

Call for proposals

The Modern Backdrop: Urban Modernisation and Representations of the Working-Class (1950-1975)

Two-day conference at the University of Salford, UK (on campus)

25th-26th May 2023

The development of social housing estates after the Second World War in Europe initiated in many cities the radical transition of urban environments from 19th-century dwellings to modern housing. The plans and hopes of architects, planners, and city councils when developing modern infrastructure and housing not only focussed on elevating living standards; modern housing estates were also believed to support the development of 'new communities' within which pre-existing and widespread social problems would dissolve.

Such modern developments appear in the material and visual culture (film, TV, art, literature, newspapers, etc.) between the 1950s and 1960s whereby artists observed and commented on the transition of urban quarters from blackened, often decaying 19th-century houses to modern tower blocks. The lives and living conditions in the old and new working-class quarters interested artists, filmmakers, and writers as much as the aesthetics of modern urban quarters. Both provided the backgrounds for commentaries on changes in society and modernisation. Films such as Albert Finney's *Charlie Bubbles* in 1968 or Stanley Kubrick's 1971 *A Clockwork Orange* utilised the imagery of this transition and offered commentary on the effects and social consequences of modernisation. TV soap operas such as *Coronation Street* (1960 –), that were part of the 'kitchen sink drama movement' in the UK, also addressed social housing and modernisation efforts. The literary work of J.G. Ballard (*High Rise*, 1975) and B.S. Johnson (*The Moron Made City*, 1966) react to urban modernisation satirically and critically. In the fine arts, the topic and its social consequences were addressed multifacetedly; photographs by artists such as Shirley Baker, UK and Albert Renger-Patzsch, Germany juxtapose social housing and its inhabitants who appear alienated from the modern environment they find themselves in. Representatives of Art Brut and Art Informel were inspired by non-traditional subject matter and art production that was perceived as more genuine. Artworks such as Jean Dubuffet's *Parages fréquentés* (*Busy Neighbourhood*), 1979 observed the asphyxiating nature of urban spaces. Others considered emotional conflicts, society and its development after the Second World War. Yuri Pimenov, on the other hand, worked in the context of the Soviet Union (*Wedding on tomorrow's street*, 1962) and depicted the modernisation of cities and social housing as a beacon of hope and evidence of the improving living conditions of the working class.

Proposals are welcome from scholars in fields such as art and architectural history, media studies, urban studies, cultural anthropology, consumer studies and gender studies.

We are inviting papers that investigate topics such as:

- Representations of the Working-Class in material and visual culture (film, TV, photography, painting, literature, etc.)
- Architectural design and social engineering: theories on the transformative power of architectural design on behaviours of residents
- Mid-20th century narratives and histories of slum clearance, overspill estates and rehousing

- Challenges in architecture and planning concerning the process of slum clearance, rehousing, planning, building, and occupying mid-20th century social housing estates
- Stigmatiser and stigmatised. The role of news media in the stigmatisation process of residents and territories
- The roles of media in affirming and solidifying reputations of social housing estates and their residents
- The role of city councils in redeveloping urban 'slums'
- The exclusion and inclusion of 'slum dwellers' in the planning and redevelopment processes
- Slum clearance and the short and long-term impacts of being 'reoused'
- Effects of media representations on memories of lived experiences
- Representations of the working class in the fine arts

Members of the Conference Programme Committee are:

Tanja Poppelreuter. Reader in Architectural Humanities (Conference Chair)

Andrew Clark. Professor in Sociology

Ursula Hurley. Professor in English & Creative Writing

Alaric Searle. Professor of Modern European History, Politics & Contemporary History

Seamus Simpson. Professor of Media Policy

Please submit a title and 300-word abstract by Friday, March 24th, 2023 to:

themodernbackdrop@salford.ac.uk

Each abstract should include the name and affiliation of the author(s), have a title, and be 300-words.

Venue Information: The conference will take place on campus at the University of Salford and registration is free of charge.

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This two-day conference is part of the research project 'The Modern Backdrop: Memories of Salford' and is funded by the Paul Mellon Centre. <https://hub.salford.ac.uk/modern-salford/>

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