die-in” in the wake of a murder by the police of a young black man in New York.

As the plane begins its final descent over the western fringes of the city, the last thing you might see before touching down is a sudden rush of green. This will be the grounds of Stockley Park, a gigantic landscaped business park developed throughout the 1980s, and so close to Heathrow that its buildings were designed to be seen from above. This business park, with its ambling curvilinear streets, ornamental lakes, and symmetrical coil of low-rise buildings available for businesses to rent, was designed to resemble a patch of Silicon Valley, nestled up against the busiest airport in Europe. Its architects sent delegations to the United States to scour the high-tech complexes of the San Francisco Bay Area, the Research Triangle in North Carolina, and the working landscapes of Atlanta, Denver, and New Jersey for inspiration. Beneath a rumbling chain of landing planes, Stockley Park was designed to map out the future of high-tech, flexible knowledge work in Britain. If you think that the grass looks a little too green and the trees a little too young, that’s because the park is an entirely constructed space, its verdant fields and golf courses having been layered over what was once a gigantic garbage dump.

This book is a history of twentieth-century Britain told through the transformation of its built environment. It tells a story about the rise of a developmental social infrastructure, and its privatization, demolition, and rearticulation under a new neoliberal consensus. It reveals the types of subjects and visions of society that emerged alongside these transformations as well as the new relationships between Britain and the wider world that they entailed. It does so by charting the emergence and spread of six different types of urban space. The first is the industrial estate. These were planned developments that provided footloose industrialists with ready-made factory buildings and infrastructure networks. Initially conceived of by private developers, dozens of industrial estates were built across the country by the state to help solve regional unemployment problems in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The second is the shopping precinct. These were municipally planned shopping centers built in the first three decades after the Second World War to form the centerpieces of new towns or redevelop existing towns and cities. The third is the council estate, the British equivalent of the US public housing project. These were

comprehensively planned, often high-density residential developments, built by the hundreds across Britain throughout the twentieth century but peaking in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The fourth is the private housing estate. These took the form either of an existing council estate whose residents had purchased their own homes from the state or one of the new high-density housing developments that were built by private developers in the late twentieth century. The fifth is the shopping mall. These were a new type of privately owned, fully enclosed retail environment that consciously followed similar developments in the United States. The sixth is the business park, also known as the science park or office park. These were privately built working landscapes designed to house high-tech manufacturing or elite knowledge work.

Taking a cue from US theorist of technology and cities Lewis Mumford, I call these types of spaces “urban forms.” In his book *The City in History*, Mumford concludes a chapter on the history of Rome by indexing all the different types of space that could be found there: “six obelisks, eight bridges, eleven public baths . . . two circuses, two amphitheaters, three theatres, twenty-eight libraries, four gladiatorial schools . . . 290 storehouses and warehouses.”<sup>3</sup> These were discrete, recognizable, and portable types of space. They comprised a familiar set of components that would have been identifiable to all Roman citizens. Although this book opens in the skies above London, we could draw up a similar index of almost every British town or city at the millennium using the six urban forms whose histories this book charts.

The first three forms—the industrial estate, shopping precinct, and council estate, which comprise the first three chapters of the book—helped usher into being a new kind of state between 1930 and 1970, one oriented toward full employment, urban redevelopment, managing consumer demand, modernizing domestic life, and fabricating community out of proximity. The second part of the book shows how these forms were each reinvented in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as privatized and securitized spaces. Private housing estates, shopping malls, and business parks all thrived in the wake of the promarket urban policies introduced by Margaret Thatcher’s government in the 1980s. Unlike Britain’s mid-twentieth-century urban forms, planners and politicians did not expect that these three spaces would contribute to a national project of state-directed development. While Britain’s midcentury urban forms were tailored toward subjects who were malleable and knowable, people whose consumer desires were predictable, or who under the right architectural circumstances could be molded into discrete communities of friends and neighbors, Britain’s late twentieth-century urban forms were not called on to make such claims. Instead of making new subjects, the private housing estate, shopping mall, and business park were planned in order to minimize crime, marshal

infinite reserves of consumer desire, and stimulate inspiration and well-being among elite knowledge workers.

These six forms do not comprise, of course, a comprehensive list. Other candidates could include prisons, schools, hospitals, research laboratories, motorways, football stadiums, and refugee camps.<sup>4</sup> I have chosen these six for two reasons. First, because besides being at home, shopping and working consume so much of our daily lives. It is possible, for instance, to imagine a Briton who lived in the 1960s, in the new town of Harlow, who commuted from a planned housing estate every day to work in the town's industrial estate, while shopping on weekends at Harlow's shopping precinct. Second, I have chosen these forms because they are each, in different ways, a fraught blend of public and private space. Shopping malls have their public concourses and private shops, council estates have their communal corridors and courtyards as well as individual flats, and both business parks and industrial estates wrap individual enterprises in a sheath of collectively managed amenities and landscaped space. Each of these urban forms posed a set of questions about how space itself should be theorized and parceled out, the answers to which changed as time passed. They show how space was the outcome of history rather than merely the terrain on which it unfolded.<sup>5</sup>

Encoded in these six urban forms were the prevailing political, social, technical, and economic assumptions of their age, and each was an agent in reproducing these assumptions. The built environment, however, is also made up of urban forms that have outlived the guiding political assumptions of those that designed them. The urban forms that accompanied Britain's midcentury moment of developmental politics awkwardly endure. The industrial estates have outlasted the regional industrial policies that fostered their growth as well as the forms of light industrial work that they were built to house. The shopping precincts built in new towns and redeveloped city centers after the Second World War are no longer called on to plan precisely for future consumer demand. The hundreds of council estates that still encircle British towns and cities reflect an optimism that new communities could be forged by architecture—an optimism that is no longer felt. I argue that Britain's neoliberal political formation has been characterized by this uneasy interplay between old and new. While the ideas, calculations, and practices of government are prone to rapid and often devastating upheavals, the buildings and plans, factories and infrastructural networks left behind by previous political moments stubbornly remain. In this sense, the built environment can be seen as a giant museum, exhibiting the decrepit and shabby remains of prior means of capital accumulation along with obsolete visions of society.<sup>6</sup> Just as John Maynard Keynes claimed that we are slaves to some defunct economist, our daily lives unfold

in cities and among buildings that were designed and built during times that are radically different from our own.<sup>7</sup>

This book comes in the wake of a revival of interest in the history of Britain's twentieth-century built environment both inside and outside the academy. When it comes to studying the built environment in Britain, history is beginning to catch up to other disciplines, particularly geography but also sociology. Urban histories are shaped at their outset by questions of topic, theory, and scale, and although the subject area may feel superficially similar, the books and articles produced by recent urban historians have been diverse. In recent years there has been a revival of scholarly interest in the history of planning, architecture, and the lived experience of urban life in twentieth-century Britain.<sup>8</sup> Some have written histories of specific towns and cities as synecdoches for broader historical themes and narratives.<sup>9</sup> Others have examined Britain's modern built environment not for its own sake but instead as a source for understanding some of the significant metanarratives of modern British history, including the emergence of an affluent consumer economy, the uneven work of decolonization, or the reproduction or subversion of gendered and sexual identities.<sup>10</sup> There has also been a revival of interest in the history of Britain's twentieth-century built environment outside the academy. The demonstrative inequality of Britain's contemporary housing market along with the encroaching privatization and securitization of public space have led many writers and journalists to reevaluate as well as celebrate aspects of Britain's mid-twentieth-century urban landscape, while others have launched urgent and direct attacks on Britain's present-day failing urban infrastructure.<sup>11</sup>

Building on these important contributions, this book takes a different methodological approach, beginning with particular types of space and moving outward—watching as they develop, mutate, spread, and become implicated in different historiographical questions. This approach allows us to see how these urban forms developed their own autonomy and logic, often escaping the ability of any single actor to contain or shape them.<sup>12</sup> It is another way that we can understand twentieth-century historical change without deferring to the causal primacy of politicians and political parties. The urban forms that I describe were not totalizing machines that instantly brainwashed all who passed through them. Some shopping malls have been reclaimed as spaces for association, dates, protests, or even just killing time. Workers on industrial estates went on strike. Residents of council estates have formed different kinds of communities from those that their planners imagined. Indeed, space has always been used by people in ways that are unanticipated or unsanctioned.<sup>13</sup> Documenting, or better yet, participating in resistance to and reappropriation of these spaces is urgent and important work. While there are instances of

resistance and reappropriation throughout this book, I focus more on the ways that urban space molded its subjects rather than the other way around.

Each chapter of this book tells the history of a different urban form and has a different configuration of structures and agents. One aim of this book is to reveal and chart the fascinating histories of each of these spaces—hopefully showing the historical fragility and downright weirdness of places that have come to feel mundane and familiar to so many of us. There are many subplots, including histories of consumerism, crime control, racial segregation, gendered forms of work, energy and heating, industrial policy, and community formation. Running through all the chapters, however, are also four strands of interrelated thought and argument, which the rest of this introduction will outline.

### Development beyond the Market

The first three urban forms—the industrial estate, shopping precinct, and council estate—each contributed in different ways to the material, social, and economic development of mid-twentieth-century Britain. In this sense, they each did certain kinds of *work*, anticipating and becoming technically complicit in what I call “developmental social politics,” a midcentury state of affairs bound up with welfare and warfare, macroeconomic management, and the nationalization of industry.<sup>14</sup> The decades between 1930 and 1970 saw massive, state-led revolutions in energy generation, transportation, domestic work, warfare, and agriculture. These three forms were a product of this historical moment and opened up new and more radical possibilities for state-directed development.

I shy away from using the common phrases “social democracy” or the “welfare state” to describe this political formation. I do so in order to avoid telling a story about the Labour Party or welfarism, and to escape, as much as it is possible to do so, the specificity of domestic British high politics and its periodizations. After all, similar attempts to manipulate the built environment in the name of public sector development could be found in a variety of radically different political regimes during this time. For example, comprehensively planned, high-density public housing complexes, the likes of which I discuss in chapter 3, were built between 1930 and 1970 by a startlingly diverse range of ideological formations across the world. They feature in Robert Moses’s New York City, Juscelino Kubitschek’s Brasilia, Nikita Khrushchev’s Moscow, and Benito Mussolini’s Milan as well as in 1930s Red Vienna and postwar imperial Hong Kong.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, industrial estates were built in Britain to help solve the problem of unemployment in deprived areas of the country, but they were also built in Britain’s empire in West Africa and the United States’ empire in Puerto Rico. In other words, there is nothing necessarily democratic about this built environment. The term “social democracy,” with its attendant nostalgia, implicit



periodization, and sheen of prelapsarian unity, is a problematic moniker when it comes to portraying Britain's mid-twentieth-century built environment.

Each of these first three urban forms mediated between the state and market, allowing the former to guide the latter in the service of development. Industrial estates were a key part of a broader mid-twentieth-century attempt to control the location of industry. By laying out a grid of factory buildings, canteens, training programs, and infrastructure networks, all owned by bodies founded and funded by the government, they helped the state to channel industry, and therefore jobs and capital, to places like the North East, South Wales, western Scotland, and underdeveloped parts of its empire. In other words, they were the outcome of a state-sanctioned historical geography of British capitalism. They were an admission that the massive economic imbalances between north and south created by the Depression, the collapse of shipbuilding and other industries, and the increasing concentration of new kinds of industrial jobs in the Home Counties and Midlands would not right itself without direct state intervention.

Shopping precincts, meanwhile, acted as instruments for urban development and redevelopment. At a time of increasing anxiety about the social and environmental consequences of unplanned, tentacle-like suburban sprawl, they were a means of re-centering British urban space and purging automobiles from town centers. Their commensurability meant that shopping precincts became go-to centerpieces for many of the more than thirty new towns built by state development corporations after the war. Shopping precincts also allowed planners and politicians to attempt to measure, and thus anticipate and plan precisely for, different types of consumer demand. Given a population of a hundred thousand people, for example, economists, geographers, and urban planners attempted to develop sophisticated models that they believed could predict exactly how many stores selling different products would be required, and make space for them.

Lastly, council housing had removed almost a third of households from the private housing market by 1980. Needless to say, this fact alone was a significant statement about how the lines of relation between the state, the market, and the individual citizen were drawn in the mid-twentieth century. But there were other, subtler ways in which mass council housing posed profound challenges to the market. Many planners and politicians believed that the density and portability of council estates allowed them to modernize domestic life en masse by centralizing and collectivizing various services, such as heating, plumbing, and waste disposal as well as health care and community development. This book will dwell particularly on the surprisingly fascinating, if unglamorous, world of indoor central heating—a novelty for almost all the first generation of council house occupants. The density of new housing estates along with their

ownership by the municipal authorities meant that radical experiments in providing heat and hot water outside the domain of the market could be undertaken. “District heating,” the heating of entire tower blocks, housing estates, neighborhoods, and even small towns with vast boilers, preferably heated with the runoff energy of nearby industry or power plants, was the boldest iteration of this idea.

These three urban forms, then, formed the technical basis for a directed program of modernization. Although architects of the industrial estate and shopping precinct were making spaces for manufacturers and stores—they were not, by any means, “anticapitalists”—many were proud of building frameworks in which individual enterprises could be planned for and closely managed by the state. Some realized, early on, the radical potential of the forms that they were trading in, and in doing so indulged openly in speculations about the different futures that they would enable. For example, Kenelm C. Appleyard, who oversaw the construction of Team Valley, Britain’s first state-owned industrial estate in the 1930s, believed that industrial estates were experiments in practical state socialism. He called for the dismantling of Britain’s entire industrial landscape—in his words, “a slum clearance of factories”—and the relocation of all light industry to government industrial estates. During the 1930s, he also praised the totalitarian governments of Soviet Russia and imperial Japan, and he toured Nazi Germany in 1938 to promote Team Valley. Meanwhile, Victor Gruen, the inventor of the shopping mall, was a socialist refugee who had worked as an architect for the municipal socialist regime in Vienna before fleeing to the United States after the Anschluss. Gruen believed that shopping malls could cure the evils of US suburbia, becoming art galleries, theaters, and community centers. Lastly, during the Second World War, the government’s Building Research Station, a state agency created to research housing and urban planning issues, gathered information about the vast municipal heating systems, powered by industrial runoff, that were built in Soviet Russia during Joseph Stalin’s five-year plans. Impressed by what it saw, the agency recommended that bomb-damaged cities and new towns should be planned around enormous municipal boilers, heated, if possible, by nearby industry. The new technical possibilities that these forms opened up therefore had an accelerating and contagious logic. In some instances, they represented the limit case of Britain’s mid-twentieth-century developmental moment.

## Neoliberalism and Thatcherism

During her eleven years in power, Thatcher unleashed an urban transformation that was arguably more profound than anything that has been seen before or since in Britain. While the 1945–51 Labour government scaled up ideas and

practices that had accreted at the municipal level over the previous five decades, and comprehensive redevelopment in the 1960s altered the look and feel of a great number of British town centers, Thatcher's government introduced a series of policies that in the space of a few years changed the very idea of what cities were *for*.<sup>16</sup> This transformation lay not in a reduction of the overall size of the state, or in the rate at which the government intervened in the management and planning of the built environment.<sup>17</sup> Instead, what changed were the ends to which that money was spent and new legislation was passed. Where once local authorities had owned and maintained infrastructure as well as provided jobs and housing, now they were forced to compete against one another to attract private capital to do this work.<sup>18</sup> The second major argument of this book is that the last third of the twentieth century saw a reinvention of Britain's developmental urban forms—a transformation that illuminates the particularities of British neoliberalism.

While both Labour and Conservative governments in the 1960s and 1970s had attempted to manage the problems of urban and industrial decline by channeling state funds or restricting the location of new industries, the new Conservative government of the 1980s introduced a raft of measures to attract private capital to cities.<sup>19</sup> Enterprise zones (1981) were miniature tax havens created in poor neighborhoods to stimulate inward private investment. Urban development grants (1982) delivered small amounts of public money to local authorities *only* on the condition that it was spent on specific projects completed in partnership with the private sector. Derelict land grants (1983) and national garden festivals (1984) used small amounts of public money to clear away decaying industrial ruins and prepare land for private development. Many of these interventions were managed and implemented by urban development corporations (1981), planning authorities that had the power to overrule democratically elected local councils. Finally, the Housing Act (1980) incentivized millions of public housing residents to purchase their own homes at heavily subsidized rates. All these processes were lubricated by a wave of financialization and attempts to stimulate the popular ownership of capital.<sup>20</sup> They occurred during a time when the autonomy of local governments and their access to funding were heavily restricted by Westminster, and nationalized industries and local authorities were put under extreme pressure to sell their landholdings on the private property market.<sup>21</sup>

This political transformation is the canvas on which the second half of this book unfolds, but it is far from the full story. Many of these policies were formal rather than substantive. The state created the conditions for a new kind of private sector urbanism, but what did private capital build when it arrived? The answer, more often than not, was housing developments, shopping malls, and business parks, owned and managed by private developers.

Instead of dwelling on policies or politicians (although of course, these both feature), this book looks at the new spaces that emerged during this transformative period—spaces that, unlike their predecessors, did not have to bear the burden of state-directed development. Some of these forms started their lives as insurgents, battling against the grain of developmental urban planning. The Cambridge Science Park, Britain's first high-tech business park, which opened in 1973, was initially refused planning permission by the Board of Trade. The gigantic Brent Cross shopping mall, built in the northern suburbs of London, had been ensnared in more than fifteen years of protracted, bitter discussions by the time it opened in 1976. In other words, these forms were latent before Thatcher's election in 1979—regional curiosities lying in wait for the emergence of the political conditions under which they would thrive.

This book comes in the wake of decades of unresolved and intense debate about the meaning as well as use of the term “neoliberalism.” For some scholars, neoliberalism is a class project imposed from above by elites that entailed a global reorientation of the way that capital has been accumulated since the 1970s.<sup>22</sup> Others have followed the framework set out by Michel Foucault's 1979 lectures at the Collège de France, arguing that neoliberalism is characterized by the new type of enterprising subject whom it calls into being: a *homo economicus* who has internalized the logic of market competition and elevated it into a reality principle.<sup>23</sup> Others have sought to historicize rather than theorize neoliberalism, with many historians having traced the emergence of a discrete set of ideas popularized among mid- to late twentieth-century economists, and implemented as policy in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in different parts of the world.<sup>24</sup> Frustrated with the different scales and registers across which these discussions have played out, others have called for the term to be jettisoned entirely, contending that it is ethereal and immobilizing.<sup>25</sup>

I argue that the term still has some utility. It allows us to connect and name a set of processes that are common across the world, and in doing so, helps us to think through political alternatives that can begin to transcend the parochialism of national electoral politics. To invoke neoliberalism is to make an assertion about change rather than continuity in the last third of the twentieth century. For the purposes of this book, I take the essence of neoliberalism to be a form of free market fundamentalism—one that, to quote sociologist Will Davies, seeks to “anchor modernity in the market,” making “economics the main measure of progress and reason.”<sup>26</sup> To take this definition is to maintain that the important transformations in late twentieth-century politics and economics had little to do with the overall amount of public money spent by states, or extent to which they intervened in their economies. Instead, neoliberalism meant the abandonment of the developmental and social aims that

guided mid-twentieth-century regimes, and their replacement with the market as the ultimate arbiter of political action.

The history of Britain's changing built environment, however, allows us to go one step further with this definition. In the second part of this book, I will argue that neoliberalism should be understood as being a type of market fundamentalism that is layered on top of the ruins of mid-twentieth-century developmental projects. As a well as the proliferation of new types of urban space, the 1980s and 1990s also saw the privatization and redevelopment of older urban forms. With parts of Britain's midcentury built environment proving architecturally unsuited for private ownership, this process frequently entailed a set of awkward and messy modifications. Council estates, for example, had to be reorganized to suit the new criminological common sense that crime was about opportunity rather than inequality—a problem inherent in the sharing of public space by strangers. When the shopping precincts commissioned and owned by local authorities or state development corporations were sold to property developers, doors to the street were installed or locked for the first time, and new legal questions emerged about how significant parts of town centers, once public and now private, were allowed to be used. Sometimes this process raised unsolvable problems. Thatcher's attempts to turn Britain into a property-owning democracy through the sale of millions of council homes, for instance, were limited by an urban fabric that resisted the logic of private ownership, as it turned out to be extremely difficult to uncouple council apartments in large estates from the collective infrastructure in which they were embedded. In housing projects where half the residents were tenants of the state and the other half had bought their apartments outright, exasperating disputes over the management and funding of collective resources ensued. While some urban forms were retrofitted in ways that made them compatible with new ideas about crime, public space, or landscapes of productive work, others were demolished, reimagined, and rebuilt.

The British neoliberal city was, therefore, made distinctive by the ways that a host of new urban forms were retrofitted to an older, increasingly shabby social infrastructure. Rather than being theoretical or abstract, Britain's modern built environment helps us understand how neoliberalism was a political formation characterized by its relationship to history—a developmental stage rather than a menu of policies or philosophical program.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the liberals of the nineteenth century, neoliberals in different parts of the world were forced to critique, dismantle, or reimagine a prior developmental infrastructure that had transformed the mid-twentieth-century world. The uneven ways in which Britain's developmental built environment was reorganized to suit the private property market in the late twentieth century are one way in which we can see this. Most important, viewing neoliberalism from the mezzanine

of a shopping mall or the courtyard of a council estate where half the residents have purchased their own homes from the state allows us to see how political change was worked out in practice on the ground. Doing so takes away some of the causal autonomy that has been bestowed on elite politicians, intellectuals, or the movements of the global economy. It allows us to see the new kind of society and new kind of subject that the neoliberal built environment attempted to conjure into being, and it is to this that we now turn.

## Making and Unmaking a New Society

Each of these different urban forms were manifestations, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, of different claims about the nature of the individual and the social world to which they belonged. This book's third argument is that the transition from a developmental to neoliberal political formation in Britain resulted in a loss of faith among planners and politicians that urban space could be used to make new kinds of people. The industrial estate, shopping precinct, and council estate each operated during a time when it was assumed that individuals and the social were raw materials waiting to be shaped by external forces.<sup>28</sup> Industrial estates, with their canteens, communal leisure centers, and generous training programs, existed to maximize the health, fitness, and productivity of workforces. Shopping precincts operated with the assumption that populations had a finite and calculable set of needs that could be provided for in advance. Council estates—often dense, inward looking, and set apart from their surrounding urban fabric—were intended to create thriving communities out of erstwhile strangers. They each assumed that the social was an aggregate of individuals who were knowable—people whose desires could be met, and whose relationships with each other could be altered in predictable ways. These claims were made in spite of the social body's evident diversity during this period. Many firms on early industrial estates were managed by German Jewish refugees (nonnative-speaking managers complained about being unable to understand the thick local accents of their employees), and many employed more women than men at different times in their history. The planners of council estates boasted that they were producing new communities of strangers at the same time as increasing numbers of Commonwealth migrants were *de facto* excluded from these spaces. The mid-twentieth-century urban forms described in the first half of this book were agents in reproducing the inequalities of gender and race that ordered the social world in which they emerged.

Britain's neoliberal urban forms—the private housing estate, suburban shopping mall, and business park—called into being a different type of individual and manifested a skepticism about the very idea of a manipulable social

body. A new kind of criminology, emerging in the United States in the 1970s and moving to the heart of the Thatcher government by the 1980s, posited that the generous amounts of public space and shared resources characteristic of many council estates—the courtyards, corridors, and walkways where new communities were supposed to arise—went against the grain of human nature itself. In the 1980s and 1990s, council estates were redesigned in ways that maximized private over public space in the name of crime control. All of a sudden, the respectable raw material of community development had become, in the eyes of politicians, threatening, unpredictable, and in need of urgent policing. Meanwhile, although shopping malls were intensively regulated types of space—developments whose lighting, heating, and music were carefully calibrated to internationally agreed-on standards—they were tailored to more intangible forces of leisure and desire. Necessity was traded for pleasure, and shopping malls became otherworldly family destinations rather than functional and feminized sites for routinized daily shopping. Lastly, high-tech business parks were spatially ordered to maximize the productivity of a new kind of worker—“flexible” and “creative.” With their pubs, verdant grounds, and public art, they set out to foster inspiration as well as cultivate a vague and cozy feeling of well-being, as opposed to developing their workforces in a rational and linear manner. Britain’s neoliberal urban forms inherited the unequal social order of their predecessors. Council estates were securitized and reordered in the 1980s, at the same time that they were becoming home to substantial numbers of people of color for the first time. Shopping malls in the 1980s attempted to exclude unproductive subjects—for the most part unemployed men—via a strategy that resulted in protracted legal battles. The affluent knowledge work practiced in business parks in the 1970s and 1980s was coded as male and oriented toward elite workers rather than the cleaners, receptionists, gardeners, or security guards who also worked in these spaces.

The ideal users of these new types of spaces were individuals whose subjectivity existed beyond the frontiers of power; they were people whose desires and relationships had to be discovered rather than produced, enabled rather than prescribed, and policed rather than reformed. Together, they show that the ideal neoliberal urban subject is one who could *not* be planned for and was formed beyond the reach of any kind of political or architectural intervention. While much has been written on the neoliberal subject as an entrepreneurial *homo economicus*, this pessimism about the use of state power to reshape instead of enable individual subjects, borne out by the design of urban space, is less well understood.<sup>29</sup> Premonitions of this complex and unknowable urban subject, immune to being shaped by power, abound among critics of the high modern, developmental projects of the midcentury. This subject can be found among Michel de Certeau’s elusive pedestrians or Henri

Lefebvre's lyrical descriptions of the citizens of Navarrenx, his medieval hometown in the Pyrenees. It can be found amid the "vernacular" forms of architecture celebrated in Las Vegas by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, or, perhaps most famously, in Jane Jacobs's evocation of the "sidewalk ballet" that unfolded outside her Greenwich Village apartment each day.<sup>30</sup>

These thinkers were right to be critical of mid-twentieth-century attempts to remake society. In Britain, these experiments were coercive, patriarchal, and tied inexorably to the inequalities produced by empire both at home and abroad.<sup>31</sup> A return to midcentury social politics should not form the basis for a political program in the present. What remained after the tide of developmental social politics had receded, however, were a series of shattered, privatized, and depoliticized spaces. The neoliberal vision of society and the built forms that have enabled it have proved compatible with staggering levels of inequality, intensive policing of space, and ownership of infrastructure by distant and unaccountable private bodies.<sup>32</sup> It is also a landscape that is spatially hostile to the effective mobilization of political resistance. This is something that anyone who has tried to organize a protest in a shopping mall or canvass a private housing development secured by an entry phone already knows.

It was the starkness of these two different visions of the individual and the social that, when they clashed on privatized council estates or in renovated shopping precincts, accounts for the distinctiveness of the British neoliberal built environment. Any given historical moment always contains accumulated traces of what came before; Saint Paul's Cathedral still stands, as does York's medieval city walls. But perhaps never before have the guiding principles governing the organization of urban space in Britain been inverted as quickly they were during the last third of the twentieth century, when a vision of society as an aggregate whole, capable of being remade by planners, fragmented and gave way.

### Aligning Britain with the World

Lastly, these six urban forms had lives that stretched far beyond Britain itself. The fourth and final argument of this book is that these spaces acted as mechanisms for aligning the look and feel of everyday British life with that of the wider world. Throughout the twentieth century, Britain exported urban plans and policies. The ideas of British new town planners and development corporations shaped the urban landscapes of Latin America, West Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and elsewhere.<sup>33</sup> Enterprise zones, a neoliberal urban planning strategy developed by the Thatcher government that created small, exceptional tax havens in impoverished inner-city areas, were exported to the United States, France, and Italy, among other places.<sup>34</sup> The first chapter of this book



shows how the industrial estate, an urban form invented on the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal in the early twentieth century, spread through imperial networks to West and East Africa as well as to the Pacific Rim by the end of the 1950s.

Despite its empire, however, and its exemplary status within Cold War modernization theory as the first country to urbanize, Britain was a net importer of urban forms from the Second World War onward. Particularly in the last third of the twentieth century, Britain's built environment was shaped by the world rather than vice versa. Britain has, of course, always existed in global and imperial networks of trade and migration. But in the postwar period, and particularly since the 1970s, the look, feel, and purpose of the British built environment has been shaped by the wider world to an unprecedented degree.<sup>35</sup> When it came to mass council housing, many towns looked east. Cities such as Glasgow and Sheffield sent delegations of architects, councilors, and planners to western Europe to marvel at Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille or traipse among the soaring towers of the Bellahøj housing development in Copenhagen. Reams of technical material about the planning of large-scale district heating systems were requested from Soviet technical journals and translated in the hope of emulation. Britain's new towns program imported as well as exported urban expertise, often employing former colonial officials at crucial stages in their planning and development.<sup>36</sup>

The most significant global alignment, though, was between Britain and the United States in the last third of the twentieth century. Both the shopping mall and the business park were direct imports from US suburbia. They were each born in the same decade—the 1950s—the former in the Midwest, where freezing winter temperatures demanded new forms of enclosure, and the latter in what has since become known as Silicon Valley in Northern California. Iterations of these forms in Britain were standardized by international networks of experts, frequently with the help of institutions such as the International Council of Shopping Centers and the International Association of Science Parks. The repetitive, almost banal modularity of these urban forms across global space allowed many to be owned by distant, overseas property developers who bought and sold them without setting foot inside, safe in the knowledge of what they looked like. The last twenty years has seen the emergence in the United States of what has become known as the “New Suburban History,” a historical turn that has looked to postwar suburbanization to answer important questions about race, gender, and the collapse of New Deal liberalism.<sup>37</sup> While these histories have tended to halt at the US border, the new urban forms generated in the US suburbs have spread across the world.<sup>38</sup> By showing how they migrated to and thrived in a new urban environment on the other side of the Atlantic, this book picks up where many US

historians have left off. Likewise, while the British route to neoliberalism has often been explained as emanating from a transatlantic network of think tanks sharing ideas and policies, this book demonstrates how physical spaces as well as ideas washed up on Britain's shores during the period when neoliberalism was in ascendency.<sup>39</sup>

These urban forms, then, passed *through* Britain and beyond, crossing borders with the ease of passing clouds. Now imagine that the plane journey with which this book began had originated in the United States. During your flight, you may then also have seen the boreal forests of Newfoundland and frigid emptiness of Greenland, but the city you are about to land in may feel uncannily familiar to that which you departed from.

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