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‘Why London? Why Now?’

THE SWINGING MOMENT

London was repeatedly discovered in the mid-1960s. More accurately, the West End of London was discovered by several writers and journalists, most of them from overseas. They were looking for the source of the British innovations in fashion and popular music which had recently permeated North America and western Europe. They found a metropolitan centre less straight-laced than they had taken Britain to be, with cutting-edge popular culture and a vibrant nightlife enjoyed by young pleasure-seekers. They concluded that London was ‘the most swinging city in the world at the moment.’¹

Britain’s pop-music revolution—by now centred in London—was the principal reason for the fixation, but this new bout of Anglomania was driven by a comprehensive enthusiasm for London’s innovative culture, embracing fashion, design, food and lifestyle generally, as well as music. Across the Atlantic, at least, London fashion had been noticed before Beatlemania arrived. *Glamour* magazine of New York featured the British model Jean Shrimpton on its cover as early as April 1963, and Mod women’s fashion became a staple of US women’s magazines over the following months. A feature in US *Vogue* in September 1964 focused specifically on the ‘new rush of Bright Young People in Britain’—‘Britain’ meaning London, a city ‘filled with these young women, their right-up-to-the-minute look, their passion for doing things, their absolute talent for fun.’² Six months later the US teenage magazine *Seventeen*, responsible for introducing the designer

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Mary Quant to American fashion followers in 1961, produced a special issue promoting 'The London Look'.³

Seventeen's readership consisted largely of American teenage girls, most of whom would have had little prospect of visiting London in the near future. Its immediate aim was to promote sales of London designs in the US, strengthening the tie-up that the magazine had established with a manufacturer; it did so by 'capitaliz[ing] on the British fever the magazine helped to induce'.⁴ In August 1965 the Hamburg teen periodical *Star Club News* published a well-informed piece on the London youth scene for readers who stood a better chance of experiencing it than did American teens, concentrating on Mod style and entertainment and describing in detail a performance by The Who at the Marquee Club.⁵ The German teenage magazine *Bravo* carried a feature on the Mod fashion fulcrum Carnaby Street, in West Soho, in February 1966.⁶ *Bravo* was a teenage life-style publication, chiefly concerned with pop music. It was the fusion of fashion and pop which produced the 'youthquake' in British popular culture in the sixties, and a similar effect became evident internationally as the Beatles and other British groups became global brands during 1964. It produced an interest in Britain and British modernity which focused on London as the world's 'only truly modern city'.⁷

The American columnist John Crosby, working as London correspondent of the *New York Herald Tribune*, did more than most to project the city to Americans as a 'place to be', though he eventually distilled his impressions of 'The Most Exciting City' not in the *Tribune* but in the London *Daily Telegraph's* new weekend magazine in April 1965. 'London is where the action is', he wrote, as Paris and New York had been after the war and Rome in the midfifties. He identified a new magnetism in Britain's capital city, as a young, vibrant London pulled Britain out of the 'long Dark Age' which had begun in the thirties and continued through the years of war and austerity. It was being led by a self-confident generation of young creatives, fun-loving and irreverent but still driven by 'a steady pulse of serious purpose.' Crosby interviewed several of them, including thirty-year-old John Stephen, who had effectively created Carnaby Street as the world's hippest menswear centre; Rupert Lycett Green, twenty-six-year-old creator of the expensive but modishly elegant clothes sold in the Dover Street boutique Blades; the Mod designer Caroline Charles, already a millionaire having started her own label little more than a year earlier at the age of twenty-one; Mark Birley, a veteran of thirty-four, who had founded the up-market Annabel's nightclub in Berkeley Square two years earlier; and

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Brian Morris, aged thirty, the manager of the exclusive and fashionable Ad Lib Club off Leicester Square. Morris told Crosby that ‘this is a young people’s town. The young have suddenly become visible.’ Observing an Oxford graduate swathing himself in brown corduroy in Blades and working-class boys ‘splurging on suede jackets’ in Carnaby Street, Crosby concluded that youth had trumped class in the new England and that ‘the caste system is breaking down at both ends.’⁸

Crosby’s was an American view of London, carried in a British publication. It was not until a year later that London was projected directly across the Atlantic in the encomium to the city by Piri Halasz in *Time* magazine’s issue for 15 April 1966. The feature would become one of *Time*’s most famous pieces, but it was the result of a spur-of-the-moment editorial decision and was researched and written in nine days, with material supplied by the magazine’s London bureau. At its core were five vignettes, or ‘scenes’, depicting an evening at the Clermont gaming club in Berkeley Square, during which ‘the handsome son of a peer’ lost \$450,000; a Saturday afternoon in Chelsea’s King’s Road, featuring Mick Jagger and the Mod queen Cathy McGowan in the Guys and Dolls coffee bar; an ‘in-crowd’ lunch at Le Réve restaurant in Chelsea, involving Terence Stamp, Michael Caine, David Bailey and the Chelsea tailor Doug Hayward; an account of the recreational life of the twenty-three-year-old fashion writer and stylist Jane Ormsby Gore; and a Kensington house party given by the actress Leslie Caron for Marlon Brando, Barbra Streisand, Warren Beatty and others (‘Dame Margot Fonteyn is due’). Halasz in New York then worked up the story to incorporate some of her own ideas—that the young were becoming more influential in the modern world and that people from humble backgrounds, with provincial accents, were becoming more influential in London. The colour illustrations helped complete the image of ‘the Swinging City’: vinyl-clad girls in the King’s Road, fashionable youth in Carnaby Street, a striptease artiste at the Sunset Strip club in Soho, revellers at the exclusive Scotch of St James nightclub, a *chemin de fer* session at the still more exclusive Crockford’s gaming club. The result was, as Halasz acknowledged, ‘a collage, pastiche, composite, or synthesis of words and ideas contributed by many people’, but it was a pastiche which produced a lasting image.⁹

A ‘passionate Anglophile’,¹⁰ Halasz saw London as an optimistic place and its youth as a force for good. Aged thirty herself, she had recently filed reports on youth movements in Cuba, the Netherlands and Indonesia, and she warmed to London as ‘yet another situation where a new generation

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was playing a key role.’ During the midsixties lull in youth activism in Britain, however, between the waning of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the explosion of student protest later in the decade, it was difficult to present a similar degree of political engagement in London. Instead the article’s emphasis on consumerism and clubbing reinforced another of Halasz’s convictions—that the retreat from empire ‘had enabled England to regain the free and easy spirit that had been crushed out of it by the weight of commanding the globe’, liberating London in particular ‘to share pleasure with its workers and its youth.’ A reference to the ‘pot parties of Chelsea’ was removed before publication, but *Time*’s London appeared unserious, an impression reinforced by the illustration of a bowler-hatted City type forging across London Bridge ‘to manage the affairs of a suddenly frivolous city.’¹¹

Halasz’s editor urged her ‘to be sure and get that good stuff about decadence into the story.’¹² As the Wilson government struggled to defend the pound in the summer of 1966, external commentators drew easy connections between London’s self-indulgence and Britain’s economic plight. Two weeks before the *Time* article, Pierre Joffroy in *Paris Match* had written a sympathetic piece on London, which nonetheless ended by asking (quoting the *Times* and ultimately Oscar Wilde) whether Britain was dying beyond its means.¹³ The American evangelist Billy Graham launched his month-long Greater London Crusade in May, ‘bent on saving this city from its excesses.’¹⁴ Like many tourists, he made his way to Soho—‘the sleazy “Square Mile of Sin”’—though police, concerned about the crowds, stopped him bringing Jesus’s love to Old Compton Street.¹⁵ As the summer’s sterling crisis mounted, the treatment of London’s swingers became increasingly censorious. ‘The pound trembles, the gold runs out, Britain’s ships stand in the docks’, wrote Anthony Lewis in the *New York Times* in June, ‘but at Annabel’s they come and go, talking of how short the skirts can go. The atmosphere in London today can be almost eerie in its quality of relentless frivolity. There can rarely have been a greater contrast between a country’s objective situation and the mood of its people.’¹⁶ The US men’s magazine *Esquire* published an enthusiastic set of pieces on the ‘London Charivari 1966’ in July, but many observers saw the austerity package imposed in that month as calling time on the city’s self-indulgence. “Swinging London” swings on, but the swinging lacks conviction’, Dana Adams Schmidt told *New York Times* readers in October.¹⁷ At the end of the year Gene Farmer wrote a lachrymose ‘Special Report’ in *Life*, yearning for the poor but honest London he had known in the early fifties, when meat and

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eggs were almost unobtainable and people burned ‘nutty slack’ to fend off the cold. By contrast, London’s new incontinence was illustrated by underdressed bunny-girls serving blackjack-playing gamblers at the recently opened Playboy Club in Park Lane. “Swinging”, Farmer wrote, ‘has got out of hand because it is the kind of fun only a rich nation can afford—and England is no longer a rich nation.’¹⁸

Londoners, ‘partly appalled by the speciousness, partly amused by the attention’,¹⁹ reacted with knowing scepticism to what the journalist Maureen Cleave called ‘the tedious swinging London that foreigners are always going on about.’²⁰ This picture of relentless hedonism, constructed largely by outsiders, was at best unreal, at worst offensive. It was based almost entirely on the West End, which was, for many Londoners, a place to visit rather than the focus of their lives. As the *Evening Standard*’s theatre critic Milton Shulman noted in October 1966, local television news programmes depicted a very different urbanity, portraying London as ‘a vast suburb where rows about rates, higher rents, snarls, and grocery prices . . . dominate the souls and imaginations of the capital’s inhabitants’—a metropolis as mundane as ‘Swinging London’ was exotic.²¹ This might have been just as myopic a view—Shulman thought so—but it is true that a researcher today, reading only the local newspapers covering the London beyond the glossy centre, would struggle to recognise the world’s ‘most exciting city.’ Sixties London was a place in which most public transport stopped by 11.00 P.M. and many West End stores closed for the weekend at 1.00 P.M. on Saturday.²² Sundays were so inert that the author Betty James wrote a guide in 1964 to help Londoners relieve the tedium of their Sabbath.²³ It is routine now for memoirs of Londoners who grew up in the sixties to stress that their part of the capital—whether comfortable suburb or decaying inner-city area—was not really very swinging at all.

But to point out that ‘Swinging London’ meant little to the average Londoner is not to say much. Of course Swinging London, as depicted, was largely mythical, just as the received images of ‘belle époque’ Paris, Weimar Berlin, *la dolce vita* Rome and the two analogues suggested by both Crosby and Joffroy—1920s Paris and post-1945 New York—were mythical. The myth emerged from stylised accounts which privileged the exotic over the routine, leisure over work, the centre over the periphery, producing a city portrait which was inevitably overdrawn. The question is why it was drawn at all: What magnetism made London an ‘in’ city, however briefly? We should be asking not whether ‘Swinging London’ was real but rather the question posed by the author of the *Esquire* piece: ‘Why London, why now?’

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The Unswinging City

In the early sixties much of London—and most of its Victorian core—could best be described as an ageing industrial city scarred by war. Only in 1963 was the last bomb site in the City of London built over.²⁴ Outer London was still pockmarked by bomb damage, while the East End and other targeted industrial areas remained disfigured throughout the decade. The prefab units introduced in the last year of the war to provide emergency—and supposedly temporary—housing were still a common feature of inner London in the sixties: indeed, the London County Council (LCC) initiated a new four-year prefab-building programme in 1964 to plug some of the gaps in South and East London's housing stock.²⁵ Much of the regular housing was substandard, enfeebled by decades of rent control.²⁶

London displayed the familiar environmental problems of an industrial city, which were being tackled by the sixties but would not be dispelled before they were exacerbated by those of the modern age. Thus the Thames was cleaner than it had been in the 1950s, when it had officially been declared 'biologically dead', but the Thames estuary still received some five hundred million gallons of sewage effluents every day in 1962. Only a tenth of that amount entered the river above London Bridge, but that was enough to ensure that the Thames did not smell very swinging even in the centre of town. The growing volume of household detergents in waste water meant that parts of the river surface carried a regular 'head' of foam; the effect on the oxygen balance was equivalent to the discharge of crude sewage from a million people.²⁷ Industrial pollution and domestic coal fires had combined to take four thousand lives in the smog of 1952, and although that catastrophe prompted the 1956 Clean Air Act, which mitigated the problem, the smog reappeared, albeit on a smaller scale, in 1960 and particularly in December 1962, when visibility fell to less than five yards, the concentration of smoke and sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere rose to fourteen times normal levels and bronchitis deaths increased.²⁸ In any case, the 1956 act did nothing to combat the growth of hydrocarbon pollution caused by rising traffic volumes.²⁹ Even by 1967 a quart of London air was said to contain 'about 10 million particles of soot or dust in addition to various unhealthy gases.'³⁰ It left its mark on the urban fabric: the two million or so tourists coming to London annually in the mid-1960s gazed on 'some of the scruffiest buildings in the world.'³¹ In December 1966

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A bomb site in the Harrow Road area of Paddington, still undeveloped in 1960. (Roger Mayne Archive/Mary Evans Picture Library)

the *Standard*'s planning correspondent, Judy Hillman, assessed the condition of several public buildings, awarding 'black hand' ratings to the worst afflicted—the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey, the nearby Middlesex Guildhall and the church of St Clement Danes, exposed to traffic exhaust on two sides on its island site.³² Traffic also exacerbated noise pollution: in 1961 one in six Londoners claimed that traffic noise had made their house shake, one in four that it kept them awake.³³ Cars and lorries were the main culprits, transforming what had once been a domestic problem into an environmental one and creating an ambient noise nuisance: where once householders had been as much disturbed by noise from neighbours as from outside, 'it has been found now [1963] that only 14 per cent notice indoor noises, while 50 per cent complain about the traffic.'³⁴

In the nineteenth century such disamenities in urban Britain had been accepted as the price payable for the higher standard of living that manufacturing cities offered. Since the outbreak of war in 1939, however, inner London had seen a steady outflow of people looking to escape the drawbacks of the inner city and enabled to do so by a similar outward movement of employment, to outer London, to the postwar New Towns or beyond.

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Unswinging London. Hampden Street, LB Camden, early sixties. (John Gay/English Heritage NMR/Mary Evans Picture Library)

Greater London in the 1960s was in fact only halfway through a population fall which had begun on the outbreak of war and would continue until the late 1980s. The capital was shedding cockneys. Initially the postwar decentralisation of population was public policy, rooted in prewar concerns about London's strategic vulnerability and more recent anxiety about congestion of the central area and pressure on the housing stock and public transport. Only in the 1970s would depopulation become a matter of public concern; before then the assumption was that movement out of the inner city—and perhaps out of London altogether—offered the most reliable means of securing an improved quality of life.

Those who left London were replaced by incomers who ranged from people driven from their previous homes by war, political upheaval or economic collapse to those for whom a move to London was necessary to develop their careers, with a large group in the middle who had judged, rightly or wrongly, that their prospects would be better in the city. The geopolitical upheavals of the mid-twentieth century accounted for the

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The first day of London's last great smog, 4 December 1962. That day and the next brought fifty-five deaths from respiratory disease. (Mirrorpix/Alamy Stock Photo)

arrival of German and central European refugees from Nazism, for the postwar Polish refugees from communism, for the Chinese who came, via Hong Kong, during and after the Chinese Civil War and for the Cypriots—Greek and Turkish—who left their island to escape the communal hostilities of the fifties and sixties. Other ethnic minority communities were augmented by assisted migration schemes: London's Maltese population expanded from the late forties, prompted by financial assistance from the British government.³⁵ Migrants from South Asia and, particularly, the West Indies were encouraged to move to Britain from the late forties to offset labour shortages on public transport and in the National Health Service.

These were all arrivals from overseas, contributing to London's developing diversity. They were the mid-twentieth-century equivalents of the men

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Working river. Lightermen on barges moored on the south bank of the Thames, opposite Queenhithe in the City, late fifties. (The John Turner Photographic Collection/Mary Evans)

and women who had migrated from country to town during the industrial revolution, seeking and generally gaining an improved standard of living at the cost of often squalid living conditions, with the added drawback of receiving frequently uninhibited racist hostility from those who were longer established in London. Perhaps the most misleading aspect of the ‘Swinging London’ stereotype was the undiverse nature of the city that it depicted. Crosby noted briefly that ‘the Flamingo [Club], a beat spot, caters to the West Indians’,³⁶ but otherwise the American commentators, who might have been expected to be alert to urban racial issues in the midsixties, were so set on projecting London as a carefree place that the possible recurrence of racial tension in a city that had seen serious race riots as recently as 1958 passed unmentioned.

Nonetheless, most of London’s in-migrants had come, as always, from the British Isles, including the Republic of Ireland, which was still exporting around forty thousand people to London annually in the late 1950s.³⁷ Many of these British or Irish migrants had come to London with less assured prospects than, for example, the West Indians recruited to work on the buses, and many found themselves consigned to the lower reaches of London’s employment and housing markets. The journalist Melanie

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Phillips interviewed the residents of what was then a slum in Cambridge Street, Pimlico, shortly before their eviction in 1977. Of the eight whose origins were specified, all came from the British Isles, but only three were Londoners. The others were a twenty-four-year-old from Bangor who had briefly worked as a waitress, an unemployed porter from Tipperary, an unemployed baker from the Isle of Wight, a casual catering worker from a village in the Trossachs and his partner, from Stirling, who had just walked out of a job as a cinema usherette.³⁸ To them and many similar incomers London offered only ‘insecure, non-unionised, low-paid work combined with insecure, low-standard accommodation.’³⁹

‘Is only rubbish-people come to this town’, claimed a Greek Cypriot coffee grinder in Camden Town, interviewed by Jonathan Raban in 1973. He had come to London in 1956 so that his children could receive an English education: ‘next year, maybe year after, I go home.’ A compatriot, Helena Petrou, had found herself alone in London after her husband divorced her, with a child, little English and no money. She lived by making up twenty dresses a day by artificial light in her basement flat in Tufnell Park. In the city but not of it, she nonetheless clung to London: ‘I want to stay here for a moment. Life changes from today to tomorrow. Who knows?’ Her memory of Cyprus—‘the Eden from which, long ago . . . she was expelled’—became steadily more distant and more rosy.⁴⁰

London’s diverse and complex economy had always absorbed large numbers of such people without conferring security or comfort on them. Helena Petrou experienced Tufnell Park in much the same way as sweated immigrant tailors had experienced Whitechapel in the 1880s. If anything, the position of the most precarious worsened during the years covered by this book; in 1977 one of Phillips’s Pimlico subjects spoke of his London life as ‘a question of survival’, weeks before he lost his home.⁴¹ Overall, though, London was a prosperous city and one in which an evolving ‘growth services’ sector offered opportunities not to be found—or not to be found in such abundance and offering such rewards—elsewhere.

In a 1966 *Evening Standard* piece about the allure of London, Angus McGill interviewed four incomers from points north: a market researcher from Middlesbrough, a public relations man from South Shields, a BBC producer from Sheffield and the Carnaby Street mogul John Stephen, from Glasgow. All were representatives of the new London, benefiting from opportunities which they could not have enjoyed in the London of twenty years earlier. None wished to return. Stephen, who had arrived from Glasgow in 1952 with ‘£13 in a burgundy leather wallet and nowhere to go’,

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exemplified those who were enriched by London's new economy. 'London is where the opportunities are', he told McGill.⁴² Similarly Tom Benson, who rode from Liverpool on his scooter to take a job washing up in Ray Parkes's Chelsea restaurant, ended up cooking the food and eventually running Parkes at its fashionable sixties peak.⁴³

There were many more, though, who, though not exactly rich, were comfortable enough to enjoy experiencing the city in a way that a Cypriot seamstress trapped in a Tufnell Park basement could not. The novelist A. S. Byatt, Sheffield-born, who 'likes to think of herself as a northerner, although she prefers living in London', enjoyed the diversity of the mothers' group at her children's nursery in Bloomsbury, where she encountered 'doctors' wives, actors' wives, a striptease artist, university wives, Indians, Italians, Cypriots.' Her previous home in Durham had been beautiful, but 'the orderliness of society weighed on [her].'⁴⁴ Martin Holmes, market researcher from Middlesbrough, told McGill, '[Back home] I'd have a far higher standard of living. I'd live in a house with a garden rather than a flat without one. But London holds you. You feel that you are closer to things happening.'⁴⁵ An anonymous stripper interviewed by Anne Sharpley in 1965 explained that she had come to London from Yorkshire with a job offer as an assistant manageress, which she had rapidly dropped, feeling that 'this is not like London': 'I wanted something more glamorous, wanted to get into the West End.'⁴⁶ The gays who spoke to Sharpley in a groundbreaking series of articles in 1964 expressed 'the relief they have at first coming to London from country districts to find "there were hundreds like me, all more than understanding"'; the prosecution rate for what was still an illegal act was only half that in the rest of the United Kingdom.⁴⁷ Sharpley herself, from Cheshire, appreciated the 'stiff course in urbanisation' that cosmopolitan Balcombe Street, near Dorset Square, gave her: 'it has become an engrossment, an arena, a listening post, a liability, an insight—and an everlasting instruction that people, after all, are more important than trees.'⁴⁸ Anne Ward, a twenty-four-year-old personal assistant, loved 'the feel of the town' and got 'a tremendous kick out of merely walking around on those fabulous misty days': 'It's so romantic—the bomb sites and the church spires looming up. It sounds very provincial, but I walk down Fleet Street and I think: "I wouldn't go back to Chesterfield for the world."⁴⁹ Valerie Warden, a twenty-six-year-old fashion artist from Liverpool, believed that had she stayed at home, she would have drifted into marriage rather than a career; 'just when she thinks she's had enough of London, something happens to convince her she can never

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Aerial view of the City by night, November 1964, showing the concentration of offices in the formerly blitzed area surrounding St Paul's Cathedral. (Mirrorpix/Alamy Stock Photo)

leave it.’⁵⁰ For Mary Taylor, a nineteen-year-old secretary, ‘things are much more exhilarating in London. Even the top jobs in Bristol go at half the speed.’ Taylor, who had left Bristol at fifteen because she thought she might as well ‘join the herd’, explained that ‘girls come to London to have a good social life, two holidays a year and earn a lot of money.’⁵¹

Secretaries like Taylor were beneficiaries of the office boom that was transforming the capital. The Conservative government had lifted controls over commercial development in 1954, enriching a small group of men who had had the foresight and nerve to buy Central London property during the war.⁵² Their efforts reshaped the face of the capital, providing most Londoners with their first—and starkest—illustration of the changing nature of the metropolitan economy, as office towers sprouted in what had always been a low-rise city. Few welcomed their assault on London’s fabric. Most postwar building in the West End and, particularly, the City did little to capture public imagination. Observing the first signs of the City’s postwar transformation in 1954, Harold Macmillan feared that ‘a lot of very confused and unworthy building will ultimately replace what the Germans destroyed.’⁵³ Tension built up until 1959, when public anger was vented at the clumsy stump designed by John Poulson for the developer

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Jack Cotton on the Monico site at Piccadilly Circus. Poulson's design was approved by the LCC but subsequently shot down after a public inquiry.⁵⁴ Though Cotton responded by engaging Walter Gropius as a kind of consultant,⁵⁵ there was not the incentive that exists today for developers to use prestige architects as a means of gaining planning permission. Generally permission was gained as a result of hole-and-corner negotiation with the LCC in which developers agreed in return to help the LCC attain one of its own development objectives. The indispensable skill of the architect consisted rather of extracting the most profitable outcome from the LCC's system of plot ratios and height restrictions rather than endeavouring to beautify London; the arcane and clandestine nature of these negotiations meant that the London public became aware of most projects only when they began to be built.⁵⁶

As the supply of bomb sites dwindled from the late 1950s, much development entailed the destruction of familiar landmarks. These included West End theatres and railway termini, targeted in the late fifties and early sixties by private developers promoting the replacement of an existing Victorian building by a supposedly more efficient successor, buried under an office tower.⁵⁷ The bomb-damaged stations at Holborn Viaduct and Cannon Street and, more controversially, the Doric Arch and Great Hall at Euston and the St James's Theatre in King Street were victims of these initiatives;⁵⁸ many more buildings were threatened. It is hard to convey today the unsettling effect on Londoners of the constant threats to and recurrent removal of a familiar townscape. Byatt, conscious that 'things are disappearing and decaying' in Georgian Bloomsbury in the early 1960s, described it guardedly as a good place to live 'for now.'⁵⁹ Bette Spektorov, an Oxford graduate interviewed by Maureen Cleave for the *Standard* in 1964, had come to London for its theatres, exhibitions and museums but thought it 'fearfully ugly': 'And what beautiful things there are, they are pulling down. It brings tears to my eyes. Very soon it will be ghastly to live here.'⁶⁰

But the office boom brought jobs. Companies sought mostly to recruit school leavers: the director of one plastics company was said to have declined to rent a new block outside London because 'there isn't even a pop record shop nearby.' Sixty-five percent of office staff were women, most of them secretaries.⁶¹ Many of them found secretarial employment unstimulating.⁶² It displayed many of the features of a casual trade. Skill levels were low—a 1960 survey found that the average London typist averaged only 1,648 words a day⁶³—and training was often limited or nonexistent.

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Typing pool in a City office, 1978. (Homer Sykes/Alamy Stock Photo)

Turnover rates were high, with both the women and their bosses assuming that their employment would end upon marriage. Few secretaries remained in the job beyond their twenties—nearly 70 percent of London secretaries were aged twenty-nine or younger. Opportunities for career development were limited, and promotion was more likely to arise from a transfer to a higher-status boss than from any enhancement of professional expertise. Old-school secretaries, with learned skills, feared that their trade was being debased by the flood of new entrants. A ‘secretary’ in sixties London might be anything ‘from shorthand-typist to private scribe to glorified personal assistant’:⁶⁴ indeed, the term ‘personal assistant’ was said to have been adopted by senior secretaries as a means of distinguishing themselves from the unskilled mass. For all that, though, the rapid expansion of London’s commercial sector meant that unlike most casual workers, secretaries were in demand and startlingly well paid. ‘These days a good secretary can virtually write her own ticket’, Karin Hart wrote in 1966; by then around a quarter of the secretaries in the City were earning more than £1,000 a year, when the national average wage for all employment was below £900.⁶⁵ Even sixteen-year-old school leavers could command £9 a week in the City.⁶⁶ The Town and Country Planning Association found in 1962 that the pay for an unskilled female office worker had risen

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by 180 percent since 1950, against a 60 percent increase in the price level.⁶⁷ ‘The worst economic freeze does not touch the pockets of secretaries,’ as Jonathan Aitken put it.⁶⁸

There were approaching half a million secretaries in London by the mid-sixties.⁶⁹ Most came from London, and many continued to live at home, earning well and paying little or nothing in rent.⁷⁰ But many came from outside—‘typists from Bradford and Hull, secretaries from Newcastle, audio-typists from Leeds and female clerks from Doncaster come hot-footing to London as fast as their parents will allow.’⁷¹ Many lived in bedsits—single rooms, usually in houses shared with other young women. Barbara Griggs described this milieu in 1963: ‘This home from home will be furnished with a divan bed in one corner, a minute electric cooker in another corner, assorted bits of uninspired secondhand furniture, and a decoration scheme that you loathe at sight but can’t afford to modify by any more decisive means than the introduction of a couple of jolly red and orange cushions on the divan to counteract the prevailing note of smoggy fawn and fern green, and an Impressionist print on the walls.’ For most young women in the city, this was merely a base in which an outgoing social life could be planned: ‘bedsitter life makes you gregarious from necessity.’⁷²

Gregariousness could lead to babies. Lamenting the number of illegitimate births to London teenagers in 1964, the London Diocesan Council for Moral Welfare noted that ‘a large proportion of the girls are commercial or office workers who live alone in bedsitters.’⁷³ London’s illegitimacy rate grew steadily from the mid-1950s. It became a talking point in the early 1960s, when it was usually attributed to pregnant girls coming from the countryside or, stereotypically, Ireland, to give birth in the anonymous setting of the big city.⁷⁴ Over the course of the decade, though, it became evident that the rise reflected changing conditions in London more than circumstances elsewhere. In 1969 James Weir, medical officer for Kensington and Chelsea, advanced a sociological explanation for his borough having the highest illegitimacy rate in Britain: it was characterised by a large number of people living in lodgings, an extraordinarily high percentage of women in the ‘at risk’ years of fifteen to twenty-nine, ‘abundant temptation’ and the social pressures pushing young people into extramarital sex.⁷⁵ Weir’s counterpart in Redbridge noted in 1969 that a rise in illegitimacy had been accompanied by a fall in the occupancy of homes for unmarried mothers, suggesting that as ‘society is becoming more permissive, unmarried mothers can remain with their parents.’ The Greenwich medical officer

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observed in his 1971 report that illegitimacy could no longer be assumed to reflect ‘low social standards.’ It was ‘to be found in all walks of life. Indeed, on occasions, it would appear to be sought by certain types.’⁷⁶

‘London is the easiest city in the world to find a partner’, the English writer Al Alvarez told American readers in September 1967.⁷⁷ If the partner sought was young and female, he may have been right. Women formed 55 percent of the population between fifteen and twenty-four in the ‘Greater London Central Conurbation’ identified in the 1966 Sample Census.⁷⁸ The idea that these women had turned London into the global capital of recreational sex owed much to Crosby and his male interviewees. A January 1964 piece in the *New York Herald Tribune* described seductively sassy ‘Chelsea girls’ empowered by fashion, ‘striding along in their black leather boots, their capes, their fur hats, their black stockings with wild designs.’⁷⁹ In the *Weekend Telegraph* fifteen months later Crosby suggested that ‘young English girls take to sex as if it’s candy and it’s delicious.’⁸⁰ Interviewed in 1967, Helen Brook, who had founded the Brook Advisory Service in 1962 to advise young Londoners in matters of sex and contraception, painted a different picture, of widespread ignorance and insecurity about sex, noting that neither innate intelligence nor an educated family guaranteed sexual awareness.⁸¹ Inner London’s numerous young women had to gain wisdom in an environment where sexual opportunity was greater and social constraints weaker than anywhere else in Britain. ‘What I hate to see is a young girl coming to London and hopping from bed to bed just because her friends do. It happens to a lot of young girls’, Jenny Randall, a secretary sharing a Belsize Park flat with five other young women, told Maureen Cleave in 1964.⁸² Randall’s six years in London had instilled caution, but as Cleave pointed out, ‘for what [young single women] suffer in loneliness, shortage of money, horrible food and terror of the big city, they are rewarded in freedom’⁸³—and freedom might include sexual freedom.

Six anonymised but unusually frank interviews in the magazine *Look of London* in February 1968 give an idea of the variety of strategies adopted by young single women in the capital’s sexual jungle. One respondent had avoided sex until she was twenty but after embarking on a serious relationship felt free to have affairs with men she believed could ‘help her with her natural development.’ After ending the relationship and going onto the pill, she became more eclectic and claimed to have had forty partners—some of them women—by the time of the interview. Another, who had jettisoned her virginity at the age of sixteen ‘because she felt that it was time

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to do something about it', had had about ten men since, on a serial monogamy basis, ending each relationship herself, and only when a replacement had been identified. One, admitting that 'she is very keen on sex and finds it beneficial to her health', nonetheless 'found great pleasure in leading people right to the brink and then refusing them'; 'she found herself easily infatuated but just as easily bored by a man.' One, initially repelled by sex after being 'half-raped' at fifteen, had subsequently had flings with men she found physically attractive, but 'now realises she cannot go to bed with men casually.' Another had had two lengthy relationships during which she was not entirely faithful, admitting that she had practised casual flings 'partly in order to run a check on the physical prowess of her main partner.' The peer pressure felt by young single women is suggested by one who had resisted sleeping with her boyfriend for three years until she was eighteen but admitted that before then 'she used to pretend she'd had fantastic affairs to anyone who happened to be interested' and by another who 'feels shame at admitting that she is still a virgin.'⁸⁴ Even she, though, was evidently prepared to countenance sex outside marriage, like most in her generation.

Randall's view was clear: 'I disapprove very strongly of adultery and divorce. Once you're married, that's it. But I disapprove of the attitude of the women's magazines that sex is a miracle that happens the moment you get a gold band on your finger, and before that it's disgusting and filthy.' The very finality of marriage made sexual experimentation beforehand acceptable. We cannot know how widely Randall's attitude was shared, but we can see it as a rational response of a young woman to London's opportunities and pitfalls. It may well be that young men were more predatory, as Randall suggested,⁸⁵ but the result was to diminish the number of young people of both genders believing that premarital sex was wrong. A 1970 survey of Londoners' sexual attitudes for the *Standard* showed a pronounced generational divergence in attitudes to premarital sex, with 60 percent of those aged between sixteen and twenty-four believing that 'young people today should . . . have sex before marriage', compared to 29 percent in all age groups.⁸⁶



Men were less evident beneficiaries of the office boom, but they were beneficiaries nonetheless. The median wage for young male clerical staff in the lowest grade rose by 142 percent between 1950 and 1960, against a

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52 percent increase in the price level.⁸⁷ ‘The young office workers who filled the new office towers rising around the city’ sustained the thirty-six betting shops which sprang up in the City of London (a square mile with a minuscule resident population and expensive rents) within three years of the legalisation of gambling in 1960.⁸⁸ They fuelled the menswear boom of the early sixties: ‘You could be a bank clerk and people would think “There’s a smart young lad,” but you could also be fashionable’, Pete Townshend told Shawn Levy.⁸⁹ But there was also an indirect effect. Office expansion widened the horizons of working-class boys entering the labour market. In the early 1950s, as the East End community activist Patrick Hanshaw later recounted, jobs had been plentiful close to home, but the local economy offered ‘full employment with only a restricted choice of direction’: ‘We were what loosely could be described as “factory fodder”, and ‘as they had done for generations, the Docks were already lifting that beckoning finger.’⁹⁰ The singer Tommy Steele remembered being summoned to see the headmaster on leaving his Bermondsey school in 1952 to find ‘a grumpy old soul’: ‘[His] one object was to put us off what we wanted to do and stick us into a factory.’⁹¹

Ten years later, however, 15–20 percent of boys and the majority of girls leaving East End schools went into office work: ‘The office seems to be regarded as the acme of working life’, as Poplar’s Youth Employment Officer put it.⁹² This undermined traditional industrial recruitment and the idea of the heritable trade. The Thames lighterman Dick Fagan noted in his 1966 memoir that ‘fewer and fewer recruits to the trade come from lightering families. . . . This is the reason why there are so many “nonnies”, that is to say, men from non-lightering families, to be found on barges today.’ He regretted the change but understood the reason for it: ‘Why put a boy into it—even if he was prepared to go—when there’s so much other work going with higher pay, better conditions, more security, a more certain future?’⁹³ During the 1962 postal workers’ strike, J. W. M. Thompson of the *Standard*, noting that the union leader, Ron Smith, had followed his father into the service, asked, ‘How many boys are eager to do the same today?’ and answered, ‘Very few.’ He concluded that ‘the loss of that tradition of esteem and continuity’ would continue to damage the service even after the dispute had been settled.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the pull of office work created labour shortages and high wages for those who chose to remain in industry. The memoirs of Alfred Gardner, describing his life in the East End garment trade, are illustrated by two views of Stepney factories in the late fifties, plastered with posters advertising jobs for machinists. On leaving school

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in 1956, Gardner felt sufficiently confident to turn down work in a cabinet maker's modern factory because its production-line techniques would have been 'too tedious, . . . the atmosphere was too depressing.'⁹⁵ Within a few years the shortage of skilled workers would accelerate the deindustrialisation of Gardner's East End,⁹⁶ but in the early 1960s general affluence kept many inner-London industries afloat. Those benefiting from the tides of fashion, such as the garment trade, were buoyant.

In April 1962, as Teddy Boys evolved into Mods, the *Standard's* Angus McGill spoke to some of 'the modernists [who] earn more money than teenagers have ever earned before—and . . . spend it with frank enjoyment on themselves.' Roy Pope, a nineteen-year-old plumber from Battersea, earning £15 a week, bought three new suits a year and had shirts made to measure. Pete Smith, an eighteen-year-old butcher from Wandsworth earning up to £30 a week, owned eight suits. Keith Smith, earning around £20 per week, also bought three suits a year, 'each different from the last to keep abreast of the mutations of modernist fashion.' They were dressed by two Clapham tailors, Brian Hoddinot and Richard Press—'the Diors of the modernist set'—who had devised a suit known as the Sackville in response to the Mod demand.⁹⁷ This direct relationship between young working-class men and responsive tailors—as close as that between any Savile Row couturier and his clients—had begun with the Teddy Boys, whose prescribed mode of dress had formed a kind of uniform, devised on the street. By extension, as Jane Wilson described, 'Mod fashions evolved in a curious untraceable way, mostly in the south and east of London where there were enterprising tailors and shoemakers who had once catered for the Teddy Boys and could still produce goods to order from customers' own messy sketches. The kids had the money and they knew what they wanted.'⁹⁸ John Stephen's dominance of the youth menswear market owed much to his readiness to produce to order in this way, getting goods made up overnight in the workshops of the small tailors who had moved to Soho from the East End during the Blitz.⁹⁹ 'Mod fashions can change overnight', McGill explained, 'but mods know that John Stephen will be there next morning with the new thing.'¹⁰⁰ In 1964 Stephen opened the John Stephen Custom Made shop as part of his Carnaby Street empire, where customers could bring in their own designs to be made up on the premises.¹⁰¹

The revolution in women's fashion did not as clearly come from the streets, but it did derive from young, freelance designers' frustration with established couturiers. Barbara Hulanicki, who would found Biba in Kensington in 1964, explained that 'the shops in England at this time [1960]

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Caps and ties for sale in the John Stephen store, Carnaby Street, April 1966. (PA/Alamy Stock Photo)

were full of matronly clothes—either direct copies of Paris clothes or deeply influenced by the Paris collections. There was little specifically designed for the young.¹⁰² Mary Quant believed that ‘the young were tired of wearing essentially the same as their mothers.’¹⁰³ She had initially envisaged her Bazaar boutique, opened in the King’s Road in 1955, purely as a retail operation and only began to design her own goods when she could not find enough off-the-peg stock that appealed to her.¹⁰⁴ What started as the recognition of a gap in the market became, though, a kind of generational battle cry: ‘the young must never *on any account* look like the old.’ In a 1967 interview Quant described with candid horror what the old looked like: ‘Women . . . wore stiletto heels and corsets. They had no bottoms, you remember, but seats. They didn’t have nipples but great appendages of bosom and none of these things fitted together: the bosom came into the room first and the woman would follow. They looked like tarts really, with their bottoms all over their toes because of the stilettos. And you

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Mary Quant in her flat in Draycott Place, Chelsea, November 1965. (Keystone Pictures USA/ZUMAPRESS.com/Mary Evans)

never wanted to touch their hair because it might sting or burn. On my thirteenth birthday I cried because this horror was getting closer to me.’¹⁰⁵ Her creations consequently came in gamine form, to the discomfort of even moderately buxom customers, but with sales rising more than elevenfold (passing £4 million in 1966), it became clear that Quant had found a gap in the market.¹⁰⁶

Quant had a difficult relationship with the ‘frankly beastly’ fashion industry.¹⁰⁷ So did most cutting-edge designers, both in women’s wear and menswear. As Stanley Adams, who opened in Kingly Street in 1965, put it, ‘Buyers don’t know their arse from their elbow. They have no identity with, or understanding of, the sort of people they are attempting to provide for.’¹⁰⁸ Designers could, though, function with a fair degree of autonomy, hoping that hard work and the serendipity of public taste would see them succeed. Quant initially put together her designs in her own bedsit; Biba began as a mail-order business, with a single design.¹⁰⁹ Premises suitable for boutiques—characteristically intimate and underlit—could be rented relatively cheaply even in Central London at least until the middle of the decade. Most boutiques began with very little capital—a weakness which would undermine many of them in the harsher climate of the 1970s, but which mattered little during fashion’s boom years.¹¹⁰

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Barriers were higher in the music industry. At the grassroots, music was characterised by a do-it-yourself approach similar to that in menswear. The skiffle boom of the 1950s involved homemade instruments in the hands of amateurs. The autobiography of Alan Johnson, growing up poor in Notting Hill in the 1950s, has a subplot recounting a musical career which began with his mother buying him a Spanish guitar from the proceeds of a pools win and ends with him performing in a band before sizeable audiences in pubs and clubs.¹¹¹ Many trod a similar path, particularly as the rewards of pop stardom became clear. ‘There’s so many groups it’s getting ridiculous’, the manager of the Tiger’s Head dance hall in Catford told Jane Wilson in November 1965: ‘we’ve had three in already this evening looking for work.’¹¹² Most would fail for lack of talent, but some were blocked by the industry’s innate conservatism. Eddie Rogers’s 1964 account of London’s Tin Pan Alley (Denmark Street, off the Charing Cross Road) lamented that the street, once the home of the professional songwriter, was now ‘a Mecca for the unskilled amateur’ and that ‘the old hands . . . either cannot get the feel of the songs that are selling today, or else they don’t want to try.’¹¹³ Though Rogers himself spoke warmly of the Beatles, many of those whom he interviewed evidently saw the new generation of pop musicians as charlatans—‘amateurs’ heedless of the industry’s standards. To judge from the book’s illustrations, few of Rogers’s interviewees would see fifty again; arguments over the value of new music were sharpened by generational hostility. ‘I don’t like the old people in this teenage business because they don’t know what it’s about’, the prolific twenty-six-year-old producer Mickie Most complained to Maureen Cleave in 1964: ‘I don’t interfere with Bing Crosby records.’ Noting that the establishment had sought to warn him off producing the Animals’ number-one “House of the Rising Sun,” he aspired to make the charts with ‘a record that only dogs can hear.’¹¹⁴

Two years earlier, Decca had rejected the Beatles. The idea of a middle-aged establishment blind to trends in youth taste is now a commonplace, both in fashion and in music. In reality it is unsurprising that the more iconoclastic aspects of the new culture disturbed those who saw their job as to target the median customer rather than the trendsetter and nationwide rather than just in London. Not every woman, after all, felt comfortable in a miniskirt. John Stephen was ‘designing essentially gay clothes for straight men’,¹¹⁵ with his use of colour and tight-fitting designs, which many straight men thought risqué. When Decca turned down the Beatles, the company was in good commercial health, with profits generated by Tommy Steele, Anthony Newley and Mantovani.¹¹⁶ Neither industry was

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oblivious to the power of the teenage pocket: the difficulty lay in reading the trends in teen taste. In the spring of 1966 Carnaby Street was said to be full of 'buyers from the more staid clothes retailers who have come to spy out what the young are buying next. They must often leave completely baffled.'¹¹⁷ Even Mary Quant, who shaped fashion far more than she was shaped by it, admitted as she entered her thirties that she and her husband watched 'all the young television programmes' and that they went 'to places like the Ad Lib where you can see the early signs of some new fad or craze beginning to develop amongst the most up-and-coming trend-setters.'¹¹⁸ Both Dick Rowe, who turned down the Beatles for Decca, and George Martin, who signed the group for EMI/Parlophone, were men in early middle age trying to gauge teenage musical appetites. 'The young will not be dictated to', as Quant put it: it was difficult to 'anticipate a mood before people realize that they are bored with what they have already got.'¹¹⁹

Inevitably the advantage lay with those who were closer to the age group in question, which accounts for one distinctive feature of sixties London, the twenty-something plutocrat. Andrew Loog Oldham was in fact only nineteen when he became manager of the Rolling Stones in 1963: 'Five years ago', he told Maureen Cleave in 1964, 'they wouldn't have let me make tea, let alone records.'¹²⁰ Still more striking, perhaps, was the trajectory of Oldham's onetime bodyguard, Reg King, who rose from working as a butcher's slaughterman to managing the group Thee. This group made no great mark on musical history, but King could still afford at the age of twenty-two to drive a white Lincoln convertible round Stanmore, where he lived with his mother.¹²¹ Mickie Most, installed in a new house in Wembley Park by 1964, drove a Porsche and claimed to have been making at least £100 per week since he was seventeen.¹²² In 1962 the twenty-eight-year-old John Stephen became the youngest man in Britain to own a Rolls Royce, but luxury cars soon became standard issue for the Carnaby Street moguls: 'we each have a Rolls-Royce as a status symbol', the twenty-eight-year-old Warren Gold, co-owner of the boutique Lord John, told Rodney Bennett-England in 1967.¹²³ By then Stephen had bought his second car, a Cadillac.¹²⁴

Such opulence elevated these men to the swinging aristocracy. More significant, though, was the evidence it provided that youth culture was becoming commercially and socially pervasive. In the 1950s Teddy Boy gangs had been aggressively exclusive. In the early sixties Mods and Rockers were tribal and territorial. McGill described in 1963 their finely delineated

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Two Mods in Brixton, 1963. (Roger Mayne Archive/Mary Evans Picture Library)

Rockers and bikes, Brixton, 1963. (Roger Mayne Archive/Mary Evans Picture Library)

pitches in Northeast London: ‘Mod strongholds are Dagenham, Ilford, Tottenham, Manor Park, Hackney, Stratford East, Mile End, East Ham, Stoke Newington, Stamford Hill. Rocker strongholds are Finsbury Park, Highbury, Holloway, Enfield, Bethnal Green, Dalston, Finchley Road, Hoxton Market. “No Mod would dare walk through Hoxton Market on his own”, one rocker told me this week.’¹²⁵ Mods, like Teds before them, helped broaden the range of men’s fashion, but clothes were tokens of their exclusivity. Music produced its own, less violent, tribes: trad jazz, modern jazz, folk revival and even early rock and roll were essentially cultish, but by the midsixties these distinctions were being blurred. The Beatles’ development of a widely accessible musical idiom had much to do with that. They have been targets of a revisionism bent on depicting the 1960s as the least culturally eventful decade of the century, but to suggest that they ‘appealed primarily to girls between 10 and 14’ is to understate their appeal to almost everybody else below the age of thirty.¹²⁶ ‘Beatlemania’ was in itself an adolescent cult, but the Beatles were instrumental in developing musical modes which—in many hands—had an extraordinary appeal to teenagers and young adults. The same effect became apparent in menswear. McGill reported in 1962 that Stephen’s customers were ‘entirely teenagers’, but two years later he noted ‘a growing number of adult customers’ in

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Stephen's shops.¹²⁷ 'Two years ago in 1965 we were just catering for the kids', said Warren Gold: 'Today everyone comes here.'¹²⁸



The New Boy Network

As Frank Mort has argued, 'the social elites were more than simply a residual presence in post-war London: they featured as active and frequently dynamic players in metropolitan culture.'¹²⁹ London's aristocracy had not been 'levelled' by the years of war and welfare. It had evolved, but the effect of that evolution had been to root the elites more firmly in metropolitan society.

In London's Victorian heyday, its aristocracy had been a caste. It lived an insular existence, focused on the noble mansions of Mayfair and limited to the months of the Parliamentary sessions. The London 'Season' was a tightly programmed series of social occasions designed to insulate the elite from wider metropolitan society.¹³⁰ Its schedule of events covered much of the Home Counties, with some of them—the Derby, Royal Ascot, Henley Regatta—not in London at all. By contrast the Season's parties and dances were restricted to a very limited area of Mayfair, centred on Park Lane, Brook Street, Grosvenor Street and Grosvenor Square.¹³¹ This world began to crumble after the First World War, when higher direct taxation and death duties undermined the financial security of the 'upper ten', and Mayfair's mansions began to pass from residential into commercial use.¹³² The proportion of the Grosvenor estate in private occupation peaked in 1914;¹³³ thereafter the commercial penetration of the West End proceeded steadily, bringing the demolition of the grander houses, from Devonshire House in 1924 to Londonderry House in 1965.¹³⁴ London lost its Marais.¹³⁵ By 1960 Berkeley Square had 'finally lost a long battle with Big Business', and none of its houses remained in private occupation; five years later one estate agent declared Mayfair 'finished' as a residential area.¹³⁶

The cost of maintaining a London establishment was the force behind this collapse, and many aristocratic families simply abandoned their London base altogether.¹³⁷ Those who stayed moved south and westwards, to Belgravia or to Chelsea, where the number of peers rose from twelve in 1935 to forty-three in 1965 despite a drop in the resident peerage in London as a whole in that period.¹³⁸ Chelsea particularly attracted what Peter Thorold calls 'the young—the expectant rich', drawn by the area's unpretentious but elegant early nineteenth-century town houses and the smaller cottages built for working-class occupation. The latter 'provided exactly the right

amount of accommodation for young families, with an au pair and probably someone to do the cleaning, but without traditional servants.’¹³⁹

Those who moved into Chelsea were occupying London’s Montmartre, an area with an artistic tradition running from J. M. W. Turner to Augustus John. The fusion of artistic Bohemianism and aristocratic libertinism gave birth to what became known as the ‘Chelsea Set’ in the 1950s. In a valedictory 1965 account of twenty years in Chelsea, the King’s Road bookseller Francis Marsden described the coalescence of the ‘Set’ in the *Fantasia* coffee bar, opened by Quant’s backer Archie McNair in 1955, after which ‘the night air was soon loud with the richly modulated cries of the “debs” and their “delights” as, clutching bottles of red wine, they sped to parties in their noisy little cars.’ These were the figures whose antics intrigued the *Evening Standard*, the *Daily Mirror* and any other paper with a gossip column to fill, but they were a noisy minority. More significant was the evolution of the area’s young middle class. Marsden described the change in street style as the war receded, with ‘long black Civil Defence greatcoats and ex-Navy duffel coats’ yielding to ‘duffel coats . . . that had never been nearer the sea than the Charing Cross Road. These were worn with the *New Statesman* and the *Times Literary Supplement* tucked under one arm.’¹⁴⁰ The Canadian sculptor Maryon Kantaroff, arriving in Oakley Street in January 1958, found that the people she met in Chelsea ‘were all very, very busy being writers or painters or would-be intellectuals’, while ‘passing sleeping partners around. “You must meet so and so, he’s a fantastic lover.”’ They lived off baked potatoes because ‘nobody had any money.’¹⁴¹ In the spring of 1959, though, Robin Douglas-Home observed that ‘the artists, sculptors and musicians living simply in their studios and attics’ were retreating before well-heeled invaders from Belgravia and Mayfair.¹⁴² Soon Chelsea ceased to be a haven for penniless creatives. By 1961 ‘property prices had risen with obscene regularity since 1945, causing great hardship to artists’, as the sculptor Anthony Grey told a public meeting called to form a Chelsea Studio Protection Society.¹⁴³ The society was formed but had no discernible effect in shielding poor artists from rising rents.¹⁴⁴ They would move down the road to Fulham, beginning that area’s overspill gentrification,¹⁴⁵ or across the river to Putney, where Edna O’Brien described in 1964 an ‘outpost for Bohemians’ that had formed in the quirky houses of Deodar Road, comprising the painter Sidney Nolan, the sculptor Anthea Alley and the writers Nell Dunn, Jeremy Sandford and O’Brien herself.¹⁴⁶

‘The only artists likely to be found in Chelsea today are . . . interior decorators’, as one local noted in 1961.¹⁴⁷ Priced out of Bohemia, Chelsea’s

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artists gave way to successful and fashionable practitioners of what Anne Sharpley called ‘the near-arts of photography, interior decoration, journalism, stage and dress design.’ They conformed to a now familiar gentrifier image—well-heeled, liberal in outlook and aesthetically aware, ‘spend[ing] their money on holidays, food, paintings, not on large houses, big cars, servants or gadgets.’¹⁴⁸ They could afford to live in sixties Chelsea—and, indeed, contributed to house-price inflation there—because these ‘near-arts’ were lucrative to those who had founded their success on the expansion of London’s creative economy. The fashion boom enriched not only designers but also fashion photographers. The rise in TV ownership—naturally most marked in the capital—and the arrival of commercial television benefited not only telejournalists, editors and presenters but also the advertising industry, with ‘London’s Madison Avenue’ developing in Eastbourne Terrace near Paddington.¹⁴⁹ Gentrification itself stimulated the demand for interior designers since, as the designer David Mlinaric explained, ‘people have no self-confidence about their decorating. They don’t mind risking a bold seven-guinea dress and chucking it away if their friends don’t like it, but they can’t chuck away a room.’¹⁵⁰

The melding of this ‘new aristocracy’ with the old one, creating a ‘new boy network’ or ‘new class,’ became clear to the world in February 1960 when Buckingham Palace announced the engagement of Princess Margaret to a commoner. Antony Armstrong-Jones—a barrister’s son, Belgravia born, Eton and Cambridge educated—was not actually very common, but he cultivated classlessness. His friends had never seen him wearing an Old Etonian tie: ‘he prefers denim trousers and a suede jacket.’¹⁵¹ As a fashion and portrait photographer who had once operated from Archie McNair’s King’s Road studio, he was a representative member of London’s ‘near-arts’ corps. His engagement helped place this group in the public eye. Within days of the announcement, the *Evening Standard* produced a series of five profiles of members of what it called ‘The New Elite.’¹⁵² All the subjects were exponents of the arts or ‘near-arts’: the theatre director Peter Hall, the choreographer John Cranko, the interior decorator David Hicks, the art director of *Queen* magazine Mark Boxer and Armstrong-Jones himself. Apart from the South African Cranko, all went to English public schools (Hall as a scholarship boy). Hall, Boxer and Armstrong-Jones went to Cambridge. At the time of Armstrong-Jones’s engagement, he was living in a gentrified house in ‘a somewhat run down area of Pimlico,’ affording ‘an excellent view of the working-class flats at the bottom of the Armstrong-Jones back yard.’¹⁵³ Boxer was one of the colonisers of World’s End, the

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shabby extremity of the King’s Road; his home, Sharpley noted without further comment, ‘formerly housed four working-class families.’¹⁵⁴ Hicks was described as ‘not unique’ but rather ‘a very successful example of a type that has moved elegantly into Belgravia and Chelsea in the last 10 years.’¹⁵⁵

By the midsixties these people needed less introduction, many being celebrities in their own right. Collectively they formed what Anthony Haden-Guest labelled the ‘New Class’ (‘bred from the Affluent Arts out of the Consumer State’) in a caustic, insightful semiparody in *Queen* in 1965.¹⁵⁶ They provided the core of Jonathan Aitken’s interviews for his 1967 study *The Young Meteors*. They clustered in the young professions. Television was ‘stuffed with highly ambitious and talented young men who will be contemptuously discarded or rapidly elevated between 30 and 35’; Desmond Wilcox, editor of the BBC’s current affairs programme *Man Alive*, felt ‘incredibly old and defeated’ when he turned thirty in 1961.¹⁵⁷ Interior design had expanded so rapidly as to be effectively a new industry in the sixties. Mlinaric had founded his own firm at the age of twenty-five in 1964 and had twenty jobs under way when *London Life* interviewed him in 1965. His staff of five were all aged under twenty-seven.¹⁵⁸ Journalism, though hardly new, was also turning to youth at the time. Several of the opinion formers prominent in the *Evening Standard* in its late-sixties heyday under Charles Wintour were in their twenties: Jonathan Aitken (born 1942), Valerie Grove (née Jenkins, 1946), Max Hastings (1945), Simon Jenkins (1943).

The twenty-nine-year-old film director Michael Winner told Haden-Guest that a ‘medium-good film script writer should turn in £50,000 a year’, at a time when the prime minister’s salary was only £14,000.¹⁵⁹ The nine fashion and advertising photographers whom Aitken interviewed for *The Young Meteors* claimed to be making between £25,000 and £60,000 a year. The writer Nik Cohn made £10,000 from freelance journalism at the age of twenty, while Haden-Guest himself made the same amount at the age of twenty-nine.¹⁶⁰ In the ‘near-arts’ few starved. Few made the kind of money claimed by the photographers, of course, but careers in these young or rapidly expanding industries also offered responsibility at a young age and the chance to be creative. Michael Beaumont, a twenty-six-year-old account executive for the advertisers Mather and Crowther, was interviewed by Maureen Cleave for an *Evening Standard* series on London’s bachelors in 1964. As he was a product of Eton, Oxford and the Coldstream Guards, his trajectory might have been expected to have carried him into the City. He chose advertising instead because ‘it sounded tough and therefore exciting’, though it paid him a relatively modest £1,300 a year.¹⁶¹

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The City itself, conservative and clannish,¹⁶² was no place for the ambitious young. Michael Burns left his stockbroking firm after receiving a Christmas bonus equivalent only to the expenses claimed by one senior partner in a weekend. Tellingly, he became a TV cameraman and later a producer and, like Beaumont, a Labour voter.¹⁶³ ‘Don’t be young’, Diana Mallory warned in a hostile account of the City in 1963; ‘you can just about get away with 35.’¹⁶⁴ Aitken found few ‘meteors’ in the square mile. An entrenched ‘bias in favour of the gentleman amateur’ deterred them, particularly when reinforced by insistence on the kind of outmoded dress code that offended the swinging: at Cazenove’s throughout the decade ‘all partners still wore bowlers, almost all men still wore stiff collars and no female member of staff dared to wear either trousers or too provocatively short a skirt.’¹⁶⁵ Aitken saw not only the City but also medicine, the civil service and the church as professions tainted in the eyes of the young meritocracy by their inbuilt barriers to talent.¹⁶⁶ In the law, the Inns of Court had long imposed a protracted impecunious traineeship on would-be barristers, while the system of articulated clerkships for solicitors was creaking in the midsixties, creating ‘a permanent pool of young trainees who cannot find articulated vacancies.’ A twenty-four-year-old trainee solicitor could expect to earn only £1,200 a year—little more than a competent secretary—and many looked elsewhere.¹⁶⁷ Just as career-path dependency was disappearing for postmen and lightermen, so it was for those who were once destined for the conservative professions.

Women had never found plentiful openings in these old worlds—a ‘woman is tolerated in the City only as a handmaiden’, as Mary Murry, a typist-translator for one of the big banks, wrote in 1961.¹⁶⁸ But they benefited from the greater flexibility of the younger trades. Journalism, broadcasting, advertising and the media all offered openings to career-minded young women, with glass ceilings still pitched some way above the heads of their generation. The TV producer Elizabeth Cowley had arrived in Britain from Canada in 1952, working in Harrods’ advertising department and for *Woman* magazine before landing a BBC job simply by writing to the producer Donald Baverstock. Josephine Douglas, producer of the first TV chart show, the *Six-Five Special*, maintained firmly that ‘it is no tougher being a woman in television than it is being a man.’¹⁶⁹ Cowley and Douglas were career women in their thirties.

The career of Lucy Bartlett, daughter of another TV woman, the announcer Mary Malcolm, reveals the more happy-go-lucky approach of a well-connected twenty-four-year-old in the midsixties, sampling all that

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Queen Charlotte's Ball, 1967. Queen Charlotte's Ball, considered the centrepiece of the London Season, was instituted in 1780 on the birthday of Queen Charlotte, wife of George III. Debutantes were required to curtsy to the queen and to a large birthday cake. The ball—and the cake—survived the end of presentations at court in 1958, after which debutantes curtsied to the guest of honour. The last ball (before the Season's recent revival) was held in 1976. (© David Hurn/Magnum Photos)

Swinging London offered. After art school, Bartlett worked briefly as a restorer for an antique dealer and a public relations officer for a wine company, before writing for *Teen Scene* on the BBC's Light Programme. A walk-on part in Richard Lester's film *The Knack* and an appearance on the TV pop show *Juke Box Jury* followed before she borrowed £100 from her father, the actor Sir Basil Bartlett, to start an interior-design company. She drove a Mini Cooper and spent £15 a week on clothes. In London, she felt, 'you push all the doors marked pull, and you get what you want.' Jack Wilton, who profiled Bartlett for *London Life*, believed that this type of new woman 'thinks of herself as an *entrepreneuse*' with a 'candidly mercenary' attitude to money. Her friends would be writers, artists and photographers rather than stockbrokers, barristers, merchant bankers or young Tories, 'all of whom she will find gruesomely boring.' She 'would far rather make £10,000 for herself than marry a man with £50,000 in stocks' and would augment her regular income from office work by occasional modelling or by designing clothes for a boutique.¹⁷⁰

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Fiona MacCarthy's account of the last debutantes to be presented at court (in 1958) indicates a consistent aspiration, even among those who did marry men with £50,000 in stocks, to lead independent lives. The group included the first woman on the board of Anglia TV, a future editor of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, a deputy secretary of the Royal Academy, a professional interior decorator working with David Hicks, the fashion editor of the *London Evening News*, one of the founders of the classy Kensington boutique Annacat and a record-breaking helicopter pilot, as well as MacCarthy herself, a distinguished journalist and author.¹⁷¹ Most of them remained within the general 'creative' milieu but rejected the life which the London Season conventionally prescribed, of 'arranging another bowl of flowers and organising another dinner party *ad infinitum*.'¹⁷² In the early sixties debutantes began to distance themselves from the principal purpose of the Season ('Debdom is a marriage market. Ugh!'),¹⁷³ routinely expressing their disenchantment with the constricting etiquette and repetitious parties and balls that its rituals prescribed. 'The season is ridiculous, idiotic, complete nonsense and a waste of time,' pronounced seventeen-year-old Angela Berkeley-Owen in 1961, adding, 'I am going to take part in it because my mother wants me to.'¹⁷⁴ In fact the Duke of Kent's engagement earlier that year to Katherine Worsley, 'the country girl who has never been a deb', dampened many mothers' enthusiasm for the substantial expenditure that the Season entailed.¹⁷⁵ By 1967, as the journalist Godfrey Smith wrote bluntly, 'the London Season carries on but no longer matters.'¹⁷⁶

The Season at its peak had enforced a finely calibrated definition of the social elite. Daughters of barristers but not of solicitors, of surgeons but not of general practitioners, could be presented at court.¹⁷⁷ By the 1960s respect for such distinctions had dwindled; by the seventies it was even suggested that 'the occasional well-born foreign name and the not-so-lofty merchant classes' had infiltrated the Season.¹⁷⁸ Haden-Guest stressed that his 'New Class' saw no need to ape the existing establishment, as 'they have numbers, money, status' already.¹⁷⁹ As is well known, the profusion of new ways of getting rich in London allowed some working-class men and women to enter swinging society—the actors Michael Caine and Terence Stamp; the hairdresser Vidal Sassoon; the photographers David Bailey, Terence Donovan and Brian Duffy; those members of pop royalty willing to be initiated—but such upward mobility was unusual. A 1966 *London Life* feature on the photographer Patrick Lichfield, the queen's cousin, with his assistant Viscount Encombe, his secretary Lady Elizabeth Ramsay and his model, former 'Deb of the Year' Rory Davis, reminds us that status and

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money were advantageous even in the new trades.¹⁸⁰ The slightest glance at *Queen* and *London Life*—‘the hymnal and psalter of the switched-on cult’, as Aitken called them,¹⁸¹ with their accounts of society weddings, expensive restaurants and foreign travel, and their adverts for country house property—indicates that these magazines did not court the unwashed. What they also show, though, is the easy absorption of the principal elements of the new popular culture. High culture was not displaced but augmented in this milieu: London’s new woman, Jack Wilton suggested, ‘will feel the same intensity of interest in, say, a new Beatles record and a visiting exhibition at the Tate.’¹⁸² So would London’s new man.

The West End leisure culture that *Time* and the other outside observers documented in 1965–67 had been forged in the previous ten years, founded on a determination to spurn the ‘square.’ The gentlemen’s clubs of Pall Mall, with firm dress codes and no women, were shunned. By the sixties several were reduced to offering lower subscriptions to men aged under thirty, but with so little success that they were forced to accept ‘all sorts of people who would have been contemptuously rejected in the high days of clubland’ in order to stay afloat.¹⁸³ The nightclub-cum-discotheque emerged instead, such as the short-lived Ad Lib, the very exclusive Annabel’s or, above all, Sibylla’s, founded by two advertising copywriters and a property developer in Swallow Street in 1966. Sibylla’s was partly funded by Beatle George Harrison and intended as a refuge for ‘the current young meritocracy of style, taste and sensitivity.’¹⁸⁴

Just as nightclubs supplanted gentlemen’s clubs, Italian trattorie became modish in these circles at the expense of haute cuisine French restaurants. The Trattoria Terrazza, opened by Mario Cassandro and Franco Lagattolla in Romilly Street, Soho, in 1959, became stiflingly fashionable in a city striving to find new ways to eat.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, boutiques threatened the fashion departments of the great stores: by the early 1960s it had become clear that boutiques provided ‘scope for the shopping individualist’ in women’s fashion which the stores were slow to match. *Queen*’s survey in July 1962 shows the wide range of boutiques available even by then, in Mayfair as well as Chelsea, catering for ‘those with a smart but straightforward approach’, for those ‘with more taste than money’ or simply ‘for the very few.’¹⁸⁶ The smart-modern tailoring of the menswear boutique John Michael, opened by John Michael Ingram in the King’s Road in 1957, was trendsetting in a way that Oxford Street recognised only slowly and Savile Row initially eschewed. Ingram acknowledged his initial uncertainty about whom he was targeting—‘I suppose it was my own age group—between

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twenty and thirty’—but he knew that he could not have started out anywhere other than in Chelsea.¹⁸⁷

In 1960 Antony Armstrong-Jones, newly ennobled as Lord Snowdon, turned up at the Trattoria Terrazza in a roll-neck shirt and without a tie. Initially reluctant, the coproprietor, Mario Cassandro, admitted him, having received a briefing on the dress etiquette of London’s new *élite*. Thereafter ‘Mario would hardly let in anyone wearing a tie.’¹⁸⁸ This seismic moment in London’s social history heralded a general rejection by the ‘new *élite*’ of the class-coded trappings of West End convention. In a 1971 study of postwar men’s fashion, Nik Cohn noted that from the midfifties the sons of gentlemen stopped going automatically to the same tailors as their fathers: ‘They thought Savile Row humbug, all those fittings and adjustments, all that obsequence, and at the end of it, what? Another dark grey suit.’¹⁸⁹ Received pronunciation was another rejected inheritance. ‘Now public schoolboys talk with a Cliff Richard accent’, Simon Napier-Bell remarked in 1966;¹⁹⁰ Haden-Guest saw ‘disc-jockey’s mid-Atlantic and David Frost-Midlands’ as ‘the two great voices of the television age.’¹⁹¹ Outside observers interpreted this and other elements of inverted snobbery as a sign that the English class system had been subverted in modern London, which was to mistake generational sparring for social levelling. The impression was reinforced, though, by the coming together of London’s new tribes in the West End.



Convergence

In 1960 Tommy Steele recalled that as a teenager in early 1950s Bermondsey he had ‘never ventured into the West End’: ‘We had heard rumours about getting lost and never coming back. The bus in our street said Piccadilly, but we thought that was miles away and we never got on it.’¹⁹² The office boom ended that, drawing young Londoners into the City and the West End to work and, by extension, to play. The introduction of the espresso machine to the Italian quarter of South Soho in 1953 established the coffee bar as a modish social venue for those who were too young to enter pubs legally (though coffee bars were said frequently to offer clandestine alcohol and amphetamines).¹⁹³ Soho subsequently became a magnet for London youth: Steele himself launched his career performing at the 2is coffee bar in Old Compton Street (‘London’s most powerful teen magnet’ in the late 1950s).¹⁹⁴ London’s first two skiffle clubs were in Soho, in Wardour Street and Gerrard Street.¹⁹⁵ The 1950s transformation of

Soho, an area ever reinventing itself, was serendipitous. Proximity to the-atreland accounted for the presence of a long-established gay community,¹⁹⁶ which in turn provided the market for the adventurous menswear sold in Bill Green’s Vince Man’s Shop, where John Stephen was an employee. Soho’s Italian community nurtured the coffee-bar craze, which attracted clothes-conscious Mods to the area. The relocation of East End tailors to the streets behind Oxford Street after the Blitz allowed Stephen to have his own designs made up locally, undercutting Green’s imports,¹⁹⁷ and to cultivate a Mod market large enough to obscure the original gay connotations of his designs. Thus established, Stephen became the ‘King’ of his new territory, the West Soho backwater of Carnaby Street, owning nine shops in the short street at his peak. By around 1962 a Carnaby Street location had become such an indispensable asset in the menswear business that Stephen’s rivals were ready to lease property for which he owned the freehold, paying rents which, by the midsixties, had risen tenfold over five years.¹⁹⁸ The Gold brothers, Irvine Sellar, Sidney Brent and Stanley Adams, all moved from the outer East End into shops in or near Carnaby Street.¹⁹⁹

Every week the Mod invasion would begin on Thursday or Friday, after payday. On Saturdays Carnaby Street was ‘a kind of teenagers’ Play Street when the mods arrive from all over London.’²⁰⁰ A Mod-oriented club scene grew up to accommodate them, centred farther east, in Wardour Street—‘the most peachy place. The most Modernist street in the world’, as one eighteen-year-old told Anne Sharpley in February 1964.²⁰¹ The Marquee Club’s move from Oxford Street to Wardour Street in the following month completed its evolution from a jazz to a pop venue and a celebrated Mod centre.²⁰² The management of Tiles Club, at 79 Oxford Street, just north of Soho Square, was said to have discouraged anyone aged over twenty-five from entering.²⁰³ The development of this West End ‘scene’ undermined suburban dance venues, just as the rise of Carnaby Street had weakened the ‘Diors of Clapham.’ Surveying the suburban dance halls in November 1965, Jane Wilson found that while the Streatham Locarno and the Wimbledon Palais still prospered, lesser venues provided a picture of cavernous, underoccupied interwar halls, unknown bands and an anachronistically restrictive dress code. ‘I reckon they come specially to have a miserable time’, the lead singer of ‘Mr Bean and his Runners’ suggested of his audience at the Tiger’s Head, Catford.²⁰⁴ Suburban cinemas suffered a similar decline. Norwood lost all its film houses between 1956 and 1971, as a host of interwar picture-palace names—the Royal, the Central, the Astoria, the Albany, the Regal, the Rialto and the Odeon—passed into

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oblivion.²⁰⁵ The principal cause was, of course, the spread of television, but the effect was again to underline the primacy of the West End even where a cinema did survive.²⁰⁶

The separate development of Chelsea's leisure scene had reflected the social composition of the area. What became famous as Mary Quant's Bazaar was not originally envisaged as a showcase for her designs but as part of a venture uniting boutique and restaurant in the same building—a combination carefully aimed at West London's *jeunesse dorée*. John Michael, whose men's boutique opened two years after Bazaar, '[did] for the young executive what John Stephen had done for the working-class boy.'²⁰⁷ The profusion of restaurants opening in or near the King's Road in the late 1950s and early 1960s—the tally of eating places in Chelsea was estimated to have risen from a dozen to around two hundred in these years²⁰⁸—clearly signified opulence. So did the plethora of antique shops: significant as the King's Road obviously was as a platform for new fashion, by weight of numbers it was primarily an antiques centre, sporting forty-one antique shops by 1966.²⁰⁹

The two poles of the new London were thus initially comparable but distinct: Soho was a Mod gathering ground and a melting pot for the capital's European immigrant groups. Although the gang warfare of the 1950s had subsided, it remained an edgy area, where at night the police patrolled in pairs with Alsatians and where, according to the A6 murderer James Hanratty in his 1962 trial, '[you] can get a gun for £10 or £12 any day of the week.'²¹⁰ Chelsea and Kensington, by contrast, catered to the young, well-heeled fashion-conscious: '[Mary Quant's] Bazaar was for rich girls', in the model Twiggy's blunt words. A pinafore dress featured in *Vogue* in 1960 cost three weeks' wages for an office girl.²¹¹ In menswear the *Standard's* Angus McGill distinguished between '*le style* King's Road', meaning 'the leisure clothes that we have suddenly become so good at—handsome, beautifully made and rather expensive'—and '*le style* Carnaby Street': 'cheap, stylish, sexy clobber for the kids.'²¹² Each had its place.

By the midsixties, though, the distinction between the two areas was being blurred. The trattoria craze had drawn all and sundry into Soho, making it less outré: 'Opera singers, princesses, hairdressers, crooks, boxers, surgeons, parsons, they all dine in Soho at some stage of the year', and few of the customers of Soho restaurants came from Soho itself.²¹³ In 1966 Alvaro Maccioni, manager at the Terrazza, led the Italian escape from Soho by establishing Alvaro's trattoria in Chelsea, where Italian restaurants had been thin on the ground: 'Something new was happening, every time I

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went down the King’s Road’, he explained; ‘Soho was for the older generation, a continuation of the fifties and I was younger.’²¹⁴ Barbara Hulanicki’s first Biba shop, which opened in Abingdon Road, Kensington, in August 1964, brought affordable, imaginative women’s wear to West London and, like Stephen’s shops, became popular with both the classes and the masses. In the space of a few pages in her autobiography, Hulanicki listed the celebrities who patronised her second (Church Street) shop at its height—Mia Farrow, Princess Anne, Brigitte Bardot, Marianne Faithfull, Yoko Ono and others—while also complaining that ‘the glossy establishment press’ ignored her because her shop ‘sold to real people and not just jet setters.’²¹⁵ The juxtaposition appears jarring but was not misleading: like Stephen, Hulanicki demonstrated that the key to success lay in combining modishness with affordability. By the midsixties several cheaper boutiques had appeared in the King’s Road. John Stephen himself opened two branches there in 1963–64, combining Soho style and Chelsea décor—‘it’s all coach lamps, brass and quality.’²¹⁶ Meanwhile the modishness of Carnaby Street attracted fashionable customers to mingle with the teens: at the eponymous John Stephen boutique in 1967 ‘the clientele includes all the usual pop personalities, and you may see such celebrities as Lord Snowdon, The Duke of Bedford and Peter Sellers.’²¹⁷ In consequence Mod dominance of the street was diluted; indeed Stephen’s biographer sees 1967 as the point at which Mods began ‘to do a vanishing trick from mainstream fashion.’²¹⁸ This was accelerated by the spread of hippie eclecticism in menswear. The eccentric purveyor of ex-military uniforms I Was Lord Kitchener’s Valet, founded in the Portobello Road in 1966, moved to form branches in both the King’s Road and Carnaby Street.²¹⁹ Rodney Bennett-England argued in 1967 that events had overtaken Carnaby Street, which now ‘cater[ed] for tourists with frivolous and poor quality merchandise resembling fancy dress.’ ‘We are not trying to dress exhibitionists’, Bill Green of the Vince Man’s Shop in Newburgh Street told him: ‘they can go to Carnaby Street.’²²⁰

Rave magazine’s April 1966 map of ‘in’ places depicted a London consisting entirely of Soho/Piccadilly and Chelsea/Kensington.²²¹ Halasz’s *Time* piece in the same month was accompanied by a map showing virtually the same London, and neither magazine suggested that one area was less accessible than the other. By the midsixties, differentiation within the ‘scene’ depended less on locale and more on price or less tangible forms of social filtration. Thus even within Stephen’s Carnaby Street empire, a two-piece suit at ‘John Stephen’s Man’s Shop’ (49 Carnaby Street) could cost

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live through several days in London without encountering a single soul who has ever set foot in a discothèque.²²⁷ The former Mod Ken Browne, interviewed by Terry Rawlings in 2000, remembered that while ‘the upper-class kids’ might set foot in the affordable Tiles (‘they had the moves, and they could afford to dress a bit better’), the average Mod would not be seen in such chic spots as the Scotch of St James or the Cromwellian—it was also about seven quid to get in or something ridiculous which was unbelievable in those days. There was a whole different scene going on in those places.²²⁸

Swinging London thus had its pecking orders. They are best seen, though, as social responses to the homogenising potential of a commercialised youth culture which appeared to transcend social divisions and which was increasingly concentrated in a relatively small area of Central London. By the midsixties the West End had developed an elaborate recreational ‘scene’, focused on music, clubs, fashion and eating out and dominated by young adults and teenagers. Nothing quite like it had existed in 1960. It was what foreign observers came to observe.



‘Why London? Why Now?’

The subeditor for John Crosby’s *Weekend Telegraph* piece suggested, ‘We [Londoners] may be living too close to the revolution to recognise it, we need a foreigner to do that.’²²⁹ It was a compelling suggestion but unconvincing. The ‘revolution’ that London’s many overseas observers recognised in the midsixties was largely conveyed as pastiche. They were journalists rather than social anthropologists, and they followed a journalistic imperative to produce a coherent story from the random material they had to hand: Halasz saw her job for *Time* as ‘the presentation of “Swinging London” as a single unified phenomenon.’²³⁰ Taken as they were by the idea of dukes shopping in Carnaby Street and secretaries shopping in Chelsea, they constructed an image of classlessness that could not stand very close scrutiny. Taken as some of them were by the idea of young London ‘chicks’ taking to sex like candy, they developed a picture of sexual eclecticism that was misguided even in this relatively liberal milieu. Almost all their accounts were shaped by presuppositions about Britain’s condition—first the benign view that London was providing a colourful escape from the nation’s natural grey austerity but later, as financial and industrial problems mounted in the summer of 1966, that the city displayed

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feckless escapism in the face of economic crisis. Both the benign and the censorious reading of Swinging London assumed a degree of self-indulgence at odds with the lived experience of most 'real' Londoners who had to eat, sleep, commute and work in the city. The writers' understandable emphasis on the West End then reinforced this effect by drawing in two minority leisure pursuits that happened to be concentrated there, in the strip clubs of Soho and the casinos of Mayfair.

Both phenomena were real enough. Soho was already well established as London's erogenous zone, but its seedy reputation was reinforced from the late 1950s as Paul Raymond and others exploited the ambiguity of controls over public nudity.²³¹ This development comprehensively thwarted the efforts of local traders in the Soho Association to make the area more respectable;²³² in 1963 the writer Wolf Mankowitz, a native and resident, described Soho appositely as 'an industrial centre for the manufacture of strip and trattoria.'²³³ The Metropolitan Police were sufficiently concerned about the impression made on tourists coming to London for the 1966 World Cup to mount a cleanup of Soho clip joints before the tournament,²³⁴ but striptease in itself continued to be treated as risqué but harmless in the midsixties. Halasz's piece in *Time* included an illustration of a performer at the Sunset Strip club in Dean Street: she posited as a selling point that 'dozens of nightclubs offer totally uninhibited striptease.'²³⁵ And while betting shops sprang up everywhere, the casinos had their origins in gentlemen's gaming circles and were consequently fixed in aristocratic London, mostly in Mayfair. Crockford's Club—another of Halasz's 'Scenes'—was in St James's Street, Quent's in Hill Street, Curzon House in Curzon Street, Les Ambassadeurs in Hamilton Place and John Aspinall's Clermont Club in Berkeley Square. Both striptease and casinos depended significantly on overseas visitors, whether tourist voyeurs or high-rolling gamblers, who were drawn more readily to the West End than to Enfield or Lewisham. The casino world, in which 'a famous peer' could lose £125,000 in a single session at Les Ambassadeurs, was hardly typical even of the affluent society. It was an exclusive milieu, with entry tightly controlled²³⁶ and conduct governed by the quasi-chivalric codes of honour that came to light in 1974 when the Lord Lucan affair opened a window on the Clermont Club. 'Membership compulsory and very exclusive', *London Life's* listing for Curzon House announced: 'prospective members vetted before joining.'²³⁷ The strip clubs and the casinos appealed to limited—and almost entirely male—clienteles, but they were rooted in the West End and shared that limited space with the nightclubs, the trattorias and the

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boutiques. Outside observers, inevitably focusing on the West End, conflated them all, creating a composite picture of a London recreational life—a trip down the King’s Road to blow half a week’s wage on clothes, followed by a flutter in a black-tie casino and an evening in a strip club—that no Londoner actually lived.

Faced with this image of decadence, ‘real’ Londoners, at the time and since, have constructed a counterorthodoxy to the effect that the sixties cultural revolution, if it happened at all, was limited to the Chelsea set or similar hedonists and that ‘nothing very swinging happened in Streatham.’ To dismiss the ‘revolution’ altogether, though, is as dangerous as to take it at face value. Aitken’s 1967 verdict remains valid: ‘The changes in tastes, behaviour and attitudes of the younger generation over the last few years have at least to a small extent influenced the lives of every Londoner under the age of 35. Whether these changes have anything to do with “swinging” is a matter of semantics, but the fact remains that without these changes today’s younger generation would be imperceptibly different from their parents, whereas in fact they are enormously different.’²³⁸ When pressed, most of those who claim today that the swinging sixties passed them by will acknowledge having owned Beatles records or, indeed, heard the group live—in their touring days they played several unprepossessing suburban venues as well as grander central ones.²³⁹ They may have shopped in one of John Stephen’s boutiques or in Hulanicki’s ‘exclusive, inexpensive’ Biba.²⁴⁰ They may have danced at the Marquee or eaten at Fiddlers Three in Chelsea or Cranks in Soho. These pleasures were accessible and affordable in a way that many of those depicted by Crosby and Halasz—the nightclub Annabel’s, the Ad Lib Club, where one table was ‘more or less permanently reserved for the Beatles’²⁴¹—were not. The new popular culture *was* indisputably popular, even if its delights were almost exclusively enjoyed by teenagers and young adults.

Halasz’s instinctive belief in the influence of youth in London was not misplaced. In 1966 almost a quarter of all residents in what the Census called the ‘Conurbation Centre’ were aged between fifteen and twenty-nine. In Greater London as a whole, the proportion of residents aged between fifteen and twenty-four was, at 15 percent, higher than in any Census since 1931. The young of 1966 were, of course, significantly more opulent than the young of 1931, and without reducing the cultural phenomenon of Swinging London purely to a matter of purchasing power, it was the youth pound which created the new aristocracy whose antics so fascinated foreign observers. ‘In the early 1960s,’ as an otherwise rather close-focused

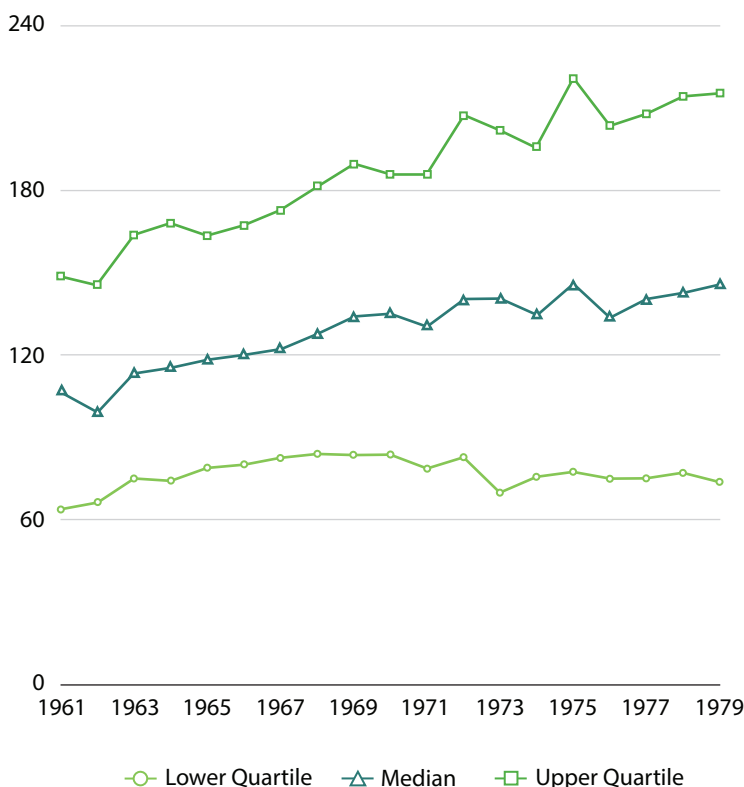
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Greater London Council (GLC) research report on Carnaby Street put it in 1975, 'the affluent young were beginning to assert their economic power, a power to make world celebrities out of pop groups, fashion models and clothes designers.'²⁴² If these world celebrities then lived at a level of self-indulgence unimaginable to the young consumers who had made them, that does not mean that Swinging London was completely elitist or negate its foundations in broadly based youth affluence. It reflected an age structure—particularly in inner London—skewed towards youth and, above all, the sheer prosperity of the city in the early sixties.

Seen in a longer-term perspective, London's economy was undergoing a process of change by which the newer service industries described earlier expanded and much of its traditional manufacturing industry declined. These two processes did not occur in step, though. For a decade or so from the midfifties, the office economy grew rapidly with little effect on manufacturing beyond creating labour shortages which raised wages. As a result, if anywhere epitomised the affluent society, it was midsixties London. Looking back from the turbulent midseventies, one GLC research report concluded that in London 1966 had been 'an extremely prosperous year when the demand for labour was unusually high'; all but two of the thirty-two boroughs showed increased economic activity from the already high levels of 1961.²⁴³ This was strikingly demonstrated by Colin Crofts's 1983 analysis of Family Expenditure Survey returns for London, which depicts the movement of the top and bottom income quartiles, and of median incomes, over the period 1961–79, in constant (1980) prices.²⁴⁴ The early sixties emerge as years of steady improvement for all groups. If Londoners were indeed guilty of ignoring the nation's balance-of-payments problems while they partied, it was probably because most of them had never had it so good.

Thereafter, though, the situation became more complex. The balance of payments caught up with London's pleasure-seekers with the Wilson government's credit squeeze in the winter of 1966–67. In October Charles Lyte in the *Standard* noted a drop in discretionary spending in London: sales of pop records had fallen, and there was 'a general decline in the restaurant trade.'²⁴⁵ Jonathan Aitken looked specifically at 'Swinging London' in November. Though he was not entirely pessimistic, concluding that 'unless things get very much worse, the talented and hard working swingers will survive easily, and only the floss will have been removed from the candy floss society', he recognised that there was much floss to remove. On the club scene, while expensive venues like Annabel's and cheap ones like the Marquee still flourished, there was 'an embarrassing acreage of empty tables' in many

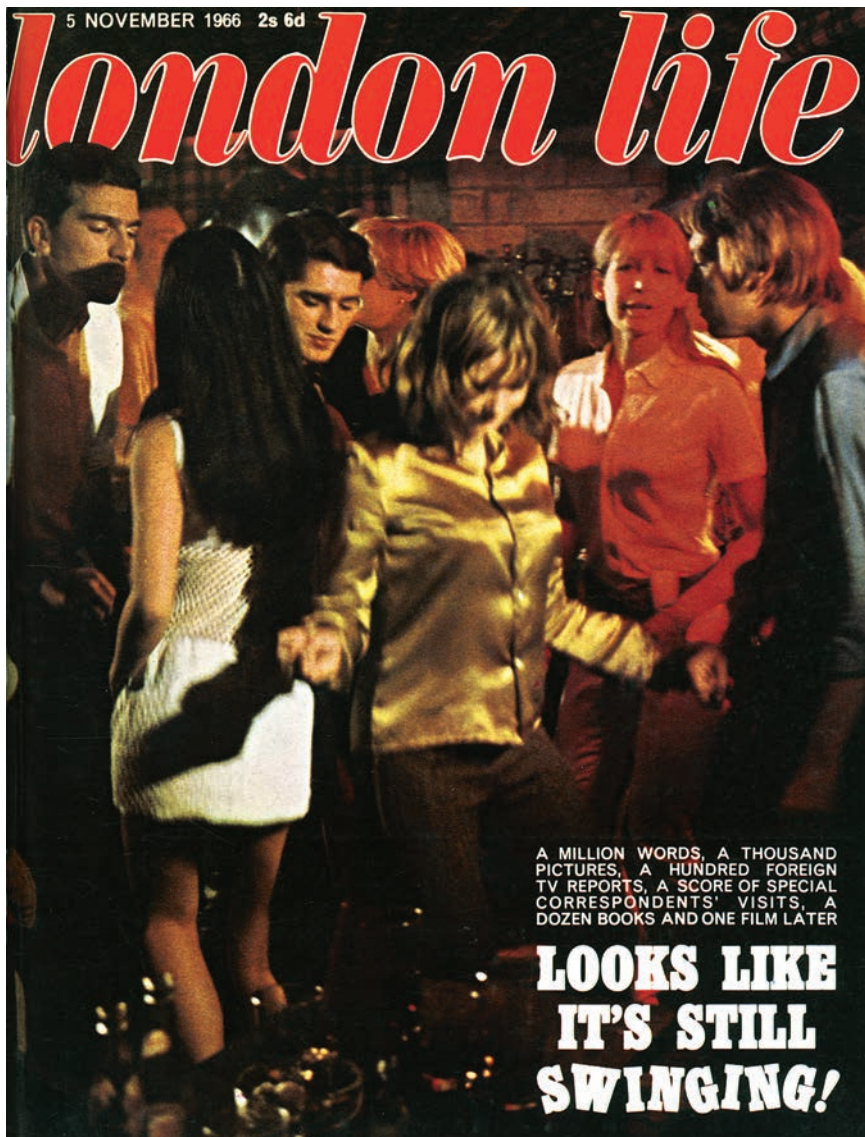
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Household real incomes in Greater London, 1961–79 (£/week at 1980 prices)

once-buoyant clubs. The overstretched gambling world was inevitably vulnerable: Aitken recorded the collapse of ‘dozens of smaller gaming clubs’ and even contraction at the Clermont. Fashion was struggling. The previously lucrative market for fashion photography had collapsed, and the designer Alice Pollock told him that ‘everybody’s miserable in the King’s Road. . . . The scene has quietened down and everyone feels low.’²⁴⁶

The 1966–67 ‘squeeze’—a belt-tightening exercise by which the Wilson government sought to stave off the devaluation of sterling—in itself said little about the strengths and weaknesses of the London economy. That winter would, though, bring early hints of the process of deindustrialisation that would transform inner London over the next two decades. The two boroughs which had fallen back between 1961 and 1966 were Newham and Tower Hamlets, presaging—even before the dock closures of the late sixties—the industrial contraction that would eviscerate the East End in



The 'in-crowd' magazine *London Life* smiling in the face of the Wilson government's economic 'freeze' in November 1966, barely six months after *Time* christened London 'the Swinging City'. (Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans)

the next few years. From 1967, in fact, unemployment rose across the inner-London boroughs.

For almost a decade the London economy had been stimulated by the boom in office and commercial employment, without being greatly afflicted by the decline in traditional manufacturing industry that was its natural concomitant. From the late sixties, though, deindustrialisation proceeded apace. Between 1971 and 1974 manufacturing employment fell by 14 percent in Greater London, against a drop of only 2 percent in Great Britain as a whole.²⁴⁷ The most visible victims were those of upper-middle age who had spent their lives in the docks or ancillary riverside trades and could not retool, but industrial contraction also hit the young hard. By 1971 the economic inactivity rate for persons aged between fifteen and nineteen in London had more than trebled, against a doubling of the rate for the working-age population as a whole.²⁴⁸ The exuberance of the midsixties, fuelled as it had been by youth spending power, was a thing of the past.

This development made London's traditional industrial areas highly vulnerable to the severe economic turbulence that followed the oil shock of 1973–74. Crofts's analysis shows the results. Between 1970 and 1979 London's lowest quartile suffered a startling 12 percent drop in real incomes, as the combination of unemployment and very high inflation rates hit those who were least able to resist—mostly pensioners, school leavers and the unemployed. In these years the capital's inner-city problem became inescapable, and the London press and much business opinion was suffused with pessimism, as a declinist orthodoxy took root concerning the city's future.²⁴⁹ What Crofts's figures also show, though, is a 16 percent rise in the real incomes of the top quartile across the decade. The seventies brought not general decline to London but growing inequality. And in the midst of that inequality, median real incomes rose by 6 percent, buffeted by the alarming inflation rate but not permanently depressed. Despite everything, the 'median Londoner' was becoming steadily more comfortable, as the rich grew richer and the poor poorer.



Conclusion

Although London's fabric had obviously been battered during the Second World War, the London of the late fifties had been, in its patterns and processes, a city which the late Victorians would have recognised. London had

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been the nation's principal manufacturing centre in the Victorian age, and it still was. The port of London had been a global entrepôt, and it still was. London's social topography was broadly that of the classic industrial city, with a working-class core around the Central Business District and affluence levels rising the farther one got from the centre. The private landlord still accommodated around half the city's households—significantly more in the older parts of the city, where the quality of much of the housing stock was low. Late-Victorian London had been ethnically complex but overwhelmingly white, which was still the case. Most people then had traversed the city by means of public transport: in 1960 they still did.

By the late seventies much had changed. The upriver docks had closed or were about to close. London's manufacturing industries had suffered an unexpectedly sharp contraction. Though the office boom had slowed after 1966, the faster contraction of industry meant that offices accounted for 40 percent of London's employment in 1976. London's economy could no longer be said to rest on its industry, and the capital was more evidently a city of consumers than of producers. The private rental market was shrinking, and the owner-occupied house was fast becoming the ultimate consumer durable. Gentrification had refreshed much of the older housing stock while making London's social map more complicated. While car-ownership levels were still slightly below those of the rest of the United Kingdom, at around 50 percent of London households, they were sufficient to call into question the appropriate balance between public and private transport in the modern city. The characteristically postindustrial creeds of urban environmentalism and building conservation coloured this debate, but other consequences of the contraction of traditional industry were less benign. London's inner-city problem had intensified during the 1970s, with conventional poverty morphing into multideprivation and something akin to social exclusion. Within the inner city racial tension had been intensified by new commonwealth immigration and by the coincidence of deindustrialisation with the coming of age of the first generation of British-born Blacks, who were consequently alienated as profoundly as any minority ethnic group in London's history.

London's 'swinging moment' should be seen in this context—as a transient element in a deeper and broader transformation of the metropolis, played out over two decades. That transformation is described by means of a series of case studies in the chapters that follow. This approach might appear episodic, and this work does not claim to be a comprehensive

‘WHY LONDON? WHY NOW?’ 47

history of London in the sixties and seventies; but the cumulative impression created by the sixteen chapters is, it is argued, that of a city evolving in these decades in ways which anticipated strikingly the Britain of the 1980s. The foundations of ‘Thatcher’s Britain’ were laid in the nation’s dominant economic centre and opinion former before Margaret Thatcher came into power. They owed virtually nothing to her.

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