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To the Wall: London's Murals and 'the Left', 1975-1986

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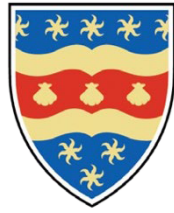
To the Wall: London's Murals and 'the Left', 1975-1986

by

Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

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To the Wall: London's Murals and 'the Left', 1975-1986
by Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between Left-wing politics and a body of exterior murals made in London between 1975 and 1986. Across this period approximately three hundred murals were made on the walls of London's streets. Funded by a complex amalgam of predominantly state patronage, many of these murals gave form to the politics of the radical and oppositional Left. While murals featured briefly in art critical debates of the late 1970s and have since been included within broader histories of community and public art, this is the first extended study centred upon this remarkable moment of cultural production. Applying diverse methodologies of the social history of art and Marxist art history to an analysis of seven case studies this thesis seeks to redress the murals' neglect within art historical accounts.

The first chapter examines murals by Greenwich Mural Workshop and Brian Barnes, in Greenwich, Charlton and Battersea, focussing analysis on the emergent techniques by which the murals related to localised campaigns and struggles for democratic control of resources, between 1975 and 1978. The second chapter analyses two murals made in Tower Hamlets—by Ray Walker and David Binnington, Paul Butler, Desmond Rochfort and Ray Walker—focussing on the murals' diverse modes of response and resistance to the rise of the Far and New Right between 1978 and 1983. The final chapter examines a Brixton mural by Brian Barnes and one in Hackney by Ray Walker, Anna Walker and Mike Jones, in relation to the deepening threat of nuclear apocalypse and hopes of the contemporary peace movement; analysing the murals' place within Cold War iconography the chapter argues that the murals established a metonymic relation to wider-ranging resistances to Thatcherism's ascent across the first half of the 1980s. Throughout, a focus on technique incorporates localised research, visual and iconographic analysis and a body of Marxist urban geography and theory to argue that the murals' radical and innovative presence as sites of contestation across a period of profound urban, economic, social and cultural transition, constitutes a significant episode in the histories of British art and international muralism.

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Introduction

'The ideal would be,' said Claude, after a while, 'to see everything and paint everything. To have acres of walls to cover, to decorate the railway stations, the market-halls, whatever they put up when architects have at last learnt some common sense! … Think of it Pierre! Life as it's lived in the streets, the life of rich and poor, in market-places, at the races, along the boulevards, and down back streets in the slums; work of every kind in full swing; human emotions revived and brought into the light of day…Think of it! Then they'll see, then I'll show them what I can do! It makes my hands tingle only to think of it! Modern life in all its aspects, that's the subject! Frescoes as big as the Panthéon! A series of paintings that'll shatter the Louvre.'[1]

Émile Zola,
The Masterpiece,
1886

The mural was perceived as an antidote to… the alienation of humanity and to the anomie of art in the modern condition. Other artists and critics realized full well that the mural painting was not the solution to any of these problems or did not even recognize them as problems. A return to the mural format, which had flourished in the pre-modern world, would be an anachronistic and futile gesture.[2]

Romy Golan,
*Muralnomad: the Paradox of Wall Painting,
Europe 1927-1957*,
2009

If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of post-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past, but for all our sakes, to a modern future in which community may be imagined again.[3]

Raymond Williams,
When Was Modernism, 1987

Émile Zola's (semi-)fictional protagonist, Claude, never realised his ambitions to paint

panoramic murals of modern life across the walls of Paris. He hung himself in a bedsit,

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1. Émile Zola, *The Masterpiece*, trans. Thomas Walton, revised Roger Pearson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38.
2. Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: the Paradox of Wall Painting,Europe 1927-1957* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 1.
3. Raymond Williams, "When Was Modernism?" *New Left Review* I/175 (May-June, 1989): 52.

before an unfinished canvas, atrophied through lack of social contact.[4] The character's failure

to undertake the planned works might be read as a foreshadowing of Romy Golan's assertion

of the mural form's anachronism in the modern world; a mark of the futility of the ambition.[5]

This study proceeds from a divergent position. Taking as its subject the intersection of Left

politics and the exterior mural form in London between 1975 and 1986, it explores a moment

in which the social and civic imaginings of Zola's archetypal avant-gardist were, in some

degree at least, realised: in the emergence of a wide-ranging, radically public mode of

socially engaged realist wall painting. In highlighting this moment the project argues that the

mural form continued to offer solutions to something approaching what Golan described as

the 'anomie of art in the modern condition', right through to the penultimate decade of the

20th century.[6] Far from naïve, anachronistic or futile gestures, therefore, it proceeds from the

contention that an art historical study of this moment and mode of late 20th century public

mural painting promises a contribution to histories of the mural form, British, 'modern' and

'contemporary' art and aspects of the epistemology of art history itself.[7]

The project is centred around seven murals: case studies amongst a wider moment of

production, which stretched to three hundred or so murals in London alone.[8] To focus a thesis

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4. It has been suggested that the character appears to be a hybrid of Claude Monet, Édouard Manet and Paul Cézanne. The desire to paint murals across the city has often been associated with Manet, whilst the hermetic and obsessive devotion to the task of a painting's resolution may have been amongst the perceived affinities which caused Cézanne to sever contact with his childhood friend Zola, after reading the manuscript of the book. See Roger Pearson, "Introduction," in Zola, *The Masterpiece*, xx-xi
5. Golan, *Muralnomad*, 1-7
6. Golan, 1.
7. This study proceeds from a model of the period as coextensive and connected to the broad patterns of modernity, both culturally and economically. Rather than adopting a concept of post-modernity, therefore, it views the continuation through the period of capitalist modes of production and accumulation through networks of combined and uneven development, international trade, global patterns of urbanization, and exponential growth in communications technology to be consistent with the patterns of modernity. It finds the case for a fundamental schism in the cultural realm similarly uncompelling. For a critique of post-modernism along similar lines see Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, *A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), though Callincos, writing from the midst of the conjuncture does tend to underestimate some of the conjunctural shifts of the 1970s and '80s which will be at the core of this study.
8. The most complete accounting of London's murals was a small guide made in 1987 by Greenwich Mural Workshop. Offering a list of murals produced in the city since 1976, with details of artists, locations and

of this length, nature and depth on seven murals is to move against the tide of art historical

taste and consensus. As Owen Hatherley has recently observed, when the murals of the

period are examined at all today it tends to be with a 'faint sense of embarrassment', at least

by art historians.[9] Indeed, despite the growing prominence of 'post-studio' practices, the

widespread diagnosis of a 'social turn' and the ascent of street art and graffiti in art markets

and museum institutions, the murals that flourished across the United Kingdom and far

beyond, between the late 1960s and mid-1980s remain almost entirely absent from

mainstream art historical concern.[10] Within this wider context of disciplinary neglect, the

political, temporal, geographical and methodological confines of this study underscore its

particular contribution: an art historical accounting of a small body of murals, whose

testament, interaction with, and figuring of Left politics in London across an eleven-year

period is taken to offer particular insight to the histories of art across the period. It is through

an exploration of this group of public facing, politically committed, realist murals as

interventions within specific historical and geographical contexts, therefore, that this study

argues, against Golan, and the tide of art historical taste, for the continued power and

relevance of the form, and its hitherto undervalued contribution to our art historical

understandings of the period. In so doing, the study proposes the murals to constitute what

Raymond Williams termed, an 'alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the

funders, the guide estimated production in the region of three hundred murals. Carol Kenna, *A Guide to London's Murals Since 1976* (London: Greenwich Mural Workshop, 1987).

9. Owen Hatherley, "Murals," in *Reclaim the Mural. The Politics of London's Murals*, ed. The Work in Progress (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2013), 10. If such a view overlooks the fondness that many local residents, historians, or political fellow travellers hold for the murals, the murals' absence from art historical and art critical discussion would seem underpinned by a generalised feeling of condescension.

10. The national scope of the mural movement has suffered even more significant neglect than its localised dimensions. Until this year's *For Walls with Tongues* project, the last publication to address the murals' on anything approaching a national scale was Graham Cooper and Douglas Sargent's 1979 survey. Carol Kenna and Stephen Lobb, eds., *For Walls with Tongues. An Oral History of Street Murals, 1966-1985* (London: Greenwich Mural Workshop, 2019). Graham Cooper and Doug Sargent, *Painting the Town* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Limited, 1979).

wide margin of the [last] century', offering a contribution 'to a modern future in which

community may be imagined again'.[11]

Rationale

The mural tradition this study addresses is today confronted by compound and pressing

threats. Notwithstanding small signs of recent interest, the longstanding indifference of art

historians and heritage organisations, and decades of intense urban redevelopment and hostile

weather, leave the period's murals faced by discursive and physical erasure.[12] Of the three

hundred or so murals produced in London across the period, approximately fifty remain,

scattered across the city in varying states of disrepair.[13] Archival and historical traces are

equally fragmented: dispersed across varied institutional and personal collections, and on the

edges of living memory. If many of the period's murals were conceived and executed as

temporary interventions, this study contends that the threat to the material and mnemonic

traces of this moment of public facing wall painting is of significant art historical concern.

Despite proportionally lower losses to the case studies examined herein—with four of the

seven remaining—this study is underpinned by the belief that the threat to the historical

memory of these murals is particularly urgent.[14] This thesis has been written across years of

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11. Williams, "When Was Modernism," 52.

12. Over the past decade, two publications have been devoted specifically to the mural tradition in question: The Work in Progress's Whitechapel Gallery publication and the *For Walls with Tongues* Oral History Project. Both publications were accompanied by small exhibitions. If the former was limited in the amount of new material it brought to light, the latter has created an oral history archive which will be of great use to future studies. Neither, however, does much to advance new art historical insights, or redress the decades of neglect.

13. The London Mural Preservation Society was founded by Ruth Miller in 2010, establishing a website and blog to document surviving murals, organising walking tours and preservation campaigns. Their website, though not updated for several years, offers the most comprehensive overview of the murals that survive. "Home", London Mural Preservation Society, http://londonmuralpreservationsociety.com/.

14. As Walter Benjamin framed the relationship between threat and historical materialism, '[h]istorical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man [sic] singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers'. It is this sense of dual danger which underpins this study's sense of urgency. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the

social, political and economic crisis following in the wake of the 2008 'financial crash'. At a moment, that is, of a historical conjuncture, which seems increasingly set to mark the breakdown of the neoliberal consensus which has dominated social, political, economic and cultural relations since its emergence in precisely the years covered by this study.[15] The recovery of the memory of a body of murals, which not only flourished across the conjuncture from which neoliberalism emerged as hegemonic, but which emerged from, gave form to, and actively partook in, the strident and explicit resistance to that emergence, is therefore seen as particularly urgent to our contemporary moment. In the case of this study, this urgency is underscored still further by their situation in a city which, as Doreen Massey observed, was at the 'heart of the establishment' of neoliberal hegemony.[16] In this sense, this study serves as a contribution to broader recollections that highlight, as Massey continued, that 'the triumph of neoliberalism was struggled over, both nationally and in particular places', and the role cultural production played in such struggles. Given, as Michael Rustin has noted, that '[t]he effect of the forgetting of history and the opposed traditions, is to "normalise" the present as the one imaginable world of all possible worlds', this study is pitched against the 'politically [and *culturally*] debilitating' effects of such amnesia.[17] It seeks, as Walter Benjamin put it, 'to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger'.[18]

Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, Harper Collins, 1992), 247.

15. This study will broadly follow David Harvey, in viewing neoliberalism as a political project carried out by, and in the interests of a corporate capitalist class. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Whilst the resolution to the present conjuncture remains far from settled, and some have suggested the possibility we are entering an era of 'authoritarian neoliberalism', the signs that the neoliberal consensus as we have come to know it is breaking down are now widespread and widely noted by newspaper columnists, politicians and academics.

16. Doreen Massey, *World City* (London: Polity Press, 2007), x.

17. Michael Rustin, "The Long Revolution Revisited," *Paper Presented at Soundings Conference*, 2006, 4, cited in Massey, *World City*, 73-4; and Massey, 74.

18. Benjamin, "Philosophy of History," 247.

In seizing hold of this memory, the amnesia of both political and art historical accounts must be confronted. If it is against art historical amnesia that the study is primarily pitched, an increased integration with overlooked political narratives will be seen as a necessary and central vector of that art historical recovery. The study opens in 1975, with the creation of what is here claimed to be the earliest of London's large-scale exterior murals to explicitly figure prevailing themes of the contemporary London Left.[19] It closes in 1986, with the formal dissolution of the Greater London Council (GLC): an event which—through its narrowing of the possibilities for the mural form *and* the city's Left politics—is taken to mark the end of the specific confluence between Left politics and the mural form examined herein.[20] In broad political narratives, therefore, it begins one year after Harold Wilson's Labour Party returned to power on the back of mass industrial action and one of the more radical (if largely unrealised) manifesto programmes in the Party's history.[21] It closes three years into Margaret Thatcher's second term as Prime Minister, one year after her Conservative administration's historic standoff with the National Union of Mineworkers, and at a pivotal moment of their campaign against the dispersed, and diverse, outposts of 'Municipal Socialism'.[22] It traverses, that is to say, eleven years in which a series of profound economic, social and political crises, stretching back into the 1960s found resolution in the ascent of Thatcher's authoritarian populist, neoliberal project, a dramatic shift of power from

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19. See Chapter One.
20. Founded in 1965 through an expansion of the preceding London County Council, the GLC was abolished on the 31st March 1986, along with five other Metropolitan County Councils. The decision, confirmed by the 1985 Local Government Act was widely perceived as Margaret Thatcher's revenge for the high-profile resistance to her government forwarded by the GLC's last Labour administration, led by Ken Livingstone, from 1981-1986. The administration constituted one of the more remarkable attempts to re-forge local government patronage in line with the politics of the New Left. For contemporary reaction to the abolition, see Beatrix Campbell and Martin Jacques, "Goodbye to the GLC", *Marxism Today* (April 1986): 6-10; Franco Bianchini, "GLC R.I.P, Cultural Policies in London 1981-1986," *New Formations* Number 1 (Spring 1987): 103-117.
21. For a recovery of this overlooked historical moment see John Medhurst, *That Option no Longer Exists: Britain 1974-76* (London: Zero Books, 2014).
22. For an examination of the stand-off between Margaret Thatcher's administration with the National Union of Mineworkers see Seamas Milne, *The Enemy Within: The secret war against the miners* (London: Verso, 2014). The history of Thatcher's stand-off with local government remains more dispersed. One of the best overviews, however, is in an edited volume on the media's culture war: James Curran, Ivor Gaber and Julian Petley, *Culture wars: The media and the British left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

labour to capital, and a concomitant shift from a stumbling industrial base towards ascendent financial and service sectors. It is a moment which has, that is to say, generally been viewed through the lens of Left decline, or the inverse ascent of the New Right.[23] As John Medhurst has observed, these narratives have often obscured historical understandings of the 1970s, which in 'mainstream media and historiography', has become, 'a nightmare decade, a pressure cooker of extreme politics and economic decline, a build up of social dysfunction that required Margaret Thatcher's harsh monetarist medicine to purge and clean'.[24] Notwithstanding the historical veracity of the Right's hegemonic victory and the concomitant shifts in the balance of class forces across the period, the murals of this study offer an opportunity to revise understandings of the period, revealing how a locally differentiated urban Left, struck out across multiple spheres for a divergent resolution to the conjuncture, and the rich traditions of struggle, thought and cultural production, that movement and contestation entailed.

Mainstream historical readings have found parallel in canonical art historical accounts of the period. With the resurgence of the international art market across the 1980s, and the rise of postmodernist and poststructuralist critical and theoretical practices, broad accounts have tended towards Frederic Jameson's view of the period as one in which, 'aesthetic

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23. In 1978, Eric Hobsbawm had declared that the 'march of labour and the labour movement, which Marx predicted, appears to have come to a halt in this country about twenty-five to thirty years ago'. In 1979, Stuart Hall treated the unfolding rise of the New Right. Over similar years, similar diagnoses were taken up by a new generation of scholars, in Britain and across Europe, who—under the influence of Althusserian, Foucauldian or neo-Gramscian analysis—offered scathing critiques of the contemporary Left, and declared the demise of class struggle as a driving historical force, or rightful centrepiece of Left politics. In the years since, the prescience of predictions regarding the New Right's ascent have tended to preclude questioning of the period's dismissals and critiques of the contemporary Left. This study will seek to challenge aspects of such accounts, arguing that the focus upon the New Right's success in achieving ideological hegemony, has tended to foreclose analysis of the decisive manifestations of class struggle which continued throughout the period. For the decline of the Left see Eric Hobsbawm, "The Forward March of Labour Halted," 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture, reproduced in *Marxism Today*, (September 1978): 279-286. For Hall's influential treatment of the New Right's ascent see, Stuart Hall, "The Great Moving Right Show", *Marxism Today*, (January 1979): 14-20.
24. Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*, 1-2

production...[became] integrated into commodity production generally'.[25] If the British art of the period is rarely at the centre of these narratives, it is, nonetheless, often seen to be marked by the increased 'foregrounding of gender issues, questions of sexuality and ethnicity, the mechanisms of power…Lacanian psychoanalysis and the divisions of "high" and "popular" culture'.[26] Aligned to a rise in postmodernism and poststructuralism from the 1980s forwards, these shifts have, once again, come to overshadow a number of art historical narratives: the increasing focus on identity related practices not just succeeding but often actively pitched against preceding explorations of collectivity, cultural agency and political commitment.[27] In this climate, the narratives of 1970s art by which an—albeit cursory—focus on the murals was initially framed, have either disappeared from the record or become stranded amidst a decade 'defined by a sense of fragmentation and a vaguely understood pluralism'.[28] As such, what John A. Walker identified as a 'Left Shift' in British cultural production across the 1970s, has often slipped from art historical prominence, even, as Siona Wilson has observed, where it is of direct relevance to more prominent identity based practices of the 1980s.[29] This

25. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 4.

26. Whilst Esther Leslie observed these features in relation to the broader humanities of the period, they are well reflected in the practice and accountings of British visual arts. Esther Leslie, "Marxism Against Cultural Studies", in *As Radical as Reality Itself. Essays on Marxism and Art for the 21st Century,* eds. Matthew Beaumont, Andrew Hemingway, Esther Leslie and John Roberts (Bern: Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers, 2007), 37.

27. As Leslie (and others) have noted the rise of postmodernism followed a brief rise in Marxist art historical accounts, and was framed 'not only independently from Marxism or in contradistinction to it, but also at the very expense of Marxism – over that dead dog's corpse'. Leslie, "Marxism Against Cultural Studies," 37.

28. Siona Wilson, *Art Labor, Sex Politics. Feminist Effects in 1970s British art and performance* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xii. The occlusion of the late 1970s is particularly notable, and has led Wilson and others to define the decade as an 'undecade'. Less noted however, is that the occlusion can also be seen to stretch into the early 1980s. In the October Group's, influential survey, *Art Since 1900*, which is generally characterised by successive yearly entries, for example, the twelve years covered by this study contain six entries and six occlusions, the highest absence for any equivalent period, and the years between 1977 and 1984, contain just a single entry (in 1980). Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

29. Walker's wide-ranging survey, grouped around the 'unitary theme' of a 'shift to the Left' on the part of 1970s visual art, argues that 'what was new and significant about art in Britain during the 1970s was its repoliticisation and feminisation, its attempt to reconnect to society at large'. John A. Walker, *Left Shift, Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: IB Tauris, 2002), 2. Wilson's recent study on Feminist Effects in 1970s British art and performance, was, she suggests, precipitated by the surprise of discovering an early collaborative work by Mary Kelly and the unfamiliarity of the politics and cultural production to which it attested. Wilson, *Art Labor*, xi-xiii.

study, therefore, offers an opportunity to revisit and expand upon the still marginalised

interactions between Left politics and cultural production in the 1970s, whilst tracing them

firmly into the succeeding decade. In this, the study's confinement to a limited number of

case studies taken from a wider mode of radically public cultural production in one city,

offers particular opportunities: underpinning a more detailed analysis than has been possible

in broader surveys or monographs of the rich, mediated and complex relations established

between localised working class communities, political struggles and a specific mode of

cultural production.[30] These dimensions, will also be seen as opportunities to expand upon

the more or less tangential studies which have addressed a move towards 'a more social art'

in Britain across the close of the 1970s.[31] Gaining brief critical prominence at the time, and

some mention in early art historical surveys of the 1970s, the tendency had, again, slipped

somewhat from art historical prominence in the intervening years.[32] Recently, however, it has

seen some reference as a notable historical antecedent in the critical literature addressing the

'social turn' in art of the late 1990s.[33] Here again, this study's attention to the social

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30. This sense of focus might be contrasted, for example, to John A. Walker's study, in which the sheer breadth of material covered, and the sequential chronology of the book leave little room for theoretical or analytical consideration of the heterogeneous relations established between cultural producers and political struggles, the contents of those struggles, or the agency of the art within them. Conversely, the opportunities raised by the murals engagement with specific locations and working-class communities might be set against the more abstract theoretical considerations of Wilson's book.

31. As Francis Spalding observed this 'enhanced awareness of the need of a more social art', reached something of a peak in 1978, when 'two exhibitions were mounted to promote the work of artists who deliberately sought to engage with a wide public: "Art for Whom", selected by the art critic Richard Cork and shown at the Serpentine Gallery, and the more broadly based "Art and Society" at the Whitechapel Art Gallery'. The work of muralists was included in both exhibitions and featured significantly in much of the surrounding critical debate. Francis Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), 224.

32. Critical debates around the question of art's social function across the late 1970s, were, in particular, concentrated around the newly founded (modernist aligned) magazine *Artscribe* and the longer running *Studio International*, which under the editorship of Richard Cork offered increasingly focussed attention to questions surrounding art's social function. Peter Fuller for some time aligned with what John Roberts described as Cork's populist 'Bergerism', before turning against 'social functionalism'. See John Roberts, "The Dialectics of Post-Modernism: Thatcherism and the Visual Arts 1", in *Postmodernism Politics and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 66-67. For a detailed survey of critical debates see Neil Mulholland, "Why is there only one Monopolies Commission? British art and its critics in the late 1970s" (PhD diss. University of Glasgow), 1998.

33. Most notable is Claire Bishop's unorthodox focus upon the work of the Artist Placement Group (founded in 1966 by John Latham and Barbara Steveni) and the UK community arts as 'two distinct poles of rethinking the artist's place in society', in a study devoted to excavating the expanded histories of participatory art across the 20th Century to argue that the 'social turn', 'should be positioned more accurately as a *re*turn to the social, part of an ongoing history of attempts to rethink art collectively'. Claire Bishop, "Incidental People: APG and

'engagements' of a singular, politicised tradition, with a periodisation which stretches into the 1980s will be seen to yield specific insights and contributions: offering challenge and analytical reframing to some of the more liberally framed contemporary criticism, and divergently weighted readings to more recent recuperations.[34]

The murals will, therefore, be seen to offer a contribution and temporal extension to a number of side-lined narratives in the art historiography of British art in the 1970s. They will also be pitted against the near universal diagnosis of a decline in 'ocular-centric' realist and social realist traditions across the period.[35] The murals emerged amidst a climate still heavily influenced by the critical standoff of preceding decades, in which the assumedly 'progressive' currents of British 'modernism', were largely set against 'rearguard', 'academicism' of realism.[36] The return to figuration heralded by Pop, meanwhile, had been largely mediated through reflections upon the 'second nature of media imagery, advertising, and consumer

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Community Arts," in *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 163-191.

34. As Neil Mulholland has observed, following John Roberts, much of the debate regarding art's sociality remained framed by a distinctly liberal paradigm, with a focus 'on the contradictions of distribution', leading to a reductive populism, in which the question of art's relation to society was often reduced to the hopes that if 'art can produce the right socially minded themes, accompanied by the right institutional provision, some organic link between art and the working class can be formed'. See Neil Mulholland, *The Cultural Devolution: Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 15-16.

35. Despite some focus on a return to figuration across the 1970s—for example R.B. Kitaj's curated 1976 Hayward Gallery exhibition, The Human Clay—very few retrospective accounts of realism or social realism take into account British art of the period of this study. Gillian Whiteley, in one of the few accounts of British social realism to attempt to do so, argues that the 'dematerialisation of art, and inception of conceptual interventional and performative practices', meant that '[e]xplorations of social realities migrated from solely visual representations into multimedia, performative, text-based discursive and interventionist practices'. For Whiteley, therefore, '[p]ost-conceptualist art is no longer ocular-centric, with shifts into philosophy and text-based work, installation, performative and environmental processes and multifarious forms beyond and outside the gallery into the expanded field of post-postmodern digital era'. Gillian Whiteley, "Re-presenting Reality, Recovering the Social: The Poetics and Politics of Social Realism and Visual Art", in *British Social Realism since 1940*, ed. David Tucker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 152 and 159.

36. As James Hyman, Robert Radford and Linda Morris have observed, this critical antagonism emerged with particular force towards the close of the 1950s, as a brief moment of engaged and politicised critical attention to realism, was supplanted by a Cold War antagonism between realism and abstraction but had antecedence in the hostility of British Academicians to the advances of modernism across the first half of the century. See James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism. Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Robert Radford and Linda Morris, *The Story of the Artists International Association 1933-1953* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1983). The standoff between modernist abstraction and social realism, emerged with particular polemic force and loaded afterlife in the exchanges between Patrick Heron and John Berger, across 1950s. See Roberts, "Dialectics of Post-Modernism," 64-66.

wares' as against 'the world of human action as the object of depiction'.[37] Since the 1980s,

the aversion to realism amongst modernist critics, has been broadly replaced by new

hostilities by which, as Matthew Beaumont has suggested, 'militant post-modernists… have

crudely caricatured realism, claiming that as an aesthetic it assumes a fundamentally

unproblematic relationship between reality and its representations'.[38] Sandwiched between

these critical currents, and a tendency to focus upon their social and environmental

dimensions, the murals' contribution to the continuum of British realist and social realist

painting has been widely ignored. This study, therefore, will forward the murals as a

significant contribution to a neglected history. In so doing, the murals' social engagements

and physical integration in sites resolutely beyond the gallery, will be seen in synthesis—

rather than conflict— with their heterogeneous stylistic, iconographic and formal

engagements with the history of realist and social realist painting and practices. If, as Andrew

Hemingway has suggested, 'realism has generally presupposed a notion of progress', the

diagnosis of the dissipation of realist traditions across the era, has been taken as coextensive

with a decline in such notions.[39] The reassertion of this overlooked realist practice, and its

relations to equally neglected political traditions characterised by what were to prove counter-

hegemonic visions of progress, therefore, will be seen to offer an important corrective to the

historical record.

The study also seeks a contribution to wider national and international histories of the mural

form in the 20th century. Separated from the art market and networks of museum institutions

through which art historical value is, as Benjamin Buchloh has observed, increasingly

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37. Andrew Hemingway, "The Realist Aesthetic in Painting: 'Serious and committed, ironic and brutal, sincere and full of poetry'," in *A Concise Companion to Realism,* ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 140.
38. Matthew Beaumont, "Introduction: Reclaiming Realism," in Beaumont, *Realism*, 2.
39. Hemingway, "The Realist Aesthetic," 140.

determined, murals have suffered a widespread neglect in all but a handful of cases: most

notably the murals of Post-Revolutionary Mexico, and (to a lesser extent) the New Deal era

in the United States of America.[40] The more dispersed history of mural production in Britain

remains a much more marginal concern, though in recent decades a number of studies have

begun to offer accounts of scattered moments of production stretching from the mid 19th

century, through to the mid-1960s.[41] The dramatic departure of the mural form from the

confines of (previously largely ecclesiastical or state) institutional interiors, and out onto the

walls of heterogeneous urban settings across Britain, however, is yet to find integration with

these accounts.[42] Indeed, the contemporaneous flourishing of the exterior mural form in cities

around the world—from Chicago to Maputo, Belfast to Santiago, Los Angeles to Lisbon—

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40. Benjamin Buchloh, "Periodizing Critics", in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Dia Art Foundation Number 1, Bay Press Seattle, 1987), 70.
Mexican murals were received with considerable interest in the United States, from the 1930s forwards, at a moment in which the Museum of Modern Art begun its rise as a canonical institution of Modern art. Though the New Deal received some attention in the 1930s, it is only over recent years that it has begun to emerge from the position of degraded counterpoint to the Triumph of American (abstract) art in the post war period. Both Mexican and U.S. New Deal murals were looked upon as precedents by a number of the muralists of this study, though it was the former which was better researched and more available, since the 1969 publication of Antonio Rodriguez's survey. The methodologies forged in the study of these earlier periods —by Warren Carter, David Craven, Leon Folgarait, Jody Patterson, and others—inform the methodological approach taken here. See, for example, Warren Carter "Painting the Revolution: State, Politics and Ideology in Mexican Murals," *Third Text*, (July 2014): 282-291; David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910-1999* (New Haven. London: Yale University Press, 2002); Leon Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jody Patterson, "What's So Amazing about the 'Amazing Continuity'?", *Oxford Art Journal* (31.3 2008); Jody Patterson, "The Writing on the Walls," *Art History,* 34.1 (February 2011): 203-208.
41. Charting the mural form's persistence through diverse incarnations, from nation building Victorian cycles in the House of Lords, a range of traditionalist and modernist interiors and the brief exploration of the Arts Council and local educational authorities in commissioning works for temporary or institutional display, these precedents remain, in many ways, quite distinct from the murals of this study, characterised by an academic, conservative, or notionally apolitical stance. See Claire Willsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and meaning* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000); Liss Fine Art, *British Murals and Decorative Painting 1910-1970,* (London: Liss Fine Art and The Fine Art Society, 2013); Alan Powers, ed., *British Murals and Decorative Painting 1920-1960* (London: Samson & Co., 2013); Dawn Pereira, "Art for the 'common man': the role of the artist within the London County Council, 1957-65," (PhD Diss., University of East London, 2008).
42. Very few of the muralists of this study or wider period perceived any meaningful continuity with (or even knowledge of) preceding domestic mural traditions, though certain attempts were made to trace the tradition to medieval church wall painting (see, for example, Cooper and Sargent, *Painting the Town*). The scholarship devoted to the sphere of preceding British murals, therefore, provides a useful genealogy of the form's evolution, but, as Alan Powers has noted the exterior murals of the period of this study mark 'a break in continuity'. (Powers, *British Murals*, 111). So strong, indeed was this break that even where there were personal relations between muralists of the two periods—as for example the friendship between Fred Millet (who had worked on murals in the Hertfordshire Schools programme) and Steve Lobb, (of Greenwich Mural Workshop)—the shared interest in murals was often not noted for some time. Author's conversations with Stephen Lobb and Carol Kenna.

remains almost equally absent from art historical consideration.[43] Wedged, therefore, between

still marginalised, but nonetheless more extensive, literatures addressing murals made under

the state patronage schemes of the early to mid-20th century, and the more numerous, if often

less academic, surveys of street art and graffiti, the international, and localised histories of the

murals of the period addressed by this study, remain a pressing gap of considerable art

historical interest.[44] This project, while limited in its scope, seeks to make inroads into that

much broader field, offering both historical and methodological contributions towards much

needed further enquiry.

Whilst somewhat marginal to mainstream art historical concerns it is the literature devoted to

the community arts movement which has offered some of the more sustained and relevant

insight into the murals—despite, as Claire Bishop notes, the fact that much of it tends 'to

comprise reports and evaluations of specific projects rather than a synthesised narrative'.[45]

The wider moment of exterior mural production in which the case studies of this thesis

partook emerged and flourished contemporaneously with the wider community arts

movement.[46] In many—but by no means all—cases, the murals of the period (and of this

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43. Despite the prominence of Chilean and Northern Irish murals in sociological and political accounts and the
attention the US community murals have received from anthropologists and urbanists, art historical studies
remain rare. In part, such neglect might be seen to stem from precisely the extent of the break with traditional
modes of mural painting: the exterior mural form requiring an analysis of complex modes of (often non-'art
world') patronage, new rituals, spaces and subjects of spectatorship, an often unfashionably direct mode of
political engagement, and the occasionally ephemeral, and always vulnerable physicality of exterior murals.
Much more work is needed in tracing the international exchanges and localised variance which characterised the
flowering of the form in such diverse settings, political moments and structures of patronage.
44. Buoyed by deepening links to commercial art markets, and—as Julian Stallabrass has observed—the
increased opportunities for self-promotion opened up by the internet and an explosion of access to photography,
the explosion of literature devoted to street art and graffiti, has, largely failed to extend an examination to the
preceding moment of exterior mural production. See Julian Stallabrass, "Elite Art in an Age of Populism," in
Contemporary Art:1989 to the Present, Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, eds. (Oxford: John Wiley
& Sons, Oxford, 2013), 39-49.
45. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 163.
46. As Owen Kelly observed, the community arts movement was vexed by the question of definition from its
origins. It remains, as Kelly saw it in the 1980s, something of a 'a general term for a group of cultural activities
which the practitioners recognise as having common features but whose precise boundaries remain undrawn'.
Nonetheless, the term came into use across the late 1960s to describe what a 1974 GLAA paper described as 'an
approach to creative activity, embracing many kinds of events and a wide range of media….[an approach
which] enjoins both artists and local people within their various communities to use appropriate art forms as a

study) were an integral part of that movement: many muralists were prominent in the movement's theoretical, practical and institutional developments, and most received at least some funds from the 'community arts' patronage schemes that emerged through the 1970s.[47] This study, therefore, draws upon the insights and theoretical understandings of the literature on community arts, examining its case studies in the context of debates regarding the meaning and historical relevance of 'community', movements for cultural democracy and the evolution and significance of collaborative modes of production and integration with diverse localised populations. However, it also differentiates itself from, and seeks to add alternative perspectives to, a number of the prevailing trends in the literature. Against a tendency to view a decline in the community arts' political commitments and progressive incorporation within the logic of a hostile state, the focus on case studies defined by their *continued* engagement with a mode of Left politics often explicitly hostile to the direction of the state reveals the extent to which (at least some) community artists continued to forward radical political positions through the mural form at least as far as 1986.[48] More centrally, the literature on the community arts has been marked by a wide-reaching rejection of standardised art historical methodologies, and in particular by hostility to conventional modes of formal or visual analysis, and what it often conceives as interrelated 'elitist' conceptions of aesthetic quality.[49]

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means of communication and expression, in a way that critically uses and develops traditional arts forms, adapting them to the present day needs and developing new forms". Owen Kelly, *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels* (London: Comedia, 1984), 1-2.

47. From the inauguration of the Arts Council's Community Arts Committee, in 1974, murals constituted a major thread of the funded work. Many of the muralists were involved in the Association of Community Artists, and Carol Kenna came to sit on the Community Arts Panel for the Greater London Arts Association. In 1976 Carol Kenna and Steve Lobb (of Greenwich Mural Workshop), were the organisers of a one-day Symposium on the Community Visual Arts with funding offered by the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Arts Council's Community Arts Committee (see Archives of the Arts Council of Greet Britain, ACGB/113/68 General Correspondence). Though Kenna and Lobb's move towards of a series of Murals Conferences from 1978, the briefly lived Committee for Murals and Environmental Projects (1978-79), and the fact that murals occasionally received funds from the main Visual Arts budget, all reveal that the limits of the mural form were aligned rather than coextensive with the community arts, the flow of ideas and personnel between the two is undeniable.

48. This position is outlined most forcefully in Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*. More recently it has been taken up and expanded into a consideration of cultural policy under New Labour in the 1990s by Claire Bishop, in *Artificial Hells.*

49. As Bishop has observed, community artists often 'rejected this question [of aesthetic quality] as synonymous with cultural hierarchy'. The after effects of this rejection, can be widely found, and influence, for

As will be seen, this study, by contrast, forwards formal and visual analysis as central to its methodology, and indeed bases its selection of case studies in part upon their embodiment of precisely the kind of aesthetic qualities susceptible to such analysis. In so doing this study contends that the literature on the community arts has thus far largely failed to grapple with one of the most important specificities of the mural form: the murals' extended existence as works of *visual* art. Rather, therefore, than casting visual analysis and aesthetic meaning as elitist endeavours—a casting which often emerged in the statements of muralists themselves—this study insists that the murals' aesthetic dimensions are central to a measure of the spheres of the murals' social engagement and communal reception: underpinning the means by which they embodied, communicated and reconfigured the struggles, hopes, and ideas of localised communities, whilst negotiating between diverse audiences, class interests, institutional support structures, and art historical precedents.[50]

The study also seeks a contribution to those debates regarding art's integration in the urban environment, which have been most consistently developed in the literature on public art. Regrettably, with a few notable exceptions, the murals of the period of this study have remained largely absent from this scholarship.[51] In part this reflects a historic antagonism,

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example, the manner in which Kate Crehan's (in other ways very illuminating) recent study fails to approach the question of visual meaning or style as anything but oppositional to reified but ill-defined 'art world' tastes. See Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 190; and Kate Crehan, *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2011).

50. In so doing the study contends that—notwithstanding the interest taken by many muralists in developing collaborative processes of production—the murals' often significantly extended reception, at sites imbedded in the fabric of the city, forms a lamentably overlooked sphere of their impact and meaning. To the insights of the community arts scholarship, this study thus forwards a much more detailed exploration of the murals as complete works of *visual* art than has been attempted hitherto, a more historically rooted examination of their relationship to patronage structures, and a more specific analysis of the shifting and contested contexts of their reception in specific urban geographies.

51. Malcolm Miles' chapter on Community Murals in Britain, from an edited volume on Art for Public Places, remains one of the few attempts to investigate the murals of this study's period in an urban context. Though cursory it underscores the potential of integration. Giving researched focus to the national expanse of mural production from the 1970s through to the mid 1980s, the chapter is — notwithstanding the brief interest of art critics like Richard Cork, or William Fever in the late 1970s—one of the only attempts to give serious art historical focus to the murals through a consideration of visual, stylistic, thematic and contextual considerations. The thematic breadth and necessary brevity of Miles' treatment, however, preclude the depth of analysis I would

with 'public art' re-emerging as a prominent category of criticism and patronage at precisely the moment at which murals and the broader community arts movement began to face existential threats.[52] Indeed, it is notable that the ascent of 'public art' in Great Britain was not only contemporary with, but intimately connected to the decline of the mural form. As Luke Rittner, Secretary General of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), observed, the public art schemes the institution expanded across the early 1980s prioritised 'collaboration' between 'the needs of architects, private companies, local authorities and property developers'.[53] Favouring works by artists with market-enshrined studio practices for integration in large-scale 'redevelopment' projects, the new 'public art' paralleled a broader political project of 'public-private partnership', channelling the use of extensive state subsidy to valorise private investment and property markets. In such schemes, public art was, as Rosalyn Deutsche observed in a 1988 essay on public art in New York City, used to 'secure consent to redevelopment and to the restructuring that make up the historical form of late capitalist urbanism'.[54] If murals were, for a short time, explored in such schemes, it was sculpture which soon came to predominate. More centrally, the approach to collaboration,

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argue is necessary, and would seem best viewed as opening up a field of research which has remained virtually unexplored in the intervening years. Malcolm Miles, *Art for Public Places: Critical Essays* (Winchester, Hampshire: Winchester School of Art Press, 1989).

52. Buoyed by the resurrection of the Arts Council's Public Art scheme from the early 1980s, the ascent of 'Public Art' in Britain marked a notable shift from the preceding decade's patronage structures.

53. Luke Rittner, "Foreword," in *Art Within Reach. Artists and craftworkers, architects and patrons in the making of public art*, ed. Peter Townsend (London: Art Monthly in collaboration with the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1984), 5.

54. Employing insights from Urban Studies, and the concepts of the 'pseudo-' and 'oppositional' public spheres derived from the work of Jürgen Habermas and German followers, Rosalyn Deutsche's influential 1988 essay on New York's public art, highlighted the manner in which 'public art participates in the production of meanings, uses, and forms for the city', and has often served to 'naturalise' or 'fetishise' forms of 'late capitalist urbanism'. Despite Deutsche's hostility to 'empiricism', and pessimistic conclusion about art's influence in the public realm, the application of theories from urban studies to examine the role of art in the city will be taken forward by this study. Whilst Deutsche—in an argument taken forward in the UK by Deanna Petherbridge — has suggested that the absence of a sufficiently theoretical framework has underpinned the art's complicity within capitalist development, this study will suggest that, conversely, an over reliance on theoretical frameworks (at the expense of empirical study) by art historians has too often blinded them to the work that offers precisely the kind of critical interventions in the urban sphere their theoretical expansions often advocate. Rosalyn Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City", *October*, Vol. 47 (Winter, 1988): 3-52. Deanna Petherbridge, Henry Moore Centre for the Study of Sculpture, and Arts Council of England, *Art & Spatial Politics: A Lecture given at the 1994 Conference of the Association of Art Historians* (Leeds: Centre for the Study of Sculpture, 1994).

redevelopment, urban space, and capital accumulation, forwarded by the new public art

schemes, stood in stark contrast to those forwarded by the artists of this study. These

divergences notwithstanding, the resurgence of the category of 'public art' in the decades

since the 1980s and its expanding application to a wide range of art work made outside of the

confines of museums and galleries across the post-war era now makes the exclusion of the

murals of this study from critical consideration in the literature increasingly strained.[55] To the

often theoretically driven literature surrounding public art's complicity in the processes of

neoliberal urbanisation and gentrification, this study seeks to add some sense of the inverse

capacity of art to offer a countervailing, and counter-hegemonic contestation of dominant

urban practices.

Outside of these literatures, in recent years a younger generation of scholars, including Hazel

Atashroo, Owen Hatherley, and Sam Wetherell, have touched upon the murals in studies

devoted to the cultural patronage, urbanism and politics of the period.[56] Of the three

Atashroo's doctoral thesis on the cultural patronage of the Greater London Council's (GLC)

final (Labour) administration (1981-1986) offers the most extended consideration of murals.

Exploring the support offered by the GLC to the community arts movement, muralists and a

range of other cultural initiatives, at a moment in which other patronage schemes were facing

severe cuts and a deep-rooted ideological reorientation, Atashroo's study offers sustained

insight into a crucial institution in the history of the mural movement and political cultures to

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55. The 2016 *Historic England* exhibition *Our Post-War Public Art*, for example, traced public sculpture *and* some moments of mural production from the late 1940s through to 2012 London Underground commissions, but gave little more than a sentence of the catalogue to describe the exterior mural production made between the 1960s and 1980s. Historic England, *Public Art 1945-95. Introductions to Heritage Assets* (London: Historic England, 2016), 13.

56. Hazel Atashroo, "Beyond the 'Campaign For A Popular Culture': Community Art, Activism and Cultural Democracy in 1980s London" (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2017); Hatherley, "Murals"; Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London: Verso, 2011); Sam Wetherell "Painting the Crisis: Community Arts and the Search for the 'Ordinary' in 1970s and '80s London," *History Workshop Journal* 76 (1), (Autumn 2013): 235-249.

which this study is devoted.[57] The exterior mural form, the complex and evolving network of

patronage which supported it, and the Left politics this study traces it in relation to, however,

did not emerge in 1981, nor at the instigation of the GLC (or any other funding body).

Indeed, as Atashroo's thesis acknowledges, the GLC's last administration was (here as

elsewhere) defined by its responsiveness to, and incorporation of, pre-existing cultural, social

and political movements. This study offers an opportunity to examine one aspect of this

responsiveness, within its broader historical contexts. In so doing, it also seeks to counter a

longer running suggestion that the political tenor of London's murals was in some manner the

product of Livingstone's feted GLC administration.[58] It is an assumption which has been

most recently carried over into Owen Hatherley's welcome but cursory suggestion of the

murals as the 'remnants' of an ill-defined—but implicitly GLC— version of 1980s

'municipal socialism'.[59] Relatedly might be seen Sam Wetherell's recent summoning of

murals, in a paper that forwarded the community arts (of East London) as not only

registering, but active agents within the 'decline of class as a motivation for political and

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57. Atashroo, "Beyond the Campaign".
58. This implication seems to have emerged gradually. Early commentators like Malcom Miles, (Miles, *Critical Essays*, 68), noted a particularly political tendency in London's murals, alongside the support from Labour Council's including the GLC: 'Whilst murals in Glasgow, Swindon and many other cities where they flourished during the 1970s were expressions of local feeling or history, those in London tended to be more concerned with a political message. The funding for many projects came from Labour controlled local authorities, the GLC before its abolition, and Greater London Arts'. Over time, historical contractions have settled around a view of the political tendency as emerging in the 1980s (for example, Historic England, *Public Art,* 13: 'There was also a resurgence of interest in politically-themed painted works during the 1980s,' or Powers, *British Murals*, 111: 'Murals experienced a revival of interest in the 1980s, but there was by then a break in continuity. For the first time, outdoor painting, usually with political themes, on gable ends and other neglected walls, became popular in London and other cities where funding was available'. Such historic contractions, aligned to the resurgence of interest in the GLC, have resulted in an implicit or explicit equivalence: for example, Hatherley, *New Ruins*, 339: 'Yet this GLC, unlike its precursor, the LCC did not (for financial and political reasons) leave a legacy of great buildings, or of social housing estates. Its presence can be seen in these murals more than anywhere else; their naivety, earnestness, daring and enthusiasm speak for the politics of the time'.
59. 'The murals painted on London buildings in the first half of the 1980s are the capital's latest surviving remnants of municipal socialism'. Hatherley, "Murals," 10. It is a judgement which the muralists of the period have taken significant exception to, and does little to illuminate the particularities of the murals politics and emergence. The view would seem to derive from Hatherley's reluctance to distinguish the politics of the 1970s and '80s from that of the post-war period, lumping social democracy and socialism together in a loose (and aestheticised) manner, which does very little to distinguish the conjunctural forces of the 1970s and '80s as anything beyond a slide into neoliberalism. It is a lacunae which somewhat undermines Hatherley's in many ways very compelling analysis. See Hatherley, *New Ruins*.

social action'.[60] As with Hatherley's, Wetherell's assertions run contrary to the findings of this study, and highlight the extent to which an absence of art historical research into the murals has often left them to stand as exemplars of, rather than subjects in the unfolding of, broader political and historical narratives.[61] Divergences notwithstanding, the attention of these scholars reveals an increasing sense of the murals' relevance to a series of pressing cultural, political and historical reconsiderations. It is hoped, therefore, that a study which places the murals' cultural, political and historical dimensions at its centre might add some precision to the murals' contributions within these broader historical re-examinations.

Over the past decade or so, some of the most consistent attention to the murals has been within local, public and oral histories. David Rosenberg has led walking tours of London's radical history in which a number of murals have featured, and Ruth Miller has organised a series of events and walking tours based upon her research of London's mural history. These have found wider audiences, through Rosenberg's recently republished book of walks on London's Radical History, and the *London Mural Preservation Society* website and blog, established by Miller in 2010.[62] This year (2019), the completion of *For Walls With Tongues* will see close to thirty oral history interviews with muralists working across Great Britain between the mid-1960s and 1985, archived with the British Library, and the publication of a book and website from associated material.[63] Together, these resources, offer some of the most prolonged and outward facing engagements with the murals to date: bringing the murals, and associated histories, to new generations and audiences, including this author. The

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60. Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis," 247-248.
61. With Hatherley's historical view of post-war council housing as an embodiment of socialism, offset by the bathos of comparison to 1980s muralism, and Wetherell's attempts to trace the origins of Blue Labour attachment to the white working class to origins in 1970s liberal identity politics.
62. David Rosenberg, *Rebel Footprints. A Guide to Uncovering London's Radical History* (London: Pluto Press, 2015) and "London Mural Preservation Society".
63. Kenna and Lobb, *Walls with Tongues.*

public reach of these projects serves as a salutary reminder that the murals were never intended for a primarily academic audience. It is, nonetheless, through the disciplinary frameworks of art history that this thesis seeks its contribution to the memory and interpretation of its subject: drawing the murals' scattered presence across the margins of diverse fields, more firmly to the centre of an explicitly art historical account. The desire to do so is based not upon a hierarchical conception of the art historical canon or discipline, but rather from a dual and interlocking contention. Firstly, that an account of this subject, guided by the methodologies and disciplinary frameworks of art history has a vital contribution to our understanding of this lamentably overlooked moment of cultural production. And, in turn, that this understanding promises a contribution to the epistemology of art history: a discipline within which, as Gregory Sholette has observed, even Marxist art historians, 'hardly stray… from citing work and practices not already ensconced within the institutional art world'.[64]

Finally, therefore, this study forwards its subject as something of a challenge to the standard disciplinary limitations and assumptions of art history. In particular, it is hoped that the subject's imbrication within the social, economic, political and geographic dynamics of the period, will offer a challenge to the 'theories of social and historical change' on which art historical accounts of the period have rested.[65] Broadly speaking, we might identify two dominant tendencies in this regard. The first, has read the period in broad (if increasingly complicated) continuity with a model of avant-garde succession, in which one movement replaces another, in what Meyer Schapiro long ago characterised as 'a self-contained

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64. Gregory Sholette, "Dark Matter, Activist Art and the Counter-Public sphere,", in Beaumont et al., *Radical As Reality*, 431.
65. As Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan have observed, 'a theory of social and of historical change is a prerequisite of any discourse that claims to engage with the historically specific circumstances involved in the generation of art objects or any other cultural products. In recent years there has been a notable tendency to neglect this requirement, particularly amongst scholars more heavily influenced by Poststructuralist theory'. Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan, "Preface", in *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850*, eds. Hemingway and Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xi.

development issuing by a kind of internal logic directly from aesthetic problems'.[66] In such

models, the period reads as a series of more or less discrete and reactive artistic movements: a

dissatisfaction with 'modernist' 'formal stylistics', 'help[ing] give rise to conceptualism',

whose 'cerebral appeal was bound to produce a reaction, which…began to read in two

directions…', and so on.[67] If the murals appeared as side-notes in a few early art histories of

this mode, the model of cultural isolationism, largely failed to account for their position

within wider historical forces. Indeed, as Meyer Schapiro long ago suggested, such a model is

inadequate, 'not only because it reduces human activity to a simple mechanical movement,

like a bouncing ball, but because in neglecting the sources of energy and the condition of the

field, it does not even do justice to its own limited mechanical conception'.[68] The rise of post-

modernism—the second predominant theoretical tendency—meanwhile has largely displaced

the mural form from mainstream accounting. Though often (at least putatively) pitched

against the 'mechanical' teleology of modernist succession, postmodernist accounts are

frequently marked by a similar neglect to wider dynamics, instead insisting on an under-

examined schism or rupture at a loosely defined moment often placed around the mid-to-late-

1970s.[69] The murals wide-reaching engagement with overlooked social and political

constituencies, their diverse relations to the social, economic and historical transitions of the

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66. Meyer Schapiro, "Nature of Abstract Art" *Marxist Quarterly* 1, (1937).
67. 'By the late 1960s… a growing body of art students were becoming dissatisfied with the formal stylistics that the new pedagogy sought to promote. This dissatisfaction helped give rise to the 'conceptual' movement which was to run parallel with the 1970s interest in 'minimal' painting and sculpture….its cerebral appeal was bound to produce a reaction which, in the late 1970s, began to read in two directions: to the revival of traditional media and to an enhanced awareness of the need of a more social art', Francis Spalding, *British Art*, 213 and 224. While contractions are of course necessary in sweeping survey, the isolation of cultural and artistic activities from wider society is telling, and more widely notable.
68. Schapiro, "Nature of Abstract Art."
69. Scholars like Frederic Jameson, have traced this schism in relation to the 'cultural logic of late capitalism', and the movement towards post-Fordist production. In many post-modernist and post-structuralist accounts, however, the diagnosis of schism has little relation to the wider social dynamics. The result has often been to flatten both modernism and post-modernism into reductively cohesive blocks, and the exclusion of those artworks which—like the murals—test the temporal and discursive limits of either category. Jameson, *Postmodernism*. As Alex Callinicos has observed one result of cultural isolationism of postmodernist accounts is that 'the changes these writers detect are, when not greatly exaggerated, either the consequences of much longer-term trends or specific to the particular, and highly unstable economic conjuncture'. Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, 7.

period and their embodiment within the urban fabric will all be seen to offer an opportunity to move beyond these deficiencies: opening up access to a more deep-rooted and wide-ranging account of the interrelations between a mode of cultural production and the wider dynamics of social and historical change.

Art, Crisis, Conjuncture and the State

In 1986, Carol Kenna wrote that, 'the initiative for the [mural] movement primarily came from artists…who had a vision [of] the development of art being through a collaboration with the neglected audience of the arts - i.e. with 'ordinary people'.[70] One of the leading muralists of the period, Kenna gives insight into the priorities which drove artists from divergent places, artistic backgrounds and approaches towards the form from the late 1960s into the early 1970s. Funded by a range of self-financing, private commissions and ad hoc support gleaned from paint companies, local authorities, schools or community centres, these early muralists shared in their commitment to define new audiences and modes of working beyond the confines of the gallery system.[71] What Kenna's account neglects, however, is the profound impact that an increasingly formalised network of state financing had upon the growth of the form from the mid-1970s forwards.[72] For Owen Kelly, this funding and a concomitant growing 'grant dependency' were not only significant, but had—by 1984—come to negate the bottom-up, artist-led origins of the community arts movement. As Kelly saw it,

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70. Kenna, *Guide*, 2.
71. Kate Crehan's above cited study, offers further lucid excavation of these early moves towards the mural and broader community arts. Crehan, *Community Art*.
72. Indeed, the tendency to view the broader community arts as a more or less spontaneous and countercultural force, runs through much of the literature. See, for example, also Crehan, *Community Art*, which notwithstanding its Gramscian theoretical base, tends to reify an opposition to the 'Art World' into a defining character, while offering little to no acknowledgement of the influence of state patronage.

community artists had become 'foot soldiers in our own movement, answerable to officers in funding agencies and local government recreation departments'.[73] This study seeks to move beyond the binary antagonism established in these accounts: between agency and structure, artist and state. Instead it argues for an understanding of the murals and their patronage structures as emerging through the historically mediated, and contingent, interaction of diverse actors and forces across the boundaries of state and civil society, across a period of historical conjuncture characterised by class struggle, a crisis in state legitimacy and profound economic, social, political and cultural transitions.

In situating an explicitly Left wing mural tradition within these dynamics, one must again confront the fact of that tradition's flourishing with the support of state patronage, across a period characterised by the hegemonic rightwards drift of the state, and—from 1976—the beginning of a series of deepening cuts to precisely the sort of decentralised government budgets which supported the murals.[74] It is crucial here to emphasise something of the diffusion, diversity and responsiveness of the patronage structure that came to support the mural movement across the course of the 1970s and into the 1980s. The murals of this study and wider period were, with few exceptions, realised through piecemeal amalgamations of project and revenue grants garnered across a wide network of funding bodies. It is a funding model that stands in contrast to the more unified commissioning schemes of preceding

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73. Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*, 3. Notwithstanding a certain tendency towards what Ralph Miliband might have called 'hyperstructuralism', a denial of the capacity for artistic agency within relations of state patronage, and a static conception of state power across the period, Kelly's account stands out as the most detailed and theoretically rigorous examination of the evolution of community arts patronage. For Miliband's thoughts on hyperstructuralism see Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 73.
74. It was, significantly, from 1976, rather than 1979 as is often assumed that the beginnings of what David Harvey has called 'draconian budgetary cutbacks', to decentralised government begun, ushered in by the conditions of an International Monetary Fund bailout. Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 58. Whilst this gathered pace rapidly after Thatcher's ascent to power, it was at this moment which, as Ken Coates and others have observed the fundamental shift from fiscal Keynesianism towards a new Monetarism begun. See Ken Coates, ed., *What Went Wrong?* (Nottingham: Spokesman, For the Institute of Workers' Control: 1979).

moments of 20th century mural production.[75] Patrons included a handful of private trusts, but

were dominated by a much wider spectrum of more or less direct state institutions, including

the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), Regional Arts Associations (RAAs), local and

municipal government departments and, from the mid-1970s onwards, the Manpower

Services Commission and Urban Aid programmes.[76] Spanning dedicated mural funds, 'arms-

length' cultural institutions and diverse tiers of local and central government, this network

took shape across mid to late 1970s and included a range of institutional logics, with often

quite distinct funding criteria.[77] Though the criteria under which the funds were offered were

by no means neutral in their motives or effects, the funding institutions shared in their

75. Though studies of murals made under the United States New Deal, the Mexican Mural Renaissance, and the UK's post-war public arts programmes reveal significant divergence between different funding agents, none of these schemes offered similar levels of autonomy to artists, who were often working with up to five or six different grant sources to realise works of their own initiative and design.

76. If institutions like the Arts Council of Great Britain are often viewed as 'arms-length', or intermediate organisations, operating at a degree of autonomy from the state, it is, as Raymond Williams observed, a very 'marginal' independence, governed by a process of 'administered consensus by cooption'. See Raymond Williams, "The Arts Council," reprinted in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989), 41-55. For the sake of this study, organisations like the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Associations—who received state funding and were through processes such as those described by Williams firmly contained within its orbit—will all be viewed as expressions of the state. Of the private trusts, the Gulbenkian Foundation UK, and Vincent Harris and Edwin Austin Abbey Mural Funds were by a distance the most supportive. The Abbey and Harris trusts were run out of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, with the latter continuing much as it had since the 1940s. The Gulbenkian Foundation, under the localised direction of Antony Wraight interpreted Gulbenkian's international focus upon 'community' to offer grants to community artists and workshops, as well as organising and commissioning a series of conferences and research projects on the community arts. These offered a significant assistance to the institutionalisation and development of the community arts, often working in tandem with the Arts Council. See Robert Hewison and John Holden, *Experience and Experiment: The UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1956-2006* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, United Kingdom Branch, 2006).
While trusts like the Gulbenkian might be seen within the expansive conceptions of the state forwarded by Nicos Poulantzas—for whom '[a]ll the apparatuses of hegemony, including those that are legally private (ideological and cultural apparatuses, the Church, etc.), all these form part of the state'—the relative confinement of their direct assistance to the mural form, means the focus will lie more firmly on other institutions. Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism,* trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 2014), 36.

77. These ranged for example from Urban Aid and Manpower Services programmes with a near exclusive focus upon job creation or environmental remedy, to the Arts Council's Visual Arts Committee which maintained a continued focus upon questions of 'aesthetic quality'. It is notable that with the brief exception of a short-lived Murals and Environmental Projects Committee (1978-79), the dispersal of funds across a wide range of committees, might be seen as slowing the cohesion of a mural movement, with communication between muralists confined to personal exchanges, and the annual (or near annual) Mural Conferences organised by Greenwich Mural Workshop from 1978 onwards. Despite a general distaste for 'mystifying' notions of 'aesthetic quality' the transcripts of these conferences reveal that a number of muralists felt discomfort that the absence of aesthetic or artistic concerns in the Manpower Services and Urban Aid programmes, were giving the form a reputation as 'poor art for poor people'. Record of the First National Murals Conference, 9th-10th November 1978, at the Battersea Arts Centre. Available in ACGB Archives: ACGB/32/137/Murals

historically novel degree of 'responsiveness': offering grants to mural projects, artists or workshop practices, with few prescriptions as to the site, theme or contents of the final work. The degree of autonomy offered to artists by this mode of patronage was to prove crucial to the development of the form. It underwrote the muralists' capacity to make work which, though funded largely by the state, was responsive to the areas and communities in which it was sited, and—crucially, in the contexts of this study—often made political and ideological assertions which were in direct conflict with the political direction of the centralised state.[78]

An acknowledgement of the degree of artistic autonomy and the diffusion of institutional logics within this structure of patronage is an essential starting point. It does not, however, account for how and why this diverse network of predominantly state institutions aligned in support of the exterior mural form between the late 1960s and mid-1980s.[79] The literature addressed to the British state's cultural patronage across the period has broadly aligned in its diagnosis of one or another mode of 'crisis' emerging from the late 1960s. This 'crisis' has been presented, by turns, as one of 'national culture', 'art', or the internal contradictions of specific institutions.[80] While acknowledging the presence of a crisis in each of these areas,

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78. The sense of thematic autonomy is neglected, in particular in Kelly's account, which, through the absence of any analysis of the theme or content of works themselves, and the static view of a hostile and overbearing state, negates any appreciation of diverse logics of the state, and the capacity for work to be made which negates or rubs against such logics. Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*.

79. Beyond Kelly's account Nicholas Pearson has offered detailed attention to the subject of the state's patronage across the period in a wider survey of state patronage from the 18th century. Nicholas Pearson, *The State and the Visual Arts* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982).

80. The tendency to view cultural patronage in line with a crisis in national culture, has often drawn loosely upon a body of New Left theory devoted to the topic of what Tom Nairn, in his 1977 essay called, *The Break-Up of Britain,* and tends to examine the processes of devolution which followed from the renewal of the Arts Council of Great Britain's Charter in 1967 through to the through to full devolution to national Arts Councils in 1994. This periodisation of crisis has been followed by Robert Hewison and Neil Mulholland, among others. Neil Mulholland's attention to the national crisis was adjoined to an examination of a critical analysis of the 'Crisis of Art' which was not only the title of a 1978 essay by Peter Fuller, but a strong unifying factor amongst a generation of critics, including Fuller, Richard Cork and Andrew Brighton, who, for a brief period in the late 1970s were amongst the mural forms most committed advocates. Jonathan Harris, meanwhile has offered an account of the crisis which examines the subject from a viewpoint centred on the Arts Council's internal failings. See, Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1997); Mulholland, "One Monopolies Commission*,"* and *The Cultural Devolution*; and Jonathan Harris, "Cultured into Crisis: The Arts Council of Great Britain", in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology across England and North America,* ed. Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

the murals' geographical, political, and social dimensions will be seen to arise from and shine light upon, the profound integration of the crises in 'culture' and 'cultural patronage' with a wider ranging crisis in capitalism and state legitimacy.[81] Building on an analysis first unfolded by Stuart Hall and colleagues at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (henceforth CCCS), the thesis will argue that the murals, and their patronage, must be seen within the dynamics of a historical conjuncture stretching from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s: a period in which the 'antagonisms and contradictions, which are always at work in society, beg[a]n to '"fuse" into a ruptural unity'.[82] As the CCCS argued in 1977 (in an analysis expanded by Hall over the succeeding years), the conjuncture in question emerged from a breakdown of the preceding post-war consensus: originating in a crisis in capitalist accumulation in the early 1960s, which deepened, before reaching a 'ruptural unity' in the wide-ranging 'exhaustion of consent', across economic, social, cultural and political spheres around the close of the decade.[83] With successive Labour and Conservative administrations proving unable to resolve the deepening crises across the 1970s, the conjuncture, eventually found 'resolution' in the ascent and implementation of Thatcher's authoritarian populist project across the 1980s (an outcome presciently predicted by the CCCS, and a series of essays by Hall).[84] Certain key divergences notwithstanding, the broad parameters of this

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81. The limitation of the study to London, as well as a contrasting periodisation separates this study from those which trace the theme of devolution from the 1960s to a conclusion in the 1990s. Here, by contrast, the focus upon a mode of cultural production which thrived in the capital city across a divergent conjuncture, throws forward different dynamics.

82. For Hall: '"Conjuncture" is a concept developed by Gramsci and Althusser that designates a specific moment in the life of a social formation and refers to a period in which the antagonisms and contradictions, which are always at work in society, begin to '"*fuse*' into a *ruptural unity*".' Stuart Hall, "Preface to the Second Edition," in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order,* Stuart Hall, et al. (Second Edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), xv. The CCCS 1978 study was a benchmark in application of conjunctural analysis in the anglophone world and noted in particular for its prescient analysis of the rise of 'Thatcherism'.

83. Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis,* 240-267.

84. Whilst David Harvey has observed that 'capitalism never solves its crises, it moves them', within conjunctural analysis 'resolutions' mark the close of a period of crisis, or in Harvey's model, its successful realignment or 'movement' to a new equilibrium under the force of a new or renewed social bloc. David Harvey, "The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis this Time," Paper prepared for the American Sociological Association Meetings in Atlanta, (August 16th, 2010): http://davidharvey.org/2010/08/the-enigma-of-capital-and-the-crisis-this-time/#fn-585-2/. Hall expanded his analysis of Thatcher's ascent in a number of articles

periodisation, align very firmly with the wax and wane of the exterior mural form, from its haphazard origins in the late 1960s, through the evolution of its network of state patronage and the emergence of the political tradition traced here through the 1970s, towards a gradual dispersal of energy from the mid-1980s forwards.

The early emergence of the exterior mural form amidst the increasingly radical social, cultural and political climate of the late 1960s has been widely noted.[85] What has been less examined, however, is the extent to which the development of the murals' patronage was itself bound up within the 'ruptural unity' of the conjuncture: with diverse state institutions coming to offer funds to the mural form at precisely the moment in which the 'exhaustion of consent' turned towards a deepening crisis of state legitimacy.[86] One of the earliest and most consistent supporters and advocates for the form was the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), an arms-length institution, established along the designs of John Maynard Keynes,

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across the 1970s and 80s: "Moving Right Show"; "Authoritarian Populism: A reply to Jessop et al.," *New Left Review* Issue 151, (May-June 1985): 115-124; etc. At the time Hall's critique was criticized by theorists on the Left for what some considered to be an implicit admiration for Thatcher, and an overstatement of ideological as above economic determinations: Bob Jessop, et al., "Authoritarian Populism, Two Nations, and Thatcherism," *New Left Review* Issue 147, (Sept-Oct 1984): 32-60; Bob Jessop, et al. "Thatcherism and the Politics of Hegemony: a reply to Stuart Hall," in *New Left Review* Issue 153, (September –October 1985): 87-101. Whilst this study aligns with certain critiques of Hall's overstatement of ideological factors, and the resultant understatement of class struggle and economic determination, it also holds that the methodological apparatus of conjunctural analysis, the broad parameters of its periodisation, and the prescience of its predictions regarding Thatcherism render the model invaluable to a scholar of the period.

85. See, for example, Kelly: 'Community arts emerged as one strand of activism in the late 1960s... and claimed to share the political, social and cultural goals of those other movements: the underground press, organized squatting, free festivals, the yippies and the Black Panthers' (Kelly, *Storming the Citadels,* 1), or Kenna: 'two related factors generated this [mural] movement. The first was that the late sixties saw the culmination of radical activity in the West, a thrust for racial equality, women's equality and an attack on oppressive aspects of government, together with a liberating tide of alternative culture' (Kenna, *Guide*, 1.)

86. This crisis deepened across the early 1970s, with a developing stand-off between organised labour and Edward Heath's Conservative administration, which, following the implementation of a three-day working week to limit the power of the National Union of Mineworkers, brought Heath's Government down in the General Election of February 1974. As Hall stated it, '[i]t was the most resounding victory, not for Labour (returned in a weak minority position…), but for the organised working class. It had brought the government to the ground.' Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 301. The return of a majority Labour administration later in the year, notwithstanding, neither Labour nor Conservative administrations did much to stem the tide of enveloping crises across the decade. For an analysis of the move from the 'exhaustion of consent' towards a deepening crisis of state legitimacy, see Hall, et al. *Policing the Crisis,* 268-317. Both Kenna's exclusion of the state and Kelly's notion of the state as a fixed force, fail to take account of the impacts of this crisis.

by Royal Charter in 1946.[87] In many ways an archetypal institution of the 'post-war consensus', by the late 1960s the ACGB faced mounting criticism for its staid elitism, from a new generation of cultural practitioners involved in the burgeoning range of new and counter-cultural activities.[88] In reaction, the ACGB inaugurated a range of new funds and committees, which across the 1970s, in the face of increasingly concerted campaigns from the newly formed Artists' Union and the Association of Community Artists, came to include substantial support and advocacy for the mural form, across several committees: a number of which came to include community artists as sitting members.[89] Local government patronage emerged in more haphazard manner across multiple administrations and local governmental departments. Beginning with a series of ad hoc grants across the early 1970s, from mid-decade forwards, a number of (predominantly) Labour administrations across London began

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87. For histories of the Arts Council see, Pearson, *The State*, 48-66; Harris, *Cultured into Crisis*; Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*.

88. For an account of some of the pressures on the Arts Council from the late 1960s into the 1970s see Kelly, *Storming the Citadels,* 10-14. As Raymond Williams observed, by the late 1970s the attacks on the Council were coming from all sides of the political spectrum, including Thatcher's key ideological ally Keith Joseph. Williams, "The Arts Council". For further analysis of the culture wars ranged upon the Arts Council see Mulholland, "One Monopolies Commission."

89. The Artists' Union formed in 1972 and offered a crucial—and widely overlooked—institution for artists' self-organisation. Their campaigns immediately set sight on the perceived elitism of the Arts Council as well as questions of prompt payment, declining jobs in higher education and questions of artists' exhibition rights. From 1974 these were joined by the lobbying of the Association of Community Artists, an organisation conceived, as Kelly saw it, as 'a campaigning group' (see Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*, 12-13). The accommodations of the Council, however, had started earlier with the 1967 Charter replacing a previous commitment to the 'fine arts' with a commitment to the 'arts' and instigating a process of devolution. In 1969, the Council established the New Activities Committee, which was replaced in 1971 by the Experimental Projects Committee. This in turn, following the publication of the Baldry Report (1974), was succeeded by the 'Community Arts Committee'. With budgets of £175,000 and £350,000 across its first two years, by 1979-1980, (when devolution to RAAs began to gather pace) the *Community Arts Committee* offered some £1 million in project and revenue grants to muralists and other community arts practitioners. Allied with a short-lived *Murals and Environmental Projects* scheme (1978-1979), and the occasional allocation of grants to mural practices considered outside the remit of 'Community Arts' from the main *Visual Arts Committee*, the Arts Council, thus offered the most centralised and coordinated funding for the nascent mural movement in England. For Kelly the Council's accommodations resulted from a 'liberal fear of being caught siding with yesterday's men', (Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*, 10). The Council's Chair Lord Goodman in a speech to the House of Lords on April 19th 1967, suggests a more conventional attempt at consensual power: 'I believe that young people lack values, lack certainties, lack guidance; that they need something to turn to; and need it more desperately than they have needed it at any time in our history – certainly, at any time which I can recollect. I do not say that the Arts will furnish a total solution, but I believe that the Arts will furnish some solution. I believe that once young people are captured for the arts they are redeemed from many of the dangers which confront them at the moment and which have been occupying the attention of the government in a completely unprofitable and destructive fashion. I believe that here we have constructive work to do which can be of inestimable value'. Cited in Arts Council of Great Britain, *Twenty-Second Annual Report and Accounts, Year ended 31 March 1967. A New Charter,* London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1967, 11.

to offer more steady budgets towards murals, and in some cases explore their own Community Arts schemes.[90] While also the subject of artist-led lobbying, these funds attest to the further intersection of forces and actors. Most prominent amongst these will be seen: a 1976 peak of local government funding as a proportion of GDP; a wide-ranging rebellion against 'top-down' modes of municipalism amongst a new generation of Labour Party activists and representatives; and, the more or less interrelated burgeoning of community politics and social movements.[91] By the late 1970s and into the '80s a precipitous decline in industry, surging unemployment and the increasingly prevalent diagnosis of an 'urban crisis', resulted in the diversion of central government funds towards the mural form through the expansion of programmes like Urban Aid and Manpower Services Commission. By 1980 or so, these—alongside occasional grants from private trusts—constituted a fairly steady network of patronage, which sustained the growth of the mural form. Across the 1980s, the ACGB's deepening devolution meant that responsibilities for murals and community arts, transferred to the Greater London Arts Association, which emerged as an intermediary agent between local government and the ACGB, and took on the committee structures of the latter.[92] From 1981, these sources were joined by the Greater London Council, which under its final Labour administration devoted significant resources towards murals, through one off

90. The most innovative of these was the Tower Hamlets Arts Project, founded in 1975, and soon administered by the Tower Hamlets Arts Committee. Though funded through the initial diversion of funds from a corporate scheme funded by Thames Television, the Committee soon received support from Tower Hamlets Council. Other boroughs, such as Greenwich, Wandsworth and Lambeth, also offered funds to murals or muralists from the mid-1970s forwards. These were forthcoming from a range of budgets. For an account of Tower Hamlets Arts Project see Sam Wetherell "Painting the Crisis," and Tower Hamlets Archives.
91. Alongside a buoyant squatters' movement, a burgeoning demand for tenant control, and the demands for community architecture and planning, the murals benefitted from an attempt on behalf of diverse local government departments to look beyond the top-down corporatism of the 1970s. For information on allied movements, such as tenant control see, *North Islington Housing Rights Projects, Street by Street. Improvement and tenant control in Islington* (London: Shelter, 1976). For an account of the Labour Left's accommodation to these new dynamics see Hugh Atkinson, "The Rise and Fall of the London New Urban Left in London Labour Politics 1976-1987," (PhD diss., Southbank University, 1995), or Ken Livingstone, *If Voting Changed Anything They'd Abolish It*, (London: Collins, 1987).
92. For an account of the growth of the Regional Arts Associations see, Pearson, *The State*, 56-64.

schemes and a community arts committee, building upon the successes of the preceding decade.[93]

The manner in which this network of state funding aligned around the mural form, therefore, will be seen through the intersection of a range of social forces, actors and state institutions, united in their imbrication within the ruptural dynamics of the conjuncture. The nature of this patronage, runs counter to certain key arguments of the CCCS study and wider readings of the conjuncture. In particular whilst the CCCS traced a decisive shift from 'consensual' to 'coercive' modes of state power across the period—a diagnosis usually seen to have been confirmed by the ascent of Thatcher's authoritarian populist project—the emergence of the murals' patronage across the period would seem better aligned to an expansion—albeit in this case limited—of the consensual dimensions of the state apparatus. At one level this will be seen to reveal that the hegemonic outcome, so presciently traced by the CCCS study was neither pre-determined, nor immediate. Rather, it was the result of a period of diverse and protracted struggles, waged outside, against, through and within the state itself. But this study will also strive against too fixed an application of Gramsican binaries and the models of dual state power derived from them.[94] Instead, the murals will be seen to confirm Nicos

93. See Atashroo, "Beyond the Campaign".
94. As Nicos Poulantzas observed in a retort to the Althusserian dualism of the state as repression plus ideology, the state is not reducible to the dualistic embodiment of political domination, for, '[t]he state apparatus…is not exhausted in state power. Rather political domination is itself inscribed in the institutional materiality of the state. Although the state is not created *ex nihilo* by the ruling classes, nor is it simply taken over by them: state power (that of the bourgeoisie, in the case of the capitalist State) is written into this materiality. Thus, while all the state's actions are not reducible to political domination their composition is nevertheless marked by it'. In this sense, therefore, the state—and its institutions—cannot be reduced to the question of simple 'domination of the masses either through police terror or internalised repression' but rather viewed through the historical accommodations of different class forces through the material substratum of the state. As Poulantzas continued: 'The relation of the masses to power and the State…*always possesses a material substratum*. I say "among other things", since in working for class hegemony the State acts within an unstable equilibrium of compromises between the dominant classes and the dominated. The state therefore continually adopts material measures which are of positive significance for the popular masses, even though these measures represent so many concessions imposed by the struggle of the subordinate classes. This essential material aspect cannot be explained if the relationship between state and popular masses is reduced to the couplet of repression-ideology.' Combined with the question of artistic agency within the structure of state patronage this model limits the usefulness of a Gramscian binary which would see the murals patronage as a simple expression of 'consensual'

Poulantzas' observation that 'the state does not produce a unified discourse, but several discourses that are adapted to the various classes and differentially incarnated in its apparatuses according to their class destination'.[95] In the case of this study, these divergences in state logic, articulation, and destination, can be identified not just between the simultaneous expansions of the coercive and consensual state, but between divergent state institutions, aligned around a common mode of putatively consensual patronage. More crucially, these divergent expressions of state power will be viewed as emerging within the dynamics of a specific conjuncture, in which, as Pat Devine framed it, 'two alternative post-social democracy trajectories presented themselves: a move in the direction of economic democracy, building on the gains of the long boom, as a transitional stage towards socialism; or a move to neoliberalism, reversing the post-1945 gains'.[96] If it was, of course, the latter trajectory which triumphed, it was within the aperture opened by the wide-ranging social, political, cultural and economic struggles for the former, that the murals' patronage will be seen. Rather, therefore, than a frequent tendency to view the period's patronage as marked by a simple passage from Keynesian culturalism, towards monetarist populism, the murals reveal that alternative—if contingent—models of state cultural patronage emerged from the midst of the period of crisis.[97] If, as Antonio Gramsci contended, '[t]he crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born', the murals and their

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or 'ideological' domination and invites a closer examination of the class forces and material institutional forces at work. Poulantzas, *State, Power Socialism,* 14 and 30-31.

95. Poulantzas, 32.

96. Pat Devine, "The 1970s and After. The political economy of inflation and the crisis of social democracy", *Soundings*, vol 43, (March 2006), 52.

97. The view is most explicitly expressed by Neil Mulholland whose book claims to 'demonstrate the ways in which the ideological change from Keynesian culturalism to monetarist populism generated and financed the new art of the era'. Mulholland, *The Cultural Devolution*, 2011. If less explicitly framed, the tendency to bypass or view the period of crisis as one of atrophy of the post-war consensus, or mere prelude to the later established neoliberal one, is pervasive in the literature.

patronage reveal that such periods contain more than 'morbid symptoms' and deferred birth, but rather a wealth of active struggles for the birth of the new.[98]

This reading of the murals' patronage draws the study into relation with a body of Marxist art history which has sought to extend the insight of Marxist theorisations of the state into an analysis of state patronage of the arts. Leonard Folgarait, for example, has offered what Warren Carter has described as the 'most sophisticated interpretation of Mexican Muralism that we have to date', through an application of Nicos Poulantzas' theory of the state to an analysis of Mexican murals.[99] As Carter has pointed out, however, Folgarait's reliance upon Poulantzas' 'hyper-structuralist' models of the state, his conflation of the state and the economy and his tendency to read murals as relatively unmediated expressions of state ideology, serves to deprive his analysis of the capacity for artistic agency or contested visual meaning.[100] Whilst agreeing firmly with Carter's critiques of Folgarait, this study's approach, nonetheless, seeks to build upon some of the insights of Poulantzas' last work, *State, Power, Socialism*, in which the 'relative autonomy' of the state is finally opened up for a re-admittance of class contestation.[101] In *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas argues for a need to move beyond a vision of the state based upon dual power, for one in which the state appears 'the site of the political condensation of struggle, it is not external to the relations of

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98. 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 276.
99. Carter, "Painting the Revolution," 291.
100. Carter, "Painting the Revolution." The charge of 'hyperstructuralism', was levelled by Ralph Miliband in the wake of an extended exchange between him and Poulantzas in the pages of the New Left Review across the late 1960s and into the 1970s. See Nicos Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State," *New Left Review* 58, (November/December 1969): 67–78; and Ralph Miliband, "The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas," *New Left Review* 59, (January/ February 1970): 53 – 60, both reprinted in *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory*, ed. Robin Blackburn, (Suffolk: Fontana, 1972), 238–262.
101. Notwithstanding the strength of Miliband's critiques of Poulantzas' early work, *State, Power, Socialism,* written some years later, offers redress to certain key aspects of the critique. In particular, in the contexts of this study, it will be seen to offer a means for understanding the evolution of the murals' patronage schemes, in relation to the ruptural dynamics of the crisis in which they emerged, without negating the question of class forces, or artistic agency.

production, but penetrates them and, indeed, is constitutive for them'.[102] This view, will here be seen to allow for a vision of the murals' patronage which moves beyond the binaries of coercion and consent, and even state and civil society, for one in which the state, and state patronage, is seen as shaped by, and shaping of, class relations, *and* class struggle. Such a model allows for an opening out of the murals' diverse network of patronage to the wider class struggles and conjunctural forces of the period, without falling to the hyper-structuralism of Kelly or Folgarait's accounts, or the voluntarism of Kenna's. In this way, the contradictory emergence and waning of a radical and oppositional mural tradition, which won funding from diverse organs of the state across a moment of generalised rightwards drift, can be approached, in a manner which neither reduces the murals to inert expressions of a singular state ideology, nor states their simple externality to the state. In alliance with a broader acknowledgement of artistic agency, it is hoped such a model, will open up insight into the murals' contested position within the complex array of overlapping social forces across a moment of class struggle.

Methodology

The study, therefore, situates itself within the methodologies of a 'Marxist art history', both through its adherence to a 'theory of social and historical change', which asserts the centrality of class struggle across a period of conjuncture, and through its attempt to open such analysis (via Marxist theories of the state) to a consideration of the contradictions inherent in the

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102. Stuart Hall, "Nicos Poulantzas: State, Power, Socialism," in Poulantzas, *State Power Socialism*, xiii. This re-conceptualisation of the state in a manner which looks beyond the model of 'coercion plus consent' and towards a readmittance of class struggle and contestation promises insight into the manner in which a tradition of Left wing murals emerged with support of state funding, across a period of crisis, class struggle and hegemonic rightwards drift.

emergence of a Left wing mural tradition, through state funding, across a period of dramatic

rightwards drift in the hegemonic political direction of state institutions. In line with a body

of recent scholarship, it contends that a renewal of such modes of Marxist analysis has a vital

role to play, not just in the recovery of the subject of this thesis, but within the interrelated

methodologies of the 'social history of art', if the latter is to be more than 'an academically

institutionalised eclecticism'.[103] As Hemingway has observed, the social history of art, might

be seen to have two basic modes. The first, broadly speaking, 'a body of scholarship which

focuses on the reinterpretation of individual works of art, and draws on a range of historical

evidence to argue that their meaning and value cannot be understood except by situating them

in relation to the complex social formations within which they were once produced'.[104] The

second an often counter-posed tradition has argued 'that a social history of art worthy of the

name cannot be orientated primarily to individual artists and their 'achievements', nor take

the analysis of individual art works as its ultimate ends….[but rather that] the object of

knowledge should be the constitution of 'art' through ideology and institutions, and the ways

that this is determined by different types of social and political power structures'.[105] This

study takes seriously those critiques suggesting the first of these variants has a 'tendency to

give undue importance to the aesthetic, making individual artworks bear a cognitive load they

cannot reasonably sustain', as well as those critiques of the second mode which observe that

it often displays an insufficient grasp of the aesthetic, an overbearing sense of structuralism

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103. Warren Carter, "Towards a History of the Marxist History of Art," in *Renew Marxist Art History*, eds. Warren Carter, Barnaby Haran, Frederic J. Schwartz, (London: Arts Books Publishing Ltd, 2013), 23. As Warren Carter and Andrew Hemingway have observed 'Marxist art history' and the 'social history of art', have complex and interconnected histories, often evolving in tandem, and at times used nearly interchangeably. In the years of, and since, the period of this study, however, the rise of post-modernism, post-structuralism, and a mode of cultural studies sheered of an analysis of class, have resulted—in tandem with a crisis in Marxism and Left politics more broadly—in a reorientation of the social history of art towards the depoliticised 'New Art History'. This study maintains an attachment to a closer alignment between the two. See Carter, "Towards a History," 14-28; Hemingway, "Introduction," in *Marxism and the History of Art. From William Morris to the New Left*, ed. Hemingway (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 1-8; and Hemingway. "Introduction: Marxism and art history after the fall of Communism", in Hemingway and Vaughan, *Art in Bourgeois Society*.
104. Hemingway, *Marxism and Art History*, 13.
105. Hemingway, 13.

and a 'facile relativism on issues of value'.[106] This study, nonetheless, seeks to draw from both. Building on Hemingway's observations, the study maintains an (increasingly unfashionable) attachment to the traditional tools of art historical scientific methodology: unfolding sustained visual and iconographic analysis of individual artworks.[107] Rather than placing such analysis at the service of reinforcing canonical works of art with enhanced 'contexts' gleaned from a socially rooted narrative, however, these methods of art historical analysis will be applied to works of art resolutely rejected from the canon, and thus from precisely these methods of detailed visual analysis. Analysing the murals' rich, nuanced, and hitherto almost entirely unexplored visual meanings *alongside* an analysis of the ideological and institutional contexts of their production, the study thus maintains a critical focus upon visual meaning as well as the constitution of 'art' and 'art history'. Combining what Hemingway has recommended as a 'radical scepticism towards the category of taste', with an enduring belief in the capacity of the traditional methodologies of art history to enrich our understandings of its subject, the study therefore seeks to bridge a concern for the (visual, social and other) qualities and meanings of individual works, with an attention to the epistemological, ideological and institutional forces through which their production and reception have been constituted.[108]

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106. Hemingway, 13.

107. 'However much history it [this study] includes, its object is aesthetic…Correspondingly, the reader should expect to encounter the traditional methods of art-historical science, style analysis and iconography. In my view these remain indispensable tools.' Andrew Hemingway, "Theoretical Apologia", in *Landscape Between Ideology and the Aesthetic. Marxist Essays on British Art and Art Theory, 1750-1850* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2017), 1-2.

108. 'Simply put, in its preoccupation with art of quality, most social history of art takes the bourgeois category of art too much for granted, and turns itself into an appendage of that it supposedly seeks to critique. It falls into the trap of the Social Democratic cultural history that Walter Benjamin castigated so brilliantly in his essay on Eduard Fuchs, an essay that has not been superseded as a laying out of the ground rules for a materialist history of art. For the most part, the social history of art as become just another celebration of the same old masterworks, even if it alters the grounds of discrimination somewhat. It thus lacks the radical scepticism towards the category of taste necessary to a truly dialectical history.' Hemingway, *Artists on the Left, American Artists and the Communist Movement 1926-1956* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 2.

A keystone to the bridging of these two modes of the social history of art emerges from the conception that, as David Craven had it, '[t]he meaning of an artwork is a site of contestation, and never more so than when popular forces are mobilised, as they often were [in Mexico] in the 1920s and 30s, against the policies of the government responsible for commissioning the public artworks'.[109] There are of course substantial divergences between the commissioning practices and popular forces adhering within post-revolutionary Mexico and those of bearing to this study. If anything, however, the import of Craven's observations regarding contested meaning are even more pronounced in relation to this study, and a body of work made—as has been suggested—not through state commissions for institutional settings, but through a dispersed and responsive patronage structure for the open streets of late 20th century London. In these contexts, the conceptualisation of the murals as sites of contested meaning—seen in different light by their (multiple) funders, those who created them, the communities in which they were sited (and on whose knowledge, insights and concerns they so frequently drew), and the art critics and other observers who on occasion strove for meaningful engagement—will be seen as essential to a measured reading of the works. Whilst it is acknowledged that none of these internally heterogeneous constituencies can be pinned down with certitude, a reconstruction of their broad coordinates remains at the core of this study's approach. It underpins the attempts to move from visual and iconographic analysis, to what Erwin Panofsky might have classed an iconological approach: one which takes into account some of the differentiated literacies and positions (including geographical, ideological, historical, institutional, political and art historical) through which the rich contestations of the murals meaning might be discerned.[110]

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109. David Craven, *Diego Rivera: As Epic Modernist* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1997), 62.
110. Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 51-81.

In the absence of a substantial body of art historical literature devoted to the subject, the broad reconstruction of these contesting constituencies (and constituents) of meaning guides the selection of source material. At the centre, of course, are the case studies, which, given their environmental integration, climactic exposure and—in the case of three of the murals—destruction, have been approached through an admixture of direct primary engagement, alongside a historical reconstruction based on photographic records and site visits. Beyond this, the study relies upon what is, by art historical standards, an eclectic range of sources. These include: the historic statements, funding applications, sketches, preparatory and ancillary work, and research material of artists, as found in personal collections and institutional archives; contemporary (and more extended) critical reception of the works, found in local, national and arts press; the committee minutes, statements, memos, policy documents and successful and unsuccessful funding applications stored in the archives of the Arts Council, local Borough Councils, the Greater London Council and the Greater London Arts Association; a range of contemporary and secondary local historical material, gathered through press, secondary literature and local history archives; material relating to the political struggles of the period gathered through press, assorted archives, primary accounts and secondary literature; and the author's extended interviews with artists and the administrators of funding agencies. These sources, have been read in relation to broader art historical, historical and political narratives and a theoretical armoury drawn from a broad tradition of art theory and cultural theory (predominantly drawn from Western Marxism or the New Left), and through visual, stylistic and iconological analysis. Though necessarily fragmentary in its reach, the sources are selected, as far as possible, for their use in the reconstruction of some of the key contestations which adhered around the site of the murals' production and reception, including the funding institutions, administrators, makers and audiences, which made up the principle constituencies of the works.

The stress placed, in compiling and synthesising these sources, on a reconstruction of localised conditions—the communities, political struggles, social geographies and immediate physical environments in which the murals were both physically and discursively set—stands in contrast to the class basis and globalised dimensions of much modern and contemporary art history. The muralists of this study were resolute in their desire to make work which reached beyond the traditional constituencies of 'fine art': work that was not only removed from the art market, but situated in, and intimately related to (more or less) specific working-class communities across inner London. The means by which artists sought to extend these relations spanned diverse methods of more or less collaborative research, thematic development, design, and execution. In those accounts which have attempted to deal with the murals' localised integration, a focus on the more participative and collaborative modes of production has predominated.[111] As in more recent scholarship devoted to what has been diagnosed as a 'social turn' in the arts since the 1990s, this focus upon participative processes of production, has tended to preclude an understanding and appraisal of the murals as completed artworks.[112] This approach has rested upon the more or less conscious construction of a binary distinction between process and product, with a concomitant focus upon production against reception.[113] Whether explicit—as in Claire Bishop's recent study—or implicit—as in much of the contemporary literature—this binary has itself rested upon a further binary distinction between 'equality' and 'quality', in which participative art's egalitarian commitment to the former is pitted against the apparent 'elitism' of the latter.[114]

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111. See for example Crehan, *Community Art.*
112. As Claire Bishop has observed, this habit of 'advocating process over product did nothing to rethink the problem of devising alternative criteria by which to reframe evaluation. By avoiding questions of artistic criteria, the community arts movement unwittingly perpetuated the impression that it was full of good intentions and compassion, but ultimately not talented enough to be of broader interest'. Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 190.
113. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.
114. Whilst Bishop's study perceptively highlights the historical reasons for (and theoretical weaknesses of) the community arts' resistance to notions of quality, its attempt to place 'quality' and 'equality' in some form of (faux-) 'dialectical' tension, tends to mask her essentially normative and unsubstantiated value judgements. In

Such an approach will here be seen to fail to give sufficient testament to the full extent of the murals' radical opening out to localised and collective meaning. For whilst the murals *will* be seen to partake in what Walter Benjamin saw as the emancipatory task of eroding 'the difference between author and public', this erosion will not, as in much of the literature, be viewed as arising through the processes of production alone.[115] Rather, the murals' capacity 'to make co-workers out of spectators', will be approached, in large part, through the impacts of their finalised form and extended reception: through the extent to which they achieved by turns mnemonic, discursive, physical, historical, phenomenological and—centrally for this study—political resonance and relevance in the lives and environments within which they were sited.[116] Rather, therefore, than mere background to production or reception, the contexts of the localised working class communities within which the murals were either successfully or unsuccessfully integrated, are here foregrounded as primary components of the works' enduring power and contested meaning. It is a methodological approach, therefore, which offers a critical contribution to the literature on community arts and more recent accounts of the 'social turn', by the opening of a methodological armoury to the methodologies of 'history from below'.[117]

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the place of this unsynthesised binary, this study will seek to dismantle the reification of a singular notion of aesthetic quality, for an understanding of aesthetic qualities, and—more centrally—argue, following Walter Benjamin, for a more materialist view of artistic production, not in relation to the relationships of production, but within them. In this way the study seeks to overcome the division between process and product, and 'quality and equality', to see an integration between the process and final work. 'Before I ask: how does a literary work stand in relation *to* the relationships of production of a period, I would like to ask: how does it stand *in* them? This question aims directly at the function that the work has within the literary relationships of production of a period. In other words, it aims directly at a work's literary *technique*.' This 'technique' will be seen manifest in both process and product: production and reception. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," trans. John Heckman, *New Left Review* I/62, (July-August 1970): 85.

115. Benjamin, "Author as Producer," 87. Whilst Benjamin applies this phrase to an analysis of Brecht's epic theatre and its capacity to demystify the processes of the writer, in the case of this study, and its attention to murals intimately related to localised neighbourhoods, it will be applied also to the extent to which the public is able to engage with and forge the meaning of a work: its relation to their everyday life and experience.

116. Benjamin, 93.

117. The movement of 'history from below', and the interrelated 'history workshop' movement, evolved in historical tandem with the murals of this study—indeed, in the case of Tower Hamlets Arts Project, often shared institutional links. In the case of this study, the mural form's intricate relationship with communities will be seen as an opportunity to interject subaltern and working-class history and experience into the enduringly bourgeois field of art history.

A final keystone of the methodological approach of this study, is the analysis of the murals within the historical continuum of the visual arts, and more specifically, within the rich but often overlooked traditions of realist painting. An unravelling of the binary distinction between production and reception through an emphasis on the profound impact of localised realities on both spheres, undergirds and is extended by this approach; the murals' capacity to 'provide cognitive as well as imaginative access to a material, historical reality', often centring, or at least touching, upon their relation to and treatment of localised historical realities.[118] But the access offered to such realities will also be seen as grounded in, and thus analysed against wide-ranging historical traditions of realist painting. Again, analysis of these aspects of the murals has been widely neglected, with contemporary criticism tending to focus upon the murals' 'social functions' as arising from their location or methods of production above and beyond their aesthetic or realist dimensions. For this study, however, the murals' intertwinement and inventive reworking of (predominantly) realist, and social realist traditions, goes hand in hand with their innovative relations to specifically situated urban environments and is central to their art historical contribution. Working largely without domestic precedent, the muralists evolved remarkably heterogeneous stylistic and technical means by which to achieve such integration: combining increasingly sophisticated formal and technical devices and locally derived iconographies with stylistic and art historical sources ranging from 19th century romanticism, through 20th century modernism, Pop Art, and Mexican, Soviet and Italian Socialist Realisms. If the sheer promiscuity of these touchstones, and referencing of localised vernacular culture, parallel certain post-modernist tendencies,

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118. For Matthew Beaumont, an inclusive and comprehensive definition of realism, 'can briefly be sketched as the assumption that it is possible, through the act of representation, in one semiotic code or another, to provide cognitive as well as imaginative access to a material, historical reality that, though irreducibly mediated by human consciousness, and of course by language, is nonetheless independent of it'. This study will take such an inclusive view. Beaumont, "Reclaiming Realism," 2.

they will also be seen within a rich and wide-ranging realist tradition which emerges from

dialogue with modernism.[119] For far from examples of unmediated naturalism, or the 'inertia

of appearance as a copy or representation of things', by which post-modernist criticism has

often condemned realist practices, the murals will be seen as what Frederic Jameson

recommended as a 'demiurgic' realist practice, with wide-ranging 'active and…

playful/experimental impulses'.[120] Rather, therefore, than inert reflections of localised

communities or realities, the murals' realism will be emphasised as an attempt to 'impose a

new form upon…perception'.[121] And through doing so to allow local and wider viewers, to

'detect in a given thing those traits which went unnoticed the day before'.[122] It is, in this

sense, that the murals realism, and its situation within and attention to the quotidian spaces

and realities of working class communities across London, will be seen to attain its fuller

resonance. And that the murals' realism, will be seen as a 'dialectical and

democratic...dynamic force not static phenomenon', to offer a remarkable episode not just

within British realist tradition, but the broader histories of twentieth century art.[123]

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119. As Esther Leslie has put it, '[i]n various important contexts, Modernism and Realism are in dialogue, even if, later, certain forces, notably those ranged against experimental art in the name of audience-friendly, politically expedient realism, interrupt, deny or suppress that exchange.' Leslie, "Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism," in Beaumont, *Realism*, 143. For Hemingway, 'realism was not only the forcing ground for the modernist outlook, but... its continuing viability would depend partly on the infusion of modernist devices.' Hemingway, "The Realist Aesthetic," 129. The question of the murals' relation to modernism is a vexed one. Whilst contemporary critics, and indeed the muralists themselves, often conceived the relationship as antagonistic, it is one of the contentions of this study that it was in fact much more dialogic: the murals' increasing integration of a broad and historically dispersed range of modernist technical and stylistic sources, proving essential to their accomplishment.

120. Frederic Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), 162. Cited in Beaumont, "Reclaiming Realism," 7.

121. 'To shake consciousness into a new perception of things, as Jakobson put it, "the ideogram needs to be deformed. The artist-innovator must impose a new form upon our perception, if we are to detect in a given thing those traits which went unnoticed the day before".' Hemingway, "The Realist Aesthetic," 129, citing Jakobson, "On Realism in Art", from *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views.* eds. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska, trans. K. Magassy. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1978), 40.

122. Jakobson, "Realism in Art," 40.

123. 'The concept of realism that [George] Eliot operates [in Adam Bede] is a distinctly dialectical one, then, in addition to a democratic one. It is a dynamic force field rather than some static phenomenon'. Beaumont, "Reclaiming Realism," 6.

Organisation

This thesis is divided into three chapters, which offer an interlocking, but broadly sequential chronological focus upon a series of political themes figured in and united through the examined case studies. These chapter themes are led by the tenor of the selected murals' political engagements, but also—in testament to the active involvement of the murals in the period's broader struggles—provide a loose narrative arc by which to approach some of the driving political concerns of Left politics within their respective timeframes. In line with the study's broader approach, the chapter divisions cannot be seen to offer a totalising view upon wider mural production or Left politics across the year covered, nor can their thematic concerns be seen as limited to the temporal windows of the chapter divisions. Rather, they offer a convenient means for grouping a selection of case studies, by which to examine the complex and evolving relations between a series of strands of contemporary Left politics and a particular strain of realist mural painting. Chapter One, examines three murals made between 1975 and 1978 in close relation to localised struggles and 'community politics' of the period around housing, industrial democracy and the claims for community control of urban space across the period. The first of these murals, is proposed as London's first exterior mural of its scale and type to actively figure the priorities of Left politics across the period, and all three works are seen as foundational and propositional attempts to explore a new mode of experimental mural painting in close relation to community and political concerns. Chapter Two, takes as its subject two murals made in East London between 1978 and 1983, and their diverse strategies for engaging with, and fighting against, the increasingly racialised dimensions of class struggle in a period characterised by the ascent of an emboldened Far-Right street movement and rightwards drifting ethno-nationalist Conservative administration. It examines the increasingly sophisticated approach to the genres of realism, the monument

and history painting embodied within the works. Chapter Three turns to two murals made between 1980 and 1985, in relation to the rising spectre of nuclear annihilation posed by the Second Cold War, the localised rise of a socialist leaning Greater London Council, and the increasingly vexed questions of unity and solidarity in the wake of Thatcher's second general election victory. It argues that these works can be seen as broader metaphors, in which some of the strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary Left found cogent expression, at a moment of eventually dwindling hope. The conclusion offers a summary of the achievements of the mural movement, and some reflections on its eventual decline.

Chapter 1

Beyond Social Democracy:
Libertarian Socialism, Community Politics and Utopias of Action, 1975-1978

The three case studies of this chapter are some of the earliest examples of the emergence of the large-scale exterior mural as a vehicle for the politics of the London Left.[124] Rather than asserting these murals as typical of the fractious field of Left politics at the time, or foundational precedents for the murals which were to follow, this chapter focusses upon their shared relation to a *particular* mode of community based politics: one tentatively proposed under the rubric of *libertarian socialism.*[125] This is not, it is worth noting, a description that was central to the political self-definition of the muralists of the time: it does not feature in their statements or the statements of groups they were involved in, nor does it feature in the literature about muralism at the time or since. It does, however, in its conjunction of two often quite divergent political philosophies, begin the task of delineating the historically specific manifestations that are brought together in this chapter. At the *libertarian* pole the muralists shared a commitment to the political impulses of the post-1968 period: they were touched by a pronounced scepticism towards the hierarchical structures and centralism of the

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124. Indeed, *The People's River*, 1975, with which the chapter opens would seem to have been *the* earliest example in this period. It is of note however that there is some photographic documentation of exterior murals in support of the Spanish Civil War. There appears to have been little knowledge of these murals amongst the artists of this study, and little sense of continuity. For those earlier murals see Robert Radford and Linda Morris, *The Story of the Artists International Association 1933-1953* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1983)

125. Carol Kenna, at an event at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2013 used this term to respond to a suggestion from Owen Hatherley, that the murals were remnants of 'municipal socialism', though she has since denied memory of the statement. It is, nonetheless, I think, a useful term, though its use is more common amongst anarchists than Socialists, Marxists or Libertarians. More recently there has been some attempt to recover the term 'Libertarian Communist', which, for all the divergence of its weighting, seems to attest to a similar attempt at a more horizontalist interpretation of traditional leftist conceptions of class-bound revolutionary action, and municipal socialism. For recent trends see for example, Novara Media, "What is Libertarian Communism," podcast by James Butler and Aaron Bastani, 16th September, 2016: http://novaramedia.com/2016/09/16/what-is-libertarian-communism/ ; or LibCom, "About*,*" http://libcom.org/notes/about : accessed 10/10/16

institutions of the post-war 'social democratic' state, and an involvement with the social movement politics and issue-based local campaigning of the era.[126] At the *socialist* pole, however, their politics was also profoundly propositional, not merely willing the evaporation of the existing order, but actively seeking a reorientation of organisational forms through a renewed focus agency of culture and everyday life in working class communities. Whilst their visions of these new organisational forms varied considerably, for all the muralists discussed here this reorientation was sought through direct and communal action located at a local level.

If on the surface, therefore, one or another of these poles may seem to dominate, pushing the murals in this chapter close to a nostalgic hippie liberalism, a romantic anti-capitalism, or an unreformed social democratic continuance, it is, I think, essential to re-assert the historical contexts of the synthesis that was being attempted. It is a synthesis, that came into being as the libertarian impulses of the 1960s were brought into sharper focus by the increasingly radicalised class consciousness of the 1970s. It is a combination that was neither blind nor indifferent to the pressing historical transitions of the period. Rather, in its efforts to rethink and redefine the boundaries of community and political action amidst the contexts of declining industry, shifting demographics and class relations, and mass redistribution of land ownership and capital across the city, I would argue that it provided one of the more forceful and historically reasoned critiques of the period. The murals and their wider politics may not have overcome the complex contradictions of scale and organisational form which have continued to haunt the wider Left in the years since. It is, nonetheless, hoped that a re-examination the murals' political character may at the least offer some contribution to our understanding of possible longer-term resolutions to the contradictions. Any such

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126. Be these traditional trades unions, mainstream political parties or centralised governmental institutions.

contribution must emerge from an understanding of the murals as both agents within and products of this broader political climate.

Recuperating the Left

In the succession of landmarks and important dates by which the narratives of British history are so often transmitted, the years 1975-78 are widely ignored.[127] The *Spirit of '45* continues to engulf commentators on Left and Right in a series of competing nostalgias (be they for the honoured sprouting of social democracy, or the stoic restraints of post-war austerity).[128] 1968's somewhat paltry British manifestations are often magnified as a conveniently global symbol of a loosely (and variously defined) countercultural explosion (usually purged of too much prickly political intent).[129] It is then not until Thatcher's 1979 election victory, in the wake of the 'Winter of Discontent', that most canonical histories resume their shibboleth-hopping trajectory to the present. Where seen at all the years between 1968 and 1979 are, as John Medhurst observed, seen as constituting a nightmare prelude to Thatcherism. That such

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127. It seems of some note that the writing of history as a succession of big events was coming under increasing scrutiny through the period with the rise to prominence of Marxist historians like Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson, and their high-profile and widely read studies of 17th- 19th century history. This was, through the 1970s, supplemented by a vibrant History Workshops Movement, which gave institutional form to the wider drives to excavate social history.

128. The phrase (*Spirit of '45*), received high profile coining in Ken Loach's, 2013 film by that title. Owen Hatherley has recently investigated much of the strange contradictoriness of this nostalgia, in Owen Hatherley, *The Ministry of Nostalgia* (London: Verso, 2015). Intriguingly, for all his critical acuity in addressing the topic, Hatherley's own architectural taste and recurrent historical thesis seems driven by a very similar nostalgia for the corporatist top-down, post-war welfare state, and the architecture it spawned. As will be seen, this places him in notable contrast to this study. His ability for dialectical and nuanced thought, however, is attested by the fact that he remains one of very few cultural observers to have written about murals at all over recent years, despite their awkward relation to his historical project.

129. It is of note that this study also falls into this pattern, utilising 1968, and its aftermath as a convenient symbol of the unravelling social democratic consensus and the surging wave of social movements that emerged and were increasingly radicalised over the course of the 1970s. As Astrid Proll has pointed out, the relative weakness of Britain's political consciousness in 1968, may in fact have spared it the more bitter fallouts, in-fighting, and state hostility that emerged, for example, in Germany, and as such contributed to the relative strengths of the 'post-'68' Left. See Astrid Proll, "Introduction," in *Good bye to London: Radical art and Politics in the 1970s,* ed. Astrid Proll (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 8.

narratives derive very directly from those woven by Thatcher and the New Right from the mid-1970s forwards, is a token of the success, influence and endurance of the neoliberal project they in part helped to construct.[130] But it is also, indicative of the Left's failure to offer an equally cohesive and compelling counter-narrative, as it instead descended into the defensive battles and recriminations of the 1980s, and compounded defeats of succeeding decades.

Two narrative tendencies have tended to dominate Leftist accounts accounts of the period. In one, Margaret Thatcher's ascent to electoral power in 1979 is seen as *the* overbearingly decisive moment in the historic betrayal of social democracy.[131] Emerging amongst the centre ground of the Labour Party, the architects of this account tended—initially—to overstate the transitory nature of Thatcher's programme, significantly underestimating the scale of the social and economic crises of the 1970s, and the social base of Thatcher's support.[132] Ranged against such accounts, have been the more intellectually reasoned arguments of sections of

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130. As has been widely documented Thatcher's rise to power was sealed by her innovative employment of a wide range of policy and think-tanks, and by a successful cornering of the media. These two groups work in presenting an image of a broken society, and an incompetent 'loony left' reached an apogee in the media coverage of 'The Winter of Discontent' over the winter of 1978-79. Derek Jameson, the editor of the *Daily Express* in 1979, has stated in relation to his newspapers coverage of the event, 'We pulled every dirty trick in the book. We made it look like it was general, universal and eternal, whereas it was in reality scattered, here and there and no great problem.' Cited in Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*, 1-2.

131. This tendency is most common amongst those associated closest with the mainstream of the Labour Party and, to a lesser extent, prominent trades unionists. Its trace is to be found in the somewhat feeble attempts of Callaghan's administration to merge a nominal commitment to social democracy with the Monetary policy imposed as the condition of the IMF bailout. Intriguingly, it also colours the accounts of some more revolutionary socialists, such as Alex Callinicos who, until the late 1980s tended to see Thatcher's premiership as a vulnerable aberration and underestimate the strength of its social base. See Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*. Its trace is also to be found, to a lesser extent in some writers for the *New Left Review*, for example in Bob Jessop's essays cited below (see chap. 1, n. 133).

132. In succeeding years, the opposite has occurred, with Thatcher's ascent seen as the singular moment in the betrayal of the working class and the shift to post-industrial economy. These crises, in fact, started in the late 1960s as the post-war boom began to falter, under the weight of historic underinvestment in industry, capital relocation, and the expiration of the post-war model of economic growth. They were exacerbated through the early 1970s by the abandonment the gold standard at Bretton woods and a series of economic shocks, whose character and relation to oil prices remains a matter of some contention. Throughout, these economic crises were complemented by acute social, cultural and ideological ones. For a brief overview of the economic situation see Harvey, *Neoliberalism*. For a more nuanced account of the intertwining of cultural, social and economic 'crises' from the late 1960s forwards, Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis*, provides the most comprehensive analysis.

the New Left, and in particular those which emerged from the Gramscian analysis associated with *Marxism Today* across the late 1970s and 1980s.[133] Building upon Stuart Hall's explorations of the historic unravelling of the social democratic consensus across the 1960s and 1970s these accounts tended to stress the failures of the 'Old Left' in adapting to the 'New Times', which were by contrast presented as being seized upon effectively by Thatcher's brand of 'authoritarian populism'.[134] Whilst both accounts offer much richer analysis than this cursory summary suggests, their combined effect has been to present an image of the 1970s as an interregnum period whose political conflicts were characterised by a split between an unreformed backwards glancing advocacy of post-war social democracy, and an ascendant neoliberalism. It is an image we see mirrored by the American based, David Harvey, when he states in his account of neoliberalism that:

> *the left failed to go much beyond traditional social democratic and corporatist solutions and these had by the mid-1970s proven inconsistent with the requirements of capital accumulation. The effect was to polarise debate between those ranged behind social democracy and central planning on the one hand… and the interests of all those concerned with liberating corporate and business power and re-establishing market freedoms on the other.*[135]

Such accounts are, despite their prominence, deficient in framing the political climate of the decade they claim to address. Firstly, whilst perhaps a fair summary of the prevailing political

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133. *Marxism Today* was the more academically tilted journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain, edited over this period by Martin Jacques. Ultimately *Marxism Today*'s analysis of the conjuncture of the 1970s achieved a degree hegemony in parts of the 'Left,' as it migrated towards the origins of New Labour, as formalised through Martin Jacques serving as an advisor to Neil Kinnock and Martin Kettle to Tony Blair. It is notable that whilst this migration is often attributed to Stuart Hall, he was in fact resolute in his divergence from his peers. See for example S Hall, "The Great Moving Nowhere Show," *Marxism Today*, Back for one special issue, 1998. As James Eaden and David Renton, have pointed out the split and rightwards drift of the 'Eurocommunists' of Marxism Today, from the 'Stalinist' core of the Communist Party, preceded the demise of the CPGB in 1994. James Eaden and David Renton, *The History of the Communist Party Since 1920* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002). For Hall's essays on the phenomenon of 'Thatcherism' see Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," and "Authoritarian Populism: A Reply" (see Introduction, n. 84). Another intervention in the debate came from Eric Hobsbawm's 1978, *The Forward March of Labour Halted*, (Hobsbawm, "Labour Halted"), (see Introduction, n. 23). Hobsbawm was to eventually serve as an advisor to Neil Kinnock. A series of prominent retorts came from Bob Jessop in the pages of the New Left Review: Jessop, et al., "Authoritarian Populism"; and "A reply to Stuart Hall,", (see Introduction, n. 84).
134. Hall, "Reply to Jessop, et al". (See introduction, n.84).
135. Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 13.

divisions between Thatcher's ascendant Conservatives and Callaghan's doomed attempts to combine an externally imposed Monetary Policy with the flailing and increasingly nominal commitments to Keynesianism between 1976 and 1979, they fail to address the political contestations of the 1971-1976 period.[136] As Medhurst has explored, far from constituting 'traditional social democratic and corporatist solutions' and 'central planning', the propositions that Tony Benn had brought to the highest level of Government under Wilson's 1974-1976 administration, arose from a desire to depart from precisely these dimensions of the post-war consensus.[137] In the build-up to the 1974 General Election, the Labour Left began to focus upon a series of demands conceived as, 'the first step beyond the corporatist idea of Public ownership planned from the top'.[138] They proposed, through the 1974 Election Manifesto, and Benn's Alternative Economic Strategy, not just the nationalisation of major industries but the leverage of their public ownership, as 'an essential democratic check and a vital resource in the armoury of elected governments to determine economic policy'.[139] As Medhurst has pointed out these policies reveal that from 1974-76, '[l]ong before Margaret Thatcher attacked the perceived failings of nationalised industries, a movement for grassroots industrial democracy had brought these issues to the fore'.[140] If, therefore, Bennism was

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136. For an account of Callaghan's administration see, Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*, or Tony Benn, *Against the Tide, Diaries 1973-76,* (London: Arrow Books, 1989); and Tony Benn, *Conflicts of Interest, Diaries 1977-80,* (London: Arrow Books, 1990).

137. Benn's diaries of the period showed that he had an acute awareness that the post-war institutions that had been used to unfold Clement Attlee's programme were no longer acceptable: 'the institutions chosen for [Attlee's] purpose, which included a substantial expansion of the public sector, lacked an essential democratic element and came to be seen as centralised and bureaucratic and hence increasingly unacceptable to post-War generations'. Benn, *Diaries 1973-76*, xiii. Benn's critique of centralised bureaucracy was accompanied by his commitments to a radical reconstitution of power in industry and wider society, which found most prominent expression in his 1975 Industrial Policy review. Having become increasingly influenced by the Marxist, syndicalist critiques being forwarded by the Institute for Workers Control and finding expression in shop floor militancy throughout the early 1970s, Benn saw a radical overhaul of the top-down centralisation of power in nationalised industries as an essential counterpart to an expanded nationalisation programme. Following defeat in his opposition to membership of the EEC, he was eventually side-lined by Wilson from June 1975 onwards. See Benn, *Diaries 1973-76*; Medhurst, *That Option No Longer* and Ken Coates, *What is the IWC*, (Institute for Workers Control, No. 14, n.d./ c.1979).

138. Tony Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, (London: Cape, 1980), cited in Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*, 40.

139. Medhurst, *That Option No Longer,* 35.

140. Medhurst, 37

defeated as an operational force within the upper echelons of government by Callaghan's

succession in 1976, the preceding years had seen the 'commitment to Morrisonian

nationalisation' which informed the right of the party, significantly challenged.[141] Indeed, as

Medhurst recalled, 'for the first time since the great 'Labour unrest' of 1910-1914' the Labour

Left had brought 'a movement for grass roots workers control within industry' to the

forefront of the national political agenda.[142]

Bennism, however, was a response to—and parliamentary embodiment of—the much broader

demands of a rejuvenated socialist movement, both inside and far beyond the Labour party.

This spanned an increasingly militant trade union movement and an array of increasingly

politicised social and cultural movements. It is within these broader coalitions of diverse

groups and lived experiences that we begin to draw closer to the murals' contexts of

production and reception. As J. Gyford traced, there was a particular hue to the Urban Left

across the period where groups with diverse origins, 'overlapping membership, alliances and

divisions…included the community action campaigns starting in the 1960s, the Community

Development Projects and other local action groups, campaigns against cuts and closures, the

development of the women's movement and campaigns on abortion and equal rights, the

radicalisation of elements of the public sector unions plus union initiatives on alternative

products, the student politics of 1968 and after, black organisations, CND and

environmentalists'.[143] In part, these groups grew up from the 'massive disappointment with

the 64-66 and 66-70 [Labour] governments', and can—as such—be seen as part of the

dissolution of consensus that Stuart Hall and the CCCS charted in their 1978 study Policing

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141. Benn, *Diaries 1973-76,* xiii.
142. Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*, 34
143. J. Gyford, "The New Urban Left: a Local Road to Socialism?," *New Society* 21 April 1983.

the Crisis.[144] But this chapter's case studies reveal the extent to which the Left politics of the period were more than futile symptoms of a withering consensus.[145] From the waves of wildcat strikes across the early years of the decade, through the struggles waged for women's rights, to the new modes of solidarity brought together by the 1976 Grunwick strike, the struggles of the period spanned diverse interests, demands and sites of struggle, united in their attempts to construct a new order in the ruins of the last.[146] Amidst these wider struggles this chapter will focus upon those attempts—particularly prominent in the middle years of the decade—to move decisively towards more localised, responsive and socialist methods of social organisation. It will argue that these projects of localised socialism, were rooted in more than the voluntarist utopianism often implied of them. Rather, it will assert that they emerged from an analysis of 'the bankruptcy of Labour's post-war legacy, and disillusion with the tradition of centralised state socialism both within the Labour Party and beyond it'.[147] It was a localism, therefore, that this study will argue should be viewed not as a parochial conservatism, or limited 'nimbyism', but rather as a means 'to go beyond a legacy of Morrisonian nationalisation, massive alienating public bureaucracies, and the paternalism and inadequacies of the welfare state'.[148]

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144. Medhurst, *That Option No Longer,* 11. Hall, et al. *Policing the Crisis*, (in particular chapters 8 and 9), 215-319.

145. In its sprawling heterogeneity, the Left was undoubtedly de-centred and difficult to pin down. Ultimately, this very heterogeneity may have led to a failure to congeal into a social bloc capable of withstanding the assaults of Thatcherism in the 1980s. It is crucial, for an understanding of what is to follow, however, to emphasise that the Left's complex of interlocking institutional and political initiatives was more than the sum of its failures. Instead, the Left politics of the period was marked by a series of conscious attempts to move beyond the inadequacies of the post-war consensus.

146. It is notable that Hall, increasingly concerned by the rise of the New Right, tended to gloss over the potentials of the already existing grass-roots Left. Whilst Hall's interest in working class culture was formidable, his tendency to dismiss its agency and existing manifestations as 'chauvinistic' or 'economistic' is perhaps typical of a broader deficiency amongst New Left intellectuals to recognise the existence of actual class struggle being waged by the 'organic intellectuals' around them. Whilst Hall's background in the WEA, actually brought him closer to Thompson, Thompson's withering critique of the lofty dismissals of Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn's critiques of the English working class through the 1960s, may be of relevance here. With the isolationism of middle-class Left academics from broader society, often contributing to a sort of detached ambivalence. See for example, E.P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English," *Socialist Register* vol 2, (1965): 311-362.

147. Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge, *Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives*, (London: MacMillan, 1984), 7.

148. Boddy and Fudge, *Local Socialism*, 7.

Left Art

If this Left contestation of the hierarchical centralism of the post-war social democratic

consensus has frequently been obscured by a deterministic leap from post-war social

democracy to neoliberalism, similar tendencies are observable in accounts of cultural

production. There has, as mentioned, been some acknowledgement of a 'Left Shift' amongst

certain artists and cultural producers.[149] More often than not, however, these figures are

viewed either as independent producers, bound up in a culturally isolated 'Left Shift', or

inserted into art historical narratives as adherents of one or another 'post-modernist'

movement or tendency.[150] What has been absent is sufficient exploration of the position of

the visual arts within the messy and contingent social, economic and institutional transitions

of the 1970s.[151] If the schism of postmodernism has, therefore, been broadly accepted, its

character remains all too frequently unexamined, or retrospectively related with the cultural

patterns of the neoliberal period.[152] Missing, is the attempt to understand 'the constitution of

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149. Artists and cultural producers like Conrad Atkinson, Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Margaret Harrison Mary Kelly, Peter Kennard, Jo Spence, Stephen Willats and more besides, all rose to prominence over the course of the 1970s with work that engaged in various ways with the wider field of Left politics across the period. The best account of the 'Left Shift', is that provided by J.A. Walker in his book of the same title. The sheer scale of the undertaking, however, leaves the roots of this cultural explosion in the historical dynamics of the period somewhat to the side. J.A. Walker, *Left Shift, Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: IB Tauris, 2002).

150. Most of these artists fit into one or another wing of 'conceptualism', or the more nebulous but recently returning 'socially engaged art'. At the time labels like 'photo-conceptualism', 'mixed media installation', or 'social functionalism' held some sway. The sheer variety of terms giving some indication of the scale of decentring across the period.

151. In part this absence can be traced within the historical evolution of the discipline of art history. As Andrew Hemingway has pointed out, in an essay tracing the influence of New Left thought in Art History, the 1970s witnessed an international flowering of a politicised Marxist Art History, yet 'the momentum of this project declined in the following decade due to a complex of political, institutional and ideological factors, and the fragile organisational base withered away or was turned to other purposes'. The effects of this transition were that, as the New Art History came to displace the more socially integrated Marxist critiques, 'its contribution was to the development of a comprehensive social history of art that accepted class as an aspect of social ontology, but was not much concerned with class struggle and saw no necessary alignment between its inquiries and Marxism as either a theory or a politics'. The effects of this, combined with the increasing de-Marxification, has left the political art and the art historical accounts of the more politicised artists of the 1970s wildly deficient. Andrew Hemingway, "New Left Art History's International," in *Marxism and the History of Art. From William Morris to the New Left,* ed. Andrew Hemingway (London: Pluto, 2006), 187 and 190.

152. As for example in Frederic Jameson, *PostModernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1991).

'art' through ideology and institutions, and the ways that this is determined by different types of social and political power structures', across the period.[153]

Beyond a wider disciplinary reluctance, one of the reasons for this absence in accounts of the late 1960s and 1970s is the sheer difficulty of assessing the agency of ideology and institutions amidst the radical contestations of the period.[154] Whilst the hegemony of both social democracy and neoliberalism succeeded (by definition) in attaining an ideological dominance and institutional form, the subaltern currents of artists on the Left in the 1970s, in failing to achieve social and political hegemony, were forced into a much more complex and ad hoc set of relationships within the fractious cross-currents of the period. Across the boundaries of the state, the art market and civil society, artists on the Left (and beyond) struck up a range of more or less consciously defined relations and alliances.[155] Whilst a full account of these lies beyond the purview of this chapter, some understanding of their bearing upon the relations of production and distribution and the form and content of the 'Left shift' across the period seems essential to an understanding of the emergence of a Leftist mural practice in the years between 1975 and 1978.

153. Andrew Hemingway, "Introduction: Marxism and art history after the fall of Communism," in Andrew Hemmingway and William Vaughan, *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

154. One of the most detailed accounts of this sort is that of Neil Mulholland, who has attempted to 'demonstrate the ways in which the ideological change from Keynesian culturalism to monetarist populism generated and financed the new art of the era: from proto-punk performance to postmodernist object sculpture'. Directed as it is, however towards the later period, and focussing more on the nature of art criticism than the functioning of arts institutions, its pitch is of less use when it comes to the interregnum period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, where—this study contends—the category of Keynesian culturalism is insufficient. Mulholland, *Only One Monopolies Commission*, 10.

155. As often as not these relationships were made in accommodation with the institutions and ideologies inherited from the post war period, even if they tended to be justified or explained by relation to the operative forces of the contemporary one. See for example Conrad Atkinson's accommodations with, and reliance on, the Arts Council, made in spite of his campaigning against their elitism under the banner of the Artists' Union (see below).

The muralists covered in this chapter (and those covered in the wider study) were all born just before, during, or in the aftermath of the Second World War.[156] Their social and educational horizons were, as such, deeply intertwined with the major transformations of the post-war period.[157] Their artistic education, for example, was underpinned by the ramifications of the 1944 Butler Education Act, by the enormous surge in state spending on the arts and by the continued expansion of Higher Education across the 1960s.[158] These institutional expansions of the post-war social democratic state, transformed art's prominence and position within wider society, and the relations of artistic production and distribution. They provided, in the Arts Council of Great Britain and the British Council, and (increasingly across the 1970s) the Regional Arts Associations and local Borough councils, new sources of funding, new (global) distribution networks, new gallery spaces and financial grants for studio facilities.[159]

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156. Of those covered in this chapter Stephen Lobb is significantly the eldest, having been born in 1936. Barnes and Kenna were both born in 1944.

157. With the expansion of the welfare state, and its combination of paternalistic centralism and socialist idealism; with the spread of the automobile, the expansion of social housing, and the related shifting patterns of urbanisation; with a model of capitalist growth tied to expansions of the commodity market, tempered its excesses by the oversight of the Keynesian state; with a foreign policy orientated towards the Pax Americana; and, perhaps most importantly, with the overhaul of primary, secondary and tertiary education.

158. Beyond the influence of the broader expansion in higher education across the 1960s the shift from the more traditional Diploma in Design to the more integrated, liberal, (but also decentralised) arts education instituted by the introduction of the Diploma in Art and Design from 1963 onwards is of some significance. As Charles Harrison and Fred Orton have observed 'The Dip AD was an integral part of and response to the ideology of Modernism…[an] attempt to shift the balance of education from development of semi-academic forms of craft skill… towards a fixation with art as High Art, and as Higher Education within a concept of higher education as liberal education. The identification of liberalism with professionalism was a necessary function of higher education in England in the later 1950s and '60s.' Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, *A Provisional History of Art and Language* (Paris: Editions E. Fabre, 1982), 8.

The introduction of Art History to the educational syllabus, though often resisted by students, offered new opportunities for arts graduates to teach, and may have contributed (amongst the factors discussed below) to the increasingly theoretical bent of much art of the 1970s. Intriguingly, and somewhat against the modernist homogeneity that Harrison and Orton describe, the decentralised nature of the courses' administration, may also have had some impact upon the fragmentation of the 'modernist' consensus as graduates emerged into wider society in the late 1960s, and began to move towards more decentralised narratives of cultural production.

159. It is notable that the move towards enhanced 'localism' in the 1970s emerged from a longer-term tension between 'local' and the 'national' culture and was actively encouraged by the Arts Council and central government. As Pearson has said it: 'Throughout its history, therefore, the Arts Council of Great Britain has worked with a built-in tension between various meanings of a 'national' role and other ideas concerning 'regionalism' and 'localism'. These tensions, while at one level centring on administrative questions (which is the most appropriate level at which to administer State patronage of the arts?) have been closely bound up with the politico-cultural vocabulary of British society. Within this vocabulary a fine art tradition is understood as an inherited collection of practices and meanings to be nurtured apart from the mainstream of British social and political life; 'tradition' is linked to notions of 'national' and 'professional', these concepts being set against ideas of 'regional', 'parochial' and 'amateur'; and the idea of the fine art tradition is linked to ideas of 'freedom'

Complemented by the surge in the national and international art market, and the explosion of a range of professions which drew upon artistic skills, in advertising, theatre, television and beyond, the expansions of the state underpinned a new social contract for the artist in society, unfolding a range of teaching jobs and ancillary positions which meant that, more than ever before, it was possible for artists from lower-middle and working class backgrounds to not only study art, but sustain an artistic practice after graduation. If, as Charles Harrison and Fred Orton have noted, the effects of this transformation were visible in arts schools by the late 1950s, by the late 1960s they were substantially more pronounced.[160]

In art historical studies of the post-war era, these shifts and expansions have been most frequently approached through a liberal celebration of the embourgeoisement of the period, which has tended to shield the canonisation of modernism by the institutions of state from deeper sociological scrutiny.[161] From the perspective of the conjuncture that followed,

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and 'initiative', these being set in opposition to ideas of 'planning', 'policy' and 'organization'.' Nicholas Pearson, *The State*, 64-65.

160. 'R.A. Butler's 1944 Education Act had greatly increased the opportunities of secondary education worthy of the name and had thus opened many more routes into higher education, which itself was substantially deprivileged by the provision of increased state subsidy for student maintenance allowances. By the later 1950s the longer-term consequences of this Act could be seen in the more diverse class character of entrants to higher education, including colleges and departments of art'. Harrison and Orton, *Art and Language*, 8. Whilst ostensibly devoted to the conceptualist group, the book's history of arts education across the post-war era offers a compelling account of the intersection of class dynamics in the evolution of the institutions.

161. Brandon Taylor has suggested that, '[i]n social terms the arrival of modern art took the form of a cultural revolution of the middle classes against themselves. The formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946 under the patrician hand of Lord Keynes announced the final demise of the idea of 'improvement' at the level of the disenfranchised or the working poor and the promotion of very different ideals and values throughout an even more inclusive middling social order'. Brandon Taylor, *Art For the Nation, Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747-2001*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), xiv-xv. This concept of 'a middling social order' has been taken up by most scholars of the post-war period, combining with wider models of the 'embourgeoisement' of the period. For Margaret Garlake, for example, the impact of class is consistently taken to evaporate to nothing throughout the period, as 'the hierarchy of class structures merged in the hybrids of the youth and drug cultures of the 1960s'. Margaret Garlake, *New Art/New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 137. What such historical models neglect, however, is the perpetuation of class forces across the period and the fact that, for all the conceptions of a 'middling social order', culture in the post-war period remained, as it always has, profoundly impacted by class relations in which 'dominant classes and groups tend to elevate *their* culture to the status of *the* culture – arguing, of course, for the objectivity of their understandings', Pearson, *The State*, 98. In such a light, the acceptance of the mythology of the 'common man' and model of embourgeoisement has tended to mask the influence of class dynamics and forces on the patronage of the period.

however, such readings lose their fixity.[162] For, as the post-war model of economic growth

began to falter in the late 1960s, and the post-war consensus no longer offered a secure

economic model for the increasing volumes of arts students, or broader society, the myths of

post-war embourgeoisement rapidly began to disintegrate. This disintegration and the social

and economic forces of the period impacted on the arts in numerous ways. The collapse of

the global economy led to a subsidence of the 1960s art market boom, and greatly reduced

the already slim opportunities provided to artists by the existence of the private art market.[163]

By the early 1970s this was further compounded by the first wave of cuts levelled at the

University sector. Whilst the Arts Council managed, broadly, to maintain its funding levels,

(at least until 1974), it did so at the expense of ever increasing scrutiny, which by the mid-to-

late-1970s was reaching a peak in the polemics of a hostile national press, for whom, as Neil

Mulholland has so effectively demonstrated, art became a convenient symbol of the broader

excesses of the wasteful state.[164] One of the most immediate effects of the collapse of the art

market and the increasing reliance upon the state institutions, amidst the increasing foment

and sharpened class consciousness and struggle in wider society, was the challenging of the

ideologies and structures which governed the institutions of the post-war period. Such

challenges took diverse form, from the occupation of arts colleges at Guilford and Hornsey in

the late 1960s,[165] through to the picketing of the Arts Council across a similar period, and the

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162. They were actively challenged by the thinkers of the New Left from the late 1950s forwards. See, for example, E.P. Thompson, "The Long Revolution," *New Left Review* Issue 9, (May-June 1961).

163. As Malcolm Miles has observed 'The number of artists emerging from education rose significantly through the 1960s, yet the opportunities for a career as a professional artist were minimal.' Malcolm Miles, *Art for Public Places: Critical Essays* (Winchester, Hampshire: Winchester School of Art Press, 1989), 61.

164. The arguments of art as an example of state waste were put forward with a particular virulence by the think tanks of the New Right across the late 1970s with Keith Joseph, in 1977, calling for the abolition of the Arts Council. Whilst this demand was ultimately forsaken, the 1980s saw a substantial reorientation of the institution to a neoliberal agenda. The narrative of state 'waste' had a significant impact upon the reception of murals across the late 1970s and '80s, and was expressed with particular regularity by Conservative local councillors. See Mulholland, "One Monopolies Commission". For accounts of funding levels see Pearson, *The State*.

165. Tom Nairn's statement that at Hornsey '[a] few North London crackpots achieved more than the working class of this overwhelmingly proletarian country', whilst conveniently dramatic, probably does more to confirm E.P. Thompson's above cited critiques of the limit of Nairn's position (see chap. 1, n. 146), than it illuminates about the social importance of the Hornsey occupation. As an example of cultural rebellion of the period, however, the occupations of the art schools remain an important touchstone, expanding to broader critiques

wide-ranging ideological (and practical) critiques levelled against the prevailing 'modernist'

ideologies which had become so central to the patronage of the institutions of the post-war

state.[166] As cuts to public expenditure kicked in, these pressures increased and were

accompanied by a wide range of increasingly politicised coalitions of artists, discussions,

exhibitions and events.[167] From the formation of the Artists' Union through to conferences

and discussions at the ICA, a social, organisational and discursive network emerged which

brought together a wide range of artists on the Left, including many of the muralists of this

chapter and study.

The politicisation, organisation and communication of artists on the Left, combined with the

relative isolation from the art market afforded by a relatively low cost of living, the

availability of unemployment benefits, teaching posts, an array of not-for-profit exhibition

spaces, and the increasingly responsive patronage of the Arts Council to practitioners not

already enshrined within the art market, offered enhanced opportunities for artists on the Left.

Insulating them somewhat from the 'umbilical cord of gold', which had previously tied their

work to the domestic tastes of the art purchasing bourgeoisie, these factors had a very direct

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regarding pedagogy, authority and the limits of culture. For an account of Hornsey see Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968, The Art School Revolution*, (London: Francis Lincoln Limited Publishers, 2008); Nairn citation, 13.
166. The Arts Council annual reports across this period consistently register the increasing amount of scrutiny applied from both young artists and more conservative sections of society. As Lord Goodman noted in his 1970 Introduction, 'We have of recent years been particularly concerned about our duty to the young... [we] last year reported on the establishment of the most fettlesome of all our committees – then called the 'New Activities' Committee… Since then the adventures of the Committee and its ups and downs have enlivened the Council and the National Press. For sometime, I was regarded as the Chairman of an institution of doubtful mental balance. Why, I was asked, have you subsidised a collection of weirdly attired, hirsute bohemians, whose principle joy in life is to revile you and the Council? Why are you paying the fines of delinquent demonstrators? Why are you stirring up anarchy in St Ives and communism in Cullompton? Why does a seemingly sane Committee, chaired by a gentleman of intellectual and social distinction, fail to impose discipline or control on the wilder elements of juvenile London?... Meetings were invaded by demonstrators; long and protracted arguments about protocol, propounded by citizens of terrifying solemnity, and clamourings for justice, meaning thereby a large share of our depleted funds.' Lord Goodman, "Introduction," in *Arts Council Annual Report 1970*, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1970), 70. Beyond the verbosity of Goodman's prose, his noting of the criticism from 'both sides' is typical of the consensual models by which institutions like the Arts Council tend to define their political neutrality. See, for example, Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England Art and Politics since 1940*, (London: Methuen, 1997).
167. These are well documented by Walker, *Left Shift*, and reflected a steadily increasing preoccupation amongst a broad range of institutions with critical left wing thought and the relations between art and society.

effect upon the nature of the art being produced.[168] Conceptual artists like Art & Language, or indeed the 'University Art' of artists like Victor Burgin, whom they so detested, both utilised the relative financial insulation from markets, to make highly theoretical work, often responsive to the increasing vogues of academic Marxism.[169] In contrast might be set those attempts to broaden art's relation to audiences beyond the conventional art world: from the return of agitprop techniques which sought to bring modernist techniques of rupture back into contact with the world,[170] a whole range of performance practices, as well as a resurgence of printmaking, fly-posting, and radical theatre.[171] Stephen Willats, Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson meanwhile, made use of sociological methodologies and diverse display methods to bring their work into contact with working class audiences in sites and institutions not usually associated with the arts: ranging from local libraries through to hospitals and community centres.[172] Conrad Atkinson, Mary Kelly and Margaret Harrison, meanwhile sought an inverted solution, bringing excluded histories into conventional centres of display, and before the attention of the gallery going public.[173] All this activity was, of course, accompanied by the expanding field of the community arts. The political tenor of this wide-ranging 'Left shift'

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168. The term 'umbilical cord of gold' was used by Clement Greenberg in 1939 to describe the enduring relation between the ruling class and the avant-garde. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism Volume 1,* John O'Brian, ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 11.
169. Whilst affirming a commitment to political radicalism, much of this Conceptualism maintained something of the hermeticism of the institutionalised modernism, it often ruthlessly critiqued: addressing itself not to the market, but to an expanded, technically specialist, audience of Arts (or at the least University) graduates.
170. For example, through the somewhat opaquely political events such as Gustav Metzger's autodestructive works of the early 1960s.
171. This ranged from Peter Kennard's photo-montages for the growing anti-war movement, through the graffiti, posters and dérives of the King Mob collective to the more imbedded engagements of pioneering community printmakers like John Phillips of Paddington Print Shop whose posters for squatting organisations and local community groups were fly-posted across the streets of West London and beyond.
172. It seems notable that these artists have been rescued from the anonymity of their decentralised exhibitions only by their savvy theoretical texts and engagements with The Arts Council and other centralised art world institutions.
173. Building upon the use of multi-media display common in the institutional critique of artists like Hans Haacke, Atkinson tended to focus upon the realities of working class communities and organised labour. Margaret Harrison and Mary Kelly, meanwhile used an even broader range of display methods to bring attention to the sphere of female experience, with Post Partem Document and Women's Work projects placing women's experience at the centre of the new exhibition spaces of the art world and proving two of the more controversial moments of the decade.

varied considerably, from an aquarian liberalism to more radical positions. Common strands, however, included the challenging of the conventional sites of artistic display and modes of production, a scepticism for preceding notions of professionalism and aesthetic 'quality', and an exploration of diverse subject matter. If the murals have thus far been almost exclusively viewed in their relation to the community arts and practices of production it is within the broader social, cultural, ideological and institutional shifts and structures, that I would argue they must instead be sited.

Greenwich Mural Workshop

Greenwich Mural Workshop's origins sit firmly—if once again not typically—within this complex of social and institutional forces. The Workshop's founders, Carol Kenna (born 1944) and Stephen Lobb (born 1936), had met in the mid 1960s, whilst Kenna studied and Lobb taught at Ravensbourne College of Art, Bromley. Having both attended grammar schools on the peripheries of London in the post-war period, they had both enrolled in nearby Art Schools which had been substantially reformed and enlarged in the years following the 1944 Education Act.[174] Following their respective graduations, both turned to teaching in the hope of maintaining independent artistic practices.[175] By 1970 Lobb's independent practice was taking off—his work included in *Art Spectrum London* in 1971, and the *Serpentine*

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174. Kenna studied at Ravensbourne, from 1963-1967, Lobb at Guilford, from 1954-1958. Lobb then went on to study a postgraduate diploma at Royal Academy Schools from 1958-61, where his most famous peer was John Hoyland (1934-2011). As will be seen Kenna and Lobb's gradual migration inwards from London's outskirts, is in some ways reflective of the broader demographics of the period, with the 'back to the city movement', arising as a rebellion against the suburbanisation and urban flight of the immediate post-war generation.

175. Kenna had taught for a time in a Comprehensive in North London. Lobb continued teaching, both Art and Art History at various London art colleges until 1977. This gendered division between work in Secondary and Tertiary education is typical of the period. So too might be seen the decision made in 1968, following the birth of their second child, to let Lobb's career take precedence. Kenna does observe, however, the extent to which they shared in the construction of Lobb's work, and was, both recall, the more forthcoming in social and organisational contexts. (Kenna and Lobb, interviews with the author, August 2015).

Summer Exhibition the following year.[176] Lobb's work in these shows consisted of interactive

installations made from wooden frames and hanging fabrics, revealing an interest in

architectural and environmental space,[177] as well as a broader involvement in what was to

become known as 'Installation art'.[178]

It is tempting, in light of Lobb's evolution towards more 'socially engaged' forms of art over

the decade, to see these early installation pieces as prefiguring later political concerns.[179] It

was, however, Kenna's influence which was more decisive in this regard. Having become

centrally involved in the foundation of the Artists' Union (of which she was the Secretary

from 1971), in 1973 Kenna enrolled on a City Planning course at the Polytechnic of Central

London.[180] There she met a politicised group of fellow students, engaged with contemporary

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176. The former was an exhibition funded by the Greater London Arts Association (GLAA) and the Arts
Council of Great Britain. Its sprawling heterogeneity led to a mixed reception amongst commentators and
critics. See Walker, *Left Shift*, 49-50. The second show, in the Arts Council's recently opened (1970) exhibition
space was, as Kenna pointed out, a career benchmark for artists at the time (Interview with the author, August
2015).
177. It seems notable that Lobb was teaching Art History to Architecture students over these years.
178. As Claire Bishop describes Installation Art's 'increasingly canonical' history is '[w]estern in its bias and
spanning the twentieth century, this history invariably begins with El Lissitsky, Kurt Schwitters and Marcel
Duchamp, goes on to discuss Environments and Happenings of the late 1950s, nods in deference to Minimalist
sculpture of the 1960s, and finally argues for the rise of installation art proper in 1970s and 80s. The story
conventionally ends with its apotheosis as the institutionally approved art form par excellence of the 1990s'.
Claire Bishop, *Installation Art. A Critical History*, (London: Tate, 2005), 8. As with the work of Marc
Chaimowicz and Su Braden, who exhibited alongside Lobb at both Art Spectrum and the Serpentine, Lobb's
work of the early 1970s disturbs such accounts with local variance: the spatially immersive environments
produced by these three artists over these two exhibitions, drawing closer to the contexts of what David Mellor
defined as London's second avant-garde, that 'focused around an 'Underground' tradition of action, dissent,
performance and the deployment of new technical resources'. David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London*
(London: Phaidon, 1993), 8.
179. Su Braden became involved with a long running community video project on South London's Aylesbury
Estate from the mid 1970s. It is of note that Braden and Lobb turned away from the developmental patterns of
installation art that Bishop has recently observed. As such if an artist like Marc Chaimowicz, can indeed be
inserted in a move towards what Bishop observes as 'the type of installation art that posits the activated viewer
of installation art as a political subject', by building upon 'poststructuralist critiques of democracy', Lobb, and
Braden avoided moving into the intellectual fields of post-structuralist theory, instead turning towards broader
audiences. As such the heterogeneous decentred viewer, activated by Lobb's early work was replaced by a
localised and located political viewer, activated, represented and addressed within the mural. Bishop,
Installation Art, 10.
180. As Kenna remembers it the Artists' Union emerged from a meeting held at the Institute of Contemporary
Arts, for exhibitors of the *Art Spectrum* exhibition. During the meeting Conrad Atkinson had stood up and made
the case for a need for collective bargaining by artists, and Kenna stood up behind him and said that if everyone
gave her ten shillings and their address she would organise it (author's interviews with Lobb and Kenna, August
2015). The speed with which it thus formed must, I think, be seen in remarkable contrast to the prolonged, but
unsuccessful, efforts of many artists in the Artists International Association to do the same from the 1930s: see,

movements calling for community architecture, and tenants' and workers' control.[181] The

politics of these movements was to prove influential on the murals that followed, but it was

Kenna's trip to the United States over the summer of 1974, to complete a final dissertation on

graffiti, that was to prove decisive. Whilst in Chicago, Kenna came to meet William (Bill)

Walker, and through him Mark Rogovin, two of the pioneering figures of the 'community

mural movement' in Chicago.[182] Returning to London in Autumn 1974, Kenna concluded that

murals offered a fusion of her interests in politics and urban space, and Lobb's installation

practice.[183] Greenwich Mural Workshop was formed—along the lines of the US mural

workshops—on January 1st, 1975.

Kenna and Lobb had moved to Charlton, in the northern reaches of the London Borough of

Greenwich, in 1967. Their teaching and exhibiting, as well as Kenna's studies and

involvement with the Artists' Union, had taken them all over London. Through their

children's schooling, Kenna's loose involvement with the local Labour Party and the

increasing activities of locally based community theatre groups like *Emergency Arts* and *The*

Combination at the Albany, the couple had been drawn into a series of more localised

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Robert Radford, *Art for a Purpose*, *The Artists' International Association 1933-1953*, (Basingstoke: Winchester School or Art, 1987). It is a testament to the political, and organisational climate of the time, which saw unprecedented trade unionism even from white collar sections of the economy. Through an association with the Union Kenna and Lobb made extensive contacts across the field of Left wing artists. An archive of papers relating to the Artist's Union can be found at the MayDay Rooms.
181. Three, broadly syndicalist, movements which rose to prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s. They were united in their call for increasingly responsive, bottom-up control in areas that had been heavily centralised by the post-war institutions of of the social democratic state.
182. These meetings happened by chance; Kenna, had met Walker while getting off a bus, who in turn introduced her to Rogovin. Both Walker and Rogovin were key members of the Chicago mural movement, which is seen as one of the key pioneers in the community mural movement that came to flourish in the United States of America from the late 1960s into the 1970s. Rogovin, after having served as an assistant to David Alfaro Siqueiros in Mexico established The Public Arts Workshop in an old store front in Downtown Chicago. Kenna and Lobb maintain contact with Mark Rogovin to the present day, and Lobb visited Chicago in 1976. See Alan W. Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art* (New York: Art Alliance press,1984).
183. Kenna has described her interest in politics as surging in the early 1970s as a response to increasing tensions in Ireland and Vietnam. Kenna, interview with the author, August 2015.

networks.[184] On deciding to establish Greenwich Mural Workshop (henceforth GMW), they

made a conscious decision to tie their artistic practice to the borough in which they lived, and

to establish contacts with local groups. In part these decisions reflected the emphasis on

localised community that Kenna had observed amongst Chicago muralists.[185] But they also

related those spheres of the London Left drawn increasingly into community struggles as a

site of political contestation, and the movements for tenant control and community

architecture that Kenna had encountered on her city planning course.[186]

A notable distinction between GMW and their American contemporaries came in what is

likely, at the time, to have seemed a minor difference. For whilst Mark Rogovin has described

his good fortune in coming across that rare and unlikely breed of a 'progressive realtor'—

[187]who gave him use of the storefront from which he ran his Public Art Workshop in

downtown Chicago—Kenna and Lobb's early financial support (and, from 1976 onwards, a

base for their activities) came instead from local government.[188] If retrospectively this

contrast between private philanthropy and state support can be viewed as a profound and

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184. *Emergency Arts* and *The Combination* were two of the pioneering forces in the community theatre movement that emerged in the early 1970s. Their funding was a result of the broader decentralisations in Arts funding that occurred in the 1970s. Kenna was an example of the more radical edges of the Labour party which characterised its London formation across these years. See Boddy and Fudge *Local Socialism*, 8: 'As the promise of 1968 faded, many came to see it as the only viable, albeit unsatisfactory arena for formal radical politics. In many localities therefore, the Labour Party at the local level has become increasingly radicalised, generating significant shifts and divisions within local Labour parties and ruling groups on councils'.
185. Marc Rogovin for example had made efforts to establish a geographic base in the community and area he hoped to serve, and William Walker, had also remained very much within a delimited community. See Barnett *Community Murals*.
186. See Boddy and Fudge, *Local Socialism*.
187. 'A couple blocks away from there was a progressive realtor. I'm sure you never heard of such a configuration! But there was a left realtor who passed away ten years or so ago, Harry Gaynor, and I said, "Harry, you know, Lester Wickstrom, who was this WPA artist and I and his wife Esther Wickstrom, we've been talking about a community mural center and I found a place that would be idyllic'. Mark Rogovin "Interview with Rebecca Zorach," Never the Same Website (2013-14), https://never-the-same.org/interviews/mark-rogovin/
188. As will be seen this soon began to be matched and outstripped by support from the Arts Council of Great Britain, and the Greater London Arts Association, and, from 1981, support from the Greater London Council. The support of the local council, however, was crucial to the developments of many mural practices in the middle years of the decade. From 1976 the Greater London Council gave Greenwich Mural Workshop an unoccupied flat on the Meridian Estate from which to run the Workshop.

enduring difference between the US and the UK mural movements, the £900 grant given to GMW by the local borough council as support toward their first year of activity, must not have seemed so at the time. Rather, it offered the encouragement necessary to begin an organisation along financial lines which Charles Landry has described as the 'barefoot economics' typical of the libertarian groups of the period.[189] As Landry saw it, in the years following 1968, 'a pattern emerged in which lack of capital was made good by the input of self-exploited labour'.[190] In GMW's first year, this self-exploitation was supported in large part by Lobb's continued teaching, and by the high levels of unpaid work that came to take up increasing quantities of the couples' time (and their kitchen table).[191]

But the support of the local Labour council, and— subsequently—other organs of the state, was significant and marked an outgrowth of the wider direction of the London Left of the period. For whilst the late 1960s and early 1970s may indeed have been characterised by a surge in libertarian and revolutionary politics and what David Widgery (from the perspective of an International Socialist) described as a permanent inoculation to the Labour Party, by the mid-1970s, the constellations of a new Labour Left were beginning to emerge within the party—and with particular force the sphere of local government. Maintaining much of the libertarian hostility to the centralised planning of the post-war state, but perhaps slightly less scarred by the betrayals of the Labour Party, across the 1960s, a new generation of Labour

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189. Charles Landry, David Morley, Russell Southwood and Patrick Wright, *What a Way To Run a Railroad, An Analysis of Radical Failure,* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985).
190. Landry et al., *Analysis of Radical Failure*, 14. Landry's text is written from a perspective of weariness with the failings of the radical left, and with a somewhat discomforting amount of bitterness towards its many forms. It is, nonetheless, useful in its descriptions of the climate. He also describes the quotidian routine in which it 'became obligatory to wake up active and move through day of committed childcare, politicised teaching in a polytechnic or college of further education, a union meeting at lunchtime, a support group and campaign meeting in the afternoon, an early evening meeting at a radical project, and the final exhausted collapse into a collective house meeting to round it all off', Landry, 6.
191. The opportunities for such activities were also greatly aided by the relatively low living costs of London at the time, where several days of teaching work could sustain a young family. It is notable that unlike a pattern of burnout and decline Landry describes, Kenna and Lobb have managed to maintain a Workshop for over forty years.

members were more hopeful as to its direction under the new Wilson administration. This 'new urban left' stretched across borders of the state, Party and civil society.[192] In the words of John Gyford, by 1983, it 'embraced socialist councillors, party and community activists and radicalised elements of local government professions particularly social work, planning and, to a lesser extent, housing, as well as the growing number of 'political' appointments to strategy groups within the town halls'.[193] It was in such a light that GMW appealed to the council, at a moment, in the wake of 1974's local government act, where local government was distributing what was to go down as a peak proportion of GDP.[194]

The character of these new accommodations between the Left and Labour Party are significant, and remain distinct to unreformed models of social democracy, or to the neoliberal state intervention that was to follow. Rather than acting as agents of the state providing a service to the community (as in the post-war model), or aiding social cohesion (as in the 1990s New Labour one), Kenna and Lobb—like many community workers across

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192. As John Medhurst has described Wilson's 1974 Government, having been swept to power by the Industrial Action that brought Heath's Conservative government to its knees was a much more radical proposition than that of the his government of the late 1960s. The scaremongering in the media, and the reactions from Right wing pressure groups, and the institutions of the deep state at the time, are a mark of such radicalism (Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*). As James Curran has observed, from 1976 onwards a reaction to the rightwards drift of Callaghan's administration was a grassroots entry of more leftist elements to the local London Labour party: 'From the late 1960s inwards a growing number if professional and other middle class groups moved into poverty-stricken inner city areas, attracted by their central location and the availability of relatively cheap good housing.. in some cases joined inactive branches of local Lab parties with small members and rapidly acquired positions of influence. Some of these confident, new recruits (often with a background in single issue politics) set out to make councils more effective agencies of change by extending their role in the local community. In places like Lambeth, Camden and Lewisham, they found like-minded allies among existing party members; in other boroughs like Islington, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Southwark, they fought bitter internal battles; and in still others they had little or no internal influence'. James Curran, "A New Political Direction," in James Curran, Ivor Gaber and Julian Petley, *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 7-8.
193. John Gyford, "New Urban Left".
194. As John Benington has pointed out, 'During 1960s whilst GNP increased by 80% and total public expenditure increased by 120% local government expenditure shot up by 170%'. Preceding the big cuts to all government spending in the wake of 1976, therefore the early to mid-1970s marked a peak of local governmental power. John Benington, *Local Government Becomes Big Business*, 2nd ed. (London: CDP information and Intelligence), 5.

the period—sought to work with active community groups, and to give form to *their* lives,

ideas politics and concerns. Their aims were stated, in their first annual report, as follows:

1. To assist people to brighten and revitalise their area, to give it an identity which they had themselves created and in which they could take pride
2. To help people discover one another through the making of pictures and thus to encourage community awareness and action
3. To encourage the development of skills of expression. To help people recover experience denied them by professional restriction of information since the renaissance.
4. To work with tenants and residents groups in the Borough of Greenwich particularly in areas of deprivation.

There is undoubtedly a liberal framing to much of the language, with the promises of

environmental improvement, educative skills development and attention to 'areas of

deprivation' (the latter of which were to become mantles of Tony Blair's cultural policy in the

1990s).[195] These are, however, counterbalanced by the commitment to collaborative work, to

fostering awareness and action and to breaking down of the restrictions of professionalised

skills and information.[196] Perhaps even more crucially these aims were put into a directly

political framework by Kenna and Lobb's (unwritten) decision to write to the Associations of

Council Tenants that had formed in the area.[197] This choice was telling, revealing GMW's

concern not to an abstracted liberal concern for 'deprived communities', or 'people' as a

195. Bishop cites a 'profound ambivalence about the instrumentalisation of participatory art as it has developed in European cultural policy in tandem with the dismantling of the welfare state' as one of the motivations for the book *Artificial Hells*. She notes that '[t]he UK context under New Labour (1997-2010) in particular embraced this type of art as a form of soft social engineering'. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 5. Intriguingly, François Matarosso, (whose 1997 book *Use and Ornament,* with its focus upon the impact of participation in the arts is often seen as influential on New Labour's cultural policy), trained as a Community Artist with Greenwich Mural Workshop. François Matarosso, *Use and Ornament: The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (London: Comedia, 1997).

196. The focus on skills and information within the Community Arts movement more broadly is explored effectively by Kate Crehan in her study of Free Form Arts. For Crehan, '[t]he reality is that, as societies become ever more skilled at transforming nature, their collective skill is embodied in an ever-increasing division of labour that inevitably robs individuals within those societies of their everyday basket of knowledge about their environment and the associated practical skills'. Fairly similar views regarding the alienation of artistic labour under capitalism were prevalent across the statements of the community arts movement. Crehan, *Community Art*, xv.

197. These were, as Kenna recalls, the only solicitations the organisation was to send out for work over their first decade of practice and were directly responsible for their next three murals. Kenna, interview with the author, August, 2015.

generalised category, as much as to working with the representative bodies of

(predominantly) working class tenants, at a moment in which—as will be seen—they were

experiencing a peak of collective activity and organising.[198]

The People's River, 1975

The first Tenants' Association to respond to Kenna and Lobb's letters was that of the

Meridian Estate, in central Greenwich, and it was in collaboration with them that the

workshop began work on their first mural, *The People's River,* which was opened in

November 1975. The mural was located on the gable end of a Victorian terrace of shops and

flats, just round-the-corner from the Estate. It was designed by Kenna and Lobb in close

consultation with the tenants over the Spring of 1975. Overlooking a disused area of land

owned by the Greater London Council, the site was selected for its visibility from the busy

thoroughfare of Creek Road and its proximity to the estate.[199] Whilst the building on which

the mural sat has long since been destroyed (replaced by a 'Subway' sandwich shop and the

entrance to a post-modern shopping mall), it stood upon the borders of what is today a

UNESCO World Heritage site, some hundred meters or less from Greenwich's l9[th] century

market, and less than a kilometre from 'the ensemble of the 17th century

buildings…[including] the Queen's House by Inigo Jones…the palatial Baroque complex of

the Royal Hospital for Seamen, and the Royal Observatory', that UNESCO felt merited

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198. Owen Kelly has made the point that many of the first generation of community artists understood that a more liberal framing of their objectives was a necessity of gaining funding for their more radical political practice. He has argued that over the long term this led to a watering down of the political tendencies of the community arts movement, who, 'addicted' to the grants of an ultimately hostile state, failed to adequately theorise their own position, and were soon joined by a younger generation who took the liberal statements of intent at face value. There is I think much of value in his critique. Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*.
199. The land had been used as a Truck Depot, until the closures of the local docks (see below) and limitations on lorries passing through central London, led to its decline. Lobb, interview with the author, August 2015.

protection as monuments to 'English artistic and scientific endeavour in the 17th and 18th centuries'.[200]

In contrast to the mock-Georgian proportions of the retail area which stands on the site today, and in still greater contrast to the celestial grandeur of James Thornhill's 18th Century mural cycle, some 600 or so metres away, in the mid-1970s the mural sat between a town centre that was 'still shabby', 'dilapidated' and yet to be recolonised by the middle classes, and one of the more run down sections of the borough, which hugged the edge of the Creek River, stretching off towards Deptford.[201] It was, despite some of the (slowly) oncoming signs of 'gentrification' in the centre of town,[202] a predominantly working class area whose historic employment had been decimated by the decline of the docks and light industry over the preceding decade.[203] Precipitated by the opening of new Docks at Tilbury, and the implementation of containerisation, the docks began an acute decline from a peak in 1966. Between 1966 and 1976, Greenwich, along with four other East London boroughs with a riverfront (Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Lewisham and Bow) lost 150,000 jobs (20 per cent of

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200. Besides Jones' Queens House (notable as the first Palladian building in Britain), other architects to work on the complex included Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor and André le Nôtre. Quotes from the UNESCO heritage listing summary http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/795/

201. James Thornhill's *Painted Hall*, in the Royal Naval College is 5,683 square feet and took nineteen years to paint (1708-1727). Descriptions of Greenwich from Beryl Platts, *A History of Greenwich* 2nd ed., (London: Procter Press, 1986), 273.

202. Gentrification was a term first used by the sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964, to describe the processes of displacement by which London's working class communities were being moved out by middle class owner occupiers. In Greenwich this gentrification is perhaps most visible in the fact that Greenwich was - over the course of the 1970s - awarded the first three architectural protection orders, as well as by the steadily growing antiques trade. The former reveals a particularly middle class form of localised activism that emerged and surged in the 1970s, as the destruction of architectural 'heritage' assets by the continuation of the post-war ideology of comprehensive redevelopment, came into increasing aspects of the city's past, see for example Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Vintage Books, 2008), 67-74. White's view of gentrification as essentially a 'good thing' for the city, however, can be placed in contrast to the work of social geographers like Neil Smith or Doreen Massey. Massey's book *London: World City*, (2008) though examining later developments, is much clearer in its approach than White. White's essentially liberal account of London's development looks particularly weakened in the wake of the 2008 financial crash and the increased strain of the neoliberal model and globalised city Massey charts so effectively. See also Neil Smith, *The New Frontier, Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996).

203. Whilst 1966 saw a peak in the cargo passing through the London docks, the opening new docks at Tilbury and the implementation of containerisation led to swift decline in economy of East London, far above that experienced by the crisis ridden country at large. See White, *London*, 204-5.

the total employment). The Meridian Estate was, therefore, situated in the midst of a geography of fierce economic decline: nestled amidst the industry which ran along the south bank of the Thames and up the Creek river, and with the docks to the north accessible by the London County Council's 1902 Thames footpath.[204] The situation was offered little hope by the slow emergence of antiques market and protection zones, multiplying between it and the Baroque grandeur of the soon to be UNESCO listed heritage site.

The lower half of the wall addressed itself to precisely the dichotomies of this geography [see figure 101]. The image rising up the irregularly shaped gable end: the enormous deep blue river Thames, stretching the width of the base, tapering swiftly to reveal two river banks stretching to a height approximately half way up the wall. On the left bank, filling out into the wall's projecting extension lie the landmarks of historic Greenwich: the Naval College, the Queen's House, the Royal Observatory and St Alfege Church. Opposite, the right bank's foreground shows the area's more recent—yet fast declining—industrial heritage brought back to life, with three brightly toned cranes, overhanging the river, one of which is shown lifting a pallet from one of the barges lining the bank at the mural's base.[205] Having absorbed the ideas of the Chicago muralists, who had been at the forefront of pioneering a collaborative mural practice which gave form to the concerns of communities of down-town Chicago *and* involved them in the painting of the murals, Kenna and Lobb had, from the outset, set out to design a mural which would be expressive of the thoughts and concerns of the Tenants' Association. As Kenna recalls, 'our politics was added to by the politics of the people we were working with. The mural was *The People's River*, because they were just

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204. Within walking distance of the Meridian Estate, The East India Dock closed in 1967, the London and St Katherine's Docks in 1978, Surrey Dock in 1970, West India and Millwall Docks a decade later, and slightly further afield, Royal Docks closed in 1982. Significantly, it has been estimated that for every job lost in the docks three more were lost in related industries. See Jonathan Schneer, *The Thames – England's River* (London: Abacus, 2005), 267.
205. A motif later taken up in Greenwich Mural Workshop's 1988 *Surrey Quays Murals*.

beginning to make changes to Greenwich town centre. Because we were working with the Tenants' Association of the Meridian Estate, and they were concerned that any improvements to the town centre wouldn't include ordinary working class people…and that the river should be maintained as a working river'.[206] It was in light of these concerns and through several stages of consultation and designs that the final designs for the mural emerged, with its celebrations of the architectural heritage of the area and its pictorial defence of the working docks. At a time in which the industrial infrastructure was beginning to fall into disuse, and the future of industrial labour more generally, was at the forefront of debate across the mainstream press, the caring homage to this industrial heritage, set on equal compositional footing to the increasingly valued 'heritage' assets of Baroque Greenwich, would no doubt have carried a strong affirmative resonance.[207]

The upper section of the wall departs somewhat from the pictorial space established in the foreground, but brings into view precisely those whose views the mural represents: the chimney breasts and gable given over to a somewhat dizzying view of banked buildings and roofs of the four storey 1930s blocks of the Meridian Estate, rendered in axonometric projection. The buildings, enclose the scene and complete a cycle of localised iconography. As with the other murals of this chapter, it is significant that the mural was positioned in the midst of the geography it represented: its iconography drawn from an area of little more than a kilometre's diameter. If the knowing viewer may, as such, have questioned the geographical reversal of the scene (with the represented left bank of the river, in fact sitting in front and slightly to the right of the mural, and the rear-grounded Meridian Estate in fact constituting the most proximate of the represented markers), they would more likely be struck by the

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206. Kenna, interview with the author, August 2015.
207. It is of note that Tony Benn's industrial policy was under fairly constant attack from the media across 1975. See Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*.

immediacy of the content. The real river stood some 200 metres or so to the left of (and for a viewer passing from the road, parallel with) the represented river. Added to the spheres of industry and architectural heritage, this representation of the area's council housing as the third sphere of localised landmarks, will be seen to underpin the murals' advocacy and will for the area's flourishing through the embrace, rather than conflict, of its constituent elements.[208]

Regardless of the viewer's familiarity with the immediate topography of the area (and given Creek Road's existence as something of a thoroughfare, for some this may well have been relatively limited) the sweeping perspectival draw of the river, carried forth from its banks by the efforts of five monumentally proportioned figures is likely to have been both the most immediate and enduring visual focus to the scene. With its curving embankment leading in from Creek road (running perpendicular to the mural's right-hand edge), the composition would have drawn passers-by in to the centralised, almost tree-like, axis of the river. Following the river over the ebbs and flows of its perspectival recession, and past the precariously balanced tugs, kayaks and sailing ships, the bulbous banks give way to the thrust of the river, upwards out of the enclosure of the banks and into the grasp of the monumental quintuplet of figures, ranged in a fan-like formation across the upper half of the wall. The figures' exertions meanwhile thrust the compositional focus back outwards, to the top right of the composition. While echoing the vaguely pyramidal, but overbearingly irregular, shape of the supporting wall, this central axis of strong toned colours would have provided the

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208. This will be discussed in greater detail below. It is notable, however, that Greenwich Mural Workshop were not alone in viewing the decline of industry with dismay. As Platts saw it: 'What words can be used about the present or future of Greenwich in the face of such silencing annihilation? Beyond this local authority vandalism, how clearly do the men who call themselves planners understand the portent in their latest decision: that by denying to London the old commercial use of the Thames, they not only ensure the decay of Trinovantum and its child-city upstream, but make inevitable the transfer of the capital of England to Southend?' Platts, *History of Greenwich*, 221.

underlying unity, energy and dynamism to the composition: offering a loose curve of energy

to lead a viewer in and through the scene. Culminating in the five figures, with their exertions

of communal action, the centralised passage also offers a condensation of the mural's broader

overarching thematic content: the seizure of the river, by the people, through collective

action. Recalling a long and varied tradition of gigantic-scaled figures in a landscape—from

Abraham Bosse's frontispiece for Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, through Goya's *Colossus* and

far beyond—the enlargement of these five figures to the gigantic scale of domination over the

landscape, imbues the wider scene with its monumental sense of historical purpose [see

figures 102-3]. In contrast to much of the tradition, however, the figures stand not as singular

embodiments of a body politic, (as for example in Bosse's *Leviathan*), or as harbingers of

external destiny stalking the landscape (as in Goya's *Colossus*), but rather as a differentiated

group, united by a common purpose of physical exertion: as monuments, therefore, to

collective human agency.[209]

This visual metaphor of collective human agency is of particular importance in the historical

and geographical contexts of 1975 Greenwich. The heavy presence of dockers amongst the

local population meant that Greenwich was a community which had not only lived by the

river, but also stood at the fulcrum of the new modes of rank and file trade unionism, that had

flourished across the late 1960s and early 1970s.[210] In defiance of the imbedded hierarchies

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209. This contrasting sense of agency is perhaps most directly surmised by the fact that whilst Goya's figure casts shadows over the landscape he does not attempt to interact with it, bound as he seems to be in his own higher grief. By contrast the quintuplet of giants in the People's River, pull the river from its banks.
210. As Eaden and Renton have pointed out the heavy presence of this shop floor militancy in the docks at this period was in somewhat complicated relation to the proscription of Communists from the predominant, TGWU: 'The situation facing party activists in the docks, where there was a strong tradition of rank and file activity was complicated by the fact that the majority union in the docks, the TGWU, had in 1948 placed a ban on communists holding union office which was not lifted until 1968.' This 'confined Communist dock-workers to a purely unofficial outlet for their industrial activity', and 'meant that Communist dockers were central to the building of shop steward-based committees at first locally and then in 1969 establishing a national shop stewards network linking together key ports with Liverpool and London.' Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 156.

of the Transport and General Workers' Union's (TGWU) bureaucracy, this rank and file

militancy, had been at the forefront of the wild-cat strikes that became so characteristic of the

industrial disputes of the early 1970s.[211] Shop floor militancy in the docks had mobilised in

firm opposition to the deepening job losses caused by containerisation and to the restrictive

impositions of Edward Heath's Industrial Relations Act. In 1972, these actions had resulted in

the imprisonment of five dockers, dubbed the 'Pentonville Five'. The campaign for their

release became a rallying point which spread across the country, uniting Fleet Street, the

building industry and the docks in solidarity actions which ground ports, print media and

construction sectors to a halt.[212] Notably, it was in precisely the period leading up to the

mural that the demands and energies of this shop floor militancy began to rise to national

prominence, through the influence of the Institute for Workers Control, Tony Benn, and

resolutions passed at the 1973 Labour Party Conference. As Benn observed in 1980, Labour's

1974 Manifesto commitments to a 'fundamental and irreversible shift of the balance of power

and wealth in favour of working people and their families', took their inspiration and strategy

from the shop floor militancy of the period. They found their most high profile governmental

form in the Industry Bill that Tony Benn brought before the Labour Cabinet in March 1975.

Though the bill was massively diluted over the months that followed, its demands for

industrial democracy at the highest levels of government constituted a significant moment.[213]

The image's call for the Greenwich community's direct reclamation of the Thames as a

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211. Eaden and Renton point out that: 'the early 1970s saw British workers displaying a level of industrial militancy not seen since the years following the First World War. The number of days 'lost' through industrial disputes in the years 1970, 1971 and 1972 were 10,908,000, 13,589,000 and 23,923,000 respectively. The strike wave not only encompassed traditional militant sections of the blue collar working class such as miners, railway workers, dockers, steelworkers and engineers, but militant trade unionism found an expression amongst previously poorly organised workers in industries such as chemicals, glass production and textiles'. Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 150.
212. See, for example, Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 155.
213. Writing in 1980, Benn was clear about the influence of shop-floor militancy on his thoughts at that time: 'if those events had not occurred when they did and in what form they did the Labour manifesto of 1974 would not have reflected any aspirations beyond the traditional Morrisonian approach public ownership'. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, cited in Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*, 40.

working river, was thus more than rhetoric. Rather, it was made at a moment in which the demands for industrial democracy, issuing forth from the community were finding their way into the spheres of central government.

The muscular exertion of the five main figures has some affinity with the heroic celebrations of the unity and strength of workers we find in varied 20th century traditions of social and socialist realism: from the celebrations of collective labour we see in Soviet art from the 1920s and into the 1930s, through the dynamic monumentality of figures in David Alfaro Siqueiros' historical epics, to the more dynamic amongst British Trades Union banners.[214] Indeed, Kenna and Lobb conceived of their work, at least in part as a conscious homage to some of these prototypes.[215] If such associations may have been sufficient to preclude further investigation by arts journalists, or (more importantly given the intended audience) to raise the interest of trade unionists, further attention reveals important distinctions.[216] Firstly, for all their physical exertion, the divergent ages, genders and body types of the five figures

214. As Christina Kiaer has observed through the prism of Aleksandr Deineka's work, the sphere of collective labour formed a subject of interest to Soviet artists both before and after Zhdanov's 'famously opaque proclamation of socialist realism as 'the depiction of reality in its revolutionary development'.' Christina Kiaer, "Was Socialist Realism Forced Labour, The Case of Aleksandr Deineka," *Oxford Art Journal,* 28.3 (2005): 321–345. For more on Soviet socialist realism see Brandon Taylor, *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), 183-186. Siqueiros, staked his social realist mural practice out in distinction to socialist realism, but maintained a strong attachment throughout his career to the depiction of human bodies in dramatic motion. (See, for example, Siqueiros, *For the Complete Safety of All Mexicans at Work*, 1952-54). Trade Union banners varied enormously: from pastoral retreats to physical celebrations of labour. They were beginning to come into fashion and focus on the left, with a display of English Trades Union Banners, held at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1973, and a catalogue published to celebrate. Towards the close of the decade GMW became involved in making banners.
215. The very breadth of these sources is itself of interest. Though Kenna and Lobb have described their self-conscious channelling of 'socialist realism', it is unclear exactly what their understanding of this broad category was based upon, all the more so given the relative absence of attention to the tradition in Britain. Interviews with the author, August 2015. The work of Siqueiros and other Mexican Muralists was known to British muralists largely through the high quality black and white images included in a 1969 English language translation of Antonio Rodriguez's, *History of Mexican Murals*. Kenna is likely to have had a further awareness of Siqueiros's work owing to her connections with Mark Rogovin, who worked with Siqueiros on his final mural, in the late 1960s. She has certainly described an enduring influence in Rivera's work, though this influence would not seem as applicable in these figures as elsewhere in GMW's work (see below). In 1971, there had been an exhibition of *Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design* at the Hayward Gallery, which Kenna and Lobb are likely to have seen.
216. It is notable that most art critics, tended to dismiss all murals as examples of 'derivative socialist realism', see Mulholland, "One Monopolies Commission," for an effective summary.

serves to undermine the often overbearing emphasis on (predominantly male, and industrially bound) physical strength, found—with some important exceptions—in much of this work.[217] Here, however, the underwhelming musculature of all but the right-most figure and the presence of the greying elder woman, second from the right, take us into a quite distinct territory. In the place of triumphant industrial muscle of many 20th century socialist depictions of physical labour, or the enveloping atmosphere of revolutionary conflict, simmering across Siqueiros' work, here the strained communal energies of the monumentally scaled group are directed towards divergent ends: towards an inescapably metaphorical harnessing of the River Thames. It is a task for which physical strength, the mural seems to suggest, is no longer at the forefront.

The nature and extension of what I think can be most productively examined as a détournement of diverse socialist tropes of heroic action, are key to the content and politics of the work and functioned on several levels. Firstly, the character of this diverse multi-ethnic, multi-gendered and multi-aged, group should be seen as a challenge to the hegemonic concept of 'white working class' masculinity.[218] This challenge must, in turn, be seen in the contexts of the increasingly racialised antagonisms of the period and place of the mural. For whilst the docks of East London had become a pioneering force in the shop-floor militancy of the early 1970s, they had a much less proud history with regard to anti-racism. In 1968, for example, 1000 dockers had gone on strike as a response to the dismissal of Enoch Powell from the Conservative Cabinet, following his racially incendiary Rivers of Blood speech.[219]

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217. Whilst, there are many celebrations of female strength in early soviet posters, and some interesting images of inter-'racial', or multi-ethnic proletariat harmony, by the mid-1930s with Stalin's increasingly conservative approach to gender and family such prototypes start to wane.

218. Though of course, Soviet art, at various points gave a commitment to internationalism and 'racial' harmony, the contexts of London's trade union banners, were slow to register any such solidarity.

219. Powell had been dismissed from the Conservative shadow cabinet in the wake of his 'Rivers of Blood' speech: a speech which carried a fervent condemnation of immigration with incendiary classical reference and suggested the abandonment of integration was the only response. It is widely felt to have done a great deal to shift the discourse on immigration far to the right. Eaden and Renton have pointed out that the anti-Powell

By the mid-to-late-1970s (as will be examined in chapter 2) the racialised tensions that Powell's speech had so flagrantly brought to the fore were increasing dramatically, amidst the deepening economic crises. This racism was, notably, strongest in precisely areas like Greenwich, where the tradition of strong historic union power had carried with it an increasing commitment to the defence of the 'white working class' against the perceived competition of migrant workforces.[220] In 1976, the National Front—a Far-Right organisation formed only eight years before—received 119,000 votes in the GLC elections, winning the majority of its support in East and South East London.[221] This electoral rise was accompanied by an increasing street presence, ranging from violent racially aggravated assaults and murders, through marches and, in a more quotidian sense, the plethora of racist graffiti which began to reach out over London's walls. These tensions came to a head in nearby Lewisham as anti-racists succeeded in stopping a National Front march in the summer of 1977.[222] In these contexts, the mural's displacement of white masculinity from the central heroic act of the river's reclamation is crucially important. That it does so through the détournement of a socialist metaphor of communal action, whose flavour is likely to have been familiar from trade unions banners, and diverse spheres of propaganda, and lived experience, is something of a masterstroke.

campaign in the docks seems to have been limited, 'to a single docker,' Terry Barrett, a member of the IS who put out a leaflet arguing: 'Who is Enoch Powell? He is a right-wing Tory opportunist who will stop at nothing to help his party and class…' The minority of this position reminds us that the docks, for all their unionism often remained in allegiance to the right of the political spectrum. See Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 166.
220. Eaden and Renton, 166.
221. Eaden and Renton, 166.
222. Local newspapers reveal the rising presence of the National Front across Greenwich in these years. See for example the article on Greenwich Council's attempts to ban a meeting in Woolwich Town Hall at which a National Front speaker was due to attend: Editorial, *South East London and Kentish Mercury*, July 17 1975, 5; or the same paper's reporting of a National Front teacher who quit his job at a local school due to the 'multi-racial anarchy and communist diversion' of fellow staff, Editorial, *South East London and Kentish Mercury*, July 10, 1975. For a very detailed (though notably Socialist Worker) account of the rising conflicts between neo-fascist organisations and the anti-fascist movement see David Widgery, *Beating Time. Riot'n'race'n'rock'n'roll* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986).

The sense of détournement is underlined as we move towards the enveloping rear-ground of the image, where the stream of figures are shown processing with instruments and banners across the void left by the raised river. Again multi-ethnic, though predominantly youthful, often bearded, there is a light-hearted grace, that pushes us further still from the firm muscularity and stoic focus of social and socialist realisms (for example Kuzma Nikolaev's, *Building of the Railway Line in Magnitogorsk*, 1930, [see figure 104]). Indeed, the playful unfolding of care-free leisure given form in the background is a near inverse of the strained world of productive industrial labour. Merging as it does with the banner carrying the mural's title, however, the rearground unites with the foreground in its celebration of communal action. And it is perhaps here that the character of the mural's wider détournement comes into clearer focus. For, though the foreground figures are indeed reclaiming the river through collective action and stand in defence of the working docks to the front right of the image, their casual dress and their diverse ages mark them out as agents not of industrial labour but the whole community: black and white, young and old, muscular and frail, and 'productive' and 'non-productive'. From the care shown in the rendering of the heritage assets, to the children playing on the grass to the left, and the canoes and kayaks on the river, it is the life of the city, and the marriage of the community's diverse resources, rather than the productive capacity of the proletariat that is the object of celebration. It is a diverse utopia of community action.

There is an apparent simplicity to this attempt to divert the traditional site of socialist agency that may not have taken all viewers with it. For in shifting the heroic figures' action away from the tangible world of industrial labour, or even conflict, and instead towards a community led recuperation of the geography and space of the area, the image diverts the site of political action from the factory to the city. If the mural had survived into the gentrified

realities of contemporary Greenwich, the seemingly over-willed simplicity of this community

of interest might well have had a trite ring to it: a complacency with regard to the

antagonisms of class interests which are glossed over in its expression of unity, and

celebration of community.[223] In the contexts of the mid-1970s, however, the celebration of

the local community had more concrete aims and localised integrations. Firstly, as Ken

Coates described in 1973, the period saw a blooming of 'non-Leninist, radical socialist

responses', focussing in particular upon 'community action on a local scale'.[224] As John

Medhurst has noted, this was a moment in which such 'groups grew beyond their middle

class roots, as working class campaigners began to assert their rights and demands in fields

such as health and housing'.[225] The fate of Greenwich, in particular, and indeed the whole of

East London, also hung in the balance, as the Greater London Council (under a Labour

administration from 1973-1977), struggled and prevaricated about the means by which to

compensate for the area's industrial decline, before eventually publishing their Docklands

Strategic Plan in 1976. The Plan was never realised, but its call for 'new homes (mainly

council-owned), open spaces and industrial jobs based on manufacturing', affirms the

relevance and agency of the mural's thematic preoccupations, and the traction of localised

community politics across the period.[226] In light of these contexts, the mural's displacement

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223. Two-bedroom flats on the Meridian Estate now [2019] sell for nearly half a million pounds. As John Boughton has observed, 'Today, riverside locations are the prerogative of the well-heeled. Back in the day, when first acquired by the Council, this was unattractive industrial land – a mix of docks and allied trades and humble terraced homes – and it was deemed good enough for working people'. John Broughton, 'Municipal Greenwich and a bit of the Isle of Dogs, Part 1,' on *Municipal Dreams Blog*, https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2018/02/27/municipal-greenwich-and-a-bit-of-the-isle-of-dogs-part-i/
224. For Coates, the actions taken by 'Tenants' associations, residents' committees, bodies airing and voicing the complaints of whole populations on council estates, in ghettoes or slums, or bodies aimed at particular groups, such as the Claimants' Union which attempts to organize people living on social security, the unemployed, and strikers claiming benefit', were one of two modes of non-Leninist, radical socialist activity which 'bloomed during the years of the Wilson apotheosis', and drew 'upon a very real store of grievances'. Ken Coates, "Socialists and the Labour Party," in *Socialist Register* Vol. 10, (March 18th, 1973): 155-178.
225. Medhurst*, That Option No Longer,* 16.
226. White, *London*, 77. The GLC's 1976 Plan was undone by the shift in central government, from Wilson to Callaghan, by the terms of reduced fiscal expenditure imposed by the IMF, and the shift from a Labour to a Conservative administration in the GLC. White, who seems frequently enamoured by Thatcher's use of extensive public funds to turn the area into a fiefdom of global financial power, concludes that 'in the face of later developments this [1976 plan] was a hidebound and unimaginative approach to the biggest opportunity to

of labour as the sole site of class struggle, moves beyond a voluntarist or speculatively utopian register, to integrate with localised demands which were both widely held and politically articulated.

Such contexts notwithstanding there are other means by which the détournement of the socialist realist trope, pushes us into a more contestable art historical territory and reception. Namely the pronounced sense of stylistic naivety, which emerges once we move beyond the dynamic compositional forces of the central passage. It is a naivety, which extends from the simplified spherical volumes of the main figures through the swift shifts in perspective and scales which run across the rear-ground of the wall, and which must, if anything, have been more pronounced in the full-scale situation of the mural. Amidst a world of rapidly multiplying billboard imagery laden with sophisticated photo montages, these complex shifts and jumps in scale constituted, what I would argue was a significant risk on the part of the Workshop.[227] For though they extended the distance of the work's impact from the attenuated bravura muscularity of socialist realisms' proletarian agent and thus, perhaps, added some further nuance to the political positioning of the mural, the traces of a naif style may also have served to alienate certain viewers.[228] If in some degree, a sense of naivety may be attributable to the fact that it was GMW's first mural, it is a stylistic tendency that hangs over their broader work, and is deserving of further examination.

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change the face of London since the Blitz'. Divergences with White's readings notwithstanding, the broader fate of the Docklands remained uncertain until Margaret Thatcher's Government pushed through a massive shift to the area's character, via their railroading of local democracy and the imposition of the London Docklands Development Corporation, with its undisguised allegiance to Financial capitalist interests, and total absence of democratic accountability.

227. The proliferation of billboards across the city over these years, was noted by a number of art critics, including Peter Fuller, "Where Was the Art of the Seventies," Lecture at Arnolfini Gallery, February 1980, revised in, Fuller, *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1980), 37.; and Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art in the Seventies*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1980), 8-9.

228. Particularly as the decade wore on and murals became more common, they became the target of the Right's assaults on the 'wastefulness.' Such conjecture, is of course difficult to verify, but the hostility shown to what came in the following years to be considered 'second rate art for second rate people' would seem to confirm that naivety of imagery risked alienating certain audiences.

On the one hand, it would be remiss for an art historian not to note that many of the stylistic manifestations of this naivety would seem to fall within a particular art historical lineage that stretches across the range of Kenna and Lobb's future oeuvre. In particular, it reveals a profound engagement with the work of Stanley Spencer and Diego Rivera.[229] Though rarely examined together Spencer and Rivera (who were born and died within five years of each other) came to form two touchstones within the dual narratives that Kenna and Lobb began to forge in their search for a historical mural tradition which was at once localised and internationalist.[230] Intriguingly, their combined influence sits together with remarkably little conflict in GMW's work. In *The People's River*, for example, it is difficult to separate which one might be more accountable for the reduced volumetric simplicity of the figure's forms, their light-hearted rhythmic disposition across the rearground of the composition, and the casual attitudes to both spatial recession and perspectival shifts. This harmony of influence can perhaps be traced to Spencer and Rivera's common interest in Giotto and Trecento, and early Quattrocento, Italian wall painting. As such, if it is Rivera's approach that would seem most forceful in the bright joyous tonality and epic nature of the historical symbolism, it exists near seamlessly with a Spencer-esque approach to dynamic action presented by the right-hand figure - whose unstrained grace in the act of extreme motion looks like he could

229. Both Lobb and Kenna have held lifelong interests in the history of art. Much to the dismay of her mother, Kenna, indeed, turned down a place to read History of Art at Cambridge to take up her place at Ravensbourne. In their preparations for opening the workshop, therefore, Kenna and Lobb looked far and wide in their excavation of both British and International mural traditions. Lobb had met Spencer, whilst a student at Guilford in the 1950s, when his class had taken a day trip to Cookham. Kenna describes Rivera as *the* touchstone figure of her career. Lobb and Kenna's interviews with the author, August 2015.
230. Almost from the outset Kenna and Lobb became a propagandist and educational force for the promotion of murals. This involved the organisation of a series of National Murals Conferences, from 1977 forwards and also travelling around the country delivering slide shows. Both Rivera and Spencer feature heavily in their slide collections.

have stepped straight out of one of Spencer's Glasgow paintings of Glasgow's industry [see figures 105-6 and 117].[231]

The breadth of this range of influence: its geographical and historical diversity, the freedom by which it merges traditions stretching from fourteenth century Italy through to twentieth century Mexico, is one of the tangible joys that animate the mural, and indeed of many of the murals covered by this study. And whilst the nuance of the art historical sources involved may have been unlikely to have registered amongst many of the mural's audience over the eight years of its existence, it is notable that those members of the tenants' association involved in the development of the mural's design, or those who came to aid in its painting over the summer months of 1975, were likely to have known something of them. For Kenna and Lobb placed considerable weight on the educative role of their mural practice, and art history was crucial to this. As they said it in the annual report cited above 'the information and the skill of the artist as with any professional is not disseminated to people generally. We have been enriched by being active in and learning about art; we think everyone should have opportunity to make things or learn about art.'[232] To these ends they gave slideshows, and initiated discussions regarding the history of muralism, to accompany the process of collaborative design. If not all of the mural's audience would have followed the art historical reference, therefore, it is notable that those at the core of the design process, quite likely would have.[233]

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231. Both these influences of course could be seen to place the work in the longstanding tradition of broad-modelled plasticity stretching back to Giotto and could be opposed to the heavy muscularity of Michelangelo (so beloved of Siqueiros). That this fondness for the "*Italian Primitives*," was something shared by the pre-Raphaelites, may in some part account for what Hatherley seems to trace as a sort of 'Arts and Crafts' sensibility in the work of GMW. Owen Hatherley, *New Ruins*, 308-314.
232. Greenwich Mural Workshop, 'Application for a Grant to the Arts Council of Great Britain,' in ACGB Archives: ACGB/113/64: RejectedApplications1976, (1976), 3.
233. In common with much of the broader community arts movement, there is something of the broad flavour of Paulo Freire's stress upon the importance and methodologies of collaborative modes of 'dialogical pedagogy'. It is of note that Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (first published in English in 1970) was a tremendously

The second source of this naivety, however, is perhaps more significant, and may well underpin the art historical sources selected (with their broad volumetric treatments of form). It is the GMW's approach to production and collaboration. For, though Kenna and Lobb maintained artistic control of their work, they remained committed, from the outset, to developing modes of collaborative design and production. Building on from the slideshows, discussions and workshops held to devise the thematic assertions of the mural Kenna and Lobb brought to the group a series of designs, from which the residents could select their preferred mode and suggest changes [see Figure 107-109].[234] In the case of this mural, it would seem that one such change resulted in the addition of further detail to the right bank of the river and rear-ground of the scene, filling in what was, in the original sketch, a patch of sky. The addition of the Meridian Estate and processing figures to this section, completed the trio of thematic focus, to include the houses of the mural's co-producers, but also significantly complicated the overall unity of the design, exacerbating the shifts of scale.[235] From the outset Kenna and Lobb had devised a three-tone system which would give reduced detail to the overall tonal modelling of the mural, but greatly enhance the ability of untrained volunteers to assist in the execution of the mural.[236] As such, the reductive simplicity of the human forms, the broad tonal treatments and, perhaps, the somewhat awkward flips of scale which emerge across the rear-ground of the composition, can all be seen as the visual markers

popular book across this period. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 30th Anniversary Edition, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Contunnum, 2005).

234. At first, and so in the case of this mural, this could go through several stages of revision, though later Kenna and Lobb insisted on cutting down this often seemingly interminable process. Kenna, interview with the author, August 2015.

235. This shift may, as such, be responsible for the somewhat awkward shifts of scale that stretched across the procession of figures in the background, and may, though Kenna and Lobb have not admitted as much, therefore, attest to some of the difficulties they had in working out modes of collaborative design which did not compromise the clarity of the mural's message.

236. Kenna has described that this system emerged from some of her own work of the late 1960s in which she had one large scale enlargements of politicians faces with greatly reduced tonal range. (Kenna, Interview with the author, 2015). At a mural conference in 1978, Kenna described the benefits of using the three-tone system for enhancing collaboration. Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Record of the First National Murals Conference*, 9th-10th November 1978, at the Battersea Arts Centre, ACGB Archives: ACGB/32/137/Murals.

of a commitment to collaborative processes. It is, in fact, in this light, rather than as nuanced art historical stylistic treatment, that the design preference towards simplified form takes on greater meaning: as a marker of Kenna and Lobb's conception of the mural as a site of community development, the determination, as they framed it, that, 'having initiated the idea, [that the community] receive and own the wall which then becomes a symbol of their unity and identity, a landmark that puts them on the map and brightens their neighbourhood'.[237]

The prickly topics of process, community and product have traditionally hung awkwardly over murals of the period. It has been customary in accounts of community art (and beyond) to view a disconnect between the fields of process and product, and to place emphasis emphatically with the former. Claire Bishop, in her study of participative art frames this as a 'a tension between quality and equality'.[238] In the 1970s, indeed, this 'tension' is frequently addressed as an assault upon 'aesthetics' and 'quality'; in GMW's reports, for example, we see a stated commitment to art 'as a communication system, not aesthetics'.[239] Without wanting to devalue the importance of process, this study takes a different view. Rather than seeing 'aesthetics' and 'communication', 'quality' and 'equality', as existing in a contradictory relation, or a tension, it seeks to address a more intimate and dialectical relation between the apparently divergent spheres.[240] In his essay *The Author as Producer*, Walter

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237. Greenwich Mural Workshop, "Application for a Grant to the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976" in ACGB Archives: ACGB/113/64:RejectedApplications1976, 3

238. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 3: 'Some of the key themes to emerge throughout these chapters are the tensions between quality and equality, singular and collective authorship, and the ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions'. Whilst Bishop does indeed return again and again to the pairing, in maintaining a model which approaches the two spheres in perpetual tension, she fails to demonstrate the synthesis, interconnection, or historical dynamics central to a more dialectical understanding of the relations between them. Tending to normalise aesthetic quality, rather than question its construction, her efforts to cast it as the historical inverse of equality, reveal a series of unquestioned ideological constructions.

239. Greenwich Mural Workshop, "Application for a Grant to the Arts Council of Great Britain," in ACGB Archives: ACGB/113/64:RejectedApplications1976, 3. In the political sphere, such a tension might be seen to have had an analogue in the widespread preference for horizontal organisation and a rejection of the 'mystifying' notions of professionalism and skill so common in the technocratic language of the 1960s.

240. Andrew Hemingway has pointed out that the complex arena of aesthetics has fared quite badly in Marxist Art History over recent decades, but its importance to the discipline of art history cannot be so easily escaped. He has noted that the neglect of 'the key questions of the aesthetic and the constitution of art history's special

Benjamin sought to prove that 'a work which exhibits the correct [political] tendency must necessarily exhibit all other qualities'.[241] Without necessarily echoing the totalising synthesis attempted by Benjamin, the method by which he proposed to move beyond the false binaries of 'quality' and 'political tendency' (and 'content' and 'form') through an examination of technique is of note, and might be extended to that other false binary of process and product. In rounding upon Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre as a model, and the playwright's demand that the work should 'not simply transmit the apparatus of production without simultaneously changing it to the maximum extent possible in the direction of socialism', Benjamin raises a means by which to synthesise between the spheres of form and content, quality and political tendency, and indeed product and process.[242] His approach recommends an analysis of technique, and the view of the work of art not in relation *to* the means of production, but rather how it stands *within* them. It is one of considerable pertinence to *The People's River*, and GMW's wider career.

Following Benjamin's method, therefore, the technique of *The People's River* might be seen to span across the mural's processes of production, the form of their product, and, finally the sphere of the murals' extended reception. Significantly, indeed, it was the finished mural which came to stand on the streets of London, for eight crucial years in the city's history.[243] Whilst the social process of producing the mural is of undoubted importance to its meaning amongst those who painted it, and indeed those aware of its painting, this study, nonetheless,

domain', remain a lacuna within the discipline. A Hemingway, "New Left Art History's International," in Hemingway, *Marxism*, 185.
241. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 84.
242. As Benjamin noted, a focus upon technique offered a means by which to approach a more material and direct social analysis, in offering a divergent starting point: '[b]efore I ask: how does a literary work stand in relation *to* the relationships of production of a period, I would like to ask: how does it stand *in* them? This question aims directly at the function that the work has within the literary relationships of production of a period. In other words, it aims directly at a work's literary *technique*'. Benjamin, 84.
243. In 1983, as part of the Peace Year Murals examined in Chapter 3, Greenwich Mural Workshop painted an anti-nuclear themed mural, *The Winds of Peace*, on top of the pre-existing mural.

takes as its departure the contention that GMW's division between communication systems and aesthetics is erroneous. Whilst giving acknowledgement to the productive relations which underpinned both the murals form and content, its process and its final form, the study notes that such relations were not, in themselves, transparent to the majority of the mural's audience. Rather, the technique embodied within the mural, can be better approached through a dialectical approach, which mediates between a democratically considered evolution and the aesthetic accomplishment of the final product. With its responsive thematic concerns, its strong dynamic pictorial forces and its simple tonal system, finding a balance between the forces of process, form, content and product. Ultimately, therefore, what is remarkable about the mural is its forceful embodiment of a technique which does indeed, serve to re-orientate, as Brecht would have it, the relations of production in the direction of socialism. This reorientation is bound up within the collaborative processes of making the mural—its drawing together of the thoughts, needs, and demands of local residents, and the collaborative processes of co-production which that entailed— *and* crucially for this study, the mural's final form as a landmark to the strength of communal effort: an image which itself touched the experiences of its viewers to lure them out of passive spectatorship.

In such a light, *The People's River*, emerges as a remarkable and integrated testament to the hopes, demands and actions of the local community, arising from a technique which allows for such integration. It offers an intelligent and *intelligible* mural which gives pride and place to the involvement of local people in their surroundings: their capacity to make, understand and forge both cultural and political change. If the discontinuities of scale and the simplicity of tonal definition may leave its message vulnerable to hostility in some quarters, therefore, these same features also underpin the political inclusivity of its making, and its fundamentally collaborative technique. Whilst GMW, and other muralists, were to evolve

more sophisticated techniques over the years that followed, the finished mural constituted a timely proposition of political solutions to the pressing localised forces of the time, not in negation of, but in an alliance with, the physical and economic realities of the city. Far from a loose willed utopianism, or 'second rate art for second rate people', the mural offers a testament to concrete attempts to re-forge everyday life, and the social realities of the city, from the bottom up. It is indeed itself a part of that process. At the time of the mural's making, it still looked as though such efforts might find form in the most ambitious and democratic industrial policy in British political history, and the possibilities for the most extensive reconstruction of the city since the advent of industrialism. What seems remarkable, therefore, about *The People's River* is its combination of the vulnerability of a naif style with the monumentalism of social and socialist realism prototypes, to create a monument to the participative democracy of the time.

Floyd Road, 1976

The People's River, therefore, emerged from a specific set of localised interests, as expressed by prominent members of the Meridian Estate Tenants' Association, and interpreted by Greenwich Mural Workshop. It gave form to specific and localised concerns but did so through a détournement of the grandiose monumentality of social and socialist realist traditions.[244] This approach was well suited to the mural's location on a major thoroughfare in central Greenwich. The GMW's second mural at Floyd Road, took a different approach [see figure 110]. Only 2 miles or so east of Creek Road, the mural was, once more, addressed to the localised concerns of Greenwich Council's tenants: tenants, indeed, facing a closely related situation of economic and industrial decline. Away from the main thoroughfares of

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244. Even if the model of these traditions may well have been an at best partial historical construction.

central Greenwich, and in an unambiguously residential setting, however, the mural's pitch is (for the mural remains largely in-tact to this day) neither grandiose, nor especially monumental but rather addressed to a distinctly domestic sphere.[245]

Located in North Charlton, (much nearer, in fact, to Kenna and Lobb's home, and their children's primary school), Floyd Road is a curved residential backstreet, tucked away to the south of the main artery of the Woolwich Road (A206). In 1976 the Woolwich Road stood as a divider. To the north, as far as the River Thames, were the warehouses and dispersed industry that had defined Charlton's character for over one hundred years.[246] These sectors were, at this point, beginning a decline that by the 1980s became terminal, and saw the area repurposed for a series of 'pioneering', and still multiplying, large-scale retail parks.[247] Floyd Road, meanwhile, sits at the northern edges of the stretches of—largely Victorian—terraced houses which spread south of the Woolwich Road, as far as the B206 and Charlton Park. It was, as it remains, a working class residential street, whose historical employment in the industry hugging the River was, in the 1970s, facing existential threat.[248] Whilst not a major thoroughfare, in any normal sense, the road is distinguished from the surrounding area by its

245. As David Harvey and others have pointed out, the domestic and reproductive spheres had been consistently absent from the history of Leftist theory through the 20th Century. One of the major accomplishments of the post-'68 movements and the radical feminism that blossomed across the 1970s was to assert the political significance of the 'reproductive' as well as purely 'productive' spheres. See David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London, New York: Verso, 2012).

246. Within easy walking distance would have been Johnson & Phillips, British Ropes, Harvey's, Stone Manganese & Siemens. Many of these industries remained active in the 1970s, though most had disappeared by the close of the 1980s. See, Stephen Craven, "Charlton and Woolwich Riverside Industry*,*" *Geograph*, http://www.geograph.org.uk/snippet/8539 .

247. See Hatherley, *New Ruins*.

248. Though Charlton was featured in a Guardian Weekend 'Let's move to…', the usually laudatory barometer of middle-class interest, could not but begin with the admission that Charlton was 'definitely unfashionable'. Let's Move to…Charlton, *Guardian Weekend*, 25th May, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/money/2013/may/24/lets-move-charlton-south-east-london/. Perhaps owing to relatively poor transport links, and the unappealing artery of the A206, with its attendant shopping complexes, the area continues, amidst the property boom of the current moment, to resist the rapid gentrification which has ensnared most such centrally located areas. Floyd Road itself, was the subject of local online speculation, in the same year, where the blogger 'Daryl', speculated on the Charlton Champion blog, 'Is Floyd Road the Worst Road in Charlton', Daryl, *Charlton Champion*, https://charltonchampion.co.uk/2013/01/24/is-floyd-road-the-worst-street-in-charlton/

circumnavigation of *The Valley*, Charlton Athletic Football Club's stadium.[249] The Valley's presence has meant that on match days the mural's usually small, intimate and hyper-local audience is transformed into a much larger (if only slightly less local) audience of, predominantly, working-class men. The mural's extended reception across the past forty years, therefore, has been split in large part between these two contrasting audiences: with the quotidian attentions of local residents offset by the ritually processing fans.[250]

For over half a century, the houses on Floyd Road had been owned by G.A. Harvey's & Co., a metal fabrication company which had moved from Lewisham via Greenwich to Charlton in the early years of the 20th century. As well as becoming one of the major employers in the area, Harvey's had also become one of the major landlords, buying and building property in North Charlton, which they had, in turn, rented to employees. Alongside the dances, sports days and social events organised by the company, these property holdings had placed Harvey's at, or near, the centre of North Charlton's communal life across the best part of the twentieth century.[251] By the early 1970s, however, such industrial paternalism was beginning to shift, as the company began its relocation to new bases at Ramsgate and Margate and, in January 1973, sold many of the houses on Floyd Road and beyond to Greenwich Borough Council. This was part of a collective purchase by the Council of 104 houses, flats and maisonettes, for a figure of £525,000.[252] This purchase, made (at best incompetently, on the

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249. The stadium was built in an old chalk pit by the voluntary labour of Charlton's supporters in 1919. The Valley's 27,111 capacity, and Charlton FC's status (wandering between the upper three divisions of English football), have brought with them little of the allure or investment attracted by other major London clubs. The street is homaged in the football club's chant 'Valley Floyd Road', whose most poetic image describes the 'mist of the Thames rolling in'.
250. These audiences are of course central to the mural's meaning and should be taken into account in all that follows.
251. Some memories and testaments to Harvey's prominence in the area can be found in and under, Keith Clarke, "A Family Connection With Harvey's," *Greenwich Industrial History Blog.* http://greenwichindustrialhistory.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/following-article-by-keith-clarke-is.html/
252. See Greenwich Borough Council Archives, Charlton Archive, *Notes on Housing*. GA Harvey's & Company was established as a Metal Fabricators in Lewisham 1874. They moved to a factory in Charlton in the side-road of Homewood Villas in 1913, becoming famous for their metal office furniture. They acquired and

Council's part) at the precise peak of the 'Barber Boom', came after a period of some neglect to the Floyd Road properties on the part of Harvey's. It typified the intertwining of industrial de-investment and the momentary peak in local government spending that occurred in the early 1970s as a tempered Keynesianism, largely failed to fill the voids left by decades of underinvestment in British industry.[253] The sale was followed by a period of further neglect by the Council, with the properties deleterious state then used as justification to advance plans for the street's demolition. The proposed replacement was to be a tower-rise block, similar to the sixteen-storey, Valiant House, which remains visible behind the mural, and was built by the Council in 1975 [see figure 111].[254]

Whilst Valiant House had been built on a piece of the council's land which had lain unused for many years, however, Floyd Road was a fully occupied street. Its destruction would, therefore, require the displacement and destruction of a community already at the core of the area's pronounced economic crisis. If such practices had been common and largely accepted amidst the depleted and substandard housing stock of the post-war era, by the mid-1970s they were being met by increasingly organised opposition. As Peter Shapely has observed, this opposition had multiple origins.[255] On the one hand it was a reaction to the long-running deficiencies of a post-war housing policy in which there had been a consistent 'failure to ask tenants themselves about fundamental issues such as the design and location of new homes',

built a wide range of properties in the area. But by 1974 were scaling down their operations. See. Grace's Guide to British Industrial History, "G.A. Harvey and Co,": https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/G._A._Harvey_and_Co/
253. As Harvey and others have pointed out this underinvestment can in some senses be traced back to a longstanding division between British mercantile and industrial capitalism stretching back through the 19th century and beyond. Over the post-war period this had led to a division between financial and industrial capitalism, that by the 1980s was settled decisively in favour of the former. See Harvey, *Neoliberalism.*
254. In keeping with the actions of many councils at the time (and since), this period of neglect was interpreted by many as directed towards setting out a justification for the buildings' demolition.
255. Peter Shapely, "Social Housing and Tenant Participation," *History and Policy Papers*, (2008): http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/social-housing-and-tenant-participation.

in which 'choice was never on the agenda'.[256] These frustrations were exacerbated further through the 1950s and '60s as Conservative administrations pushed to increase the 'pace' of redevelopment, by offering incentives 'to encourage councils to adopt new system-built developments, including tower blocks, maisonettes and multi-deck access flats', forms which often constituted, 'even more non-consultative form[s] of accommodation'.[257] By the late 1960s this increased absence of consultation was compounded by the deteriorating build quality that was so disastrously highlighted by the collapse of a tower at Ronan Point in 1968 and the fact that redevelopment was increasingly targeted towards what was considered adequate, if ill-maintained, housing stock.[258] With council rents rising significantly in 1972 and 1973, and the political demands for localised direct democracy emerging from a number of quarters, a wide ranging demand for tenants' control and community architecture arose, spanning a buoyant squatters movements, rent strikes, and architects working with communities to propose alternative development models.[259]

It was along the models of the broader movement for tenants' control that the Floyd Road Tenants' Association, formed in August 1974 to oppose the Council's plans. Rather than demolition, the Floyd Road residents joined an increasing chorus of voices across the city to demand the council listen to their desires for refurbishment. It was a struggle, made easier in this instance by the existence of the council as the principle landlord, and the shifting tides of

256. For Shapely, the post-war period was characterised by 'a Fordist approach, with large-scale developments seemingly offering a long-term solution to the inner-city slums'. By the 1970s Shapely felt the deficiencies of this model were coming to the fore. Shapely, "Tenant Participation".
257. Shapely.
258. Owen Hatherley contends that the collapse of Ronan Point can be viewed as the end of architectural Modernism in Britain. Hatherley, *Militant Modernism* (London: Zero Books, 2009), 12.
259. Council rents rose significantly as a result of the Rent Bill, see for example *Pavement,* Vol 2 no 10, December 1972. As Medhurst and others have noted the effect was a working class politicisation around the sphere of housing, Medhurst, *That Option No Longer*. Astrid Proll has suggested that there were approximately thirty thousand squatters in London across the mid-1970s. Proll, *Good Bye,* 11.

contemporary opinion.[260] By early 1976 the Council had given way, acceding to demands for refurbishment. It was this campaign, and its success, that provided both the rationale and the subject matter for the mural at Floyd Road. Kenna and Lobb had met members of the Tenants' Association in May 1976, in the wake of their successes in overturning the demolition.[261] Though involved in several other projects, it had quickly become clear that a mural commemorating the victory would provide an ideal subject.[262] Not only did it fit with Kenna's interest in tenants' control, but the tenants' victory over the Council's plans meant that the mural could offer both a monument to the success of the campaign, and a means to preserve the community spirit which had been forged in the preservation of the street.[263] It would, in short, offer a means by which to not only give testament to the existent community of Floyd Road and to its survival of an attempt on its existence, but also to extend that community, by the communal processes of design and painting of the mural. It would offer both a monument and a continuing rallying point.

The dialectical conception of community that is pointed to by this duality of purpose — community as both active (producer of, and produced by, the mural) and inheritor (of the commemorated struggle and in turn, the mural itself) has been central to GMWs practice ever since their foundation, and runs through the commitments they have made to both active

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260. A 1976 report by a housing rights project in North Islington gives a good overview of the diverse challenges proposed by the private sector, and an account of Tenants Rights action across both state and private sectors: North Islington Housing Rights Projects, *Street by Street: Improvement and tenant control in Islington*, (London: Shelter, 1976). As White, (*London*, 72) points out, by 1974 the buying out of private landlords and refurbishment of homes was becoming more accepted across various levels of government.
261. Kenna, interview with the author, August 2015.
262. In 1976 GMW, had opened a permanent base in a flat on the Meridian Estate, and were in the process of negotiating a mural for the Rathmore Community Centre where they were also running an arts class. It was through the community centre at Rathmore that they made contact with Floyd Road tenants. The Rathmore murals were eventually started in 1978.
263. It is notable in this context that by 1976 Greenwich Mural Workshop's reliance upon the Council for funding was decreasing, having received a sizeable grant from the Arts Council's Community Arts budget. This may well have allowed them more confidence in making mural that gave explicit form to a victory *against* the council. Their focus on the power of the community against unidentified bulldozers, also differentiated their response to that of, for example, Brian Barnes, whose much more combative approach lost him the support of the local council for good. GMW kept on notably good terms with the council.

processes and finished products in their funding applications ever since.[264] Such a conception spans the complexity that Raymond Williams observed in the contemporary (1970s) usage of the word. As Williams saw it, '[c]ommunity can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships'.[265] More broadly it seems noteworthy that this dialectic conception related very closely to Williams' understanding of 'culture', as spanning both 'the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to' and 'the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested… It is always both traditional and creative'.[266] This dialectic, between the inherited, traditional or existent aspects of community (and culture), and the live, dynamic, or alternative ones, was by no means universally held by the community arts movement or broader contexts of the time, in which a more static or nostalgic view of (particularly working class) communities faced by existential threats, was often predominant.[267] The Floyd Road mural's more dialectic approach—as a work which celebrated an existing community, even as it sought to act as a conscious agent in its evolution—will be seen as central to its importance.

The mural's image provided a visual embodiment of the relations between these conceptions of community as an existing and inherited set of relationships and an active and alternative

264. In their 1976 report, for example, they state, that 'having initiated the idea, [the community] receive and own the wall which then becomes a symbol of their unity and identity, a landmark that puts them on the map and brightens their neighbourhood'. This provides a telling interplay of both past and present and active and inherited cultural forms. Greenwich Mural Workshop, "Application for a Grant", 2.

265. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 72-74.

266. Williams, "Culture is Ordinary," in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable, (London: Verso, 1989), 4. Whilst, the leap from 'community' to 'culture' may seem to be something of a stretch, it is I think central to the achievement of the Floyd Road mural that it encompasses something of Williams' nuanced and dialectical visions of both. Furthermore, as shown by the introductory quote to this thesis, the two are never far apart in Williams' thinking.

267. The notion of 'community' favoured by a number of community artists was one of a static, inherited community facing existential threat from without. Such a conception, often intertwined with a racialised pining for the 'White' working class continues to hang over much political discussion today. In the 1970s, Richard Hoggart's highly influential 1957 study, *The Uses of Literacy*, formed a touchstone for this nostalgic notion of decline. For a discussion of the complexity of the term and the dangers of inadequate theoretical conceptions of it, see Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*, 48-50.

one. Most notably in its central compositional contrast between the enclosing facade of the 'inherited' Victorian terrace, and the transformative activity of the figures that inhabit the street. This contrast dominates the mural's architectonic structure: the illusionistic extension of the viewers' space into the narrow stage-like frieze running up to the facade of terraced houses that occupies the left-most three-quarters of the mural, counterposed by the pleasantly anarchic spread of brightly toned figures who animate the space.[268] This contrast between figures and the stage setting of architectural facades also forms a consistent compositional device in what might be called a school (or more appropriately tendency) of 20th century English urban naif painting. It is there, for example, in the interplay of the spectral figures who float across L.S. Lowry's architecturally impermeable cityscapes, or in the brighter bombast of the contemporary East End artist Dan Jones, who consistently sets off his noisy and animated street processions against the fixed, high-rising stage-setting of London streets [see figures 114-116].[269] In these two artists' work, and many more besides, the contrast between the animated human figures and their setting seem to form a metonym for that oft quoted, but persistently alluring phrase from Karl Marx's, *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, that '[m]en [sic] make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted'.[270] In the pictorial universe of Lowry and Jones, the city's streets and buildings form a repeated embodiment of those inherited circumstances against and within which crowds of figures work to give form to their own historical agency.

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268. It seems of note that this is a compositional theme that continues in Stephen Lobb's work to the present.
269. Jones' delight in the banners, shop-signs and at times snippets of riddles or language all complicate this dualism - with the active and inherited play of language adding a further level of inherited and creative structure.
270. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Surveys from Exile*, *Political Writings Volume 2* (London: Verso Books, 2010), 146.

At Floyd Road, however, the tone of the relation of architecture to the figure appears notably closer to Williams' framing of the dialectic between existing and alternative relationships, than to Marx, Jones or Lowry's of inherited circumstances and historical agency. Approximately twice life size, the fifty-three figures of the Floyd Road mural are not the, more or less anonymous, masses of Jones or Lowry's birds-eye worlds. Rather, the monumentally scaled, individualised figures—portraits of the street's residents, made from life over the summer of 1976—dominate their architectural surroundings. Rising up ladders and around the steep perspective of the street which fills the mural's right-hand passage, the figures jubilantly interact with, rather than just occupy, their 'inheritance'. Indeed, as is driven home by the mural's narrative cycles, they actively defend it.

These narrative cycles can be divided into three broad categories. Across the upper left and middle sections, the figures' communal action is directed towards the restoration of the houses' facades, sewing and hanging curtains within the windows, re-plastering and repairing sash frames from the outside. Along the pavement at the bottom, a frieze of highly active figures, mainly children, are only slightly disturbed from their play, cycling and—once more largely non-productive—inhabitation of the road, by the spreading alarm of the happenings to their right.[271] There, winding up into the gable of the supporting wall, figures are shown rushing to push back the encroaching bulldozers and diggers, and halt the destruction of the street. Across the whole, a certain unweighted lack of gravity or recessional fidelity, is held back from overbearing awkwardness by the strong rhythmic passages of the figures disposition. In the lower and left-hand sections—not dissimilarly to the lower sections of the main, 'West', wall of Diego Rivera's National Palace murals (1929-35)—the interlocking

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271. It is notable that one of the reasons for the composition's grouping of an abundance of figures along the base was the desire to allow children to participate in the painting of the mural without scaling tall scaffolding: a practical lesson learned from the People's River. Steve Lobb, interview with the author, August 2016.

limbs and gesture drives the pictorial energy [see figure 117]. As the figures disperse, across and up the right-hand section, the mural moves closer to the precedent of Rivera's followers at Coit Tower: the clustered, episodic figure groups set against an ambiguously receding street recalling something of Victor Arnatauff's *City Life* section, just as the wrapping of the only marginally diminished figures into the gable draws towards Bernard Zakheim's *Library* scenes of the same cycle (both 1934). Throughout, the rhythm of the figures actions and a joyous sense of observed interaction reigns (despite the pressing invasion of the diggers). In all three narrative cycles, it is the communal and collaborative action—multiply directed towards the defence of the 'tradition' of the architecture, and yet itself constitutive of alternative relations of 'live' community—which is accorded visual agency, dominating the composition and, by turns, restoring the homes, occupying the street and pushing away the bulldozers and diggers to the periphery.

The character of this mobilisation of the street against the encroachments of diggers, and in defence of the tradition of the architecture is likely to have met with a contested reception at the time and has undoubtedly shifted significantly further in the forty years since its conclusion. For, if the visual dynamism and dramatic purpose of the metaphorical action have obvious benefits for telling the story, the symbolism will have had unintended resonances for those less aware of the specific contexts of the mural.[272] The emphasis on direct action, and communal unity, for example, is likely (once more) to have pushed the reading of the mural towards a sort of voluntarist utopianism, or a symbol of nimbyist entrenchment.[273] Such a

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272. For those passing through the street rather than living in it, for the passing fans, or for those who have moved in over the forty years since and are too isolated or incurious to find out about the mural's original contexts.

273. It seems worth emphasising that each of the mural's three narrative cycles is, to a greater or lesser extent metaphorical. The fixing of the buildings, for example, was done over a much-extended period of time, and largely by residents upon their own homes, rather than by the whole street upon each-others'. The defence of the street was achieved through campaigning and months of tedious appeals, rather than by a physical confrontation with the diggers. And whilst the play and inhabitation of the street were undoubtedly a part of the life of the

reading depends in no small part in the way that the viewer might read the work's

iconography. Firstly, there is the question of the Victorian terrace, which was, by the 1970s

intimately connected to the dynamics of class in the city, having become the vessel of choice

for a generation of middle class owner occupiers, who were returning to the city from the

suburbs to which their parents retreated in the post-war period. As Jerry White has described

them:

> *Upper middle class but more or less impecunious young married couples not yet*
> *burdened by school-age children, politically left of centre but generally free from*
> *party ties, balancing otherworldly bohemianism with up to the minute careers in*
> *television or journalism or film or stage, the early gentrifiers were marking out their*
> *own space in self-conscious contradiction to that of their parents' generation. They*
> *chose 'real life' against the 'genteel London suburb'…they chose to widen their life*
> *experience among working-class neighbours rather than live among the sort of people*
> *they had met at school. They took a risk rather than playing it safe. Through*
> *gentrification they rejected consumerism and the mass product of suburb or luxury*
> *flat or New Town House.*[274]

By the 1970s what had, in the post-war period, been described as the 'back to the town

movement', and in the 1960s earned the description of 'gentrification', was gathering pace.[275]

As White points out, it had been become increasingly associated with the restoration of

London's housing stock, moving from a preference for Georgian Houses amongst the

'bourgeois frontiersmen' of the 1940s, towards Victorian houses in the decades that followed.

By the 1970s, White has remarked that 'nowhere was safe from the middle-class invaders'.[276]

If Charlton, therefore, was in fact safer than most places from their reach, it is worth bearing

in mind that the symbolism of the act of restoring a Victorian terraced house remains, at some

level, bound up with the deepening pressures of gentrification upon the city. In a very

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street, and expression of its community, it is notable that the community was in fact brought together as much
by their resistance of the eviction and by the painting of the mural, as by any utopian pre-existing harmony.
274. White, *London*, 65.
275. As noted above the term 'gentrification' was coined by Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe the shifts occurring
in London. As Neil Smith notes, the broad processes denoted by the term were categorised under the rubric of
Hausmannisation, by Engels in the 19th Century, but have undergone particular shifts in the changing relations
of capital to urbanisation over the intervening period. Smith, *The New Frontier*, 32-38.
276. White, *London*, 74

important sense, such an interpretation is, in this case, undermined by both the historical

dynamics of the area, and the position of the residents as council tenants fighting for a say in

the siting and conditions of their tenancy.[277] It is likely, however, that the mural's historical

reception may, particularly as the distance has increased between the mural's daily audience

and the contexts of its production, have been coloured by such interpretations.[278] Indeed,

even the rising tide of opposition to local councils has been considered by some as a means of

salving the guilt of middle class owner occupiers.[279]

As the ideological battles of the 1970s gathered pace, the term 'community', with its

simultaneous assertion of unity and potential deflection of class, became bound up in such

shifts and conflicts. For whilst Raymond Williams felt, in 1976, that a key aspect of the word

community was that, 'unlike all other terms of social organization (*state*, *nation*, *society*, etc.)

it seems never to be used unfavourably', by the mid 1970s, this was not in fact the case.[280] In

March 1976, for example, the local newspaper, *The Voice of Charlton* (which was edited from

the very house on which the Floyd Road mural was painted), printed a virulent letter

attacking in particular the newspapers contention of speaking for the 'community'.[281] The

letter begins with a condemnation of the paper's coverage of a campaign against the council

and continues:

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277. As Smith has pointed out, gentrification, though often examined through the prism of culture and ideology, is in fact about the dynamics of capitalism and land ownership. Dynamics which are not in play here. Smith, *The New Frontier*.
278. It seems notable that in recent years, for example, the mural has begun to be defaced. Intriguingly, however, with a predominance of scatological additions of penises and deformations rather than the much more common tagging that has beset most murals. The deterioration of the household paint over recent years may also be responsible for the declining sense of ownership or reverence shown here.
279. This, for example is an interpretation put forward by White (*London*, 66): 'And, certainly from the late 1960s on, the newcomers could salve any troubled consciences by allying with indigenous residents to wage war against a common enemy: the council'. It is perhaps notable here that White was himself a former council employee. Furthermore, his fundamentally liberal and determinist conception of London's progressive historical dynamics frequently tends to assert itself in his conceptions of Left politics, which tend towards/ the divisive frames of Thatcher's ideological vision of the Left as either 'loony' or regressive. In this, however, he is far from alone.
280. Williams, *Keywords*, 74.
281. The house had become a community centre in 1974.

I think it is offensive that those who claim to speak "for the community" should, on the one hand, be singularly reticent on these basic issues, whilst on the other, berate their readers for so negative a response ("what happens – NOTHING.")

I suggest that the naïve attitudes and feeble minded philosophy;- suggestions, possibilities, ideas idly tossing around in your columns, intuitively seen by the majority of "the community" for what it really is – chit chat, to use an expression of your own – is the cause for "NOTHING" happening.

However, it is the conceit ("are we the only people who care"), contempt ("are you all waiting for the next crisis") and arrogance ("use our time and energy doing more productive work elsewhere") towards the greater proportion of residents of north Charlton ... which will seal your fate.

Be no surprise if and (in its present guise) no great loss if the VOICE OF CHARLTON ceases to exist before very much longer. Here would be an aspect of the pressure being exerted in this and every other "community" throughout the world: the outcome of the grave economic crisis, just a very small aspect. But the decision to quit will be that of those currently responsible for its production...

So while you are considering doing more productive work elsewhere, remember that the majority of 'The community', like the majority of communities all over the world, will be forced to stay put and , in a serious manner, take up the questions of the attacks against their jobs and living standards, education and welfare systems. They are already heartily sick of being told that it is all their fault and being made to pay for the crisis. If VOICE OF CHARLTON seeks to augment that chorus, it will shortly have its answer.[282]

Whilst this was an attack made on the *Voice of Charlton*, and not GMW, and precedes GMW's involvement with the street, it is worth citing at length for the light it shines upon some of the underlying (and localised) hostilities and resentments which mobilised against those who claimed to speak for 'the community'. Particularly, I would argue, in its focus upon the economic hardships of the period, and its contrast between the geographical mobility of those, 'forced to stay put', and those free to be 'doing more productive work elsewhere', the letter highlights the widespread feeling that those mobilising around the mantle of community, might be doing so from a position of middle-class detachment to the actual forces of production. This was a narrative used to particular effect by Margaret

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282. Letter from Jeff Jackson*, Voice of Charlton*, *a paper by and for the residents of North Charlton* No 9, March, 1976 (Printed at 36a Floyd Rd), Royal Borough of Greenwich Archive.

Thatcher, and the New Right which coalesced around her as they forged new social base across these years, mobilising composite hostilities and resentments against the Left and the 'establishment'. In this case, the circumstances and processes of the mural's production, the nature of the conflict it commemorates, and the underlying dynamics it examines, remove the mural from the sort of nimbyist entryism, or chiding remarks, Mr Jackson seems so opposed to. Rather than a liberal indifference to the conditions of the street, the mural offers a testament to and celebration of the potential of the street's residents to reclaim and have a say in the city they inhabit. It is, however, quite likely that the mural's celebration of the communal defence of a Victorian terrace, may have appeared as so much liberal, aquarian froth to some viewers.

The politics of class and architectural symbolism are further complicated if we consider what the Victorian terrace of Floyd road was being saved from. For, as is reinforced when we view the mural from across the street, with the tower of Valiant House behind, the mural's defence of the Victorian terrace, was—beyond a defence of the homes of the residents—also bound up in a wider opposition to the modes of comprehensive redevelopment which had characterised the post war era. In particular, in this case, in opposition to the tower block being proposed on the site. In his recent works of architectural and cultural criticism, Owen Hatherley has attempted to redress the manner in which the tower block has been progressively devalued as a symbol of architectural hope.[283] In his attempts to restore the redemptive social vision of post-war modernist architecture Hatherley has suggested that the council block, along with NHS should be seen as one of two great accomplishments of post-war Bevanite socialism.[284] Proceeding from here, he has suggested that 'the idea of Modernism as 'paternalist' imposition on the benighted pool, upon which Postmodernism

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283. See Hatherley. *Militant Modernism*, *New Ruins* and Ministry *of Nostalgia*.
284. Hatherley*, New Ruins*, xvi.

based so much of its self-justification, makes sense only if we begin with an extremely limited definition of Modernism'.[285] Combining a Marxist admiration for the creative capacity of capitalist development, a related disapproval of a certain 'Arts and Crafts' sensibility, and (perhaps most importantly) a firm opposition to the modes of eclectic historical reworking, and low-rise redevelopment that came to dominate in Thatcher's Britain, Hatherley's reinterpretation of post-war architecture and society, leaves very little space for the manifestations of the 1970s Left.[286]

The *Floyd Road Mural*, however, stands as a warning of some of the potential pitfalls of Hatherley's attempts to restore post-war modernism (and social democracy) from the ideological assaults of Thatcherism, and—more broadly—those accounts which fail to adequately take account of the limits of post-war social democracy. For beyond questions of style or historical categories, the mural offers testament to the existence of considerable resistance to the logic of post-war redevelopment long before neoliberalism became hegemonic. This resistance was waged, from both Left and Right, and—on the Left—was mounted not against the kind of socialist modernity Hatherley seeks to recapture, but rather to its absence: to those modes of undemocratic centralism, and corporatist compromise which characterised the institutions and ideologies of the post-war state. Far from an act of middle class nimbyism, voluntarism, or limited architectural protectionism—and even further from the nonchalant assumption that 'affluence, social peace and equality were permanent', with

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285. Hatherley, xvi..
286. Though Hatherley does acknowledge, almost in passing, that the 1970s Left did exist, they enter little into his historical model: 'However, Samuel noted that the conservation of the built environment, and critiques of modern architecture and planning, had not emerged solely from the right. In fact, as when Covent Garden was saved in the 1970s from demolition by self-consciously revolutionary architects at the GLC, this drive to preserve came also from the left, particularly after 1968. However, the right capitalised on it with great speed, replacing the planned landscape of social democracy not with the 'community architecture' of public participation in the inner city, but by letting developers build traditional-looking car-centred cul-de-sacs and retail parks on the outer suburbs. It seems that whenever the left thinks it can turn the past to its own advantage, it is outplayed by the right.' Hatherley, *Ministry of Nostalgia*, 9.

which Hatherley typecasts the whole 1970s generation—the mural recalls the existence of an organised, working class resistance to the inadequacies of post-war 'social democracy'.[287] Not, as Hatherley suggests, because 'the 'welfare state' was normal, familiar and rather boring' but rather because of the manner in which it threatened to impose itself upon, rather than respond to, the deepening needs and desires of working-class communities facing compound and multiple threats.[288] The resistance summarised in Floyd Road, therefore, recalls that beyond a symbol of architectural hope, the post-war tower block *could* also symbolise the imposition of (often) shoddily built housing, that was unfit for purpose and often made against the will of residents. It was a resistance often waged, therefore, against the enrichment and interests of private developers from the public purse.

Amidst the ideological battles that have emerged in the years since its completion the symbolic connotations of Floyd Road mural have undoubtedly migrated and shifted. Recovering something of the contexts for its primary audiences in 1976, therefore, requires an acknowledgment of the struggles waged at the time both by the residents of Floyd Road, and those across London and the broader country that have been erased from historical memory. It requires an acknowledgement that the fallout from social democratic centralism preceded Margaret Thatcher's rise to power and had a series of quite divergent demands. Far from the mantle of 'consumer choice' by which Thatcher began to reverse the accomplishments of the post-war consensus, the resistance embodied in Floyd Road emerged from a grassroots attempt to reclaim power and control over commonly held resources.

To return, then, to the kernel of Marx's dialectic of structure and agency as viewed through the fixity of architecture and inhabitants in a lineage of naif urban painting. If the buildings

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287. Hatherley, *Ministry of Nostalgia*, 11.
288. Hatherley, 11.

represented in the mural at Floyd Road no longer serve—as I have argued they could be seen in the paintings of Lowry and Jones—as impermeable stage sets of the inherited structures, not of our making, against which our agency is cast, this does not mean that the mural seeks to elude inherited circumstances. Instead, the interaction between residents and architecture, agency and structure, in the *Floyd Road Mural* might, I would suggest, be seen as a testament to a moment in which the Left began to fundamentally reconsider the spheres in which their agency could operate. In this sense, the interaction of the residents *with* the architecture of the street offers a metaphor for the concerns of community politics, and their conceptualisation of the experience of daily life, and the environments in which it was carried out, as a site of struggle. A site, therefore, capable not only of being reworked, but as central to the making of one's 'own history'.

What could, therefore, be seen as a voluntarist mode of utopian action is, instead, I would argue, part of an attempt to re-articulate the field of political action, in a manner which David Harvey has recently argued is vitally important to an emancipatory politics. As Harvey argues, 'only when politics focuses on the production and reproduction of urban life as the central process out of which revolutionary impulses arise will it be possible to mobilise anti-capitalist struggles capable of radically transforming daily life. Only when it is understood that those who build and sustain urban life have a primary claim to that which they have produced and that one of their claims is to be the unaliented right to make a city more after their own hearts desire, will we arrive at a politics of the urban that makes sense'.[289] *The Floyd Road Mural,* pays testament to just such a politics. Writing in 1976, Raymond Williams suggested that, '[t]he complexity of community' in the contemporary usage could be seen in the interaction between two originally distinguished meanings with, 'on the one

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289. Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 16.

hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this'.[290] If the failures of the wider tenant control movement of the 1970s to forge modes of common organisation to withstand the assaults that neoliberalism made upon urban life must be seen to bear out this historic contradiction between common concerns and organisation, the *Floyd Road Mural* nonetheless stands as an important testament to the extent to which such contradictions can be—and at moments across the mid-1970s were—resolved, at the level of localised community struggles.

Brian Barnes: BRAG and Wandsworth Mural Workshop
***Battersea: The Good The Bad and the Ugly*, 1976-1978**

The final mural of the chapter returns us to the southern banks of the Thames, and to an area which, in common with those already examined, was undergoing rapid transformations across the 1970s. Battersea lies to the west of the sites thus far discussed.[291] Renowned for market gardening from the 17th century, through the 19th and 20th centuries the area was steadily transformed by the influence of the railways and industry, with the area's population surging from 6,617 in 1841 to 168, 907 in 1901.[292] A spectrum of high and low grade housing sprung up to accommodate this expansion: the south of the borough dominated by the suburbanisation process by which the well-heeled increasingly relocated their 'town houses' away from the city centre; the north accommodating the workers who flocked away

290. Williams, *Keywords*, 74.
291. The area had been seized from Westminster Abbey by Henry VIII during the dissolution of the Monasteries. From the 17th Century onwards, having moved into the hands of the nobility, the area became renowned for its market gardening, supplying fruit and vegetables to the expanding Covent Garden and other markets, but also across the world, to the expanding British colonies. By the mid-19th Century, however, industry came to proliferate along the river front.
292. The Battersea Society, *A Brief History of Battersea,* accessed, July 18, 2016: https://www.batterseasociety.org.uk/history.php.

from the enclosures and towards the industry and jobs which grew up along the Thames. By its peak in the middle years of the 20th century the industry which had built up in the north of the borough included Morgan's Crucible, Garton's Glucose, flour mills, breweries, Prices Candles, the Nine Elms Gas Works and Battersea Power Station.[293] This diverse industrial expansion spread out across the banks of the Thames, held in check only by the presence of the 200-acre Battersea Park, which had been opened by Queen Victoria in 1858.[294] Outside the Park's gates the post-war era saw the construction of extensive council housing in the gaps left by heavy bomb damage and slum clearances. By the 1970s, however, the character of the northern stretch of the borough was once again beginning to shift as industry began its contraction, to the cost of some 2000 redundancies in 1971 alone.[295] These dynamics were accompanied by the forces of gentrification as newcomers moved south across the river from Kensington and Chelsea. Combined with the contraction of industry, the rise of council rents that followed the Rent Act of 1973, and the increasing presence of property speculators hoping to capitalise on the vacated industrial sites, there was, as noted by the local magazine *Pavement*, a particularly acute 'class struggle over land' in play by the mid-1970s.[296]

Brian Barnes, the artist responsible for designing and co-ordinating the mural had moved to Battersea in the late 1960s. Born in 1948, Barnes had grown up in the southern suburbs of the metropolitan expanse of London, between Bromley and Sidcup. Attending a local Secondary

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293. Designed by Gilbert Scott, and operational between the 1930s and the 1980s, the Power Station remains an icon of the area. It is of note that the main protagonist of this section, the artist and activist Brian Barnes, continues to this day to campaign over the future of the Power Station site. See, for example, Spectacle Films, *Battersea: Selling an Icon*, by Spectacle Films, 2015, accessed, August 21, 2016, https://vimeo.com/ondemand/batterseapowerstation.
294. In the post-war period Battersea Park played host to the Festival of Britain pleasure gardens designed by John Piper, as well as a series of important exhibitions of modern sculpture organised by the London County Council. See Elaine Harwood and Alan Powers, *Festival of Britain* (London: Twentieth Century Society, 2001); and Garlake, *New Art/New World*.
295. Pavement, "Redundancies," *Pavement* Vol 2 No 5, July, 1972, (Pavement, London): 'With Morganite Crucibles, Philip Mills and now Triangs at Merton there have been over 2,000 redundancies in the Wandsworth area over the last year'.
296. Pavement, 'Take Over', *Pavement,* Vol 3 No 1, March 1973, (Pavement: London).

Modern, he became one of three students to garner local newspaper headlines by achieving three particularly high A-levels.[297] Combined with an enduring childhood facility for drawing, these took Barnes to Ravensbourne College of Art, at the age of the age of seventeen. There, as chance would have it, he found himself a peer of Carol Kenna and a student of Stephen Lobb (the co-founders to be of Greenwich Mural Workshop), though he did not re-enter into contact with the couple until 1975.[298] From the outset Barnes' student work showed a passion for directly observed figure and landscape scenes, which has run through his career ever since.[299] On the strength of his work at Ravensbourne, Barnes was, in 1967, accepted to the Royal College of Art.[300] In a department which remained fairly evenly balanced between realist and modernist concerns and approaches Barnes recalls being left largely to his own devices. Although what little of his work survives would seem to confirm a continued interests in portraits and cityscape scenes, a distinct lightening and brightening of palette and an intensification of crisply defined edges lend his work of this period a slightly pop-ish air, which may (or may not) be traceable to the influence of a college whose recent graduates included luminaries of British 'Pop' sensibility: David Hockney and Peter Blake.[301] In contrast to the bohemian glamour of Hockney, and commercial fascinations of Blake, and the slightly Victorian fantasy of both alumni's early work, however, Barnes' gently pop-ish realism was infused with a more worldly and quotidian focus: a care and interest in the world,

297. Barnes' facility for story-telling and his fast-witted, (frequently self-referential) humour imbue his recollections of his childhood with something of the quality of myth. In an interview with the author (August 2015) he recalled his brother's characterisation of his youth as feral: spent alternating between playing around clay pits and developing a dual interest in art and nature which was to serve him through life. The 1963 feature in the Bromley Gazette was the first of his many and continuing appearances in local newspapers.
298. Barnes seems to have re-made contact with the couple through a series of shared acquaintances, and political actions. Barnes, interview with the author, August 2015.
299. This may account for why Barnes decided against transfer to the more modernist National Diploma of Art and Design (introduced during his second year), and thus became the last student to receive what he has (half-)jokingly described as a 'proper' artistic education, in the form of the outgoing Diploma in Painting. (Barnes, interview with the author, August 2015)
300. His tutors included Ruskin Spear, Carel Weight and Peter Blake.
301. Barnes' memories that he was largely allowed to 'get on with it' by his tutors notwithstanding, it seems notable that the Royal College was, at this stage, one of the last outposts of the realism that had briefly flourished in the post-war era. See James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism. Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

scenes and people that surrounded him, the vistas of South West London, garden scenes and portraits of models and family.[302] [See figures 118-123, for a selection of student work].

It was on taking up his place at the RCA, that Barnes and his young family moved to a flat above what had been his father's television repair shop at number 6 Battersea Church Street, in the north reaches of Battersea, just one block away from the Thames and a short bus-ride across the river from the RCA.[303] In making this move to 'inner-city London' from the suburbs, Barnes is in some ways typical of the wider demographics of the 'return to the city' movements detailed above.[304] In Battersea, however, both his direction of travel and—more importantly—his political actions were in contrast to the more specific localised patterns of gentrification, which in the 1970s was largely moving outwards, as the more centralised and saturated housing markets of Kensington and Chelsea, began to overspill into the hinterlands south of the Thames. On Barnes' graduation from the RCA, the family had remained in Battersea, and Barnes had begun to teach Art and Design at the Tulse Hill Comprehensive in nearby Lambeth.[305]

It was around the same time, crucially, that Barnes became increasingly involved in local political activities, and with a group of local activists that had come to be centred around the local magazine *Pavement*. This group spanned the agitprop MayDay Theatre Collective and a series of localised campaign groups and had grown out of a local Marxist reading group called the Putney Workshops. The initiator of the workshops and editor of Pavement was

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302. His nudes perhaps betray something of the spirit of Euan Uglow, or William Coldstream.
303. Barnes met his partner Aileen at Ravensbourne. They married and had their first child in 1965. Aileen returned to finish her course at Ravensbourne before studying textiles at the Royal College.
304. See, for example, White, *London*. Though this movement is often associated with the forces of 'gentrification,' it will be seen that Barnes' politics, life and actions do not sit easily with such associations
305. Tulse Hill was a notably mixed school, described in the note above (chap.1, n. 222) by a departing National Front teacher as characterised by 'multi-racial anarchy and communist diversion' of fellow staff, (Editorial, *South East London and Kentish Mercury*, July 10, 1975). It was visited by Mohammed Ali on his visit to London, and its alumni include Linton Kwesi Johnson, Ken Livingstone, and Smiley Culture.

Ernest Rodker, a carpenter and campaigner of the New Left since the late 1950s. To E.P.

Thompson, writing in a letter to Scottish Communist John Daly, in 1959:

> *This Ernest Rodker lad is a first-class lad. He is, what a young socialist comrade ought to be, heart, soul and body in the cause. He has good initiative and good ideas. He is willing to listen and learn. He has proven himself as an organiser – did most of the publicity in London for the first Aldermaston. It would be good for him. The only problem? A beard. I have written to him and suggested to him he takes off his beard. If he does, I am telling you Bro. Daly, you will damn well have him for your campaign, and you will thank us all afterwards.*[306]

Rodker, has recently confirmed that he never did take off the beard.[307] Such matters aside, it

is notable that by the 1970s his 'initiative' and 'ideas', were moving in directions that were

quite distinct to those of the grand peace marches of the first New Left, in which he had cut

his teeth. These new modes of politics found written expression in Pavement and more

directly active form in the Battersea Redevelopment Action Group, which Barnes and Rodker

co-founded in 1973 (henceforth, referred to by the deliberately catchy acronym BRAG).

Pavement had started as a 'wall newspaper' which Rodker and others fly-posted across the

streets of Wandsworth, but from 1972 assumed a more conventional bound magazine

format.[308] If the mix of text and image and DIY aesthetics placed Pavement somewhere

between the 'zines of 1960s counterculture and those which rose up around Punk in the late

1970s, its contents attest to an eloquence, insight and involvement across an unusually broad

mix of political arenas. Articles and editorials give attention to anti-racism, diverse forms of

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306. Letter from E.P. Thompson to Lawrence Daly, dated 8th September 1959. Having left the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1956, shortly before the mass exodus which followed events in Hungary, Daly, whose father had been a founding member of the CPGB, founded the Fife Socialist League. It was in reference to, and preparation for, Daly's campaign to stand for a Parliamentary seat in West Fife in the 1959 election that Thompson was writing. Cited in David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: Opening the Box, 1957-1959* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 336.

307. Confirmed via an Email to the author, 7th June 2016. Without wanting to overstate the symbolic weight of grooming habits, photographs of their political actions make clear that beards were a near-ubiquitous accessory for those (men) of the group of Battersea campaigners in the 1970s.

308. The interest in 'wall newspapers' would seem to have filtered into Europe from a wide-ranging interest in Maoism in the late 1960s and '70s. As John Phillips has pointed out they were prominent in the activities of The *Atelier Populaire* in Paris in the late 1960s, see, John Phillips, *Agitpop 1968-2008: Activist Graphics, Images, Pop Culture* (London: London Print Studio, 2008), 8.

industrial dispute, rent strikes against councils and private landlords, squatting, local and international politics. Throughout is notable a consistent focus on class, and the localised possibilities of direct action, be that through picketing a local computer company involved in the apartheid state of South Africa, through to the reasons for and against voting in GLC elections. There is also a pronounced hostility to party politics of all forms.

BRAG had a similar tenor though more specific political remit to that expressed in Pavement. As an editorial in Pavement explained:

> *The coming years will see the greatest opportunity to rebuild the heart of London since the Great Fire of 1666. Up and down the river site after site is being vacated by existing industry and docks. Even the effect of the wartime Blitz did not produce such crucial areas for redevelopment. The Battersea Redevelopment Action Group now reveals that some 30 acres of riverside land will soon become available. It will be a tragedy if these sites were to be swallowed up by a piece-meal building of luxury flats and hotels. The action taken so far by BRAG should be supported by all local people…If these plans go through, it will be a sell-out of the interests of local people to the rich, who are moving into Battersea as house prices soar.*[309]

It was around precisely the question of asserting the rights of the local community to have a say in the future of this 30-acre site of riverside land that BRAG organised. The methods used by the group were diverse: occupations and banner drops in newly built luxury flats; the picketing and shutting down of meetings of local councils, property developers and companies with interests in the redevelopment of the area; a series of agitprop plays made in collaboration with the MayDay Theatre Collective and performed in pubs, factories and public squares across the borough and beyond; setting into process judicial and public reviews; and, crucially, a series of posters and art works which utilised the techniques Barnes had learned at evening printing classes, and which were fly-posted around the area (often alongside more conventional graffitied slogans).

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309. Pavement, "Biggest chance Since Great Fire," *Pavement,* Vol 2, no 9. November, 1972, (Pavement, London).

From 1973 onwards, BRAG's most concerted and sustained campaign was directed against the Morgan Crucible Company. Founded in Battersea in 1851, Morgan's opened its factory in 1856. Having maintained production throughout the war, despite being a principle target to German bombers, by the 1970s—with money from a Government relocation scheme—Morgan's were moving their operations to Wales. The move was finalised in 1976. These plans, made at the cost of hundreds of local jobs, were accompanied by plans to capitalise on the value of the riverside land, by selling it to property speculators to be turned into luxury flats and offices. These plans would require a re-zoning of the site by the local council and were to be aided by the selling of land owned by the GLC to afford access to the river. It was against these plans that BRAG focussed its resources and energies. Morgan's stood as a particularly effective symbol of their wider concerns, highlighting the misuse of public money, the localised cost of nationalised planning, the local council's complicity in the decline of local working-class jobs, and the widespread acquiescence of local politicians to the transfer of land to private speculators.[310]

The posters which Barnes made for the campaigns against Morgan's reveal the pace of his development as a graphic artist and printmaker over these years. The earliest print Barnes made for BRAG was the rather austere lithographed landscape scene, 'Don't Let Morgan's Walk All Over You', of 1973. Derived from a painting Barnes had made several years before, the lithograph presented a view of the Morgan's site from a raised vantage point on the north banks of the river, with the text of its title laid out above it in a freehand font [See figures 124-126].[311] Consciously or otherwise, the view from the north of the Thames looking south

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310. For the evolution of the campaign against Morgan's, see Pavement, 1973-1976.
311. Barnes had made the painting several years before while still a student at the Royal College, having managed to persuade a decorator working in the Cheyne walk apartment to allow him to work from the window.

over the embankment and the river, tapped into a longstanding pre-occupation amongst British artists with that particular wide-spreading stretch of river: JMW Turner, James Abbot McNeil Whistler, Wilson Steer, and others had all made numerous studies and paintings looking south from the banks and houses of Cheyne Walk, just a little further to the East.[312] It also registered that equally longstanding sub-genre of cityscapes seen from raised windows, which flourished under the bourgeois Paris of French Impressionism and pioneering photographers, and continued forwards into the 20th Century through images like Boccioni's *The City Rises*.[313] For all this art historical positioning, however, the Lithograph's effectiveness as political poster is less convincing: the distancing of the site of interest brought about by the attention to the well-kept geometric plant beds in the foreground diluting the clarity of the industrial focus and, more problematically, perhaps, a total absence of interplay between the textual statement and the image.[314]

By February 1974, however, we see Barnes changing tack, and beginning what was to become a twelve-year series of black and white screen-prints, which he and BRAG fly-posted across the walls of Battersea and used as placards for demonstrations [see figures 127-132]. United by the presence of a close-up focus on the same patch of riverfront as the lithograph,

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312. As Richard Cork observed, Turner used to cross over the very same patch of river in a row boat from his apartment on the north banks to visit a Battersea Church. Richard Cork, "A Hod Full of Bricks, a Fistful of Dollars," *The Guardian,* June 11, 1979.

313. It is, with its liminality between interior and exterior spaces, between the framing of the private view and the observed public sphere, a multiply resonant format throughout the modern era. It is characteristic of Impressionist scenes, and continued through Matisse, Picasso, and Futurism to whole subgenres of holiday 'snaps'. But it also traces back from here to with first photographic image of a person as realised from Niepces' window. It seems notable that the evolution of this visual form coincides historically with Henri Lefebvre's contention (channelling Heidegger) that the Third Republic (in the future tense) 'will conceive the notion of *habitat*. Until then, to 'inhabit', meant to take part in a social life, a community, village or city. Urban life had, among other qualities, this attribute. It gave the right to inhabit, it allowed townsmen-citizens to inhabit.' Henri Lefebvre, "The Right to the City," in *Writing on Cities* trans. Eleanore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 76.

314. Indeed, the prospect of the site from a luxury Chelsea apartment seems a wildly inappropriate focus for a political group devoted to fight against Chelsea's influence. Whilst the focus on the industrial stacks distances the work from the kind of 'l'art pour l'art' vision of the 'Nocturne' series Whistler began just up river from the site, it is, nonetheless a somewhat clunky vista, as far as the interplay of political intent and artistic vision.

the series casts the Morgan's factory as a stage set for the image of cow in various states of interaction with greedy avaricious property speculators and the CEO of Morgan's (with occasional interjections from Barnes himself to knock sense into the speculators and spill over their pales full of milked pound notes). With their simple outlines, and clear bold contrasts these were (at the outset) the works of an artist coming to terms with the medium of screen print and are perhaps less aesthetically refined than the initial lithograph.[315] In their strong development of a clear, legible and locally focussed iconography, their humour and their broad range of stylistic reference,[316] however, these were increasingly effective political images. They took aim at the greed of the encroaching developers and struck out in defence of the communal right to a share of Battersea. Pointed, aggressive and metaphorically resonant, they marked the origins of the satirical humour, which underpins Barnes' early development and came to full fruition in the Battersea mural. The posters were a fitting accompaniment to BRAG's campaigns, which saw the group ejected from board meetings in London and Wales, whilst holding the speculators to public tribunals [See figure 133-138].

The idea for a mural, seems to have grown directly out of the tactics BRAG was pursuing against Morgan's (their openness to the use of fly-posting, agitprop and confrontation), and the chance existence of a vacant plot of land owned by the GLC at the perimeter of the recently vacated factory site. This site—once cleared—afforded a view of the factory wall from the busy Battersea Bridge Road, and BRAG (operating under different organisational names) were able to successfully persuade the GLC to allow them to create a 'pocket park' on

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315. John Phillips, for example, notes that a certain absence of technical facility held back the production of political prints across this era. (John Phillips, interview with the author, August 2015).
316. The cow's form, for example, whilst most frequently derived from a ceramic mural Barnes had rescued from a closing local dairy, also morphs into the form of Franz Marc's *Yellow Cow* (1911), in the 1984 *Victory*, and Poussin's *Golden Calf* (1633-4), in a BRAG letterhead.

it [see figure 139].[317] The existence of the (enormous) empty wall in such public view on the very site whose future BRAG had been devoting such energies to contesting, was a remarkable opportunity. Placing a mural on the wall would allow for an expansion of Barnes' visual campaign against Morgan's at the very location where it could make most effect: on a busy thoroughfare which ran directly past the factory site. Furthermore, upon completion, the existence of the mural could be—and very quickly was—used as a further pretext to campaign against Morgan's development plans: objecting to their plans for the site on the basis of the wall's artistic, and new social value.[318]

Conversely, of course, the convenience of the wall for BRAG's purposes presented a series of challenges. Firstly, there was the question of permissions. In the cases of the other murals examined in this chapter, this was largely a formality: the justification of a community interest having been more than enough to convince already politically sympathetic owners of the walls. Morgan's wall, however, was an entirely different proposition. They were, after all, the very company from whose board meetings in Wales, Barnes, Rodker and other BRAG activists had been forcefully ejected in 1975 and against whose potentially very profitable plans for redevelopment BRAG were a nagging, persistent and determined opponent. Barnes' solution, was to set up the Wandsworth Mural Workshop, and to populate its management

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317. The use of direct community action to bring back areas of publicly owned land into communal use and control, is evocative of the community gardens which flourished across London, but also brings to mind the international examples of the Situationist rallying cries of 1968 ('Sous Les Pavés, La Plage') and the high profile reclamations of the 'People's Park' in Berkley California of the same year. More importantly, however, I would argue it is typical of the strategies being pursued across London and the UK throughout the 1970s, with myriad adventure playgrounds, community gardens and pocket parks being made by communities across the country (with or without funds from local government). These attempts to transform the vacant lots and unused land (which were multiplying all over London) into expanded centres of communal life, amounted to a significant reclamation of the public sphere, that has all too often been over looked by theoreticians, skipping as they do (once again) between the hegemony of social democracy and that of neoliberalism. Many of the small parks and adventure playgrounds which continue (just) to intersperse London's inner city, date from this era. Barnes was also successful in creating a pocket park in Thessaly Gardens which was to become the site of his second major mural.
318. Following the mural's completion, Barnes very quickly wrote to the Arts Council and other organisations emphasising the imminent threat to the mural posed by Morgan's.

committees with people not officially associated with BRAG. The Wandsworth Mural

Workshop then applied to Morgan's for permission to paint a mural which condensed the

local 'community's fears and aspirations'. Remarkably, given that Barnes' name was

prominent in WMW's' structure, and amidst the many newspaper reports that accompanied

the mural's two-year period of completion, Morgan's granted the permission and didn't

intervene with the site while painting continued.[319]

With this considerable potential hurdle overcome in Summer of 1976, Barnes and those

grouped around BRAG and WMW set about work on the mural. It is of particular note, given

a recurrent tendency to view these murals as a product of 'municipal socialism', that this

mural, as with GMW's first mural at Creek Road (and many others besides) was begun with a

cavalier and voluntary enthusiasm, and 'shoestring economics' that derails any sense of

conventional patronage or financial incentive.[320] If this is a tendency that is shared by a

number of muralists in their earliest projects, however, it is particularly remarkable in the

case of a wall which, at 18 x 190ft was—as Barnes never fails to point out—as wide as the

Sistine Chapel is long.[321] As such, whilst Barnes was no doubt very happy and encouraged

by the £350 grant from Wandsworth Borough Council—a grant which at least allowed him to

cover some of the costs of the project—the vast majority of the work on the mural was done

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319. Whilst Barnes made concerted effort to ensure that BRAG's name was not associated with the mural, many local newspapers soon made the connection. It is, as such, probably a token of the low level of agency which Morgan's executives imagined art to have, that the mural was allowed to go ahead at all.

320. As noted, the notion of the murals as relics of 'Municipal Socialism' has been put forward most forcefully by Owen Hatherley over recent years, connecting, as it does with his own interest in post-war social housing. See for example, Hatherley, *New Ruins,* 330: 'Yet the GLC, unlike its precursor, the LCC did not (for financial and political reasons) leave a legacy of great buildings, or of social housing estates. Its presence can be seen in these murals more than anywhere else; their naivety, earnestness, daring and enthusiasm speak for the politics of the time'. Or his introduction to, The Work in Progress, *Reclaim the Mural*. In both cases Hatherley's failure to deal with the conjunctural, grass roots dimensions of 1970s radicalism leads to a temporal and institutional misdiagnosis of the evolution of muralism.

321. Though Barnes in fact tends to claim that the wall was larger than the Sistine chapel, he seems to forget that the height of the chapel is significantly more than that of his wall. Its width, however, *is* remarkably similar to the chapel's length.

in weekends and spare moments of release from his teaching job.[322] From January 1977,

however, Barnes was able to devote more time to the mural, owing to his securing of a grant

from the Gulbenkian Foundation for the post of Battersea's 'artist-in-the-community'. This

was added to by supplementary grant from the Edward Austin Abbey Mural Fund in 1978, as

the mural came near completion, and by the donation of paints form Crown Paints. There is,

nonetheless, a sprawling sense of amateurish enthusiasm by which this, and many other early

mural projects willed into life, which should not be overlooked.

Barnes' movement towards, and conception of, the role of artist-in-the-community seems

worth contrasting with that made, for example, by Greenwich Mural Workshop.[323] For where

Kenna and Lobb, in response to Kenna's trip to the United States, had set out from the

beginning to work *with* 'community groups in a local area', it seems notable that Barnes,

conceived his position from the outset as an active member *of* the community in which he

lived. Living just one street away from the mural, and having, over the course of his political

campaigning in 1974 and 1975, come into contact with, and begun to make screen prints for,

a wide range of local political and community groups, the position of artist-in-the-

community, was made as a relatively organic transition from his life and activity in the area in

which he lived. This difference is significant and somewhat complex—and is one amongst

the many subtle distinctions that Owen Kelly was probably right to highlight, in his 1984

essay on the community arts, had never been adequately theorised by a movement unwilling

to theorise its own progress.[324] Whilst Barnes has, on occasion been criticised by those who

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322. A diary Barnes kept over the entire process of painting the wall reveals the difficulty of balancing the painting around the multiple responsibilities for campaigning in the area and caring for his young family.
323. Barnes maintained this position under Gulbenkian funding for two years, but continued with the support of the Arts Council, the Greater London Arts Association and the GLC, as a community artist right through to the early 1990s, combining mural work with printmaking, and a commitment towards 'spreading knowledge of the arts'.
324. Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*.

argue his political 'propaganda', was obtained on false funds, his active identification with active and localised struggles, forms a welcome counterpoint to an all too common liberal tendency to view 'community' as the disadvantaged other.[325] In Barnes' work the tendency is arguably the inverse, with Barnes feeling free to distil, interpret and lead the will of the wider community.[326] As he stated in a 1978 conference, and has repeated more recently, there is always an extent to which the community is led by the artist in any collaboration.[327] Whilst GMW and the Association of Community Artists, may have established procedures for consultation that provided a more formalised sense of involvement, it is notable that Barnes' familiarity with the community in which he worked, with its landmarks, dynamics and, crucially, its politics meant that his mural undoubtedly draw upon the views and interests of the local community. Furthermore, notwithstanding an admission of leadership, Barnes did make efforts, in both political campaigning and publicity, to engage local residents [see figures 140-142].[328] Indeed, the stalls he had run with members of BRAG for some time, were arguably a more extended mode of consultation than many others ever made.

325. Whilst Barnes may occasionally have pitched towards this in his funding applications, his understanding of class and his identification with the areas in which he worked, shines through.

326. The complex issue of political representation seems crucial, but under-examined in conceptualisations of community arts. Whilst Barnes' tendency to present his own politics as those of the community is no doubt far from conceptually water-tight, it is notable that no conception of community involvement in fact is, and even those whose collaborative methods were as conceptualised, emulated and revered as Greenwich Mural Workshop admit that designs and consultation often came to a matter of persuasion.

327. Brian Barnes, contribution to "Conference Seminar 2:1," Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Record of the First National Mural Conference*, (9th - 10th November, 1978), Battersea Arts Centre, in ACGB Archives, ACGB/32/137, Murals, November 1976- Feb1983: 'One of the biggest problems I've found is that people think it's what kids do, so there's difficulty encouraging people. When you've got the wall painted white and the scaffolding up, then people come up and ask to have a go: but until then it's a struggle. Since I had 8 years at college, I have that dual problem of creating images that I think relevant and being a community worker and doing images that relate to the community; but that, so far has been resolved fairly successfully. Mainly because I put my case very strongly that it should be done, and feel strongly about the image, and generally they accept. I suppose it's the difficulty of showing people what art is.'

328. As Barnes stated: 'The way we go about involving the local community is by publicity basically – public meetings, leaflets around the area of the murals. We are identifying a wall and asking people to say if it is the right wall and asking them what they want it to be about. And from these meetings come the ideas for the picture. From that verbal design stage I then put that into pictorial form and continually take ideas back to those people who have shown interest'. Greenwich Mural Workshop, *First National Mural Conference*.

The Mural

If Barnes had not theorised the nature of 'community art' to the same degree as some of his peers, the sheer scale of the wall he was attempting to paint, soon meant that he was forced, by circumstance, to develop a wide range of methods of community engagement. Work on the mural began in September of 1976, with Barnes and a team of volunteers working on clearing the site, undercoating and squaring up the wall over the weekends, and finally beginning to transfer the first elements of the design on Sunday 26th. Work on the main section of the mural was to continue for 18 months, with attentions then devoted to the side wall. In total approximately sixty locals were enlisted the help paint: the mode of their solicitation and involvement ranging from young passing children sent up ladders with single colours to fill an area, through to heavily populated volunteer days, and the longer term involvement of artist friends like Chris Orr, and Barnes' wife Aileen, and their two children, all of whom assumed responsibility for certain sections at various times. Throughout, Barnes served as an artistic director and often substantially reworked sections painted insufficiently by volunteers.

A Press Release addressed 'Dear Neighbour', and distributed to residents of two local estates in October 1976, confirms that by this early stage the theme and general compositional schema of the mural had been largely confirmed, following 'conversation with locals':

> *On the long wall a large broom will be sweeping some of Battersea's problems (derelict factories and tower office blocks, Garton's smell and trendy restaurants, empty luxury flats and juggernauts, the Heliport and Battersea Park's Waterchute) into a huge crushing machine on the shorter wall. The broom will have swept clean a space for the benefits that could come to Battersea (low rise housing with gardens a swimming pool, allotments and adventure playgrounds, a riverside walk and expanded public transport system) pictured together with local landmarks and well known Battersea people.*[329]

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329. Brian Barnes, "Letter to residents of Ethelburgh estate," October 1976, Archive of Brian Barnes. Whilst this description indeed conforms in large part to what was completed, it is notable that certain elements shifted over time and that Barnes continued to refine the designs across the two years of work.

Whilst changes continued to be made to the designs and detail of the mural, the description confirms that this was—from the outset —to be an enormously ambitious image. Stretching all the way across two adjoining walls it was to be the 'largest and most public' mural in London.[330] As with the murals already discussed it was to incorporate iconography derived from the local area. Here, however, the image was going to be both more diverse and more complex: covering not only the positive affirmations of local community examined thus far, but also the negative features of the area. Whilst this dual approach can, in part, be seen in relation to Barnes' evolution as a political artist across these years, the degree of complexity was also, in some degree, imposed by the scale and—perhaps more importantly—the format of the wall. At 18 x 190 ft, it was clear that any single image would either occupy a very small position from the distance of the road or need to be multiply divided. If one strategy— with roots back to antiquity—would be to tackle such a long extended wall as a frieze, Barnes instead took the decision to present it as a series of eleven, roughly square panels, of loosely interconnecting scenes [see figures 145-146] The multiple division of such a large wall is a common tactic for murals across this period, and far beyond, and allowed for Barnes to continue refining his ideas and break up the workload of the wall into manageable chunks.[331] It was not, however, without significant risks: threatening to split the wall's impact and complicate its reading. The episodic approach, did, however, have the advantage of allowing Barnes to create a more wide-reaching painting. Rather than the singular heroic actions of the murals thus far examined, therefore, it allowed for a more complex panoramic totality: one which was well suited to the wide-ranging propositions and campaigning interests of BRAG in the area.

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330. Barnes, "Letter to residents."
331. Such modes of multiple division can, of course, be observed in medieval churches where divergent sections could fill in different episodes of Saints lives, or divergent Saints, in an order which could correspond to liturgical, architectural or narrative functions.

Of the many ways in which artists chose to deal with split episodic compositions in murals over the time-period of this study (and beyond), it is notable that Barnes' method is one, which at first inspection seems to favour fairly subtle gradations, underpinned by a regular unit scale and emergent sense of underlying symmetry. Rather than the firm linear divisions reminiscent of cartoon story boards or medieval panel paintings, or the seemingly random flows and juxtapositions of space we witness in later murals (for example that of Ray Walker examined in Chapter 2) Barnes' eleven equally proportioned sections are loosely blended into a near continuous scene, united by a seemingly common horizon, and relatively even scale and chromatic range.[332] If we gain some sense of simultaneity and rupture, therefore, in the gentle undulating rhythm by which the mural jumps between mildly alternating vanishing points through the range of interiors and exteriors and across diverse locations ranging from allotments to factory floors, there is little of the more dramatic modes of spatial fracture and discontinuity that characterises so much twentieth century art and mural painting. Rather than rupture, it is almost despite themselves that a casual observer is likely to have come to note the seams and disjunctions over which their gaze has passed between, for example, (to work from the left foreground) an allotment, a cobbled street, a factory floor and a swimming pool.

The quality of near-continuous space which unites the wall is, however, notably undermined by the enormous shift of scale presented by the broom, whose magnified head, with its individually defined and diversely tensioned bristles, occupies the central panel of the mural's main wall [see figure 148]. The broom's centrality somewhat lessens its disjunctive

332. As will be seen, it is my contention that a viewer's perception would have altered with time. This is, unfortunately, impossible to verify with much certainty in the absence of a first-hand account which considers the temporal dimensions of viewing the work, and its subsequent destruction. It is, however, based on my own relation with to the work through images and slides—and an attempt to reconstruct the complexity of the reception of exterior murals.

effect, but once this break point is noted, it becomes clear that it stands at a division between the stylistic and thematic categories of the work: with the sensitive (pop-infused) realism of the left hand side, representing a utopia of the Battersea 'Good' (of the title), whilst to the right a more aggressively fragmented, decomposing dystopia of Battersea's 'Bad and Ugly', seems poised to be swept into a in a state of deserved disintegration [See figures 147-149]. These stylistic contrasts are only relative and the division between the two sections is rendered subtle by the relatively even horizon line and bright popish hues. Once noted, however, a clearer sense of division, emerges between the inhabited (and inhabitable) space of the left and the uninhabited (and largely uninhabitable) space of the right—which is in fact largely given over to facades and exteriors of buildings shooting off into the sky. This right hand section presents no mid-ground: the industrial, modernist architecture (though occupying roughly the same proportion of the wall as that to the left), is rendered with its multiple vanishing points pulled back, down, and in multiple directions away from the centre of the (four square) subdivided sections [see figure 150]. As a result, the buildings cascade unevenly into one another and the regularity of the sections become harder to determine. Before these buildings the three portrait figures (as against the forty-one portraits on the left-hand section) are presented in violent falling (or descending) motion amidst a world of similarly floating logos and a helicopter.

Be it in the paired vices and virtues of Giotto's Arena Chapel, in Padova, the heaven and hell which underpin the *Last Judgement* scene (1306) at the apex of that and so many other chapels, or, moving forwards, the juxtapositions between capitalist and communist figures that took up the central sections of Diego Rivera's famous Rockefeller mural (1933) or the pre-Hispanic and post-conquest attentions of the West and East Wings of Jose Clemente Orozco's *The Epic of American Civilization* at Dartmouth College (1932-34), the

compositional and narrative potential of the binary division between contrasting spheres is one with a long tradition in the visual arts, and mural painting in particular [see figures 151-153]. Such binary compositions afford the opportunity (particularly useful in the architecturally or spatially integrated mural form) for the creation of a centred, more or less symmetrical composition, but also, of course, for a narrative of dialectical relations.[333] Seen against this tradition, what becomes apparent about the Battersea mural, however, is the quotidian tangibility of its utopian and dystopian scenes. For, whilst Barnes' descriptions of the mural (and the broom's sweeping action) imply a sense of temporal progression, the good emerging in the wake of the bad, it is notable that both sides derive their iconography from tangible contemporary realities, gleaned from an area of no more than two miles in radius.[334] Rather than the eschatological transmutation of physical realities presented in a Last Judgement, or the civilizational epic of Orozco, therefore, both utopian and dystopian scenes are taken very directly from the geographical realities and social forces which were pressing upon the contemporary neighbourhood. The separation that such a localised iconography gives to a work from even the more modern of the aforementioned dialectical compositions is considerable and is perhaps best highlighted by the centrepiece of the mural. For here, in place of Christ in Majesty of Last Judgement scenes, or Rivera's heroic male worker at the crossroads of history, we are left with a magnified and slightly dishevelled broom head. The bathos of this divergence is, I would argue, central to the work's tone: to its fusion of knowing humour, and ludic political pragmatism.

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333. Indeed, we could no doubt argue that the binary is one of the most persistent modes in the history of narrative painting more generally, with the divisions between the celestial and earthly realms, between heaven and hell and between man and god, man and woman, underpinning much of the narrative content of painting from the Christian era forwards. In the 19th and 20th centuries, such tensions might be seen to have turned increasingly inwards, be that through those genres of interior and exteriors mentioned in the balcony scenes (see chap. 1 n. 313), through the relations of man and nature in the sublimes of romanticism, or the more focussed perceptual explorations of artists amidst the exterior microcosms of their studios or spiritualist fantasies.
334. With Garton's being the western-most point against the Kambala estate to the east, it is indeed a hyper localised iconography.

The bathos of the possible iconological relation between Last Judgement scenes, or Rivera's mural, and the walls of Battersea is unlikely to have been accessible to many beyond the realms of art historians. The proximate familiarity of the mural's broader iconography, however, will have been, and, in turn, a very important aspect of the proximity and tangibility of the mural's iconography will have been precisely the slow unfolding of some of the dialectical tensions outlined above. In this sense, the mural seems likely to have offered an important appeal to viewers who may not have shared Barnes' political opinions, allowing them to piece together the overarching structural propositions from a gradual perception of divergent details. This highlights a remarkably important feature in external mural painting, which is rarely noted. For, in contrast to gallery art or interior murals, where the spaces of display tend, as Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach have noted, to be orientated towards the rituals of aesthetic contemplation, the mode of reception for exterior murals is quite divergent. At once more protracted and more fleeting, exterior murals tend towards a deferred engagement across many encounters—over years, or in some cases, life-times—and in vastly varying states of interest and distraction. As Walter Benjamin has observed, '[d]istraction and concentration form polar opposites…a man [sic] who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art. This is most obvious with regard to buildings. Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction'.[335] Spanning pictorial and architectural modes, mural paintings, and in particular exterior mural paintings, are absorbed by a complex mix of the tactile habits of physical interaction and the cognitive absorption of concentration. As such, the means by which they move between these modes, stirring people out of distraction and towards

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335. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana Press, 1973), 232.

concentration is of vital importance. Without wanting to imply a universal viewership, therefore, the deferred but deepening revelation of dialectical division in the Battersea mural, its subtle unfolding through a localised iconography and shared chromatic range, nonetheless divided with subtly, but firmly distinctive architectonic and iconographic characteristics, offers a crucial element of its success: underlying an accessibility and appeal that precedes a developing awareness of its political bite.[336]

If the political bite of the mural is likely to have been deferred, however, it was nonetheless forceful for it, and indeed once we note the more frenetic pace of the right-hand section it is impossible to escape the dystopian atmosphere of its cascading collapsing spaces. The iconography matches the atmosphere and deserves some elaboration. Rising from the dust of the broom is the *Morgan Man* logo which rises into a representation of the dilapidated Morgan's factory (on whose very walls the mural is painted). This Morgan Man is based on a sculpture of the figure at Morgan's new headquarters in Wales whose public unveiling Barnes and BRAG had attended (and disrupted) [see figure 154-155].[337] From here we move to the Garton's Glucose factory whose 'stench' had provided the infamous Battersea aroma across the 20th Century. If Tate & Lyle's 1976 purchase of the works offered a good reason for Mr Cube's attendance, he was also, as Barnes emphasised at the time, a very useful symbol of post-war British capitalism: having been invented as a riposte to Clement Attlee's plans to nationalise sugar, Mr Cube waged war with the state in a variety of ads and cartoons across the 1940s and 1950s [see figure 156]. Across the 1970s, meanwhile, the Tate & Lyle Sugar Workers' Strike had taken strike action to focus on the risk to 9,000 jobs made by the terms of

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336. This accessibility and appeal seems confirmed in the quite bizarre revelation that even those figures who were castigated in the right-hand passage of the mural, (Charles Forte and Cllrs Mike Tapsell and Tony Belton) all expressed a fondness and desire to be photographed with the mural at some point over the years following its completion. Brian Barnes, interview with the author, June 2016.
337. And whose 'Michelangelesque musculature' Barnes noted in his diary as being distinctly 'pedestrian'. Barnes diaries.

the UK's entrance to the EEC.[338] From here, the pointed towers of Garton's find their extension in the cartoonish fabrication of the Disneyland castle that speculators had hoped to build in Battersea park, before being dissuaded by local opposition ('crap, insecure, Mickey Mouse service sector jobs', were not what Battersea needed, BRAG protested in a 1972 campaign) [See figures 157-160]. In the foreground Mickey Mouse jumps away from the water chute of Battersea's recently defunct theme park, its water here merged to a destructive fire, perhaps recalling the fatal crash at the theme park in 1972, or perhaps merely suited to the descent of the theme park's main speculative investor Charles Forte—who rides the chute into the flaming netherworld. Next come the towers of the Doddington and Rollo estates, both noted for their exceptionally poor build quality, malfunctioning lifts and inadequate plumbing which, as John Broughton notes, at one point saw 400 of the Doddington's 970 flats lose heating and 'two plumbers…kept on permanent standby to deal with problems'.[339] The local housing officer responsible for their completion and upkeep takes a karmic slip before them, to the amusement of Mr Toad, a character derived from a local 'yuppie' restaurant'.[340] Finally, between the luxury apartment blocks of (yet another) 'Valiant House' and the logo of the Bat Cave restaurant (also 'yuppie') floats a helicopter. Across the foreground, meanwhile, Winnie the Pooh logo, joins the Toad and the Bat's Cave as a third animal-based gentrifying restaurant, its bins shown overflowing into the street as they frequently did, to the complaints of residents [see figure 161-162].[341]

338. See, British Pathé, *Tate and Lyle Sugar Workers' Strike (1970-79)*, accessed September 10, 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IED3MA3oW8. Of particular note is the focus of discussion upon an absence of local control.
339. John Broughton, "A Brief History of Council Housing in Wandsworth, Part 2," *Municipal Dreams*, Blog, 19th January 2016, accessed September 2, 2019, https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2016/01/19/a-brief-history-of-council-housing-in-wandsworth-part-ii-1945-to-the-present/.
340. Brian Barnes, interview with the author, June 2016.
341. Barnes, *Interview June 2016*.

What is united, in the cascading rhythm of this section, therefore, is a wide-ranging spectrum of the buildings, businesses and interests whose domination of the local economy and landscape BRAG felt to be to the detriment of the local community. These are the pinpointed and existing foes of the area as BRAG saw them. And indeed, moving from the destruction and sweeping away of declining industry, through the aborted fantasy speculation of Disneyland, via the mismanagement of local council officials, to the speculative luxury flats in their wake, this is an image of social ills that possesses a historical dynamism and understanding far more sophisticated and wide-ranging than many of those that have followed. For, rather than a singular focus upon, for example, yuppie restaurants, or polluting factories, here, the diverse spheres of negligence, pollution and economic exploitation emerge from a complex of forces which lie beyond the control and accountability of the local community. These span the borders of the state and capital, economy and culture. Here, therefore, the agitprop of the early BRAG posters—the pinpointing and positioning of blame—is expanded into a cycle encapsulating the wide-ranging malaises of the present and existing area. Such an understanding is significant, uniting the spheres, of urban pollution, industrial decline and gentrification within a singular composition, recalling that what was going was not 'a narrow and quixotic oddity in the housing market', a freak moment to industrial decline, or isolated moments of waste or pollution, but rather part of 'a much larger endeavour: the class remake of the central urban landscape'.[342]

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342. As Neil Smith observed, such understandings were not immediately apprehended. Charting the evolution of his own work as an urban geographer Smith notes that a change emerged in his approach to gentrification around 1979, in which he began to perceive that '[g]entrification is no longer about a narrow and quixotic oddity in the housing market but has become the leading residential edge of a much larger endeavour: the class remake of the central urban landscape'. Smith, *The New Frontier*, 37. Such a description certainly fits Battersea in the mid-1970s, with large developers moving in to take advantage of the rent gap left by retreating industry. It was, indeed noted by *Pavement* in the 1973 article cited above (see chap. 1, n. 309).

By contrast, the left-hand section presents a much more static, harmonious and inhabitable space [see figure 147]. Moving from the central broom to the left we see a triplet of swallows rising into the air across the arcs of the rainbow which lies across a deep recessing field. This section, immediately establishes its contrast to the more cluttered and geometric world of the right-hand side. Moving leftwards we merge into a playground section watched over by a portrait of Barnes' daughter with a bouquet of balloons. Here the rainbows' bright tones are carried through in the balloons and the playground equipment (based on the recently constructed adventure playground in Battersea Park). From here we move to the low rise Kambala estate, which was at that time being built to the principles of community architecture in the eastern reaches of Battersea, through a process of consultation with the local community. Next, we move into an interior of a local lathe factory, foregrounded, somewhat surreally, by a swimming pool. The orthogonals of the lathe factory are lined to the left by the facades of the 18th century Wandsworth Village. Beyond these the next section opens up to the forecourt of the local bus garage (sited opposite the mural) with bus drivers, conductors and nurses in conversation, a nurse and young people on bicycle and skateboard, projecting from the arch of a railway bridge. The final, left most section, meanwhile transitions to a riverside walk, with Battersea Bridge (itself some 30 metres or so to the right of the mural, and an allotment being tended by Barnes' wife Aileen. Across this section are the forty-one portraits of local people including a diverse sweep of children from the local estates, who had stopped by to watch or help the mural's painting, local nurses and bus conductors who stopped by to watch progress, and portraits of Barnes, Aileen, their children, and BRAG activists [see figures 163-165].

It seems notable that it was the right-hand dystopia of the mural that attracted the most positive comments from the most serious extended commentary on the work—a review by

Richard Cork, in the *Guardian*.[343] Rightly, Cork praised the, 'inventiveness with which

Barnes veers between fact and fantasy, reportage and wish-fulfilment, expose and mythology

throughout this [right-hand] section'.[344] Yet where Cork felt that in the left half of the mural

'this pictorial energy faltered', and that this faltering meant that that section no longer 'stood

as a model of the vitality [Barnes] wanted to see restored to Battersea's communal life', I

would diverge.[345] For, whilst the right hand passage may have appealed more to Cork's

pronouncedly modernist tastes, it is precisely in the conjunction between the halves, and

panoramic scope of 'the Good', and 'the Bad', with both their contrasts and their unity, that

lies at the core of Barnes' hopes for communal life, and the accomplishment of the mural.

What emerges, however, is not the sense of a communality to be 'restored to Battersea's life'

but rather a communality that already existed, and—the mural proposed— to be strengthened,

nurtured, celebrated and defended. This divergent temporal reading: not of a return to an

idealised past, but as a mediation upon, and attempted intervention within, actual and present

relations is crucial to the murals dialectical structure and reading.

Beyond the contrasts between the open, inhabited space of the left and the alienating facades

of the collapsing architectures to the right, further important propositions emerge from the

relations between the two.[346] Broadly, we might identify these contrasts and relations as

operating across the spheres of work, leisure and housing. In terms of labour, the mural

contrasts between the exterior of polluting industrial factories across the right-hand section

and diverse spheres of embodied labour on the left: the council's construction workers on the

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343. Typically, the report was not published until after the mural's destruction. Richard Cork, "A Hod Full of Bricks, a Fistful of Dollars," *The Guardian,* June 11, 1979. Other coverage came from local newspapers.
344. Cork, *Hod Full of Bricks*.
345. Cork.
346. The question of architectural style is once more of interest here, with the predominant industrial modernism of the right-hand passage set off against a distinct historical amalgam in the left: with the low-rise Kambala Estate and remnants of Wandsworth Village's 18th century facades. The whole thus forms a counterpoint between a modernist dystopia set against a utopian admixture of styles: a valuing unlikely to sit well with Hatherley's dislike of postmodern, surburbanist relativism.

Kambala estate, bus drivers, conductors and nurses on the forecourt of the bus depot and the small scale local lathe factory. With the exception of the lathe manufacturer (which was, as Barnes observes, a cooperative), all other spheres are public sector jobs, and all—including the lathe factory—occupy a singular (if lightly subdivided) common space with the surrounding spheres. Labour, therefore, merges seamlessly, into the spheres and spaces of leisure revealed in the activities (to move from left to right) of child-rearing, gardening, skateboarding, cycling, swimming and playing. The contrast with the right-hand section— where restaurants and a private theme park proposed on public land, are embodied by logos hovering within a largely unpeopled space—reveals a division between public and private: parks, open spaces and free communal leisure contrasted with a proposed private theme park (on public land) and gentrifying restaurants. Housing in the right-hand section is represented by (private) Georgian facades, the ill-fated Doddington and Rollo Estates and the recently constructed Valiant House luxury flats. On the left, meanwhile, these are contrasted with the community architecture of the Kambala estate.

Together these contrasts reveal the profoundly contrasting forces of urbanisation active across the period: not—as Cork posits—a temporal division, so much as a dynamic mediation upon the questions of agency, control and collectivity as pressing on contemporary Battersea. In these terms, the right-hand section is characterised by the control of capital, with the acquiescence of local government officials to its interests (as embodied in the slipping local councillors and infamy of the Doddington and Rollo estate). The left, by turns, reveals a rejection of the interests of capital, not—as might be typecast of the libertarian left—through a withdrawal or aquarian denial of class interests or industrial society. But not, either, by the narrow, rearward glancing economism or nostalgic workerism, of which organised labour was often accused. Rather, the mural offers a celebration of a shared public sphere spanning

industrial labour, care and public service work, all flowing into an abundance of collective recreation. It is of note also, that both halves of the mural draw upon the campaigns pursued by BRAG and other community groups across the period. So, to move across the right-hand passage, Valiant House serves as a reminder to the occupations of the building by BRAG, to highlight the speculative nature of its unsellable luxury flats; restaurant logos pay tribute to the complaints against the impositions of yuppie restaurants from local press and residents, and the Disneyland theme Park, Tate and Lyle, and Morgan's Factory buildings all pay tribute to specific campaigns by BRAG or organised labour. But, across the left-hand section also we can see the propositional sphere of local activism, including the construction of adventure playgrounds and community gardens,[347] the (successful) campaign to save the Latchmere baths from destruction, and the construction of the Kambala estate in light of the pressures of and demands for tenants control across the period.

Against the more heroic register of the preceding murals of this chapter, the dialectical approach of Barnes' Battersea mural, therefore, allows us to perceive, in greater detail, the extent to which a radical 1970s Leftist critique of the post-war pact as well as the contemporary movements of capital was much better founded and more robust than is commonly allowed for. Beyond the polarities of voluntarist libertarian escapism, or un-reconstituted economistic labourism which have often been thrown at one or another section of the Left of the period, the mural reveals a locally orientated series of action and demands. These were vigorously critical of the failings of post-war social democracy, with its

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347. Adventure playgrounds were another prominent feature of 1970s community action, opened up by the possibilities of the 'rent gap', (see Smith, *The New Frontier*) as well as the radical tenor of the moment's politics. Pavement magazine, for example, describes the construction of an adventure playground at the nearby Fownes Estate, rejecting the notion that all it takes is 'a little goodwill'. As they state, '[t]he actual situation… is that members of the militant Tenants' Union (including some who do not live on the estate) took over the playground site – won a confrontation with the Council – and will take further action if the Council does not live up to its promises. The same people helped organise the recent rent-rise strike'. Pavement, "Why Pavement… Critique of the South Western Star," *Pavement*, Vol 2 no 12, February, 1973.

inadequate top-down conceptions of control and power, *and* of the enveloping attempts of capital to exploit the fissures and opportunities opened by the rent gap and declining industry. But they were also searching and propositional: highlighting the agency of local communities to expand democratic control and influence upon their environment. The mural, therefore, issues critique, celebration and propositions: spanning economic, cultural and democratic arenas, across the boundaries of state and civil society, capital and community. Local in its vision, clear in its pursuit of an expanded commons and direct about the means of attaining it, the Battersea mural reveals a mode of politics that was neither nostalgic, nor unduly utopian, but rather pragmatic and determined. All this is given fluorescent, vibrant, engaging and dynamic form. It marked a new height of the political mural form in England.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the relative absence of the middle years of the 1970s from the historiographical record has obscured a vital moment in the history of Left politics, and with it a fuller understanding of a remarkable moment in the history of cultural production. Spanning from the upper reaches of government to more localised manifestations of the radical, decidedly extra-parliamentary Left this political moment was central to the emergence of the mural as a form and site of political contestation. The case studies examined above, grew out of and gave form to a particular vector within the wider political moment: a sphere of localised struggles for the socialisation and democratic control of resources including land, housing and industry.[348] In so doing, the murals offer a vital and necessary counterweight to the dominant dismissals of the Left initiatives of the period as

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348. See introduction to Chapter 1 above

either nostalgic, unreconstructed Keynesianism, or naively utopian projects. Rather, the murals have been seen to emerge from and give form to reasoned and critical understandings of the limitations of the post-war social democratic consensus arising from active struggles to create a new world in their wake. In so doing, this chapter has argued that the murals constituted a significant and concerted reorientation of the field of cultural production, striving, as Brecht and Benjamin might put it to 'not simply transmit the apparatus of production', but rather, to transform them 'to the maximum extent possible in the direction of socialism'.[349] In utilising the exterior mural form to build upon, and give enduring visual form to, localised struggles mounted by the Left across a period of deepening crisis, opportunity and historical conjuncture, the muralists found a new means of cultural and political action.

There remain, as will be seen in the next chapter, significant limits to the extent of this historiographical and political restitution. Indeed, if this chapter, opened with a recuperation of the hope of the Labour Party's 1974 Manifesto, it is important to note that by 1976—with Jim Callaghan's replacement of Harold Wilson as Prime Minister, and the Party's acquiescence to the fiscal restraints imposed by a 1976 International Monetary Fund bailout—the radicalism of that moment of parliamentary possibility had been roundly quelled.[350] The accommodations of the Labour Party to international capital, had severe implications for the Party's electoral prospects, and relations with organised labour. It ushered in a period of monetarist economics and fiscal restraint which Tony Benn, writing in 1989 held to mean that 'though there was a change of administration in 1979, which was

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349. Benjamin, "Author as Producer," 89.
350. 'Yet within two years [of Labour's 1974 victory], despite some genuine progressive reforms, very little of this [initially radical] ambition remained and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was instructing the Labour Governments Chancellor, Denis Healey, in the direction of economic policy'. Medhurst, *That Option No Longer,* 11.

clear and sharp in electoral terms, there was a continuity in thinking about central questions

which stretched out from Labour to Conservative rule, one paving the way for the other'.[351]

More broadly, as will be seen, the subsidence of the hope and industrial militancy of the early

years of the decade, led some on the Left to conclude that an epochal change was afoot: that

The Forward March of Labour had— as Eric Hobsbawm put it—*Halted,* or that the time had

come, as André Gorz put it, to bid *Farewell to the Working Class*.[352] The murals of this

chapter offer a corrective to these increasingly accepted orthodoxies of defeat. They reveal

the extent to which, beyond the defeats, the period continued to offer a rich field of Left

politics and action, in which the experience and demands of everyday community life

emerged not as alternatives to class struggle or organised labour, but as new sites of struggle,

with interlocking demands for expanded democracy and control.

Whilst there were limits to the capacities of these locally orientated modes of socialist action

to scale or cohere into a social bloc capable of withstanding the assaults of capital across the

coming years, the murals, therefore, warn against over-totalising narratives. Indeed, as the

coming chapters of this study reveal, the London Left had years of struggle ahead: years in

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351. Benn, *Diaries 1973-76*, xii. Tony Benn saw the combined effects of the 1975 referendum on membership of the European Economic Community and the terms of the IMF bailout to constitute, a 'major shift of power to international organisations… reached without any serious examination of their impact on the democratic process and in complete disregard of the growing countervailing pressure to decentralise political power'. He described the latter as 'the victory of world bankers in the IMF over a Labour Cabinet'. Benn, xii-xiii.
Ken Coates, has offered a detailed accounting of the failings, and effects of the capitulations of Callaghan's administration, Ken Coates, ed., *What Went Wrong?,*(Nottingham: Spokesman, for the Institute of Workers' Control, 1979).
352. Eric Hobsbawm, "The Forward March of Labour Halted," 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture, reproduced in *Marxism Today*, (September 1978): 279-286. Hobsbawm's influential lecture, and its reproduction in *Marxism Today* offered a rather sweeping historical analysis of a collapse of organised labour (largely under the weights of its internal contradictions). In particular it seemed to suggest that the shift, or embourgeoisement of the post-war era, which had seen an enormous shift in the labour force from blue to white collar work spelt a death knell for the eponymous *Forward March of Labour*. It offered an echo of wider Eurocommunist and New Left thought in diagnosing an epochal shift in the historical agency of the working class and site of class struggle and a foundation point for *Marxism Today*'s descent into the New Times theory. Whilst forming a more nuanced and extended critique of labourism, André Gorz's *Farewell to the Working Class*, imagined a similar fate for historical working-class agency. André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay On Post-Industrial Socialism*, trans. Michael Sonenscher (London: Pluto, 1982).

which their responses to shifting historical dynamics threw up innovative modes of politics, new scales of collective action, and new social blocs. Notwithstanding the deepening cuts to local government expenditure inaugurated from 1976 onwards, the close of this chapter also constituted a moment of unfolding possibilities for the mural form. In late 1977, David Binnington and Desmond Rochfort—whose subsequent work on the *Cable Street Mural* will form a focus of the next chapter—completed a pair of murals at Royal Oak, in West London, garnering media coverage from major newspapers and arts press alike [see figures 166-167].[353] These art critical attentions on the mural form were extended in 1978, which—with the inclusion of drawings and photographs of the *Royal Oak* and other murals in major exhibitions at the Serpentine and Whitechapel Galleries—marked something of a watershed year for the form. Muralists featured prominently within a debate on *The State of British Art* at the ICA, in the Spring, and in the Autumn, Carol Kenna and Steve Lobb, of Greenwich Mural Workshop, organised the first National Mural Conference, attended by muralists from across the country.[354] The same year the Arts Council, established its (short lived) Murals and Environmental Projects Committee, and an expanding field of patronage emerging through the Manpower Services Commission, as well as the structural investments of the Inner Cities Partnerships.[355] Local (largely Labour) councils in Tower Hamlets, Camden, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Barnet, were also turning to the form, and the Gulbenkian Foundation and

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353. Much of the contemporary criticism highlighted a belief that the *Royal Oak Murals* could usher in a new era of mural painting. See for example, William Feaver, *Observer*, October 23, 1977; and Richard Cork, "The Royal Oak Murals*," Art Monthly* (March 1978): 11-12.

354. For a transcript of the ICA conference see, "The State of British Art,", in *Studio International* Vol. 194, no. 989 (1978); 74-138. For Mural Conference, see Greenwich Mural Workshop, *First National Mural Conference.*

355. These latter two initiatives were very direct examples of the actions of the centralised state to cope with the effects of rising unemployment through limited structural investment programmes. If the former was designed at first to offer a means of training to young unemployed workers it soon became seen by many as a cynical move to massage unemployment figures, see Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*. Both schemes tended to employ murals instrumentally, focussing above all on their ability to occupy the time of the makers in socially useful activity. At the 1978 Mural Conference, fears were expressed that the absence of any conception of artistic quality, or local involvement, was giving muralism a bad name. See Greenwich Mural Workshop, *First National Mural Conference.*

Abbey Harris Trusts both came to offer funds to exterior muralists.[356] The mural form, as such, was in ascendance: occupying an increasingly prominent position within broader art critical debates, and beginning to attract an expanded degree of patronage.

The Critics' Crisis

Notwithstanding these advances, the murals in this chapter did not tend to find much place within these art critical narratives, for reasons that rest in part upon the nature of that criticism. The advent of *Art For Whom?* at the Serpentine, and *Art for Society* at the Whitechapel Gallery, (in Spring and Summer of 1978) offered a convenient linguistic call and response: highlighting a sense of widespread unease regarding the sociability of contemporary art.[357] The exhibitions were accompanied by articles and correspondence across a spectrum of arts periodicals and mainstream press, revealing an art world undergoing a period of polemic division.[358] In combination with the conference at the ICA, these exhibitions offered a new prominence, and direction, to some of the critiques and thoughts of a body of critics known collectively as the *Crisis Critics*. The '*Crisis*' in the arts was in no sense particular to 1978. Rather the diagnosis can be seen as an ongoing critical response to a

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356. It is notable that in the wake of the *Royal Oak* murals, the Abbey and Harris funds, came to offer small amounts to a number of murals. For a sense of the rising scale, and geography of patronage across these years see Kenna, *Guide*.

357. *Art For Whom?* was curated by Richard Cork, and featured work by Conrad Atkinson, Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, The Islington Schools Project and preparatory sketches for David Binnington and Desmond Rochfort's *Royal Oak* murals. *Art for Society*, was a much more sprawling affair, spanning painting, documentary photography, trade union banners, and mural documentation. It was organised and selected by a committee including Richard Cork, John Gorman, Charles Gosford, Ian Jeffrey, David Logan, Toni del Renzio, Margaret Richards, Ken Sprague and Caroline Tisdall, together with Nicholas Serota and Martin Rewcastle of the Whitechapel Gallery. Of 300 artist applications the exhibition catalogue lists work by 100 artists. If Richard Cork's exhibition and catalogue attempted to assert something of a false homogeneity to a sprawling body of conceptual and mural work, the Whitechapel show, must have been overpowering in its heterogeneity.

358. They received extensive coverage in *Art Monthly, Studio International*, *Artscribe* and *Art Forum*.

broader de-centring, and perceived confusion in the art of the period.[359] If this de-centring

had been visible in the arts throughout the 1970s, the sense of a crisis came to the fore in

particular in the wake of the high profile opprobrium to 'Tate's Bricks', in February of 1976:

the (media-led) public outcry to the Tate's (four-year-old) purchase of Carl Andre's

Equivalent VIII (1966), serving for many to highlight a perceived distance between the art

world and broader society.[360] In a series of articles and publications over the next two years,

Cork, Fuller and Andrew Brighton, continued to lament 'the failure of so much contemporary

art to communicate with anyone outside a small circle of initiates'.[361]

The murals of this chapter, therefore, emerged amidst a period in which the diagnosis of a

crisis in art's sociability was becoming increasingly widespread. And it was this climate,

which came to frame the mural form's brief inclusion within mainstream art critical debates

across 1978, precipitated, largely, through the representation of murals by photographs and

preparatory sketches within the aforementioned 1978 exhibitions. Whilst united in their

diagnosis of a crisis in contemporary art's sociability, Cork and Fuller (to take the two most

dominant critical exponents of the 'Crisis'), differed significantly in the wider direction of

their analysis. For Cork—who had completed a PhD on Vorticism, before becoming the

editor of *Studio International* and art critic for the *Evening Standard*—the 'Crisis' of

contemporary art, lay in what he perceived to be a widening gulf between the individualist

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359. This decentring can, as suggested above, be seen in relation to a wide spectrum of overlapping forces, including: a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the presumed 'autonomy' of the 'modernist' project; an increased critical scrutiny emergent amongst artists' increasingly reliant upon public funds administered through a mode of top-down patronage inherited from the post-war era (of which many were increasingly sceptical); changes in Arts Education across the 1960s; and the broader social critiques and politicisations of the age.
360. In a special edition of *Studio International* devoted to *Art and Social Purpose*, Cork, observed, '[t]he melancholy fact remains...[that an] event like the Andre debacle is no substitute for a permanent and positive interaction between contemporary art and the public with which it would presumably like to communicate.' Richard Cork, "Editorial," in *Studio International* (March/April, 1976): 94. For media coverage, see Phillip Mellor, "What a Load of Rubbish, How the Tate dropped 120 Bricks," *Daily Mirror*, February 16, 1976, 1.
361. Cork, *Art For Whom?,* (London: The Serpentine Gallery/Arts Council, 1978), 3.

impulses of the avant-garde, and the interests of wider society.[362] Focussing largely upon the

need for a recuperation of a 'more organic' link between artists and their public, Cork's

critique often centred upon a loose and limitedly historical paean for a 'resuscitated' public

sphere.[363] He proposed muralists and conceptualists as capable of, and indeed largely

responsible for, bridging this gap. Refined in particular in relation to his 'public facing' role

as the art critic for the *Evening Standard*, Cork's *crisis criticism*, was in large part a populist

response to the perceived gulf between art and society.[364]

Fuller's stance, constituted a more critically ambitious, if pessimistic project. Building on the

work of prominent Marxists including John Berger, Herbert Marcuse and Sebastiano

Timparano, and contemporary writings in the *New Left Review*, Fuller took a more historical

view of the contemporary crisis, proposing it as nothing less than a break down in the entire

bourgeois visual tradition.[365] For Fuller, '[w]hatever Britain's historical future, the 1970s will

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362. Cork placed the agency and blame for this situation (which tended to be very loosely periodised somewhere between Vorticism and the present), firmly with artists: '[f]undamentally… the social purpose of all art should be brought to the forefront once again. After years of irresponsible neglect by artists, who have driven themselves into a marginal position on the boundaries of common understanding, it now ought to become the central focus of attention. There's no point in making art unless it has some social purpose in the broadest sense of that word'. Faure Walker, "Interview with Richard Cork," *Artscribe* No. 7 (1977): 41.

363. It is notable that even in his somewhat incongruous, and seemingly very personal, summoning of the Vorticists, Cork's analysis failed, in large part, to account for the historical conditions in which the Vorticists operated (to deal fully with their links to militarism, for example), or the remarkable transitions which had occurred in the relations between art and society in the intervening period. Cork, *Art For Whom?*, 7-8.

364. Neil Mulholland has written extensively about the populist tenor of the crisis critics. See Mulholland, *The Cultural Devolution: Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century,* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011). Whilst Mulholland (16-17) emphasises Cork's theoretical debt to Raymond Williams, however, Cork's own account suggests a pragmatic, liberal observer, adjusting to a busy schedule and a new found 'popular audience': 'One great cumulative influence is that I've been writing every week for an evening audience which encompassed a broad cross-section from readers of *The Times* to readers of *The Sun*. Addressing such a public… forced me to consider, all the time, how each particular exhibition might be approached with a view to awakening the interests of people who would not automatically be interested in art at all'. James Faure Walker, "Interview with Richard Cork," *Artscribe* No. 7 (1977): 41.

365. Centring upon a reading of super-structural forces, wed to an often reductionist determinism about the decline of the bourgeoisie, Fuller channelled the entire decline of the 'bourgeois optic' and visual tradition, into the conjuncture of the 1970s. The debt to Timpanaro and Marcuse is well examined in Mulholland, *Cultural Devolution,* 19. Fuller's analysis also seems to rely upon the assertions of the Nairn-Anderson Thesis regarding the incompleteness of the English Bourgeois revolution, a rather partial interpretation of Gramscian hegemony, and an interpretation of super-structural autonomy based loosely on Raymond Williams' writings. See Fuller, "The Crisis in British Art," *Art Monthly*, (June and July, 1977). For a sympathetic critique of the vogue and limitations of such theoretical touchstones see Wade Matthews, *The New Left, National Identity, and the Break-up of Britain.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

be seen, retrospectively, as a time when the visual arts as practices by professional fine artist were reduced to residual forms of little cultural or social significance'. He continued, 'today it is the conventional visual means—the range of professional standards itself—which has disintegrated. As the bourgeoisie relinquishes its historical function of training artists and paying them to represent the world, they cease to be inheritors of an optic which they can choose to accept or endeavour to extend…The artist was no longer *necessary* for the bourgeoisie'.[366] Contending that the 'bourgeois optic' was irrevocably incapable of registering the world-view and experiences of the working class, who were in turn unpossessing of a professional visual tradition of their own, Fuller, turned towards a future orientated aesthetic gleaned from Berger's writing.[367] If Fuller's pessimism, and theoretical prescription of a forward looking aesthetic tended to isolate him from a close interpretive alignment with murals, Cork's prominent support for the mural form tended to mean that his critical attachments to liberal notions of a public realm, and somewhat flowery praise came to dominate the murals' critical reception. Indeed, following his inclusion of the *Royal Oak Murals* at the Serpentine exhibition, it was Cork's interpretative frame which dominated the virulent attacks the murals received within the mainstream art world: tying them—in the critical sphere— to the 'social functionalism', and liberal contradictions of Cork's arguments.[368]

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366. Fuller, "Crisis" *Art Monthly*, (June 1977): 8.

367. 'But a new optic cannot be created by willing it, *in vacuo*, and the working class in Britain remains intransigently depoliticised and culturally hegemonised. Because the political power of the proletariat is as yet unrealised, it has no 'professional' visual tradition of its own; this, in their attempt to identify with this rising class, our theoretical artists become trapped'. Peter Fuller, "The Crisis in British Art," *Art Monthly* (July 1977): 10-14. As frequently commented at the time, such a theoretically proscriptive approach, seemed to offer very little hope to practicing artists. Indeed, the propositional section of Fuller's essay is limited to a single paragraph at the close, which draws heavily on John Berger's 1950s adaptions of a social realist future orientation, 'Some artists may come to realise that in this situation, the way forward is an attempt to give glimpses of moments of becoming through which, given parallel historical changes, new ways of seeing, and new forms owing little to the tendency of all art under capitalism to become property might be realised.' Fuller, "Crisis," 14.

368. As James Faure Walker stated in *Artscribe*, 'what Cork considers the "one great challenge facing art in the latter half of the 1970s", which lies in its… "committing itself to an uncomplacent and more socially aware redefinition of its own fundamental purpose". In other words, art should relate to society. I'd drink to that, even if it doesn't mean anything. Art simply can't help relating to society (with or without a big S)... But what Cork probably means is that the artist should openly say that he wants to 'relate' to society, should try and raise

While the crisis critics, therefore, brought murals to the fore of art critical debate in 1978, the murals' position as accessories in the critics' broader conceptions of crisis, tended to foreclose, rather than open up, insight into the kind of analysis forwarded by this chapter. Furthermore, it was, notably, Binnington and Rochfort's *Royal Oak Murals*, rather than those of this chapter that succeeded in capturing the interests of the arts establishment. Part of the reason for this was, no doubt, a simple question of PR nous and art critical connections. As recent graduates from the Royal Academy Schools, Rochfort and Binnington, had amassed considerable institutional support for their murals, and set out from the beginning with a quite divergent mode of working.[369] Rather than contact with other muralists or local community groups, Rochfort and Binnington's turn to the form was made through an interest in diverse, geographically and historically distant sources: an interest in socialist realism, shared with the editorial team of *Artery* (fellow members of the Communist Party of Great Britain), and a particular interest in the work of the Mexican Muralists, known through reproduction in Antonio Rodriguez' two books on Mexican Murals.[370] At this stage, therefore, Binnington and Rochfort marked their practice out in conscious distinction to 'community murals'. Indeed, in the case of Cork, at least—taking a lead perhaps from Binnington and Rochfort's statements—it was precisely the murals' distance from community arts practice which seemed to offer hope. 'Far from applying ornamental bandages to areas which desperately

society to his own level of awareness, should make himself known to as many people as possible'. Faure Walker, "A.D*.," Artscribe* No. 2, (Spring 1976): 6. Whilst Faure Walker skirts the question of some art's rather limited audience, it is notable that Cork's own evasions regarding who is signified by 'society' invited precisely such a critique. It was one carried further by Jeffrey Steele, in his "Notes Towards Some Theses Against the New Kitsch," *Art Monthly* 18, (July/ August, 1978): 19-20.

369. Having started with a grant of £1,700 from the Vincent Harris Trust, run by Royal Academicians, by 1977 they had amassed £11,000 amalgamated with support from the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Greater London Council, and Westminster Borough Council.

370. Binnington recalls striking up a close friendship with the librarian at Westminster Public Library, in order to search out and order books on the Mexican Muralists. (Interview with the author, August 2015). Rodriguez' volumes *A History of Mexican Mural Painting*, and *David Alfaro Siqueiros*, were amongst the only books widely available at this point. Only the former was available in English, though both are amply illustrated. Rodriguez, *Mexican Mural Painting*; and Rodriguez, *Siqueiros*, (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974); Rodriguez, *Siqueiros*, (México : Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974).

need radical social surgery', a critique Cork had levelled at community murals in Scotland, the *Royal Oak Murals* appeared 'to grow forcefully out of the dehumanised wasteland so evident all around'.[371] Fuller, meanwhile saw the murals as 'formalist… derived primarily in relation to other works of art (especially Siqueiros' hideously rhetorical Stalinist nightmares); they show no discernible attempt to make art through giving plastic expression to lived experience in the world, in its actuality and becoming…[instead they constitute] a montage of art-book clichés'.[372] Whilst contrasting in their judgements, both critics are notable in their incuriosity about all but the most superficial of conceptual and contextual challenges set by the mural form.

In their analysis of the crisis, both Cork and Fuller fell short in what Gramsci identified as a key principle of historical methodology: to 'distinguish organic movements (relatively permanent) from movements which may be termed "conjunctural" (and which appear as occasional, immediate, almost accidental)'.[373] Whilst notoriously difficult to distinguish when caught up in the middle of them, Fuller's attempts to read the organic movements of the past two centuries into the conjunctural forces of the 1970s, led to a peremptory assertion that the 1970s represented an end of the bourgeois era of art, and to serious reductions regarding the homogeneity of art in the bourgeois era. Cork, tended in his overbearing super-structural focus—which gave little or no attention to the specific conjunctural forces of the 1970s, or, indeed, to the structural transitions of the broader period—to elevate a trans-historical, public

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371. Cork, *Art For Whom*, 22.
372. Peter Fuller, "Social Functionalism," *Art Monthly* 19 (September 1978): 27.
373. 'It is the problem of the relations between structure and super-structure which must be accurately posed and resolved into the forces which are active in the history of a particular period are to be correctly analysis and the relation between them determined... in studying a structure, it is necessary to distinguish organic movements (relatively permanent) from movements which may be termed "conjunctural" (and which appear as occasional, immediate, almost accidental). Conjunctural phenomena too depend on organic movements to be sure, but they do not have any very far-reaching historical significance; they give rise to political criticism of a minor, day-to-day character, which has as its subject top political leaders and personalities with direct governmental responsibilities.' Antonio Gramsci, "The Modern Prince," in *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1971), 177.

realm. The muralists of this chapter were undoubtedly drawn towards the form in part as a

reaction to a perceived crisis in the sociability of art. But they subscribed neither to Cork's

pluralist idealisations of a liberal, public realm, nor indeed to Fuller's pessimistic accounting

of a fundamental rupture of a visual tradition sheered of all capacity for an expression of

working class interests.[374] Instead, their movement towards the mural form was mounted in

response a longer term organic movement of art's increasing commodification and absorption

into the spaces and institutions of bourgeois experience, *and* the surrounding explosion of

localised political struggles. Ironically, in fact, their attempt to draw upon wide-ranging

visual and iconographic traditions in the service of the concerns, demands and interests of

working-class communities, might have offered both Cork and Fuller's projects meaningful

enhancement: offering a degree of material and historical reality to Fuller's hopes for a future

orientated aesthetic, and much richer examples of an artistic practice based in shared social

concerns, than was found in Cork's attempted populism.

Ultimately, however, the muralists of this chapter were defined by their commitment to a

mode of political struggle and localised community which stood in a conscious

contradistinction to the wider arts community and made little efforts to court the kind of

attention necessary to sustain interest and art critical position. Indeed, despite the more

positive reception afforded to the *Royal Oak Murals*, it is notable that—notwithstanding

occasional standalone pieces from Cork, or other critics—little in the way of sustained art

critical attention was paid to the mural form beyond 1978. This is, in some senses a shame,

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374. See, for example, Binnington and Rochfort's contributions to the *Art For Whom?* catalogue, both of which emphasise the particularity of the present crisis in art's sociability, in relation to a crisis in capitalism, but which go to lengths to avoid the determinism of Fuller's argument and the abstracted liberalism of Cork's. For example, Binnington:'[s]o it may seem that we are now approaching a decisive rupture with the modernist tradition, but the indications and signs must not be mistaken for the birth pangs of a new movement. For without an economic base and without political intervention, a social art, as a movement, will be only a critics pipe dream'. Binnington, "A Genuine Social Function for Artists: A Dream or Reality?," in Cork, *Art For Whom*, 57.

for the murals examined in this chapter—as indeed the *Royal Oak Murals*—remain exploratory works, by young and developing artists, who might have benefitted from a more sustained discursive and theoretical framework opened up by critical attention. But, if the strengths and the shortfalls of the murals went largely un-noted by contemporary critics it was, perhaps, little loss. Over the coming years, largely outside of the view of mainstream art critical interest, the muralists of this chapter, and those of the *Royal Oak Murals* evolved their practice in a manner which came to terms with many of the formal and practical challenges of the form, as well as some of the broader challenges of political representations and realist practice. Intriguingly, as the moment of art critical attention waned, so too did the gap between the apparent 'fine art' murals like those at Royal Oak and community murals like those of this Chapter begin to narrow.

Chapter 2

Contesting the Great Moving Right Show:
'Race', Class, Realism and Resistance in Tower Hamlets, 1978-1983

The murals of the previous chapter were read against a particularly localised mode of

socialist politics, emerging amidst the disintegration of the social democratic consensus, and

the urban dimensions of what could, in its broadest dimensions, be described as the

disintegration of the Fordist industrial proletariat. If this is often viewed as a broadly

communitarian response to political contexts of the mid-decade, the murals were seen to be

defined not by an occlusion of class politics but rather its expansion into new spheres of

contestation. Whilst the chapter opened at moment of hope for the Left and the labour

movement, it closed with a Labour Government facing a series of continuing economic

crises, deep-rooted epistemological and electoral challenges.[375] The murals revealed a

developing series of techniques, as a body of young artists began to grapple with the

potentialities and challenges of the mural form. An attention to some of the political and

technical developments charted in the last chapter will be maintained through the present and

next chapter of this study.[376] As the decade drew to a close, however, they were given a new

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375. Stuart Hall, in a key 1979 essay, framed the epistemological challenge to the Left, as the need to explain, 'how a capitalist economic recession is presided over by a social democratic party in power (politically) with mass working class support and organized depth in the trade unions; and "lived" for increasing numbers of people through the themes and representations (ideologically) of a virulent, emergent "petty-bourgeois" ideology. These features of the current situation are not so much expressions of the economic crisis (its political and ideological reflection) as they are factors which *have effects*—including effects on the economic crisis itself and its possible solutions'. It is to the contestation of these "lived" experiences to which this chapter will now turn. Stuart Hall, "The Great Moving Right Show," in *Marxism Today* (January 1979):14.
376. The narrative division between a communitarian focus and a realist concern with working class experience, should not be read as totalising, and both chapters (and those that follow) contain murals which could be seen through the filter of either theme. Nonetheless, there is a sense in which the murals which most actively, and successfully engaged with figuring Left wing thought across the period of these first two chapters, register something of a broader shift: from the glimpsed opportunities of the mid-decade, towards a deepening critical examination of social relations. Such movement seems intricately bound with the defeatist hue of a Labour administration increasingly beset by economic crises, in whose face an abandonment of the ideal of full-employment and creeping accession to Monetarist orthodoxy, resulted in a split from their historic social base.

weight and urgency by the ascent of the 'New Right': an ascent most firmly confirmed by

Margaret Thatcher's electoral victory of 1979.[377]

The two murals considered in this chapter will be seen as part of a Leftist response to the

long durée of the Right's ascent. In particular, they will be seen as responses to the contexts

of the 'new racism' and revanchist ethno-nationalism that Margaret Thatcher's brand of

authoritarian populism both drew upon and reconfigured in the construction of a new social

base.[378] Whilst the previous murals of this study touched obliquely upon the theme of 'race'

in their celebrations and representations of the increasing 'diversity' of London's population,

The Promised Land, (or *Chicksand Street Mural*), 1979-1980 and the *Cable Street Mural*

1978-1983, addressed the contexts of surging racism and Far-Right activity much more

directly. In part, this can be seen as a response to the national context: the murals'

chronological bracketing stretching rather neatly across the years of Thatcher's ascent, from

the infamous 'swamping speech' of January 1978, through the Conservatives' 1979 electoral

victory and their 1981 British Nationality Act, to 1983: the year in which Thatcher's

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377. As Tom Mills has defined it, the New Right is, 'an umbrella term for the movement of activists, intellectuals, journalists and private propagandists who—supported by sections of big business and acting in concert with sections of the political elite—emerged in reaction to [the social movements and working class militancy of the 1960s and '70s] and more generally in opposition to the more egalitarian and democratic culture of the post-war settlement'. Tom Mills, *The BBC, Myth of a Public Service*, (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 108.

378. 'New racism' is a term used by Paul Gilroy, in his 1987 study of 'the cultural politics of race and nation', in order to distinguish the ideological and political particularities of the newest wave of racism from those which had preceded it. Following Hall (with whom he worked at the Birmingham CCCS) Gilroy situated 'the rise of this new racism…in a crisis of political representation in the organisations of the working-class movement.' Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack,* 2002 edition, (Oxford: Routledge Classics), 21. The concept of *authoritarian populism* as a description for the ideological-political aspects of Thatcherism first emerged in the wake of Stuart Hall and colleagues at the Birmingham CCCS's 1977 study *Policing the Crisis.* The term, however, was coined the following year, as Hall developed an adaption of Poulantzas' theory of *authoritarian statism*, augmented by a delimited version of Laclau's theory of populism. The concept was refined and fiercely debated across the 1980s in a series of articles and counter-articles, but seems invaluable in its pinpointing of some of the ideological contradictions which lay at the heart of Thatcher's hegemonic project. For a summary of the concept and its origins see Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*; Nicos Poulantzas, *State Power Socialism,* trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 2014), 203; Stuart Hall, "Popular-Democratic versus Authoritarian Populism," in *Marxism and Democracy*, ed. Alan Hunt (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980). For the 1980s debate, see Jessop, et al. "Authoritarian Populism" and. "A Reply to Stuart Hall"; and Hall, "A Reply to Jessop et al.".

Conservatives gained their second electoral majority, having reversed poor poll ratings on the back of a neo-Imperialist war.[379]

If these can be seen as the frames of the national moment, the murals' response to that moment played out more directly in relation to the localised realities of Tower Hamlets, (where both murals were located), and to the broader and longer-term processes upon which Thatcher's brand of authoritarian populism drew. Across the 1970s and into the 1980s Tower Hamlets, was at the forefront of a pronouncedly racialised contestation, which both preceded and was in turn inflected by Thatcher's statements and actions. Through their divergent address of the quotidian, political and historical dimensions of these localised conflicts, the murals will be seen as a direct and forceful attempt to intervene within them: and to do so in concert with, or (in the *Cable Street Mural*'s case) testament to, the considerable localised activities of anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns.

Once more, posterity has often treated the anti-racist manifestations of the Left of the period with a considerable amount of (at times quite justified) condescension. On the one hand, the imbedded chauvinisms of the anti-racist Left have been castigated as a naive 'Black and White Unite and Fight' school of universalist anti-racism, privileging what Chris Searle once described as the idea that 'the essence is not to affiliate ourselves to people of the same colour or race as ourselves, but to people of the same class, the working class, the world

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379. The 'swamping speech', is a widely used title for Thatcher's January 1978 Granada Television interview, which will be dealt with in greater detail below. The Falklands War, stretched from April to June 1982, and is widely held to have helped Thatcher reverse her poor poll ratings and secure an extension of her commons majority in March 1983. As Radhika Natarajan has pointed out, however, the prominence of the Falklands has often caused the 1981 Nationality Act—an act which marked a 'culmination of the rhetoric concerning who was British', creating 'three tiers of British citizenship' based on 'ties of blood, not allegiance, desire, history or even character'—to pass un-noted. See Radhika Natarajan, "Ties of Blood: How Thatcher altered 'British'," *Open Democracy* (April 17, 2013): https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/radhika-natarajan/ties-of-blood-how-thatcher-altered-british.

over'.[380] On the other, there has been a reading of the period as a slide into a liberal identity politics of the academy, in which class became rapidly occluded by questions of identity.[381] Within these frameworks even a mural as complex, and uncompromisingly partisan, as *Cable Street*, has been described, by Sam Wetherell, as an embodiment of a broader passage, on the part of the Left, from a focus on class to a liberal identity politics;[382] whilst being held up by others as a work of retardaire socialist realism.[383]

This chapter takes a divergent line. Central to its argument will be a re-assertion of the murals' positions within the fierce political contestations of their immediate contexts of production and reception. In these contexts, the murals' attempts to figure the shifting social dynamics of class, migration, racialised division, historical memory, and political action, can

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380. The phrase 'Black and White Unite and Fight', is used frequently by Paul Gilroy, to characterise the perceived shortcomings of mechanical Marxist accounts of class and 'race', Paul Gilroy, *Ain't no Black*. Chris Searle was a leading figure in the Writers Group of Tower Hamlets Arts Project —who were involved in both the murals of this chapter. The quote comes from an interview with Searle in the Morning Star, September 1977, cited by Sam Wetherell in an account of the community arts, Sam Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis: Community Arts and the Search for the 'Ordinary' in 1970s and '80s London," *History Workshop Journal* 76 (1) (Autumn 2013): 243.

381. As Gilroy, one of the leading scholars associated with the shift from class, to identity-based understandings, noted in 2002: '*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* suggested that academic consideration of living social movements might have filled the strategic and analytical gap resulting from the defeat of class-based understanding. That once-attractive initiative quickly lapsed into arid theory and has now dried up into a desert of wasted scholastic opportunities'. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, xix. Though we might question the extent to which Gilroy's work (or at least the reception of it) could be seen as bound up in, rather than just a reaction to, the 'defeat of class-based understanding', his concession is noteworthy in elucidating the shifts between the 1980s and today.

382. In an otherwise insightful essay on the community arts of the period, Wetherell associates the *Cable Street Mural* with a movement towards an inclusive, neutered, classless category of community: 'Instead of dwelling on 'authentic' working-class experiences, by the end of the 1970s the artists in the East End were instead emphasizing either community-wide solidarity or individual self-expression, seen as clear alternatives. For the former, class-based alliances were supplanted by an appeal to the inclusive category of 'community', a move reflected in, among other things, anti-fascist mural painting and local-history movements organized by these two community-arts projects'. Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis," 238. Elsewhere he holds the mural up as a pinnacle of community arts practice: 'Arguably the biggest achievement of East London community arts, however, was the painting of the enormous Cable St Mural (completed in 1981). This was an attempt at community-making through an appeal to a romanticized local history whose inheritors were the 1970s and '80s inhabitants of East London'. Wetherell, 244. Both these interpretations seem to co-opt the mural for a wider historical argument, whilst taking little account of its fiercely partisan position within the contexts of the period.

383. See, for example, Malcolm Miles, "Chapter 6: Community Murals in Britain," in *Art For Public Places: Critical Essays* (Winchester, Hampshire: Winchester School of Art Press, 1989), 73. Whilst Miles makes some effort to situate the mural through art historical reference, (to, for example, Goya) he makes little attempt to pin down the exact mechanics of the work, beyond describing it as socialist realist in style.

be viewed not so much as relics from a bygone and politically naive age, or indexes of a diverted and ineffectual Left, but rather as crucial moments in an ongoing struggle to make sense of a rapidly shifting urban scene. These shifts were bound up within the complex processes of decolonisation, which as Simon Faulkner and Anandi Rammurthy have pointed out, can be defined in the British context as 'a complex of political and ideological processes that emerged after 1945' not only 'encompassing formal acts of withdrawal from colonies, anti-colonial struggles and counter-insurgency campaigns', but also, crucially for this chapter, 'the redrawing of relationships between Britain and its colonies under a neo-colonial model, and the migration of colonial peoples to Britain, as well as the wilful forgetting of empire and the re-imagining of Britain in some political circles as a discrete national entity'.[384] These latter fields in particular will be seen as central to the social transitions registered in the murals, and to an understanding of their force and historical dimensions.

As Hannah Feldman has pointed out, the task of 'decolonising' the art of the 'post-war' period, can be traced not only within the political assertions of works themselves, but also within our attentions to their complex webs of occlusion and unresolved contradictions. In what follows Feldman's understanding of the 'double valence' of the term decolonising, as 'both [an] adjectival form wherein the art is part and parcel of the historical contest fought over decolonization and as a verb, wherein the action being named shifts to our own attempts to "decolonize" the field of art and its history in accordance with efforts to differently imagine alternative representational possibilities', will be taken as a point of departure.[385] Seen in this light the murals and their wider moment break loose from some of the binaries posed by the proposition of an unbridgeable and emergent rift between the politics of 'class'

384. Simon Faulkner and Anandi Ramamurthy, "Introduction," in *Visual Culture and Decolonisation in Britain,* Simon Faulkner and Anandi Ramamurthy eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1.
385. Hannah Feldman, *From a Nation Torn. Decolonising Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962* (London: Duke University Press, 2014), 10.

and 'identity', and become readable as expressions of a critical moment within an ongoing struggle. Their attempts to figure, and indeed forge, new models of community based on solidarity, empathy and communal struggle, may not always have succeeded in seeing through the broader contradictions of the moment. But in their efforts to face and work through these contradictions, their stands against a surging ethno-nationalist racism, and their exploration of new and reworked narrative and realist modes, the murals played a rare and forceful role within the urgent political contestations of the time.

From Cable Street to Brick Lane.
Tower Hamlets, 1978

> *'I think people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy and law throughout the world, that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to be really rather hostile to those coming in.'[386]*

> Margaret Thatcher,
> Interview with Granada Television,
> January, 1978

> *'It was said about the 1960s and early 70s that, after all, Mr. Powell lost. This is true only if the shape of a whole conjuncture is to be measured by the career of a single individual. In another sense, there is an argument that "Powellism" won: not only because his official eclipse was followed by legislating into effect much of what he proposed, but because of the magical connections and short-circuits which Powellism was able to establish between the themes of race and immigration control and the images of the nation, the British people and the destruction of "our culture, our way of life".'[387]*

> Stuart Hall,
> *The Great Moving Right Show*,
> January, 1979

The above quote, from a 1978 Granada Television interview is broadly seen to mark a crucial moment in Margaret Thatcher's ascent to power and the broader social dynamics of the

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386. Quoted in, amongst others, David Widgery, *Beating Time*, 14.
387. Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," 19.

period.[388] With its deliberately measured conditionals weaved against the dehumanising tenor of its central and repeated verb, the statement confirmed a violently divisive politics of racialised difference at the heart of the Tory party. For David Widgery '[s]ingle-handedly, [Thatcher] had recuperated overt racism into the Parliamentary tradition'.[389] But the ideological strands which Thatcher both drew upon and reworked were in no sense unique to 1978. Nor, as Stuart Hall has pointed out was her mode of populism, a 'rhetorical device or trick'. Rather, as Hall continued 'it addresses real problems, real and lived experiences, real contradictions—and yet is able to represent them within a logic of discourse which pulls them systematically into line with policies and class strategies of the Right'.[390]

The ideological currents and material contradictions upon which Thatcher's project drew emerged from an intersection between the conjunctural forces which have formed a focus of this study so far and interrelated longer term forces bound up with the processes decolonisation: migrants from Britain's former Empire, and other countries across the world, having responded to the call of British capital to reconstruct the national economy in the wake of the Second World War, only to encounter growing hostility as, from the late 1960s onwards, that economy stumbled into crisis. As Paul Gilroy has observed, this created a historically particular admixture of ideological and material forces: 'overdetermined by Britain's painful loss of Empire and…the profound cultural and psychological consequences of decline which is evident on many levels: economic and material as well as cultural and psychological'.[391] For Gilroy, as for Hall, the 'representational failure' of the Left to

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388. See, for example, Widgery, *Beating Time*, 14-16.
389. Widgery, 14.
390. Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," 20.
391. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, xviii. For Gilroy, the novelty, therefore, was underscored by a sense of Imperial decline and a sense of the enemy within, which were profoundly exacerbated by the crumbling of the post-war social and economic models.

articulate a response to these conjunctural forces opened the territory for the Right's agenda to prosper.[392]

This was, as such, the multi-modal context in which a 'new racism' began to take hold, and into which Enoch Powell's infamously incendiary 1968 *'Rivers of Blood'* speech was pitched.[393] As Nancy Murray has described it, Powell's vision was characterised by 'seeing black people in terms of an alien influx which has violated the deepest instincts of a formerly homogenous people…[a] racial interpretation of the nation, with its imagined unity and Burkean reverence for tradition, as well as his supposition that it is natural to want to be with one's 'own kind' and protect home territory from the incursion of strangers'.[394] Amidst the economic crises of the 1970s, *Powellism* spread far and wide, and—in the wake of Powell's expulsion from the Conservative Shadow Cabinet—found its most organised expression in the burgeoning of the Far-Right. Combining an active and violent street presence with increasing electoral success, the growth of the Far-Right is epitomised by, but in no sense unique to, the fortunes of the *National Front*: a Far-Right party formed in 1967, that by 1976

392. For Gilroy, as for Hall, the solution to the conjuncture was to be found on a theoretical plain. Charting the 'representational failure' of the organised Left through the decline of social democracy, Gilroy noted: 'It is important to recognise that the populist impulse in recent patterns of racialisation is a response to the crisis of representation. The right has created a language of nation which gains populist power from calculated ambiguities that allow it to transmit itself as the language of 'race'. At the same time, the political resources of the white working class are unable to offer a vision, language, or practice capable of providing an alternative. They are currently unable to represent the class as a class, that is outside of the categories in which capital structures and reproduces it by means of 'race'…. where attempted relation to class organisation and languages of class politics has been tenuous'. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, 22. Though Gilroy's analysis is of great use in moving beyond an essentialised conception of 'race' and racism, in what follows, both the extent of a 'working class representational failure', and the efficacy of Hall and Gilroy's theoretical strategies, will be questioned.
393. Powell was suspended from the Conservative shadow cabinet following the controversy surrounding his 1968 speech. That speech, fused a 'common sense' populism, with the apocalyptic metaphors of Roman poetry, in a manner *The Times* described as 'the first time that a serious British politician has appealed to racial hatred in this direct way in our postwar history'. Editorial comment, *The Times*, April 22,1968.
394. Nancy Murray, "Anti-racists and Other Demons," *Race and Class*, Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 27, Issue 3, (1986), 1.

received some 100,000 votes in the GLC elections and was an increasingly active and

menacing street presence.[395]

At one level, therefore, Thatcher's swamping speech constituted a reclamation of *Powellism*

from the grip of an ascendant Far-Right. Whilst constituting a notable electoral out-flanking,

however, this recuperation did little to temper the violence and divisiveness of the Far-Right's

politics.[396] Rather, as Hall and others have argued, it brought their breed of ethno-nationalist

politics firmly into the mainstream fold.[397] Far from halting the Far-Right's violent street

presence and social base, therefore, Thatcher's recuperation, if anything augmented it. For, as

Widgery described, 'the very sanctimoniousness of [Thatcher's] words and the pained

poshness of the voice that uttered them… fuels and authenticates the street savagery. It's the

nod from the CO to the privates that they can put the boot in'.[398]

These national contexts played out with a particular force in Tower Hamlets, an area in which

the conjunctural forces of the period were particularly acute, owing to the rapid decline of the

docks and related industry (see Chapter One), and the long history of migration and Far-Right

anti-migrant sentiment. As Widgery observed:

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395. Widgery, *Beating Time,* 40. As Matthew Worley has stated it: 'The 1970s saw British fascism emerge from the doldrums in which it had laboured since Sir Oswald Mosley's hey-day in the 1930s. The principal vehicle for this was the NF, which formed in 1967 and grew steadily thereafter as questions of immigration and national identity found their way to the centre of the mainstream political agenda. NF marches became more frequent and larger in scale as the decade drew on, while its paper sellers became a common sight on street corners, at football matches and even outside the school gate in certain inner-city areas'. Matthew Worley, "Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the end of 'Consensus'*,*" *Contemporary British History* Vol 26, Issue 3, (2012): 340.
396. As Widgery and others note the NF's electoral fortunes declined significantly in the local elections of May 1978 and infighting soon followed. Widgery, *Beating Time*, 40,
397. As Stuart Hall noted in 1979, 'I would be happier about the temporary decline in the fortunes of the [National] Front if so many of their themes had not been so swiftly reworked into a more respectable discourse on race by Conservative politicians in the first months of this year'. Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," 20.
398. Widgery, *Beating Time,* 14. David Widgery was an East End doctor, and member of the International Socialists (who from 1977 became the Socialist Workers Party). His account of the Rock Against Racism (RAR) initiatives, are an invaluable source on the contexts of rising racism and Far-Right street presence, though remain marked by his own involvement in anti-fascist groups clustered around the SWP (including RAR and the Anti-Nazi League).

> *The east end is an area acclimatised to successive waves of migration; a permanent point of entry and a place of constant departures. It is therefore a mixture of the international and the insular. One of the cradles of the Labour movement, it is also the birthplace of British fascism: the first meeting of the British Brothers League was held in Stepney in May 1901, old arguments and politics continue in new idioms and are compounded by the social problems of the modern city.*[399]

In the 1970s the area was, as in the early years of the 20th century, experiencing a deepening of the 'international and the insular'. The former came, most pronouncedly with the quickening arrival of a migrant population from East Pakistan: largely from rural Sylheti areas, in the east of what, following the 1971 War of Independence, became Bangladesh. Joining the predominantly male population who had settled in the area in search of employment across the 1950s and 60s, were, particularly from 1971 onwards, those escaping the genocides of the war and the famine of 1974.[400] These events, compounded by the tightening restrictions of the UK's 1971 Immigration Act, meant that across the 1970s men were increasingly joined by women and children, as a view to longer-term settlement became more widely held.[401] Employed largely in local industry and the rag-garment factories established by the previous wave of Jewish migrants across the late 19th and early 20th Century, the Bengali population began, from the late 1960s onwards to establish a community base in the area around Brick Lane, Spitalfields.

As in the 1910s and again in the 1930s, these demographic shifts were accompanied by a rise in Far-Right mobilisation in the area, particularly as the local economy slumped into a series

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399. Widgery, 20.
400. For a full account of the contexts of this, and former migrations to the East End, see Kenneth Leech, *Brick Lane 1978: The Events and Their Significance,* Revised Second Edition (London, Stepney Books, 1994): 5-7. Leech was a local priest and socialist, who did extensive community work to combat racism in the area. Initially written in the immediate aftermath of the events in 1978, his account is notable for its in depth social and historical understanding.
401. Leech, *Brick Lane*.

of pronounced crises across the 1970s. Following a series of violent street attacks on Bengali

migrants in 1970, and the murder of Tosim Ali, on April 7th of that year, the National Front

experienced a surge in the broader East End from 1972, spurred on from the mid-1970s by

the numerically small but highly active, violent, and explicitly neo-Nazi British Movement

and Column 88 groups.[402] These Far-Right groups maintained a violent street presence across

the period, with gang attacks on isolated Bengali migrants, homes and businesses and a

proliferation of fascist and neo-Nazi graffiti and propaganda filling the walls of the East End

[see figure 201]. From 1976 onwards such mobilisations intensified and became increasingly

focussed upon the emerging centre-point of Bengali migration and community life around

Brick Lane. Fascist booksellers had, for several years run a stall at the north end of the lane

during Sunday Markets, but across three months in 1976 the Spitalfields Bengali Action

Group (SBAG) recorded 30 cases of violent assault against Bengalis. In 1977 Race Today

noted 'a systematic campaign of deadly assaults against the Asian community'.[403] As

Widgery stated it: 'by 1978 it had become impossible for anyone living or working in the E1

area not to have witnessed the provocations: doorstep and bus-stop abuse, the daubing of

menacing graffiti, the window-breaking and air-gun pot shots, the stone and bottle-hurling

sorties on Sundays, and the threatening atmosphere around certain estates and tube stations

which produced a de facto curfew'.[404]

Whilst tensions around Brick Lane (and beyond) had been rising from 1976 forwards,

therefore, the months following Thatcher's swamping speech witnessed a notable

deterioration. On May 4th 1978, Altab Ali was killed by a group of fascists as he crossed a

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402. Leech, *Brick Lane*, 7-12. As Leech states, these were 'really evil and Nazi orientated groups', and though 'of less importance in statistical terms [were] locally more obnoxious and physically dangerous'. Leech's accounts of the violence of the Column 88 group includes an account of their sending him death threats written in blood. Such threats were a consistently faced by anti-racists of the period. Leech, 12.
403. Leech, 8.
404. Widgery, *Beating Time*, 27.

park to the south of Brick Lane on his way home from work. On June 11th of that year, some

hundred and fifty fascists from all over London assembled and attempted to 'storm the lane',

warded off only by a swift organic rising of Bengali self-defence groups. As Kenneth Leech

has observed this marked an extended scale to what had, until that point been smaller, and

more opportunist attacks. Across the next two weekends and right across the summer of

1978, Brick Lane became the centre of pitched battles between Far-Right and allied anti-

fascist and Bengali groups vying for control of what, very quickly, became a national symbol

of inner city conflict [see figures 202].[405]

The murals of this chapter responded very directly, though divergently, to these contexts and

events. *The Promised Land*, was begun in a side-street off Brick Lane, just one year after the

violent struggles of 1978. The *Cable Street Mural*, was less than a kilometre to the south, on

a road which had become an icon of the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s, and—though

conceived as early as 1976—began in earnest amidst the escalating tensions of Brick Lane's

'national moment'. Both murals, therefore, were made and situated in the midst of the urgent

localised contestations of the period. As with the fascist and anti-fascist graffiti which

proliferated across the walls of Tower Hamlets over these years, they can be read, on one

level, as an urgent marking out of fiercely contested space for an anti-racist and anti-fascist

politics. Yet, for all the significance and urgency of such marking, the primary value of the

murals also went beyond bald spatial claims for the politics of anti-racism, to the use of that

space for visual representations of the social, historical and contemporary dimensions of such

politics. Against a wider historical reading of the period as a slow slide into the hegemony of

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405. Leech, *Brick Lane*, 9-10.

authoritarian populism's representational strategies, the murals thus offer a vital site of

contestation.[406]

Tower Hamlets Art Project

Both murals of this chapter emerged from the initiatives of the Tower Hamlets Arts Project

(THAP). THAP had been launched in 1976, by local activists and community workers in

opposition to the proposed 'Eyesights' initiative. 'Eyesights' had sought to place work by

'renowned' artists, on the advertising billboards of East London. Sponsored by Thames

Television, the scheme had been presented as a 'community initiative', designed to place

'culture' on the walls of the 'deprived' inner London borough.[407] It was met by 'an outcry

about the irrelevance of such a scheme to an area of London which so badly needed resources

to develop its own art projects'.[408] Tower Hamlets, had for some years, been host to a series

of community arts activities, including the Basement Project, opened in 1973 in the basement

of St Georges Town Hall and the Half Moon Theatre, founded the year before. Taking

exception to what they perceived to be an act of condescending cultural imperialism, in an

area in which resources might be much better spent elsewhere, some of those already

involved in these projects, Maggie Pinhorn, Dan Jones, and Chris Searle, (amongst others)

initiated a campaign to prevent the project they pithily dubbed as 'Eyesores'. Mobilising

activists and the local community in opposition to the scheme, they succeeded in diverting

406. See Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*; and Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," 20: 'What makes these representations popular is that they have a purchase on practice, they shape it, they are written into its materiality. What constitutes them as a danger is that they change the nature of the terrain itself on which struggles of different kinds are taking place; and they have pertinent effects on these struggles. Currently, they are gaining ground in defining the "conjunctural". That is exactly the terrain on which the forces of opposition must organize, if we are to transform it'.
407. For an account of Tower Hamlets Arts Project see Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis." Archival material is held in Tower Hamlets Local History Archives (henceforth, THA) and Whitechapel Gallery Archives, (WGA).
408. "Report on the Big Show," 1976, THA: S/THA/2/1.

the money to a quickly formed group of community initiatives, entitled Tower Hamlets Arts

Project (THAP), to be administered by the Tower Hamlets Arts Committee (THAC).[409]

The starting budget of £10,000, was soon supplemented by successful approaches to other

funding bodies), and swiftly made THAP one of the leading community-based arts projects in

the country.[410] THAP established a remarkably diverse programme which spanned reading

clubs, a bookshop, publishing ventures, film-making workshops, community dark-rooms and

an expanding series of community arts projects. Pulling together some of the leading figures

of the community arts and literature movement, as well as some of the more active and

outward facing political activists in the area, THAP built upon and cemented the diverse

cultural and political initiatives, which had a long history in the East End.[411] With many of

the THAC members active in the committees of the Arts Council (which by 1976 also

included Carol Kenna) as well as in the Association of Community Arts and the Artists'

Union, the expansion of mural painting across London and the broader country was

registered swiftly by THAC, and they soon set out to set up a murals scheme, as part of their

wider initiatives. As the *Evening News* announced on 6th January 1976, 'Tower Hamlets will

blossom into vivid colour this summer as armies of artists sweep away a century of drabness,

to make 1976 East London's Year of the Paint Brush.'[412] Whilst THAP's interpretation of the

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409. See *Tower Hamlets Arts Committee, Minute Book, December 1975-July 1979*, THA: TH/8445, S/THA/1/2/1; and *Tower Hamlets Arts Project, Big Show*, WGA: WAG/EXH/2/257/BigShow
410. Maggie Pinhorn, who was involved with THAP was by all accounts a ruthlessly efficient fundraiser. Chairperson of the Association of Community artists, she was involved in a huge range of community projects across Tower Hamlets, Covent Garden and beyond. David Binnington recalled her invaluable assistance in preparing funding applications, and her ability to judge the size of a financial application, by the weight of the paperwork involved. (Interview with the author). THAP immediately won the support of the Greater London Arts Association, who were, with increasing funds from the Arts Council, beginning to act as one of the principal financiers of the Community arts in London, a role that was expanded following the Arts Council's increased devolution following 1979. For an account of this devolution process see Pearson, *The State*. They also won significant funds from Tower Hamlets Council, whose budget for the Arts in 1978-79 totalled £43,000. See "28 March 1978, item B," *Tower Hamlets Arts Committee, Minute Book December 1975-July 1979*, THA: TH/8445, S/THA/1/2/1.
411. Sam Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis."
412. 'Tower Hamlets will blossom into vivid colour this summer as armies of artists sweep away a century of drabness to make 1976 East London's Year of the Paint Brush. That is the aim of 35-year-old Dan Jones, anchor

community arts tended to focus upon collaborative processes, above and beyond the final

form or products, upon which this study's selection is based, the murals of this chapter

stretched these definitions.[413]

The Promised Land
'Race' *and* **Class on Chicksand street**

At Chicksand Street, THAP were contacted to oversee a grant from the Spitalfields project to

restore a playspace and park on a plot of land recently opened to public use by the GLC, in a

side-street off Brick Lane.[414] The decision to create a mural and playspace, aligned well with

THAP's priorities at this moment, which anticipated the Arts Council and other groups in

prioritising funding for murals and environmental projects.[415] Forming a square amidst two

blocks of 1930s GLC administered housing, a series of warehouse spaces, sweat shops, and a

run-down row of Georgian terraces, the park offered a much needed communal space [see

man of an ambitious project to literally paint the town. Backed by GLAA, seeking aid from everyone – from the RA and the big paint companies to pensioners groups and youth clubs to decorate walls, doors and corridors as part of the borough's arts year. Already the response is astonishing'. "Painters are Going to Town in the East End," *Evening News*, January 6, 1976: THA: 750/Folder 2/ General ANO 1977-1981/Clippings.

413. Having set up a Murals and Environmental Projects subcommittee, THAP resolved to continue patronage of community focussed murals. As will be seen, they also resolved that a professionally led mural commemorating the Battle of Cable Street, upon the wall of the Town Hall, would provide a lasting legacy to anti-racism, in an area in which racism was, once more, dramatically on the rise. The first documented mention of the *Cable Street Mural* seems to be in the January 1976 *Evening News* article cited above (see also, below, Chap. 2 n. 521). For details of the Murals and Environmental Subcommittee's work, see *Tower Hamlets Arts Committee, Minute Book Dec 1975-Jul 1979*, THA: TH/8445, S/THA/1/2/1. Beyond this, THAC were also (alongside the GLC and the Department of the Environment) to sponsor and support murals by Kate Morris and Carolynne Beal, at Christchurch, Spitalfields, which pushed more forcefully at advancing a realist style in relation to local subjects than a collaborative process. For an account of that mural's opening, see *East London Advertiser*, December 29, 1978, THA: 750/Folder 2/ General ANO 1977-1981, Clippings.

414. The organised creation of parks and communal space from declining industrial space, was something of a development from the more ad-hoc recoveries of space examined in the last chapter. A community group in the area to the north end of Brick Lane, the Spitalfields Project was funded through the Department of Environment. With the Tories' ascent their future remained uncertain at the moment of the park's commissioning and would seem to have disappeared completely the next year in line with Thatcher's assault on community initiatives and funding. See Ray Walker, "Letter to Alister Warman," September 9, 1979, ACGB/31/10 Box 4.

415. These resulted in Tower Hamlets founding their own 'Murals and Environments Subcommittee'. The first mention of this committee's foundation was on February 27, 1978, some months before the Arts Council's Committee launched, see "Minutes February 27th, Item 3b," *THAC Minute Book*, THA: TH/8445: S/THA/1/2/1.

figure 203]. In an area in which a sense of isolation was widely remarked,[416] and division

rife, this was, as an early THAP funding endorsement confirmed, 'one of the most used open

spaces in Spitalfields'.[417] Yet it was, by its positioning and moment, a fundamentally

contested space, far removed from liberal ideals of a neutral public sphere so often associated

with community and public arts. It was perhaps in light of these contexts, and the symbolic

importance of the site, that THAP's usual preference for a more process driven community

arts approach, with less 'professional' artists, and less overbearing concerns for 'quality' and

'product' was forsaken, and Ray Walker approached.[418]

Ray Walker had moved from West London, to Poplar, in Tower Hamlets, in 1976. Raised in

Liverpool, Walker had studied at Liverpool College of Art from 1961-1964, before taking up

a place to study fine art at the Royal College of Art, London, from 1965-1969.[419] At the

Royal College he was a contemporary of Brian Barnes, who recalls sharing his concerns for a

broadly figurative idiom with Walker.[420] From the outset, however, Walker's art displayed a

416. For an account of the problems of isolation encountered by migrant women in the area, see Nilufar Ahmed, "Chapter 3: Women in Between: the case of Bangladeshi Women living in London," in *Women and Migration in Asia, Vol. 1: Transnational Migration and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Meenakshi Thapan, (New Delhi/London: Thousand Oaks/ Sage Publications, 2005), 99-129.

417. See Mandy Berry, "Grant Application to the Arts Council of Great Britain, Committee for Murals and Environmental Projects," September 1979, ACGB/31/10/Box 4.

418. As minutes from a late 1978 Murals and Environments subcommittee suggest: 'it is important to maintain a reasonable artistic standard – by this we do not mean that all murals should be "great art" – (whatever that is), but that the work should meet the criteria of those involved in the process; i.e. if it is a project being done with local people (old or young) involved in painting a wall then it should be followed through and properly completed if it is a project involving mural artists then they must relate their work to the local community and involve them in a process of consultation.' *THAC Minute Book*, undated [late 1978], THA: TH/8445: S/THA/1/2/1.

419. 'He was born in Liverpool at the end of the war, in 1945, the eldest child of a Liverpool working-class family. He had three brothers and a sister and grew up in a cramped terraced house in an area that has by now become one of the most infamous examples of inner city decay. His father was often away at sea when Ray was very young…Ray had gained a place at a good local grammar school, Hillfoot Hey, where he was greatly encouraged by his art master.' Anna Walker and Mike Jones, "Biography," in Ray Walker Memorial Committee, *Ray Walker*, (London: Ray Walker Memorial Committee, 1985), 9. Stuart Sutcliffe ('the Fifth Beatle') and John Lennon, had met studying at the Liverpool College of Art in the late 1950s. Though both had left by Walker's start in 1961, the bohemian community which surrounded the Art College persisted through the 1960s. Walker's band is said to have played with the Beatles at the Cavern Club at one of their regular nights there, presumably at some point in 1961. Walker and Jones, 9.

420. The pair were to maintain contact, showed at the same Kensington gallery for a brief period in the early 1970s, and later worked collaboratively in the London Muralists for Peace Collective (see Chapter 3 below). Barnes' half joking asides that Walker seems to have copied his style upon arrival at the Royal College cannot

more modernist sensibility than Barnes', fusing an interest in surrealist juxtaposition and biomorphic form, with an attention to an evolving, carnivalesque tableau of bohemian life.[421] Through the 1970s, Walker's more bohemian works—portraying life in the squats of West London—evolved in two directions, with an interior world of compressed family scenes reminiscent of German Expressionism, set against a more public mode, as his attentions turned outwards towards themes of city life beyond [see figures 204].[422] As Walker moved towards this mode of more socially orientated realism, he found it increasingly difficult to sustain himself from gallery sales, and increasingly drawn to the mural form.[423] Having, in 1973, assisted John Bratby, the renowned realist painter of the previous (post-war) generation, and a group of students, in the execution of a large temporary mural at the site of the Sam Wanamaker's Globe Theatre, in 1977 he took on a commission to complete an

be verified, but in his year of graduation Walker was working in a quite distinct style to Barnes. For Walker: '[t]he training I received at art college has been beneficial in many respects. As a student I had plenty of time to practice drawing and painting and to experiment with other media. I met other students and teachers and observed many diverse involvements in the Arts and in the Visual Arts in particular. I had a relatively unrestricted opportunity to study paintings and sculpture, etc., visit exhibitions, attend lectures, see films, read books, etc. without having to cope with the problems of earning a living'. "An Interview with Ray Walker," (c.1979), in Ray Walker Memorial Committee, *Ray Walker*, 79. In his celebration of a collegiate environment free from commercial pressures Walker's memories align with a number of the other muralists covered in this study, including, for example, Brian Barnes and David Binnington.

421. His earliest work shares some affinity with that of John Bellany, a Scottish student, one year his senior. Bellany was by his own, and his teachers', accounts something of a sensation at the College. Bellany recalled in a letter to his friend being one of the only students whose name the tutors even knew. Carel Weight, also recalled being extremely impressed by Bellany. It may not be too far a stretch to suggest that Bellany's interest in a 'Northern' identity may have stretched as far south as to encompass a fellow socialist Liverpudlian. The two also shared a proximity to the sea: Bellany having grown up in a Scottish fishing village; Walker, the son of a sailor. See, John McEwen, *John Bellany*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Co., 1994), 59-61. Carel Weight, who may have served as a tutor to both, is likely to have provided some succour in this direction. Long capable of romantic, Victorianesque juxtapositions, of angels and figures within the landscape, in the early 1970s Weight began to explore more contemporary urban juxtapositions.

422. In both tendencies, the work of Max Beckmann, can be detected as a (near)consistent touchstone, with Beckmann's angular approach to the human figure, the carnivalesque world of his later works, and his charging of tight interior scenes with oversized figures, marking consistent devices for Walker. Walker is likely to have seen Beckmann's work in the major 1965 Tate exhibition upon first moving to London, but it is notable that his influence strengthened through the mid- to-late-1970s.

423. As Anna Walker and Mike Jones described: 'Ray wished to exhibit the larger more socially aware paintings which were becoming the focus of his art. He had various one-man shows, but the galleries were concerned with saleable work and increasingly reluctant to show this more direct, aggressive painting. Surviving as a socially-aware artist through the private gallery scene proved impossible for Ray, as for many others whose work is of a far less controversial nature'. Walker and Jones, "Biography,"15. He succeeded in earning a living 'with a variety of casual jobs (more than 50) either part time or full time periodically including factory work, labouring, house painting, etc., teaching, selling my paintings… and odd periods on the dole.' "An Interview with Ray Walker," in Ray Walker Memorial Committee, *Ray Walker*, 79.

interior panel mural on the theme of Dick Whittington, for the Whittington Hospital in North London [see figure 205].[424] As Walker recalled, 'This was my first move to having my work on permanent show in a public place and it delighted me'.[425]

In 1978, Walker had completed his first exterior mural on a side-road in Bow, facilitated (though not predominantly funded) by THAP.[426] In the *Bow Mission Mural*, Walker had given decentralised focus to the ambient diversity of the area, with multi-ethnic figures at work and leisure spreading in largely undifferentiated scale across the bright-toned blues and yellows of the backdrop [see figure 206]. The Bow mural, revealed Walker's evolving concern and appreciation for the complex issues surrounding artistic publicness, and a reorientation from the more personal world of carnivalesque reference which characterised his early canvasses and the Whittington panels, towards a more legible and socially engaged realist mode.[427] In so doing, his preceding engagements with Beckmann-esque interiors, were displaced by a free-floating exterior scene of animated figures set a brightly toned ground, recalling something of the later works of Fernand Léger. In his contributions to the 1978

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424. Bratby had shot to fame in the 1950s as one of the Beaux Arts Quartet, championed by John Berger. By the 1960s, however, the particular mode of realism Berger had championed was much maligned, as Cold War tensions escalated, and pop art and American influenced abstraction, rose to the fore of the buoyant art market. It seems likely that Carel Weight may have put Walker and Bratby in contact, given that he had taught both, and was a frequent champion of his students' ambitions to work on a large scale. In 1969, for example, Weight had organised a show of large paintings at the Royal Academy, for a group of Walker's peers working in what they themselves described as a mode of 'conservative abstraction'. David Sweet, [an abstract painter in Walker and Barnes' cohort], email to the author, February 6, 2016. The *Whittington Hospital Mural,* reveals the Edwin Austin Abbey Mural Fund's growing interest in a new generation of social realist muralists, in the wake of the (associated) Vincent Harris Mural Trust's funding of the *Royal Oak Murals*. The artists fee for the mural is listed as £1500, "A40," in *Edwin Austin Abbey Trust Scrapbook*, Royal Academy Archives. They also offered a retrospective grant of £350 Brian Barnes' Battersea mural. Though their contributions tended to remain small, their increased patronage formed another useful source for muralists.
425. Ray Walker, cited in, Walker and Jones, "Biography", 15. Elsewhere, Walker elaborated, that: '[a] carte-blanche freedom of the studio to paint whatever you will may be the only sanity for a great many artists but to maintain that kind of absolute autonomy on public walls is treading on dangerous ground as far as compatibility is concerned. In spite of this an artist can keep the better part of himself intact and still maintain the right to address himself to a community. This doesn't mean side-stepping visual tyranny'. "Interview with Ray Walker," 79-80.
426. THAC and the Bow Mission offered £250 each, whilst the bulk of the grant came from the ACGB's short-lived Murals and Environmental Projects fund who offered £1,450. See, Walker, "Letter to David Pratley," July 13, 1978: ACGB/31/33 AF/PA/ES/265/400.
427. This thinking behind these shifts is elucidated in "Interview with Ray Walker," 79-82.

National Mural Conference, Walker, worked through some of his anxieties regarding mural's public function and community integration, commenting that '[t]he artist inevitably cow-tows to the public demand. His [sic] work is curtailed by their insensitivity, and this has been a constant problem throughout the ages. However much one goes through the process of discussing and getting ideas from the public one is left with a compromise in which the artist's best ideas are degraded.' In another contribution he recommended, that '[i]nstead of spending a hell of a lot of time researching what the public wants, some will want one kind of thing, some will want another; why don't you project your own ideas firstly, see how it goes down and go on from there'.[428]

At Chicksand Street Walker stated his ambitions for a mural that would 'give people a collection of images which relate specifically to their own lives, the source of the imagery being 'life in the local community' presented as a particular urban microcosm'.[429] Such a description could equally be applied to Bow Mission and would seem central to Walker's ambitions for the mural form. The two murals also share a concern with the diverse spheres of a localised quotidian existence, their thematic reach ranging from housing, through public space to work. Notably absent at Chicksand Street, however, is a trace of the former mural's origins in the ambition 'to brighten a very drab wall'.[430] Rather than any environmentally ameliorative function, the mural which emerged at Chicksand Street is characterised by an uncompromisingly 'realist' stance. For Desmond Rochfort, whose *Royal Oak Mural*, was described in passing at the end of the last chapter, this shift marked an increasingly 'radical'

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428. See Greenwich Mural Workshop, *First National Mural Conference*. Such an opinion can be contrasted with Walker's later statement that 'I've come round to thinking is *their* mural, why not work with them, they're going to see it, why not let them have a say in what it's going to be about. You have the skills, the intuition, the ideas, the invention, it's all going to be there, it's not going to be wasted. It's interesting to hear what people would like on their walls anyway. I've come round to believing that it's not a bad principle to act on.' Ray Walker, cited in Ray Walker Memorial Committee, *Ray Walker*, 15.
429. Ray Walker, quoted in Chartist, "Playground in the Abyss, Art on a wall in Chicksand Street," in *Chartist* (May/June 1981): 15.
430. "Bow Mission Annual Report 1978", cited in Ray Walker Memorial Committee, *Ray Walker*, 15-18.

approach in Walker's art, manifest in particular in a selection of content and themes 'that responded less to what people on the spot thought might be "nice to look at", and more to what he discovered to be significant in their lives'.[431] At Chicksand Street, Walker's search for the significant had, by his own admission, set out from first impressions, 'tainted by memories of reports and photographs of the racial harassment, outbreaks of racist violence and even murders of Asian people in the Brick Lane area'.[432]

Beginning work in July 1979, Walker—who had recently moved from Poplar (just to the east of Brick Lane) to Hackney (just to the north)—set about making sketches and photographs of the area. Whilst the photographs do not survive, charcoal studies do. With Walker's characteristically bold line, and strong sense of plastic values these range from nuanced portraits of local residents, to more generalised studies of (women) workers sewing, cutting and ironing within the cramped environs of local garment factories [see figure 207]. The studies reveal something of Walker's tenderness and intimacy with his subjects, and the extent to which the final mural built directly upon his observations and sketches in the area. Yet the final mural's plethora of portraits and observational details of local life, stretch far beyond the surviving sketches, and would seem to confirm Mandy Berry's observations of an extended period of visual research built around the observation of local people and scenes.[433]

For all the warmth with which Walker studied the people of the local community, his period of study does not seem to have much lifted his impressions of the area. As he described it in 1981, '[t]his public site…and the streets around it were strewn with heaps of rubbish, broken

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431. Desmond Rochfort, "Reflections on Public Art: Ray Walker," in *AND Journal of Art* No. 6, (1985): 20. Such a shift in attitude is in part confirmed by Walker's above cited contributions to the First National Mural Conference in November 1978, just after Bow Mission.

432. Chartist, "Playground in the Abyss," 15.

433. Mandy Berry, "Grant Application to the Arts Council of Great Britain, Committee for Murals and Environmental Projects," September 1979, ACGB/31/10/Box 4.

glass, dead rats and dead cats. Rubbish bins had not been installed on the site and it quite obviously had not been cleared for years (a neglect produced by bureaucratic buck-passing by the GLC and Tower Hamlets Council). Numerous Asian children were hanging around squabbling or playing football. Several down and outs were sitting around on what was left of benches, boozing and cursing the Asian children".[434] It is a description given form in the final work, which as Ray Walker conceded, 'celebrated few aspects of life… but I found little to celebrate'.[435]

Perhaps predictably, given the sheer scale of the wall to be covered, Walker's evolving interest in his subject, his ambitions for mural painting, and the three months of funding covered by the initial funds, Walker had overrun the initial budget by the Autumn of 1979. He was to gain further funds from the Arts Council's short-lived Murals and Environmental Projects committee (who, it would seem, were only too happy, at this moment, to support the efforts of highly trained artists like Walker).[436] In letters to Alister Warman, the Art Council scheme's administrator across 1979, Walker foresaw the potential for expanding his painting across the wall to the right of the space, observing that of a '30x 200 ft' rendered wall, he had thus far only managed to complete, a 30 x 70 ft section, though had 'plenty of designs for the remaining sections.[437] With the advance of Arts Council funds, Walker was able to work through until the summer of 1980, and expand his designs to cover the entire wall (though this was, in fact, 80 ft shorter than his letters suggest, at 30 x 120ft). For all these negotiations, the final mural contains a robust architectonic structure, and cohesive thematic

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434. Chartist, "Playground in the Abyss," 15.
435. Walker, cited in Caroline Taylor, "Ray's Masterpiece Starts a Storm," *East London Advertiser*, March 6, 1981. Accessed in THA: 750/ Folder 2/ General ANO 1977-1981/ Clippings.
436. Alister Warman, the administrator of that project has described his excitement at Walker's potential, his professional training and art historically sourced models of realism. Warman, interview with the author, September 2015. In exchanges with Warman across 1979, Walker consistently stressed his frustration at the less professional approaches favoured by THAP, see for example Ray Walker, "Letter to Alister Warman," September 25, 1979: ACGB/31/10, Box 4.
437. Ray Walker, "Letter to Alister Warman," September 25, 1979: ACGB/31/10, Box 4.

unity, which prevent its lateral, and somewhat ad hoc expanse, from feeling in any sense

arbitrary. The unity of the design notwithstanding, the mural is perhaps best examined in

three broad sections [see figure 208].

The Left: Housing

The left-most portion of the mural's three sections can be drawn from the mural's edge on

Chicksand Street to the south to the depicted tube train to the right [see figure 209]. It offers a

condensation of the immediate environment: the facade of the GLC administered housing of

Chicksand House, (which faced the mural), opening up to a forecourt inhabited by a range of

figures and overspilling detritus. Across the forecourt are ranged dispersed figure groups

receding across a steeply rendered (but not overbearing) surface of grey tarmac. Here the

lessons of Léger's approach to shifting scales, which Walker seemed less able to apply at

Bow Mission, seem much better processed, with wonderfully luminous detailing of carefully

observed rubbish, floating against the uninhabited spaces of the grey field of the reclining

forecourt.[438] But the whole dispenses with the dislocating device of the primary toned planar

background, which underlined Walker's debt to Léger at Bow Mission [see figure 206]. Here,

instead, is a charged but cohesive representational space, mirroring and extending the

physical setting of the mural. The effect is to condense both figures and litter into a tight, but

not overcrowded, scene of the immediate locality.

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438. At *Bow Mission* Walker's use of abstracted tonal fragments as an underlay to figurative scenes and
background to the scene recalled Léger's work. But rather than allowing the abstracted details to come forth and
disrupt the picture plane, through dislocations of scale, they remain, a background device: a non-spatial field
upon which his quite divergent figurative assertions sit. If in some ways, this practice brings the mural closer to
Léger's later work, where the abstracted panes of colour often seem to form a background to the foregrounded
elements, Walker's decision to depart from Léger's radical dislocations of scale, his interests in close up,
juxtaposition and montage, renders his composition prone to a sense of irresolution.

The section is structured with something of a circular motion around the multi-ethnic, multi-gendered figure group at its centre [see figure 210]. These figures are themselves encircled in chains, thorned vines and a rope. For Desmond Rochfort, this group of figures, were bound in 'a dance of liberty'.[439] It is an interpretation which seems underwritten by the off-cast chain and opened padlock to their immediate left, and the tethering of the rope to their right. Yet the struggle and anguish of the figures and their continued confinement within ropes and vines, undermine Rochfort's suggestion of 'dance' and suggest that any striven for 'liberty' is not yet achieved, nor likely to be easily won. A bald, suited figure behind the group, flanked by bills from Tower Hamlets Borough Council and the GLC, meanwhile, underlines the bureaucratic dimensions of the figures' captivity.[440]

The physical and symbolic sense of struggle generated by this group, is compounded by the broader environmental degradation which surrounds them, even as it is held back from an overbearing register by a series of less temporally extended, or symbolically loaded, liminal details. To the left rear, for example, a group of racially divided children crowd around a young girl, leapfrogging over a half-dismembered television set; a moment of ludic resourcefulness (literally, if) temporarily overcoming the deprivation of the pervasive litter. In the foreground a pile of rotting fruit, nestles alongside discarded cigarette packets, flyers from a contemporary Bollywood movie, and other anthropologically telling detritus [see figure 211]. To the central group's right, the theme of rubbish is combined with a more explicitly violent scene: a figure in full exertion kicking the contents of an over-spilling bin forwards across depth of the scene. This stream of litter provides an effective channel of

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439. Rochfort, "Ray Walker," 21.
440. Not visible in the early versions of the mural in progress (captured by David Hoffman) these figures in the rear are one of three late additions to this section. The others are the foregrounded floating bottle and the woman pouring rubbish from the first-floor balcony. Each addition adds precision to the scene's balanced counterpoints, in this case moving the attention away from the slightly distracting ambivalence of the three divergent materials in which the group are wrapped and directing the political critique of the image with much greater precision.

space from the rear to the foreground and culminates in the green bottle hovering poetically above the finger of the outwards-pointing, forward-staring, leather jacketed figure [see figure 212].

This figure—one of several figures in the mural who face outwards: many of them elderly men—anchors the foreground scene, holding the viewer with his firm gaze, inscrutable expression and pointing finger. Similar outwards glancing elderly figures were also employed by Walker at Bow Mission. Their presence seems pitched to register some form of imbedded, and embodied wisdom and historical testimony: their deadpan expressions, aged faces and austere clothing seeming, particularly at Chicksand Street, to cut against the nostalgic tone of post-imperial decline (so crucial to the narratives of the Far- and New Right), with a reminder of the historical continuity of the contemporary struggles faced by the local population.[441] Precedence at Bow Mission notwithstanding, the trope functions to a much greater effect amidst the expanded spatial and narrative structures of *The Promised Land*. In this specific instance, the figure also seems to recall something of Leon Battista Alberti's 15th century prescriptions for a 'communicative figure' to underline and communicate emotional narratives within effective '*historia*'.[442] Embodied experience notwithstanding, Alberti's

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441. There seems a particular resonance in the case of the figures in this mural, in fact, with the opening lines of The Clash's 1980 single 'Something about England', which begins: 'They say immigrants steal the hubcaps/ Of the respected gentlemen/ They say it would be wine an' roses / If England were for Englishmen again/ Well I saw a dirty overcoat/ At the foot of the pillar of the road/ Propped inside was an old man/ Whom time would not erode...'. The song moves on to recount, through the old man's narration, a history of 20th century working class experience punctuated by two World Wars, the continued indifference of the state, and the persistence of an unequal society, as an affective counterpoint to the jingoism of the opening lines. It seems highly unlikely that the Clash (recording their Sandanista album in New York across 1980), and some 10 years or so younger than Walker, would have encountered the mural, or Walker have anticipated their song. Nonetheless, there seems a notable parallel, in the use (by two products of West London 1970s squats) of the spectre of a forward glancing elderly figure as a narrative vehicle for meditation upon the poignance of embodied historical testament, in wider cycles undercutting the nostalgia of revanchist nationalist tropes.
442. Alberti's 15th century treatise declared: 'It seems opportune then that in the *historia* there is someone who informs the spectators of the things that unfold; or invites with the hand to show; or threatens with severe face and turbid eyes not to approach there, as if he wishes that a similar story remains secret; or indicates a danger or another [attribute] over there to observer; or invites you with his own gestures to laugh together or cry in company.' Leon Battista Alberti, *Leon Battista Alberti: On Painting*, Rocco Sinisgalli, ed., (Cambridge:

prescriptions seem particularly relevant to the figure's upturned finger, which leads us to a bottle, hanging poetically in mid-air. Highlighted in this way, the bottle's arrested flight, forms part of, and crystallises, the short-temporal explorations of liminality which run through the scene, even as—in the midst of an area where bottle attacks were becoming more frequent— its imminent shattering adds a sense of violence and threat to the whole.[443]

Above the central group, an Asian woman throws yet more litter from the first floor balcony of Chicksand House, as a festival-like banner bearing the words 'Brick Lane 1978' peels away from the wall [see figure 213 and 208b].[444] Augmenting the collection of moments of suspended time, and the theme of environmental decline, the peeling banner, would, given its reference to a year predating the mural, also seem designed to mark out the mural's direct and conscious engagement with the themes, legacies and contexts of the year that turned Brick Lane into a national icon of racialised division and inner city decline. Typical of Walker's approach, however, the juxtaposition of the banner with a litter throwing woman of Asian descent, serves (off-set as she is with the white bin-kicker to the right), to undercut any overly reductive racialised reading of the source of degradation or conflict.

This collection of moments of arrested time—the leapfrogging figure, the over-kicked bin, the hanging bottle, the peeling sign and balcony issued litter—is returned to a more extended temporality by the figure in the Sari to the rear [see figure 213]. This (presumably Bangladeshi) woman, is depicted arriving, behind a trunk, with child in arm, past a broken

Cambridge University Press, 2011), 49. Whilst the inscrutability of this figure's expression offers nothing of the catharsis of tears or laughter, he nonetheless directs us to a suspended, and important, narrative device.

443. Widgery, for example, describes 'bottle hurling sorties on Sundays', as one of a number of signs of deteriorating local relations. Widgery, *Beating Time*, 27.

444. The sign and the litter thrower would appear, once more, to be last minute additions (given their absence in earlier versions of the mural). In this case their addition would seem to serve multiple functions. Beyond the sense of liminal temporality described, the contexts of Brick Lane 1978 would seem to very firmly root the whole in the racialised tensions of the area which peaked in 1978 (this, for example, forming the title of Ken Leech's book on the subject).

window and rearward pointing blonde woman, to the presumed 'Promised Land' of the work's, bitingly bathetic title. Allied with the 'Dance of Liberty' figures this motif extends the temporal and narrative dimensions at play, inscribing the section with the narrative arc of arrival to, and struggle through, the enveloping quotidian surroundings. Indeed, this is the moment in which Walker's wider title is most cogently filtered. As Walker said of this title, 'the mural depicts ironically a kind of "Promised Land"—a stepping stone for many who came from near and far with dreams, illusions broken but not devoid of hope, for what hope is worth'.[445]

The attention given by this section of the mural to the localised housing situation, and its emphasis on 'black', 'white' and 'Asian' men, women and children cohabitating under the aegis of pronounced environmental neglect and implicit tension is significant. For, whilst the shocking incidents of high profile street violence around Brick Lane in 1978 are better remembered—enshrined in collective memory by documentary photography and cultural histories alike— it was the less spectacular, and more quotidian situations which coalesced around residential settings which formed the backdrop to such moments. As David Widgery described the situation of migrants arriving to the wider East End: 'in no time they are in some kind of ghastly parody of a concentration camp where the half-pissed skinhead camp commandant makes late-night patrols with a pack of Alsatians while the Asians imprison themselves behind barred windows...this is no fun for anyone and the warmest heart in the world (and some of the longstanding residents have them) can't build a spirit of neighbourliness out of a situation which everyone has a valid reason to resent…'[446]

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445. Ray Walker, quoted in Chartist, "Playground in the Abyss," 15.
446. Widgery, *Beating Time*, 27-28.

Widgery gives a sense of the centrality of residential settings within these wider conflicts and a deeper sense of the contexts to which Walker's realism was tuned. Given the location of the mural, and its specific reference to 'Brick Lane 1978', moreover, it is of note that the high profile incidents of June 11th 1978, which kick-started the summer of confrontations between fascist and anti-fascist groups for the control of Brick Lane, were directly underpinned by the local housing situation.[447] For the rallying of fascists on June 11th followed on from a week of controversy across the national press regarding a GLC plans to offer preferential treatment to Bengali families on the estates in the Brick lane area, and move white families out.[448] As Stuart Hall and others have pointed out was so common across the period, the mediatised furore both inflamed and misrepresented the situation.[449] At an immediate level the media tension all but ignored the long-running systematic oppression that Bengalis and other minority groups had faced in the allocation of housing, and which the policy was itself intended in part to address. As a 1976 GLC report, for example, pointed out, non-white people were 'disproportionately allocated the oldest and most unpopular types of accommodation' and 'GLC allocations are maintaining and even reinforcing the pattern of immigrant disadvantage which is so characteristic a feature of the private housing market'.[450]

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447. As Widgery described it, on Sunday 11th June, a 'full scale windowsmashing mob some 150 strong was mobilised from all over London and attempted to charge the lane. Assembled openly after a front street meeting and included youths bussed in from as far afield as Peckham, Dagenham, Putney and South Ockenden, and directed by known local fascists. They succeeded in breaking a few windows and car windscreens and knocking a fifty-five year-old shopkeeper unconscious before they were chased off'. Widgery, *Beating Time,* 28

448. The 'Ghetto Plans' were brought to mainstream attention by a front-page *Observer* article, of June 4th, entitled 'GLC Plans Ghetto for Bengalis'. The story was then picked up by other major newspapers. Condemned by most it was, as Kenneth Leech has pointed out, welcomed by the *Telegraph*, who wrote a leader on June 6th, declaring ghettoes, were 'not obviously a bad thing', and that 'there will be fewer cases of tension if races live separately. Admittedly there will be forays into those areas by hooligans of other races. But alas the harmonious multi-racial Utopia cannot exist outside the minds of those who are striving so disastrously to bring it about'. Cited in Leech, *Brick Lane*, 13.

449. Hall's *Policing the Crisis* dealt at length with the role of the media in the construction of moral panics across the period. Leech provides a very effective summary of the shortcomings and misrepresentations of the media in the 'Bengali Ghetto Controversy': Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis*; Leech, *Brick Lane*, 13-14

450. Cited in Leech, 13.

In the East End this situation was compounded by the fact that many Bengali families faced isolation and attack when straying from what they had come to identify as 'a safe zone' around Brick Lane.[451] Indeed, many chose to abandon council allocated housing on the peripheries of the Tower Hamlets and return to overcrowded squatted properties in the blocks around Brick Lane and Chicksand Street. These campaigns for housing—augmented by the emergence of community centres and mutual self-defence patrols — were some of the earliest political formations of the local Bengali population, and brought them into alliance with housing activists, anti-racists and the burgeoning Black Panther movement.[452] It was, indeed, the appeals of one such group—the Bengali Housing Action Group (BHAG)—which were 'credited' with the origins of the GLC's 'Ghetto plans' in the newspapers. In direct contradiction to the reports, however, BHAG had never asked for preferential treatment, but rather provided a list of thirteen estates (only three of which were, in fact, in Spitalfields), in which they would feel safe to be re-homed, and on which they had identified plentiful examples of flats left abandoned by the Council neglect, so widespread across the period.[453] In the aftermath of the furore surrounding the GLC plans, members of three Bengali groupings allied with a range of other local organisations, including the Chicksand

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451. For a full account of the concrete situation see Leech, 13; and Sarah Glyn, "East End Immigrants and the Battle for Housing: a comparative study of political mobilisation in the Jewish and Bengali communities," *Journal of Historical Geography* 31, 3 (July 2005): 528-545.

452. The involvement of Black Panther organisers, Mala and Farrukh Dhondy, was particularly instrumental in setting up the Bengali Housing Action Group (described below): see Glyn, "Battle for Housing". As well as fighting for the housing rights of Bengali families, in 1975, this group set up a squat in the Pelham Buildings, two streets north along Brick Lane from Chicksand Square. According to Glyn ("Battle for Housing," 12), Pelham house was home to several hundred Bengali families at its peak. For a broader account of the development of Bengali political organisations, see Leech, *Brick Lane*. And for an insider (and partisan) view of their interaction with anti-fascist groups, see Widgery, *Beating Time*.

453. As Glyn and Leech point out the immediate contexts for the rehousing situation that the 1978 GLC report was set out to address were the Conservative GLC's 1977 'Armistice' for squatters. Hoping to draw to a close a period of extensive squatting (see Proll, *Good Bye to London*, 11) these plans offered council homes for squatters. Around the Brick Lane area, where BHAG and other groups had set up squats for Bengali residents, approximately 100 Bengali families applied for council homes under the scheme. See Glyn ("Battle for Housing," 14) and Leech (*Brick Lane*, 13). Compounding these issues was a severe absence of building in the Spitalfields area and the bureaucratic overlap of Tower Hamlets Council and the GLC, who shared responsibilities for housing tenants and often failed to work in tandem, see Glyn, "Battle for Housing," 9.

Community Action Group, to reject the idea of a 'ghetto'.[454] As the Bangladeshi Youth

Movement wrote to Horace Cutler, Leader of the GLC, in early June:

> *we reject absolutely the kind of social engineering which could result in all-Asian estates or blocks. We are committed to the multi-racial, multi-cultural society of which we are part, and join with other local Bengali and white groups in protesting against dangerous separatist housing policies which would ruin existing and developing relationships between the communities and isolate the Bengali community as a target of violence.*[455]

It is within these contexts that the focus of the left-hand passage attains a fuller specificity.

For, rather than constituting a 'pessimistic' or 'reductive' realism, the mural draws very

closely upon the localised political realities: the environmental degradation of local housing,

and the multiple hints at the charged racialised conflicts elicited within such situations. In

these contexts, the image of the mother and child arriving to a litter filled scene, for example,

works to undercut the notion of a pre-existent utopia ('*The Promised Land*'), destroyed by

migrant incomers. The broken-windowed flat to which she is about to enter, draws attention

to the fallacy of the notion of overcrowding, in an area in which so many properties remained

deserted and under-maintained as the GLC and Tower Hamlets Council shifted

responsibilities.[456] The multi-'racial' figure group, shackled beneath the weight of municipal

bureaucracy, meanwhile, points towards a shared and ongoing struggle, which, by its very

ongoingness precedes the new arrival.[457] Crucially, therefore, for all its charged conflicts and

dystopian images of the neglect, the section rejects and works against easy sentiment,

reductive binaries, or racialised readings of decline. Instead, it offers a nuanced, if largely

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454. See Leech, *Brick Lane,* 13-14.
455. Bengali Youth Movement, "Letter of June 7th," 1978, quoted in Leech, 14.
456. Glyn, "Battle for Housing."
457. It is notable in this regard that this multi-'racial' group includes, 'black', but not Asian, figures: a decision that would seem, given the contemporary demographics, designed to strengthen the temporal reading of the work being forwarded here, aligning broadly with the fact that African and West Indian migration had tended to pre-date that from East Pakistan and Bangladesh.

negative, view of a crucial area of quotidian conflict, whilst pointing— in those serried bills haranguing the 'dance of liberty' — to the political agents responsible for it: the councils.

The Core: A Common Enemy?

The middle section of the mural expands the political dimensions of the mural's address further, and in some ways more directly [See figure 214]. Divided from the left section by the tube train to the rear, and a loose spatial divide in the foreground, this 'middle section' presents approximately five loosely differentiated subsections, underpinned by a gradated sense of recession. The foreground presents a seeming continuation of the hyper-localised reference of the left-hand passage: a group of half-length larger-scaled elderly figures grouped around a newspaper, alongside a semi-circular group of black and Asian youths [see figure 215-16].[458] Both groups would seem, through their informal clusters and leisurely activities to be set within the park space itself. They offer a monumentality and sense of observed and differentiated psychological realism, that seem to mark them out as portraits. Behind, a smiling portrait of an Asian youth bridges to a middleground section of more distant portraits, whose general sense of happiness offers a counterpoint to the graver expressions of the foreground figures [see figure 216]. Throughout both passages, the divergent scale and sense of interiority mark a notable shift in tone and tempo, from the more liminal and narrative moments on the left. Rather than a direct narrative function, the figures would seem poised to assert little more than their human presence.

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458. The Newspaper divides between 'good' and 'bad' news sections in the front and back pages. The former containing the headlines: 'New Hope for Cancer'; 'Heart Transplant a Success'; 'White Rhino and Grey Whale Rescued from Extinction'; and several references to THAP writers group and events. The bad, in themes which seem only too familiar in 2017, by turn focusses on: deteriorating relations with Russia, 'World Peace Threatened' and 'Further Cuts in Health, Housing and Education'.

Above these figures to the right, the dynamic wedge of four exposed rooms from a local garment factory marks the right hand of this 'mid-section', whilst the tube train (fronted by that wonderfully observed group, huddled around a seated elderly man with stick in hand) marks the left [see figure 217]. Between these points is opened a V-shaped aperture with a densely packed recessive street scene and a tumult of diverse scenes and incidents: local youths, Sari-ed women, shawled pensioners, flat-capped men, bowler-hatted city workers, custodian-helmeted policemen, the odd Lenin-shaped beard, and—to the right—trees that look lifted from an early Léger cityscape, or Kandinsky hilltop. Presumably based around the busy streets of nearby Aldgate, the scene opens the mural up to the tumult and heterogeneity of the busy city beyond.[459]

Atop all this, is presented the soaring skyline of the City of London. As Rochfort observed, this section rounds home the remarkable proximities of geographic inequality that hang over a city like London, and an area like Tower Hamlets in particular: extreme poverty and deprivation sitting tooth-to-jowl with one of the world's wealthiest square miles.[460] With the spire of Hawksmoor's Christchurch and the recently completed Nat West Tower falling approximately in line with their actual positions [see figure 218], there is a particular forcefulness and haptic veracity to the City's looming presence in the mural. It is a veracity soon diverted towards more symbolic ends by the figure of the villainous capitalist behind; with clutched banknotes, and bulging 'gold-shot' eyes, he looms silhouetted against the clear blue of the sky [see figure 219].

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459. Aldgate East, being the nearest tube station, and presenting precisely the busy, mixed crowd scenes this section focusses upon.
460. As Rochfort put it: 'The fact that this dire situation existed not half a mile from the richest square mile in the country, the City of London, impressed upon Ray Walker the stark and crushing inequalities of social life'. Rochfort, "Ray Walker," 21.

Reigning over, yet disconnected from, the street scene below, this is one of several undoubted focus points of the whole mural: framed by that V-shaped wedge, it offers the most recessive space and (in a direct sense) the broadest geographical reference point. It also seems to offer the overarching grist of Walker's political convictions, pointing towards the possible direction of his statement that, 'I just hope that people may look at the mural and at least understand that there is a hell of a predicament – feel urgent about life rather than apathetic… I would like to think that it has a usefulness in being a catalyst in the spectator'.[461] In this section the catalyst would seem directed towards the identification of a common enemy in the proliferating, and soon to be transcendent, City of London, less than a mile behind the mural. At a broader level, of course, the City's Square mile serves as both a symbolic and geographic hub for the spectre of global financial capitalism. Here, therefore, we see the unmasked villain of the whole: the expropriating capitalist, whose avaricious pursuit of profit bulges gold veined eyes from his head. His two extra hands, (wrapped either side of the Nat West Tower), clutch at a calculator and pan, the latter of which stands poised to melt the golden jewellery and religious accoutrements hovering above it, into the compellingly liquid bar of gold below.

There is, I would suggest, more than a faint trace of that most poetic passage of the Communist Manifesto in this image.[462] Here however, the profaning of the holy relics, illustrating that 'all that is solid melts' not 'into air', but into gold.[463] What I would suggest

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461. Chartist, "Playground in the Abyss."
462. 'The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society…Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, ever-lasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch form all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, the conditions of life, and his relations with his kind'. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 2008 Edition, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press), 6.
463. Marx and Engels, 6.

here as a loose paraphrasing of Marx's passage might also open up, and be seen to underwrite, a broader assertion in the mural, that—as in Marshall Berman's appropriation of the same passage—the city itself, with its expanded global networks (pinpointed, for example, by the arriving immigrant, or the diversity of the gold's sources), serves as a vehicle for tearing apart 'all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions'.[464] At a site in the midst of a bitter racialised conflict, exacerbated by the localised decline of industrial capitalism, and a moment in which the global financial capitalism of the City of London was poised for ever increasing economic dominance, and a reorientation of London's workforce and demographics, this geographically integrated reminder of a much more violent, pronounced, localised and culpable contrast and division than that of 'race', seems both poignant and urgent.

It is a contrast rounded home by the mural's proximate representation of more immediately localised labour, in that opened-up building frame which forms the right most passage of the mid-section. Set against the avaricious facility of the City banker, looming large and demonic above, are presented the more proximate sources of employment in the compressed sweatshop scenes which had dominated local industry for centuries. True to accounts and photographs of the local rag-trade of the time, Walker presents white women, women of colour and Asian men, huddled in the two leftmost rooms of the compressed architectural frame [see figures 220 - 221]. This gendered and racialised composition of local labour was, as the Race Today Collective observed, typical of the reorientations of capitalism across the era: as lower paid, menial work in bad conditions became increasingly racialised and

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464. Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 9th Edition (London, New York: Verso Books, 1997).

gendered, drawing upon the global reach of postcolonial networks to fill positions 'white labour' was increasingly unwilling to perform.[465]

All this was, of course, part of that endless reworking of social relations that the aforementioned Communist Manifesto so unforgettably described, and played out with a particular intensity in areas like Tower Hamlets, as previous generations of settled working class labour responded to longstanding government initiatives to move away from the inner city.[466] The device of the opened building structure, (itself, I would suggest traceable to Walker's interest in German Expressionist art, and Max Beckmann in particular), as such adds the dimension of the localised precarious (and usually concealed) labour into the broader equation [see figures 222].[467] In so doing, it deepens a series of counterpoints which can be traced across the section (between labour and capital; Tower Hamlets and the City; global and localised networks), and the mural as a whole (between productive and reproductive spheres; work and leisure; the expropriator and the expropriated).

The Right: Nation, 'Race', and Racism

This building frame also serves as an effective compositional device, bridging from the central passage out and across the awkward, diagonal dip of the wall's surface, into the

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465. 'The truth is, of course, that the Asians went where work was available, where there was a shortage of white labour willing to take on the exploitative hours. The fractioning-off of black workers into the lower paid and hard worked jobs is the essential ingredient in the colonial relationship that British industry established with its new work force.' The Race Today Collective, *The Struggle of Asian Workers in Britain* (London: Race Today Collective, Railton Road, 1983), 10.

466. As Widgery observed, '[t]he sociologists tell us that the inner city is a sink into which have sunk the least able of the urban working class. The net effects of post-war housing, transport, education and employment policies have led the successful skilled working class to move outwards in a series of concentric rings, creating the proletarian suburbia of Essex. Those who have got on, have got out'. Widgery, *Beating Time*, 21.

467. Walker's interest in Beckmann is described above (see chap. 2, n. 424). The summoning here seems to derive in particular from Walker's own adaptations of Beckmann's doll-house like interior settings (in for example, Beckman's 1920, *Family Interior*), towards compound opened architectural divisions of scenes, as in, for example, Walker's *Night Frenzy Triptych*, 1975 or the right-hand panel of his *Whittington Mural*.

expansive right hand section of the wall [see figure 223].[468] It is a transition aided by Walker's decision to leave the right most, axonometrically receding rooms unpeopled, given over instead to Walker's relish for representing machines: a device, which, coupled with the wall's irregular dip, helps move us out to the right.[469] Here the background takes on a more fragmentary character: a smashed dismembered door and scattered bricks bridging into a resumption of municipal blocks and a brutalist structure, foregrounded by the dramatically enlarged images of an exploding alarm clock, a cockroach, fly and feasting rat.[470] These dislocations complicate but do not undermine the sense of a representational and once again hyper-localised space, broadly coterminous with that of the square in which the mural sat.[471]

In the lower section a series of dynamic and monumentally proportioned figures, lead us into a series of cascading diagonals—down and out across the wall's strange lowered partition— and into a section facing a dropped football pitch. To the left a series of less prominent figures, pour out from the background to the right of the opened sweat shop, culminating in the strange skeletal blonde woman with that negative image of an upturned bottle in her opened overcoat.[472] Moving beyond these less emphatic figures, however, the passage is dominated by two striking large-scale compound images. The first, is the figure draped in a

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468. A section which, it would seem, was added only with the provision of additional funds from the Arts Council.
469. For Walker's joy in machines see, for example, his treatment of the car engine at *Bow Mission*, figure 204.
470. There is a hint of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's *Dog* (1914), and that artist's other animals in the bold, tactile, formal simplifications of the rat. A fact that may be attributable to Richard Cork's interest in Vorticism and contact with Walker and other muralists across these years.
471. Though the precise facade of the left-hand buildings and the modernist structure cannot be identified within contemporary photographs, and severe clearances of the area have occurred since, both would seem in fitting with the broad architectural styles of the immediate area.
472. This blonde figure with opened coat presents a use of contours and play on positive and negative form which once more recalls something of Walker's debt to Léger. But it also brings to mind his continued interest in a surrealist inflected juxtaposition. At once compelling and complicated to read in any direct narrative integration with the surroundings, it cuts against the more legible sections around it. If, at Bow Mission, however, such juxtapositions tended to overpower the whole, here the composition offers enough narrative and compositional integration to accommodate such shifts in range and tempo. The presumed reference to alcoholism engendered by the bottle and the hollowed neck, is thus recuperated at some level as a sign of social ills, despite the relative obscurity and divergent pace of the symbol.

shawl, holding a shirt in her right hand with left palm outstretched, leading into a second shirt. Across this second shirt's folds, (which echo the figure's shawl and the drapery of the man behind), are written a series of social ills: Bad Housing; Squalor; Unemployment; Apathy; Exploitation; Racism; Neglect; Lies; Greed; and Hatred [see figure 224]. If the global capitalist to the left offers a recessed compositional crux to the whole, the beautifully inventive device of this shirt and figure, offers a striking counterpoint. Projecting outwards, rightwards and downwards, this is the largest and most foregrounded component of the composition and serves as an anchor to the right-hand section. Against the white male banker of the left, here is an elegant and forlorn, brown-skinned woman, with outstretched palm and hands enmeshed in the fabric of the garment trade. Against the banker's liquid gold, here is locally handwoven product with the multiple immiserating factors of the community woven into its twine.

From here, we are led—past the exploding alarm clock and opportunist rat in a sardine can—to the second dominant image: two large-scaled masked figures controlled on puppet strings from dismembered hands behind the control tower, or penthouse, of the brutalist block [see figure 225]. This is, undoubtedly the most violent section of the work, the masked figure of the British bulldog seeming on the verge of kicking in a baby's expressively compressed head, whilst the accompanying masked figure of the Bengal tiger in a Bangladesh flagged T-shirt seems ready to pounce on him. For Desmond Rochfort, who had, by the time of his writing on the mural (in 1984), returned from a British Council funded trip to Mexico, and embarked on a PhD on Mexican Murals, the section was reminiscent of Orozco's *Catharsis* mural from Mexico City [see figure 226].[473] There is some variance in *The Promised Land*'s more staccato dynamics, and Orozco's more pronouncedly visceral pessimism. But there is,

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473. Rochfort, "Ray Walker."

in that whole right-hand sweep—from the shirt of social ills, out and down to the bottom

right of the wall, and the distended head of the child—a taught and monumental diagonal

axis, and dynamic violence that lends itself to such comparison.

In the Orozco, the upper section is dominated by the blood red of a final cataclysm merging

with the grey-black of guns and all-pervading mechanisation. Here, by comparison, the

diverse facades of localised pre- and post-war London architecture, provide a more localised

background to the two mysteriously controlled puppets. For Rochfort, this did not overly

change the shock or direction of the register:

> *On the far right-hand side of the mural is depicted the awful result of this greed, a*
> *world full of poverty racism and apathy, with monstrous masked figures accosting*
> *immigrant men, women and children. The paradox is that these masked thugs are*
> *themselves being controlled like crude puppets by a pair of disembodied hands that*
> *manipulate strings attached to their bodies. The lesson of this extraordinarily*
> *powerful and inventive image is that proletarian fascist racism is fomented,*
> *manipulated and ultimately carried out in the interests not of working people but of*
> *those who exploit and prosper on whatever divisions they can create.*[474]

This reading, for all its articulate praise, contains some slippages that are at once revealing

and misleading. Firstly, the suggestion that this section alone presents the outcome of the

greed highlighted in the mid-section, risks conflating Rochfort's aesthetic preference for the

bold dynamic composition of the right hand side, with an overly sequential and divided

reading of the mural.[475] The left-hand passage, for example, with its focus upon the housing

situation, reveals the 'outcome' of capitalism's rapacious greed and the inequalities it fosters,

just as much as the right (indeed, if we are to extend the migratory networks of the image of a

newly arrived migrant, perhaps more so). Moreover, rather than a linear or sequential

narrative of cause (greed) and reaction ('proletarian fascist racism'), I would argue that the

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474. Rochfort.
475. As Rochfort stated: 'the economic and expressive monumentality of the right-hand side of the Chicksand mural was not so effectively reflected in the central and left-hand areas'. Rochford, "Ray Walker."

mural's strength lies in precisely its attempt to give serious attention to a locally resonant panorama of social relations under capitalism.[476] In this light, the figure of the expropriating capitalist, the rubbish strewn domestic situation, the arriving migrant *and* the masked figures, are intimately related, but not divisible to a mechanistic cause and reaction amidst the sections.

More significantly, but relatedly, Rochfort's interpretation of the right-hand passage fails to grapple fully with the specifics of the image. For, rather than simply presenting a masked figure of a British nationalist 'accosting immigrant men, women and children', Walker has, in fact, complemented the bulldog mask with that of the tiger, a symbol (rounded home by the T-shirt emblazoned with a Bangladeshi flag) of Bengali nationalism. Relatedly, the figures in the bottom right—compressed beneath the puppets—are not simply being 'accosted'. Nor are they entirely, or transparently, 'immigrant men, women or children'. Rather, they include both an Asian (perhaps migrant) father, mother and child, and a beer swilling 'white' couple. These figures, are themselves brought into a charged face-off by the spatial compression generated by the jackbooted foot of the bulldog-masked-puppet, *and* the sidewards glance and axis of imminent motion of the tiger-masked one.

These aspects are, I would suggest, more complex and problematic than Rochfort's summary suggests, and not without their own threats of occlusion. For, the symbolic representation of British and Bengali nationalism, as locked in a broadly equally weighted and externally manipulated face-off, threatens a conflation and equivalence between two multiply distinct phenomena. On one level it suggests an equivalence between two remarkably divergent

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476. In a sense Rochfort's preferences within the mural may reflect some of the characteristic reluctance on the part of the Communist Party to give to the sphere of reproductive life sufficient attention, as much as his aesthetic preference.

nationalisms, occluding the distinction between, on the one hand, a dominant, ascendant and increasingly state sanctioned, white suprematist, expression of British identity; and, on the other, the stirrings of national identity amongst a subaltern diaspora community, on the other side of the world from their 'home country'. As Franz Fanon observed, nationalism often formed a vital element within decolonial struggles.[477] This was very much the case with Bangladesh, where a Bengali identity—which stretched across the borders with India— had been vital in opposing British Colonial rule, and the extended period of governance from West Pakistan, which emerged in the aftermath of the Partition of India.[478] Building (at least at the outset) upon a strong local socialist tradition, this 'identity' proved a vital aspect of the struggle which won Bangladesh independence from Pakistan in 1971.[479]

If we extend this conflation with regards to expressions of national identity to the concrete local situation, it can appear even more problematic. For the stirrings of a nationally bound identity amongst the London based Bengali population, far from imposing a masked violence, controlled (via the puppet strings) by some nefarious external force, was in fact proving increasingly vital in stirring self-organisation: with self-defence groups forming to resist the street violence and intimidation of British nationalists and fascists; housing groups forming to offer direct control to families facing the structural racism of the British State; and a series of Bengali community groups and centres beginning to form around the Brick Lane area, to counter the severe isolation faced by (previously rural) Sylheti families, adjusting to a

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477. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2002), 21-22.
478. Following the 1947 British Partition of India, the territory known as East Bengal was created: splitting the Muslim majority population from the Hindu majority of West Bengal. In 1955, East Bengal became East Pakistan, unified with (and often subjected to the increasingly militarist and appropriative rule of), West Pakistan. The Bengali Language Movement, emerged in 1954, and the All Pakistan Awami Muslim League, formed in 1949, as cultural and political expressions of Bengali identity, and proved vital in the eventual struggles for Bangladeshi independence.
479. For summaries of this history, see, for example, Enamul Haque, "Introduction," in *The Art Heritage of Bangladesh, 1936-* (Dhaka: International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2007); or Faruque Ahmed, *Bengali Journals and Journalism in the United Kingdom: 1916-2007* (New York: Lulu, 2009).

totally new way of life within the hostile confines of the metropole.[480] Indeed, as Ken Leech

had stated it, 'the emergence of a new Bengali radicalism is the most encouraging and most

hopeful aspect of the whole period'.[481] In all this, it seems clear that the channelling of a

Bengali identity, expressed by a previously largely rural Sylheti community now adapting to

life in the metropole of London, was significantly more complex than a simple mirror of the

ethno-nationalist racism, laden in post-colonial nostalgia and lament, of the British Far-

Right.[482]

Seen through these filters, the right most section of the mural could be seen to point towards

some of the by now well documented flaws of what Paul Gilroy, in his seminal 1987 study of

'race' and racism in Britain, termed the 'Black and White Unite and Fight' school of British

anti-racism.[483] In its seemingly over-riding critique of *all* nationalism, its false equivalences

between divergent nationalist identities, and its suggestion of external manipulation it would

indeed seem to forward a distinctly European mode of Universalised Internationalism, which

risks occluding the legacies of Empire, in a manner which Gilroy might rightly condemn as

labouring under the same misconceptions as the 'new racism' itself, and would certainly seem

to preclude the mural as embodying what Hannah Feldman termed the adjectival sense of

decolonising struggle. Combined with the wider critique of capitalism, levelled in the mid-

section, therefore, this image may indeed, to a retrospective viewer, seem to tip the whole

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480. See above, and Leech *Brick Lane*, 9-10, and 13-15.
481. Leech, 23.
482. Given Fanon's further observation that national movements often gain most traction within urban communities rather than rural ones, the migration from rural Bangladesh to urban London, forms another vector of divergence with the nostalgic force of Britain's post-colonial, urban, nationalist lament. See Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 22.
483. Gilroy's book was underwritten by a distrust of much of the then [1987] prevailing understandings of relations between 'race' and class. As he put it, 'Conflicts around 'race', nation and ethnicity must be examined in the light of … other divisions where the unity of a single 'working class' cannot be assumed but remains to be created... class has to be shorn of the positivistic certainties which came to be associated with it in the period in which industrial production was ascendant. These are now an outmoded, residual presence in both sociological writing on 'race' and socialist political analysis of racism'. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black,* 9. Building on the work of Mouffe, Laclau and others, Gilroy followed Hall in forwarding a rigorous critique of the ideological shortcomings of the contemporary left.

towards an embodiment of Gilroy's critiques of the broader Left as insufficiently attentive to the increasingly complex historical dynamics affecting the fundamental composition, and identifications of Britain's urban communities, and the broader working class.[484]

In the contexts of the wider mural, and the localised situation, however, the grip of such cooption into totalising critiques begins to loosen. For, far from the mechanistic, static or hierarchical interpretations of the Left, which Gilroy so forcefully critiqued—in which 'race', was subordinated to an unmoving conception of class unity, as an illusory and secondary concern—taken as a whole Walker's mural offers an exploration of precisely the quotidian and geographic contexts in which the 'new racism' was emergent.[485] Eschewing the heroic register of sections of the contemporary Left, he does not choose to paint the triumphant unity of an unmoving working class freed from the 'illusions of racial division'. Instead, in his biting but nuanced realism, I would argue Walker sought to explore precisely the moments through which new relations of class, 'race', and racism were being brought into being. As Gilroy reminds us, '[t]he range of possible outcomes within the formation of any particular class may be determined primarily by economic considerations but 'in the last instance' it will be rooted in the results of ongoing processes of conflict. Class in concrete historical conditions is therefore the effect of struggles…when struggles of class formation are being discussed, that is struggles which have the effect of organising or disorganising classes, the possibility of reciprocal determination between 'race' and class politics can be identified'.[486] And it is precisely this sense of the intersections between class and 'race' in struggle to which Walker's wider mural was attuned.

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484. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*.
485. For Gilroy, such tendencies were, 'particularly acute where writers have resisted the idea that 'race' and class belong to separate spheres of experience with different epistemological and ontological valencies and used Marxian and neo-Marxian approaches to confront the question of historical agency posed by the relationship between 'race' and class'. Gilroy, 2.
486. Gilroy, 23-24.

With this in mind, it is within the more direct sphere of contemporary struggle, rather than as a universalising symbol of the illusory nature of national identities, or at a stretch the racial identities they in part help to construct, that I would suggest the puppet image is better understood. Rather than the embodiments of 'proletarian fascist racism', it seems more likely then, that the masked puppets were intended to stand in for the more localised spectre of segregation, so resolutely rejected by the Bengali Youth Movement and other groups in June 1978. As one Asian Newspaper of the period reported, 'by rejecting outright and with one voice the proposed ghetto solution to the housing and racial problems which the Asian community is faced in East London the 20,000 Bengalis have struck a blow for multi-racialism and multi-cultural community life in Tower Hamlets'.[487] Or, as Widgery put it, '[b]ecause of the political maturity of this young [Bengali] settlement, what the NF wanted, street fighting between black and white in E1, did not occur...instead the Spitalfields Asians responded with firm dignity, firm militancy and a new-found unity. And their long-standing local white allies from the socialist groups, the Tower Hamlets Trades Council and the local churches in the immediate area were supplemented by a wider range of whites prepared to challenge the racists' right to speak for East London opinion'.[488]

Whether or not we, or the mural's contemporary viewers, might follow fully Widgery's assessment of the situation, or indeed, Walker's own symbolic device, an acknowledgement of the pressing dangers of exacerbated and perpetuating divides within the area, would seem to be at the forefront of the masked-puppet symbol's concerns, and contexts of reception. And it precisely within those pressing and urgent contexts, that the wider mural deserves to be reasserted. For in this light, the mural offers a counterpoint to many of the charges thrown

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487. See Bengali Youth Movement, "Letter of June 7th," quoted more fully above, (chap. 2, n. 457).
488. Widgery, *Beating Time*, 33.

at the Left of the period and emerges as a rare and nuanced contribution to the vital anti-racist struggles of the period. Far from the ossified expression of an overly reductive 'class' over 'race' politics, the mural, as a whole, pays extended testament to material conditions in which new solidarities were, and so needed to be, formed. The active and pressing struggle to build such solidarity, whilst contesting the forces of division, in areas like Tower Hamlets, are all too frequently lost in retrospective readings of scholars like Gilroy and Hall. Today, 'class' has been significantly displaced from its centrality in methodological analysis, whilst, as Gilroy has observed in 2002, 'arguments for taking 'race' seriously are uncontroversial in a climate where it is likely to be taken too seriously while racism is not taken seriously enough'.[489] In this context Hall and Gilroy's channelling of Gramsci's 'pessimism of the intellect' across the 1980s, has often led to an overbearing critique of the historic Left, in which precisely the sense of active struggle, and the limited successes have too often slipped from view.[490]

For all its embroilment within the contradictions of the moment, indeed, in part precisely because of its determination to examine them, *The Promised Land* offered a largely cogent intervention, at a much-needed site. Against a climate in which national and localised media alike overflowed with the resurgent racism of Thatcherism, the manner in which this localised spatial contestation sought to represent and make sense of the conflicts and contestations around it, and to image communities in their midst, is noteworthy. Indeed, it was precisely the absence of a 'representational strategy', towards the conjunctural forces on the part of the Left, which both Gilroy and Hall felt was allowing the ideological hegemony

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489. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, xvii.
490. Whilst, Gilroy's critique contains many important contributions, retrospectively, the critique of the Left often reads as overbearing. Both Hall and Gilroy, cite Gramsci's dictum of 'Pessimism of the intellect…' as an inspiration for their critical and theoretical projects, and in particular for their assault on the contemporary Left, without, I would suggest, attending to Gramsci's necessary dialectical counter, of 'optimism of the will'. Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," 15; Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*.

of the New Right to gain grip. As Gilroy put it, 'the rise of this new racism can be located in a

crisis of political representation in the organisations of the working-class movement'.[491]

By and large eschewing false or easy dichotomies, the *Promised Land* succeeded in

addressing precisely the concrete 'real and lived experiences' of an area in which the

divisions, of 'race' and nationalism, upon which the 'New Right' drew were rife. Addressing

the confluences and contradictions of local life as manifest in labour, leisure, spatial

inequalities, and spatial cohabitation, the *Promised Land* succeeded in identifying a common

enemy without offering quaint or unobserved platitudes. In so doing it rejected the temptation

to represent the social ills inscribed on the shirt, and on display throughout the mural, as the

mechanistic *product* of an unaltered class enemy. Rather it situated them within a panorama

of shifting contemporary social relations, whose dimensions spanned the global and the local,

class and 'race', the individual and the social, and the spheres of production and

reproduction. The power of such a critical realism, in such a contested space cannot, I do not

think, be over-stressed. Against the characterisations of scholars like Hall and Gilroy, of a

Left totally incapable of either facing or contesting the spectre of the Great Moving Right

show, here is testament to the urgent attempts of many to do just that, without losing sight of

Kenneth Leech's observation, that

> *No attempt to deal with racism alone will be adequate any more than will the attempt to evade racism. The attack on racism, whether in the form of organised racist groups or in the more pervasive form of our institutions and laws, must not be watered down. However, it is essential to widen the attack into one on the oppression of the urban poor. Here in Brick Lane the former rural poor of Sylhet have been exposed to and highlighted the problems of the urban poor in a most acute form.[492]*

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491. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, 30. Or as Hall put it, 'they are gaining ground in defining the "conjunctural". That is exactly the terrain on which the forces of opposition must organize, if we are to transform it'. Hall, "Great Moving Right," 20.
492. Leech, *Brick Lane,* 23

The mural lasted less than five years before it was destroyed by the local council.[493]

Cable Street: Necessary Myth or Collective Truth?

> *To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man* [sic] *singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of the Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that* even the dead *will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.*[494]

> Walter Benjamin,
> *Theses on the Philosophy of History, VI*

The *Battle of Cable Street Mural* (or '*Cable Street Mural*') is situated about a kilometre south of Chicksand Street. Made on the side wall of the mid-nineteenth-century Italianate St George's Town Hall, at 236 Cable Street, Stepney, between 1978 and 1983, it remains in situ. Like *The Promised Land*, the mural was conceived as a both a direct response to, and intervention within, the contexts of rising racism and Far-Right activity in Tower Hamlets and the broader East End. In stark contrast to the quotidian and dystopian dimensions of contemporary local life represented at Chicksand Street, however, the *Cable Street Mural* takes on a deliberately heroic, partisan and celebratory register: commemorating the localised

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493. The mural was destroyed in 1985, with no consultation with THAP or THAC. See, Max Velody, "Row as Mural Knocked Down," *Hackney Gazette*, August 9, 1985, 3: 'Demolition men moved in last week to knock down part of the wall as dangerous cracks were discovered in the surface. And faulty brickwork may mean that more of the mural may have to go…. Tower Hamlets Arts Project worker Denise Jones was angry that the decision had gone ahead without public consultation…. A spokesman for Tower Hamlets Council said: "the wall is dangerous and could have injured a child in the playground if the work wasn't done. We don't know how much will have to be removed but we are anxious to keep as much as possible...The Council added: "with hindsight we should have contacted our own arts office and other interested bodies before going ahead, and we have apologised. But the work had to be done".'
494. Benjamin, "Philosophy of History," 247.

events of October 4th 1936, known collectively as 'The Battle of Cable Street'. The events of that day saw hundreds of thousands of East Enders, and antifascists from across the country, take to the streets of East London, to halt a proposed march by Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF). It constituted, what the local historian William Fishman has described as 'an extraordinary political happening'.[495]

Following on from a year of increased BUF presence in the East End, accompanied by an increasingly violent and antisemitic street presence, Mosley's proposed march, through the heart of the 1930s Jewish East End was, as Fishman noted, 'an act of provocation, ostensibly aimed at the dual targets of Fascist attack: Jews and Communists'.[496] Supported by the police and sanctioned by the state, it was only the impassable masses of counter demonstrators that succeeded in 'Barring the Road to British Fascism'. Coming at a moment of growing international crisis, with fascist governments in power in Italy and Germany, and conceived in solidarity with anti-fascist forces in Spain, the events were roundly condemned in the press, presented with varied weighting, as the unruly violence of two pernicious groups of political extremists.[497] To those on the Left, however, and those who were there, the halting

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495. For, Fishman: '[it was] an extraordinary political happening…Mosley was to lead a march through the Jewish quarter…Three thousand mobilised at their start line in Royal Mint street, flanked by over double their number of police, who were to act as a protective shield. But they never set out…'. Confronted by hundreds of thousands of locals and anti-fascists drawn from across the country, first at Gardiner's corner, and later at the smaller barricade on Cable Street, they were instead 'forced to turn about and march off in the opposite direction: through the deserted City, along the Embankment, where, in the absence of an audience, they quickly dispersed. That night there was dancing in the pubs and in the side streets of the East End. And thus was a legend born'. William Fishman, quoted in Cable Street Group, "Chapter 6, The Battle," in *The Battle of Cable Street, 4 October 1936, A People's History*, (London: Cable Street Group, 1995), [no page numbers].
496. William J. Fishman, "A People's Journée: The battle of Cable Street (October 4th 1936)," in *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rudé*, ed. Frederick Krant, (Montreal, Québec: Concordia University, 1985), 381. A participant at Cable Street, Fishman is one of the major figures in a tradition of East End historians.
497. The next day the *Evening Standard* ran with the headline 'A Plague on Both Your Blouses!'. The *Daily Mail* (until events at Olympia in 1934 an active supporter of the BUF), with the unsuprisingly more partisan 'Reds Attack Blackshirts. Girls among injured'. *The Manchester Guardian*, ran with 'Government Attacked by Fascists and Communists', while their London Correspondent, called the day a 'Fiasco', and dripped scorn on the anti-fascists and fascists alike. *The Telegraph*, meanwhile, ran with 'Brick Hits Sir O. Mosley's Car'. *Evening Standard*, October 5, 1936, 7; *The Daily Mail*, October 5, 1936, 13; The Manchester Guardian, October 5, 1936, 5, 10; *The Daily Telegraph*, October 5, 1936, 13.

of the march constituted a rare and unambiguous victory. To the carriers and custodians of the day's memory, it has been seen to mark the halt of Mosley's growth in the East End, the beginning of the retreat of this first wave of British Fascism.[498] As Harold Rosen put it, it remains 'a red letter day in the left-wing almanac'.[499]

The iconic nature of the historical events depicted—which will be dealt with in more detail below—has both attracted and tended to over-determine critical attention to the mural. Stretching some 340 metres up the sidewall of the former town hall the *Cable Street Mural* remains the largest, best conserved, most contested, and most written about mural of this wider study. The mural remains a centrepiece of marches for the anti-fascist Left and a backdrop for politicians' photographs. It has, as such, become a ritual site for the memory of the events it depicts, and has been attacked by Far-Right groups on a number of occasions, (one of which will be examined below).[500] Much of the critical attention, however, has failed to draw a clear distinction between the mural and its ostensible subject matter. Indeed, as David Renton has implied, the mural has become a major source in ongoing renegotiations of the collective memory of the Battle.[501] A clear testament to the mural's success, and central to considerations of its rich history of reception, this folding of the mural into the events it depicts has often precluded adequately critical engagement with the mural's artistic and

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498. For more discussion of the accuracy of this interpretation see below.
499. Harold Rosen, "A Necessary Myth: Cable Street revisited," in *Changing English* 5:1 (1998): 28.
500. As a result of its importance to both sides, the priority of caring for the mural has been much more pronounced than any other, and it has been restored or reworked after attack no less than four times. All this has given the mural a prominence within a strong local history tradition, but also amongst left wing historians. As Owen Hatherley (*New Ruins*, 340) notes, it is 'the only one of the 1980s murals to have achieved any major fame'.
501. As Renton states, in reference to an interview with a participant in the day's events, in which it was clear exaggerated claims of personal involvement in crucial events were being made: 'Perhaps he had read Phil Piratin's book. Maybe he had looked at the large mural now up on Cable Street itself. For whatever reason his own memories of Cable Street had been shaped by other people's memories: and were more truthful as a result'. David Renton, "Necessary Myth or Collective Truth? Cable Street Revisited," *Changing English* 5: 2 (1998): 193.

aesthetic dimensions, its history and contexts of production and what might be seen as the iconological particularities of its historical and political intervention.

If attention to each of these neglected dimensions will guide much of the rest of this chapter, the often-overlooked resonance of the mural's subject matter within the contexts of the late 1970s forms a necessary point of departure. By the mid-1970s the 'Battle of Cable Street' was a vital and contested narrative, with inculcations to 'Remember Cable Street' appearing as graffitied slogans across the walls of the city [see figure 227], and the event attaining a central prominence in the political imaginary of large sections of the Left.[502] This status as a shibboleth, however, was by no means historically uninterrupted or universally held. As Arnold Wesker's 1957 play *Chicken Soup with Barley* so poignantly reflects, the passing of the radical potential of the 1930s in the period after the Second World War, had for a long time driven a wedge between the memories and experiences of those present on October 4th 1936, and the political landscape of the post-war period.[503]

In its broadest dimensions the rising prominence of the memory of 'Cable Street', could perhaps be situated within what David Binnington, the first artist to work on the mural, disparagingly termed a 'thirties nostalgia boom': the parallels between two periods of pronounced economic crises, and polarising political opinion resulting in a wide-ranging

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502. As will be seen Cable Street formed a vital symbol, in particular for the anti-racist movement grouped around the Socialist Workers Party. For a useful summary of the contestations around this period, see Evan Smith, "The Battle of Cable Street and the Communist Party," Hatful of History, (2013), accessed May 5, 2017: https://hatfulofhistory.wordpress.com/2013/10/04/the-battle-of-cable-street-and-the-communist-party/.
503. Wesker was the nephew of some of the crucial Communist Party activists of the period, and famously based the lead protagonist of the play, Sarah Kahn, on his aunt Sarah Wesker. The play begins with an account of the build-up to the battle of Cable Street, before moving on to trace the separation of the post-war generations and those that had been so active in the 1930s, through the vehicle of an increasingly dispersed family unit. Arnold Wesker, *The Wesker Trilogy: Chicken Soup With Barley; Roots; I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

interest in and reassessment of the 1930s across the 1970s and 80s.[504] At a more precise and local level, however, the build-up of a Far-Right presence in the East End across the 1970s, had clear parallels with the extended build-up to events on October 4th 1936: the BUF's growth in the area from 1935 onwards drawing upon the period's economic crises, and marked by a parallel growth in mobilisation, street presence, racist graffiti and propaganda, and escalating incidents of racially motivated assault.[505] Though by the 1970s, the scapegoat in the East End had moved from the Jewish community to the Bangladeshi one, and the symbolic centre of the conflict from Cable Street to Brick Lane, Ken Leech has observed that the geographic strength of the Fascist movements in Hoxton and Bethnal Green, and some of the leading figures, remained unchanged.[506]

But it was, above all, as a symbol of the resistance to the mobilisations of the Far-Right, that the *Battle of Cable Street* attained its full resonance in the 1970s. It is notable, therefore, that the anti-racist and anti-fascist activity of the period had significantly predated the events at Brick Lane in 1978. Indeed, certain organisations of, for example, Jewish ex-servicemen

504. Binnington refers repeatedly, and disparagingly, both before and during work on Cable Street to a '30s nostalgia boom. In an interview with a local journalist in 1979, for example, he is quoted as saying of the Cable Street Mural: 'without being part of the Thirties nostalgia boom…I hope it will be a monument to our ability to overcome oppression'. Mike Jempson, "The Great Wall Plan," in *East London and Hackney Advertiser*, September 1, 1978. A less disparaging observation of peaking interest in the 1930s across the 1970s and '80s has also been observed in Robert Radford, *Art For A Purpose. The Artists' International Association 1933-1953* (Basingstoke: Winchester School or Art, 1987), 7.
505. Rejecting contemporary revisionist histories (of for example R. Skidelsky) which suggested that Communists and the Jewish population overstated the antisemitism of the BUF, Fishman notes: '1936 registered a peak build-up of Fascist activity and propaganda aimed against the Jews. They were accused of clannishness and filthy habits; of swindling the innocent gentiles and depriving them of jobs; of being, simultaneously, capitalist plutocrats and communist agitators…Piratin rightly suggests that it was a populist "appeal to the basest sentiments" and founded on ill-informed accusations. With full time organisers ensconced in strongholds in Green Street (Bethnal Green), Hoxton, and Salmon Lane (Poplar), Fascist incursions were mounted against the Jews. Attacks on individuals and shops were stepped up as gangs of Blackshirts made daily, more often nocturnal, forays into the ghetto'. Fishman, "People's Journée," 383.
506. As Leech observed, 'during the 1930s many fascist and racist groups were active in precisely the same districts where they are active now. In the mid 30s the British Union of Fascists claimed 4,000 members in Bethnal Green…The recent resurgence of organised racism in the area therefore must be seen in the context of a long tradition'. Leech, *Brick Lane*, 11.

stretched continuously from the 1930s to the 1970s.[507] From 1975 onwards these local groups and networks were joined by a growing number of national groups, typified above all, perhaps, by the Anti-Nazi League (ANL).[508] Founded in 1975 as (by most accounts) a front organisation for the International Socialists (who, in 1977, became the Socialist Workers Party), the ANL became a leading force within the 'anti-fascist' mobilisations of the period. Following a broad, (and for some un-nuanced) idea of an essential continuity between the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s and those of the 1970s, the ANL proved central in the organisation of mass counter-demonstrations to halt proposed National Front marches across the period, and up and down the country.[509] Whilst the ANL had been involved in the contestations of Brick Lane in 1978, two of the largest such counter-demonstrations occurred at Wood Green and Lewisham, in North and South East London, in April and August of 1977. With their emphasis on direct action to literally 'Bar the Road to British Fascism', these two events (or 'Battles') had clear parallels with, and drew significant inspiration from, the legacy of Cable Street. They drew together local populations and anti-fascists from across the country to ensure that the National Front were unable to hold mass rallies in areas of high migrant populations and were treated with a similar disdain to their forbearers at Cable Street by the national press.[510]

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507. As Widgery (*Beating Time,* 39) notes, the '43 group of left wing Jewish ex-servicemen, became the '62 group, and was a well organised anti-fascist vigilante group active in the East End across many decades.

508. Viewed by most as Socialist Workers Party fronts the ANL (formed 1975) and RAR (formed 1976) were two of the most active anti-fascist groups of the period. For an insiders account see Widgery, *Beating Time*. For a less partisan one, see Matthew Worley, "Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the end of 'Consensus'*,*" *Contemporary British History* Vol 26, Issue 3 (2012), 333-354.

509. Gilroy's concept of a 'new racism', and indeed, his attack upon the static mechanical assumptions of the 'Black and White Unite and Fight', mode of contemporary anti-racism, were in no small part directed to groups like ANL and SWP, with their more or less un-reconstituted conceptions of working class unity. Whilst there were, however, undoubted divergences between the contexts of the 1930s and the 1970s, some of which will be observed below, there were also continuities. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*.

510. Nancy Murray has provided a very strong account of the hostility faced by anti-fascist groups across the period. Murray, "Anti-racists and Other Demons". For an account of the events see Widgery, *Beating Time*.

As in the 1930s, however, it seems important to note that such defensive activities were also accompanied by mass rallies and cultural initiatives.[511] On April 30th 1978, for example, a march organised by the ANL and their sister organisation Rock Against Racism (RAR), saw 100,000 people march from Trafalgar Square to a concert at Victoria Park, some three kilometres or so North East of Cable Street. In the park a concert featured leading punk, ska and reggae bands including Steel Pulse and The Clash.[512] Whether or not we can follow Widgery's heroic (and partisan) claim that 'RAR cured the schizophrenia between Marxist politics and modern culture', the vibrancy of the social and generational cross-sections brought together in descriptions, and photographs of events [see figure 228], provide an indication of the broader cultural moment into which the *Cable Street Mural* was pitched.[513] For all the aforementioned criticism that has been levelled at these anti-fascist initiatives, their success in both opposing Far-Right mobilisation and attempting to extend the reach of the left towards the vibrant contemporary counter-cultures merits recalling. Indeed, for Stuart

511. As Fishman has, for example, recalled some of these activities occurred in the very building upon which the mural came to be located, 'On 17 February, a "Week of Peace and Democracy", initiated by the C.P., was marked locally by a grand exhibition at the St. George's Town Hall. It brought together a practical united front of diverse anti-fascist leaders…speakers including George Lansbury, Father St John Grosser, TU officials and Mary Hughes'. Fishman "People's Journée," 384.

512. David Widgery's account gives a great sense of the crowd's diverse composition: 'As the park slowly filled up one could float through three generations of the left. At the outskirts there were couples who might have met at a WEA summer school on the modern novel, had been in the front of Trafalgar Square when Bevan spoke against the Suez invasion, and sometimes did the New Statesman competition on Sunday. Their sensible footwear had been learnt on the Aldermaston march but the thermos flask and binoculars came from bird-watching outings. The only speaker they had managed to hear was Tom Robinson and he reminded them a bit of the young Anthony Wedgewood Benn.

Between them and the middle ground were ex-hippies, fire-eaters, clowns and people from the Militant giving out leaflets explaining why you should not support the ANL. The middle was the generation of 1968, listening knowledgeably but not at all sure who was playing. They had henna on for the occasion even if it did remind them of a commune they'd rather forget and they were slightly worried about the whereabouts of their eight-year-old whom they had arranged to hand over to its other single parent by the inflatables. They quite liked Tony Benn's speech, which had reminded them a bit of the young Tony Cliff.

Between them and the 200-yard deep sea of pogoing punks was a mud moat studded with upturned cider bottles and brown-sodden socialist newspapers. The front-line punks had been on amphetamine for days and were living for this moment. This was their Woodstock and their Grosvenor square. When Red [Saunders, one of Rock Against Racism's founders, and ex-Teddy Boy] strode out in his Mr Oligarchy cape and bellowed, "This ain't no fucking Woodstock", it was even better. The punks didn't like any of the speakers but knew exactly what the music was saying'. Widgery, *Beating Time*, 87.

513. As one of the founding members of RAR, Widgery's account is both detailed and polemic, particularly when it comes to an assessment of the ANL and RAR's significance. Others were, as Leech pointed out, much less welcoming of the SWP-related groups' tendency to flood into an area for a demo and flood out again: Leech, *Brick Lane*, 10. It is a tension which (amongst others) continues to hang over the SWP's tactics today.

Hall, in the aforementioned 1979 article, *The Great Moving Right Show*, (broadly noted for its attack on the deficiencies of the contemporary Left), Rock Against Racism was seen as 'one of the timeliest and best constructed of cultural interventions, repaying serious and extended analysis', whilst the broader interventions against the National Front, were described as 'one of the few success stories of the broader conjuncture'[514]

In contrast to some of the predominant examinations of the *Cable Street Mural* as a rearwards glancing work of socialist realism, a more or less unmediated retelling of the event, or—more bizarrely—a pinnacle of an 'inclusive' community focussed arts practice in the borough, therefore, the mural's position and stance within the dynamics of this rare 'success story' deserve to be foregrounded. Against the more quotidian contexts of Chicksand Street, The *Cable Street Mural* set out to celebrate and excavate a rare and binding victory for the anti-fascist, and internationalist Left, at a moment of increasingly pressing, and vibrant mobilisation on the part of their successors. In so doing, it will be argued that the mural constituted a new and urgent fusion of the genres of history painting and public monument: utilising the form of a public wall painting to, as Walter Benjamin put it, 'seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger'.[515]

Stage One: David Binnington—Approaching Communal Memory

Work on the mural, stretched across five years, from 1978 to its opening in 1983. It can be traced firmly across two phases. The first phase stretched from 1978 to 1982 and ended —as will be seen —with David Binnington's departure from the project. The second phase, involved a significant reworking of Binnington's designs, and the mural's eventual

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514. Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," 15.
515. Benjamin, "Philosophy of History," 247.

completion by Ray Walker, Desmond Rochfort and Paul Butler in 1983. Though often overlooked in accounts of the mural, an exploration of the relations and divergences between these two stages will be seen, in what follows, as crucial to a fuller examination of the mural's meaning and political and historical positioning. Though it is rarely stated in such bald terms, it seems likely that Dan Jones was the major driving force behind the project's initiation.[516] A resident on Cable Street since the late 1960s, a local youth worker, the Secretary of the Stepney Trades Council and the son of the prominent 1930s anti-fascist activist (and artist) Pearl Binder, Jones was one of the central figures at the Basement Project and THAP and a monolithic presence in local politics.[517] He was also a committed anti-racist and anti-fascist with a clear and strong sense of the historical parallels between the 1930s and the 1970s, and an idea of the potential agency of the visual arts [See figure 229].[518] As early as January 1976, Jones had suggested in an interview that '[THAP] are thinking of showing the Battle of Cable Street in the 1930s on the side of St George's Town Hall', also noting that 'we are trying to get the Royal Academy to sponsor a project for a really professional mural. We are looking at the possibility of placing it on one of the big public buildings, maybe the Town Hall'.[519] By late 1977, when Jones visited David Binnington, whilst the latter was completing work at Royal Oak, the two projects would seem to have fused in Jones' mind.

516. Though Jones' centrality is obscured by both the collective ideals of many of the organisers (not least perhaps himself!), the diverse artists involved, the multiple stages of the project's evolution, and the complex, almost mythic dimensions of these diverse agents' memories of the project itself, all sources confirm Jones' early involvement. Beyond this, Jones' residence on Cable Street, his parents' (East London MP, Elwyn Jones, and AIA artist Pearl Binder's) involvement in the cultural and political life of the 1930s, and Jones' wife, Denise Jones', longstanding interest in the Battle of Cable Street all suggest likely sources of inspiration.
517. A brief examination of Jones' artistic work appears above in Chapter 1. For an intimate portrait of Jones, see Roger Mills, "Chapter 4. The Basement," in *Everything Happens on Cable Street* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2011), 76-85.
518. A sense of Jones' understanding of these parallels, and his own involvement in anti-racist struggles shines through in a 1982 letter to Peter Conway, in which he describes having received 'threats to our lives and those of our families because of outspoken anti-racist activities', whilst describing contemporary fascist groups as 'Hitler's heirs'. This letter will be cited in more detail below. Dan Jones, "Letter to Peter Conway," undated [June 1982], in THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445: File re. Cable Street Mural.
519. "Painters are Going to Town in the East End," *Evening News*, January 6, 1976: THA: 750/Folder 2/ General ANO 1977-1981/Clippings.

Presumably impressed by what he saw, Jones requested Binnington's participation in the project.[520]

The *Royal Oak Murals*, it will be recalled, had been greeted with considerable critical fanfare following their opening in 1977.[521] They were seen to set a new benchmark of professional intent, budget and (until the completion of Barnes' Battersea Mural in 1978), scale. David Binnington (b. 1949) had grown up in Bridlington, in East Riding, Yorkshire, studying at the local grammar school before reading Fine Art at the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University.[522] His passage to the mural form was taken with his fellow student Desmond Rochfort, and—as both recall—under the political and artistic influence of their fellow student Andrew Turner, with whom they shared a studio space.[523] Coming from a family of miners and a committed member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), Turner had directed the younger students' attentions towards the work of the Mexican Muralists as well as an array of European realists including Georg Grosz and Francisco Goya.[524] Rochfort

520. *Royal Oak* opened in November 1977, and Binnington would seem to have set to work fairly quickly on researching *Cable Street*. Initially, Binnington accepted the contract under the name of Public Art Workshop, though it seems that at this stage Rochfort had little or no involvement with the project. Whether this was due to a preference for Binnington's work, or because by this stage Rochfort was already gearing up for a British Council funded visit to Mexico to study the murals there, remains unclear. Rochfort's visit to Mexico was to form the beginnings of his academic research into and publications on the work of the Mexican muralists. Binnington appeared at a December meeting of the Tower Hamlets Arts Committee, alongside Steve Lobb of Greenwich Mural Workshop to express an interest in the project and the history of national and international mural movements. (see, "Minutes: Item 4c," December 19, 1977, *THAC Minute Book*, THA: TH/8445: S/THA/1/2/1). A letter to Dan Jones of January 1978, confirms that by this stage Binnington had already done substantial research on the subject, indeed by his own estimation having 'read everything in print on the subject'. See "Minutes," December, 17, 1977, *THAC Minute Book*, TH/8445: S/THA/1/2/1; and, David Binnington, "Letter to Dan Jones," January 23, 1978, in THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445: File re. Cable Street Mural.
521. See Chapter 1.
522. David Binnington, interview with the author, August 2015.
523. Andrew Turner (b. 1939) is a Scottish-born artist some years Binnington and Rochfort's senior. The son of a West Lothian miner, Turner had moved with his family to North Yorkshire following the decline of the Scottish coalfields in the 1950s. Rather than following his father and uncles into the pits, he had worked as a trawlerman, before entering the Edinburgh School of Art. Expelled from Edinburgh for leading a protest against the Vietnam war in 1962, he eventually gained a Painting Diploma from Leeds College of Art. See Peter Lazenby, "Banners High: Review of The Pits and the Pendulums, by Andrew Turner," *Red Pepper Magazine*, (November 2010): http://www.redpepper.org.uk/banners-high/.
524. Both have described Turner's political and artistic convictions as a major revelatory influence. Interviews with the author, August 2015. Rochfort was to go on to write several books on the Mexican Muralists.

and Binnington both joined the CPGB during their time at the Royal Academy Schools and recall summer vacations across Europe to take in Italian frescos and Goya's black paintings.[525] Through the Communist Party, they had become involved with a group of young artists, writers, poets and intellectuals associated with the magazine *Artery*.[526] Rochfort, wrote regularly in the magazine, and he, Binnington and Turner served on the editorial board for much of the period between 1974 and 1978.[527] Crucially, for Rochfort and—to a lesser extent—Binnington, one of the magazine's most sustained objects of focus was the excavation and definition of a theoretical programme of socialist realism. For two young artists, in the process of marrying their increasing political awareness with their advanced artistic training, such discussion must have given considerable succour, and both the Royal Oak and Cable Street murals, attest to the influence of a theoretically refined conception of realism.[528] Rather, than the somewhat stilted socialist realist traditions being explored by

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525. Both seem to have parted company with the CPGB at some point in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Binnington looks back on his naivety, and cites an unknown source, commenting that 'if you didn't join you don't have a heart, and if you didn't leave you don't have a mind'. Rochfort insists his politics have not changed, but he has readjusted on the question of means. Interviews with the author, August 2015.

526. Founded in 1971 by the then student at the Royal College of Art, Jeff Sawtell, by the mid-1970s the magazine described itself as 'the only broad cultural magazine produced by the left in Britain concerned with the development of the Second Culture and Revolutionary Art'. "Frontispiece," *Artery* vol. 5 no. 3 (19), London. Often tending towards fairly economistic determinism, the magazine also gave a platform to some of the strongest emerging Marxist critics of the period, including John Tagg, John Green and Bob Dixon. In general, the CPGB at the time has been described as split between what was termed the 'Stalinist' wing, and those more dissenting, and intellectually grounded 'Eurocommunists' associated with the monthly academic journal, *Marxism Today*. Whilst not stating any direct allegiances to Stalin, Artery is consistent in its, often sweeping, attempts to stand with the Soviet state against the ossified remnants of Cold War assault. If, in this, they may have shown a willing blindness to the excesses of the USSR, their continued insistence on the importance of labour, and the ascendance of the working class as frames of analysis can perhaps be seen positively against the Eurocommunists' frequent attempts to sublimate them. Furthermore, though many contributors were wildly determinist in the inevitability and imminence of the working class ascendance, others were far from blind to recent theoretical advances, featuring articles on Althusser, timely revisitations of Brecht and covering a broad range of visual artists and poets.

527. Despite associations with the Communist Party, and its interest in an explicitly 'socialist realist' tradition, it is notable that Peter de Francia, was covered in and wrote for the magazine, whilst Maoist Socialist Realists, like Maureen Scott and the League of Socialist artists were notable by their absence.

528. Intriguingly, both now distance themselves somewhat from the magazine. Binnington, in particular, reflects on much of political stance as 'silly, youthful, exuberance' and seems keen to stake out some distance between his own position and that of Jeff Sawtell, the magazine's editor. Rochfort on the other hand reflects that his core principles remain largely unchanged, though he 'now believe[s] in different means'. He maintains friendships with many of the group. Whilst in part these differences would seem to be reflected in their varied level of input at the time (Rochfort contributing essays on Mexican Muralism, Stanley Spencer, Fernand Leger and Francis Bacon, against just an interview with Binnington) they may also bear testament to Binnington's own dramatic break with his youth, in the wake of his departure from the Cable Street Mural, (see below).

others in London at the time, or the dynamic celebration of industrial labour in Rochfort's *Royal Oak Mural*, however, Binnington's section at Royal Oak, focussed upon the alienation of office work [see figure 166]. Fusing character types reminiscent of Georg Grosz's work, with several motifs and spatial devices influenced by the work of David Alfaro Siqueiros, it offered an enveloping, claustrophobic—if in part confusing—panorama of the alienation of white collar labour.[529]

By April of 1978 the 'Murals and Environmental Projects Subcommittee' of the Tower Hamlets Arts Committee (which had, by this point, largely taken over THAP's responsibilities for murals) reported that the Cable Street Mural Group had been meeting regularly with the 'whole process of community involvement being given serious consideration'.[530] With funds forthcoming from the Tower Hamlets Arts Committee (THAC), the Arts Council's 'Murals and Environmental Projects Committee', and the Abbey Harris Trust fund, and more being sought elsewhere, by September Binnington was at work on the project full time.[531] This sequential flurry of external funds, and indeed the stated commitment to the process of 'community involvement' would seem to have calmed, if not entirely dissipated some of the concerns expressed within the THAC. Minutes from a July 1978 meeting record questions about the absence of proper consultation before the project had begun: no doubt exacerbated by the fact that this was a project which — even at this early stage —was planned to stretch over three financial years and require some £30,000 of

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529. The central motif of clasped hands, for example, is reminiscent of the centrepiece of Siqueiros's *Polyforum* murals, (opened 1971), whilst also forming a constant motif in the Rodriguez books through which Binnington knew Siqueiros' work. The eagle which dominates the upper register, meanwhile, recalls Siqueiros' *Tropical America Mural*, (1932). As noted above (see chap. 1, n. 372), Binnington's knowledge of Siqueiros' work was filtered through Rodriguez's two volumes.
530. "April 24th 1978", *THAC Minutes*.
531. The eventual project received funds from Tower Hamlets Arts Committee, Tower Hamlets Council, Greater London Council, Greater London Arts Association, ACGB, Gulbenkian Foundation, Vincent Harris Mural Trust and the Leonard Cohen Trust.

funds, a scale far in excess of any other mural of the period.[532] Concerns were also raised

whether the mural would provide a 'truthful accounting' of the event, or 'a fantasised image

of what really happened'.[533] A similar complex of underlying tensions can be traced, more or

less explicitly, across most of the mural's first stage of development. Though it is not clear

from the minutes who raised the objections, they seem to have stemmed from the sheer scale

of the project, and its divergence from the operational norms of both the Basement Project

and THAC.

On the one hand this was, from the outset, to be a permanent mural, made by a 'really

professional artist', with an attachment to artistic 'quality'.[534] As Alister Warman wrote to the

GLC in support of a (unsuccessful) funding application, '[t]he Arts Council has approved

£3000 towards Cable street… The panel selecting proposals for funding considered the

Public Art Workshop to be one of the most professional organisations engaged in mural

painting in this country. The commission at Cable street is just what they need to extend and

improve one the work done at Royal Oak, Westway.'[535] This sense of 'professionalism',

was—as Warman has recalled—one of the mural's primary attractions for the Arts Council,

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532. As the minutes record, 'A discussion ensued on this subject [of the Cable Street Mural] which was chaired by the acting-secretary owing to the involvement with the project of Dan Jones, the acting chairperson for the evening. Considerable criticism was voiced over the lack of public consultation which had gone on before the project had begun. The Visual Arts Representative [Dan Jones] stressed that it had always been intended that the public would be fully involved with the development (or otherwise) of this project, but that events had overtaken themselves, and the necessity to apply at an early stage for planning permission had meant that news of the mural had got around before ever it has been finally decided to go ahead with it. The Visual Arts representative regretted this situation. The question was asked "what efforts are being made to raise additional money for this project." "Perhaps", it was mooted, "the Arts Committee could be repaid for the extra money they have made available". "July 5th 1978, Item 2a", *THAC Minutes*.
533. "July 5th 1978, Item 2a", *THAC Minutes*.
534. See Dan Jones, cited in *Evening News*, "Going to Town", January 6, 1976; and Dan Jones, for Bethnal Green & Stepney Trades Council, "Letter of recommendation for the mural," c. 1978, THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445: File re Cable Street Mural. The letter states, '[b]ecause of the national importance of this subject, the historical significance of the site for the mural and the fact that a declaration of human brotherhood may be seen by the fascists as a fair target for them to attack, we would want the mural to be so constructed and carried out so that as far as possible it is a <u>permanent mural</u> - spray proof, fire proof and vandal proof. Even if it costs quite a bit more to carry out the money would be well spent'.
535. Alister Warman, "Letter to Robert Hales, Greater London Council," June 27, 1979, in ACGB/31/33: Murals and Environmental Projects 1978/79.

who hoped that this could mark a new era of mural painting.[536] Indeed, reference to

professionalism punctuates Binnington's correspondence with the project's diverse funders

throughout the period.[537] Whilst no doubt appealing to many funders, such stress upon the

'quality' of the product and professionalism of the artist, ran counter to the tendencies of

Tower Hamlets Arts Committee, where it was processes rather than products that were

generally prioritised.[538] At Cable Street, a compromise seems to have been reached, in the

acknowledgement that, as Maggie Pinhorn put it, 'there would be no sense in a mural project

such as this without a high degree of community involvement'. To these ends, Pinhorn,

speaking on behalf of the Basement Project explained, 'we plan to use our network to ensure

that the community benefits from the mural project – using it as a learning process and an

opportunity to become creatively involved. Regular meetings will be held at the Basement to

discuss the mural project with the artists. We hope to include as many people as possible in

the whole process (both preparation and painting) formally and informally'. Whilst, as such,

'the artists themselves are not community artists…we feel that during the time of the project

(2 ½ years) ample opportunity will be provided for a strong relationship and understanding to

be built up which will be mutually beneficial to everyone taking part. The artists will also be

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536. Alister Warman, Interview with the author, September 2015.
537. As Binnington wrote to Lesley Greene at the GLAA in 1981, '[t]his project is a challenge to the current dogma of "community murals". I have no faith in those tatty, highly coloured elastoplasts that adorn our city. I do not believe in painting murals that in effect label an area as depressed, sad and in need of "community art". I do not believe in the badly painted, incompetent, ill conceived imagery that is called "British Mural Painting" and I make no apologies for doing it differently...Ever since its conception in 1977, the Cable Street Mural was seen as a high cost, permanent mural, perhaps taking between three and four years to paint. At this stage of the project, after 19 months of site work with the image just beginning to develop, I should look to GLAA and expect support from practitioners, who understand the problems of developing and assembling a new visual image'. David Binnington, "Letter to Lesley Greene, Visual Arts officer at GLAA," April 14, 1981. THA: Cable Street Folder: THA-281.
538. For THAC thoughts on matters of quality and process see chap. 2, n. 420. Or, more ominously, given the permanence of Cable Street, the continuation of the same minutes: 'We should like to see a trend away from permanent images towards the idea of changing hoardings, bill boards, etc. There is of course no reason why any of the walls painted so far should not be painted over and done again.' "Minutes of Tower Hamlets, Murals and Environmental Subcommittee," undated [late 1978], in *THAC Minutes*.

in daily contact with the users of the Basement – children, young people and older members of the community'.[539]

The recollections of Roger Mills and Binnington confirm that some of Pinhorn's optimism proved to be well-founded. As Mills recalls it, the location of Binnington's studio in the Basement, and his adept accuracy in woodwork led to a healthy and happy relationship with the Basement Project, and in particular with the children.[540] Be it as a result of these evolving relationships or, more likely, owing to the particularities of the project, Binnington soon began to rethink the absence of community involvement that had characterised his working method at Royal Oak. Writing to Phil Shepherd, an arts administrator with THAC, in 1978, he stated:

> *Community involvement I think it is not only important as a "political" device but essential to the* <u>*quality*</u> *of image it could and should be occurring at the initial stages helping the artist select the* <u>*content*</u> *of the mural both by providing information and stimulus and by comment on designs produced. At this stage, whilst the work on the wall is at the drawing stage, local people's ideas can be effective, the image can still be changed and improved. Given stimulus and criticism it is my job to find an image that sums up as clearly and truthfully as possible, this reaction to an historical event.*[541]

This statement, reveals a dual commitment to aesthetic quality *and* community involvement. Whilst constituting a rejection of the kind of visual and practical involvement that Pinhorn had hoped for and maintaining a strict artistic control over responsibilities for both the design and the painting of the mural, Binnington's situation of the effectiveness (and indeed the

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539. Maggie Pinhorn, on behalf of The Basement Project, "Letter in support of 1978 Arts Council Funding Application," 1978: ACGB/31/10/Public: Box 4.
540. See Mills, *Cable Street,* 154. It is notable that Binnington worked for many years (under the name of 'David Savage'), as a carpenter. Mills' recollections may thus either be taken as a mark of retrospective adjustment, or accurate prefiguration. Binnington also recalls that despite teasing his status as a 'real artist', Maggie Pinhorn, in particular, offered invaluable help and support over the years of the project. Binnington, interview with the author, August, 2015.
541. David Binnington, "Letter to Phil Shepherd," 10th April, 1978, in THA: THA/2/8/1.

quality) of the mural in its responsiveness to the memories and ideas of local people is significant, and was to have a definitive effect upon the final mural.

Soon after his first contact with Jones in Autumn 1977 Binnington had set about preliminary research. By January 1978, he commented that, 'I think I've read everything in print on the subject and met a good few of the eye witnesses so all that's left is the arty bit'.[542] Confidence notwithstanding the process of collecting the testaments and recollections of those locals that had been present at the event and the broader community, who had grown up in its shadows, was to continue for some time. Contacts were established with local trade unions, Jewish groups and anti-fascist organisations of ex-servicemen with a history stretching back to the 1930s. Leaflets were distributed, inviting local residents to share memories or material relating to the event, and to submit photos for inclusion in the mural. The Cable Street Mural Group set up two celebrations to commemorate the anniversary of the Battle (on October 4th 1978 and 1979).

These ad hoc modes of consultation and research were supplemented by the extensive interviews with veterans of the battle, undertaken in collaboration with the newly formed 'Cable Street Group'. These interviews built upon the strong oral and local history traditions being pioneered by members of THAP and Stepney Books, and eventually found published form in the mid-1990s.[543] Synthesising these accounts Binnington invited locals to an exhibition of his designs at the Britannia Pub. Throughout, promotional materials and local

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542. Binnington, "Letter to Dan Jones," January 6, 1978, THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445.
543. It is notable that both the history workshop movement and the oral history traditions emerged across precisely these years and had strong roots in the East End. Raphael Samuel, for example, a leading light in both traditions was a long-term resident of Spitalfields. The work of Stepney Books, and others, meanwhile, as well as local historians like Bill Fishman, testify to a longer running tradition of popular history, which fused oral and local historical sources and traditions. For a summary of the work of Stepney Books and Oral Histories in Cable Street, see Roger Mills, "Chapter 1: Coming to Cable Street," in Mills, *Cable Street,* 16-28.

newspaper interviews, solicited broad involvement, explaining that 'any feedback, positive or negative is invaluable' in compiling the image [see figure 230].[544] All this was combined with Binnington's continuing archival research, through national and local archives, and would seem to have occupied him for much of the first years of the project, as delays to beginning on the wall persisted. As Binnington explained to Alister Warman in 1979:

> *Delays in getting wall repaired and rendered, allowed me to get to know the area, and through meeting a lot of locals determine much better the type of image required. I now believe that an 'acquaintance' period like this is essential if any time of communication is to be developed between and artist from the outside and the community.*[545]

Rather than the apotheosis of the community arts in Tower Hamlets, or an uncompromising rearward glancing work of 'socialist realism', therefore, the mural emerged, across its first stage of evolution, from a series of complex negotiations, contingencies and accommodations. It was precisely this fusion of diverse approaches to collaboration, historical research, and diverse approaches artistic control, that—it will be argued—came to define the mural's artistic and historical contributions.

Dynamic Images and Memory: First designs

The stages of design through which Binnington's work on the mural passed are preserved by sketches from the 1979 period and photographs of the mural at the end of the first stage of work in 1982.[546] From the earliest surviving sketch Binnington's design structured the scene around a dynamic perspectival vortex, centred in the lower half of the main (left-hand)

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544. Cable Street Mural Project "Get Involved It's Your Mural," Promotional Material, c. 1979: ACGB/31/10: Works of Art for Public Places (1967 – 1984): Box 4.
545. David Binnington, "Letter to Alister Warman," January 26, 1979, in ACGB/31/33: Murals and Environmental Projects 1978/79.
546. Notwithstanding the difficulties in recovering a comprehensive sense of a half-completed mural from such limited sources, the projected mural bears investigation, not least in its revealing contrasts and convergences to the final version.

section of the irregular double-breasted wall, [see figure 231]. Spreading out from this centre in dramatically distorted curves, likened at the time to the effects of a fish-eyed lens, are the transversal and orthogonal devices of 1930s Cable Street's architectural facade.[547] These create a deep but compressed tunnel of space spreading across the entire wall and from the busy foreground point of the dramatically distorted lamppost to the rear-grounded figure stood atop the barricade. The chaotically inhabited recessive vortex reveals a startling array of incident: a flurry of charging mounted police, flying projectiles and darting humans, framed by the overturned vehicles to the left and the right of the action on the main wall. A formation of fascists, meanwhile make a forlorn departure from the scene in the less charged, but architecturally cohesive right-hand section.

If the broad, simplified and near cartoonish figure types maintain a link to Binnington's first mural at Royal Oak, (though seem to verge towards Bomberg's 1910s Vorticist works towards the rear), the overall effect is in notable contrast.[548] Against the complex symbolism, hieratic symmetry, sci-fi-like mechanisation and compressed interior of Royal Oak, here is a de-centred street scene, that, draws us very firmly into its whirling and recessive space. The architectural foundations of that space remain, for all the distortions, familiar and everyday, being pieced together from documentary photographs of the barricades and shops arrayed along 1930s Cable Street. The animation of the space, by contrast, is anything but commonplace. At Royal Oak, spatial compression (from the rearground and above) contributed to an enveloping sense of ennui. In the Cable Street designs, the architectonic compression pushes us inward through the chaos and animation. The architecture of the street

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547. See, for example, Jempson, "Great Wall Plan."
548. It is also worth bearing in mind that, as an early sketch, Binnington deliberately left bare certain details, awaiting further feedback from consultations. The connection with Bomberg, however, may well be significant given Bomberg's connection with the area, his Jewish heritage and Binnington's use of a vortex form so intimately connected with Vorticism.

is transformed into a swirling tunnel of action, into which the viewer is very forcefully drawn.[549]

The design's emphasis on the physical involvement of the viewer is intriguing and worth drawing out in relation to the day's events and contemporary sources and accounts. It is notable, for example, that most of the mediatised images of the day's dynamic moments were shot from high aerial perspectives, in the broad open spaces of Gardiner's corner. In the archival Reuters newsreel (which Binnington unearthed in the archives), for example, the footage works through scenes of the Fascist's gathering at Royal Mint, before taking on the massed crowds, scuffles and baton charges between protestors and mounted police at Gardiner's corner, with only a passing shots of the dissembling of barricades at Cable Street after the day's events.[550] As Harold Rosen reminds us, this geographical focus, was in fact broadly appropriate, for, despite the name of 'Cable Street' having gone down in history, 'the decisive happening was the gathering of a vast crowd at Gardiner's Corner, where they solidly blocked five important roads which converged on a large open space'.[551] It was here that the main crowds had gathered, and that Mosley and his Blackshirts had planned to make their entry into Stepney.[552] Crucially it was here also that they were first blocked by the main mass of people gathered and a tram (one of four) whose anti-fascist driver had been persuaded to abandon it.[553] After a series of police baton charges failed to clear a way, the

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549. The designs share with *Royal Oak* a loosely characterised figure treatment, with only very broad facial characteristics and body types: though given Binnington's continued requests for local people to be included in the design it seems likely this is a product of the stage of design, rather than a final treatment.
550. Reuters Newsreport, "Battle of Cable Street", 1936; accessed May 3, 2018;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AQDOjQGZuA.
551. Rosen, "Necessary Myth," 28.
552. Published in the *Blackshirt*, a week before the proposed march, Mosley's plans allowed for preparations to be made of countervailing plans, massing troops at 'Leman Street, Gardiners Corner (Aldgate), Cable Street and St George's Street (now The Highway)' with the establishment of barricades at Cable street. See Phil Piratin, *Our Flag Stays Red* (London: Thames Publications, 1948), 21-23; and Fishman, "People's Journée," 388.
553. Of the scenes at Gardiner's corner, the Cable Street Group noted 'An eyewitness compared the scene to Wembley Stadium on Cup Final Day with a huge crowd cheering and singing. The *News Chronicle* reported 310,000 but some eye witnesses put the figure at over half a million people'. See Cable Street Group, "Chapter 6: The Battle," in *Cable Street*, [no page numbers]. As Phil Piratin (*Our Flag*, 23), described it: 'The police,

police attempted to pass down Leman Street, towards Cable Street to the south. Finally, frustrated by the barricades there, the Police Commissioner, Phillip Game, called on Mosley to abandon the march.[554]

Filmed from a high vantage point, the wide, open spaces of Gardiner's Corner and Royal Mint, captured in newsreels and newspaper photographs [see figure 232-233] lack the spatial compressions and architectural framing which formed the main focus of Binnington's Cable Street design. Instead they tended to reduce the action to a series of dispersed, if chaotic looking scuffles. The voiceover of the newsreel, reinforces the lofty detachment of the imagery, assuring that 'swift action by police avoided serious bloodshed', lingering over 'Sir Oswald Mosley's' troop inspection and repeatedly implying the source of the violence in the gatherings of 'Communists and Jews'. Newspaper reports and images broadly echoed the tone of the newsreel.[555] All, however, noted the enormous range of projectiles launched at police, the baton charges of the police to try to clear a route for Mosley through Gardiner's corner, and contained a general condemnation of the unruly behaviour of those gathered. In the days that followed the focus shifted to the arrests, and court charges against participants, for possession of weapons and projectiles, offensive language and obstruction.[556]

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aiming to keep Leman Street clear, tried to hew a path through the crowd, estimated at least 50,000. That blocked the whole of Gardner's [sic] Corner. At the junction of Commercial Road and Leman Street a tram had been left standing by its anti-fascist driver. Before very long this was joined by others. Powerless before such an effective road-block, the police turned their attention elsewhere. Time and again they charged the crowd; the windows of neighbouring shops went in as people were pushed through them. But the police could make no impression on this immense human barricade'.

554. As Fishman described, there the BUF were, 'forced to turn about and march off in the opposite direction: through the deserted City, along the Embankment, where, in the absence of an audience, they quickly dispersed. That night there was dancing in the pubs and in the side streets of the East End. And thus was a legend born'. Fishman, in Cable Street Group, "*Chapter 6. The Battle"*, *Cable Street.*

555. The *Evening Standard* lamenting that the anti-fascists had not stayed at home, the *Daily Mail*, mirroring Fascist propaganda about the Red scare, the *Guardian* pouring disdain and condescension on the anti-fascists, and the *Telegraph* most concerned about a brick hitting Mosley's car. See chap. 3, n. 499.

556. See, for example, "100 in Court After Banned London March*," Daily Mail*, October 6, 1936, 7.

Absent from the reports and images, however, is a full sense of what Phil Piratin, the

Chairman of the Stepney Communist Party at the time, had described as a police force, 'as

vicious in action as anything I have ever seen including some of the hunger marches'.[557] As

Rosen recalled the scenes at Gardiner's corner: 'the police had decided they could batter a

way through for Mosley with baton charge after baton charge. This ceaseless onslaught went

on for what seems now like hours. The pattern was unchanging: mounted police hitting out

indiscriminately and the foot police following up to arrest the wounded, some bloody-

headed'.[558] It was this sense of endless police violence to clear the way for Mosley that was

to form the basis of Binnington's designs. In this respect a letter from Binnington to Jones, as

early as 1978, is revealing. Explaining his visits to the BBC archives, and his extensive

research, Binnington notes seeing the newsreels:

> *What caught my attention was the horses. They were the only active, dynamic element in the whole scene. Thousands of people standing still trapped in a huge crowd and those horses ploughing through them like snow ploughs…Phil Piratin gave me a clue to the genuine heroism of some of those Jewish people. He said Cossacks when describing the mounted police. I later realised that for generations the Jews had feared, and as a matter of survival avoided the Cossacks in Russia and Poland. To come out on the streets of Whitechapel and face the British Cossacks must have took some doing. Any sane person is intimidated by those police horses with their riders with long, lead weighted clubs. How did those Jews, particularly the older generation feel, bloody terrified I bet!*[559]

Yet Binnington transfers this central motif of the violence of mounted police, to the

barricades and narrow confines of Cable Street. This was, after all, the location of the final

defeat of the Fascists as the Police proved incapable of passing the narrow street, with its

three barricades defended by the local dockers.[560] Though some photographs of the day

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557. Piratin, cited in Fishman, "People's Journée," 388.
558. Rosen, "Necessary Myth," 30.
559. Binnington, "Letter to Dan Jones," January 6, 1978, THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445
560. Piratin provides a most vivid account of events on Cable Street, where '[a]s [the police] charged they were met with milk bottles, stones, and marbles. Some of the housewives began to drop milk bottles from the roof tops. A number of police surrendered. This had never happened before, so the lads didn't know what to do, but they took away their batons, and one took a helmet for his son as a souvenir'. Piratin, *Our Flag,* 23.

reveal the barricades early in the day and after the events being dissembled by police and others (seemingly unpublished at the time) reveal arrests made on Leman Street, it is notable that few images remain of any documented baton charges on Cable Street. Rather, combining the surroundings of Cable Street, drawn on contemporary photographs of the barricades, street signs and action, with the footage and eyewitness descriptions of baton charges from throughout the day, Binnington offers a condensation of the day's main action into the tight environment and nominal setting of Cable Street. This setting, combined with the low vantage point and whirling perspective, therefore, managing to recapture something of the energy and vigour of eyewitness accounts of the day yet missing from contemporary photographs.[561]

Onto the Wall

Binnington's work on the wall itself had progressed with notable difficulties and delays across its first years. Owing to the desired permanence of the mural, it had been decided to use the Keim paints that Binnington and Rochfort had employed at Royal Oak.[562] A Bavarian silicate mineral paint systems, developed for Ludwig I of Bavaria, Keim promised a durable medium which could simulate the effect of Italian fresco, and withstand the hardships of a

561. See Rosen, "Necessary Myth"; Piratin *Our Flag*; and Cable Street Group, *Cable Street*.
562. The seeking of a permanent paint system was a requirement of the grant from the Vincent Harris Mural Trust to the *Royal Oak Murals*. See "Minutes of Meeting, item 5, condition a. April 15, 1975", *Edwin Austin Abbey and Vincent Harris Mural Funds Committee Minutes 1960-1975*, Archives of the Royal Academy of Art: RAA/REG/2/1/3: 'the committee would be prepared in due course to consider the definite allocation of such money from the Harris Fund on the following conditions: a) after trials, they are able to give an assurance, with supporting evidence, that the pigments and a medium such as Silicon Ester in a hydrolysed form, would be satisfactory and lasting.' Through Gwyn Williams, the artists had been pointed towards Keim Farben silicate paints (interviews with the author, September 2015). Keim Farben was established by the Bavarian scientist Adolf Wilhelm Keim, in 1878. He had responded to the call of Ludwig I of Bavaria to develop a paint that simulated the quality of Italian lime-based frescos but could survive the 'sulphurous air' of Northern Europe. Keim used a silicate technology to do this, with a promise of century of life. See Keim Mineral Paints; About Us; History: https://www.keim.com/en-gb/about-us/keim-history/. Binnington recalls that Keim Farben had seen the municipal financing of an exterior mural by the Greater London Council as an opportunity for expanding their market and offered the young artists a substantial discount on the paint. Dan Jones noted the desire for the murals permanence and protection from vandalism in a 1978 funding application. In the same application, it is noted that Keim was 'the only permanent paint system available to the exterior muralist'. Dan Jones, "Letter of recommendation for the mural," c. 1978, THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445.

Northern climate.[563] Initially the ill-repair of the wall caused serious set-backs: the enormous roughly hewn, war damaged, damp splattered surface presenting numerous obstacles to the development of the smooth silicate render required by the Keim. Stretching well into 1979, these set-backs were succeeded by wage disputes and strikes of Tower Hamlets Council workers, by the disappearance of the two assistants projected through the Manpower Services Commission, and by the difficulties of working with Keim in adverse weather and temperatures.[564] Compounding all this, was the sheer scale of the wall, which unlike the larger Battersea, or Chicksand Street murals was spread vertically up some 20 metres. This made moving up and down the scaffold for materials or viewing distance a significant physical drain.[565] Whilst at first Binnington had remained philosophical about the delays, therefore, later they seem to have caused increasing tensions with both Tower Hamlets Arts Committee, and funding bodies.[566]

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563. Whilst Keim murals remained a minority of those painted, owing to the cost, the difficulties of preparing a wall with an appropriate level of acidity, and what some remember as a laborious fixative process, something in the region of ten murals were executed in Keim Farben paint before the close of the 1980s. Brian Barnes in particular has recalled the difficulties of working with Keim Farben. Others, including Binnington, Rochfort and Butler, however, recall enjoying working with it. Interviews with the author, August and September 2015.

564. The Manpower Services Commission had been established by Edward Heath's government in 1974 but became increasingly active under Callaghan's administration, and even more so under Thatcher's. Presented as a scheme to get people back into work, it became increasingly viewed as a cynical attempt to massage unemployment figures. Cable Street was one of several mural schemes across the period to attempt to use the scheme to train muralists. Binnington's recollection of uninterested and ultimately disappearing trainees (one of whom he claims to have stolen his radio), is unfortunately fairly typical of the experience of many muralists. Binnington, interview with the author, August 2015). Ray Walker, had experienced similar problems on the Chicksand Mural, writing to Alister Warman in 1979: '[t]o begin with we employed a school leaver (one of Mandy Berry's protégés) who turned out to be disinterested, unpunctual, non-attendant and quite inadequate as far as the work was concerned'. He did note, however, that a second assistant had worked out better. Walker "Letter to Alister Warman," September 25, 1979: ACGB/31/10, Box 4.

565. As Binnington recalls this made working in the upper sections of the wall particularly exhausting, requiring some 40 metres of descent and ascent whenever he wanted to change paint or fetch extra sketches, and the same journey with the additional moving of wooden planks whenever he hoped to step back to see his work from a distance. Binnington, interview with the author, August 2015.

566. Across 1979-82, Binnington was forced to send consistent updates to funding bodies justifying the expanding length of the project. In a letter to Lesley Greene of the GLAA for example Binnington wrote: 'Dear Lesley, Thank you for your frankness and concern. I will try and reply to the question you raised regarding the length of time the Cable street mural is taking. You asked me to itemise, for the benefit of your panel, the reasons why it is taking so long. I offer no such excuses.' David Binnington, "Letter to Lesley Greene, Visual Arts officer at GLAA," April 14, 1981, THA: Cable Street Folder: THA-28. Whilst signs of internal tensions are more difficult to assess, a letter written in 1982, following Binnington's departure laments Binnington's 'painfully slow progress'. Dan Jones, "Letter to Peter Conway," undated [June 1982], in THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445: File re. Cable Street Mural. There are a series of occasionally acrimonious letters between Binnington and Peter Conway across 1980 and 1981, referring to ongoing problems with scaffolding. For a summary of the

Binnington was also aware, in the wake of his experiences at Royal Oak, that much of the final form of the mural would have to be worked out and adjusted on the wall.[567] Working in the night to transfer his designs with the use of overhead projectors Binnington had, by early 1982, succeeded in painting some two-thirds of the wall [see figure 234].[568] The final design, bears considerable similarity to the 1979 sketches, with the overall vortex like space and exposed cobbles creating a swirling dynamism to the left, whilst on the right the fascist group are pushed even further out by the interjection of a series of hands sketched across the width the foreground. To an extent these hands return us to the Siqueiros-derived motif at the centre of his first mural, but rather than performing a symbolic function, here their primary impact is phenomenological: pulling the viewer even more firmly into the scene, by implying a continuity of the pictured crowd into the viewer's space.

This substitution of a more directly involving pictorial device for the historical detailing of the fascist retreat underlines the commitments Binnington's design made to a mode of what we might call haptic realism, and his commitment to a full-ranging imbrication of the spectator, within the dynamic depiction of the historical event. Expanding the possibility for a realist mode of history painting which builds upon, rather than against the advances of modernism, it reveals the use of dynamic pictorial devices to summon 'inner' and subjective worlds, bound up in the memory of a historical experience. It is notable in terms of many of

affair see "Memorandum from Mr DF Shields to Councilor Simon JP," October 6, 1981, THA: Cable Street Folder: THA-281.

567. As Binnington wrote to Alister Warman in 1979, 'So far I've done quite a few drawings revising and improving the original sketches though there is a limit to what can be done on a small scale. I learnt this lesson at Royal Oak, beyond a certain point all one is doing is producing small sketches that work on that scale but cannot possibly work when enlarged - sketches for Arts Council Committees' Binnington, "Letter to Alister Warman," January 26, 1979.

568. It was Siqueiros who had initiated the use of projectors for mural painting in the 1930s, following discussions with Sergei Eisenstein. Though there are suggestions that Binnington and Rochfort used them at *Royal Oak*, the use at *Cable Street* was much more pervasive. [see figures 234].

the postmodernist critiques of realism, modernism and history, the extent to which

Binnington's designs aimed at a resolution of these historical modes. For Peter de Francia,

inspecting the mural in 1979, these attempts lay at the core of the mural's strengths: '[The]

mural attempts to merge pictorial elements based on the personal experience of local people

and researched documentary evidence with formal compositional devices intended to convey

a sense of dynamism and movement on a very large scale. Since I believe this to be an

exceptionally difficult and unresolved dilemma in contemporary art, all attempts to achieve

solutions to the problem are worthy of support.'[569]

It was notable, and rarely commented, however, that this deepening emphasis on the

physiological aspects coincided with the development of plans, first mentioned as early as

1979, that the mural should be accompanied by a series of predella panels, to be located

beneath the main mural.[570] An application to the GLC approved on May 4th 1982, approves a

grant towards eighteen predella scenes, to be designed and executed by Paul Butler, to

accompany the main image.[571] Stretching from Jewish arrivals to Whitechapel from the

1870s onwards, through sequential events of the early decades of the twentieth century,

before tracing in greater detail the build-up of the BUF and antisemitism in the East End in

the 1930s, the preparations for and key moments of October 4th 1936, these scenes were to

culminate with scenes of the Blitz in the East End and the arrival of 'New Immigrants' from

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569. Peter de Francia, "Letter to Alister Warman," June 12, 1979, in ACGB/31/27/Public. One of the most prominent figures of the marginalised British social realist tradition, Peter de Francia, had close personal friendships with John Berger and Renato Guttuso, and likely taught Barnes and Walker at the Royal College.
570. The earliest mention of these plans would seem to be in a Time Out article of 1979: 'Binnington also hopes to use the lower wall surrounding the area in front of the mural to place it in a context of what happened prior to 1936 and what has happened lately, using small individual paintings of such events as the arrival of Jewish immigrants, the First World War, unemployment, the rise of fascism, the blitz of the docklands, the arrival of West Indian and Asian immigrant and the continuing struggle with racism and fascism'. Time Out, "A Monument to Victory," *Time Out*, October 26 - November 1, 1979. In THA: 750, Folder 2, General ANO 1977-1981, Clippings. They remained, however, notably absent from other sources until 1982.
571. See Greater London Council Archives (henceforth GLCA), "Report AR 465. Item No 32," *Visual Arts – Cable Street Mural Project*: A. 23: Report June 9, 1982, by director of Recreation and Arts.

the 1960s.[572] To be ranged across the base of the mural, these scenes would have marked a return to the medieval churches model of pictorial narrative and deepened the historical and narrative reach of the mural. They provide a further marker of the expansive and exploratory mode of mural painting that Binnington was striving for.

The Fascists Strike Back

Binnington's mural was never to be realised. In late May 1982, after some four years of work on the project, just days after the GLC approved grant, and in what was hoped would be the final months of work, the mural was attacked by the paramilitary neo-Nazi group Column 18.[573] Scaling the scaffolding in the middle of the night and using the thick encaustic paint used for road lines they emblazoned 'BRITISH FASCISM NOT COMMUNISM - STOP THE RACE WAR- RIGHTS FOR WHITES', across the mural's face in 8 ft high letters [See figure 235]. The shock and the sheer quantity of undone labour were too much for Binnington. Amidst tense relations with the rest of those involved, he retired from the project, and—as it was to transpire— from mural painting.[574]

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572. The scenes listed in the above report are: '1. The New Immigrants 1875-1914/ 2. 1814-1918 War – A Home for Heroes/ 3. The Twenties/ 4. The Depression / 5. The Scapegoat/ 6. British Nazism/ 7. Attacks in Jewish Whitechapel/ 8. Local opposition/ 9. Proposed Moseley March – October 4th 1936/ 10. The Outcry/ 11. Chalk the Streets All Out Sunday/ 12. The crowd assembles – 250,000 people/ 13. The British Union of Fascists assemble – 3,000 people/ 14. The police attempt to clear a route / 15. The police instruct Moseley to withdraw/ 16. The public Order Act/ 17. Blitzing of East London – 1941/ 18.New Immigrants – 1960'. GLCA: "Report AR 465".

573. It will be recalled that this was the group that Kenneth Leech described as a paramilitary neo-Nazi group who had sent him death threats written in blood. (See chap. 2, n. 404).

574. There has been some question, and no little mythology, about the nature of Binnington's departure. A letter of resignation, (dated June 3, 1982) confirms that it occurred after a meeting on June 2nd. The letter of resignation contains a considerable amount of self-critique, accepting some responsibility for fact that he felt that the community support necessary to protect the mural from further attacks was 'not present to any noticeable degree'. His further statement that 'I have little confidence in the organised left's willingness or capacity to produce more than a short effort before moving on to the next fashionable campaign', however, would seem to have gone down very badly with some. A letter of response from Dan Jones to Peter Conway, (cited in more detail below) is notable in its hostile response to such perceived attacks and castigates Binnington for walking away 'at the first sign of response, from the sons of Hitler'. Binnington re-trained as a carpenter, and continued to manage an atelier, under the name of David Savage until his death in January 2019. David Binnington, "Letter to Peter Conway," June 3, 1982; and Jones, "Letter to Peter Conway," undated [June 1982], both THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445.

To some extent, such damage was to be expected; from the outset, the mural was intended as an anti-fascist intervention in an area experiencing a surge in fascism. It was, perhaps more than any other mural, intended as a site of direct contestation: a memorial to the local community's historic success in repelling the influence of fascism, but also a large-scale spatial intervention for the contemporary cause of anti-fascism. To the fascists of the contemporary period, therefore, this was always likely to be seen as a deliberately antagonistic act: immortalising a moment of their historic defeat, all the more provocative for a movement built in no small part on images of implacable strength and machismo. As Binnington put it, in his resignation letter, '[t]he damage to the wall by fascists was to be expected for we cannot rattle the cage of creatures of this kind and expect no response'.[575]

Whilst the organised Far-Right had experienced something of an electoral decline from their 1978 peak, they remained active around the East End long into the 1980s (and beyond).[576] Indeed, as has been seen, their declining electoral success, can in no small part be seen as a result of the accommodation of much of their rhetoric into the heart of government policy. In this sense, it is notable that the attack on the mural, came in the midst of the jingoistic whirl of the Falklands war, and seven months or so after Thatcher's infamously divisive British Nationality Act, had 'erased the economic and political circumstances of the late empire that compelled and governed migration' and defined British identity into three tiers of blood related hierarchy.[577] More locally, it followed on the heels of local elections on May 6th 1982.[578] Whilst Labour held their control of Tower Hamlets, and the Far-Right vote in fact

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575. Binnington, "Letter to Peter Conway" June 3, 1982.
576. It is notable in this regard that the mural was attacked by far-right groups on two further occasions: once in 1986 and once in 1993. See Mills, *Cable Street*, 162-163, for Butler's account of this attack. He seems, however, to have confused the date.
577. Radhika Natarajhan, "Ties of Blood."
578. It is notable that the mural was also defaced in 1993 on the day after local elections in which the British National Party won its first council seat in East London, increasing its share of the vote by 14% to 33.9%. On that occasion again the Liberals ran a campaign laden in dog whistles to racist tensions. See Mills, *Cable Street,*

collapsed amidst the infighting which had been prevalent since 1978, the election was notorious for the racially charged campaign of the Liberal-SDP alliance. As Chris Nineham has put it, 'The liberals began to gain influence in the East End in the early 1980s using a right wing populism to attack the extremely unpopular Labour councils'.[579] Prefiguring tactics used to even more pronounced effect in the 1990s, a 1981 Liberal leaflet had drawn upon the long racialised fears of rising violence in declaring, 'every year more break-ins, muggings, rapes, violence and acts of vandalism. People are scared to go out at night, and even to open their doors. Something is very wrong indeed'.[580]

From the outset therefore the threat of vandalism to the mural had been perceived and, to an extent, budgeted for: early funding applications argued for the use of Keim paint not only by merit of the proposed permanence of the mural - but also for the medium's supposed protection against likely vandalism.[581] Whilst such claims may have been made in good faith, owing to the sealant layer which fixed the Keim and offered enhanced protection from the climate, the 1982 attack revealed their shortcomings. Keim did indeed offer a hardened layer once fixed, but the medium's sensitivity to the pH value of the render, as well as the diverse extent of the mural's fixity in this mid-stage of completion caused significant problems when confronted by the obduracy and permanence of the line marking paint used by the fascist assailants.[582] Following some weeks of consultation with Keim and muralists across London, it was decided that only by sandblasting significant sections of the wall could the image begin

and BBC News, "On this Day, *7th September, 1993. Shock as racist wins council seat",* BBC; News; http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/17/newsid_2520000/2520085.stm.

579. Chris Nineham, "Rotten Borough," *Socialist Review* Issue 168 (October 1993): http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr168/nineham.htm.

580. Cited in Nineham, "Rotten Borough". For the racialisation of law and order concerns see Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis*.

581. See Jones, "Letter of Recommendation".

582. Most problematically, it ruled out the use of heavy solvents to repair the wall. See "Correspondence" (with Keim and others) in THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445: File re Cable Street Mural**.**

to be re-worked. Volunteers were recruited and work began, salvaging what was possible from the wall and setting about re-rendering [see Figure 236].[583]

Meanwhile, with Binnington departed, crisis meetings were held to work out how best to salvage the project. It was clear that retreat was not considered an option: beyond the many thousands of pounds of public funds that had already been invested in the project, the question of backing down to a fascist attack was unthinkable for a mural designed as a show of strength against precisely such forces. With Paul Butler already involved in plans for the predella scenes, Desmond Rochfort and Ray Walker soon joined him as the project's inheritors. With GLC funds destined for the predella scenes diverted to the main wall, and extra funds forthcoming from the THAC, Butler, Rochfort and Walker set to work in the Summer of 1982, completing work on the mural by May 1983, with a grand opening ceremony timed to coincide with the 47th Anniversary of the Battle.

Stage Two: Reform and Completion

The exact mechanics of Butler, Rochfort and Walker's coming together on the project remain ambiguous.[584] Butler had contacted Rochfort and Binnington, at the time of their first murals at Royal Oak, and been re-contacted by Binnington when the idea for the predella scenes

583. "Correspondence", THA: S/THA/2/8/1: TH/8445.

584. This ambiguity emerges in no small part from the divergent memories of the three surviving muralists, (Binnington, Butler and Rochfort), and the frequent repetition of their divergent stories without recourse to archival sources. Butler, for example, has referred to the date of the graffiti in 1981 and seems to place himself at the centre of negotiations. In the run up to last year's 80th anniversary celebrations of the battle, Rochfort responded to an article which accurately cited the graffiti as occurring in 1982, by claiming that work on the mural had continued to 1987 (it actually having finished in 1983). An error he has confirmed to be resultant from a 'mistype', but remains on record. Even sources as well researched as Mills' *Cable Street*, describe the graffiti incident as occurring in 1980. See Paul Butler, interview with Roger Mills, 2011: http://spaceofforgetting.typepad.com/files/cable-street-interview-1.pdf; David Rosenberg, "Antidote to the Far Right's Poison- The Battle of Cable Street's Mural," *The Guardian*, September 21, 2016: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/sep/21/battle-cable-street-mural-fascists-east-end ; Desmond Rochfort, "The Full History of Cable Street Mural," Letters, *The Guardian*, September 25, 2016: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/sep/25/the-full-history-of-the-cable-street-mural; Author's correspondence with Desmond Rochfort, October 2016; Mills, *Cable Street,* 157.

emerged.[585] Though Cable Street was to offer Butler his first experience of mural painting, he had exhibited widely across the 1970s.[586] His somber realist approach, to figured cityscape scenes, and his expressed interest in the mural form underlying Binnington's contact in early 1982.[587] Rochfort (b. 1949) was born in Rhodesia, but moved with his mother to Devon at a young age. He came to the RA with a Foundation from the Yeovil Polytechnic, and a Painting diploma from the Byam Shaw School of Art.[588] He had, we will recall, studied with Binnington at the Royal Academy Schools and collaborated with him at Royal Oak.[589] Those murals remained a touchstone of 'professional intent' for the broader mural movement, and Rochfort had since completed an impressive interior cycle of murals at a youth club in East London.[590] Crucially, Rochfort's murals at Royal Oak were also executed in Keim, thus giving him a technical experience almost unique amongst other London based muralists at this stage.[591] Walker, as we have seen, had been active in Tower Hamlets for several years, completing murals at Bow Road and Chicksand Street with the involvement of THAP, and had in the intervening period completed another work commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Peasants Revolt, in East London and a Triptych on *Army Recruitment* commissioned by the Imperial War Museum [see Figures 237, and 238].[592] Whilst not closely acquainted

585. Binnington, interview with the author August, 2015; and Butler, interview with the author, October 2015.
586. Participating for example in *Narrative Painting*, (ICA and Arnolfini, 1979) and the aforementioned *Art For Society* (1978) at the Whitechapel. Both exhibitions were notable events in something of a 'realist' turn, detected in the art world across the late 1970s. In 1980, Butler received an Arts Council Major Award, and in 1981 had been artist in residence at Maltby Colliery, Yorkshire.
587. Binnington recalls having seen Butler's 'monochrome, black and white sketches' at some point prior to Cable Street and having been impressed. Binnington, interview with the author, August 2015.
588. Rochfort, , interview with the author, August 2015.
589. Though close friends in the build-up to Royal Oak the two seem to have drifted apart somewhat in the aftermath, Rochfort travelling to Mexico before taking up a teaching position at Chelsea School of Art, whilst Binnington threw himself into the commission at Cable Street.
590. This cycle of murals was at Toffee Park Youth Club and offered a forceful engagement with the themes of racism in the local area. They would appear to have been painted over at some point in the 1990s.
591. The only other mural to have been commenced in Keim by 1982 was Stephen Pusey's second large-scale commission *Children at Play Mural* in Brixton (eventually completed in November of that year). More, however, were soon to follow (see chapter 3, below).
592. *The Peasant's Revolt* mural offered an impressive memorial to the historic event, and another touchstone in Walker's development as a muralist. The relative speed with which the mural had to be completed, and the more distanced historical subject matter, prevent further elaboration at this stage.

with each other, therefore, the three artists were united by their 'professional' accomplishments, broadly realist approaches and Leftist politics.[593] Honoured and well-pleased with the invitation, they soon set about collaboratively upon the complex question of how to progress.[594]

The necessity for sandblasting had caused a substantial loss of all but the uppermost sections of the mural. Whilst Binnington's studies and cartoons remained in the basement studio the three new artists decided to make significant alterations. The reasons for these changes would seem to have multiple sources. Both Butler and Rochfort have recalled that the priority of establishing meaningful collaboration between three artists with divergent styles required careful forethought, if it was not to result in unsatisfactory compromises.[595] Binnington's methods of working—his evolution of the designs on the wall and his extensive use of projectors to transfer sketches and alter designs—are likely to have complicated any attempts to follow the evolving states of his designs. The nature of Binnington's departure, would also seem to have brought out some degree of acrimony, which may have left those surrounding the mural less willing than otherwise to push for the realisation of his former designs, especially in as far as they might have diverged from their own interpretation of the events.[596]

593. Rochfort, it seems, was still a member of the CPGB, (and notes today that his politics remain largely unaltered, though his question of means has shifted). Walker would seem to have joined the Labour Party in 1979. Not a member of any party, Butler identified with the Left, and the anti-fascist movement in particular. Rochfort, interview with the author, August 2015; Ray Walker Memorial Committee, *Ray Walker*; Butler, interview with the author, October 2015.

594. As Butler recalls it was 'the opportunity of a lifetime', and as both the unprecedented funds and the lasting prestige of the mural suggest, this was–for committed Left wing muralists–a remarkable commission. Butler, interview with the author, Octover 2015.

595. Butler; interview; Rochfort, interview with the author, August 2015. Whilst Rochfort had already collaborated with Binnington at Royal Oak it is notable that there they had divided the commission into two individually completed walls. This was Butler's first experience of mural work, and–barring his assisting of John Bratby in the early 1970s–Ray Walker's first experience of collaboration.

596. Writing after Binnington's departure from the project, Dan Jones expressed multiple frustrations: 'I am very sad about this decision, but much sadder about the manner in which he has resigned… I feel this particularly strongly as Dave chooses to attack local people, the organised labour movement, and individuals who have courageously risked their reputations and political careers in order that the mural could be done….It may be a bit tough to spell this out but those of us who have suffered threats to our lives and those of our families because of outspoken anti-racist activities in the area have on the whole not chosen to resign from the

Finally, each of the muralists is likely to have had their own interpretations of this shibboleth of the contemporary Left, which they may, quite justifiably, have felt important to incorporate in a mural which would take up much of the next year of their lives.

Despite some major changes, the continuities with Binnington's designs are considerable [see figure 239]. The upper third of the main wall, down approximately as far as the horizon line of the barricade remained in-tact and was left ostensibly unchanged. In the right hand wall the undamaged area stretched slightly lower, as far as the half-stripped Hitler figure, dropped from a state of the art 1930s gyrocopter, (two elements that had emerged in Binnington's plans since the 1979 sketches).[597] These remaining sections preserved the radial fish-eye distortions generated by the architectural confines of Cable Street—with the period shop fronts, broken windows and the red and white chequered flags of the Spanish Republican fight—and a number of dramatically flighted projectiles, including pliers, milk bottles and chamber pots. In the lower sections, the vandalism and repair necessitated reworking. It was decided that each artist would take on a section: Walker to the left, Rochfort the right, and Butler, responsible for the middle section [see Figure 240].[598] Aspects of Binnington's design were taken on by each. Most prominently the upturned lorry, bridging the awkward divide between the two segments of wall remains almost identical to Binnington's designs (referencing back to a decisive feature of many accounts, and the barricades'

anti racist activity we were engaged in at the first whiff of response from Hitler's heirs; instead we picked ourselves up and got on with the work that had to be done…This mural is not and has never been the private possession of Dave Binnington, he has had to face enormous difficulties on its execution but one of the saddest aspects of the last two years', painfully slow progress on the mural has been the methodical process by which efforts of help and support from artists and from the wider community were frozen out by artists who now choose to attack the very people who were trying to offer support'. Dan Jones, "Letter to Peter Conway," June 1982. Though, of course, set in response to Binnington's own attacks, the tone of the letter highlights a sense of a growing divide between Binnington and those surrounding the project. Binnington's analysis of the reasons for this will be dealt with in more detail below.

597. Gyrocopters were a relatively new addition to the police equipment and were used to monitor the movement of crowds throughout the day. See Piratin, *Our Flag*.

598. Butler recalls that it was felt that Walker and Rochfort had the most strongly contrasting styles and that therefore he would be the most appropriate choice to synthesise their work. His own inexperience of the mural form perhaps underwrote this analysis. Butler, interview with the author.

effectiveness).[599] The motif of the curving horse neck, which dominates Butler's central passage of the mural and the Dali-esque figure of the egg-holding woman in Walker's left-hand segment are both reworked from Binnington's designs.[600]

These continuities and reworkings ensured a continuity and outlet for much of Binnington's in-depth historical and visual research; augmented, in turn, by that of his successors. Crucially, Binnington's core thematic preoccupations and representational strategy—presenting a mixture of truncheon wielding police violence and the barricade of Cable Street on the main wall, with the fascists isolated in a less dynamic section to the right—were also broadly preserved. What has shifted, however, is equally notable, and rarely discussed. Most immediately, in the place of Binnington's tunnel of recessive space, which drew the viewer so forcefully through to the fore- and mid-ground and stood at the centre of the compositional dynamics, the reworked lower half of the mural presents a much more densely inhabited scene. Covering the exposed cobblestones and receding road of Binnington's design, we find a dramatically interlocking melée of figures, stretching from the foreground, near continuously to—and crowded on either side of— the barricade. The barricade, is thus transformed from the end-note of an engulfing compositional vortex to an apex of the bulging foreground action, pushing up into (and against) the recessive, curved perspectives of the rear. This shift is reinforced by a raised vantage point on the foreground action, producing

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599. Piratin, *Our Flag*, 22.
600. As Butler said it, 'the curved neck of the horse is definitely a motif which was in Binnington's original idea. But it's not his drawing. I took the design idea from it… for the horses we went down and drew some old nags at the farm in the East End. The central horse's head… is an amalgamation of the drawings I did at the farm and photos from racing newspapers', Butler, Interview with Roger Mills. The fingers of the left-hand figure, with their delicate clasp of the egg seem derived from Salvador Dali's 1937, '*Metamorphoses of Narcissus*', (Tate), a work made in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, the year after Cable Street. Their final form is closely related to the version Binnington had placed on the wall, though Binnington's broad treatment and obscured face are reworked by Walker into a profiled portrait. Given the departure from Dali's anthropomorphic visual trick in which the fingers of the hand form into the shape of a seated body, there is some question as to whether Binnington may have intended for the overlapping second hand, clasped into a V-sign, to contribute some kind of adaptation of Dali's visual game, that was lost in the translation of the image by Walker. More broadly Walker's adaptations of Binnington's design reveal the extent to which the former's image could be taken as a base and reworked.

dual perspectival assertions.[601] Gone are those dismembered hands which in Binnington's

final state, would have occupied the lower section of the composition and drawn the viewer

into the action as a participant, positioned decisively below the downwards swinging

truncheons of the charging mounted police. Instead, in the final mural, the bustling

foreground scenes are viewed from a point above the police, approximately half-way up the

barricades.

These changes shift the compositional dynamics significantly and necessitated a much more

complex series of foregrounded devices to maintain something of the pervading sense of

dynamism, so crucial to the work's success. Beneath, and enhancing the prominence of, the

barricade, the reworked foreground action is animated around two pyramidal anchors: the

smaller peaking with the white-shirted, flat-capped figure about to launch a projectile, and

tracing down to the blue uniforms of the two closest mounted police. The larger pyramid can

be traced across the entirety of the police detachment, with the left most policeman and the

rump of the right most horse, marking the base, and the apex situated somewhere near the

barricade-topping-leaflet-thrower, inherited from Binnington. These pyramids, reinforce the

centrality of the barricade, but also enclose a dense wedge of action, animated by the

imminent radial sweep of the foremost mounted policeman's truncheon and the dynamic

curves of the horses. To the bottom, figures flee out towards (though beneath the line of sight

of) the viewer, expanding the radial force of the central wedge. To the right, the wedge is

enclosed by a non-mounted policeman, at full stretch to grab a man trapped in front of the

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601. Though somewhat conflicted this means of presenting a 'battle' and its setting through dual perspectival
schemes could, in fact, be traced back as far as one of the earliest battle scenes to be rendered in a rational
perspective scene: Uccello's *Battle of San Romano*, from the National Gallery (c. 1438-40). In Uccello's work,
however, the dynamics are reversed, with the extended background scenes pulled upwards in relation to the
more recessive (and rationally rendered) foreground.

barricade by the scruff of the neck.[602] To the left, a bank of figures enclose the scene with bright red banners. To the extreme bottom left corner, this bank of protestors meet the police, in the punching fist of a protestor, as nearby children scatter marbles into the only segment of exposed cobbles. Across the whole, the periodic repetition of the blues of the policemen's uniforms give an anchor and continuity to the chaotic happenings.[603]

On the one hand these shifts to the design might be read as an attempt to expand the historical and memorial aspects of the mural. Many of them, including the throwing of marbles to trip police horses, the imminent stone-thrower, and the apprehended man at the foot of the barricades are derived from contemporary accounts and photographs.[604] It seems noteworthy, however, that many of these episodes were also unearthed by Binnington, and his own foreground scene may have grown to include more such incidents than the arrested state implies. Notwithstanding the relative incompletion of Binnington's design, however, the compositional shifts mark a divergence with pronounced effects on the mural's register. Forsaken is the focus upon the viewer's visceral physiological involvement in the experience of facing baton charges at foot-level. Instead, the finalised mural offers a more detached and symbolic condensation of the day's action. In elevating the viewer above the level of the swinging truncheons, the focus shifts from Binnington's concern with the viewer's

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602. This would seem to be the figure of Charlie Goodman, who as a 1979 Time Out article recalls had got in touch with Binnington at the 1978 reunion: 'Binnington produced rough drawings to show at the reunion 'as an initial catalyst. You say "was it like this", and they say no, and you go on and listen. One bloke showed us a photo of himself being nicked - he got three months - and that's gone in the corner of the mural'. This would seem to be the scene relocated by Butler to the centre. As Goodman, continued, 'it was a historic day for the East End of London besides being a historic day for the fight against racism…everyone the police arrested had a big police escort back to the station – it gave them the opportunity to get out of the firing line…'. Time Out, "A Monument to Victory".
603. Tracing either of the aforementioned pyramids confirms Rochfort's description of the importance accorded to chromatic relations in uniting the three sections of the bottom half of the mural upon which the artists worked: the constant punctuation of blues drawing us between and across the different artists' sections.
604. For a texture of many of these events see Piratin, Our Flag, 24. It is notable that the arrested figure has moved from the figure derived from a photograph brought in by Charlie Goodman, (see photo in Figure 233, right sheet, bottom middle) and visible in Binnington's designs, to another, older looking man. Whether this was by a significant adaptation of the Goodman image or finding another, remains unclear.

integration, to actively barring it. In so doing it is the symbolic impassability of the barricade, the unstoppable mounting mass of people ranged across the entirety of the midground, which become the main focus of the scene. What is lost in dynamic immersion, therefore, is transformed into symbolic condensation – baton charges and barricades alike crammed into a narrow and impassable bank of the day's distilled actions.

This deepening symbolic aspect, is driven home by the explosion of red flags and banners which line the barricade and form the second major lateral chromatic unifier across the three artists' sections. Beyond their compositional effect, the flags' give symbolic reference to the forces of the 1930s Left: an Independent Labour Party flag to the far left; the 'Mosley Shall Not Pass. Bar the Road to British Fascism' banner beneath it; the Hammer and Sickle, of the Communist Party to its right; and the larger ILP banner lining the bumper of the upturned truck in the centre. These banners also serve to further delineate and separate off the blackshirts in their much more staid, right hand passage, with their own dimmer-toned red and blue Union Jacks, German flag, inscrutable expressions and fascistic uniforms. These figures remain isolated from the dynamic main wall, behind the masses of police who ultimately failed in clearing them a route.

The presence of these flags and banners could be seen to build on some of the day's accounts, with some eyewitnesses referring to an eruption of flags on the morning of the day's events. As Bill Fishman summarised it:

> *from out of the narrow courts, alleyways and main thoroughfares came this steady tramp of marching feet, growing in intensity as the columns swelled through reinforcements. A forest of banners arose, borne aloft, with the watchwords THEY SHALL NOT PASS emblazoned in a multi-variety of colours, with red predominating.*[605]

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605. Fishman, "People's Journée," 388.

The inclusion of the 'Mosley Shall Not Pass' slogan within the mural, therefore, seems a crucial, and well-chosen addition, offering a centrality to the phrase in the day's events which is borne out by multiple accounts.[606] As Joe Jacobs recalled, the slogan, which derived from, and marked solidarity with the anti-fascist struggle in Spain was 'on everyone's lips and being whitewashed on walls and pavements'.[607] Photographs of the day show the phrase upon the barricades and walls of Cable Street, and multiple accounts refer to its spread across the walls of East London [see figure 241]. Yet, the prominence of banners is much less pronounced in photographs of the day's action. Indeed, newspaper reports of the court proceedings in the days following the event confirm that an active effort and number of arrests were made in order to clear flags from the hands of protestors.[608] As such, whilst the representation of the BUF with flags in the right hand passage, is borne out by photographs of the beginning of the day's action, by the time the action had reached Cable Street, with police raids in full force and all manner of projectiles being launched, it seems unlikely that many banners would have remained in hand or on display.

This, of course, does not preclude the banners' presence as symbols, in was what always intended as a distillation of the actions and events, rather than a documentary or naturalist mirror. But the symbolic prominence of Independent Labour Party and Communist Party flags within the mural, has itself been questioned by David Binnington, who recalls the additions as antithetical to his own researches. As Binnington has recalled it:

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606. The phrase derived from the close of Dolores Ibarruri's radio broadcast at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in July 1936—'It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees! No Pasaran!'—and had become a slogan of the anti-fascist struggle in Spain, and across Europe. With heavy local detachments to the International Brigades, and the high profile of events in Spain in Britain at the period, the phrase quickly found a resonance in the weeks building up to the confrontations of October 4th.
607. Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto: My Youth in the East End: Communism and Fascism, 1913-1939,* (London: Janet Simon, 1978).
608. See "100 in Court After Banned London March*,*" *Daily Mail*, October 6, 1936, 7.

I was very aware from my research that no party could claim [the day]. They wanted to historically… the Communist Party wanted to, and the Labour Party wanted to… But historically neither Party could…Neither of them. You read the accounts at the time, you go into the detail, and this was a genuinely local response to an affront to the East End. This was "No Passaran!, you're not coming through here and bugger off". That was something that was not organised by anybody, it was something that welled out of the awkwardness, and gut and determination of the east end people.[609]

This understanding, as Binnington recalls, drew heavily upon first-hand accounts, and was in particular influenced by Joe Jacobs' auto-biography 'Out of the Ghetto'.[610] Jacobs was the Secretary of the Stepney Branch of the Communist Party across the 1930s, (until his expulsion from the Party in 1937). His book was released in 1977, and formed the first major riposte to what had until then been the dominant (and somewhat triumphalist) Leftist account of Cable Street provided by the memoirs of the Stepney Communist Party's Chairman (and later MP) Phil Piratin.[611] Documenting his frequent divergences with Piratin, and the Party bureaucracy's pronounced and prolonged hostility to his demands to confront fascism in the street, Jacobs' account notes the prolonged opposition of the Party to the concept of a counter-demonstration to halt Mosley.[612] As Jacobs recalls it, as locals prepared to resist, 'we in the CP were supposed to tell people to go to Trafalgar square and come back in the evening to protest after Mosley had marched… How could they be so blind to what was happening…?'. Indeed, as late as the Wednesday before the march the Communist Party's paper, the *Daily Worker* was advising people to stay away from direct confrontations with Mosley, and instead calling readers to attend the pre-organised Young Communist League's

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609. Binnington, interview with the Author, August 2015.
610. Binnington.
611. Having joined the Communist Party in the wake of the violent confrontations between Mosley's BUF and anti-fascists at Olympia in 1934, Piratin was elected a local councillor in 1937, and eventually became one of the last two Communist Party MPs (for Mile End), during the 1945-'50 Attlee administration.
612. Jacobs' opposition to the party leadership was long-running and led to his expulsion from the party, as Fishman recalled, 'Joe Jacobs had led a dissident group, which responded by direct action, that is, constant physical attack, wherever and whenever Mosley appeared on the streets. This was resisted by Party leadership, who argued that instead of immediate confrontation it could be more fruitful in the long term to engage in the tactics of circuitous entryism into the Trade Unions and reformist parties… By this time, the long term would be too late... It helped solve the dilemma in favour of the dissidents, but led, ultimately, to Jacobs' expulsion from the CP for his "lack of party discipline".' Fishman, "People's Journée," 385.

rally at Trafalgar Square, to express solidarity with Spain.[613] On Wednesday 30th September,

consistent pressure from the Stepney Branch, had succeeded in calling a meeting with

representatives of the CP District Party Committee for London, where, as Jacobs recalls:

> *We were treated to a long talk on the world situation in which it was stated that the demonstration in support of Spanish democracy was more important than Mosley's march in East London. Our leaders always talked about the world situation in a particular jargon which often impressed the rank and file… We argued that the best way to help the Spanish people was to stop Mosley marching through East London. It was, in fact, the same fight. If we said the Fascists should not pass, it was what the Spanish people were trying to ensure and giving their lives in the process. A victory for Mosley would be a victory for Franco. In any case the people of East London had their own ideas about all this and would oppose Mosley with their bodies, no matter what the CP said.[614]*

The ILP had adopted a similarly equivocal position, attempting, with Labour Party MPs, The

Jewish Board of Deputies, and others to force Parliament to ban the march, but refusing to

lend any support to the idea of a counter demonstration.[615] As late as the Friday before the

march, the ILP were urging their supporters to avoid confrontation (a position maintained on

the day of the march by 'leading voices' of the Jewish Community).[616]

For Binnington—following Jacobs— such prevarication, made the day not so much the

triumph of CP or ILP organisation, but instead the expression of a spontaneous grassroots

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613. "Ex-Soldiers Asked to Give Way to Mosley," *Daily Worker*, September 30, 1936, cited in Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto,* 237.

614. The Party's position on this issue was, as Eaden and Renton's history of the Party makes clear, fairly typical of the Popular Front period, where electoral ambitions and links with Union officials were placed above grassroots concerns and organisation. Such policy is in part traceable to 1935, where 'Georgi Dimitrov had warned the CP not to devote too much energy to the small fry of Mosley's BUF, 'at the present stage, fighting the fascist danger in Britain means primarily fighting the National Government and its reactionary measures'.' Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 55. The position's origin could be extended further to the gradual adoption of the doctrine of Socialism in One Country, by which as Eric Hobsbawm described, 'the state interests of the Soviet Union prevailed over the world revolutionary interests of the Communist International'. Hobsbawm, cited in Eaden and Renton, x.

615. A petition gathered 200,000 signatures in under a week and was delivered to parliament in support of a ban.

616. Charlie Goodman recalled the struggle: 'One of the hardest jobs was to try and get the Jewish establishment to try and understand what was going on. Jewish Chronicle the previous Saturday [had said on its] central page… 'Don't go, shut your doors, Don't be involved'.' It was a position they stuck to. Charlie Goodman, quoted in Cable Street Group "Chapter 6.", *Cable Street.*

uprising of the local population, pitched in direct *opposition* to the Party bureaucracies. It is notable that even the *Daily Worker* credited the organic unification of the local population, for the day's success. As they put it on October 5th, '[t]he rout of Mosley's gang is due entirely to the way in which the whole of East London's working class rallied as one man (and as one woman) to bar the way to the Blackshirts. Jew and Gentile, docker and garment worker, railwayman and cabinet maker, turned out in their thousands to show that they have no use for Fascism'.[617] This sense of an organic groundswell comes across in many of the accounts gathered by the Cable Street Group, and is undoubtedly central to the day's importance. As Piratin, in fact recalled it, '[t]he people of Stepney learnt that if "law and order" were to be maintained they would have to do it themselves. For the police were acting as their enemies'.

For all the truth in the reading of the day as an expression of the local population, and the importance of Jacobs' account as a corrective to the more triumphalist accounts of CP involvement that had preceded it, the Communist Party, as indeed the ILP, cannot be seen as monolithic entities.[618] As such, the initial hostilities of their bureaucracies to any idea of a counter demonstration or confrontation cannot be taken as wholly representative. Indeed, the very fact that (until his expulsion, in 1937) Jacobs remained a vocal and active member of the CP, testifies to the divergences of opinion within the Party ranks. These conflicts were particularly pronounced in Stepney across 1936 and beyond, where local Party activists had been at the forefront of the fight against the rise of the BUF.[619] Moreover, in the days before the march, the pressure from the Stepney grassroots had forced the CP bureaucracy to change

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617. They did, unsurprisingly, accord some credit for this action to the Communist Party: pointing out that 'the Fascists were due to assemble at Royal Street at 2:30, while the Communist Party had appealed to the workers to throng Aldgate and Cable Street at 2pm'. *Daily Worker*, October 5, 1936, 1.
618. In this sense Eaden and Renton's observation that, 'the [Communist] party remained a workers' party if of a deformed sort', is of some note. Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 58.
619. See Eaden and Renton, 58; Piratin *Our Flag*; and Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*.

their position, cancelling the Trafalgar Square rally, and calling instead, from Thursday 1st

October forwards, for people to gather at Aldgate at 2pm, adopting the theme of '*No*

Passaran!'. The ILP had followed suit the next day, with an announcement printed in

Friday's newspapers, backed up by a rally speech by Fenner Brockway on Saturday 3rd

calling for a massive counter demonstration to halt the fascists in their tracks.[620]

Notwithstanding their extended prevarication, once the decision had been taken, the CP

moved remarkably swiftly, mounting what Bill Fishman thought Phil Piratin was justified in

calling 'the most powerful campaign of propaganda and preparation…unequalled in any

other action of working class history with the exception of the General Strike'.[621] Without

time to print new flyers for the march the CP organised for all the Trafalgar Square flyers to

be painted over, redirecting crowds to Aldgate. They commandeered a series of vehicles to

patrol the streets with loudspeakers on the day and in the build-up, set up a headquarters at

Manningtree street, some 60 yards from Gardiner's corner, dispatched runners to convey

communications, and distribute posters and banners, and set up first aid and command posts

at Whitechapel Library, Toynbee Hall and Cable Street.[622]

All this underlines the observation that 'at the heart of Cable Street was a layer of East End

Jews who aligned themselves with the Party. Some members of the CP, others anarchists or

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620. See Fishman, "People's Journée," 387-388.
621. Piratin, *Our Flag*, 19 and Fishman, "People's Journée," 387.
622. As Piratin remembers it, '[t]housands of posters, hundreds of thousands of leaflets, and hundreds of gallons of whitewash were employed in advertising the counter-demonstration. Approaches were made to trades councils, trade unions, and Labour Parties to participate. Many did, in spite of the counter-propaganda put over by almost every other section of the movement. The Labour Party, The Daily Herald, The News Chronicle, the Jewish Board of Deputies, all appealed to the people to stay away. Everything was done to damp down the working-class anger. Communists were condemned as "trouble-makers", but in spite of all this slanderous misrepresentation the appeal of the Communist Party was responded to by thousands of Labour Party members and supporters. On that occasion the leadership of the Communist Party was undisputed'. Piratin, *Our Flag,* 20. See also Fishman, "People's Journée," 387.

Zionists who accepted the leadership of the party in the fight against fascism'.[623] In this light, the inclusion of the flags feels less problematic, for whilst both the CP and the ILP undoubtedly prevaricated over the day's actions—in many senses only acceding to upwards pressure at the ultimate hour—their eventual mobilisation formed a vital aspect in the effectiveness of the day. In this sense, Sam Berkowicz's memories can be set as something of a counterweight against Jacobs'. For Berkowicz:

> *By and large it was the Communist Party. I won't say the dockers wouldn't have had a go on their own, but when they brought the whole of the London Communist Party with groups of Jewish ex-servicemen coming from Manchester, from Leeds - they came by train especially – you had the hard core of experienced people – veterans. Without the Communist Party there might have been a melee and a riot but it wouldn't have been a disciplined riot which is the difference between a riot and an achievement. If there was a weakness anywhere they could whistle up twenty of the heavy mob. Remember the streets were very narrow. There was a hard core of toughs who came out of the billiard halls. They were not particularly socially conscious but they knew what fascism meant. They came out with their cues, you know?*[624]

Collective Truth or Necessary Myth?: The Continuity of History

Intertwined with, but pointing beyond, questions of the parties' roles in the day's events, the question of the banners' symbolism points to a more fundamental aspect of the pitch of the completed mural. It is one perhaps best approached through Harold Rosen's 1995 mediations on role of myth and collective memory in reworking his own recollections as a participant in the day's events. In the below passage he recalls the moment in which he found his teenage self moving from Gardiner's corner:

> *Somehow the word got round, 'All to Cable Street'. For those interested in the texture of everyday political action or, as I am sure some would put it, 'mob behaviour', how does that happen? Who breathed it into our ears and how did they know? I have no visual or auditory memory of getting the message, but I know that I did because of what followed. When I tried to answer those questions, looking back over so many years, I have to answer that it was not as I thought some radical magic at work*

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623. Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 59.
624. Berkowicz, quoted in, Cable Street Group "Chapter 6,", *Cable Street*; and Mills, *Cable Street,* 38-40. Intriguingly, Mills notes that this interview was conducted with Denise Jones and David Binnington (though Binnington's retrospective opinion at least would seem to differ substantially).

> *conjuring up a brilliant inexplicable communication system (spontaneity again) but that the Communist Party had mounted a flexible military operation, a predetermined strategy. What mattered to us then was that we knew if we wanted to be where the action was we had to get to Cable Street..*[625]

At one level Rosen's meditation on the role and readjustments of memory in the day's events offers a particular insight into the divergent narrative and historical weights of the two designs. It seems notable that Binnington's design was, in most ways, more likely to approximate the subjective and immersive pitch of Rosen's (and others') more 'direct' memories: the furore of the streets and the sense of liminal and even ecstatic becoming in the adrenaline of the day.[626] Yet the mural's final form, rather than constituting a perversion of such memories, highlights a divergent aspect, perhaps closer to the event's subsequent reworking in relation to *collective* memory: filling in the roles of the political parties, based upon subsequent retellings, but also, *crucially*, highlighting the centrality and prominence of the barricade. As Rosen continued:

> *…and then the word had it that in Cable Street there was a barricade, the barricade that later became famous. If that can still intoxicate the left today, imagine how it drove us on with wild imaginings. There might even be someone with a red flag and a blood-stained bandage round his forehead. If this wasn't The Revolution, it was the next best thing. A rare glorious victory was unfolding. So we were off.*[627]

Elsewhere in the same text Rosen recalled noting for the first time at the 60th anniversary celebrations of the event, that even the name by which the event is remembered remains a testament to the mythic hold of the barricade:

> *Why do we call it Cable Street? After all, the decisive happening was the gathering of a vast crowd at Gardiners Corner… The answer seemed obvious to me once I had asked the question. It was in Cable Street that a barricade was constructed. A barricade! That potent icon of urban revolution: 1848 across Europe, the Parisian Communards in 1871, the Russian Revolution. So then, the very choice of name was a*

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625. Rosen, "Necessary Myth," 30. For an account of the Communist Party's role in coordinating this movement see Piratin, *Our Flag*, 23.

626. In so doing, it seems likely that it would have produced a remarkable testament to the memories of the day's survivors, to which purpose it was very consciously designed and reworked.

627. Rosen, "Necessary Myth," 23.

> *crucial part of the creation of a myth in the particular sense that I am giving to that word.*[628]

What Rosen's text, and the final state of the mural, bring to light is the extent to which the events of Cable Street remain loaded in a mythic importance, drawing on, and in the process adding to an iconography of Leftist history. And whilst both Binnington and the final artists' versions were rooted in a similar Benjaminian concept of recalling history at 'a moment of danger', it is, I would suggest, the final version of the mural which makes its claims to this register much more directly: utilising the barricades and the banners as a condensation and memorial to the heroism of the Left against the spectre of fascism. From Delacroix's 1830 barricade—whose iconic pyramidal structures it in part recalls (though here reverses to a monument of resistance rather than overcoming)—through to the more tragic depictions of the barricades of 1848 or the Paris Commune, therefore, the mural's final form offers a clear reference to a wider history of pitched urban contestation within an ongoing tradition of Leftist struggle. Crucially, as Rosen's text reveals, these mythic and iconographic dimensions were intimately bound up with *both* the events of the day, and their constant renegotiations in collective memory.

These mythic dimensions would seem to have hung over the mural's reception and are central to an understanding of its function and historic pitch. Firstly, it seems worth recalling the extent to which the mural's articulation of a historical parallel—between the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s, and their contemporary successors of the late 1970s and early '80s— played into the contemporary field of Leftist politics. And it is here, perhaps that the relevance of Piratin and Jacobs' alternative views of the conflict becomes more apparent, for the late 1970s witnessed a particularly sharp divide between divergent groups over the legacy

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628. Rosen, 28.

of Cable Street. On the one hand, sections of the Socialist Workers Party, and their front organisations the ANL and RAR, drew heavily on Jacobs' revisionist accounts to emphasise the mythic proportions of the event as a death knell for fascism, and highlight the importance of their own strategies of direct confrontation with fascist groups on the streets.[629] For them Cable Street had defeated British Fascism.[630] On the other hand, the CPGB took a notably divergent line, arguing that: 'To equate the SWP's tactics in Lewisham with what happened at Cable Street… is dangerous nonsense. Mosley was stopped by the mobilisation of a quarter of a million Londoners brought into action as a result of a tremendous, sustained campaign by their mass organisations. A few militants didn't suddenly make fiery speeches and, overnight, mass unity sprang into action'.[631]

Moving beyond the acrimony of Left groups and more immediate strategic questions, these contestations of Cable Street's legacy, highlight an important aspect of the mural's historical positioning. On the one hand, along with the writings of Gilroy, Hall and others, they might be used to question the very basis of the historical parallels which the mural, and many anti-fascists of the period set out to assert. For, as Hall pointed out, the 'familiar ghosts and spectres' of fascism, *could* serve as a distraction from the important methodological task of differentiating between the two epochs, and identifying the difference between 'organic' and 'conjunctural' forces of the contemporary period.[632] On the other hand, such debates could

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629. As Evan Smith has pointed out, '[f]or the SWP in the 1970s, when in their own words, they were "waging a continuous battle against the fascists" of the NF, the "Battle of Cable Street" was seen as the "decisive battle to smash the fascists"…which has rightly passed into history as a crucial victory for the British working class'. Evan Smith, "Battle of Cable Street". Smith's citations are taken from Tim Potter, "Lessons of Lewisham," *International Socialism*, 1/101, (September 1977): 19; and Chanie Rosenburg, "The Labour Party and the Fight Against Fascism," *International Socialism*, 2/39, (Summer 1988): 62-63
630. Smith, "Battle of Cable Street".
631. Dave Cook, *Morning Star*, August 26, 1977, cited in Smith, "Battle of Cable Street".
632. 'Finally, there is "fascism". There is a sense in which the appearance of organised Fascism on the political stage seems to solve everything for the Left. It confirms our best-worst suspicions, awakening familiar ghosts and spectres. Fascism and economic recession together seem to render transparent those connections which most of the time are opaque, hidden and displaced. Away with all those time-wasting theoretical speculations! The Marxist guarantees are all in place after all, standing to attention. Let us take to the streets'. Though Hall insisted that this was not an argument against taking to the streets, he insisted that 'it *is* an argument against the

themselves be re-extended to a question of the historical event itself. Indeed, the very nature of Cable Street's historic significance, and the limitations of strategies Joe Jacobs described as 'street work', have themselves been questioned by some, who raise the objection that in fact, in the months after the 'Battle' the BUF witnessed a surge in membership, reaching an electoral highpoint in the East End during 1937 elections.[633]

But to view the mural, the mythic hold of Cable Street's legacy, and indeed the anti-fascist mobilisations of the 1970s and '80s, in such isolated and binary terms, would, I think, be to fundamentally misread their significance. For, far from constituting isolated events, they formed part of broader moments of contestation, whose manifestations spanned the divergent tactics, of 'street' and 'community' work; defensive and productive struggles. In this sense, Phil Piratin's accounts of how, in the years following Cable Street, the Stepney Communist Party worked to eradicate the BUF's presence, by building a strong cultural presence in the area and a strong tenants movement, resisting evictions and campaigning for better housing conditions, cannot, I would suggest be so easily separated from a consideration of the direct actions 4th October.[634] Similarly, Leech, Widgery and others' accounts of the multiple interfaces between the organised Left, the Black Power Movement and the emerging Bengali community groups in struggles for housing, self-defence, and political representation, cannot be so neatly separated from the direct street presence of the ANL and Bengali self-defence groups. Rather, taken as a whole, these diverse initiatives constituted a moment of coordinated and mutually reinforcing responses to the conjunctural forces of their respective

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satisfactions which sometimes flow from applying simplifying analytic schemes to complex events'. Hall, "Great Moving Right Show," 15.

633. See, for example, Daniel Tilles, "The Myth of Cable Street," *History Today* Volume 61, Issue 10, (October, 2011). Whilst, some aspect of Tilles' claims are borne out by election figures in 1937 and confirmed by—amongst others—Piratin (*Our Flag*) and Fishman ("People's Journée"), his analysis seems to seriously misplace the agency and blame and underestimate the extent to which the confrontations at Cable Street were a vitally necessary communal stand against the spectre of localised antisemitism.

634. See Piratin *Our Flag*; and Glyn "Battle for Housing".

moments. As Gilroy, Thompson, Marx and others remind us, it is precisely such struggles which constitute and define class relations.

As such, Phil Piratin's contention that '[t]he main aim for the anti-fascist movement must be to rally masses of people for a struggle which will eliminate the festering social and economic conditions in which fascism can thrive', does not, as it is sometimes taken to, preclude the necessity and importance of moments of direct confrontation and anti-racist or anti-fascist mobilisation.[635] Rather, such moments can, by Piratin's own accounts of the 1930s, provide vital moments in the broader struggles. As Piratin recalled:

> *Cable Street was a great scene… Never was there such unity of all sections of the working class as was seen on the barricades at Cable Street. People whose lives were poles apart, though living within a few hundred yards of each other; bearded Orthodox Jews and rough-and-ready Irish Catholic dockers were the workers that the fascists were trying to stir up against each other. The struggle, led by the Communist Party, against the fascists had brought them together against their common enemies, and their lackeys….*
> *I find it impossible to describe the reactions of the Stepney people. In Stepney nothing had changed physically. The poor houses, the mean streets, the ill-conditioned workshops were the same, but the people were changed. Their heads seemed to be held higher, and their shoulders were squarer-and the stories they told! Each one was a "hero"- many of them were.[636]*

It is, I would argue, in capturing this sense of a monumental moment of becoming, rather than a staid historical recollection of a by-gone and glorious past, that the *Cable Street Mural* attains its full resonance. For against a wider climate in which the death of the monument, the death of history painting, the death of history, the death of class, and the death of the Left, have all been broadly declared, the *Cable Street Mural* provides a monument: a history painting, which proclaims and recalls the self-realisation of a constantly reconstituting class through the process of common struggle.[637] Whilst some have seen the more mythic and

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635. Piratin, "Foreword to the 1978 edition", *Our Flag,* xi.
636. Piratin, 23-24.
637. On the death of History painting, see David Green and Peter Seddon, for whom the genre's long decline across the 19th and 20th centuries reaches a near terminal state in the crisis of narrativity and the 'end of

celebratory register of the mural as a mark of 'romanticised' mythology, or *retardaire* and fixed notions of historical relations or class analysis, I would argue that instead they underpin the mural's contribution and historical insight.[638] Here is a monument and testament to the continuity and importance of a dynamic historical becoming. Against the 'pessimism of the intellect', so prevalent in the work of many contemporary critics of the Left, these moments of 'optimism of the will' seem well worth recovering in our accounts of the period.[639]

As Harold Rosen, said of the events of 4th October, 1936:

> *If you are lucky, there are moments in your life which are especially and uniquely illuminated. They stand out from the rest of your life as bright icons, huge representative symbols, which give meaning to how you have lived. This is why we purify such moments, polish them and, in our heads, play them over again and again. Cable Street was one of those moments for the left in the 1930s. We gave it a mythological and heroic dimension. Because we are short of such out and out victories, we badly needed those dynamic images.*[640]

The *Cable Street Mural* continues to offer just such an image.

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history', in the post-modern era. David Green and Peter Seddon, eds., (2000)*, History Painting Reassessed. The Representation of History in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2000), 1-14. On monuments meanwhile, Lewis Mumford declared as early as the 1930s, that '[t]he very notion of a modern monument is a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument'. Lewis Mumford, "The Death of the Monument", in *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 263-270. Malcolm Miles and others have since pointed out that monuments have persisted in other forms. For Miles, '[a]s a general category of cultural objects, however, monuments are familiar in the spaces of most cities standing for a stability which conceals the internal contradictions of society and survives the day-to-day fluctuations of history. The majority in society is persuaded, by monuments amongst other civil institutions, to accept these contradictions, the monument becoming a device of social control less brutish and costly than armed force'. Malcolm Miles, "Chapter 3," in *Art Space and the City*, *Public Art and Urban Futures* (London: Routledge, 1997), 58.The Cable Street mural's confident and eloquent excavation of a vital, living, popular and counter-hegemonic history, alive to a multiplicity of narratives and historiographical nuances, and its forging of them into a monument which–rather than masking contradictions–displays them for new publics, is all the more exceptional against this broader context.
638. Wetherell, has claimed it as, 'an attempt at community-making through an appeal to a romanticized local history'. Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis," 245. Miles, meanwhile claims that it, 'establishes its cast as heroes and villains, as crudely as a spaghetti western but using pictorial devices from art history'. Miles, *Public Art*, 71.
639. See chap. 2, n. 492. Beyond the fact that Gramsci was writing from a prison cell, Hall and Gilroy's channelling of one half of the dictum, alongside their tendency towards theoretical, above empirical understanding of the working class movement, has often resulted in a flattening out of the more positive dimensions of the period.
640. Rosen, "Necessary Myth," 29.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3: Resisting Apocalypse
London's anti-nuclear murals, 1980-85

Where Britain in the mid-to-late 1970s could be characterized as a country in the midst of a severe economic crisis and apparent political paralysis, then the early 1980s were defined by the socioeconomic convulsions that accompanied Margaret Thatcher's monetarist shock therapy and the resurgent tensions of the Cold War. The immediate future, as presented in Derek Jarman's film Jubilee (1978), was portrayed as one in which Britain's stagnant economy and decaying city landscapes had produced an inversion of the nation's ideal, replete with omnipotent media monopolies and encroaching police state. Come the early 1980s, and the devastating unemployment and riot-strewn streets that provided the backdrop to punk's second wave were further cast in the shadow of a revived global arms race. The postindustrial signifiers of the 1970s were thus transformed into the postapocalyptic.[641]

Matthew Worley, *One Nation Under the Bomb,* 2011

By the mid-1980s Powell's war had become Thatcher's: his oppressed majority were preyed upon by the ever-enlarging ranks of the enemy within, and her press gendarmes had taken the offensive. On the other side were all the forces which weakened the body politic, and had to be contained by the law and order state – the criminals and hooligans, the scroungers and feckless unemployed, trade unionists and Labour Party activists, striking miners and peace campaigners, Greenham women and women wanting abortions, permissive parents and subversive teachers, anti-racists and urban rioters, left-wing extremists and professional agitators.[642]

Nancy Murray,
Anti-racists and other demons: the press and ideology in Thatcher's Britain,
1986

The murals of the last chapter were examined as responses to 'the long durée of the right's ascent'. Specifically, they were read as sites of contestation with, and resistance to, the 'new racism' that emerged with particular force in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets from the late 1960s forwards. They were, as such, placed in relation to social forces which were at

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641. Matthew Worley, "One Nation Under the Bomb: The Cold War and British Punk to 1984," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 2011): 70.
642. Nancy Murray, "Anti-racists and other demons: the press and ideology in Thatcher's Britain," *Race and Class*, Vol. 27, Issue 3 (January 1986): 3

once locally specific *and* exemplary of a broader tide of ethno-nationalism that Margaret Thatcher's authoritarian populist project drew upon and reconfigured in the construction of its social base across the late 1970s.[643] Whilst touching briefly upon the transformations of the state across Thatcher's first administration (1979-1983), therefore, the last chapter primarily stressed the murals as localised interventions in a fight for working class identity across the period of Thatcher's ascent. In this regard they were emphasised as sites in a historical moment which, as Paul Gilroy observed, was 'overdetermined by Britain's painful loss of empire and… the profound cultural and psychological consequences of decline'.[644]

 The current chapter takes as its case studies two 'anti-nuclear' murals, made at sites across inner London, between 1980 and 1985.[645] If there is some chronological overlap with the preceding chapter, therefore, the analysis which follows moves from the dynamics attending Thatcher's 'authoritarian populist' ascendency, to those which accompanied its consolidation of power. As will be seen, these were years of deep recession, urban crises and industrial conflict, in which the coercive power of the state was routinely and brutally deployed against those who would not succumb to the political, ideological and economic logic of the newly forming 'consensus'. From the Brixton uprisings of April 1981 (which raged past the earliest mural of this chapter just months after its opening), through the re-election of Thatcher's Conservative administration in June 1983, that administration's decisive stand-off with organised labour in the 1984-85 miners' strike, and September and October 1985's urban unrest across London (in Brixton, Tottenham and Peckham), and beyond (most notably in

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643. The term 'authoritarian populism' is, as explained above (see chap. 2, n. 380), derived from Stuart Hall's analysis of Thatcherism, and was first employed by Hall in the 1979 essay, "The Great Moving Right Show". For a defence and historical explanation of the evolution of the term see Hall, "Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop et al.," New Left Review 147, (May-June 1985): 115-124.
644. Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, xviii.
645. Made at the peak of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's activities in the 1980s, both murals address the 'anti-nuclear' theme. They will also, however, be read as expressions of the 'peace movement'. Though strategical differences do apply (and will be highlighted) between the two terms, the strong interplay, interrelation and strategic alliance will mean that they are often used near interchangeably in what follows.

Toxteth), this was period in which— far from dissipating—the pronounced social conflicts and divisions of the preceding years came to a head time and time again. As will be seen, such conflicts were, in some senses, particularly acute in London, where a broad socio-demographic mix, swift industrial decline, soaring unemployment and the rise of Labour Left administrations in local government, sat cheek by jowl with the rumbling emergence of a new era of high finance, ensuring high-profile and bitter confrontations: between the police and the urban population, capital and labour, the centralised state and local authorities, and the forces of coercion and resistance.[646]

The murals will be seen to offer particular insights into these social and political conflicts. Such insights, however, will be filtered through the murals' unified thematic focus on, and testament to, the contemporary anti-nuclear and peace movements, which burgeoned in reaction to the deteriorating international tensions of the period often known as the 'Second Cold War'.[647] Whilst attentive to the murals' interaction with the reorientations of British state and society under Thatcher, therefore, the chapter will also offer consideration the murals' positioning within longer-running history of *British Art in the Nuclear Age*. As Catherine Jolivette observed in the introduction to a 2014 volume of that title, 'surprisingly little critical art historical attention has been paid to the responses of [British] painters,

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646. As Jerry White framed the divisions of London: '[o]f all the decades of London's twentieth century, the 1980s proved the most socially unsettled, dangerous and paradoxical. In the 1980s London seemed to be moving fast in two opposing directions: into terminal decline, its traditional industrial base deconstructing, its public realm shabby and withering, large numbers of people pauperized without work or hope; but at the same time there was a booming London, the City prosperous as never before, a new office explosion colonizing unexpected parts of the East End, conspicuous consumption symbolized by the 'yuppie' in his or her porsche.' White, *London*, 75.

647. As Fred Halliday explains the term: 'the conflict between east and west, i.e. communism and capitalism, has been a feature of world politics since 1917 and has been globalised, i.e. geographically and politically dominant, since 1945; but it has also known periods of greater or lesser intensity… those who argue [that Cold War has been] continuous…[are] right in arguing that social conflict has been continuous but they tend to understate the degree of *fluctuation* involved in this process. Hence they undervalue the specific nature of the more intense conflicts experienced in the late 1940s and early 1980s'. Fred Halliday, *The Second Cold War*, (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983), 9-10. Whilst the term has fallen somewhat out of contemporary usage therefore, it will be employed here, along the lines Halliday describes, in light of its descriptive value.

sculptors and other fine artists… regarding nuclear threat'.[648] If Jolivette's volume went some way towards addressing this historiographical absence in the years 1945-1963, this chapter seeks, in part, to respond to her call for 'other historians to further explore the intersection of British art with the nuclear subject through the 1970s, 1980s and beyond'.[649] As two of the most technically advanced and politically forceful works of this wider study and what would seem to be the largest scale, and most enduringly public facing, artworks to address the 'anti-nuclear' theme in Britain, (and perhaps anywhere in the world), it will be argued that the murals offer a considerable contribution to this wider field, both drawing upon and reconfiguring the iconographic and thematic concerns of earlier periods.

Continuities notwithstanding, the murals also register the extent to which the Second Cold War, as Fred Halliday has observed, was in important ways 'incomparable' with earlier periods of the stand-off.[650] Most centrally, the fact that '[a] full exchange of weaponry in Cold War II could destroy humanity as we know it' had profound consequences.[651] If in earlier periods of the Cold War a nuclear exchange 'would have caused enormous damage to both Russia and the rest of Europe', by the Second Cold War, 'enough nuclear weapons [were] accumulated to destroy life on the planet twenty times over'.[652] As will be seen, this technological reality, lent much 'graver' and less ambivalent air to the cultural production of the period which engaged with the nuclear theme. In the period covered by Jolivette's volume, British artists' responses to the nuclear threat are often viewed through the filters of 'covert resistance', 'duality' and 'ambivalence', or through the tension between abstraction

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648. Catherine Jolivette "Introduction," in *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, Jolivette, ed. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 4.
649. Jolivette, "Introduction," 2.
650. Halliday, *Second Cold War*, 22.
651. Halliday, 22-23.
652. Halliday, 23.

and figuration typified by the work of an artist like Henry Moore.[653] During the Second Cold War, by contrast, the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic dimensions of nuclear exchange came to occupy a remarkable prominence. From Peter Kennard's widely reproduced photomontages, through illustrations in proliferating editions of *Peace News*, CND Newsletters and broader publications of the peace and anti-nuclear movements, television dramas like *Threads*, illustrated novels like Raymond Briggs' *When the Wind Blows*, to the imagery and lyrics of Punk's second-wave, a sense of unabridged horror, and apocalyptic (or post-apocalyptic) foreboding was widely shared.[654] Though radically divergent, and in some senses antithetical, in their relation to such horror, the murals examined below contain a thematic force, which is underpinned by the urgency and pressing sense of existential threat, that characterised the contemporary moment.

The growing sense of artistic partisanship, and an urgent and frequently apocalyptic sense of foreboding was further underscored by the broader social and political conflicts of the period. As Halliday observed, 'the Second Cold War was linked to a wide-ranging conservative roll back in most spheres of social policy…in both internal and international issues, the

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653. For Simon Martin, 'Moore's work encapsulated the tension between abstract and figurative responses to the Bomb, and the ambivalence of artists and the wider public', Simon Martin, "Painting the End: British Artists and the Nuclear Apocalypse, 1945-1970*,*" in *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, Jolivette, ed. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 229. These broader cited terms run through the essays collected in Jolivette's volume, see for example, Robert Burstow, "Geometries of Hope and Fear: The Iconography of Atomic Science and Nuclear Anxiety in the Modern Sculpture of World War and Cold War Britain," 51-79; or Catherine Spencer, "Covert Resistance: Prunella Clough's Cold War 'Urbscapes'," 171-194.

654. Peter Kennard (born 1949) is a British artist who begun making politically themed photomontage work during the late 1960s. By the early 1980s he was one of the most prominent visual artists making work in the service of CND and the broader peace movement. His images appeared in magazines, books, banners and billboards. Though he made a large number of anti-nuclear images across the period, a good selection can be found in: Peter Kennard, text by Ric Sissons, *No Nuclear Weapons: The Case for Nuclear Disarmament / Photomontage by Peter Kennard* (London: Pluto / Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1981). Editions of Peace News and local branch CND Newsletters can be found at the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Archives at the London School of Economics. The 1983 television drama *Threads* was screened by the BBC. Set in the aftermath of a nuclear explosion over Sheffield it is widely regarded as one of the more shocking moments of television. Raymond Briggs' 1982, illustrated novel *When the Wind Blows*, took as its narrative departure point the Government's 1980 *Protect and Survive* leaflet, gently satirising the staid tones by which it described the destruction of civilian life. Raymond Briggs, *When the Wind Blows*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982). Matthew Worley, has detailed the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic imagination in Second Wave punk. Worley, "Under the Bomb".

postulation of an external threat was combined with alarm about the erosion of pre-existing values to foster mobilisation for a new Cold War'.[655] In the British context, Thatcher's increasingly bellicose foreign policy, across a moment of economic recession and pronounced class conflict, was paralleled by the ever increasing prominence of a narrative of an 'enemy within'.[656] As Nancy Murray emphasised at the time, the 'enemy within' was, in part, an adaption of Powell's oppressed minority, and in part an invention of 'New Right' politicians and journalists.[657] It offered motive and ideological cover for the unfolding of Thatcherite policy: justifying the dramatic expansion and deployment of the state's coercive apparatus, the centralisation of power, and an unprecedented assault on civil society, organised labour, welfare provision and local government.[658] By 1985-6, these attacks, had left deep scars on the social and political movements, communities, and funding structures which lie at the centre of this wider study. Bridging the gaps between internal and external threats, between the local and the global, and between civil society and the state, the murals of this chapter offer a particularly rich insight into these dynamics, and the extent to which the Cold War climate was intertwined with a broader social contestation. They shine light on the wide-scale determination, hope, solidarity and resistance by which Thatcher's radical reformist agenda was, for a time, met: on the extent to which the New Right's spectral phantom of the 'Enemy Within', did in fact, to some extent, begin to materialise in opposition to the direction of travel.

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655. Halliday, *Cold War*, 16. The combination of internal and external threats, of course, had significant precedent in the United States across the late 1940s and early '50s. In the UK, however, the necessities of post-war construction and the unfolding of the post-war state, produced a quite divergent situation.

656. For an analysis of the term in reference to Thatcher's famed stand off with the miners see: Seamus Milne, *The Enemy Within*, *The Secret War Against the Miners*, Fourth Edition (Verso, London, 2014).

657. As Murray explained it, 'The government is relying on the media to 'market' not only specific policies, but the Thatcherite world view, with its dichotomies of good and evil, productive and non-productive, law-abiding and criminal'. Murray, "Anti-racists," 2.

658. See Hall, "A Reply to Jessop et al.".

Visualising the Second Cold War

The Second Cold War is commonly traced between 1979 and 1985.[659] In October 1979 Leonid Brezhnev, had tried to pre-empt a forthcoming announcement of a NATO deployment of missiles across Western Europe, by declaring a 'limited and unilateral local withdrawal of his forces from East Germany'.[660] This was, in E.P. Thompson's estimations 'like a nuclear 'red alert' to the propaganda organs of NATO and the British state, whose operators—television 'experts', defence correspondents, editorialists—were 'scrambled' and instantly sent aloft upon their long-prepared offensive against the public mind'.[661] Following a November announcement, NATO's deployment of close to six hundred nuclear tipped Cruise and Pershing-2 missiles at sites across Western Europe was ratified in Brussels on December 12th, to Thatcher's enthusiastic support. One week later, the USSR invaded Afghanistan. Very swiftly, a preceding 'emphasis upon the search for common ground, gave way to one of strength and military preparedness as the bases of international order', with 'an increased emphasis by both sides upon the likelihood of war and on the need for military preparations against possible attacks from the enemy'.[662] Through Reagan's election in 1980—on a Republican Manifesto which promised to 'restore' U.S. Military superiority—to the eventual arrival of Cruise missiles in 1983, a hardening of stances in the Kremlin, the White House and Downing Street, created an international situation succinctly characterised by E.P. Thompson's observation that, 'hawks breed hawks'.[663]

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659. Halliday observes that deterioration in relations can be traced to the 'wave of third world revolutions which from 1974 onwards engulfed the South, from Saigon to Managua' and to a series of crises of capitalism in advanced Western economies. Halliday, *Cold War*, 15.

660. For a blow-by-blow account of these initial months of deterioration, see, E.P. Thompson, "The Doomsday Consensus," First Published in the New Statesman, 20 December 1979, reproduced in E.P. Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight,* (London: Merlin Press, 1980).

661. E.P. Thompson, "Domesday Consensus," 259.

662. Halliday, *Cold War*, 1 and 11.

663. E.P. Thompson, "European Nuclear Disarmament" (first published in the Guardian, 28th January, 1980), Republished in Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight*, 278.

The years between 1979-1985, therefore, witnessed a return to a climate of sustained rivalry

and antagonism, on a scale unseen since the 'First Cold War' of 1946-1953. In Britain, the

period between 1946 and 1953, however, had been marked by a widespread ambivalence

towards nuclear weapons. In part this was a result of the effective propaganda efforts by

Western Governments and state apparatuses, which effectively suppressed images and reports

regarding the nature and extent the damage wrought at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whilst

framing discussion of nuclear bombs in terms of their role in ending conflict and their

embodiment of the scientific progress and discovery of the 'nuclear age'.[664] Remarkably,

Clement Attlee's Labour Government (1945-1951) had even managed to keep the

expenditure of millions of pounds of public finances in the development of a British Nuclear

programme secret from the public (a feat, in fact, repeated by Labour administrations in the

1970s).[665] Though there were, as such, some determined and high profile anti-nuclear

campaigners from the outset, it was not until 1954—with reports on the effects of the USA's

H-Bomb tests in the South Atlantic, the scale of Britain's nuclear programme known, and a

fuller account of the damage wrought at Hiroshima and Nagasaki available—that opposition

began to gather pace. The emergent first wave of the anti-nuclear movement in Britain found

its most enduring institutional form with the foundation of the Campaign for Nuclear

Disarmament (CND) in 1957, and peaked with a 100,000 person march on Aldermaston in

1962.[666] Wide-scaled resistance to the nuclear bomb, therefore, began only after the passing

of the period which, by Halliday's estimations, could be characterised as 'Cold War' proper.

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664. As Carol Jacobi and Christophe Laucht have observed, photographs and reports of the extent of the damage reaped by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki were widely suppressed until the withdrawal of US troops from Japan in 1952, with official news reports and government statements tending to focus upon the bombs' unprecedented power and the excitements of scientific advance rather than the shattering human cost. See Carol Jacobi, "'A Kind of Cold War Feeling,' in British Art, 1945-1952," 19-50*; and* Christophe Laucht, "An Imagined Cataclysm Becomes Fact: British Photojournalism and Real and Imagined Nuclear War in Picture Post," both in *British Art in the Nuclear* Age, ed. Jolivette, 81-101.

665. See, Joan Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook* (London: Macdonald Optima, 1987), 6 and 48.

666. For an account of this evolution see Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook*.

The first wave of CND, therefore, rose to prominence in a period of 'oscillating antagonism', in which short term crises were superseded by substantial thaws.[667] By 1963, with the passing of the Cuban Missile crisis, the signing of a Partial Test Ban Treaty by the UK, USA and USSR and the increasing focus of protest movements on opposing the USA's engagements in Vietnam, the first wave of the anti-nuclear movement, passed into a period of decline.[668]

During the Second Cold War, however, the deterioration of international relations was met with an immediate response. In Britain the anti-nuclear movement grew swiftly across late 1979 and early 1980, maintaining a steady growth right through to October 1983, when some 200,000 people took to the streets of London, doubling the first movement's peak at Aldermaston in 1962. [669] Cultural and visual producers were to play an important role in this growth, drawing upon and reconfiguring some three decades of research and revelations regarding the effects of nuclear weapons, while highlighting the astonishing rate of nuclear proliferation across that period. They were aided by and communicated to and through, the residual networks and social base of the preceding CND movement, a confluence of the wider social movements of the period and an expanded field of Left politics. They were also able to draw upon a much wider sense of outrage at the total absence of democratic process entailed in the NATO decision to station Cruise Missiles on UK soil, and the emerging revelations that control of the missiles was to remain with the U.S. Air Force.[670] In her

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667. For Halliday, the Cold War can be divided into four phases: 'Phase 1, the First Cold War, 1946-1953; Phase II, the period of Oscillatory Antagonism, 1953-1969, Phase III, Détente, 1969-197; Phase IV, the Second Cold War, 1979 onwards'. Halliday, *Cold War*, 3.

668. For Ruddock, 'Decline in support for CND was probably accelerated by two events – the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty by the UK, USA and USSR and the growing intervention of US troops in Vietnam. By '65, opposition to the Vietnam war was beginning to dominate CND campaigning'. *CND Scrapbook*, 35.

669. 'CND revived because people joined. Outrage at the secret NATO decision, revealed in December 1979, to deploy American cruise missiles in Britain, coming only seven months after an election devoid of debate on defence, led to the formation of dozens of new anti-missile groups'. Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook*, 48.

670. 'The process by which 'Britain' made up its mind and came to this remarkable consensus remained obscure. Wherever one looked, the decision had already been taken, or was about to be taken by someone else…The 'mind of Britain' (and its 'quota') was it seems made up not in this country but in the Hague, by a NATO committee known as the High Level Group, whose instructions were passed on in turn to a thing called NPG, or NATO's Nuclear Planning Group'. Thompson, "The Doomsday Consensus," 260.

memoirs, Margaret Thatcher noted that this threat to British Sovereignty, as well as what she perceived to be a latent anti-Americanism, had proven particularly divisive, even among her traditional support.[671] Divisions in British state and ruling class interests were compounded by a rivalry between the British military and Navy, and resulted—as E.P. Thompson observed—in a near constant flow of 'official secrets', revealing the danger and possibility of nuclear attack, and the remarkable insufficiency of Government plans in such an event in the media.[672]

It is with an awareness, therefore, not only of the contexts of pressing nuclear threat, but also the importance of efforts to unmask and reveal that threat, that the murals of this chapter demand to be seen. They partook in the resistance to, and articulation of a counter-narrative against what E.P. Thompson identified as the strategy 'by which 'Britain' was instructed that its mind was already decided', on the question of Cruise missiles.[673] Thompson identified the three features of the strategy such: '[t]he first we call subliminal indoctrination: that is, the decision was presented as if agreement was already *assumed*…. The second was that of

671. 'In Britain, distrust of the United states surfaced on the question of whether there should be a 'dual key' – that is whether there should be a technical arrangement to ensure that the US could not fire these weapons without the consent of the British government.…on 1 May 1983 I cleared personally with President Reagan the precise formula we should use to describe it. But I knew that it would be difficult to defend our line: not only anti-nuclear protestors but a sizeable number of our own supporters in and out of Parliament had their doubts. Moreover, most of the newspapers were opposed to us on the question of the dual key.' Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 268-269.

672. 'This savage in-fighting over the war budget, as our defence chiefs seek to mobilise minuscule sectors of elite public opinion upon their side, builds up a terrific pressure on the bladder of Official Secrecy. Suddenly on such occasions ordinary viewers and readers find themselves sprayed from on high by conflicting official leaks… Admirals and generals and senior officials of the MOD stand against the wall of Fleet Street and leak in the public interest. A lot of 'Official Secrets', in the form of Official Information, have been sprayed around in the past two months. We have been told the exact range of Cruise missiles; what kind of warhead is going on the Tridents; where the Cruise missiles will be sited...We are told that 'a US Air Force team has been touring the UK', examining possible firing-sites ("at least half a dozen")…since these breath-taking secrets usually appear spontaneously in rival establishment sheets, I think that we may take it that all this leaking is very much in the public interest'. Thompson, "The Doomsday Consensus," 261-262. These leaks continued through 1980. As Ruddock explained, '[i]n February of 1980, BBC Panorama revealed the existence of the government's pre-recorded *Protect and Survive* films to be transmitted in the run-up to a nuclear war. The Government responded by putting on sale a public information booklet of the same name'. Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook*, 48. The leaflets were widely satirised by the opponents of nuclear proliferation.

673. Thompson, "The Domesday Consensus," 260.

suppression. The facts were disguised (so far as possible) from public knowledge… The third was that of devaluing the issue. The decision was presented, not as one of high and controversial political concern, but as a trivial question of *technology*'.[674] The murals, and the wider moment of cultural production to which they belonged, constituted a clear and significant attempt to rebuke such a strategy: shattering the illusion of consensus, exposing the facts, and highlighting the pressing severity of the issue. Furthermore, by virtue of their existence *as murals*, they played a very specific role in this process: not only making visible the extent of the nuclear threat and the potential agency of opposition, but placing such visualisations on the streets of the nation's capital city. As such, they were conceived to embody contestations at 'strategic sites' in the heart of a metropolis which was simultaneously most threatened by, and (in some sense) most capable of resisting, the spectre of nuclear apocalypse.[675] As will be seen, the murals' dual (visual and physical) presence, was also particularly suited to a broader function: allowing them to stand not only as testament to the threat of nuclear war and hope of the peace movement, but also as indexes of the metonymic relation of the peace movement to the attendant social conflicts of the period. The enduring presence of the two murals examined below in the urban fabric, marks them apart from much of the wider moment of cultural production: embedding the political dynamics of the Cold War within the psychic and physical memory of the city right up to the present day.

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674. Thompson, 260.
675. The notion of 'strategic sites' was stated in a 1983 Press Release by the London Muralists for Peace, though, beyond existing in the midst of inner city communities spread across London, it is difficult to see what strategy was being performed. London Muralists For Peace, "Autumn 1983 Press Release," Archive of London Muralists For Peace, Archive of Brian Barnes.

Nuclear Dawn

The earliest of London's murals to explicitly address the theme of nuclear war and give form to politics of the anti-nuclear movement, was begun by Brian Barnes and Dale McCrea in the spring of 1980, and completed in March 1981.[676] McCrea, a resident in the newly formed housing cooperative at Carlton Mansions in central Brixton, had approached Barnes about the opportunities for a mural on the exposed, pre-rendered side wall of the cooperative's 1891 block of mansion flats.[677] Some months from his last mural project and in receipt of revenue grants from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Arts Council and the Greater London Arts Association—with which he also supported growing community printshop activity—Barnes visited the site in March, and set about working on the wall in April 1980, with help from McCrea and (for a brief spell) Wandsworth Arts Resource Project co-worker Christine Thomas.[678] In contrast to Barnes' previous mural at Thessaly Gardens, though in common with his first mural on Battersea Bridge Road, this was an enormous public facing site.[679] Carlton Mansions sat adjacent to Brixton's busiest market streets and arcades. Its side wall— rising some 15 metres up and 9 metres across—had been exposed by the wholesale demolition of the terraced Victorian buildings to its east facing flank, leaving a visible approach of nearly a quarter of a mile along the busy thoroughfare of Coldharbour Lane.[680]

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676. McCrea was an architecture graduate and squatting activist, who had worked as an assistant to Barnes on the *Thessaly Gardens Seaside Mural*, between 1978 and 1979.

677. Brian Barnes, *Diaries*, March-April, 1980. Collection of the author and Archive of Brian Barnes.

678. Christine Thomas was employed through Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Grant for a second full time worker, offered in December 1979. See Wandsworth Arts Resource Project, "Annual Report, 1979-1980," ACGB/103/202-GLAA, 5. The same annual report makes clear that, despite the wishes of the Arts Council that Community arts projects should move to local authority support, Barnes' practice was reliant upon these three streams of funding, given the hostility of Wandsworth Council to his work. Wandsworth Arts Resource Project, "Annual Report, 1979-1980," 3. Barnes, has pointed out that this hostility, beyond the Council having turned Tory in 1976, was due to his own political activism. Barnes, interview with the author, August 2016.

679. In 1979, Barnes had completed a mural on the end of a school in a pocket park created by Aileen Barnes and local women, at a site adjacent to the couple's home on the Carey Gardens Estate, North Battersea.

680. The gable end of the, by now, free-standing mansion block hugging the railway lines would seem to have been exposed during the mass demolitions of the south side of Coldharbour Lane around 1970, to clear space for the Barrier Block and a never completed, motorway system. See "Carlton Mansions," Brixton Society, accessed May 12, 2018, http://www.brixtonsociety.org.uk/2013/05/06/carlton-mansions/. For oral history resources on

Remarkably, given the scale of the wall and the uncompromisingly political tenor of its final image, Barnes and McCrea appear to have set to work on the pre-rendered wall with little consultation or certainty as to the theme or the image of the completed mural. McCrea's idea for a mural featuring roses and bumblebees was initially entertained, studied and sketched out on the wall, before being rejected by Barnes ('Not keen on Dale's Bumblebees').[681] Barnes' diary entry on 21st April, notes that '[McCrea] will copy *Satan Sowing Seeds"* by Felicien Rops instead'.[682] If the delegation of the 'copying' to McCrea, marks a diversion from Barnes' more common directorial position in projects, the casual, improvisatory and artist-led approach to the creation of an image on such a major and public facing wall is in even sharper contrast to the more rigorous modes of 'community consultation' developed by many contemporaries.[683] Even more remarkable, however, is the initial choice of image. One of five images from Rops' *Les Sataniques* portfolio—a series described by one art historian as 'an amalgam of witchcraft and demonology, sacrifice and sacrilege'— *Satan Sowing* presents an enormous satanic figure, draped in peeling flesh, casually scattering young babies as he strides over the Paris skyline [see figures 301-5].[684] Of all the sources available for a late 20th

the history of Carlton Mansions see, Clapham Film Unit, "For What We are About to Lose*," accessed June 27, 2018, http://claphamfilmunit.wixsite.com/mysite/oral-histories.

681. 'Not keen on Dale's Bumblebees. He will copy Satan Sowing Seeds, by Felicien Rops instead' noted Barnes' diary entry on April 21st. There is no indication of a nuclear theme in the diary until August 31st when, in the wake of a graffiti attack by residents, Barnes notes that, 'Barnes drew cruise Missiles scattered by a skeleton on the watercolour design'. This was followed on September 2 by a note of the addition of the mushroom clouds on the watercolour. Barnes, *Diaries*, 1980.

682. Barnes, *Diaries*.

683. Though McCrea *was* a resident in the building, and some degree of consultation with twelve other residents was undertaken in October of 1980, it seems likely—as Stephen Lobb has observed— that the presence of the mural on a busy thoroughfare, may also have led to a diminishment of public consultation. 'It was set beside a city thoroughfare whose hurrying populace came from many different communities and whose ownership would be individual not collective'. Stephen Lobb, *The Murals of Brian Barnes* (Creekside Press: London, 2013), 23.

684. Felicien Rops was a libertine fin de siècle Belgian Printmaker and dandy whose flirtations with eroticism and Satanism were mixed with particular force in *Les Sataniques,* a series of five watercolours and later lithographs to which *Satan Sowing the Seeds* belonged. As Victor Arwas saw that series: '[t]he five plates called *Les Sataniques* are his most complete symbolist statement. Unencumbered by an existing text, Rops was free to credit his own monstrous world. He produced a dark and powerful set of images, an amalgam of witchcraft and demonology, sacrifice and sacrilege. [Joris-Karl] Huysmans called them 'hideous and grandiose', while [Joséphin] Péladan felt that through them 'Rops rises to Dürer while remaining more than ever Rops'.' Victor Arwas, *Félicien Rops,* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976), 8.

Century public mural, this image—by a 19th century libertine with an avowed contempt for the public—would seem amongst the least appropriate.[685]

If the wider series of *Les Sataniques* is dominated by Rops' characteristically misogynistic images of women being penetrated by demons, *Satan Sowing*, pushes towards a slightly less pronouncedly asocial meaning, through its relation to the parable of Satan Sowing the Tares. The parable, recalled in the Gospel of St Matthew describes how, while a farmer sleeps, the devil sows tares seeds, (or 'darnel weeds') in a field of wheat. Uncertain whether to gather the darnel seed or let it grow, the servants ask the householder, who advises to 'let both grow together until the harvest', at which point they may be separated: the wheat to the barn, and the tares burned.[686] Jesus explains the parable in relation to the apocalypse, underlining its meaning as a parable of deference, or tolerance, pending the last judgement.[687] What is so striking about Rops' interpretation of the scene, however, is the replacement of traditional representations' more or less demonic agrarian figure sowing seeds, with a gargantuan flesh-peeling Satan, scattering babies upon Paris. The shift shatters aspects of the metaphorical

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685. Rops' contempt for the public is shown in multiple letters, such as that sent to Félicien Champsaur: 'I don't exhibit in order not to expose myself to receiving an Honourable mention…I grant no one the right to honour me, such recognition seeming to me to be the depths of humility. I don't know if I will ever produce something which pleases me; as for pleasing others, I give no more of a damn for that than for my last year's gloves'. Octave Mirbeau has written of another letter in which Rops stated, 'if…I have ever made some smutty drawings, it is precisely in hatred of this public of which you speak, and in order to lower my buttocks to the level of its face'. Both cited in Arwas, *Félicien Rops*, 7.

686. 'Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way./ But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also./ So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?/ He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? / But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them./ Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.' Matthew 13:24-30, *Holy Bible, King James Version.*

687. Asked for interpretation of the scene, Jesus suggests that: 'He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the Kingdom; and the darnel weeds [or Tares] are the children of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels'. Matthew 13:39, *Holy Bible, King James Version.*

(and agrarian) register of the parable, allowing the agents of the towering Satan to fall indiscriminately upon the contemporary city.

Rops' interpretation of the scene—with its macabre, satanic figure, wearing clogs, wide-brimmed hat, and tethered peasant's rags, and scattering babies upon a modern cityscape—were almost wholly preserved in the early stages of Barnes and McCrea's work on the wall, though with a shift of the cityscape to late 20th century London [see figure 306]. Contrasting with the pop-ish, satirical, but over-ridingly celebratory and humanist tone of Barnes' preceding work, the near unedited use of such an uncompromisingly bleak image is remarkable, and would seem bound up within what Matthew Worley has noted as a wider movement towards an apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic imaginary across the period.[688] Worley's observations trace the shift from post-industrial malaise of the late 1970s to a more existentially loaded register in second wave punk, often —but not exclusively—through direct reference to the resurgent Cold War. Though Barnes was no punk, it is perhaps of note that the Rops' image was originally used by McCrea for a 1979 screenprint (printed with Barnes' assistance) in promotion of a punk 'Squat Benefit gig' [see Figure 307]. The precedent offers a testament to the interplay between Barnes' print and mural practice, and something of an explanatory link for how a 19th century lithograph with an obscurantist reinterpretation of a Christian parable might ever be considered as a model for a public mural. Punk and medium transfer notwithstanding, the adoption of the image, in advance of an anti-nuclear theme, reveals the extent to which the apocalyptic imaginary of the period was not confined to the nuclear subject, but rather intertwined with a broader sense of pessimism

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688. Worley, "Under the Bomb," 65-83.

which accompanied the atrophy of the urban environment and the closing horizons and deepening social tensions which followed Thatcher's May 1979 election victory.[689]

In part, perhaps, in light of the initial design's unrelenting pessimism, on June 19th the mural suffered the first of several bouts of graffiti, with the 'unauthorised additions of flowers and "hippy" multicoloured clothes'.[690] Barnes and McCrea identified the source of the attacks to be McCrea's fellow residents in Carlton Mansions, and—in recognition of this fact—Barnes made edits to the design and (eventually) undertook further consultation with the residents.[691] The most significant of these additions were recorded in Barnes' diaries on the 31st August and 2nd September: cruise missiles (in the place of Rops' babies), and a double mushroom cloud rising on the horizon.[692] On 24th September Barnes completed the final, scaled watercolour (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum), in which the addition of a hand releasing the metamorphic chain of a dove to CND logo, and nuclear bunker beneath Parliament Square, further underlined the thematic shift [see Figure 308]. Though relatively minor in their compositional effect, these changes radically transformed the political content of the image: turning a minimally adapted version of Rops' parable scene, into a sharp and pointedly contemporary political mural. The designs were approved by a meeting of twelve Carlton Mansions residents on October 1st, finding their way onto the wall as Barnes and McCrea continued work through the winter. Further attacks on Christmas Day 1980, however, suggest the shifts may not have appeased all the objections [see Figure 309].[693]

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689. As Worley has observed in the case of punk, the Cold War did not so much displace the 'decaying urban landscapes', as 'cast [them] further in the shadow'. Worley, 70.

690. 'Unauthorised additions of flowers and "hippy" multicoloured clothes'. These attacks were followed on 7th of August by 'damaging graffiti', and on Christmas day, by 'sarcastic comments up the left side of the mural'. Barnes, *Diaries*, June 19, August 7 and December 25, 1980.

691. Aided, in the final case, by the fact that the attacker had got stuck half way up the wall in Barnes and McCrea's make-shift cradle and had to be rescued by the Fire Brigade. 'Ian Kane and mate graffitied all the left side of the mural with sarcastic comments but got stuck at the full height of the mural and were rescued by the fire brigade.' Barnes, *Diaries*, December 25, 1980.

692. Barnes, *Diaries*.

693. Barnes.

Given the social and political engagements of Barnes' wider career it seems unlikely that the initial, vague and historically indeterminate pessimism of Rops' original would have survived unaltered to the mural's completion. The timing and nature of the shift, however, is significant. While the pressure from McCrea's fellow residents in Carlton Mansions must have played a part, it is notable that their interventions coincided with the dramatic rise of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. It was this growth, combined with a call from U.S. muralist Bill Walker, for artists to work on murals on the common theme of 'Opposition to War Preparation', which Barnes cited as responsible for the change.[694] The spectre of a nuclear apocalypse had grown steadily across 1980, with the aforementioned flow of leaks in the press fuelling a growing public understanding and disquiet about the scale, nature and threat of nuclear annihilation.[695] This disquiet soon found form in the earliest manifestations of what were to be three of the most sustained years of protest in the peace movement's history. In the spring, as Barnes was setting to work, E.P. Thompson and other prominent intellectuals founded the Campaign for European Nuclear Disarmament (END), to build consensus against nuclear weapons across Europe and thus exert pressure on both Eastern

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694. Brian Barnes, *Nuclear Dawn Press Release*, Autumn/ Winter 1980, Archive of Muralists For Peace, Archive of Brian Barnes (henceforth: AMFP/ABB). The call-out from Walker is worth quoting at length, revealing both the sense of international exchange, and the broadly similar analysis of the moment: 'We propose a theme: OPPOSITION TO WAR PREPARATION! We believe the world situation demands urgent action on the part of all people of good will. Draft registration, big military spending, war hysteria promoted by the press all point towards world War III – coming soon. War preparation is a community issue – we are hiding our heads in the sand, and doing the youth of our communities no good if we fail to recognize that, and fail to spread our awareness. Resurgent militarism is closely linked to attacks on education, health care, to the resurgence of Klan-Nazi activity, to the energy "issue" (which masks the war-related nuclear industry and the new seizures of Native American lands for development)—there's lots and lots to paint about in this theme! We have an opportunity to influence and awaken public opinion in our communities. Let's set an example – that can give new life an direction to the public art movement.' Bill Walker, "A Proposal for Joint Action Against War Preparations," *American Mural Network* (Spring 1980), AMFP/ABB.
695. In May, the Government had been forced to publish their plans for civil defence in the form of the soon to be widely satirised booklet 'Protect and Survive'. In the Summer of 1980, the Government announced the allocation of extra resources to civil defence, and that their Polaris submarine missile system would be replaced, at great cost, by the American Trident system. Around the same time, RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire and RAF Molesworth in Cambridgeshire were confirmed as the locations for the forthcoming cruise missile deployment. See, Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook*, 48-49

and Western blocs. But it was CND which led the charge. In August, the forty-fifth

anniversaries of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were commemorated on a scale not seen since

CND's height in the early 1960s, only to be exceeded by an 80,000 strong march called by

CND in October.[696] The summer also saw the Labour Party, now led by long time CND

supporter Michael Foot, throw its weight behind the anti-nuclear movement, co-organising

the first of several mass rallies, before endorsing a motion, at their Autumn conference, which

promised '[a] commitment in the Labour Party manifesto to unilateral nuclear

disarmament'.[697] In October, just after the conference, Lambeth Council—which, the under

leadership of Ted Knight, from 1978-1985, was to become one of the more prominent of a

new wave of Labour Left councils—recommended a grant of £2000 to the mural.[698]

The diversion of Rops' model to a directly anti-nuclear theme, therefore, was concomitant

with, responsive to and eventually part-funded by, the growing opposition to nuclear

proliferation across the period. The design shifts by which Barnes made the diversion reveal a

similar responsiveness: drawing upon the emergent imagery of the peace movement of the

1980s, the longer-standing iconography of the 'Nuclear Age', as well as a characteristically

playful attention to wide-ranging cultural, political and art historical sources. For all the

contingency, and the aforementioned questions regarding the suitability of Rops' image for an

exterior mural, however, much of the mural's force and political bite emerged from Barnes'

détournement of Rops' image and the parable it represented. As has been observed, Rops'

image cut away at the metaphorical and agrarian dimensions of conventional treatments of

the Parable of the Tares (for example, those by William Blake, James Tissot, or in medieval

manuscripts), by transforming the sower into a gargantuan Satan, and the scattering seeds,

696. Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook*, 48-49.
697. See Ian Birchall, "Labour and the Bomb," *Socialist Review* 10 (15 November-14 December 1980): 19-21.
698. This late funding came after initial hostility from council staff, including an inspection which claimed the mural was 'infringing council airspace,' see Barnes *Diaries*, May 10, 1980.

into 'children of the evil one' in the form of babies raining down upon the city [see Figures 310-12]. In recasting Rops' babies into the (soon to be developed) cruise missiles, however, Barnes broke with not only the abstraction of the metaphor but the very notion of temporal deference, which adhered, however uncomfortably in Rops' image.[699] For in Barnes' image the seeds of Satan appear not as future subjects of a deferred last judgement, but rather as the imminent *sources* of the apocalypse. This shift from a divine and deferred eschatology to an imminent and *manmade* apocalypse underlines the urgency of the image: transferring the parable from a meditation on deference, or—at its most enlightened—tolerance, pending an externally triggered Armageddon and divine judgement, to what will be seen as a driving call to immediate action, to prevent an all-too-human Armageddon. The strangeness of Rops' midpoint notwithstanding, the image thus offers a fitting index of both the endurance and shifts of the apocalyptic imagination in the modern age.[700]

The nature of this evolution, from Satan's seeds, through Rops' demonic babies, to Barnes' scattering of Cruise-Pershing nuclear missiles, also offers a fitting and appropriate testament to the 'seminal' importance of cruise missiles in the escalating tensions of the Second Cold War, and the countervailing urgency of the peace movement. It was the announcement of the deployment of Cruise-Pershing II missiles across Europe that had fundamentally shifted the balance of international power and the psychic proximity of nuclear apocalypse to British and European citizens. As Vida Henning, a CND activist from Havant framed it, 'With the invention of a Strike-First weapon – the Cruise Missile— we in Britain would certainly be

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699. The discomfort of temporal deference in Rops' image is multiple: instituted by the demonic casualness with which the metaphor is broken into scattering babies, and—to follow the parable—in the foretold cohabitation of evil within the contemporary city such scattering implies.

700. As Christoph Laucht has observed, '[p]rior to the arrival of the atom bomb, human beings often imagined Armageddon by referring to seemingly unprecedented natural events such as comets, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis and so on. But the advent of nuclear arms fundamentally changed these assumptions because, as Paul Boyer notes, 'it seemed that man himself had, in the throes of war, stumbled on the means of his own prophesied doom'.' Laucht, "Cataclysm Becomes Fact," 82.

retaliated against. Our island is small and densely populated. We would not survive. We only have one chance and that chance is now. We have to persuade the Government to rescind their decision'.[701] A similar tone runs through much of the contemporary strategical discussion of the peace movement: with Cruise consistently and deliberately seized upon as the symbolic rallying call for anti-nuclear campaigners.[702] The halting of the scheduled 1983 deployment offered a concrete, tangible and potentially attainable transitional goal pending unilateral, and eventually international nuclear disarmament. In recognition of this, the image of cruise missiles prefiguratively proliferated across the early 1980s. Prior even to their development, their imagined form appeared in the floats and banners of peace campaigners, the cartoons of pamphlets and newsletters, newspapers and, perhaps most famously, Peter Kennard's photo montages [see Figures 313-16].[703] Barnes' own representation of the missiles—in fact wildly inaccurate—derived from one such image: the imaginative premonition of their form sketched by a Guardian illustrator.[704]

Beyond imagination, the images of cruise drew upon longer running iconography of missiles which had emerged with particular force in the 1960s.[705] If earlier fine art engagements with the nuclear theme had often remained oblique, characterised by what Robert Burstow has called 'duality and ambivalence', in the build-up and aftermath of 1962's Cuban Missile Crisis, there emerged a clear and darkly satirical tendency to associate the nuclear theme with

701. Vida Henning, *In the Event of…A Personal Account by Vida Henning—Co-ordinator of Havant CND Group in the 1980's* (Havant: Green Cottage Publishing, 2009), 3. Written in the form of a diary, this section of the account is titled, 'October 1980'.
702. As E.P. Thompson framed it: 'within each nation [in Europe] the expulsion of nuclear-missile bases from its own soil must be a prime objective of the popular movement'. Thompson, "European Nuclear Disarmament," 280.
703. Cruise-pershing II missiles were not in fact developed until 1983. As will be seen Barnes' image of them thus relied upon illustrations of their possible form.
704. Barnes, Interview with the author, August 2016.
705. Though Laucht has observed an interest in missiles in two articles in Picture post from 1952 and 1956, those articles focussed largely upon the technology of the rockets, with little reworking of the images. See Laucht, "Cataclysm Becomes Fact," 93.

the phallic form of the fighter jet and missile.[706] In Colin Self's *Leopardskin Nuclear Bomber No. 2* and Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, (both 1963), for example, the phallic associations of Cold War weaponry are used to offer a gendered critique of the toxic masculinity of the (escalating) conflict, and the culture of nuclear proliferation between rival superpowers [see Figures 317-18].[707] Barnes' imaging of the missiles as the seeds of destruction offers an intriguing variation of the priapic mode: moving the weapons from their satirical phallic threat to the germinal scattering agents of what seems, in some senses, an even more imminent (and certainly less humorous) destruction. The sheer quantity of missiles in the image underscores such resonance, highlighting the absurd machismo of continued proliferation in light of the well-publicised destructive capacity of a single missile.

The imminence of this destruction is reinforced by the representation of a billowing double mushroom cloud rising from the horizon up across the upper two thirds of the wall. The mushroom cloud emerged in the years following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on 6th and 9th August, 1945—and in particular in the wake of the summer 1946 United States' Operation Crossroads atomic tests in the Marshall Islands—as the centrepiece of the iconography of the nuclear age.[708] Notwithstanding, the 'ambiguity, paradox and contradictions' Jane Caputi has observed in the employment of the symbol in the United States, its uses in the British context were, as Christoph Laucht has noted, from the outset,

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706. Robert Burstow, "Geometries of Hope and Fear: The Iconography of Atomic Science and Nuclear Anxiety in the Modern Sculpture of World War and Cold War Britain," in Jolivette, ed., *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, 70.
707. Benjamin Ziemann has noted a similarly gendered tendency in the iconography of the Peace movement in West Germany. Benjamin Ziemann "The Code of Protest: Images of Peace in the West German Peace Movements, 1945–1990," *Contemporary European History* 17-2, (2008), 237-261.
708. For Spencer Weart, for example it was, 'the most impressive of all nuclear symbols', Spencer Weart *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 401-402, cited in Laucht, "Cataclysm Becomes Fact," 84.

'generally more negative and associated with destruction'.[709] By 1946, Laucht notes that the mushroom cloud, had emerged as a 'household name'.[710] Yet, for all its ubiquity, the images of the mushroom cloud that did emerge in the early post-war years, as indeed those of the damage caused by the blasts it came to signify, remained tightly controlled by the U.S. military. The images of the cloud that did emerge were in part notable for their abstraction: shot from planes above the cloud level, many of the earliest images were blurred and, after 1946, largely taken from the tests of Operation Crossroads, rather than the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The images of the urban damage they wrought, meanwhile, were, with a few notable exceptions, suppressed until the withdrawal of the US military from Japan in 1952.[711] As Carol Jacobi has observed this resulted in a situation in which, in the immediate post-war years, '[t]he cloud… became the sole image in the West, representing the event [of the bombing] while quite literally obscuring it'.[712]

Barnes' adoption of the cloud, however, emerges from, and partakes in, a countervailing tradition of unmasking and revealing. Though complicated by official secrecy, the process of recovering the scale and nature of the 'events' at Hiroshima and Nagasaki began almost immediately.[713] The process (and products) of this recovery were to become central to the psychic imagination of the Cold War and the urgency of the anti-nuclear movement.[714] The

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709. 'While the image of the nuclear mushroom cloud arguably assumed more varied and diverse layers of meaning in the American context, oscillating between nuclear utopia and dystopia and even kitsch, its meanings were generally more negative and associated with destruction in the British context, as illustrated by Chisholm's article for *Picture Post.'* Laucht, "Cataclysm Becomes Fact," 85.
710. Laucht, 85.
711. Excepting the rare printing of Satsuo Nakata's aerial photograph of the razed Hiroshima in the Daily Express on Wednesday September 5th, 1945, images ranging from a 1923 Tokyo earthquake, through to images of bomb damage in Europe, were instead used to emphasise the resonance of the explosions' urban destruction in the immediate post-war press. See Jacobi, "Cold War Feeling", 19-50.
712. Jacobi, 25.
713. For an analysis of the multiple means by which Picture Post sought to visualise the conflict in the immediate post-war years see Laucht, "Cataclysm Becomes Fact".
714. As Vida Henning recalled of April 1980, '[f]or quite a few years I'd been comfortably jogging along enjoying my job, my family, my house and garden and shutting my mind to these terrifying images of the devastation and annihilation of the two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that hit my ten-year-old brain in August 1945'. Henning, *A Personal Account*, 3.

process of recovery unfolded through the sourcing, reproduction and production of accounts; documentary, imaginative and filmic images; and ritual, (with, for example, annual memorial commemorations of the bombs emerging—and remaining—as one of the staple events of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's calendar).[715] Across these modes a dual temporal emphasis emerged: with the reconstruction—from images and accounts—of the human and environmental destruction nuclear weapons had already wrought, developing alongside, and feeding into, the apocalyptic premonitions of what might yet be unleashed. One of the enduring means of fusing these past excavations and future imaginings, emerged just days after Hiroshima, in the form of the (initially drawn) image of a mushroom cloud superimposed against the city of New York [see Figures 319-21].[716] Here, the mushroom cloud (in the absence of documentary images of its destruction) served as a signifier of both accomplished and foretold destruction, even as the geographic shift moved the U.S.A. from a position of perpetrator to imagined victim. If, as Robert Jacobs and Mick Broderick have traced, New York remained the most frequently envisioned target, images of a mushroom cloud superimposed above an aerially viewed vista of London had featured in a February 1950 edition of Picture Post, with concentric rings annotated to detail the scale of destruction to a perimeter of 80 miles [see Figure 319].[717] From these origins, images of mushroom clouds over Western cities came to be employed for purposes ranging from Cold War propaganda to that of the peace movement, appearing anywhere from B-Movies to scientific

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715. As Henning observed of August 6th 1982: 'this day always brings with it my annual collapse into fear. The Hiroshima/Nagasaki images are lodged in my head, but come to the fore at this time every year as I contemplate the horror and imagine it happening to my loved ones'. Henning, 16.
716. As Robert Jacobs and Mick Broderick, have observed, the mode stretches back to August 7, 1945, the day after the Hiroshima bombing. Robert Jacobs and Mick Broderick, "Nuke York, New York: Nuclear Holocaust in the American Imagination from Hiroshima to 9/11," *The Asia Pacific Journal*, Volume 10, Issue 11, Number 6 (March 5, 2012): https://apjjf.org/2012/10/11/Robert-Jacobs/3726/article.html.
717. See Laucht, "Cataclysm Becomes Fact," 86-88.

articles.[718] They, in short, became a central plank of the means by which Cold War culture, began to apprehend the, in many ways, unimaginable effects of nuclear weaponry.[719]

Within the contexts of this wider tradition, the precise mechanics of Barnes' image deserve attention. Though in part contingent upon Rops' design, it is notable that Barnes' image reverses a common tendency of mapping the apex of bomb's explosion in the centre of a city viewed from a raised and significantly distant external viewpoint. Instead, Barnes employs a relatively lower (though still raised) viewpoint in the midst of the city, relegating the mushroom cloud to the periphery. Such viewpoints were, in fact, much more frequently associated images of the destruction of bombs, than their hypothesised potential (see for example, the enduring images of the damage at Dresden or Coventry, which for a time stood in or merged with those of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, [figures 322-24] as against, the more removed perspective of the 1950 Picture Post montage [figure 319]).[720] In contrast to the images of ravaged cities, however, Barnes uses the viewpoint to foreground iconic landmarks of the London skyline—including the Houses of Parliament, the Ministry of Defence and the Shell Centre. In a Press Release of 1981, Barnes highlighted the symbolic importance of these buildings, noting that the Shell Building and Houses of Parliament, (which support the Skeleton's two feet), offer symbols of capitalism and state power dually responsible for the threat of nuclear war.[721] Whilst such symbolism (especially that of the Shell building) may

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718. Jacobs and Broderick have observed that the practice emerged with increased frequency in cinema and other media following the USSR's first tests of a nuclear bomb in 1949. "Nuke York," 3.

719. An interconnected mode which dispensed of the image of the mushroom cloud but focussed instead on the concentric circles, was visible right through the 1980s in newspaper reports, Government documents and peace movement literature.

720. As Jacobi points out the fact that '[t]he few pictures [of Hiroshima and Nagasaki published] in *Life* gave the impression of being so similar to those from European theatres of war, Coventry or Dresden, for example, that they discouraged understanding of the scale of difference of the devastation'. Jacobi, "Cold War Feeling", 25. Laucht observes that the lingering effect of the Second World War bomb damage hung heavily on the British imagination in particular: '[a]part from the effects of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings that figured high in British and US civil defence planning, British scenarios by and large also included experiences of the Blitz and mapped them onto imagined nuclear war', Laucht, "Cataclysm Becomes Fact," 91.

721. Brian Barnes, "Press Release: Masterpeace," [n.d. circa January 1981] ALMFP/ABB: 'The Figure strides across South London, one foot on the Houses of Parliament and the other on the shell office complex at

not have been legible to all, the reversal of the bomb's apex from the centre to the periphery of the city, creates a clear focus on its destruction civilian life, in notable advance (if only momentary) of state-capitalist landmarks. Correspondingly, the viewpoint also offers a sense of the human scale of the urban sphere: with roads and recognisable architectural features, leading the viewer into a vista stretching approximately 7 miles across South London, out towards the southern reaches of the London basin from which the cloud is seen to rise. Rendered with Barnes' characteristic mode of graphic clarity, and high-toned pop-ish exuberance, this expansive stretch of the London skyline must be amongst the most expansive *defined* spaces in mural painting of any period. It combines geographic and geometric reduction with a schematic attention to significant detail: a series of South London's landmarks picked out, amidst the tonally reduced horizontal and vertical masses of housing, roads and eruptions of green.

Amongst the recognisable landmarks of the middle distance—just to the right of the Skeleton's upper shin—are the 1970s Southwyck House Estate (or 'Barrier Block'), the 1910 Lambeth Town Hall, and between them, a droste effect image of the mural itself [see Figures 325-27].[722] Though compositionally subtle, this rendering of two of the more recognisable buildings in Brixton (both within eyeshot and 300 metres of the mural), would likely be recognisable to even mildly attentive local viewers. Beyond offering continuity with the modes of localised iconography and ludic invention, which had already become established as marks of Barnes' style, this trinity of local landmarks underlines the mural's sense of perceptual veracity and urgency: including the mural, and, by implication, its viewers forcefully within the urban fabric whose destruction is rendered imminent by the rising

Waterloo, to show that a war will come about through governments and capitalism wishing to control oil supplies.'
722. For information on the site, and the Barrier Block see Urban 75, "The Barrier Block," 2010, accessed June 20, 2018: http://www.urban75.org/brixton/features/barrier.html.

mushroom cloud and scattering missiles. This pressing physical intertwinement of the viewer,

alongside the remarkable scale of the wall, underline the mural's remarkable contribution to

the wider tradition of simulated Armageddon. More than many such images, the mural

underlines Paul K. Saint-Amour's observation of the manner in which 'the inhabitants of

Cold War cities …became accustomed to a more overtly and permanent variant of the

uncanny frisson felt in Hiroshima before the bombing, as a structure of the condition of

everyday life'.[723] Though Saint-Amour's observations of the frisson in Hiroshima, referred to

an extended durée, Barnes' image, with its mushroom cloud already rising, more bombs

hovering and the city streets abandoned, imposes this 'frisson', through the emphasis on the

milliseconds between detonation and incoming destruction. The profoundly disquieting

psychological effects of this temporal assertion are central to the mural's power and

urgency.[724]

The sense of physical involvement, temporal urgency and the structuring condition of the

nuclear threat, is at once inflected and undercut by the enormous, striding skeletal figure,

once again derived from Rops' original. The figure maintains the elegant stretched limbs and

gracious arch of Rops' original: a dynamic pose which has an even more pronounced effect at

scale: looming some 40 feet tall, over the south London street. Adding both dynamic urgency

and a macabre symbolism the figure is, once again, worth reading in its relation to Rops'

original. For, in the transition from Rops' flesh-peeling peasant demon (maintained in initial

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723. Paul Saint-Amour, "Bombing and the Symptom: Traumatic Earliness and the Nuclear Uncanny,"
diacritics, vol. 30, no. 4. (2000): 61.
724. It is a sense of interregnum and liminal despair that dominates many of the early responses to the mural.
See, for example, the final sentence of Geoff Dyer's rather fleeting mention of the mural in a novel set in
Brixton: 'I left the dole office and shook my head at the pavement-faced guy selling a revolutionary tabloid.
Across the road the pale sun brightened the colours in the huge Nuclear Dawn mural showing a spectral figure
of death clad in stars and stripes, striding over the dwarfed, fish-eyed landmarks of London. Bricks, their
colours slowly warming in the weak sun, would have looked nicer, *but that was probably not a relevant
consideration any more*' [emphasis added]. Geoff Dyer, *The Colour of Memory*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012),
12. Or, see Hannah Miller's film based around memories of growing up in the mural's shadows: Hannah Miller,
Not the End of The World, 2010, accessed June 20, 2018: https://vimeo.com/50200537.

designs), to Barnes' stripped skeleton, clad in the flags of the United States of America, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, the mural offers a telling episode within wider iconographic shifts in the presentation of war in the century or so which separates the image from Rops' original. In particular, the transition highlights a shift in the affective use of the body in the representation of war and brutality. From Goya's *Disasters of War*, Gericault's *Raft of Medusa*, and Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, through Rops' work made in reaction to the battle fields of the Franco Prussian war (in the shadows of which the image of *Satan Sowing* is almost certainly cast), images of exposed, lacerated and putrefying flesh were frequently employed, across the 19th century, as a means of summoning the brutality of war and human cruelty (and a counterweight to more dominant traditions celebrating military heroism).[725] Moving into the 20th century, however, the affective device of decomposing or exposed flesh is increasingly foregone, for that of the stripped skeleton. In Otto Dix's *Schadel (Skull)*, (1924), or Edward Burra's, *Skull in a Landscape* (1946), for example, the bared (and in the former dismembered) skull motif gives form to the more totalising and mechanised destruction of the body of modern warfare [see Figures 328-29].[726]

While the toxic red gradated sky of Burra's *Skull in a Landscape* is often seen to offer reference to the dawning of the nuclear age, (and may well have offered a model for the toxic gradation from yellow to blue in the sky of Barnes' mural), the affective device of a skull in a

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725. It is worth noting, in this regard, Rops' reactions to a visit to the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian war. As Victor Arwas framed it: 'Camille Lemonnier, the Belgian writer, was there [on the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian War] too and he reports Rops saying: "[w]hat a book one could do on this. Yes, this whole plain crawling with human brains, the dead on the grass turning into fertilizer for tomorrow's corn, the almost voluptuous reek of this vast putrefaction showing the idea of earth in love…You see the effect of our old sensitivity is to prevent us from seeing the humorous side of death, a cold, stiff, terrible humour".' For Arwas, '[t]his glimpse of death and decay was to flavour much of his later work'. Arwas, *Félicien Rops*, 7.
726. Such developments might be read in relation to what Benjamin Ziemann, has described as a 'whole new field of research' around the 'pictorial representation of armed conflict', and in particular to what he describes, (following Bernd Hüppauf) 'as a "crisis of representation" that emerges in the photography of the First World War, if not before… [around] the problem of how to represent trench warfare visually, where the battlefield is effectively a void.' The evisceration of flesh, and focus upon a stripped skeleton would seem a useful adjunct to this wider movement. Benjamin Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 237-238.

war-ravaged landscape remains broadly in line with Dix's focus. Carol Jacobi, however, has

noted that skeletons (whole or dismembered) also attained a new prominence in the post-war

years, offering a series of more or less 'oblique' references to the atomic, via associated

themes ranging from 'the prehistoric' to the 'silhouetting of the skeleton when the body is

penetrated by radiation'.[727] Henry Kay Henrion's 1963 *Stop Nuclear Suicide*, made for the

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, represents an archetypal, and forcefully direct

exploration of this last mode [see Figure 330].[728] Barnes' skeleton, however, is of a different

order: neither the survivor of a nuclear holocaust, nor its victim, but rather its *agent* and

origin. If this agency derives in large part from the image's origins in Rops' Satan, and the

stripping of the flesh can be seen in line with the broader 20th century depictions, it is notable

that animated skeletons—more in line with José Guadalupe Posada's *Cavalderas*, or indeed

the medieval imagery of the plague from which they in part derived, than Dix's *Schadel*, or in

fact Henrion's *Stop Nuclear Suicide*—can be seen to permeate the anti-nuclear imaginary of

the Second Cold War. From the pageantry of nuclear parades, to the pages of *Peace News* and

the aesthetics of punk's second wave, this dramatic recasting of the skeleton as both agent

and symbol of destruction, would seem particular to the Second Cold War [see Figure 314

and 331-33].[729] Forging a sort of Freudian inversion to the erotic symbolism of missiles, such

skeletons point, at once mockingly and with purpose, to the perverse lunacy and threat of the

'death drive' manifest in nuclear brinksmanship.[730] In both its fatalism and its irony, such use

of the skeleton would seem to highlight the historical specificity of the nuclear threat in the

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727. For Jacobi, Giacometti's 'skeletons in space', ('the logo of existentialism'), the engagements of Isabel Hawthorne with bird skeletons and the wider prominence of the skeletal form in the art of immediate post-war years, were framed by multiple oblique references to the atomic bomb. These ranged from an associated sense of a return to 'primal origins', through to more direct reference of modern technologies and x-ray. Jacobi, "Cold War Feeling," 30-33.
728. It also, once more, reveals the increasingly direct approach to the representation of nuclear conflict in the immediate wake of the Cuban missile crisis.
729. Worley, "Under the Bomb."
730. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick; int. Mark Edmundson (London, New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

Second Cold War: a period in which the proximity of nuclear threat, was intertwined with something of its unfathomable distance for a generation raised under the pressing ontological spectre of totalised destruction, even as first hand memory of active conflict receded.

The animation of the gargantuan striding skeleton also highlights something of a wider transition observed by Benjamin Ziemann in the imagery of the international peace movement of the period: marking a shift from a focus on the victims of war and nuclear conflict, to a deepening stress on agency.[731] The wrapping of the skeletal figure in the flags of the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, defines this agency: emblazoning the Satan-derived agent of death with the insignia of the three most prominent Cold Warrior state actors. This tri-pronged attribution of blame again reveals something of the specific political thrust of the Second Cold War, in which, as Halliday and others have noted, the peace movement was less marked by Left-wing defences of the Soviet Union, and more inflected by a dually weighted anti-imperialism aimed at both Western *and* Eastern blocs (albeit with a greater emphasis —rendered by the scale of the flags—on the Western powers).[732] Beyond a bilateral focus, the pinpointing of state power also points to a growing tenor of anti-statism within the peace movement of the period. Fuelled in part by the chasm opening between a radical, Left-drifting tradition and the beginnings of the neo-liberal cooption of the centralised state, this anti-statism came from a wide spectrum of political and sociological formations (which will be explored in more detail below, in relation to the

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731. Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 254.
732. For Halliday, the Second Cold War was 'less anti-communist [than the First, but]…on the other hand, much of the left adopted positions that are themselves as opposed to the USSR as those of the right'. Halliday *Cold War*, 20. Though there had been some trace of such sentiment in the CND of the 1950s given the presence of a number of anti-Stalinist figures of the New Left, the Second Cold War, saw a greater emphasis on the need to forge common ground across Eastern and Western Blocs. In particular through the campaign group for European Nuclear Disarmament (END). As the co-founder of END, E.P. Thompson, highlighted that: 'distinguished voices, east and west—Sakharov and Zhores Medvedev, Lord Zuckerman and the Pugwash scientists are saying the same heart-stopping things about our common dangers and our common interest in survival. They are also saying that *they can no longer get through to political power*'. Thompson, "European Nuclear Disarmament," 277-282.

chapter's second mural). From Crass inspired anarcho-punks, through libertarian post-'68ers, the lingering social movementists of the first New Left, to the Eurocommunist elaborators of a Gramscian war of position, the peace movement, became a fulcrum of diverse anti-statist positions. For John Keane, writing in 1984, this 'anti-statism undoubtedly constitutes an important and new phase of the struggle…[i]f these anti-state and pluralistic features of the new British peace movement are considered together, it is not implausible to suggest that the decisive significance and political potential of the movement lies in its militant defence of a democratic civil society against the state'.[733]

The broad anti-statist dimensions of the mural's critique are given a satirical, comic, but nonetheless, politically directioned expansion, by the inclusion of a series of prominent states-persons, in the cartoonishly jagged aperture which frames a nuclear bunker, in the bottom right of the mural [see Figures 334-35]. There, hiding contentedly in the jowls of Parliament Square are Prince Charles, Margaret Thatcher, Norman Tebbit, the local Police Commissioner, and (Conservative Leader of the Greater London Council) Horace Cutler, in what became a rotating series of ignoble political figures.[734] With comically exaggerated heads—in later editions swigging champagne as the city above stands destined for obliteration—the figures cut somewhat against the enveloping pathos of the scene above. Though their small scale prevents too profound an effect upon the overall image, their presence—legible at eye level for a nearby viewer—recalls the humour, diverse visual registers and bitingly satirical streak which runs through Barnes' wider career. Beyond

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733. John Keane, cited in John Mattausch, *A Commitment to Campaign. A Sociological Study of CND* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 147. Mattausch's study of the CND, provides a nuanced and in-depth account of its sociological character. As will be explored below, Mattausch disagrees with Keane's characterisation of the peace movement as an embodiment of civil society, characterising it instead as 'more accurately described as one section of the state (the welfare section) protesting against the practices of its "warfare" counterparts.' *Commitment to Campaign*, 148.
734. In 1985 some figures were replaced with more contemporary political actors (largely Conservative MPs), including Jeffrey Archer, Douglas Hurd, Edwina Curry and David Owen.

stylistic continuity, however, the section also reveals the emerging prominence of the nuclear bunker in the cultural imagination of the period. This emerged in particular, in the wake of 1980's leaks of the government's plans for civil defence, which were much popularised and mocked by the peace movement.[735] The plans, published in May 1980 in a pamphlet entitled *Protect and Survive*, revealed the absurdity and horror of the Government's official preparations in the case of nuclear attack. Entailing a suspension of all democratic governance, the protection of strategic elites within bunkers and the establishment of military rule, they glossed almost entirely over the apocalyptic scale of human death and destruction, offering bureaucratic and neutral description of a military rule built on the ruins of apocalypse.[736] From television dramas like *Threads* to cabaret acts, the bunker was widely seized upon as an emblem of this bifurcated lunacy of impending destruction, and the wider complicity of the political class.[737]

At the opposite end of the cityscape from the bunker, rising up some two thirds of the wall from the horizon, Barnes' mushroom cloud offers a further enactment of the split between individual and global forces, micro and macro, (engendered in the offsetting of bunkered politicians and the flags of Cold Warrior states). Emerging from the shadows of the billowing form of the mushroom cloud, are images of screaming children (in the lower cloud) and the globe (in the upper). Partially masked by, but also animating, the strong and iconic form of the cloud itself, these features harness two distinct foci of contemporary Cold War

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735. E.P. Thompson's book *Protest and Survive*, was just one example amongst many which repurposed the Government's 'Protect and Survive' title. Peter Kennard provided a series of illustrations on the same title, whilst—as has been observed— a huge number of peace movement publications revelled in, recoiled from, or satirised the government's rhetoric.
736. Great Britain. Central Office of Information, *Protect and Survive* (London: HMSO, 1980).
737. As Ken Livingstone, future Leader of the Greater London Council, noted of the plans: 'this meant that as soon as war looked likely I would select two other members of the GLC and together we would one whisked to safety in a massive bunker in Essex, which was also designated for use by the Cabinet and the Royal Family. The thought of spending my last days locked in a bunker with Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet while all my friends died held little appeal'. Livingstone, *If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish it,* (London: Fontana,1988), 231.

iconography: stressing, as Richard Cork saw it 'that the threat is a global one and that its

long-term effects will endanger the future generation just as severely as today's

population'.[738] A focus upon human suffering had long been a trope of the peace movement,

with a particular focus upon the suffering of women, children and the family unit, marking a

particular focus in the 1940s and '50s.[739] The summoning of the global scale of the

destruction, however, is more contemporary. In part, perhaps, revealing what Benjamin

Lazier describes as the newly global consciousness of the 'Earthrise Era', it underscores the

global consequences of a nuclear exchange in an era in which the two superpowers contained

the capacity to destroy the earth twenty times over.[740] As E.P. Thompson observed, citing

Andrei Sakharov, 'the peril that threatens the world as a result of the estrangement of the

world's two superpowers' was terrifyingly absolute in its dimensions.[741] The superimposition

of the two modes—human victims and global dimensions—thus reconfigures a longstanding

emphasis on micro and macro scales, which Jolivette has observed runs across the nuclear

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738. Richard Cork, "The Skeleton on the Corner," *Evening Standard*, March 5, 1981.
739. '[The] attempt to show the viewpoint of those personally affected and concerned first appears after 1945 as depictions of passive suffering… These pictures have a predilection for women and children – especially little girls – as victims of war and violence, and the iconographic references are mostly to the Second World War and its immediate consequences, such as hunger and unheated houses. Even in the mid-1950s this was still the usual angle.' Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 252-253. Though Ziemann's focus is on the iconography of the West German Peace Movement, many of his observations carry weight in the British context.
740. The image of the globe is again—and more prominently—drawn upon in Barnes' next mural on a nuclear theme, *Riders of the Apocalypse*, 1983, which will be referred to below. Lazier, drawing heavily on the work of Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger and Hans Blumenberg, argues that the 'Earthrise era' is characterised by shifts in the 'world picture' instituted by the images space missions provided of the globe. Highlighting that one such image—'Blue Marble'— is reported to be the most disseminated photograph in human history, Lazier argues that, the 'earthrise era comprises several important developments. The first is the rise of an "Earthly vision," or a pictorial imagination characterised by views of the Earth as a whole...Views of Earth are now so ubiquitous as to go unremarked. But this makes them all the more important and their effects historically novel. Our ideas and intuitions about inhabiting the world are now mediated through images that displace local earthbound horizons with "horizons" that are planetary in scope'. Benjamin Lazier, "Earthrise; or, The Globalization of the World Picture," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 116, No. 3 (June 2011): 602-630.
741. 'What Sakharov has written about most of all has been "peaceful coexistence". As he has described the alternative: 'A complete destruction of cities, industry, transport, and systems of education, a poisoning of fields, water, and air by radioactivity, a physical destruction of the larger part of mankind, poverty, barbarism, a return to savagery, and a genetic degeneracy of the survivors under the impact of radiation, a destruction of the material information basis of civilization —this is the measure of "the peril that threatens the world as a result if the estrangement of the world's two superpowers".' Thompson, "European Nuclear Disarmament," 279.

age, to harness the dual poles of the present danger.[742] Set against the city below, it also offers a counterpoint to the local staging of the scene, highlighting both the individual and global dimensions which would accompany any urban destruction.

The image presented by the mural, therefore, is unrelenting, wide-reaching, historically mediated and pressingly contemporary. Despite its humour, the caring inclusion of local landmarks and the bright high-toned palette, it also offers a notable contrast with Barnes' preceding work, in both the overbearingly apocalyptic register and the strikingly global dimensions of the struggle it addresses. As many of the subsequent engagements with the mural attest, it is the bleakness of the mural's historical testament which remains the dominant tone.[743] Yet, to focus solely upon the negative aspects of the scene is to ignore the mural's subtler but driving testament to the peace movement, and what must surely be understood as its more *active* political assertion. For, as a 1981 press release for the mural stated it: '[t]o counterpose this dire scene and to show some hope for a future free from nuclear war, a hand releases a white dove, symbol of peace, which transforms in stages to the CND symbol as it strikes the head of Death'.[744] Traversing the top right hand corner, these features cut across the dominant register of imminent apocalypse, merging two of the most prominent symbols of the peace movement in a dynamic train. Benjamin Ziemann has suggested the representation of a dove in flight (rather than simply bearing an olive branch), marks an advance upon, or deviation from, more traditional ('early modern') images of the dove as a static and stative symbol of peace attained: an advance he traces back to Picasso's

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742. 'Informed by knowledge of the properties of the atom, shifts in scale, from micro to macro, are a device that can be seen in the work fo a number of artists and designers of this period.' Jolivette, "Introduction," in *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, Jolivette, ed., 2.

743. This was certainly the case for Geoff Dyer's 1989 mention of the mural, or for Hannah Miller's film (see chap. 3, n. 726). More recently, however, the mural's reinterpretation in the label and name of a 'Nuclear Dawn Beer' produced by Brixton Brewery (2017), or as a feature of the Brixton Pound, suggest a less profound engagement emerging.

744. Brian Barnes, "Masterpeace. Nuclear Dawn Press Release," 1981, ALMFP/ABB. Barnes has noted that the image of the hand was derived from a photo of Freddy Mercury. Interview with the author, August 2016.

1949 image for the Peace Congress [see Figures 336-37].[745] Here, however, the image of the

dove in dynamic action departs further from its stative origins, and (as in a 1982 West

German poster described by Ziemann), 'itself joins a movement which leads to a destruction

of weapons and thus finds the way to peace'.[746] Though compositionally subtle, the intrusion

of the train of peace fundamentally shifts the mural's message, transforming the imagined

apocalypse into a potentially illusory or symbolic space, through the introduction of a

secondary immanent possibility: that of the Peace Movement's triumph: with the shattering

of the skeleton's skull by the train of peace. The fact that, in the mural's world, only one of

these outcomes—the destruction of London or the triumph of the peace movement—remains

possible, establishes the dual liminality, which multiply reinforces the urgency of the call to

action: highlighting CND, and the broader peace movement as the only possible sphere of

resistance to the immanent apocalypse of the moment.

Localised Resistance: The Greater London Council, Peace Year and the 'Loony Left'.

*Whatever one's reservations about Ken Livingstone's GLC, it prised open the South
Bank, the concert halls and the public parks and gave them over to popular
performance. When Ranking Ann was toasting free on the stage of the Queen
Elizabeth Hall, Misty was making the County Hall car park shudder, ragas*

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745. Though Ziemann suggests the poster to date from 1949 (see note below), it is the 1950 Peace Congress in Sheffield for which a flying dove motif would seem to have been used (see figures 336-337). Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 255. Picasso's frequent reworking of the dove (and of course other) motifs, however, make exact chronological tracing complicated.

746. '[I]n 1982, a graphic artist invented a sequence of images showing a hand, first emerging from a dove of peace, then clenching into a fist, then reaching to the bottom edge of the picture and there striking down fighter planes and cruise missiles. This version of the dove symbol harks back to 1949, when Picasso designed posters for the communist peace movement. Before Picasso the dove had not been shown flying, but rather conveying the message of peace in the form of an olive branch. Here, however, the dove itself joins a movement which leads to a destruction of weapons and thus finds the way to peace. The sequence also marks a clear deviation from early modern allegorical iconography, in which Pax and the dove only arrive once peace has actually been established'. Though executed by different means, Barnes' image offers a similar (and antecedent) example of this new mode. Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 255.

tintinnabulated through the Purcell Room and ice-cream vans sounded outside, one began to hear what a socialist city might sound like.[747]

David Widgery, 1986

You work for the state: in the state, but against the state. You work to change the restricting nature of the state, to fight for more democracy, more collective practices, new cultural sites, etc. It is in this sense that we need to understand the state not only as an institution, but also as a form of social relations, a class practice.[748]

Alan Tomkins, 1984

Nuclear Dawn was opened by the President of CND, and ex-Labour MP, Hugh Jenkins on February 21st 1981 [see Figures 338-39]. Winning praise from art critic Richard Cork, it was reproduced as a poster by CND, finding a worldwide distribution.[749] Local Conservative councillor Patricia Jenkyns was—perhaps predictably—less impressed, objecting in the South London Press, to 'ratepayers' money being spent on political propaganda', whilst finding 'shocking' both the mural's content and the 'waste of money' it constituted.[750] Within months of its completion, however, the mural was immersed in a bigger shock: its engagement with the themes of urban apocalypse and resistance reframed, as several days of urban insurrection flowed past and in the streets surrounding it [see Figures 340-41]. The events followed several months of rising tension between the Metropolitan Police and London's black and Afro-Caribbean communities. These tensions were exacerbated in the

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747. David Widgery, *Beating Time. Riot'n'race'n'rock'n'roll* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), 188.
748. Alan Tomkins, "Leisure Policy," (originally presented as a background workshop held at the Arts and Unemployment Conference, Newcastle, 24 November 1984), printed in GLC, *State of the Art or Art of the State. Strategies for the Cultural industries in London.* (London: Greater London Council, 1985), 168.
749. See Richard Cork, "The Skeleton"; Steven Lobb, *Brian Barnes*; and Brian Barnes, email to the author, February 2018.
750. Cllr Jenkyns, did go so far as to concede that, 'the mural might be quite good from an artistic angle'. For his part, Barnes acknowledged that the mural was political, adding, 'I am not interested in a political debate and in letting the mural become a platform for the Tories. Of course people will object to it but what we are saying is that if the government stopped spending money on nuclear weapons Lambeth wouldn't have the problems it does because the Government would be able to give it its full grant'. Barnes and Jenkyns quoted in: Ian Mallin, "'Political Mural' upsets Tory Councillor," *South London Press*, February 24, 1981, 3. ALMFP/ABB

strong Afro-Caribbean community of Brixton, by the launch of a plainclothes police operation at the beginning of April. '*Operation Swamp 81*' saw nearly a thousand young black men subjected to racially profiled 'stop and search' under the powers of an obscure early 19th century by-law. Following the death of Michael Bailey in what looked to bystanders to be police custody, three days of arson, looting, pitched battles with the police and mass arrests ensued. The uprisings, soon known as 'the Brixton Riots', were heavily covered in the national news, and have been seen, alongside a series of other urban 'riots' across the decade, as a crystalline symbol of the social and racialised tensions and divisions which characterised Thatcher's administration and the deepening 'urban crisis' across the period.[751] The connection of the scenes to the mural's apocalyptic tenor was noted, Barnes recalls, by the South London Press in the weeks following the uprisings, with one writer going so far as to suggest the mural responsible for the disturbances.[752]

Less than one month later, a Labour Party administration soon to be led by Ken Livingstone, won control of the Greater London Council (whose base at County Hall featured prominently in *Nuclear Dawn* amidst the buildings of state in the foreground, and whose deposed Conservative leader, Horace Cutler, was pictured safely ensconced in the nuclear bunker).[753]

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751. See, Martin Kettle and Lucy Hodges, *Uprising!: Police, the people and the riots in Britain's Cities*, (London: Pan Books, 1982). For a much longer-term analysis of the historical forces leading up to the rebellions see A. Sivanandan, "From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain," *Race & Class* XXIII, 2/3, (1981/82): 111-152.

752. Brian Barnes, interview with the author, August 2016. Though I have not been able to find this reference, the wider tenor of the local journalism revealed the immediate politicisation of the events, with journalists reporting 'Fears that political extremists may move in to pick up the pieces in the wake of the Brixton riots', and noting that 'Brixton's police commissioner says he is keeping "an open mind" about claims that the weekend's riots were started by outside militants', "The Blitz of Brixton and the politics of Fear," *South London Press*, Tuesday April 14, 1981, 1. The contexts of Lambeth's increasing reputation as a bastion of the 'Loony Left', form a necessary background to such reports. For an in-depth analysis of this media coverage see James Curran, Ivor Gaber and Julian Petley, *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

753. County Hall appears centrally between the skeleton's stride, on the far bank of the river and sandwiched between the Shell building and Houses of Parliament. Cutler was a particularly unpopular figure, pioneering the sale of Council housing, soon adopted by Thatcher's government. Following his defeat he left politics to focus on his chain of strip clubs, whilst penning an autobiography. For critical accounts of Livingstone's rise see Jerry White, "The Greater London Council, 1965-1986," in *London Government 50 years of Debate: the contribution*

As a strategic metropolitan authority with responsibilities for transport and planning, and an enduring, but by 1981 significantly diminished, housing stock, the GLC had rarely featured in the plans of the Labour Left.[754] In the wake of Thatcher's 1979 election victory, however, a new generation of activists within the leftward drifting London Labour Party began to set their sights on the 1981 GLC elections in the hope of developing a model of 'what a socialist Labour government could look like under Tony Benn'.[755] Though often seen as part of a growing movement of radical Labour Left administrations across the period, James Curran, Beatrix Campbell and Martin Jacques, have noted the significant features which mark the GLC apart from the broader Labour Left administrations.[756] Fusing aspects of Tony Benn's 1974 Alternative Economic Strategy, with a pluralist (and populist) attempt at 'giving power away to the people', 'Ken's GLC', both built upon and gave substantial grants to the community groups and social movement politics that had flourished across the preceding years.[757] For Left-wing admirers, a hostile Right-wing media and many Londoners alike, the administration became a prominent and leading example of a new mode of Left politics.[758]

of LSE's Greater London Group. LSE London Development Workshops, Ben Kochan, ed., (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2008), 33-44; or Horace Cutler, *The Cutler Files* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982). For an insider's account see Livingstone, *If Voting Changed.*

754. Though Herbert Morrison had made the London County Council into a bastion of his paternalist vision of Labourism in the 1930s and '40s, the GLC had been created in 1965 by a Conservative administration keen to gerrymander themselves into power.

755. Ken Livingstone, *If Voting Changed*, 127.

756. As Campbell and Jacques saw it in 1986, here was 'a very different kind of Labour group, populated by a new kind of Labour activist. They were people who had often acquired political skills and ideas from outside the administration of local government - through feminism, community politics, the student movement, the Vietnam campaign or wherever'. Beatrix Campbell and Martin Jacques, "Goodbye to the GLC," *Marxism Today* (April 1986): 6. For Curran, an academic judgement that 'the urban left was innovative, flawed, influential and transitory', has thus far paid 'insufficient attention to… important differences between left wing councils in different parts of the country', and in particular the divergence between 'workerist' traditions 'strongly influenced by Militant Tendency' and the 'radical pluralist councils that attempted to build an alliance between town hall socialists and trade union, ethnic, feminist, gay and other groups in the community in a bid to forge a new, progressive coalition...(e)xemplified by GLC and left wing borough councils in London'. Curran, "A New Political Generation," in Curran, Petley and Gaber, *Culture Wars*, 6.

757. James Curran, points out that Livingstone's GLC offered funding to voluntary groups at an 'unprecedented scale', rising from £2 million in 1981-2, to £47 million by 1983-4. Curran (1987), "The Boomerang Effect: the Press and the Battle for London, 1981-86," in James Curran, Anthony Smith, Pauline Wingate, *Impacts and Influences: Media Power in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1987), 125.

758. The Private Eye were perhaps the most vociferous in their assaults on 'Ken's GLC', with regular columns and cartoons including 'Ken Spart', 'the Gays', 'Wimin' and 'Ginger Tom', giving cruel form to the homophobia, misogyny and ad hominem attacks with which the GLC's support to new constituencies was treated. For praise of the GLC see *Marxism Today*, (April 1986); Franco Bianchini, "GLC RIP, Cultural Policies

For all its successes, 'Red Ken's' GLC', operated with limited and reducing powers. As Doreen Massey has observed, the result was a politics that was 'exemplary and rhetorical', in which 'if it was not possible with the powers and resources at hand fully to address the problems of the cities, nonetheless the possibility on principle of doing so could be established'.[759] These principles were perhaps most publicly played out through the initiation of the Fare's Fair policy, which, for a brief moment, brought free, and then significantly subsidised transport to Londoners (and following a highly publicised stand-off with the high court, brought the GLC's advocacy to the hearts of many Londoners).[760] There was also a wide-ranging attempt to open up the structures and halls of governance: extending the rights of committee membership and attendance as well as the availability of grants to constituencies previously excluded from state patronage and decision making.[761] Much to the

in London 1981-1986," *New Formations* Number 1 (Spring 1987): 103-117. For a more recent recounting of the administration, see The GLC Story, *The GLC Story. Oral History Project,* (London: The GLC Story, 2017).

759. 'The aim was to argue for alternatives and to establish through small and symbolic interventions the fact that an alternative politics was imaginable. In other words, if it was not possible with the powers and resources at hand fully to address the problems of the cities, nonetheless the possibility in principle of doing so could be established'. Doreen Massey, *World City,* (London: Polity Press, 2007), 88. It is worth noting that alongside Hilary Wainwright and Robin Murray, Massey was involved first hand in the Industrial Strategy of Ken's GLC. See David Featherstone, 'Doreen Massey obituary*,' The Observer*, March 27, 2016, accessed June 22, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/mar/27/doreen-massey-obituary.

760. 'Livingstone's GLC, with the support of most Londoners, had fought to establish a sensible funding regime for public transport in London and so ameliorate one of London's enduring disabilities. Its potential success is demonstrated by an estimated 10% increase in public transport use during the three months' operation of Fares Fair, and a 6% fall in cars entering London in the rush hour. It seemed preposterous that such a sensible strategy for Londoners should have been defeated in the courts - justice was with the Council but the law was against it. The GLC didn't give up entirely. A low-fare travelcard initiative called Just the Ticket followed in May 1983, again leading to very positive signs of increased public transport use and fewer cars. And a 'lorry ban' was implemented in central London from December 1984. By then, though, the government had removed responsibility for public transport in London from the GLC and given it to a new London Regional Transport Board, appointed by Ministers. Fares rose again from January 1985. Even so, in the memories of a generation of Londoners from 1981 on, it was better to have tried and lost than not to have tried at all.' White, "Greater London Council," 40-41.

761. As Livingstone explains, the campaign against the 'staid tradition of County hall', took many forms, and began from the off: 'Our open-door policy, and the decision to let any non-racist London group meet free of charge in the committee rooms, which in the past had stood empty at weekends and in the evenings, meant that the corridors were often filled with ordinary Londoners in all their diversity… At the same time as establishing our committee structure [on May 28 1981], we voted to welcome and entertain The People's March for Jobs [a contingent of 500 marchers who had set out on London across May against the soaring unemployment of Thatcher's Government, who the GLC accommodated on camp beds, fed and celebrated]… It was as though the People's March had humanised the very building in which the GLC was housed. This episode rapidly and

ire of the media, the GLC initiated specialised committees for 'Women', 'The Community Arts', and 'Ethnic Arts', and gave new and unprecedented support to a huge range of voluntary organisations and community groups. At the very moment in which Central Government cuts to local authorities, were undercutting the provision which had begun to emerge for such groups, the GLC welcomed them into the halls of municipal government. Through such activities the GLC moved beyond Labour's traditional base, offering unprecedented support to '[the] multiple social identities – including those of gender, race and sexuality – of a changing and more diverse society'.[762]

Owing in part to the nature of restrictions placed upon the GLC, cultural policy (which had received no more than quarter of a page in the 1981 Manifesto—and had previously been as marginal to the labour movement as it was to the parameters of the GLC itself) became an unprecedentedly prominent plank in the administration's activities.[763] Building upon London's pre-existent community arts tradition, and giving increased focus to what it titled 'Ethnic arts', the Arts and Recreation Committee, became a vibrant embodiment of the administration's broader attempts to open the doors, committees, chambers and coffers of County Hall to the city beyond. As Peter Pitt framed the work of the Arts and Recreation Committee he chaired (following Tony Banks' departure for the House of Commons in 1983) 'a major thrust…was to try and re-define the whole notion of cultural politics. To oversimplify we wanted to change the concept of the arts as 'high culture' to be enjoyed by the few on the South Bank or at Covent Garden. We wanted to increase participation which essentially meant breaking down those barriers that prevent too many from enjoying what the

dramatically brought home to many people that we intended to conduct ourselves in a completely different manner to previous administrations.' Livingstone, *If Voting Changed*, 151-152.
762. Curran, "New Political Generation," 5.
763. Bianchini, "GLC RIP," 117.

arts can undoubtedly provide'.[764] Though these ambitions were only ever half realised and

built upon precisely the mode of cultural politics which runs through this study, the adoption

of such aims by such a large and symbolic institution of the state was a remarkable

achievement. An achievement all the more remarkable for its un-repentantly Marxist framing,

with internal bulletins and policy statements alike revealing a significant processing of the

work of Stuart Hall and other New Left scholars regarding the fields of class, hegemony and

the state.[765] It was a framing which won the repeated ire of the Right-wing press, and

perhaps most memorably, caused Bernard Levin to launch a full-scale invective, declaring

that 'Caliban now has unlimited access to our money, and unlimited willingness to spend it

for his own dark ends'.[766]

Central to the achievement of the GLC's cultural policy was the support offered to the

community arts. The scale of the achievement, however, has at times been overstated,

particularly in relation to murals, whose political tone is often seen to confirm them as a

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764. Peter Pitt, "Foreword," in GLC, *Campaign for a Popular Culture. A record of Struggle and Achievement; the GLC's community Arts Programme, 1981-86*, (London: GLC Supplies Department CRS, 1986), 1.
Tony Banks served as the first Chair of the Arts and Recreation Committee, from 1981- 1983, before becoming the MP for Newham North. A prominent figure in Livingstone's GLC, he was to serve as Minister for Culture, Media and Sports for Tony Blair from 1997-1999.
765. Alan Tomkins, who was hired by Tony Banks as the Arts Policy adviser, had studied under Stuart Hall at the Open University, and would seem responsible for much of this tone. His appointment was typical of the GLC's approach: bringing Marxist intellectuals into the corridors of power. Alan Tomkins, interview with the author, August 2016.
766. 'Now, however, Caliban has emerged from his lair, blinking at the light and mumbling his watch-word: elitist. Mr Peter Pitt…has declared that "we want more working class and black audiences"….But there is one great, and terrible difference between the pioneers of art for the masses and the present attitude of the GLC. The former wanted – it was, in many cases, the mainspring of their existence – to illuminate the lives of the poor, the uneducated, the despairing, by making sure that they had cheap access to the best that art and craft had created through the ages. The wiser among these pioneers knew that those who availed themselves of what was offered would always be a minority, as indeed they have always been a minority among the rich, the educated and the confident...the contempt of the far left for the people whose interests they claim to have at heart is notorious. Surely this must be the only era in history, other than that of Nazi Germany, in which excellence is not something to admire and strive for, to encourage and share, but something to hate and mock, to root out and destroy…Caliban lives indeed…the Royal Festival Hall interior will have to be practically rebuilt for an evening of wrestling or snooker, all at a prodigious cost. But Caliban now has unlimited access to our money, and unlimited willingness to spend it for his own dark ends. Art on the South Bank, it seems, may have to go into exile, like the government of a nation subjugated by tyranny, until the GLC is swept away and the free republic of true civilisation is restored'. Bernard Levin, "The way we live now: And in the blue corner, Monty Verdi," *The Times*, February 22, 1984. In GLC/DG/AR2/4, Arts Committee Casing.

product of the 'municipal socialism' of Ken's GLC.[767] Against such readings, might be read

the Committee's own acknowledgement that, 'the GLC did not invent the community arts,

nor did it wish to embrace all of its history – which in London goes back to the 1960s. The

title 'Community Arts' was taken from an existing movement of artists whose avowed policy

was working with, rather than for, people with the ultimate end of what was sometimes very

loosely called social change'.[768] Though funding was split between the Arts Committee and

the Community Arts Committee much the same could be said for the GLC's relation to

murals.[769] At a moment when Arts Council funding was being scaled back and reorientated

towards a new model of 'public art', its grants to the Greater London Arts Association

diminished, and local government budgets slashed, however, the support was significant.[770]

Whilst the GLC's patronage did not fundamentally transform the practice of the artists of this

wider study, therefore, the support nonetheless constituted a lifeline.[771] The GLC's

767. See Owen Hatherley, "Introduction," in The Work in Progress, *Reclaim the Mural*, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2013).

768. GLC, *Record of Struggle*, 15.

769. Much of the GLC's funding for muralists came by way of revenue and capital grants administered through the Community Arts Sub Committee, which had been established in 1982, with an annual budget of £1 million, and by 1984/85 was commanding a budget of £2,416,489. Between 1981 and 1985 the sub committee allocated grants of £5,222,854 between 494 allocations. See GLC, *Record of Struggle*, 36. As the report highlights, the need for revenue and capital funding to establish stable and lasting community arts organisations was given high priority by the committee. GLC, 45. Groups like Greenwich Mural Workshop and Brian Barnes' Wandsworth Arts Resources Project, were particularly well placed to take advantage of these funds. Individual mural projects meanwhile were more often funded through the Visual Arts Committee, who as early as 1982 had stated a particular interest in the mural form. See GLC, "Grants For Murals, Museum and Multiethnic Festival," Press Release, Tuesday December 8th 1981, GLC/DG/PRB/35/037/432. Contrary to popular opinion, the GLC had in fact funded mural projects prior to Ken Livingstone's administration. With the outgoing Labour Administration of 1977 offering funds towards the Royal Oak Murals, mentioned at the close of Chapter 1.

770. In the build-up to the 1979 election, the New Right think tanks had proposed the abolition of the Arts Council. See Jonathan Harris, "Cultured into Crisis: The Arts Council of Great Britain," in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*, ed. Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 183. Though abolition was not undertaken, a deep-rooted ideological re-orientation confirmed Raymond Williams' suggestion, that, "[t]he true social process of such bodies as the Arts Council is one of administered consensus by cooption". Raymond Williams, "The Arts Council," in *Resources of Hope. Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso Books, 1989), 149. Though Williams also suggested that '[t]he first decisive appointment is that of the chairman,' (Williams, 149) and Thatcher's appointment of Sir William Rees-Mogg to that role was to wait until 1982, the reorientation had begun almost immediately upon her election, with the Arts Council's annual reports and internal bulletins reflecting the ideological foundations of New Right, in their promotion of relation with private business, their acquiescence to massive cuts, and their prizing of enterprise, economic reason, and big-name artists. A fuller account of this shift will be dealt with in the Conclusion.

771. Brian Barnes and Carol Kenna, interviews with the author, August 2016.

achievement—here as elsewhere—consisted in large part in its willingness and capacity to build upon and support pre-existent movements and communities of interest, welcoming them into a previously hostile state apparatus, whilst—for a time—weathering the worst of the Tory inflicted cuts.

Peace Year

The funding stream for the *Hackney Peace Carnival Mural* examined below exemplifies the GLC's tendency to build upon, and give funding to, pre-existing social movements, whilst at the same time standing apart from the more responsive means of project or revenue grants which typified the Council's grant giving in the arts. The *Hackney Mural* was commissioned as one of a series of six murals, made at five sites across inner London, from a collective named the *London Muralists for Peace*, in alignment to a broader cultural programme in promotion and celebration of the GLC's 1983 'Peace Year' celebrations. That programme saw the GLC commission or stage exhibitions, plays, cabaret, music festivals, dance events, publications and a series of anti-nuclear photomontages by Peter Kennard displayed on prominent billboards across the city [see Figures 342-43].[772] With a budget of £200,000, the 'Peace Year', took its inspiration from the UNESCO Year of Peace, coincided with the height of CND's activities (in preparation for, and last ditch attempts to halt, the arrival of Cruise missiles in the Autumn), and was used to bolster the GLC's declaration of London—along with a number of local councils across the country—as a Nuclear Free Zone.[773] Outwards facing, demonstrative, innovative, and overtly hostile to the direction of travel under Thatcher's administration, Peace Year typified the GLC's model of politics. Utilising the

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772. Opening with an exhibition of Kennard's montages and a speech by E.P. Thompson in County Hall, the programme was indicative of the mode of cultural politics the GLC forwarded, and was credited, perhaps optimistically, by Ken Livingstone, with a significant shift in public opinion against nuclear arms. See Livingstone, *If Voting Changed*, 233.
773. See, for example, Curran, "The Boomerang Effect," 125.

Council's prominence as the strategic authority in the nation's capital city, with a base just across the river from the Houses of Parliament, the Peace Year project fused a generous understanding of the political dimensions of culture, a familiarity with the power of advertising and the potential of celebration. It played a prominent role in the GLC's recasting of London as a radical and globally orientated city.[774] It was, as such, a particularly forceful embodiment of a wider trend of the GLC, to pursue a local internationalism and politics of place.[775] In the case of the Peace Year, the strategy would seem to have worked: foregrounding the GLC as an advocate for the interests of Londoner's and transforming the Capital into one of the more strongly anti-nuclear cities in the country.[776]

The capacity of the GLC—a body of the state—to carry out such a broad scheme of cultural patronage, pitched quite directly against the foreign policy of the national Government under Thatcher points towards a contradiction at the heart of this chapter, the peace movement and the broader moment of mural production. Against the more rudimentary understandings of the state as a monolithic block or unmediated instrument of ruling class power to be seized or

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774. 'The GLC used press advertising and the billboards, hosted a plethora of popular entertainment, and had that GLC motif everywhere, from the Thames Barrier to the South Bank, from Crystal Palace to the London marathon. This visibility helped define the GLC in a different way, making it integral to the life of the city. The advertising was not confined to abolition. They ran a long campaign for London as a nuclear-free zone. It was as sophisticated as commercial advertising but the images could hardly have been more contrasting'. Campbell and Jacques, "Goodbye," 9.

775. From the hosting of Irish Republican politicians to the staging of exhibitions of Soviet art, and the construction of a Peace Pagoda by Tibetan monks in Battersea Park, this sense of 'local internationalism and a politics of place' was crucial to the GLC's direction under Livingstone. Though mocked in the press, Doreen Massey underscores the significance of the achievement: 'Local internationalism ignores such hierarchical presumptions [that local politics is less important than national]. It cuts right across the scalar geographical imagination that supports the discourse of subsidiarity. Local authorities should have their own 'foreign politics', in the sense of enquiring into and taking responsibility for the wider implications of their places. And this is not a matter only for local states but for local places in a wider and more grass-roots sense. This could contribute to a more grounded (and alternative) globalisation that based itself firmly in the material juxtapositions of place while at the same time insisting on an acknowledgement of openness. Moreover *within* place the same point applies: the issue is not only (though it is most importantly) one of challenging the big battalions – in London, the financial City for instance. 'Ordinary Londoners' are implicated too.' Massey, *World City*, 184-185.

776. 'Nationally opposition to unilateral disarmament was running at 52 per cent, with 39 per cent in favour. After our peace year campaign the London figures showed 48 per cent opposed and 44 per cent in favour'. Ken Livingstone, *If Voting Changed*, 340.

crushed, or even the more nuanced, but still insufficient Gramsican divisions between state

and civil society, and the state's coercive and co-optive forces, it reveals the extent to which

the state constitutes what Nicos Poulanzas, in 1978, called a 'complex of apparatuses' and

'condensation of the relations of class forces'. As Poulantzas saw it, '[t]he state does not

produce a unified discourse, but several discourses that are adapted to the various classes and

differentially incarnated in its apparatuses according to their class destination'.[777] The GLC

under Ken Livingstone, and Peace Year in particular, reveal the extent to which, even as the

neoliberal consensus began to tighten its grip, and re-orientate the state to the interests of

financial capital, divergent discourses and alignments of class power remained possible. In

this respect the GLC's Peace Year, highlighted the GLC's searching for, and temporary

attainment of an alternative mode of class power, wielded by an alternative social bloc.

Though often conceived as an expression of civil society or '*middle class radicalism'*, the

peace movement might instead, be productively seen—at least in part—as John Mattausch

has pointed out, as emblematic of a new form of 'welfare state class'.[778] Through its

expansion of patronage, and its pluralist mode of politics, the GLC extended, drew upon and

appealed to the 'welfare state employees' Mattausch describes, as well as the more traditional

elements of the labour movement and a range of new constituencies. As will be seen Peace

Year thus became a focus for the potential of a new pluralist mode of Left politics which

looked beyond the pitted oppositions of the state and civil society; the Labour movement and

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777. Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 2014), 32.
778. Mattausch, *Commitment to Campaign*. Mattausch's study of the sociology of CND, was written in the 1980s, and from the position a supporter. Bringing the insight of 1970s Marxist theory and sociology, it firmly rejects the instrumentalist, and essentialising model which Fred Parkin had used to brand CND as a model of 'middle class radicalism', *and* the models which saw CND as a remarkable flowering of anti-statist civil society. Instead, it observes that CND was a testament to and product of a new mode of 'welfare state employee' who could no longer fit in preceding divisions between (for example) manual and clerical labour. Where Mattausch's study falls down (with hindsight) however is in its rehearsing and foregrounding of a 1950s Bevanite contrast between the 'warfare' and 'welfare' states as *the* primary social conflict of the era. With hindsight (and to many at the time) it is clear that Thatcher's reorientation of the state and class power, stretched beyond the enrichment of warfare, to constitute a new alliance with financial capital, and a fundamental blow to the post-war social contract itself.

social movements; and a static analysis of class. The mural commissions, in particular, reveal the extent and hopes for a political strategy which, as a 1979 leaflet (echoed by a number of officials and politicians at the GLC called it), worked both 'in and against the state'.[779]

The Peace Year Murals

Though developed and promoted in tandem with the broader Peace Year activities, the six murals produced by the London Muralists for Peace, were in some senses conceived at one degree of separation. Funded through the diversion of £40,000 from the GLC's budget for purchasing art works for the decoration of County Hall, rather than the main Peace Year stream, the idea for the murals would seem to have emerged and developed through conversations between a group of muralists, members of the GLC's Arts and Recreation Committee impressed by the *Nuclear Dawn Mural*, and CND across the Autumn of 1982.[780] In January 1983, these conversations were formalised in a funding application for 'upwards of five murals' to be made across London, by the 'London Muralists for Peace'.[781] London Muralists for Peace were founded as a collective the same month, 'to paint murals of the highest quality, on the theme of peace, involving peace groups and local people where possible in their design and execution, in London between March 1983 and March 1984 to coincide with GLC Peace Year'.[782] The collective initially included ten artists spread across

779. London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, *In and against the State / the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, A Working Group of the Conference of Socialist Economists* (London: Pluto, 1980).
780. As Barnes recalls it, it was he who presented the idea of the murals to the GLC Arts and Recreation Committee's chair, Tony Banks, who—impressed by Nuclear Dawn—agreed. Carol Kenna and Alan Tomkins claim not to remember the precise mechanics, though Tomkins recalled a meeting at which final proposals for Peace Year were discussed, describing it as a somewhat chaotic and last-minute affair. Alan Tomkins, Brian Barnes, and Carol Kenna, interviews with the author, August, 2016. The papers of the Muralists For Peace, held by Barnes, do not shed light on these early stages but mention a November meeting with CND activists at which the idea was fleshed out, the constitution and official lodging of a funding application in January 1983, and the release of funds in June, 1983. See GLC, "Arts And Recreation Committee Report, January 1983: Visual Arts Proposals," 6, point iii and Brian Barnes and Steve Lobb, "London Creates Six Anti-Nuclear Murals," *Community Murals Magazine*, No. 2 (Spring 1984): 9-12. Both ALMFP/ABB.
781. GLC, "Arts and Recreation Committee Report, January 1983".
782. London Muralists for Peace, "Foundation Document," January 1983, ALMFP/ABB. In a later press release and funding documents from the GLC the purpose is stated as 'completing five or more murals that would match the 'prestigious and professional appearance of the Brixton Mural ('Nuclear Dawn')'. ALMFP, ABB.

five geographically based groups, listed as: Brian Barnes ('Wandsworth'; eventually, *Riders of the Apocalypse,* Sanford Housing Cooperative, New Cross, Lewisham, 1983); Paul Butler and Desmond Rochfort ('Hammersmith'; eventually Paul Butler, *Shepherds Bush Peace Mural*, 1983-1984), Chris Cardale, Viv Howard, Carol Kenna and Steve Lobb, ('Greenwich'; eventually Greenwich Mural Workshop, *The Day Before* or *The Winds of Peace*, Creek Road, Greenwich, 1983), Dale McCrea and Pauline Harding ('Lambeth'; eventually *Peace* and *War*, Brixton, Lambeth, 1983-84), and Ray Walker ('Tower Hamlets'; eventually Ray Walker, Anna Walker and Mike Jones, *Hackney Peace Carnival Mural*, Dalston Junction, Hackney, 1983-1985).[783] With initial funds released in June of 1983, most of the groups set to work with immediate effect.[784] The artists met regularly across the period to discuss the thematic concerns, designs, financial practicalities and approaches. A 1983 group statement, summed up their collective position: '[t]hrough our art we bring to Londoners our view that nuclear confrontation is an abhorrent and unnecessary threat to existence and show that we believe mass opposition to this policy, and support of unilateral nuclear disarmament is the only sensible course'.[785] For Brian Barnes and Steve Lobb, writing in early 1984, the opportunity to work in this collective manner with a group who were 'not just fine artists, but political people committed to a cause', had been of significant mutual benefit.[786]

Five of the six murals commissioned from London Muralists for Peace, were completed between 1983 and 1984. Ranging from Paul Butler's complex, dialectically balanced, horizontally fragmented, multi-scene composition at Shepherd's Bush, through Greenwich Mural Workshop's localised, aerially viewed urban vista, defended from encroaching missiles

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783. London Muralists for Peace, "Foundation Document."
784. The question of the release of funds was a particular source of discontent in extended exchanges of letters both within the group and to the GLC. See, Letters from Ray Walker and Brian Barnes, 1983-84, ALMFP/ABB.
785. London Muralists For Peace, "Autumn 1983 Group Statement," ALMFP/ABB.
786. Barnes and Lobb, "Anti-Nuclear Murals," 12.

by a celestially hovering human chain of pyjama-clad peace campaigners, to Brian Barnes'

extra-planetary view of the Earth encircled by missile-straddling Cold Warriors, the murals,

pursued a wide range of visual strategies to fulfil their common thematic brief [see Figures

344-48]. Such heterogeneity notwithstanding, the murals executed across 1983 and 1984,

reveal a significant degree of iconographic and thematic continuity with *Nuclear Dawn*.

Crucially, each of them—if the two Brixton murals, by Pauline Harding ('*War*') and Dale

McCrea ('*Peace*'), which faced each other across a park in Vining Street, Brixton, are taken

as a pair—tackles the theme of 'Peace' through the foregrounding of its symbolically

rendered stand-off with the forces of 'War', (the former carried in *Nuclear Dawn*, by the

thematically resonant but compositionally marginal interjection of the Dove and CND logo

against the skeleton's motion).[787] Though divergently pitched with regards to the temporal

moment and the implied outcome of the stand-off, (ranging from the post-apocalyptic image

of a mutilated dove set against a looming war machine in McCrea and Harding's Brixton

pair, through to the liminal depiction of the floating multi-ethnic figures at the moment of

missile-shattering triumph in GMW's), it is of note that the five earliest murals represent the

ascendant or vanquished forces of peace in approximately equal compositional weighting to

those of war.[788]

This summoning of 'peace' through the countervailing state of 'war' is, at one level, in line

with what Benjamin Ziemann has defined as a tendency of protest movements generally, and

the peace movement specifically, towards binary codes of communication: stressing the

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787. The paired Brixton murals, offer a deeply pessimistic conclusion of a radioactive world and butchered dove bound in barbed wire. The Greenwich mural, is more optimistic, a human chain of a multi-'racial' community seen to literally smash the metal bombs into shards. Paul Butler's Shepherds Bush mural and Barnes' second New Cross one, meanwhile, push at the more philosophical dimensions of the theme, exploring (in the former) the moral ambiguity of technological development under capitalism, and (in the latter) a more partisan image pointing once again to the liminality and pressing existential threat of the moment.
788. A notable contrast with Nuclear Dawn's much more dominant compositional focus upon war.

existence, or possibility, of peace through the symbolic representation of its negation.[789] The

relatively balanced embodiments of war and peace in the murals designed across the first half

of 1983 also register the increasingly pressing social contestation between a peace movement

reaching its height in the build-up to the scheduled arrival of the Cruise Pershing II missiles

in the autumn, and a government pursuing an increasingly bellicose position towards both

external and internal enemies. As Thatcher's memoirs recall, the political potential of fusing

the spheres of internal and external policy was brought forcefully to light by the popular

reactions to the Falklands War of 1982, which 'transformed the British political scene'.[790] As

Thatcher continued (omitting mention of well cultivated links with the press), 'without any

prompting from us, people saw the connection between the resolution we had shown in

economic policy and that demonstrated in the Falklands crisis'.[791] Across 1983, and in

particular in the build-up to June's General Election, the Conservatives expanded their

offensive, mobilising a rhetorical battle against the serried ranks of the 'Enemy Within'.

Given its straddling of civil society and international relations, the peace movement,

therefore, became a particularly loaded site of contestation. On taking office as Secretary of

State for Defence, in January of 1983, Michael Heseltine, became a pivotal figure in the

attacks on peace campaigners, utilising information from the secret services to denounce

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789. 'Like the functional systems of modern societies, protest movements use a bifurcation or binary code for communication. Such codes mark a clear preference for one of the two distinguished sides…but this does not mean that the rejected side (the rejection value) is negligible or superfluous… This constitutive asymmetry also applies to the codes of protest movements: on the one side the protesters, on the other what they are protesting against. Peace movements use this code to stress the distinction between violence and non-violence, a distinction that is the code of peace movement communication. Protest communication has to convey what it is in favour of, but this can only be done by rejecting dangers arising from political decisions, the observation of which motivates and justifies its intervention. The peace movement cannot designate peace as its highest good without the rejection of weapons, violence and war'. Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 258-259.

790. Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 264. Many at the time and since have suggested that Thatcher's motivations for, and framing of, the Falklands war were directly pitted to precisely this motive.

791. Thatcher, 264. For analysis of Thatcher and the New Right's strategic courting of the press, see Tom Mills, "Chapter 5: The Making of a Neoliberal Bureaucracy," in *The BBC. Myth of a Public Service* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 254-300.

campaigners and discredit the movement.[792] For Heseltine, writing in April 1983, CND

constituted 'an organisation led and dominated by Left-wing activists ranging through the

Labour Party to the Communist Party. Many people attracted to the peace movement will just

not want to believe that behind the carefully tuned phrases about peace lies the calculating

political professionalism of full time Socialists and Communists'.[793] Such assaults were

expanded across the media and beyond and were pivotal to the 'Enemy Within' narratives

that Nancy Murray and others have observed as so central to the Conservative

administration's cementing of hegemony.[794]

In this climate the centralised symbolic stand-off between *war* and *peace* in the Peace Year

murals made between 1983 and 1984 worked at multiple registers: channelling the longer

running and more contemporary iconography of the 'nuclear age', it gave testament and

support to the contemporary peace movement, whilst also pointing towards the urgency of the

broader societal conflicts with which that movement was by now firmly intertwined. The

symbolic expansions of war and peace, thus offer broader insight into the fault lines of

political contestation: 'peace' finding form in the sites, actions and strategies of the

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792. As a 1983 article in Peace Line stated: 'The government's own CND counter offensive is well underway, spearheaded by Michael Heseltine. An indication of Heseltine's concern about CND is the immediate reply he sent – by messenger – to a letter from Bruce Kent...a final decision on the million pound anti-CND advertising campaign has yet to be taken; not to mention the £5,000,000 spent annually by MoD on "Information".' London Peace Line, "Tory Smear Campaign*,*" *London Peace Line* (April 1983): 4. See also, Henning, *A Personal Account*, 22 and Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook*, 65.
793. Cited in Ruddock, *CND Scrapbook*, 65.
794. The New Right even went as far as to found organisations devoted to an attack on the peace movement, including 'The Coalition of Peace Through Security' and the 'Campaign For Defence and Multilateral Disarmament'. As Peace Line explained: 'A number of groups have been formed recently whose explicit aims include countering CND…[they have carried out] various activities, such as anti-CND banners trailed by low flying aircraft... Among most outspoken of the anti-CND groups is the Coalition for Peace Through Security (CPS), based at Whitehall. Most interesting of their material is perhaps the pamphlet "30 questions and Honesty Answers about CND", whose cover – apart from the hammer and sickle, and the allusion to honesty, is indistinguishable from CND's own pamphlet. The questions too are identical except for number 30: How do I oppose CND?' London Peace Line, "Tory Smear Campaign*,*" 4.

contemporary peace movement,[795] multi-ethnic communities united in action,[796] harmoniously balanced rural and urban landscapes,[797] internationalism, children, women and the icons of the feminist movement;[798] war, in missiles and armaments,[799] political leaders from Eastern and Western blocs,[800] faceless bureaucrats or soldiers,[801] and barren, fenced and militarised landscapes.[802] Ranging from images of contemporary protests, through thematic explorations of gender, the environment and governmental rot, to more existential mediations on modernity, technology, teleology and capitalism the murals offer a cross-section of the broader symbolic markers which ran through the peace movement *and* broader moment of political contestation. In so doing they offer a taste of what Murray described, in the epigraph to this chapter, as 'the forces which [in the New Right's imaginary] weakened the body politic*', whilst also paying tribute to Benjamin Ziemann's contestation that the iconography of the Peace Movement in the 1980s remains a richly inventive and thus far overlooked subject of attention.[803] Above all, perhaps, they reveal the extent to which the peace movement and its eschatological imaginary, offered both an umbrella movement, in which diverse forces of opposition could unite, and a metonym for the advancing societal contestations of the period.

795. In the form of the Greenham Common Fence in Brian Barnes, *Riders of the Apocalypse*, 1983 and the human chain in GMW, *Winds of Peace*, 1983.
796. In GMW's, Brian Barnes' and Paul Butler's Peace Year murals.
797. In GMW's, Brian Barnes, and Paul Butler's murals.
798. In Butler and Barnes' murals.
799. In all the murals excepting McCrea's.
800. As the re-cast *Horsemen* of Durer's apocalypse, in Barnes' mural.
801. In Butler and Harding's murals.
802. In McCrea and Butler's murals.
803. Murray, "Anti-racists," 3; and Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 256.

The Hackney Peace Carnival Mural

As a series and individual works, the aforementioned Peace Year murals remain deserving of greater attention than the limits of this chapter allow. The *Hackney Peace Carnival*, or *Dalston Mural* (as it is also known)—designed by Ray Walker in 1983 and completed by Mike Jones and Anna Walker in 1985—however, stands slightly apart, and demands our focus. Picking up on a number of themes common to the broader Peace Year Murals, but forsaking the symbolically rendered binary stand-off which underpinned the earlier completed works, the mural offers an extension of Walker's evolving mode of socially embedded realism, and a utopian counterpoint to the imminent apocalypse of *Nuclear Dawn*. Ray Walker, it will be recalled, had worked on the *Chicksand Street Mural* from 1979-80, and was one of the three artists called upon to complete the *Cable Street Mural* following David Binnington's departure from the project in June 1982. With work on *Cable Street* ongoing through summer 1983, Walker accepted an invitation from Barnes and Stephen Lobb (of GMW), to become a founding member of the group soon to be known as the London Muralists for Peace (henceforth, LMFP) in November 1982, balancing work on the two projects through to summer 1983.[804] This continued an intense moment of activity with four exterior mural projects running end-to-end with two commissions for hospital panels (at the Whittington in 1978 and Newham in 1981) and his Army Recruitment Triptych for the Imperial War Museum (1982).

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804. Walker was involved in the meetings with the GLC in November and January, before funding was finally confirmed for the project in March 1983.Alongside continuing work on Cable Street, Walker assisted with the priming and squaring of the wall for Barnes' mural at Sanford Housing Coop, in New Cross, in May/June of 1983 (Walker and Butler were unique amongst the LMFP, in having experience of working with Keim Silicate paint systems of which three of the five Peace Year murals were painted). For an outline of Walker's schedule of work see Ray Walker, "Letter to Les Franklin, GLC Senior Arts Officer," 18th November 1983, ALFMP/ABB.

Fairly early in the process of working on the mural, Walker became active within the Dalston section of the Hackney branch of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Hackney CND (HCND) had formed in 1979, pulling together activists from Hackney Against Nuclear Waste and a broad spectrum of (predominantly Left leaning) political backgrounds, that sociological studies confirm to be fairly typical of CND in the period (and across its history).[805] The HCND newsletter, and Hackney People's Press pay tribute to the breadth and frequency of their activity, with a dizzying programme of engagements in local and national events throughout the early 1980s.[806] As a lifelong socialist from a working class Liverpool family, a former resident of West London's squats, an increasingly active member of the (Left-leaning) Hackney Labour Party, and a member of the organising committee of the influential Labour Left oriented Chartist group, Walker's political formation was likely well suited to the pluralist character of HCND, as would have been his interest in exploring new modes of 'cultural political campaigning'.[807] He acted as a convenor of HCND's media group across the summer of 1983, built a missile float for a 1983 vigil outside Hackney Town Hall, and was a regular or semi-regular presence in their busy programme of activities.[808] Such

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805. As local HCND activist Victoria Lukens remembers the group, '[t]here were a few older members who were old school Hackney born and bred socialists like Rudi Garfield who was a member of Hackney Workers Circle. We sort of got infiltrated by the local CPGB and then there were a few Socialist Workers/Trots as well. [There was a] little bit of conflict there and concern about any hijacking of "the cause". [But, e]veryone was welcome…HCND supported a few other causes and we would have stalls at various events that were not HCND organised. We went on demos for the miners and anti-racism marches, etc. We HCND members were in and out of each-others' houses for sub-committee meetings and on the phone to each other everyday. It was a fun time, very intense, and I don't think I have ever had such a large group of like-minded friends.' Victoria Lukens, Email to the Author, June 22, 2017. For a sociological study of CND, see Mattausch, *Commitment to Campaign*.
806. Across 1983 alone HCND staged plays, concerts, film screenings and exhibitions; organised, participated in or had a presence at festivals and carnivals; mobilised for national demonstrations at Greenham, Molesworth, Central London and beyond (coordinating flyposting, flyering, door knocking, stalls, billboard advertisements and coaches); organised solidarity events with Greenham women, continued the Peace Survey and petition; and held bi-weekly open meetings. See *HCND Newsletters*, 1983, and *Hackney People's Press*, 1983.
807. By Mike Davis' testament Walker's 'exuberant commentary and contagious enthusiasm' were frequently applied to 'developing a consciousness of the cultural-political dimension in socialist activity'. Mike Davis, "Not By Art Alone," in Ray Walker Memorial Committee , *Ray Walker* (London: Coracle Press, 1985), 65-66. Davis knew Walker through their shared involvement in Chartist, a group which had moved from the Trotskyist Left in the early 1970s towards a position inflected by Eurocommunism, but dedicated to integration in the Labour Party. They were key supporters of Livingstone's bid to become leader of the GLC in 1981.
808. Mike Davis, "Not By Art," 65-55. Though Davis recalls Walker's deep involvement, Lukens recalls that Ray was not one of the core activists: 'Ray did come to meetings - mainly about the mural'. Lukens, Email to the author, June 22, 2017.

involvement is confirmed by the September 1983 Hackney CND Newsletter, which noted

that 'Ray' had secured a site for his Peace Mural opposite Dalston Junction Station,

completed some designs for the mural, and was 'anxious for as many people as possible to

view his final sketches'.[809] The October issue reproduced an image of what it called the final

sketch for the mural (a large oil painting now housed in Tower Hamlets archive, see Figure

350), and noted that '[i]n six months time this colourful peace procession should be spilling

into Dalston Lane'. It observed that, 'Ray has developed the composition from photographs

he has been taking during the summer at various festivals so you might find yourself

portrayed among the throng'.[810]

The invitation for HCND members to view the final sketches built upon a series of

consultations stretching back to the beginning of 1983. As Walker explained in a Press

Release from late that year: 'I gave a slide show of murals painted by London muralists,

including myself, to Hackney CND who expressed their support. Later a public meeting of a

similar nature took place in June at Hackney Trades and Labour Hall where I exhibited early

working drawings. A discussion took place to construct a broad consensus of opinion of what

the mural ought to express'.[811] Elsewhere Walker refers to further consultations in October.[812]

This approach would seem to diverge from the more informal modes of consultation adopted

by Walker at Bow Mission and Chicksand Street, and might well have resulted from

conversations with other members of LMFP.[813] In contrast to the more symbolic engagements

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809. Hackney CND, *Newsletter*, October 1983, 3/251. CND Archives, London School of Economics, CND/ADD/8/3, CND Add, Local Groups Newsletters B-H, 1980-85, Folder: Part I (of 2).
810. Hackney CND, *Newsletter*. The calm tone of the column in fact masks what had been several months of frustration on Walker's part, in his attempts to secure full agreement to use the site. See Walker, "Letter to Les Franklin."
811. London Muralists for Peace, "Autumn 1983 Press Release," ALMFP/ABB.
812. Walker, "Letter to Les Franklin."
813. The process of showing slideshows of murals in advance of several rounds of consultation in relation to images was akin to that developed by Greenwich Mural Workshop. Carol Kenna, interview with the author, August, 2016.

of the other muralists from the group, however, was Walker's determination to make a mural

which paid testament to the *localised* manifestations of the peace movement. It was a

determination reinforced by his mode of visual research. Across 1983, Walker took in excess

of three hundred photographs at 'peace demonstrations, carnivals and festivals in Hackney,

Berkshire and Central London'.[814] As in his previous mural projects, these images served as a

base for an extended series of drawings in pencil, charcoal and other media. The drawings

which survive include psychological portraits, tectonically charged figure groups, contextual

motifs, urban scenes, and more imaginative and symbolic explorations. They are united by

their common focus on the outwards facing and public manifestations of the peace

movement—its floats, musicians, banners, processions and pageantry (see Figure 349).[815]

In working towards his final designs, Walker describes being guided by the 'consensus of

opinion' in his consultations. In particular, he noted that, '[e]veryone agreed that the major

problem to resolve is that of producing a peace mural that is unmistakably of a peaceful

nature as distinct from one which is of an anti-war / anti-nuclear character only, ie. of a

celebratory and peaceful nature'.[816] Though this emphasis on a thematic celebration of peace,

was implicit in the title of 'Peace Year', it was in fact rare amongst the year's cultural

manifestations. As Alan Tomkins, Officer and Policy Advisor to the GLC's Arts Committee,

recalled, the notion of celebrating peace posed an unfamiliar problem to many on the Left,

whose background in anti-imperialist struggles, or active contemporary involvement in

campaigns ranging from those against apartheid South Africa to those against the withering

cuts of Thatcher's administration, were more frequently pitched in oppositional registers.[817] If

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814. Walker, "Letter to Les Franklin."
815. This attention recalls an enduring focus in Walker's exterior mural work upon the *exterior* manifestations of the community of study, and once again, highlights his approach to exterior mural work as a celebration of communal life.
816. London Muralists for Peace, "Autumn 1983 Press Release."
817. Alan Tomkins, interview with the author, August 2016.

the Peace Year murals marked a move towards a more even balancing of the forces of peace and war than, say, *Nuclear Dawn*'s near unrelentingly apocalyptic tone, Walker's determination to offer a positively affirmative celebration stands apart, and may well in fact—given his mode of consultation—have been conceived in direct counterpoint to the earlier mural.[818]

The Designs

The surviving designs for the mural (an oil painting made in September 1983, a pencil drawing in October and a later mixed media work which was reproduced in April of the 1984), expand upon the observations of the studies: condensing a celebratory vision of 'peace' through a focus on the observed iconographic markers of the peace movement into a vibrant, overspilling street scene [see Figures 350-52]. Titled '*Hackney Peace Carnival*', the designs present a busy crowd processing through a street, not dissimilar to the one on which the mural was planned and eventually executed. A series of musicians (explored in several of the sketches, and tracing a thematic interest back to Walker's Newham Hospital panels) dominate much of the foreground, leading—and lending a visually imagined musical accompaniment to—a packed procession, bearing banners, floats, flags and placards.[819] Helmeted police bob innocuously amongst the crowd to the right, with a group of steel drummers raised somewhat ambiguously above. The whole is offered a sun-drenched luminosity (most pronounced in the oil painting) by the bright primary colours of 1980s fashion. The procession stretches approximately three quarters up the designs, crowned by a float, borne aloft by masked (or, in the canvas, hooded) figures, and framed between two

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818. Given that *Nuclear Dawn* was the only completed mural to address a similar theme in 1983, it seems likely that it would have featured in Walker's slide show, and the emergent discussions.
819. These figures are more prominent in the oil painting than in the other two sketches— where a row of heads, a gas masked figure, and a carnivalesque mask disappearing off the edge of the wall all serve to diminish their impact.

three-storey Victorian terrace facades. Above, enclosing the rear of the scene a brick railway bridge is topped by a blue sky punctuated by a soft cloud and the towers of the 1904 Navarino Mansions and a 1960s housing block, which appears slightly different in each of the designs.

Against the sweeping South London vista of Barnes' *Nuclear Dawn*, the more limited, but equally elevated birds-eye view of Greenwich offered in GMW's *Winds of Peace*, and the extra-planetary (and distinctly late 20th century) world picture of Barnes' *Riders of the Apocalypse*, the low vantage point, densely inhabited urban scene and quotidian human scale of Walker's designs are of note. Moving away from the distanced views of a conspicuously uninhabited and imminently threatened urban space, or—in the case of *Riders of the Apocalypse* —planet, Walker offers a familiar space in which to set the densely populated scene. In this, and other regards, the designs bear significant compositional affinity to Cable Street —and in particular the left section of the wall on which Walker worked alongside Paul Butler [see Figure 353]. In common with *Cable Street*, Walker's designs present approximately fifty figures enclosed within the confines of a terraced street, viewed from vantage point just above a crowd, with a compositional apex of that crowd offered at or around the midpoint of the wall. At Cable Street, however, these compositional features are all pitched to emphasise the violence and heroism of the events: with the exposed paving stones to the foreground and the radial fish-eyed distortions of the upper sections—the lingering influence of Binnington's design—sucking the viewer into and enclosing within, a vortex of violent action. In Walker's Dalston designs, by contrast, the perspectival effects are reversed: the terraced walls bulging at the base rather than collapsing from the top, the vanishing point raised above the crowd, and the packed head of the procession leaving no

access to the scene or sign of the pavement below. The effect is an ebullient and celebratory focus on the surging, outward thrusting, dynamic action of the crowd.

This focus upon the peace movement in dynamic action, aligns with a contemporary tendency Benjamin Ziemann has observed in his iconographic study of the posters of the West German peace movement. Emerging in the mid-1970s as a counterpoint to a longer running focus on the 'images of suffering inflicted by weapons and war' Ziemann notes a new mode of image, offering a focus 'on peace campaigners in action'.[820] A focus on 'campaigners in action' can, in fact, be traced back further in the UK, for example to Peter Peri's 1958 sculpture of two Peace Campaigners on the route to Aldermaston [see figure 354]. Walker's celebratory and joyful tone, however, pushes away from the austere heroism which characterised Peri's sculpture, and instead aligns with Ziemann's observations regarding the prefigurative character of the new mode, in which 'peace protests tended to be represented less as the means to an end and more as a means that incorporated part of the end and so anticipated it'.[821] This sense of the peace campaigners as *embodiments* and foreshadowings of peace rather than more narrowly instrumental actors, is equally central to Walker's image, which, as will be seen, offers, not just as an image of protestors, but 'a picture 'of peace'…a depiction of 'what it would be like to live in peace'…an anticipation of peace'. As Ziemann contends, here is an assertion that '[p]eace—overcoming weapons and violence—not only needed the peace movement to establish it, but was also… to be found within that very movement.'[822]

Ziemann's tracing of this prefigurative mode in temporal and symbolic contrast to 'early modern allegorical iconography in which pax and the dove only arrive once peace has

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820. Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 254.
821. Ziemann, 254.
822. Ziemann, 255-256.

actually been established', *and* the 20th Century focus on the victims of war, gives considerable insight into the historical and iconographic specificity of Walker's image.[823] It is worth, however, pushing from Ziemann's concentrated focus on iconography towards a more detailed examination of the relation of such iconography to the peace movement. For Walker's process reveals that, rather than stemming from the sphere of artistic or iconographic invention, the prefigurative celebratory tradition described by Ziemann, has firm roots in the contemporary peace movement itself. In this sense it is of note that Walker not only consulted with, photographed and sketched the activities of local peace activists, but in fact cited a specific event—the 1983 Hackney Peace Carnival, organised by Free Form Arts and 'local peace activists'— as a primary inspiration for the final designs.[824] Sparse documentation of the event notwithstanding, the involvement of Free Form Arts, a pioneering community arts organisation founded in 1972, gives a clue as to its tenor.[825] Though emerging from, and to an extent coexisting within, a similar milieu to the muralists covered by this study, Free Form's commitment to developing collaborative modes of practice in 'deprived' areas, frequently stopped short of, indeed actively avoided, overtly political demands, focussing instead upon more liberal sphere of collaborative practice with popular and democratic cultural forms.[826] Free Form's organisation of a localised Peace Carnival, at

823. Ziemann holds up early modern allegorical representations (for example, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory and Good Government*, in Siena Town Hall) as emblematic of a tradition in which 'Pax [appears] as the classical personification of peace, bearing her familiar attributes such as an olive branch – the symbolic offer of peace – and a horn of plenty or garland of wheat, characterising peace as a state of well-being', (Ziemann, 240), and contrasts it to the rapid decline of such representations from 1800 forwards. He moves on to note that, 'in the twentieth century there was no longer any generally understandable and definitive image for peace... [owing to] the future-oriented nature of modern society, which has imposed a temporal dimension on the differentiation between peace and war: peace is no longer conceived of as a system but as a perpetual movement towards an ever-receding future goal.' Ziemann 259.
824. London Muralists for Peace, "Autumn 1983 Press Release."
825. Kate Crehan, *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2011), xiii.
826. For a detailed and illuminating account of Free Form, see Crehan, *Community Art*. Founded in 1972, (and based just across the road from the site of the mural), Free Form were one of the primary innovators in the community arts. From the outset they were committed to, as Crehan explains, 'mak[ing] 'art' that would reach beyond the usual art world audiences…finding collaborative ways of working with those living in impoverished 'communities'.' Crehan, xiii. Free Form's activities originated in community festivals and grew rapidly to also encompass murals, carnivals and environmental projects, in working class, or as they more frequently framed it, 'deprived' or 'impoverished' communities from Hackney to Liverpool. The use of words like 'deprived', in the

the height of the Second Cold War, thus speaks, on the one hand, to wider reaching politicisation of the moment, as Thatcher's spectral vision of the 'Enemy Within', in fact began—in part—to materialise.[827] The absorption of such groups, left a distinct mark on the tenor of the peace movement. From Greenham Common Peace Camp, through the GLC's Festivals for Peace, to a range of community festivals, carnivals and events, the peace movement took on the focus on community, feminism, the politics of everyday life and cultural politics which characterised the post-'68 generation. Often this lent the movement a utopian, celebratory and prefigurative air, and focus on culture, quite distinct from the more austere instrumentalism of the first wave of CND, or the traditions of the labour movement.[828]

In another sense, however, the focus upon 'Peace', and the absorption of previously more liberally focussed groups, might be seen to reflect a wider 'depoliticisation' of the moment.[829]

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place of class, was perhaps responsible for Free Form's remarkable success at generating funding from liberal institutions of the state. It also, however, lent itself particularly well to the 'instrumentalisation of participatory art as it has developed in European cultural policy in tandem with the dismantling of the welfare state', and was to become central to the reorientations of cultural policy 'under New Labour (1997-2010) …[which] embraced this type of art as a form of soft social engineering'. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London, Verso, 2012), 5.

827. As John Mattausch has observed Thatcher's dual assaults upon the welfare state and external enemies, meant that a bloc of 'welfare state' employees (sitting somewhere between traditional working and middle-class occupations, and given their funding by local and regional government, encompassing groups like Free Form and the wider muralists of this study) began, increasingly, to find political voice waged in opposition to the 'warfare state'. (Mattausch, *Commitment to Campaign,* 144-148.) As observed above (chap. 3, n. 780), Mattausch's argument hinges on the longer running tension in the formation of the post-war welfare state, (between 'welfare' and 'warfare'). From the present distance (and context), however, these dynamics might instead be seen to reveal the complexity of the resistance to a shifting dynamic of class (and political) power within the state, as Thatcher's neoliberal ideology ran up against resistance from the residual influence of preceding bloc of social democratic state power. In either analysis, the effect was that a number of groups whose preceding political activity had been framed more in terms of cultural or community activity than full-frontal conflict with the state, were drawn, in alliance with the labour movement, into more concerted stand off against the state. At times, this created tensions within the groups, and it is of note that it was in 1983 that Free Form split, with the performance artists increasingly political stance, as against the visual and environmental artists' move towards more depoliticised projects, forming a fundamental reason for the split. See, Crehan, 76.

828. The broader mode which envisioned the peace movement as a utopian prefiguration of the values it strove to create, bears testament (without being reducible) to these sociological shifts. It is notable, for example, that the post-'68 Left's embrace of culture, stretched far beyond the Libertarian mode, ranging from the Trotskyist led anti-racist festivals of the last chapter, to the CPI's Festa dell'Unita in Bologna.

829. Certainly the peace movement's stress on ethico-moral dimensions has often been stressed as a depoliticising influence See Mattausch, *Commitment to Campaign*, and Fred Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1968).

Certainly it marks some sense of distance from the more antagonistic 'anti-imperialist',

struggles which had to an extent displaced the peace movement in the preceding years. It is

important, however, that the focus on 'peace' did not fully replace more oppositional

focussed assertions, but rather coexisted in the broad coalition of the contemporary

movement. Walker's designs attest to this fact, most prominently, in the inclusion of the US

Embassy in the irregular stepped adjunct to the bottom left of the otherwise rectangular wall,

in two of the three studies. Though forsaken in the oil painting, (and the final mural), the

interjection of the building—some five miles west of the composite Hackney scene which

dominates the design—points to the complex synthetic mode of realism and lingering

attachment to modernist fragmentation in Walker's style, and to his desire, to intertwine a

testament to localised celebrations with those to the broader expressions of the peace

movement. The U.S. Embassy at Grosvenor Square—with its distinctive facade topped by a 9

metre wide gold-plated aluminium eagle (exaggerated in scale in Walker's sketches)—had

emerged as a major centre, and icon of anti-imperialist protests in the 1960s, and most

famously during the clashes with protestors on 17th March 1968, when ten thousand

protestors became embroiled in bitter battles with police.[830] As CND returned to prominence

in the early 1980s, so too did Grosvenor Square: the US Embassy—and the broad anti-

imperialist campaigns of the preceding decades—become incorporated within the broad

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830. The events of that day resulted in 200 arrests and 50 hospitalisations —a level of violence 'unseen' since
Cable Street and the 1930s. 'The Battle of Grosvenor Square', became an enduring symbol of the British
manifestations of rising social agitation and anti-imperialist struggles of 1968. Building for an October 1968
rally, which it was hoped would overshadow the March events and harness the energies released by French
uprisings in May, Abhimanya Manchanda explained that, '[t]he lair of U.S. imperialism is the American
Embassy in Grosvenor Square and that's where the protest should be made'. Abhimanya Manchanda,
"Grosvenor Square – that's where the protest should be made," *Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism Online*
Transcription, Editing and Markup: Sam Richards and Paul Saba, (1968):
https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.secondwave/grosvenor-square.pdf. Whilst Manchanda's hopes for the
site and scale of October's events were thwarted, and March's events were, in the end, to mark the high-water
mark of the British incarnations of the globally charged social tensions of 1968, his identification of the
building's symbolic importance was widely held. Much as Cable Street became the historico-geographical
marker of the struggle against fascism in the 1930s, so too did Grosvenor Square become a dominant marker for
the anti-imperialist struggles over the decades that followed. In comparison to Cable Street, however, Grosvenor
Square remained a more active site of live conflict, as diverse anti-imperialist campaigns continued across the
1970s, succeeding CND as the prime expressions of the British Left's internationalism.

umbrella and symbolism of the peace and anti-nuclear movements. Put baldly, the two spheres of post-'68 activism—an internationalist, anti-imperialist Left and more communitarian libertarian localism—separated to an extent after the peak of Grosvenor Square, marched together again as the peace movement gained momentum in the 1980s.

These anti-imperialist dimensions are carried through elsewhere in the designs: in the stilted Uncle Sam figure (moved from the fore- to the mid-ground between the second and third designs) and—most prominently—the large float at the apex of the crowd and the centre of the composition. The float, borne aloft on bamboo sticks by a group of masked demonstrators— offers a reclining figure in military uniform, missiles clasped in green hands, jacket and lapels dripping in medals and dollar signs, with (in the earlier two designs) a janus-faced head, which fuses the snouts of a shark and wolf (the wolf's opened mouth bearing a coin with a £ sign). Though it is unclear if it was observed or invented, this merged head of the archetypal predators of land and sea might, I would suggest, be read as a symbol of the dual objects of the British peace movement's opposition in the period, as calls to halt to the development of the new submarine missile system 'Trident', joined, from 1982 forwards, the opposition to the land-based Cruise.[831] The broader attributes of the float are longstanding and widespread icons of imperial vanity and plunder, frequently drawn upon in the contemporary imagery of the peace movement, and inherited from anti-imperialist campaigns which flourished over the preceding decade. Drawing together military regalia and the pounds and dollar signs, the figure testifies to the association of capital appropriation and

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831. E.P. Thompson pointed out that the conflict between Trident and Cruise played out as a conflict between the Ministry of Defence and the Navy, in 1980. Thompson, "The Doomsday Consensus," 261. By 1983, with Trident and Cruise receiving funds, Merseyside CND Magazine, noted that, '[s]ome people, even within CND itself, have criticised the movement for becoming too exclusively concerned with the dangers of Cruise and Trident.. but these new missiles represent such a massive leap in the arms spiral that we must concentrate as much of our efforts as possible to exposing the lies and distortions which about on this subject'. Merseyside CND. *Merseyside CND Magazine* (Autumn 1983), 3.

imperial plunder in Leftist critiques and visual codes. Many of these features would seem to mark the figure out primarily, as an embodiment of Western Imperialism, a reading underlined in two of the three studies by the inclusion of a Russian-attributed float to the rear, with ushanka hat, five-point stars and a headdress of rocket fuselages.[832]

Allied to the imperialist float, the boiler-suited figures in gas or skull masks, offer a clear antagonism to the broader celebratory affirmation of the scene. Building upon the spirit of the carnivalesque in their channelling of the ludic subversion of the natural order, the figures of death or foretold apocalypse, processing in the midst of a Hackney street, reveal a persistence of Ziemann's 'binary codes'. Crucially, however, they are here rendered at the level of the procession's self-representation and selected symbolism, rather than at the level of artistic metaphor. Once more the 'self-representation' of the procession offers insight (be it of Walker's invention or derived from the event itself), of the broader tenor of the peace movement: similar gas- or skull-masked figures, often bearing missiles or emblems of death, being ubiquitous on marches and demonstrations across the period. An HCND Newsletter account of a June 1983 action at the US Embassy, describes how similar deathly symbols were effectively contrasted against the float of a globe, offering a symbol of hope. A similar globe float is visible in two of Walker's designs.[833] Beyond extending this binary symbolism,

832. If the presence of this second figure, once again bears testament to the deepening non-alignment of Western Leftists in the Second Cold War, the prominence of (indeed, in the oil painting, *sole* focus upon) the symbols of Western Imperialism bear testament (once more) to the enduring prominence of America, and Atlanticist Britain as the prime targets for Western anti-imperialist movements. See Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 306: 'there was still a sour envy of American power and sometimes a deeper anti-Americanism shared by too many across the political spectrum'; or Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 249.
833. 'The theme was the world and the slogan 'Fragile—handle with care'. The event was the linking of the Soviet and U.S. Embassies across Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens... About 25 of us from Hackney gathered…we set off along the route until we could find a gap in the chain to fill. It wasn't easy. Every spot of shade held a group of people and a banner melting slowly in the heat. Groups had come from all over the country. Once we found a place we waited for a while…we saw in the distance a globe bouncing along between the lines propelled by people's hands. The 'world' labelled 'Fragile – handle with care' was on its way to the U.S. embassy. The symbolism of the line produced tremendous feelings. As the world passed there was spontaneous applause and cheering. We mustn't let the world drop! In the opposite direction went a ghastly skeleton with a gas mask head and a mouth protruding with numerous missiles. Another globe bounced along, neatly skirting the skeleton on its way to the soviet embassy'. Dave Martindale, "Linking arms for peace,"

the float bearers' foreshadowing of the aftermath of a nuclear explosion—through allusion to death (in the skull masks) or radioactively protected government clean-up agents (in the gas-masks)— places them firmly in the world of an apocalyptic (or post-apocalyptic) imagination, already noted in relation to Barnes' work. In contrast to Barnes' skeleton as the agent and bringer of an imminent death, however, these figures' revelling in the *post*-apocalyptic draws closer to punk's macabre and ludic forecasting of nuclear annihilation, and at least in part, therefore, may gesture towards the influx of this new generation of anarcho-punks into the peace movement [see figures 331-33, and 355].[834]

By allowing these dynamic contrasts, between the assertions life and death, peace and war, to be carried at the level of the Carnival's self-representation Walker's image stretches beyond both the binary codes of the broader peace year imagery, and the non-descript prefigurative tone of some peace movement imagery. It offers a celebratory unification of the contemporary stratifications of the peace movement through the representation of its diverse tones, sites, sociological and generational backgrounds, and expressions. Reaching beyond the limits of a singular event, whilst nonetheless proceeding from a studied cross section of the contemporary movement, the mural at one level, seems to offer an answer to a question Stuart Hall asked of the first movement in 1958, when he wrote: '[c]an a political shape be imposed upon or rise from a movement which contains within its ranks such garden varieties as anarchists, non-violent revolutionaries, proto-Trotskyists, New Left socialists, soft shoe communists, constituency Labour Party members, renegade liberals, pacifist old-timers

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Hackney Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Newsletter No. 24, (August 1983): 1/ fl 240, LSE: CND/ADD/8/3.

834. As Worley points out, 'Crass claimed credit for revitalizing the CND movement in the early 1980s, with black-clad punks becoming a staple feature of the marches and the sieges of nuclear installations organized by the antiwar movement then and since'. Worley, "Under the Bomb," 74. Though the connection with boiler suits and skeletons is not explicit here, Gee Vaucher's album cover for Crass' 1984 album *Bullshit Detector,* and the cover for The Exploited's 1983, *Lets Start a War,* both reveal the use of the skeletal as a tendency in punk's exploration of the pre-figured post-apocalyptic aesthetic.

beatnicks and vegetarians, Peace News, Sanity, Solidarity, Anarchy and War and Peace'.[835]

Hall's answer to his question is in line with the Gramscian dictum of 'pessimism of the intellect', on which, as noted, he so often drew: '[b]y any book, the answer should be 'No'. No single flag, no slogan, no ideology can command so motley an army of the good'.[836] Walker's image, by contrast—made some twenty-five years later—stresses the Gramscian counterpoint, of 'optimism of the will'. Underlined by the slogan of the most prominent banner, just to the left of the main float, Walker's image functions as both affirmation and exhortation, for the movement's capacity to 'Unite for Peace', beneath the (single) flag (and logo) of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The importance of such an affirmation in a climate of growing 'frustration felt by CND concerning the government's patronising attitude towards the peace movement, Margaret Thatcher's continued commitment to nuclear arms spending and her insistence on multi-lateral nuclear disarmament', was noted as early as January of 1983, in the *Hackney People's Press*.[837] It was to become increasingly pronounced in the wake of the second Conservative election victory (in June 1983), and the stationing of Cruise missiles (in November).[838]

The Wall

The optimism of Walker's designs and the six-month timescale predicted for their completion notwithstanding, the mural was to take over two years to complete: opened on October 19th

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835. Hall (1963), cited in Mattausch, *Commitment to Campaign*, 25.
836. Hall (1963), cited in Mattausch, *Commitment to Campaign*, 25.
837. The Hackney People's Press reported a Peace Fair in January of 1983, in which a '[c]onvivial afternoon with kids activities and live entertainment going on…[served] to an extent [to] hide the growing amount of frustration felt by CND concerning the government's patronising attitude towards the peace movement, Margaret Thatcher's continued commitment to nuclear arms spending and her insistence on multi-lateral nuclear disarmament'. Hackney People's Press, "Peace Fair at Central Baths*,*" *Hackney People's Press*, (January, 1983): 8.
838. See, for example, John Miller, "October 22nd: Why You Must Be There*,*" *Hackney CND Newsletter*, (October 1983): 3: 'In many ways this year's demonstration is even more important than the last three. It will be the first since the Conservatives swept back to power, and our first opportunity that their victory in the election does not give them a mandate to press ahead with the deeply unpopular Cruise and trident programmes'.

1985, by Tony Banks— former Chair of the GLC's Arts and Recreation Committee, turned Labour MP for Newham North West—in an event featuring '[m]usic from Chat's Arkestra and an African group, African and Asian food provided by the Pan African organisation and the Asian centre and a bar' [see Figures 356-58].[839] The delays had set in from the off, with negotiations between Walker, Hackney Council, the GLC, and British Rail (whose billboard site the mural would replace), ongoing throughout 1983, even before the wall could be prepared with the smooth silicate ground render required by the Keim paints.[840] In mid-May 1984, with the laying out of the designs on the Dalston wall in its early stages, Ray Walker suffered a fatal brain tumour after a day spent working on the wall. Just 39 years of age, he left behind his partner, the artist Anna Walker, and their young son Roland. His passing was marked by a series of tributes and memorials from friends, artists and political fellow travellers.[841] As Desmond Rochfort noted, Walker's death was a tremendous loss and 'tragedy', 'not only in personal terms, but also in artistic ones, for we are denied the full extent of the achievements he would undoubtedly have attained had he lived longer'.[842] In his brief six year career as a muralist, Walker had created a remarkable body of work, on subjects ranging from the 13th century Peasants Revolt to contemporary Army Recruitment, and for sites including Hospitals, Museums and four East London walls. It was a body of work

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839. 'The Dalston Junction Peace Mural was officially opened on the 19th October by Tony Banks of the GLC and Hackney Mayor, Betty Shanks. Designed by Hackney CND member, Ray Walker, it was completed after his untimely death in May 1984, by mural painter Mike Jones and Ray's widow, Anna Walker. Bertha Turner of HCND gave a brief talk recalling her experience of working along with ray and a group of interested local people designing a Peace Garden to be built on the site. It would provide a peaceful oasis for Hackney people and the bustle of Dalston Junction. Given the international reputation of Ray Walker as a mural artist of great renown it is hoped that the Garden will soon be completed, providing a fitting setting for such a mural. Music from Chat's Arkestra and an African group, African and Asian food provided by the Pan African organisation and the Asian centre and a bar set the appropriate mood of celebration for the large and enthusiastic crowd which gathered there. While it is conflict and disaster which attract media attention and sell newspapers, both the subject matter of the mural and the people at its opening are a clear demonstration that a decent human life for all is possible when we adopt a positive attitude and work in harmony.' Bertha Turner, "Peace Mural Opening," *HCND Newsletter* No. 46, November 1985, 3.
840. These delays caused Walker significant work and irritation: a constant stream of letters between Walker and Barnes (as coordinator of LMFP) and the GLC, attesting to the difficulties involved in such extended bureaucratic wrangling. See Ray Walker, *Correspondence*, 1983. AMFP/ABB.
841. See, for example, Ray Walker Memorial Committee, *Ray Walker*.
842. Desmond Rochfort, "Reflections on Public Art: Ray Walker," *AND Journal of Art* No. 6, 1985: 23.

which, as Rochfort framed it, offered a 'significant and powerful contribution to the idea that art, once more, can be a dramatically powerful and radical form of democratic human social expression'.[843] His final Dalston designs confirm him as an artist at the height of his powers: maintaining his extended interest and fascination with the society and communities in which he worked, while developing an increasingly sophisticated approach to the challenges and opportunities of the exterior mural form. A memorial exhibition of canvasses, and panel paintings was organised in Walker's honour by the GLC, in their exhibition space in the foyer of the Royal Festival Halls at the South Bank.

Tributes notwithstanding, with Peace Year already some months past, the GLC Arts Committee noted the necessity to see the wall completed at the earliest opportunity.[844] By August it was agreed that Ray's widow Anna Walker, and fellow mural artist Mike Jones would take on the responsibilities, remaining 'as true as possible to Walker's designs'. Anna Walker had met Ray in the mid-1970s, living with him in Camberwell and Hackney, joined in 1978, by their son Roland. Though trained as a painter, this was to be Anna Walker's first experience of mural painting. Mike Jones, (son of the prominent trade union leader Jack Jones), had been a muralist since the mid-1970s, completing a series of murals as part of the *The Fine Heart Squat,* and from 1978 the *Art Workers Cooperative*, a collective of largely Camden based muralists working across the late 1970s and into the '80s.[845] Jones' major commission at the Transport and General Workers Union/ Unite Centre in Eastbourne and his still extant Fitzrovia Mural on Tottenham Court Road, reveal the developing coordinates of his style: a lively mode of social realism, in which a focus on diverse psychologically

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843. Rochfort, "Ray Walker," 23.
844. GLC Paper
845. *Fine Heart Squad* had started life in the early 1970s, with Phil Hartigan and friends moving from Luton to London. Jones completed murals with them, before parting ways. *Art Workers Cooperative*, included the artist Simon Barber and others, working mostly in Camden from 1978 forwards. For an overview of Jones' life see, Mike Davis, "A Life in Art and Politics," *Chartist*, September/October 2012, 4.

nuanced figures in dynamic (and often politically related) action fused with a playful

fragmentation of tectonic and spatial boundaries [see Figure 359]. Though less expressive or

muscular with regard to figure treatment, and less forceful in the pursuit of plastic and

tectonic form than Walker's later work, Jones' style shared with Walker, in its playful

acceptance of fragmentation, and pursuit of a psychologically nuanced and broadly

affirmative mode of realism.

The disappearance of several of Ray Walker's compositional sketches, conflicting sources

regarding the extent to which his designs had been transferred to the wall prior to his death

and Anna Walker and Mike Jones' desire to allow the mural stand as a testament to Walker's

intentions, thwart conclusive attributions of authorship.[846] Such complexities

notwithstanding, the final mural offers a broad synthesis of Walker's three surviving designs.

Taking elements from each, it is the final sketch, reproduced in the Hackney People's Press,

in May 1984, which offers the dominant model.[847] The removal of certain elements from the

designs (for example the globe and usanka hat-wearing floats, or the gas masked figure in the

foreground) underline the increased dominance of the main imperialist float, with a return to

its (now enlarged) wolf-shark head, offering a prominent apex, crescendo and symbolic

counterpoint to the crowd's ebullient celebration of peace.[848] As will be seen the addition of a

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846. Of the seven preparatory compositional designs Walker noted to have made only three seem to survive. Most accounts suggest that work on the wall was only just beginning in May. These might be set against Carol Kenna's memories that Walker was in constant touch regarding work on the wall across the winter. Though it seems likely that this may have been preparatory work on the surface rather than the transfer of designs. Carol Kenna, interview with the author, August 2016.

847. It is from this design, for example, that the layout of the crowd is most clearly derived, with: the wedge of musicians, stretching from the bottom edge of the wall to the float bearers, led by the row of heads, with upwards facing gazes disappearing from the edge of the composition; the prominent and anchoring position of the black saxophonist to the bottom centre right; the stilted Uncle Sam enclosing the crowd to the rear left; the skull masks of the boiler-suited float bearers; the approximate positions of the banners; and the array of logo emblazoned balloons adding political character to the spatial void above the crowd. Other figures re-emerge from the oil painting: the black woman with raised arms in the centre of the foreground; the Dharmachakra and Buddha figure within the arcade of the left-hand buildings; as well as the sun drenched chroma of the whole.

848. An effect underlined by the removal of the gas-masked figure from the foreground of the second and third designs.

number of figures—either from Walker's preparatory sketches, or as new additions—extend and strengthen the symbolic resonance of this ebullience. Overall, however, the tone and symbolism of the mural remains heavily guided by Walker's designs.

Transferred onto the wall, however, the designs' fuller ambitions emerge. For alongside offering a testament to the peace movement, the mural extends a forceful and considered testament to, and integration with, its setting. Carried across multiple registers it is established, in the first instance, through the architectonic assertions derived from Walker's studies. Here, the relative perpendicularity of the depicted street's right-hand facade, and the final form of the distant tower block derive from Walker's last sketch, but the radial distortions of the left-hand facade, are closer in character to the earlier studies: returning, and in fact exaggerating, their sense of a dramatic and twisting perspective through the slight raising of the vantage point suggested by the mouldings of the left terrace facade. In combination with the perpendicularity of the right, this represents a rupture of perspectival assertions, which serves to deepen the phenemenological involvement of viewers moving eastwards on the thoroughfare of Dalston Lane, to the right of the mural. From this position (the most frequent likely viewpoint) the impassability of the right-hand facade and the twisting torque of the left section, exert their strongest effect: by turns arresting the viewer's passage past the mural with the oblique right hand section, and creating a rightwards torque from left foreground to right rear. Echoing something of the dynamic perspectival schemes devised by Siqueiros (and carried into Cable Street via Binnington's designs), and in contrast to the unresolved tectonic assertions of Walker's first mural projects (and indeed Jones' preceding ones) this careful modulation of perspectival assertions reveals an increasing awareness, on the part of the muralists of the period, of the power and importance of the

position and phenomenological involvement of the viewer.[849] Underlining the thematic focus

on the crowd's energy, and drawing it into forceful relation with the nearby street, the effect

pushes beyond the trompe l'oeil virtuosity to underpin the mural's spatial and thematic

engagement with the viewer and the streets around.

The sense of phenomenological involvement and local integration are furthered by the

abandonment of the fragmented inclusion of the U.S. Embassy at Grosvenor Square in the

lower left corner of the wall. Forsaking the anti-imperialist symbolism of the building, and its

aforementioned connections to the contemporary peace movement, the omission returns the

scene to a singular homogenous space and reinforces the wider move towards a more all-

pervading and —crucially — *localised* celebration. Marking a departure from Walker's later

designs and allowing the anti-imperialist assertions of the scene to be carried by the float

alone, the localisation of the scene nonetheless remains exemplary of the reconstructive

realism which underpinned Walker's designs and wider career. The 'localisation' is achieved

through the depiction of a combination of local architectural markers —specifically (and

consistently across all designs) the 1904 Navarino Towers, some half-mile to the north east of

the mural, along Dalston Lane—in plausible, but ultimately imagined, relation to locally

resonant, but less traceable buildings[850]: a 1960s tower block, the two Victorian facades and a

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849. Though Desmond Rochfort's *Royal Oak Mural* had taken some interest in the concept of dynamic perspective schemes, the resolution reached here, and its testing across the preparatory designs, marks an advance. Rochfort, who was a friend of Walker following their collaboration at Cable Street, had begun a PhD on Siqueiros in 1983. Mike Jones and Anna Walker were to travel to Mexico, following their collaboration on the mural. More broadly the movement towards tectonically cohesive and phenemonologically involving spaces is detectable across the period, confirmed in large part by the Peace Year Murals.
850. Though the scene has been suggested to offer a Westwards view down Dalston Lane from its five-point intersection with Amhurst and Pembury Roads, such a reading is inconsistent with the perpendicular steel bridge over Dalston Lane at this site, and the distance of Navarino Mansions from any plausible models for the other buildings. (It is a reading forwarded, for example by London Mural Preservation Society, "Hackney Peace Carnival Mural": http://londonmuralpreservationsociety.com/murals/Hackney-Peace-Carnival-Mural/). The shifts in architectural features of the terraces and tower block between designs, further confirm the image as an imaginative reconstruction. There are some affinities, however, between the final perpendicular angle and architectural detailing of the right-hand facade, and the view to Dalston Lane from Amhurst Road, which suggest Mike Jones and Anna Walker may have interpreted aspects of the scene in light of this westward view.

brick arched railway bridge.[851] Whilst Walker's design shifts and topographical inaccuracy preclude a reasoned reading of the mural as an actual Hackney site, the features all offer sufficiently clear reference to the vernacular architecture and urban spaces of Hackney to allow the scene to be read in clear continuity to the broader site.[852] Again this rendering of a composited, but increasingly well-defined and recognisably *local* scene, marks a development which runs through the murals of this study, reaching something of an apogee in the Peace murals (for example in Barnes' *Nuclear Dawn*, or GMW's *Winds of Peace*). In combination with the Dalston mural's monumental figures and compositionally projecting crowd scene, however, the effect is quite divergent from its contemporaries: projecting the ebulliant energy and celebratory character of the mural's street scene out into the streets and projected pocket park below.[853]

Building upon these compositional features, it is the character of the crowd itself which (dominating more than half the composition), offers the clearest sense of integration with the streets beyond and underlines the second crucial sphere of the mural's assertions. For, beyond presenting a celebration of the peace movement's heterogeneous unity, the mural is also clearly pitched to offer testament to the character and diversity of the area in which the mural sits. With five monumental black figures slightly rearranged to anchor the foreground of the scene, (centring upon the woman with upraised arms and outwards gaze) the mural opens up to include an enormous diversity of figures. From the young black figure in carnival mask to

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The final tower appears less resonant of any local examples with its blue and white facade, though Walker's designs would seem to alternate between examples on Dalston Lane and those further east.
851. Whilst the architectural detailing of the tower block and Victorian facades shift significantly between each of Walker's studies, and again in the final image, the railway bridge remains more constant, but would not seem consistent with an example local to Navarino Towers, which are steel girded and transversal. Intriguingly, however, it does rather closely resemble the bridge which crossed Beck Road, the street on which Walker lived.
852. Hackney was an area in which mass Victorian expansion, was succeeded (following war-time destruction) by a wave of council-built tower blocks of the type that emerged across London's East End.
853. From the outset, the HCND newsletters note that the mural was conceived in tandem with a Peace Park, in the space before the mural. Though this park was not completed at the time of the mural's completion, the lot has remained a public space, today forming a forecourt to the Dalston Curve Garden.

the bottom right to the image of Gandhi, leaning out the window at the top left, the whole

scene is punctuated with demographic mix: old, young, men, women, black, white, Japanese,

Indian, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and what would seem much more beyond. Though such

multi-'racial' scenes trace a long history in London's murals, the highly refined sense of

psychological realism coupled with the strident and dynamic monumentality of the figures,

mark the Dalston mural out as one of the most vibrant and compelling images of a multi-

ethnic group united in communal action to be made across the period. If the Carnival theme

was ideally suited to such a representation—the British Carnival movement having started

with force in the late 1950s with the efforts of Claudia Jones and others—the Dalston site was

equally so.[854] Located diagonally opposite Dalston Junction Station, the mural sat (and sits)

in the midst of a busy and well used thoroughfare, surrounded by diverse and active

community centres, cultural resources and busy shopping streets.[855] The area was, as it

remains (despite recent waves of pressing gentrification), home to a remarkably mixed

demographic, with a sizeable Caribbean population to the east, a large West African

population to the north, a sizeable Kurdish community also to the north, and East London's

longer-standing working class British and Irish born communities who had resisted the

migration of many of their former neighbours outwards to Essex.

854. As A. Sivanandan explains, '[i]n 1959, after the Kelso Cochrane killing, Claudia Jones and Frances Ezzrecco… led a deputation of West Indian organisations to the Home Secretary. And in the same year, 'to get the taste of Notting Hill out of their throats', the West Indian Gazette [of which Jones was the editor] launched the first Caribbean carnival in St Pancras Town Hall'. A Sivanandan, 'From Resistance To Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean struggles in Britain', Race & Class, XXIII, 2/3, (1981/82). By 1966, these efforts had evolved into the Notting Hill Carnival. Across the 1970s and into the 1980s, local carnivals proliferated across London alongside the broader festival movement. A mark of the proliferation can be seen in Hackney People's Press August 1983 issue, which noted that Finsbury Park was to hold its own Carnival, and that a 'Hackney Festivals Support group published a new manual on how to organise a community festival', Hackney People's Press, "Carnival Time," *Hackney People's Press*, August 1983, 6.
855. The mural was within several hundred meters of the Centerprise Community Resource Centre, Ridley Road Market, the Rio Cinema, Kingsland High Street, and Free Form arts.

The mural's studied engagement with the texture and diversity of this community —
alongside, and interspersed with, the texture and diversity of the peace movement—reveals
its continuity with Walker's longstanding desire to 'develop a really solid British cultural
image which is about British people as a racial mix'. Crucially, however, and in opposition to
readings of the murals of the period as an index of a movement towards identity politics at
the expense of class, the mural also speaks to the ambitions with which Walker prefaced
those comments, his desire to 'paint about working people…people in working-class
situations'. For while the Peace movement is often considered outside of the working class
traditions, as an exemplar of 'middle class radicalism', a series of compositional additions to
Walker's designs make abundantly clear that the image, made at a site in the midst of a
working class area, was intended as homage to working class collective action also. The
addition of the figure in the British Rail hat in the wedge between the right knee of the float
and the 'Hackney CND' banner, for example, should I would suggest be seen as a reference
to the struggles of rail workers and others against Thatcher's assault on nationalised
industries, from 1979 forwards.[856] Over the period of the mural's production, these struggles
had seen a number of strikes by railworkers as well as localised campaigns from the Hackney
Public Action Transport Committee against the proposed closure of Dalston Junction station,
just 50 metres from the mural.[857] The trombonist wearing a hard hat and miners lamp, just
below the main float (who replaced the CND-logo emblazoned baseball capped figure in
Walker's oil painting), meanwhile, would seem to offer reference to the miners' strikes which
had raged across the period of the murals completion. Though less geographically proximate,
'the Miners' Strike' was to emerge as *the* decisive stand off between organised labour and
Thatcher's Government, winning enormous support from trades unions and diverse social

856. By 1983, 20,000 jobs had been cut across the rail industry, with a further 5,000 scheduled.
857. The station was eventually to close in 1986, though was reopened in 2010, following the opening of the
East London Line, by Ken Livingstone's Greater London Assembly.

movements in Hackney, across London and far beyond. Solidarity actions were a constant feature of Hackney Community action across the period [see Figure 360].

Combining with the broader flotilla of banners referencing an array of trade union branches, local peace groups and Christian CND, and the balloons emblazoned with 'Greenpeace, 'Ecology', 'GLC', 'Jobs Not Bombs', 'Saoirse' and 'мир' the crowd offers a vast array of the labour movement struggles, international campaigns and social movements of the period. The combining of these multiple elements—the diverse strands of the peace movement, the diversity of local community, the contemporary struggles of organised labour and the emergent social movements— reveals the full scale of the mural's ambitions. For the mural proposes and offers a unity between each of these spheres, not (as A. Sivanandan observed in a divergent context) 'one unity—or two or three—but a mosaic of unities'.[858] Considering the breadth of the mural's representation, HCND activist Victoria Lukens, felt compelled to conclude that the mural was, in the end 'purely allegorical': that for all the plurality of its members political formations and involvement in broader causes HCND remained, 'very white, and predominantly middle class'.[859] Leaving to one side for the moment the term allegory, (a term Lukens admits to using with some caution) the observation highlights a broader tension within the mural's mode of representation. For the presentation of such diverse elements in a single united scene rubs up against the question of the historical and political veracity. The peace movement, for example, is—as already highlighted—often

858. A Sivanandan, 'From Resistance To Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Carribean struggles in Britain', Race & Class, XXIII, 2/3, (1981/82): 116.
859. 'I feel that the imagery in the mural was purely allegorical- if that's the correct term. I didn't recognise anyone in the mural. Isn't there a black sax player in the mural? HCND was very white and predominately middle class. I have a few odd stories about trying to get the working class locals involved and even some of the less progressive middle calls locals too- There was a flower shop owned by a very posh but rather down at heel woman who we asked if she would put poster for the Peace Fayre in her window- she said NO because she thought it a good idea if everyone was wiped out in a nuclear war. I was sincerely shocked and had never been confronted with that response before. HCND supported a few other causes and we would have stalls at various events that were not HCND organised'. Victoria Lukens, email to the author, 22nd June, 2017.

offered up, as in Lukens description as an archetype of 'middle class radicalism'. And, whilst Livingstone boasted that in the aftermath of Peace Year, Londoner's polled five per cent above the national average in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament,[860] the failure of the peace movement to make inroads into working class communities like Hackney is seen, even by admiring observers, to bar to its status as a mass movement, and ultimately have restricted its agency as a political actor.[861]

Such questions regarding historical veracity are thrown into even sharper relief if we consider the broader situation which enveloped the mural by the time of its opening on October 19th, 1985. The weeks before the opening had witnessed urban insurrections and confrontations between predominantly Afro-Caribbean and black British communities and the police, across London (in Brixton, Peckham and Tottenham, to the north of the Borough of Hackney), and beyond (in Toxteth) on a scale unseen since the 1981 uprisings described above.[862] They marked the peak of the urban crises and social disorder of the period, joining periodic uprisings in Birmingham, Bristol and beyond. In national politics, meanwhile, a rout of the Labour Left had begun in the wake of the 1983 Election defeat.[863] Locally, June 1985 had seen Labour Left Hackney Council abandon its defiance of Thatcher's latest round of withering cuts to local government, and accede to the setting of a rate capped budget.[864] The GLC had been amongst the first wave of Labour Left Councils to capitulate and set a rate,

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860. 'Nationally opposition to unilateral disarmament was running at 52 per cent, with 39 per cent in favour. After our peace year campaign the London figures showed 48 per cent opposed and 44 per cent in favour'. Livingstone, *If Voting Changed*, 340.
861. 'All available data on the Campaign's membership supports Nias' claim that CND is not a "mass movement" in the sense of attracting support from a wide social base'. Mattausch, *Commitment to Campaign,* 140.
862. As in 1981, the insurrections arose from a series of events which served as flashpoints in the long worsening relations between black Afro-Caribbean communities and an institutionally racist Metropolitan Police force, Criminal Justice System and Government.
863. Under the leadership of Neil Kinnock, the Party began its long march to the right (via two more electoral defeats and twelve more years of Tory rule).
864. Hackney's capitulation was preceded or followed by that of other Labour left councils with just Lambeth and Liverpool, holding out, and eventually forced into submission by auditors, in the following months.

and by April of 1985 was already destined for abolition, scheduled (and forthcoming) on April 1st 1986.[865] The GLC's flagship Fares Fair policy, had been defeated in the High Courts, and a long-running smear campaign against them, and broader 'Loony Left' was in full swing across the media. The peace movement, meanwhile, was in similar state of atrophy and decline: the arrival of cruise missiles in November 1983, and the continuance of the bellicose foreign policy of the Thatcher Government's second term, marking a resisted but ultimately fatal blow to the movement's momentum.[866] The miners' strike was conclusively defeated in June 1985, marking, as it would prove, one of the last great stands of organised British labour in the twentieth century. Thatcher's war against the spectre of the 'Enemy Within' was, in short, ascendant and—despite debates on the Left, as to its permanence—to set the tune for the decades ahead.

A Mosaic of Unities

> *Here, however… a new beginning is posited, and the unlost heritage takes possession of itself; that glow deep inside, over there, is no cowardly "as if", no pointless commentary; rather, what rises above all the masquerades and the expired civilisation is the one, the eternal goal, the one presentiment, the one conscience, the one salvation: rises from our hearts, unbroken in spite of everything, from the deepest part, that is, the realest part of our waking dreams: that is, from the last thing remaining to us, the only thing worthy to remain. This … offers an introduction to our figure, our blossoming gathering…*[867]

Ernst Bloch, 1923

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865. The abolition of the GLC, had been mooted by sections of the New Right in the 1970s and was incorporated in the Conservative's 1983 General Election manifesto. As Livingstone framed it, '[i]t was to be part of a general campaign theme: Scargill, Benn and Livingstone were the enemy within that had to be defeated as the Argentinians had been defeated in the south Atlantic'. Livingstone, *If Voting Changed*, 163. Though a long campaign was fought through the Lords and Law Courts: 'Overnight in 31 March 1986 London's would become the only residents of a capital city in Western Europe who were denied the right to elect their city government'. Livingstone, 306.

866. As Chris Murray stated it in April 1984: '[there is] a lack of direction or sense of urgency in our activities. This isn't confined to Hackney, and I believe is partly due to the failure of CND nationally to provide clear central initiatives', Chris Murray, *Hackney CND Newsletter*, May 1984, 3 / 255. As Matthew Worley saw it: '[u]ltimately, the relentlessly bleak vision presented by punk groups of all stripes began to take its toll. As Richard Cross has suggested, the anarcho-punk movement's "inability to defuse" the overriding nuclear threat halted the development of its politics, leading to a sense of isolation and a distorted sense of its own importance'. Worley, "Under the Bomb," 78.

867. Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.

Truth is bodied forth [vergegenwiirtigt] *in the dance of represented ideas* [868]

Walter Benjamin, 1928

These broader contexts, return us to a final consideration of the mural's mode of realism, climate of reception and historical pitch. On the one hand, they might be seen to reinforce a vision of the mural as a naively wilful utopia, removed from the harshening realities of the moment and community they addressed. In this sense they could be viewed as a reenactment of Richard Cork's dismissal of murals: 'applying ornamental bandages to an area that desperately needs radical social surgery'.[869] In a similar vein, the elision of the divergent class character of the peace movement and the multi-ethnic, predominantly working class community with which it is melded might lend weight to the readings of Sam Wetherell and others, that the community arts of the period underwent a reorientation from class consciousness to a more liberal mode of identity politics.[870] More charitably, in light of the shifting political dynamics, and contingencies which delayed the mural's production, the mural might be viewed, as Owen Hatherley has recently suggested it often is, as simply 'a jollily carnivalesque multiracial crowd of the sort which no longer seems threatening to local power'; or, by extension, (and more positively), a memorial to a bygone era in which such 'threat' was indeed possible.[871]

The inclusion, in the left-hand adjunct to the wall that had once been destined for the U.S. Embassy, of a memorial portrait of Ray Walker, looking out with fixed gaze over the crowd,

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868. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1988), 29.
869. Richard Cork, "The Royal Oak Murals," *Art Monthly* No. 15, (1979): 10-11
870. As Wetherell saw the passage of community arts across the period '[b]roadly speaking, a blueprint of a community divided along the vertical lines of class gave way to a vision of a multiplicity of different communities cleft by horizontal divisions. Faced with the disappearance of class, community artists, some with more enthusiasm than others, worked instead at the level of the individual and the neighbourhood'. Sam Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis: Community Arts and the Search for the 'Ordinary' in 1970s and '80s London," *History Workshop Journal* Issue 76, (Autumn 2013): 247.
871. Owen Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London: Verso Books, 2011), 340.

and rear grounded by ambiguous mask like figures, underlines the fact that the mural was indeed intended as a memorial of sorts. Notwithstanding the subtle additions and shifts to the design executed between Walker's death and the mural's completion, the driving optimism of the composition and the events upon which it was based, were indeed rooted in CND's highpoint of 1983, rather than the unravelling dynamics of the years that followed. The preservation of the original conception, therefore, may well be more revealing of Mike Jones and Anna Walker's desire to allow the mural to stand as a memorial to Ray Walker's designs than a rendering of the unfolding political direction of the intervening years. To impart too strong a sense of lament or rearward glance to the mural, however, would be to fundamentally misread the character of both the mural, and the moment. For in its address of the peace movement, class dynamics, and the broad social and political realities of the moment, the mural is no more nostalgic or backwards looking than it is bound by the false binary of naturalism and fantasy. Instead, returning to Lukens' questioning, but apt, use of the term 'allegory', I would suggest that the mural offers an embodiment of Walter Benjamin's wide-ranging conception of the term as a fragmentary, seeking, but unfulfilled, embodiment of representative truth.[872]

As Bainard Cowen has observed, in Benjamin's reading: '[t]he obscurity, fragmentariness, and arbitrariness of allegory all signify the absence of a fulfilling event; this absence, in turn, serves to invoke that event with a greater urgency and a desperate faith'.[873] Notwithstanding the mural's reference to a specific event, its unification of the diverse flowerings of the contemporary peace movement, the community in which it stood, contemporary labour movement struggles, and social movements, also speaks —through its fragmentariness—to

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872. See, Bainard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique* No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981): 109-122.
873. Cowan, "Theory of Allegory," 119.

precisely such an absence. It is this absence of fulfilment, in turn, that underlines the urgency and faith of the mural's address: its advocacy for the triumph of a *mosaic of unities*: for the peace movement's integration with the workers' movement, and the integration of the Hackney residents represented in and confronted by the mural, and the unity of all within the broad interlocking struggles of the contemporary Left. It is crucially, however, a unity, and a utopia, based not in fantasy, but in a wilful reading of the material forces, which in resistance to Thatcher's Government *did* in fact rally together in this period. And if, by 1985, they had, by most accounts, been roundly defeated, such defeat should not, I would argue, distract us from the very real, vibrant if ultimately *fragmentary* attempts made to achieve unity. From the sit-in actions which Hackney Peace Campaigners organised at the junction next to the mural during the first outings of Cruise missiles from Greenham Common across 1984 [see Figures 361-62], through the remarkable expressions of solidarity shown by Londoners to the striking miners which continued into 1985 (figure 60), to the GLC's historic attempts to recast of London as a site of local internationalism and the politics of place, the period was remarkable precisely in its drawing together of a broad coalition of diverse, intersectional solidarity and resistance.[874]

These moments may not have succeeded in attaining the unity imaged in Walker's wall, in destroying the new monolith of class power orchestrated by Thatcher, in diffusing the threat of Nuclear War, in halting the arrival of cruise or the assaults on working class organisation which have deepened across the intervening period. Their fragmentary attempts, however, reveal the veracity the mural's mode of allegorical realism. The question of class composition is central here, and worth dwelling on, for, underpinning accounts of the GLC, the peace movement, the community arts, and indeed, the broader Left of the period, hangs the

874. For Doreen Massey's important summary of local internationalism and the politics of place see above (chap. 3, n. 777).

lingering influence of Fred Parkin's conception of 'Middle Class Radicalism'.[875] In this model, the Left—in a period in which, following Hobsbawm, the *Forward March of Labour*, had indeed *halted*—was dominated by an exemplary mode of 'middle class', or post-class radicalism, drifting seamlessly into the *New Times*.[876] Retrospectively, however, such accounts appear wildly insufficient. For whilst a strand of Left Eurocommunist thought imbedded within the academy, did indeed rise to a hegemonic perversion, through the derailing of the *New Times* philosophy into the delusions of Blairism, the diverse manifestations of class struggle across the period speak not to the evaporation of class, but rather to the temporary formation of a new social bloc, in light of its shifts. Against the evisceration of industry, the demographic shifts and the maturations of the generations created by the post war state, a new mode of unity, encompassing traditional aspects of the labour movement, alongside a new generation of welfare state employees, the post-'68 social movements, and a whole range of new constituencies, *was* brought together, in pitted opposition to Thatcher's bellicose, revanchist, class project. The muralists of this study, but also the political contours of the London Left, and the contemporary peace movement, were all fundamentally imbricated within this new social bloc. The Dalston mural, but more broadly, the achievements of Ken's GLC, offer historical examples of what this social bloc could achieve, in working—as the then Head of Finance of the GLC, John McDonnell has recently re-asserted—'in and against the state'.[877] Looking at the mural from the periscope of

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875. For Jerry White, for example, "The old proletarian areas of inner London, which had given birth to Labour in the early years of the century, were the first to defect from a party that now seemed to offer nothing to the white working class. And for the left their departure was more a cause for rejoicing and bitter ostracism than any attempt to gather them back to the fold'. White, *London,* 395-396.

876. *New Times* was a philosophy forwarded in the mid-to-late 1980s by a number of intellectuals associated with *Marxism Today* and taken up by Neil Kinnock and others in their (neo-liberal) reformulation of the Labour Party for a 'post-class' era. (see also, chap. 1, n. 352).

877. This model of class conflict, which sees both class and state as more malleable and negotiated spaces, is in line with the new Marxisms ranging from E.P. Thompson through to Gramsci. Though by no means universally adopted by the Left of the period, and no means wholly successful in the GLC, it offers a model which moves beyond reductive Leninist formulations of the seizure of state power, whilst stopping short of the New Times hokum about the evaporation of a class project. The mural's embodiment of a new class unity, spanning 'race', identity, labour and social movements, retains potential as a site for successful politics.

thirty five years of dwindling class struggle, and now pressing social conflict, such examples are much needed.

In this sense, the mural's complex temporal and symbolic assertions can perhaps best be read, by returning to Ziemann's characterisation of the peace movement's prefigurative mode:

> *Peace needs movement.. in other words, this is first and foremost an image 'for peace', showing 'what we need in order to make peace a reality'. However, I would also read this picture as a picture 'of peace': despite all their differences, this crowd is friendly and happy a depiction of 'what it would be like to live in peace'. Here the peace movement was presenting itself as an anticipation of peace. In place of the early modern conception of peace as a polity ordered by a balance of virtues, the peace movement's picture is the very incarnation of those virtues. Peace—overcoming weapons and violence—not only needed the peace movement to establish it, but was also, and principally, to be found within that very movement.[878]*

In reaching beyond the confinements of the peace movement to incorporate the broad interlocking social conflicts of the period, Walker's image 'for' and 'of peace', maintains and extends Ziemann's parameters. It offers reference not only to 'peace' in movement, but to society in movement. As in Ziemann's example the static and stative sphere of 'virtues' are replaced by a more materialist understanding of the dynamism and wide-reaching confluence of a new social bloc, constituted in opposition to the hostile reorientations of the state constituted by neo-liberalism. If the mural is an image of peace, therefore, it is also an image of struggle: a struggle not only against the use of weapons, but the use of violent repression instituted in the name of ruling class. It is this multiply pronged unification and celebration of the struggle for and achievement of peace *and* social justice which underpins the mural's continuing relevance and import. For whilst the peace movement, and diverse struggles of the 1980s have in some senses passed—the historical conjuncture finding resolution in the

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878. Ziemann, "Code of Protest," 256.

triumph of Thatcher's new social bloc—the mural reminds that the deeper organic forces remain unaltered. As nuclear war, resurgent nationalism and state repression return to the fore, so too does the mural's testament to an absent event, return 'with a greater urgency and a desperate faith'.[879]

 In an article, written two years before his death, Walker cited Kathe Kollwitz, statement to the effect that: '*One day a new idea will arise and there will be an end to all wars. I die convinced of this, it will need much hard work, but it will be achieved'.*[880] Walker's mural plays its part in that hard work, and, to return to his death portrait in the lower left, adds, 'thus will I, a death's-head, become an angel's countenance'.[881]

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879. Cowan, "Theory of Allegory," 119
880. Ray Walker, "Feminist Art: Kathe Kollwitz Book Review," *Chartist* No. 90 April/May, 1982, rear cover.
881. Benjamin, *German Tragic Drama*, 215.

Conclusion

This study has offered an art historical excavation of a body of exterior murals from what it considers to be the 'condescension of posterity'.[882] Applying a range of art historical methodologies to a series of case studies, it has sought to emphasise the murals' position within art historical understandings of the period, and histories of the mural form. In focussing on seven murals which offer particular insights into the form's relations to the diverse spheres of Left politics and struggle, the study contends that the murals' imbrication within the social, political and cultural dynamics of the period in question offer particular, and hitherto largely unexplored, insights regarding cultural production, artistic agency and the histories of politically committed realist painting. In so doing, the study has argued that the murals' fleeting place in art critical debates of the late 1970s, their positioning within histories of community arts and their marginal trace within histories of public art, have failed to adequately account for the specificity of their art historical contribution.

The chronological progression of its three chapters notwithstanding, this thesis does not offer a comprehensive history of the exterior mural form across the years in question. Nor can it be seen to offer a complete overview of the, in some senses, narrower field of the relations between Left politics and exterior mural production in London—though this does form the principle subject of investigation throughout. Further studies will, I hope, begin to address these and other related projects in greater detail.[883] Here, however, a more limited attempt has been made to examine seven case studies in relation to a series of chronologically sequenced

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882. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2013), 12.
883. Much work, for example, remains to be done in tracing the emergence and trajectory of mural production in cities outside of London. Further work might be done in exploring the relations of these and other London murals to shifting conceptions of class identity, work, history, realism, ethnicity and gender.

political concerns: the demands for democratic control in the localised politics of mid-to-late 1970s London; the resistance to the rise of the New and Far Right forces in Tower Hamlets across the turn of the decade; and the emergence of the peace movement and broader politics of the Greater London Council's final Labour administration as counterweights to Margaret Thatcher's expanding political project across the early 1980s. It is noted that each of these themes might, in turn, be productively expanded—by the examination of further case studies, divergent literatures, and new methodologies. Similarly, further studies will, it is hoped, begin to elucidate other themes, subjects and spheres of iconography within these and other murals made in London, Britain and indeed across the world over similar years.[884]

Despite these limits, the structuring of this thesis through a sequential analysis of the themes embodied in its case studies, has sought to offer insights to broader histories of the form, and—in particular—the hitherto uncharted relations between a lamentably overlooked sphere of Left politics, and a similarly neglected mode of cultural production.[885] The murals of the first chapter, were seen to constitute an opening point in these relations: a forging ground of more or less collaborative techniques by which artists sought to situate their work within an active field of localised struggles for enhanced democratic community control: in housing, work, leisure and processes of urbanisation. The second chapter's case studies were rooted in localised struggles of a different order: constituting responses—and resistance—to the rise of racialised tensions in the borough of Tower Hamlets across the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Through, by turns, a panorama of contemporary life and a monument to a historical event, the two murals employed diverse and divergent models of research, realism and narrative

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884. The international dimensions of the flourishing of the exterior mural form in diverse locations in the decades following the 1960s, and the transnational exchanges and contrasts raised by this moment, would seem to offer particularly fruitful areas for further study.
885. The conception of technique, has—as explored in Chapter 1—been derived from Benjamin, "Author as Producer."

painting to establish relations to, and interventions in, contemporary realities. They were

united, however, in seeking to counter the growing racialised division through the exploration

of diverse working class communities in the process of becoming. The final chapter's case

studies might be seen to shift slightly from the sphere of localised politics to a more

eschatological and internationalist register: addressing (again through divergent modes of

development and address) the peace movement's resistance to the threat of nuclear

annihilation across the early 1980s. Examining the murals through their relation to

iconographies of the Cold War and *British Art in the Nuclear Age,* the chapter argued that

their attentions to the communal agency of the peace movement established a metonymic

relationship to the Left's wider-ranging resistance across the period, and thus maintained and

extended the wider attentiveness of the project's case studies to active and (more or less)

localised struggles.

There is, therefore, a sense in which the three chapters might be seen to trace a political

trajectory, from localised spheres of resistance around community campaigns, towards

broader social, ideological, political and ultimately eschatological contestations. Such

patterns might be seen to find some parallel in the evolution of the Left across the period, as

localised single-issue campaigns began to fuse into wider ranging coalitions of resistance to

the assaults of Thatcherism. But the focus and structure of this thesis has not sought to test

such an argument. Though concerned with the relations between politics and art—and

hopefully adding some texture to understandings of a neglected political history—this study

has, as far as such divisions are possible, tended not to 'look at politics through art, but at art

through politics'.[886] In this sense the chapter's sequential and thematic groupings have

offered a means by which to place the murals within what Walter Benjamin called a 'living

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886. Andrew Hemingway and Paul Jaskot, "Review of T.J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea* and O.K.
Werckmeister's *Icons on the Left," Historical Materialism* 7 (Winter 2000): 267.

social context', through an analysis of the diverse and evolving *techniques* by which the murals addressed a range of salient political concerns.[887] Where the literature surrounding community arts, has tended to approach the question of technique through focus upon the processes of production, this study has argued that these processes cannot be seen in isolation. It has, therefore, sought to move beyond the binaries of process and product, quality and equality, form and content which have hung over the treatment of 'community' and 'participative' arts.[888] Here the processes of production have been analysed alongside interrelated questions of style, iconography, form and content, to approach a fuller understanding of the murals position *within* the period's struggles and social, geographical and historical dynamics.[889] In this sense it is hoped that the study's thematic structure has enabled a more profound and multivalent sense of the murals' complex existence as sites of *contested* meaning to emerge.[890]

The situation of this body of politically committed realist murals on the public-facing walls of working class communities across inner London, has been taken to mark not only a significant aspect of their meaning, but a significant stage in the mural form's historical development and political capacities. Since the 1920s Left-wing muralists had sensed, and seized, the radical collective power of the mural form for overcoming the limits of individualised ownership and reception adhering around the easel painting.[891] With few

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887. Benjamin, "Author as Producer," 2.
888. As explored above (see, for example, chap. 1, n. 237) Claire Bishop has both noted, and—to an extent—extended these binaries. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.
889. '[I]nstead of asking: what is the relationship of a work of art to the relationships of production of the time? Is it in accord with them, is it reactionary or does it strive to overthrow them, is it revolutionary?—in place of this question, or in any case before asking this question, I would like to propose another. Before I ask: how does a literary work stand in relation *to* the relationships of production of a period, I would like to ask: how does it stand *in* them?' Benjamin, "Author as Producer," 2.
890. This concept of murals as sites of contested meaning, emerges from the work of Craven, *Rivera*.
891. If Zola's epigraph at the opening of the thesis reveals that many had sensed the social capacities of the mural form before, it was in Mexico that the form begun its earliest and most enduring and extended relation to Left politics. As the Manifesto of the [Mexican] Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, drafted by David Alfaro Siqueiros, put it, in 1922: '[o]ur aesthetic goal must be to socialise artistic expression and wipe out bourgeois individualism. We repudiate so-called easel painting of every kind of art favoured by

exceptions, however, preceding 20th century murals of the scale and ambition of those within this study had remained within the confines of one or another—often state—institution. This placed murals outside of the sphere of private ownership, and those rituals of individualised bourgeois reception that Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach have done so much to analyse within museum and gallery spaces.[892] Institutional murals, nonetheless, offered a substantially mediated mode of 'public' experience and collective reception: their sites providing a new range of rituals and scripts, often quite removed from radical and emancipatory hopes of theorists and makers.[893] Allan Wallach has observed that, [w]ithin the context of a gallery space, a work of art is successful to the extent it articulates and enhances the spaces ritual meaning'.[894] The same, however, could be said for institutional murals. As Wallach points out, this raises 'the problem of political art: because it applies to a different type of activity it demands a different type of space'.[895] The creation of the large-scale politically themed murals of this study on the streets of a major city, across a period of historic urban transformation, therefore, constituted a breakthrough in the history of the form:

ultra-intellectual circles, because it is aristocratic, and we praise monumental art in all its forms, because it is public property.' Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, "A Declaration of Social, Political and Aesthetic Principles," in David A. Siqueiros, *Art and Revolution*, trans. Sylvia Calles (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 24-25.

892. As Wallach has observed, '[m]odern gallery spaces are devoted to a type of ritual activity. That activity might be described as aesthetic contemplation… the gallery ritual of aesthetic contemplation, as it has evolved over the last fifty years is designed to inculcate and renew certain values and beliefs: belief in the supremacy of individual sensibility; the importance of private as opposed to collective or public experience; alienation as spiritual transcendence, etc.'. Alan Wallach, "Conrad Atkinson, The Dilemma of Political Art," *Arts Magazine* 54, no. 4, (December, 1979). For more elaborated explication of these analyses see, for example, Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995); or Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual", *Marxist Perspectives*, 4 (Winter 1978), 28-51.

893. While Carter and Craven, for example, have observed the interrelation between urban mobilisations in Mexico City and the execution of Rivera's National Palace Murals (see Carter, "Painting the Revolution," 290), even here the question of access to the murals and rituals of viewing is largely overlooked. As such, the radical public urge of, for example, Mexican mural paintings, is often held in an unacknowledged tension with the limited public accessibility to the murals. A notable exception is Robert Linsley's essay on Rivera's Rockefeller Centre murals which takes into focus the role of the murals geographical reorientations of New York City, Robert Linsley, "Utopia Will Not Be Televised: Rivera at Rockefeller Center," *Oxford Art Journal,* Vol. 17, No. 2 (1994): 48-62.

894. 'Within the context of a gallery space, a work of art is successful to the extent it articulates and enhances the spaces ritual meaning…Hence the problem of political art: Because it applies to a different type of activity it demands a different type of space.' Wallach, "Conrad Atkinson."

895. Wallach, "Conrad Atkinson."

offering a novel solution to 'the problem of political art' through radical integration in the space of the city.[896]

The movement of the mural form out into the streets of the city has, therefore, been taken to constitute a major reorientation of the activity, space and mode of collective public experience of realist painting. In light of this, this study has attempted to offer some approach to an analysis of the murals' action upon and place within the complex ritual frameworks and scripts of the city. These scripts and rituals are more complex and nebulous than those adhering within gallery and museum spaces designed for the rituals of aesthetic contemplation, and significantly more research could be productively forwarded in this area.[897] Nonetheless, this study has attempted to approach these complexities through a dual attention: to the localised contexts of the communities and struggles in which the murals were sited; and to a body of Marxist social geography and urban theory, which, following Henri Lefebvre, has sought to analyse the theoretical, political and historical dimensions of *urban praxis.*[898] Removed from the category of commodity exchange, condensing knowledge and contributing to the unproductive consumption of the city—to its use value: its heterotopic forces[899], the encounters, situations, experiences of its users and makers—the murals have been seen to align very strongly with Lefebvre's categorisation of the city as *oeuvre.*[900] A

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896. Wallach.

897. The question of memory and extended reception, for example, could open up a rich field of interpretive research.

898. For Lefebvre, the evolution of a new urban praxis lay at the heart of his emancipatory call for the right to the city: '[w]e thus must make the effort to reach out towards a new humanism, a new praxis, another man, that of urban society', Lefebvre, "The Right to the City," 150.

899. As David Harvey has outlined Lefebvre's concept of heterotopia is quite distinct from Foucault and other poststructuralists. See Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, xvii.

900. 'In short, they [cities] are centres of social and political life where not only wealth is accumulated, but knowledge (*connaissances*), techniques, and *oeuvres* (works of art, monuments). This city is itself '*oeuvre*', a feature which contrasts with the irreversible tendency towards money and commerce, towards exchange and *products*. Indeed, the *oeuvre* is use value and the product is exchange value. The eminent use of the city, that is, of its streets and squares, edifices and monuments, is *la Fête* (a celebration which consumes unproductively, without other advantage but pleasure and prestige and enormous riches in money and objects)'. Lefebvre, "The Right to the City," 66.

sense of the murals as not just depicting, but actively partaking in the struggles, rituals and contestation of wider urban realities has been argued as central to their agency, function and political position, and their role in a broader defence of the city as use value, against the incoming assaults of capital across a crucial moment in history.[901]

The work of David Harvey and Doreen Massey, and its stress on the importance of place in the construction of the neo-liberal hegemony, but also in its contestation, has been seen to give a particular historical meaning to these aspects of the murals' agency and meaning. As Massey has said, '[i]t is often pointed out that in the USA the battle over New York and the huge fiscal crisis which that city underwent, was a forging house, and laboratory, for neoliberal practices that would eventually be generalised. So too in Britain, though in a very different way…what happened in London was central to the national transformation'.[902] Central to Massey's argument is the fact that these transformations also had wider significance, reinventing London as a 'seat of global forces', in the neoliberal world.[903] The murals, therefore, have been seen to be profoundly imbricated not only within the dynamics of London's urban crisis *but also* the contestation of the wider conjunctural settlement.[904] Around the turn of the century Thatcher's rise to power was credited by many with having provided the solution to London's urban crisis: a reorientation towards the financial sector roundly praised for the reinvention of not only London's economy, but that of the entire country.[905] It has been important, therefore, to stress the murals testament to the possibility of a divergent resolution, and the extent to which London offered a particular condensation of

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901. The contrast of such a model of resistance with much of the public art that was to come to predominate from the 1980s forwards is considerable. If aspects of the nature of this divergence are, it is hoped, revealed by this study, further research might productively expand upon the institutional and ideological dimensions of such contrasts.
902. Massey, *World City,* 73
903. Massey, 21.
904. See for example, Hall, *Policing the Crisis*; Ward, ed. *Vandalism*; Kettle and Hodges, *Uprising*.
905. See for example White, *London*. A highly effective counterargument to these narratives of London, and the Financial Sector, as a 'Golden Goose' is found in Massey, *World City*.

the broader crises of the period. As Jerry White has observed, the wider decline in the nation's industrial economic base was felt more swiftly and more acutely in London than the rest of the country across this period, with manufacturing jobs falling in Great Britain by 25 percent, in Greater London by 36 per cent, and in inner London, by 41 per cent, across the 1970s.[906] The murals thus emerged across a period characterised not so much by anodyne economic 'restructuring' as pronounced class war and an atrophy of industrial labour: with the sharp rises in unemployment, de-skilling, de-unionising and fragmentation borne overwhelmingly by precisely the working class communities in which murals were being made.[907] Decline also left deep scars on the physical fabric of the city, with a huge surplus of inner city properties left to degrade and huge swathes of formerly industrial land left abandoned and unused.[908]

An understanding of the specific, urban manifestations of the crisis and the nature of its resolution has, therefore, been seen as essential to an understanding of the period, and the murals' place within it. The locations, funding structures, and audiences of London's exterior murals were intimately related to the circumstances of not just national, but specifically local urban crisis.[909] Moreover, the murals of this study were addressed to precisely the themes and

906. This decline reads even more dramatically when looked at in the longer historical perspective, where an estimated 2.72 million strong manufacturing workforce in 1961 London, had declined to 940,000 in 1974, 435,000 in 1989, and 274,000 by 1997. White, *London*, 206-208.
907. This atrophy of industrial labour has often been referred to as 'restructuring'—the emergence of a much-vaunted financial sector across the 1980s, masking the broad and severe economic decline of the preceding years. From the perspective of this study, however, the dynamics of decline and its effect upon the constitution and experience of working class Londoners cannot be overstated. In 1983, London's population reached its lowest point for a century, with inner London home to fewer people in the 1980s than in 1851 before the great expansions of the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. Through the 1970s, working class families continued to be encouraged to leave the city, to New Towns like Basildon and Harlow, via Government sponsored relocation schemes. White, *London*, 72 and 83.
908. In Tower Hamlets, the 'dead and disturbed space' went from 57 hectares in 1964 to 277 in 1977, three times the land still occupied by factories. White, 206.
909. If the funds offered by Urban Aid and Manpower Services Commission were the most direct responses to the urban crisis, the growing financial support from borough councils cannot be separated from the broader concerns regarding of urban and environmental decline, and growing attempts to forestall what was perceived as a concomitant epidemic of vandalism. For this latter, see Ward, *Vandalism*.

struggles which were perceived by the Left as offering either form, or solution, to that crisis: be that through the murals' multifaceted contributions to the forging of community, or their posited responses to the circumstances of industrial decline, threatened or sub-standard housing, the surge of and resistance to racism and nuclear proliferation, the reformulations of working class identity, or their summoning of a class consciousness and political action within a localised historical continuum. A fixation upon the manifestations of the crisis, and its resolution in neoliberalism, however, has too often displaced academic focus on these struggles and political contestations of the period.[910] Some effort, therefore, has also been made to recover something of what John Savage described as the 'sense of possibility that new ways of thinking and being might grow from [the] emptiness – like the scented buddleia on the bombsites…[that f]or the young, the reckless, and the radical, space gave freedom. It felt like you could take back your power'.[911]

A contention of this study, therefore, has been the historical significance of the manner in which its case studies gave form to *and took part in* the contestation of the period's urban realities: the fact that the muralists cooption of London's walls to give form to diverse aspects of the dynamic, if fragmented, counter-hegemonic forces of the period, offered a contribution to a divergent conjunctural settlement. Whilst it is important not to idealise the movements of the period, or to overlook their internal contradictions and historic defeats, the overwhelming indifference shown to them by most accounts renders the fragmentary testament of the murals all the more important. As Gramsci pointed out, 'there exists a scholastic and academic

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910. Here, in particular, a writer like Jean Baudrillard stands out as exemplary of a very widespread trend: Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, *Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005); though the wider tendency has been effectively critiqued by both Carter and Hemingway. Carter, "Towards a History of the Marxist History of Art," in *Renew Marxist Art History*, eds. Warren Carter, Barnaby Haran, Frederic J. Schwartz, (London: Arts Books Publishing Ltd, 2013), 14-28; Hemingway, "Introduction," in *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left,* (Pluto Press, London, 2006), 1-8.
911. Savage, "London Subversive," 18.

historico-political outlook which sees as real and worthwhile only such movements of revolt which are one hundred percent conscious, i.e. movements that are governed by plans worked out in advance to the last detail in line with abstract theory…. [b]ut reality produces a wealth of the most bizarre combinations'.[912] It is these bizarre combinations, and their continuing relevance, rather than any deficit in high theory, which this study has sought to emphasise in approaching its subject.

One of the bizarre combinations which this study has set out to examine, is the manner in which this body of radical and committed political murals—often explicitly hostile to the policy and direction of the centralised state—came into existence through the emergence of a network of predominantly *state* patronage across a period in which the state oversaw dramatic cuts to decentralised budgets, creeping authoritarianism and a decisive reorientation in favour of ruling class interests. Hitherto, scholarship has tended towards hyper-structuralist narratives of the deepening cooption of community art by a hostile and domineering state, a focus upon singular institutions of patronage, or a voluntarist assertion of cultural or artistic autonomy.[913] By situating the murals, their makers, the struggles in which they partook *and* their structures of patronage within broader historical dynamics, this study has sought to emphasise the murals' emergence within the conjunctural dynamics of a period in which as Pat Devine observed, 'two alternative post-social democracy trajectories presented themselves: a move in the direction of economic democracy, building on the gains of the long boom, as a transitional stage towards socialism; or a move to neoliberalism, reversing the

912. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 179
913. On co-option see, for example, Kelly, *Storming the Citadels*. For focus upon singular institutions, see Harris, *Cultured into Crisis*; or—for a much more detailed and detailed contribution—Atashroo, "Beyond the Campaign." For accounts overstating the autonomy of cultural producers from state forces see Kenna, *Guide* and Crehan, *Community Art*. Though both Kenna and Crehan would likely recoil from the characterisation of their accounts as reinforcing artistic autonomy, the understatement of the importance of state patronage, could be seen as an incarnation of such a model.

post-1945 gains'.[914] Whilst not circumscribing the murals, or their patronage, as direct

assertions of one or another of these polarities, the evolution of both, has been seen as

belonging precisely to the dynamics of contradiction, struggle, unrest and contestation in

which these poles emerged. This positioning is important: revealing the murals to be neither a

last gasp of stumbling but benighted post-war 'Keynesian Culturalism', *nor* the unmediated

expressions of the state's consensual power as it orientated towards a neoliberal

framework.[915] Rather, the emergence of the murals' patronage across a wide spectrum of state

institutions, has been seen as part of broader dynamics that bear testament to a moment in

which class struggle, and political and ideological contestations flowed outside, within, and

against the state.[916]

Ultimately, therefore, the murals have been seen as multiply bound up within the dynamics of

a period of conjuncture which separated post-war social democracy from the neoliberal era.

Whilst Gramsci described such periods of interregnum as ones in which, 'the old is dying and

the new cannot be born', the murals have been seen to offer much more than 'morbid

symptoms'.[917] Rather, the diverse and evolving techniques by which the murals of this study

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914. Pat Devine, "The 1970s and After. The political economy of inflation and the crisis of social democracy", *Soundings* vol 43, (March 2006): 52.

915. The idea of the 1970s as a moment of flailing Keynesian culturalism is central to Neil Mulholland's work. Whilst his analysis of the criticism of the period is very strong, this model seems to underestimate the generative force of the conjuncture and the extent to which its cultural politics were defined in conscious opposition (rather than a withering extension of) the post-war consensus. See Mulholland, *Why is there Only One Monopolies Commission* and Mulholland, *The Cultural Devolution*.

916. As stated in the introduction, such a view emerges from a model of the state opened up by Nicos Poulantzas' last work, where in place of a conception of the state based upon a model of dual power, it appears instead as a 'site of the political condensation of struggle…not external to the relations of production, but penetrat[ing] them and, indeed… constitutive for them'. Hall "Nicos Poulantzas," in Poulantzas*, State, Power Socialism*, xiii. But it also seeks to do justice to the notion of class struggle, by focussing upon state patronage (and the state) as situated within (and susceptible to) rather than overbearingly (if 'relatively') autonomous from the sphere of wider struggle and contestation. Poulantzas has had some influence on those who at the time and since have advocated working *In and Against the State*, including the GLC's Director of Finance from 1981-1986, and—at the time of writing—Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, John McDonnell MP. See, for example, George Eaton, *"*How John McDonnell plans to Transform the State from Within," *New Statesman*, 13 November, 2018: https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/11/how-john-mcdonnell-plans-transform-state-within.

917. 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear', Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 276.

partook in the vivacious and wide-ranging struggles of the period, have been seen to reveal

not just the 'possibility and necessity of creating a new culture', but its tentative

embodiment.[918] Through a thoroughgoing reorientation of the mural form and realist painting

within the 'living social contexts' of a city across a period marked by fierce contestations of

profound historical significance, it has been argued that the murals did, 'not simply transmit

the apparatus of production', but rather explored means by which to reorientate it, 'in the

direction of socialism'.[919] By 1986, Thatcher's political project had emerged as the

hegemonic resolution born of the crisis. It was a resolution which spelt the end of the specific

confluence of Left politics and mural painting traced here.[920] In an ensuing period, in which it

has been observed, that, 'it has become easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of

capitalism', the murals, and the struggles in which they partook, have often—where

examined at all—been approached as secondary or reformist concerns.[921] Here, by contrast,

they have been seen as 'a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past'.[922] From

the midst of our present conjuncture their memory seems well worth seizing hold of.

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918. As the same passage of the Prison Notebook, concluded, '…this reduction to economics and to politics means precisely a reduction of the highest superstructures to the level of those which adhere more closely to the structure itself—in other words, the possibility and necessity of creating a new structure.' Gramsci, 276.
919. Benjamin, "Author as Producer," 4
920. The abolition of the Greater London Council, allied to the reorientation of the Arts Council and the waning of political hope meant that whilst murals continued to be made, their embodiment of Left politics tended to be subsumed within broader, more liberally orientated, celebrations of community life. If, therefore, Brian Barnes was able to include reference to the Communist MP Shapurji Saklatvala, in his 1988 *Battersea in Perspective* mural, it was within the contexts of a wider schema quite removed from any active integration within contemporary political struggles. Whilst further studies, or overarching histories, will—it is hoped—further elucidate these endpoints, the speed with which they occurred is worth noting.
921. See Frederic Jameson, "Future City," *New Left Review*, I21, (May-June 2003): 76. As Harvey has observed the tendency to view urban and community-based struggles as secondary or reformist has long hung over Marxist accounts, but '[c]itizen and comrade can march together in anti-capitalist struggle, albeit often working at different scales. But this can occur only if we become… more "conscious of the nature of our task", which is collectively to build the socialist city on the ruins of destructive capitalist urbanisation. That is the city air that can make people truly free. But this entails a revolution in anti-capitalist thinking and practices. Progressive anti-capitalist forces can more easily mobilise to leap forward into global coordinations via urban networks that may be hierarchical but not monocentric, corporatist but nevertheless democratic, egalitarian and horizontal, systematically nested and federated…internally discordant and contested, but solidarious against capitalist class power – and, above all, deeply engaged in the struggle to undermine and eventually overthrow the power of the capitalist laws of value on the world market to dictate the social relations under which we work and live…the world of true freedom begins, as Marx insisted, only when such material constraints are left behind. Reclaiming and organising cities for anti-capitalist struggles is a great place to begin'. Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 153.
922. Benjamin, "Philosophy of History," 247.

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To the Wall: London's Murals and 'the Left', 1975-1986

by Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann

Appendix 1: Illustrations

Chapter 1

Beyond Social Democracy:
Libertarian Socialism, Community Politics and Utopias of
Action, 1975-1978

Figure 101
Greenwich Mural Workshop, *The People's River Mural,* Creek
Road, Greenwich, 1975, photograph collection of Carol
Kenna, c. 1975.

Figure 102
Francisco de Goya, *The Colossus*, 1808-1812, Oil on Canvas.
Figure 103
Abraham Bosse, *Frontispiece of the book Leviathan by Thomas
Hobbes*, 1651, Engraving.
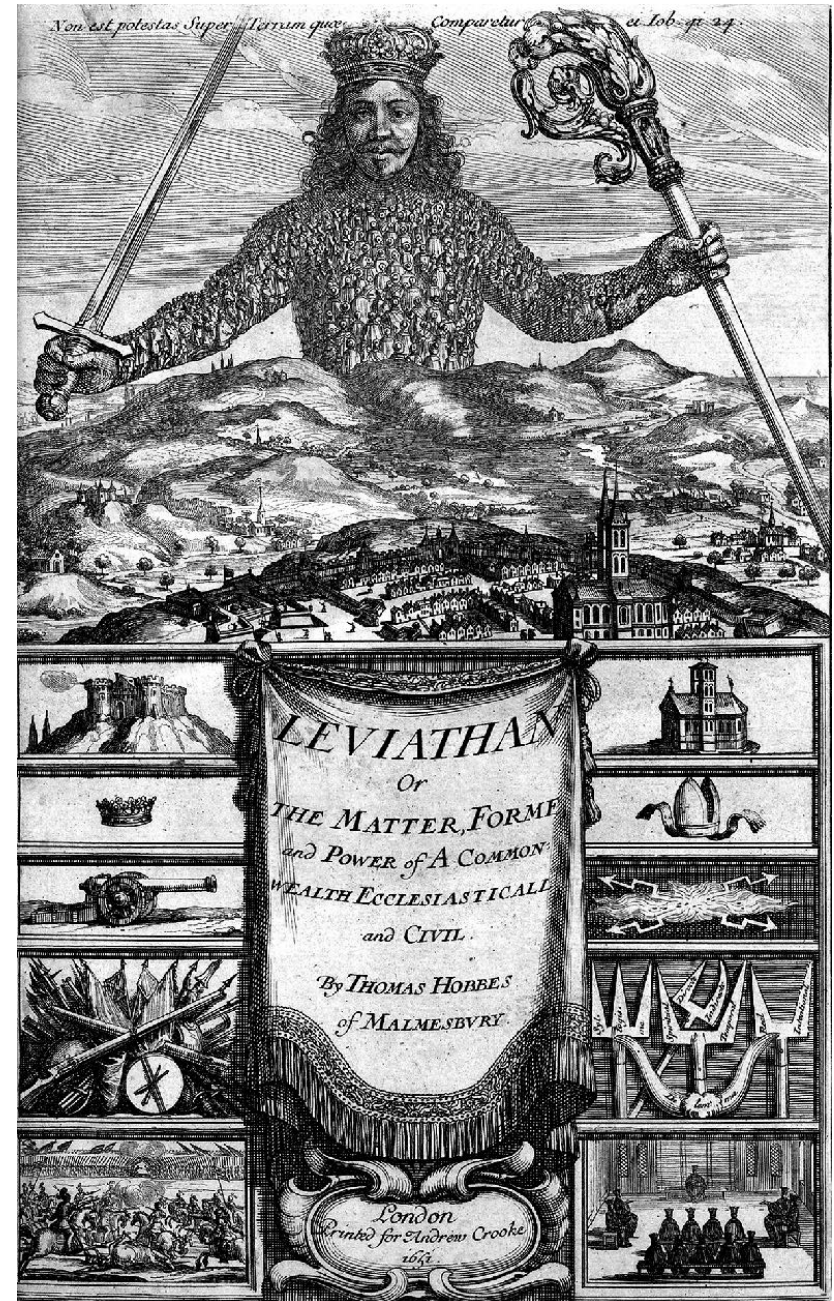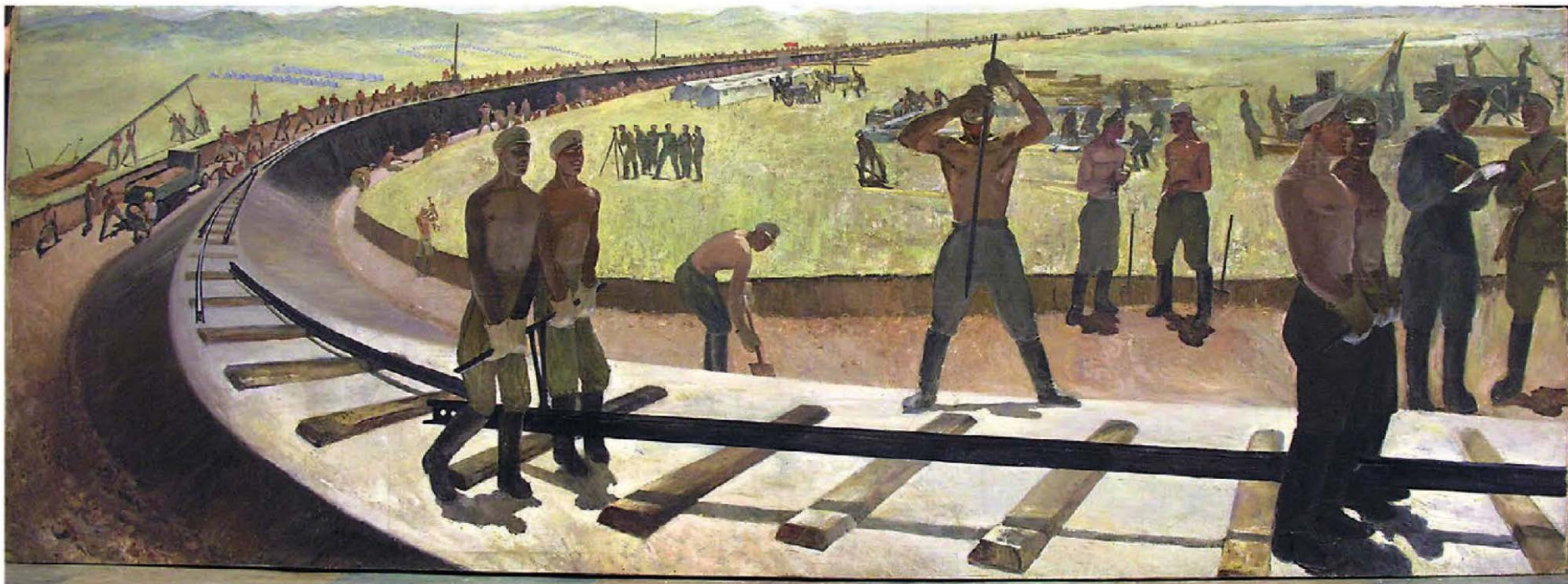
Figure 104
Kuzma Nikolaev, *Building of the Railway Line in Magnitogorsk*, 1930, oil on
canvas, 139.5 × 380 cm.

Figure 105
Stanley Spencer, *Shipbuilding on the Clyde: Riveters,*
1941, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 579.1 cm,
Figure 106
Stanley Spencer, *Shipbuilding on the Clyde: The
Furnaces,* 1946. Oil on canvas, 156.2 x 113.6 cm

Figure 107
Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Design for the People's River*, 1975, gauche on paper
Figure 108
Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Design for the People's River*, 1975, pen on tracing paper
Figure 109
Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Design for the foreground of the People's River*, 1975, pen
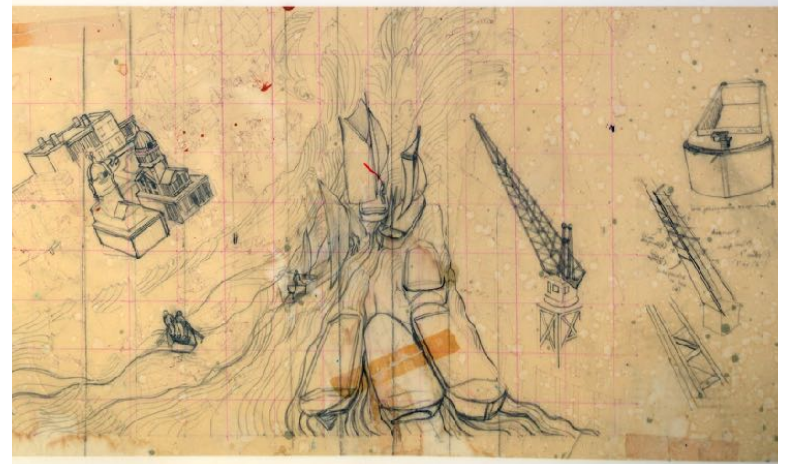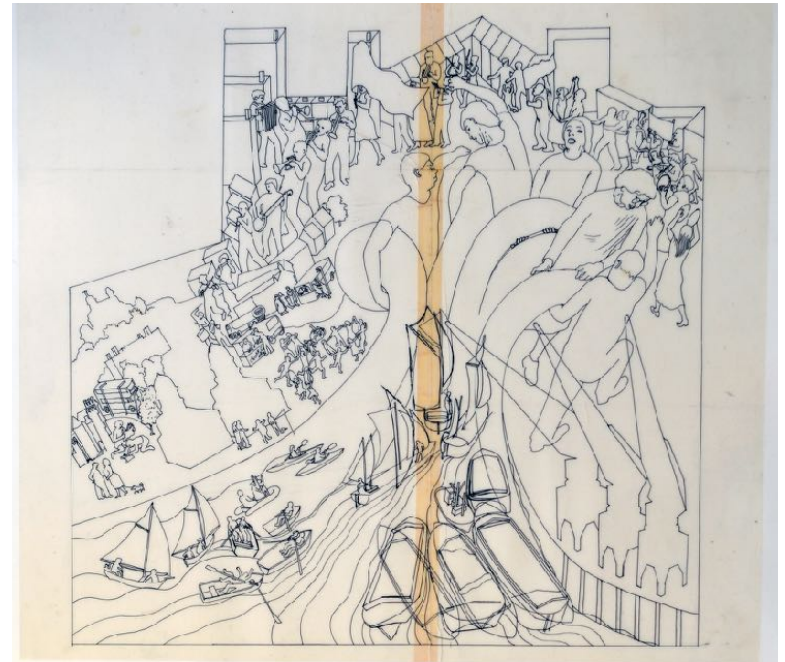
Figure 110
Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Floyd Road Mural,* 1976, Charlton.
Photograph collection of Carol Kenna, c. 1976.
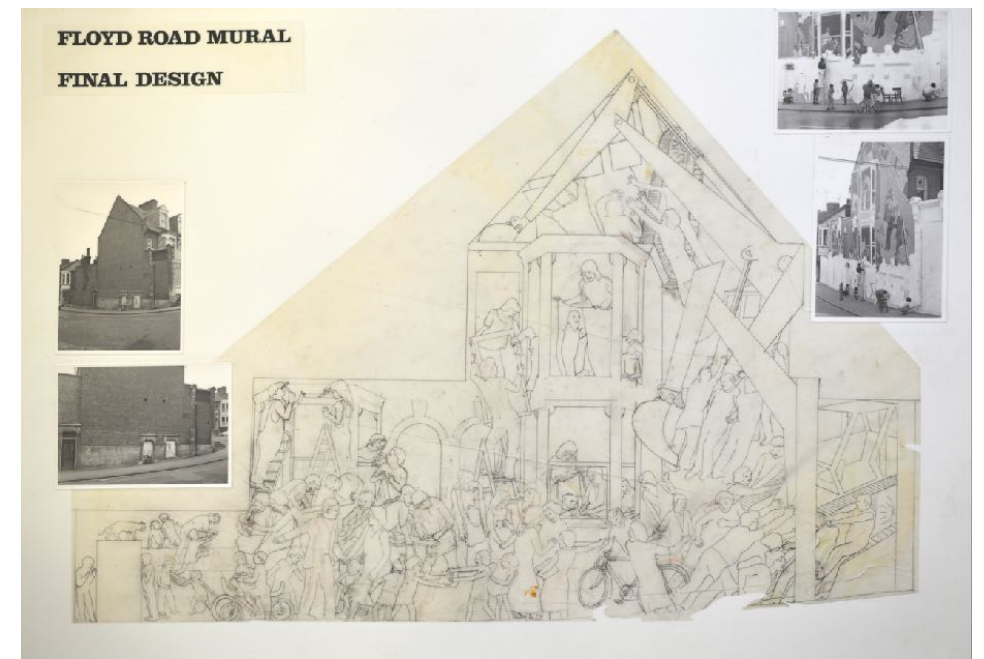
Figure 111
Photograph of Floyd Road Mural, showing Valiant
House behind, 2016.
Figures 112-113
Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Designs for Floyd
Road Mural,* 1976. Gouache and pen on paper.

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Figure 114
L.S. Lowry, Industrial Landscape, 1955, oil on canvas, 114 x
152 cm, Tate collection.
Figure 115
L.S. Lowry, *Coming Out of School*, oil on canvas, 35 x 54cm.
Tate collection
Figure 116
Dan Jones, *Poplar Rates Rebellion*, date and dimensions
unknown.

Figure 117
Diego Rivera, *The History of Mexico*, 1929-1935.
Main Wall, National Palace, Mexico City, Mexico

Brian Barnes' student
work, all oil on canvas.
Collection of the artist

Figure 118
Brian Barnes, *Conservatory*, late 1960s.
Figure 119
Brian Barnes, *View from RCA Studio*, late 1960s.
Figure 120
Brian Barnes, *Conservatory,* late 1960.
Figure 121
Brian Barnes, *Battersea Bridge Road*, late 1960s.

Figure 122
Brian Barnes, *Self Portrait,* late 1960s
Figure 123
Brian Barnes, *Life Model,* late 1960s.

Figure 124
BRAG Protesting Morgans, c. 1973-4 (Barnes pictured holding
lithograph of river view)
Figure 125
Brian Barnes, *Battersea Bridge and Morgan's Crucible site
from Cheyne Walk*, early 1970s. Oil on Canvas.
Figure 126
Brian Barnes, *Battersea Bridge and Morgan's Crucible site
from Cheyne Walk,* 1973. Lithograph
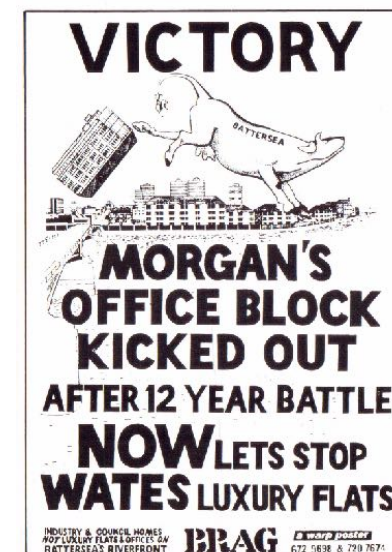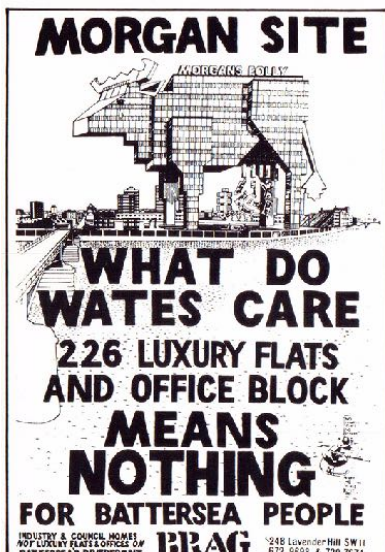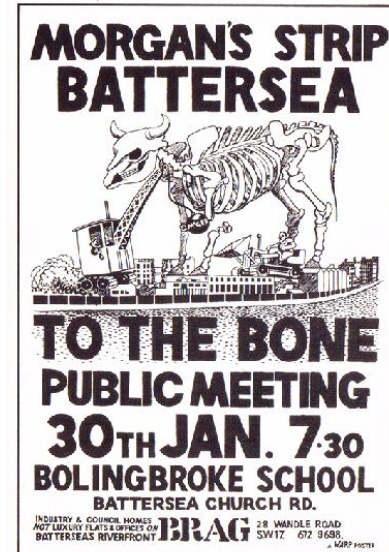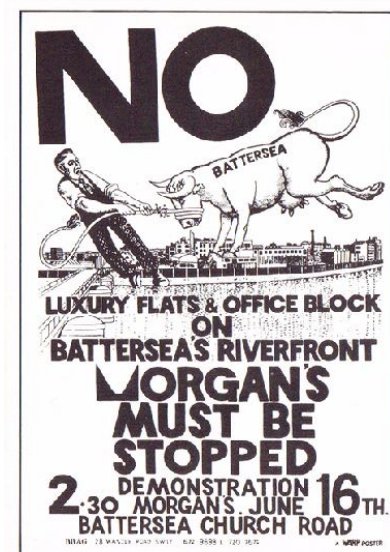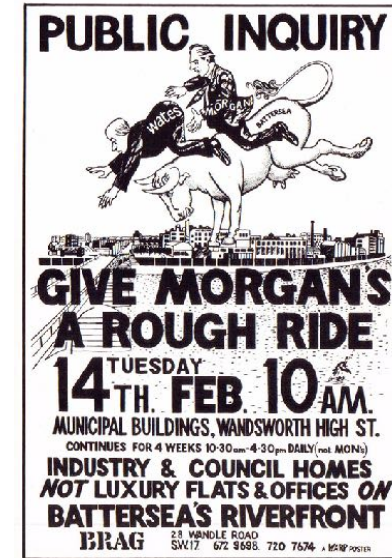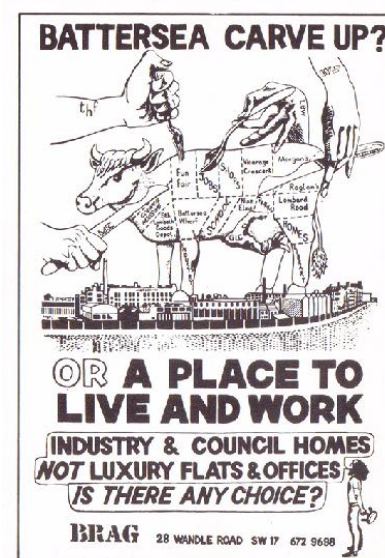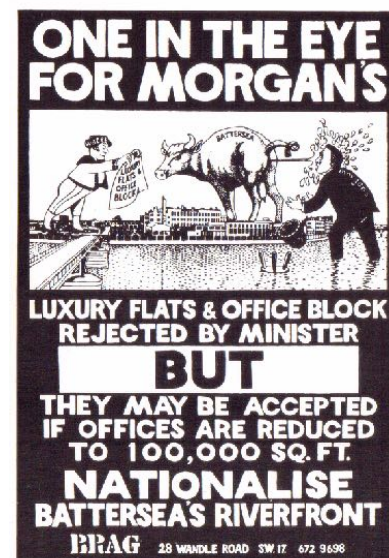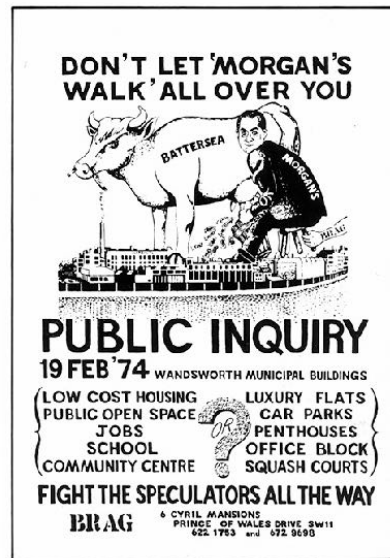
Figures 127-132
Brian Barnes, *BRAG Campaign Posters,* 1974-1984
Screenprints

Figures 133-138
BRAG actions, 1973-1980
Figure 139
Ernest Rodker and BRAG clear the pocket park in front
of Morgan's

Figures 140-142
Brian Barnes, consultation and research, c. 1976.
Figures 143-144
The wall in progress, c. 1977.

Figure 145
Brian Barnes, *Battersea: The Good, The Bad and The
Ugly Mural*, 1976-78, Battersea. Composite photograph
Figure 146
The mural with subdivisions marked.

Figure 147
The Good, detail
Figure 148
Broom Head, detail
Figure 149
The Bad and the Ugly, detail
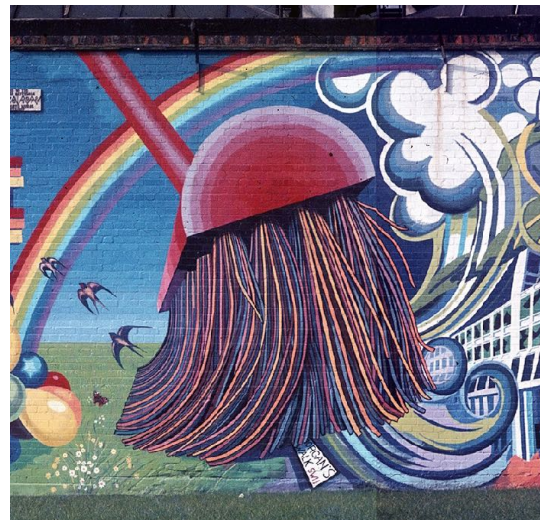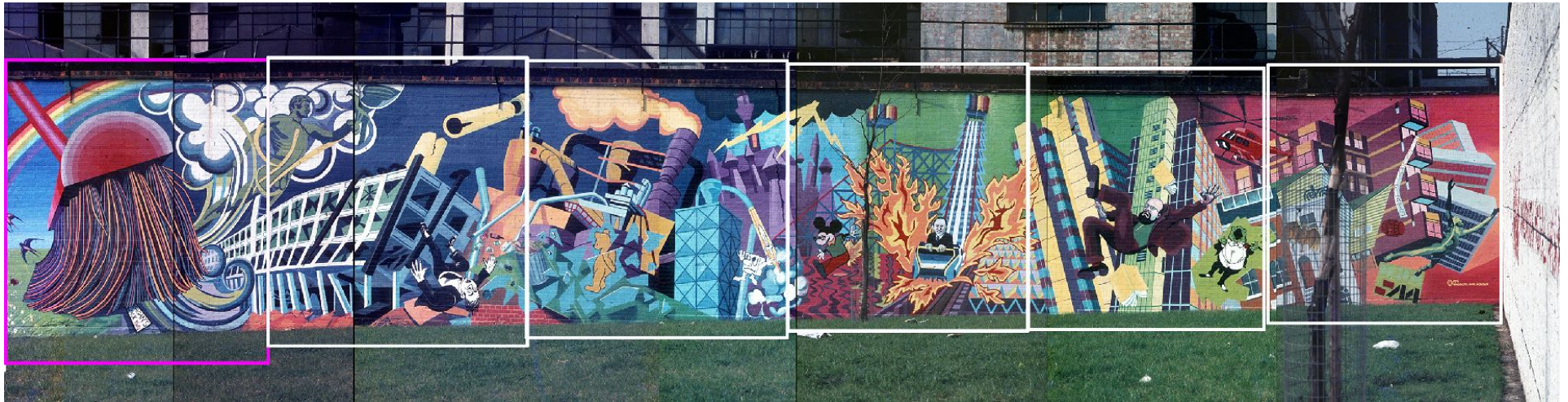
Figure 150
The Bad, detail with unit subdivisions

Figure 151
Giotto, *The Last Judgement,* 1306, Arena Chapel, Padova.
Figure 152
Barnes, *Battersea Mural,* Broom Detail
Figure 153
Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934, Palacio de Bellas
Artes, Mexico City
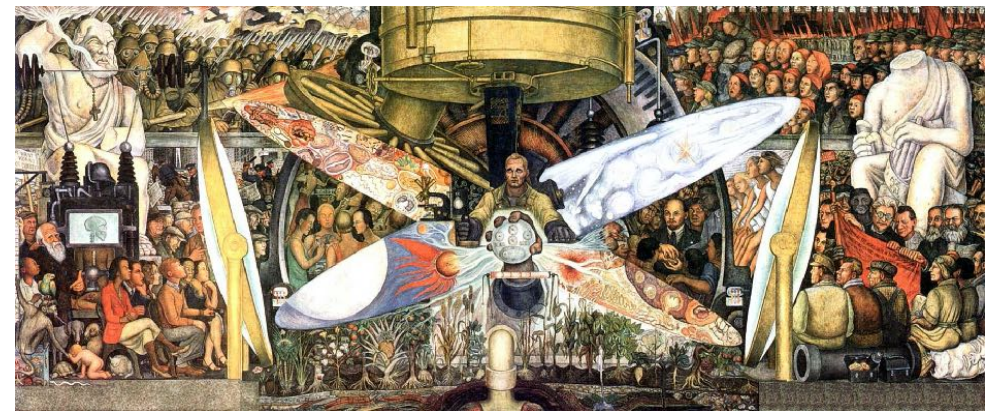
Figure 154
Battersea Mural, detail of Morgan's Man, Morgan's
Crucible Factory, Cllr Mike Tapsell falling.
Figure 155
Photograph of the unveiling of Morgan's Man at new
factory in Wales, prior to BRAG's action.

Figure 154
Battersea Mural, composited detail of Morgan's Man,
Morgan's Crucible Factory, Cllr Mike Tapsell falling, and
Garton's Glucose Factory.
Figure 155
Photograph of the unveiling of *Morgan's Man* at new Wales
factory.
Figure 156
State, Cut it Out Mr Cube, Tate and Lyle Advertisement, c.
1950s.
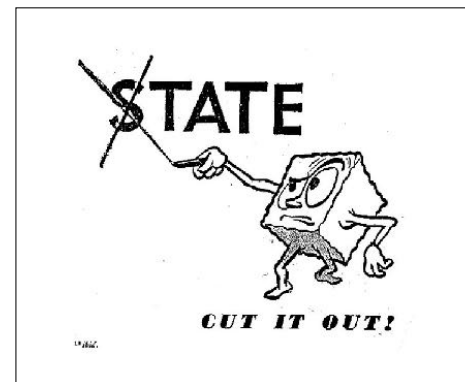
Figure 157
Battersea Mural, Detail showing Garton's Glucose, the
unbuilt Disneyland, and Charles Forte on rollercoaster
Figures 158-160
BRAG protests against the Disneyland proposal, Battersea
Park, early 1970s
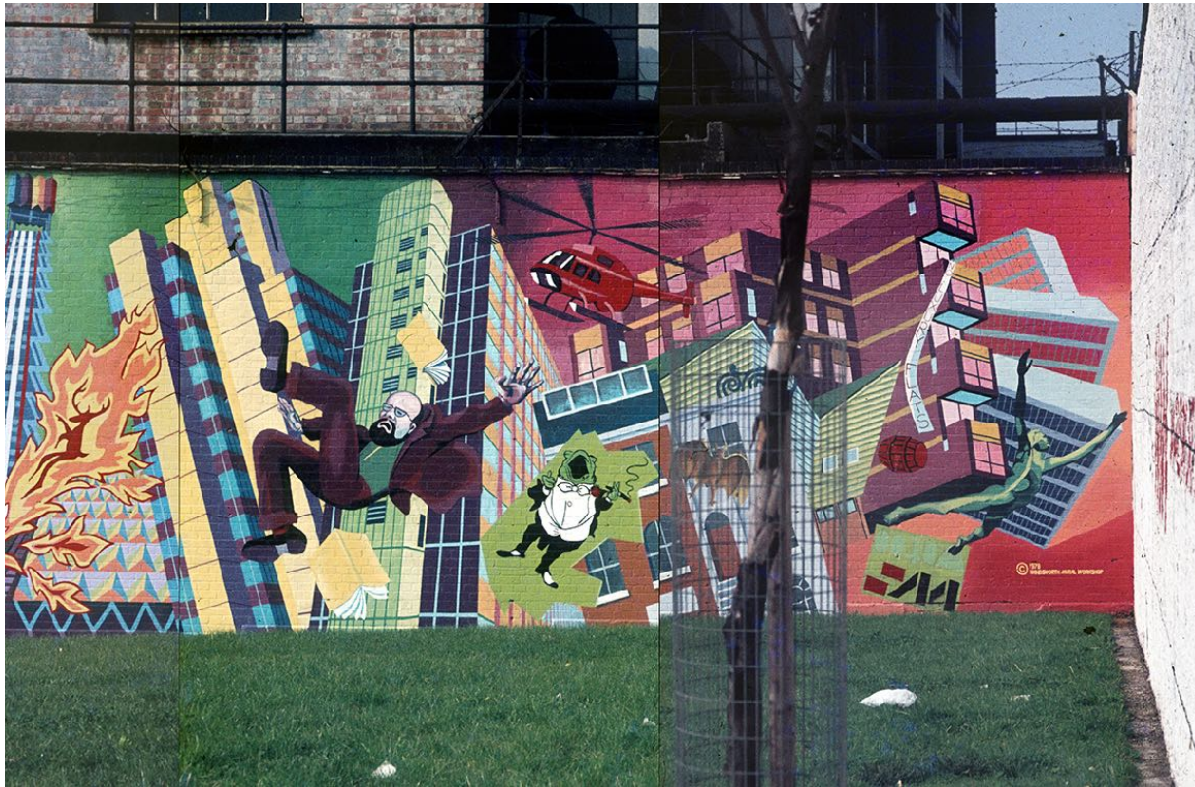
Figure 161
Battersea Mural, Detail of Doddington and Rollo
Estates, Planning Officer Tony Belton falling, Mr Toad
and Bat Cave Restaurants, and Valiant House Luxury
Flats.
Figure 162
BRAG occupy Valiant House.

Figures 163-165
Battersea Mural, Details of the Good, Allotment and river access, Kambala Estate, and Bus Garage, Lathe factory and swimming pool.

Figure 166
David Binnington, *Office Work*, Royal Oak Murals, 1976-77
Royal Oak, London.

Figure 167
Desmond Rochfort, *Construction Work*, Royal Oak Murals, 1976-77
Royal Oak, London.

Chapter 2

Contesting the 'Great Moving Right Show':
'Race', Class, Realism, and Resistance
in Tower Hamlets, 1978-1983

Figures 201
Paul Trevor, Graffiti, Brick Lane, 1978

Figures 202:
Paul Trevor, Contesting Brick Lane,
Summer 1978

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A NEW MURAL AND SUMMER PLAYSCHEME FOR SPITALFIELDS.

IN THE NEXT 3 MONTHS THE TOWER HAMLETS ARTS PROJECT (THAP) WILL BE PAINTING A MURAL AND DOING UP THE PLAYGROUND SITE IN CHICKSAND STREET, AS PART OF A LARGER SCHEME TO IMPROVE THE AREA AND REPLANT THE GARDEN. DURING THE SUMMER WE WILL BE RUNNING VARIOUS PLAYSCHEMES AND EVENTS WITH OPPOTUNITIES FOR LOCAL KIDS TO GET INVOLVED IN PHOTOGRAPHY, DRAMA AND ARTS ACTIVITIES AND ALSO TO HELP PAINT AND DESIGN THE MURAL.

AS THE MURAL IS TO BE A MAJOR WORK AND WILL HAVE A LARGE IMPACT ON THE AREA WE WANT IT TO REFLECT THE AREA AND ITS PEOPLE.

We want your ideas and support. Come and meet the Artists.

Friday 27 July, 6·30~8·00pm.
in the chicksand st. playground.

Figure 203:
THAP Promotional materials, *A New Mural and Playspace,* 1979

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Figures 204
Ray Walker, *The Dispossessed,* 1975, oil on canvas, 152 x 156 cm.
Ray Walker, *Demon Power*, c. 1978, oil on canvas, 80 x 268 cm
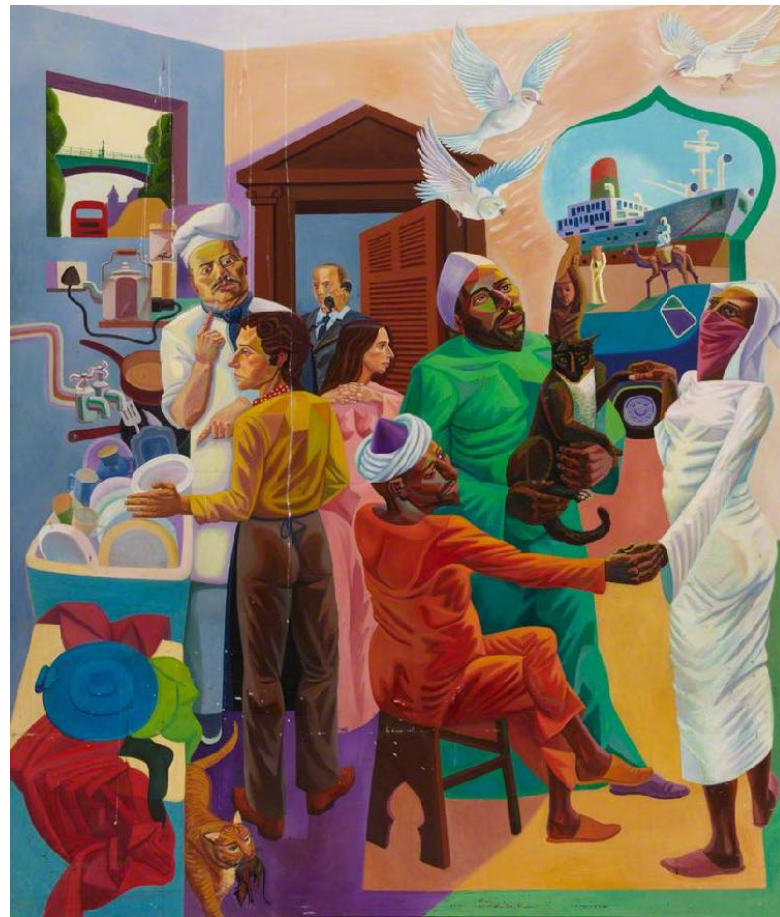
Figure 205
Ray Walker, *Dick Whittington Hospital Mural*, 1977

Figure 206
Ray Walker, Bow Mission Mural, 1978
Photographs © David Hoffman

22-23. Sketches for Chicksand Mural 'Portraits' 1979
charcoal on paper   each 27 × 20
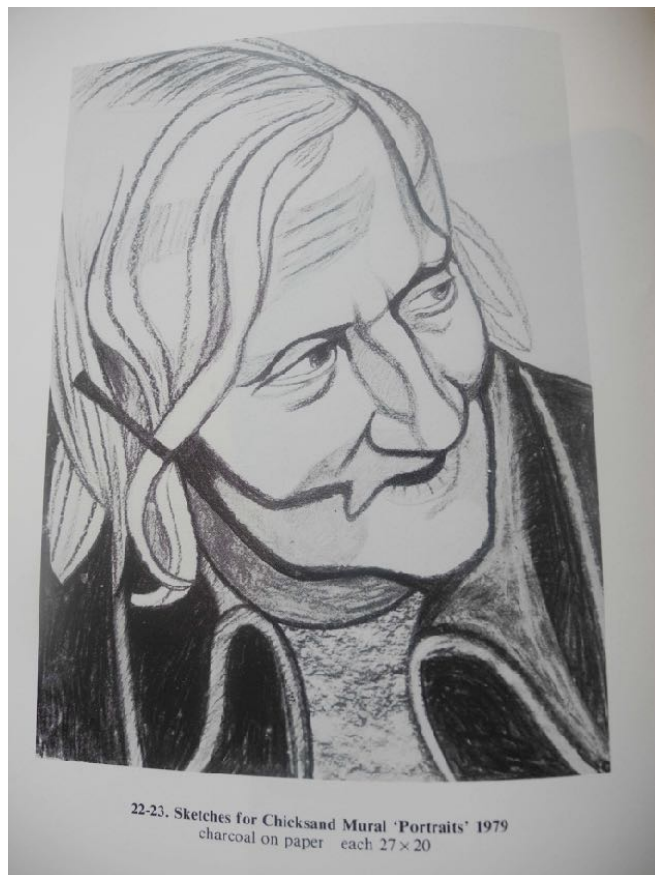
Figures 207a:
Ray Walker, *Sketches for Chicksand Street Mural*, 1979

Figures 207 b
Ray Walker, *Sketches for Chicksand Street Mural*, 1979

Figure 208a
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land Mural*, viewed from Chicksand Street, 1979-1980.
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 208b
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land Mural*, viewed from Chicksand Street, 1979-80.

Figure 209
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail: left hand section (note there are several alterations to final version).
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 209b
David Hoffman, Children playing in front of Chicksand Mural, c. 1980
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figures 210
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, details: left hand section, 'The Dance of Liberty'. Top left and right images, completed version. Bottom right missing GLC and LBTH bills.
Photographs © David Hoffman

Figure 211
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, details: left hand section,
detritus, padlock and 'Dance of Liberty'
Photograph © David Solomons

Figure 212
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail: left hand section, pointing
finger and bottle
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 213
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail: left hand section, family arriving (to rear)
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 214
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail: middle section.
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 215
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, details: portraits (old
and young). Photographs © David Hoffman
And Middle Section: Photograph in the public domain.

Figure 216
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, details: middle
section
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 217
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, details: middle
section, old man sitting.
Photograph © David Hoffman
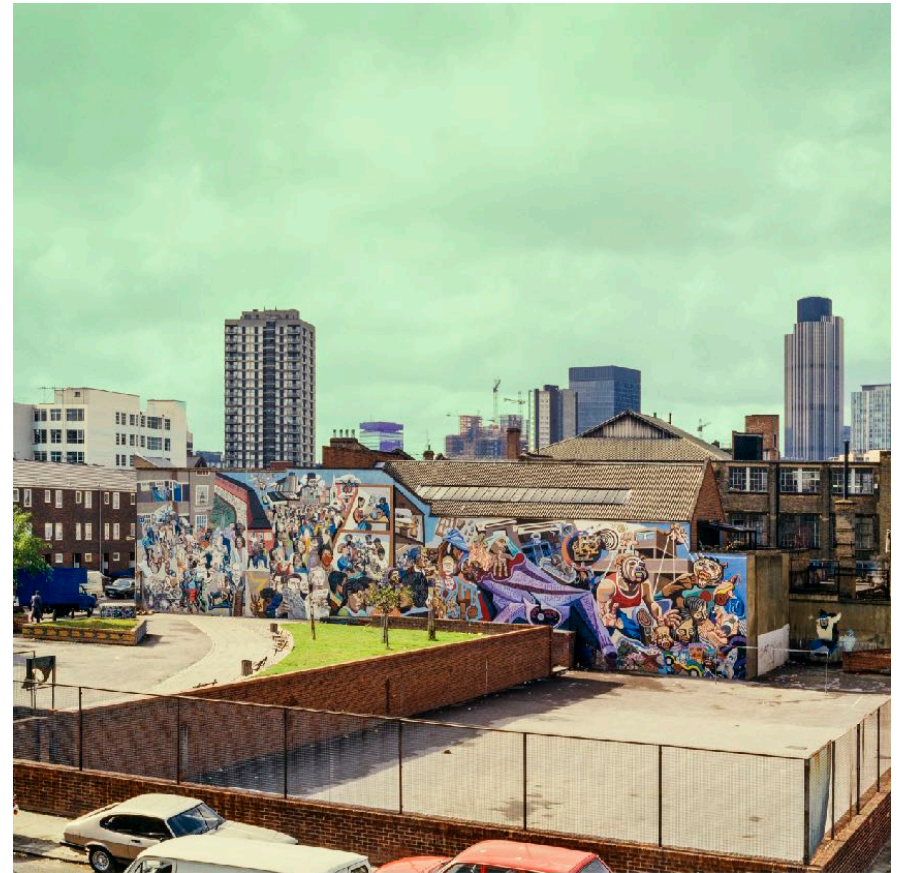
Figure 218
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, seen with Hawksmoor
spire and Nat West Tower behind.
Photographs © David Hoffman

Figure 219
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail: crowd, city and capitalist.
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 220
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail: sweatshop
scenes. Photograph © David Hoffman
Figure 221
Paul Trevor, Spitalfields sweatshops c. 1978

84-85. Night Frenzy Triptych 1975
oil on canvas

Figure 222a
Ray Walker, *Night Frenzy Triptych*, 1975: sweatshop
scenes
Figure 222b
Max Beckmann, *The Family Room,* 1920

Figure 223
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail: right hand
section

Figure 224
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail, right hand section: shirt
of social ills.

Figure 225
Ray Walker, *The Promised Land*, detail, right hand section:
masked figures 'proletarian fascists?'

Figure 226
Jose Clement Orozco, *Catharsis,* 1935 (detail) Palacio de
Bellas Artes, Mexico City

Figure 227
Syd Shelton, *Jubilee Street*, Whitechapel, c. 1977

Figure 228
Syd Shelton, *Rock Against Racism, Victoria Park*, April 30th
1978
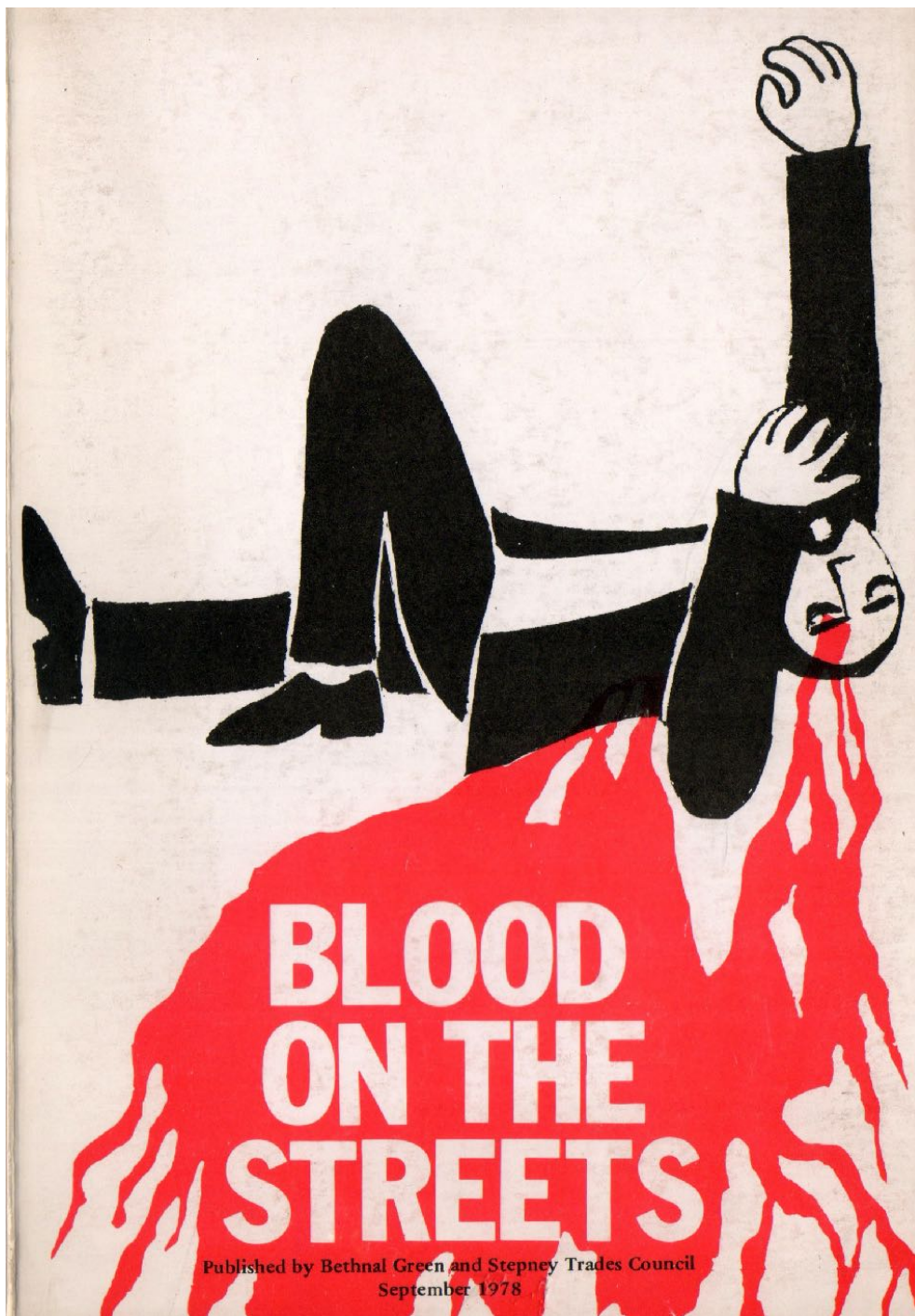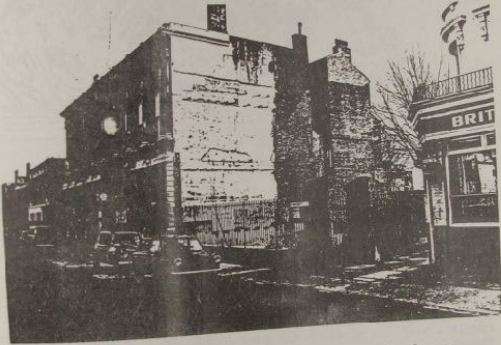
Figure 229
Dan Jones, *Stepney Trades Council Poster on Murder of Altab Ali*, 1978.

Figure 230
Cable Street Mural Project, *Get Involved It's Your Mural,* c.
1979

Figure 231
David Binnington, *First Sketch for Cable Street Mural*, 1979

The Daily Mail, MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1936.

London Baton Charges: Eighty-Four Arrests

NORMA SHEARER WILL SECRET

REDS ATTACK BLACKSHIRTS

Girls Among Injured

By Our Special Correspondents

EIGHTY-FOUR ARRESTS, IT WAS STATED AT SCOTLAND YARD THIS MORNING, WERE MADE YESTERDAY DURING THREE HOURS' DISTURBANCES IN THE EAST END OF LONDON, AND IN THE LATER DISORDERS IN THE STRAND AND TRAFALGAR-SQUARE AND ON THE EMBANKMENT.

Sir Oswald Mosley had planned a march of his Blackshirts from Royal Mint-street, facing the Tower of London, through the East End to four centres where he was to address his followers. Communists and others had resolved to attempt to prevent the march.

Comprehensive plans to preserve order, involving the cancellation of all leave and the concentration of 4,000 mounted and foot police in the area, were carried out by the authorities, with the result that the disorder was confined to sporadic outbreaks, in which batons were freely used and many people injured. Five hundred St. John Ambulance men were on duty.

MARCH CANCELLED

The first Blackshirt contingent to arrive was attacked
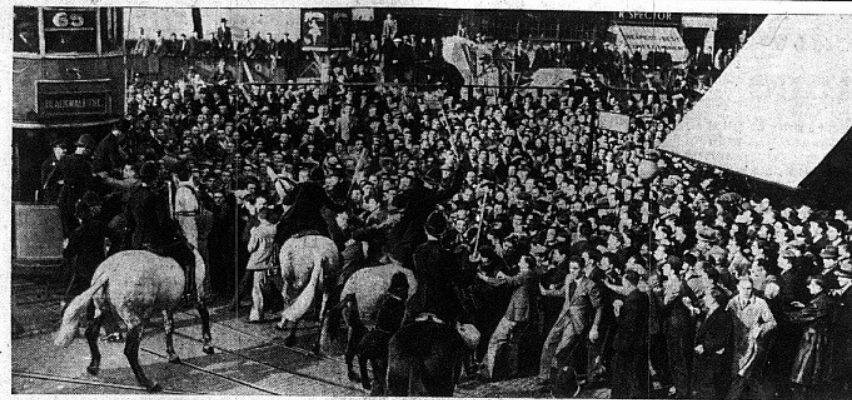
Mounted police breaking up the great crowd at Gardiner's Corner, E., during yesterday's disturbances.

AN SOS FOR AMBULANCE —IN CASE HE CRASHED

WHILE flying "blind" over the Irish Sea yesterday the pilot of a 10-seater air liner heard a loud report.

He saw that through some mysterious mishap the port wheel had been damaged and the tyre had burst, and fearing that he might crash when he landed he

'Safer Streets' Drive By London Police

Special "Daily Mail" News

SIR Philip Game, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, has issued instructions that a determined attempt shall be made by the Force to reduce the number of street accidents this month.

Casualties reported last October showed a great increase over previous periods, and it is to guard against a similar rise this year that all ranks have been asked to assist.

WIFE'S LEAP AS CAR FALLS 100 ft.

From Our Own Correspondent

Glossop, Derbyshire, Sunday.

MR. Joseph Ackroyd, of Studley-road, Darnall, Sheffield, saw his wife and two young children leap for life from a runaway motor-car to-day just before it hurtled over a 100ft. precipice on the Snake road between Glossop and Sheffield.

Dead Husband's Letter of Advice

From Our Special Correspondent

Hollywood, Sunday.

NORMA SHEARER has not acted for the films for at least six months. Whether she will ever play in the pictures planned by her late husband, Mr. Irving Thalberg, before his death is still uncertain, although she may have the part of Marie Antoinette.

I understand that Mr. Thalberg left a letter of advice on his professional career, but his lawyers are silent on the matter.

Thalberg, who had been visiting specialists for two years, knew he would die soon.

Norma Shearer, named as the principal heiress of her husband's estate, to-day becomes the richest film star in the world.

His will was dated June 12, 1935. The amount of his fortune is undisclosed, but is estimated at between £1,600,000 and £2,000,000. It was derived from three sources: from his Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer contract, paying a salary believed to be £100,000 a year as a producer; from Messrs. Loew's Inc., controlling the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company, which had a contract with him dividing between him and two other men 20 per cent. of its net annual income; and from his

Figure 232
Cable Street Press, Daily Mail, *October 5th 1936*

Figures 233
Cable Street Press, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph *October 5th*
1936

Figures 234
David Hoffman, *Binnington Transferring the Image onto the Wall*, c. 1980
Photographs © David Hoffman
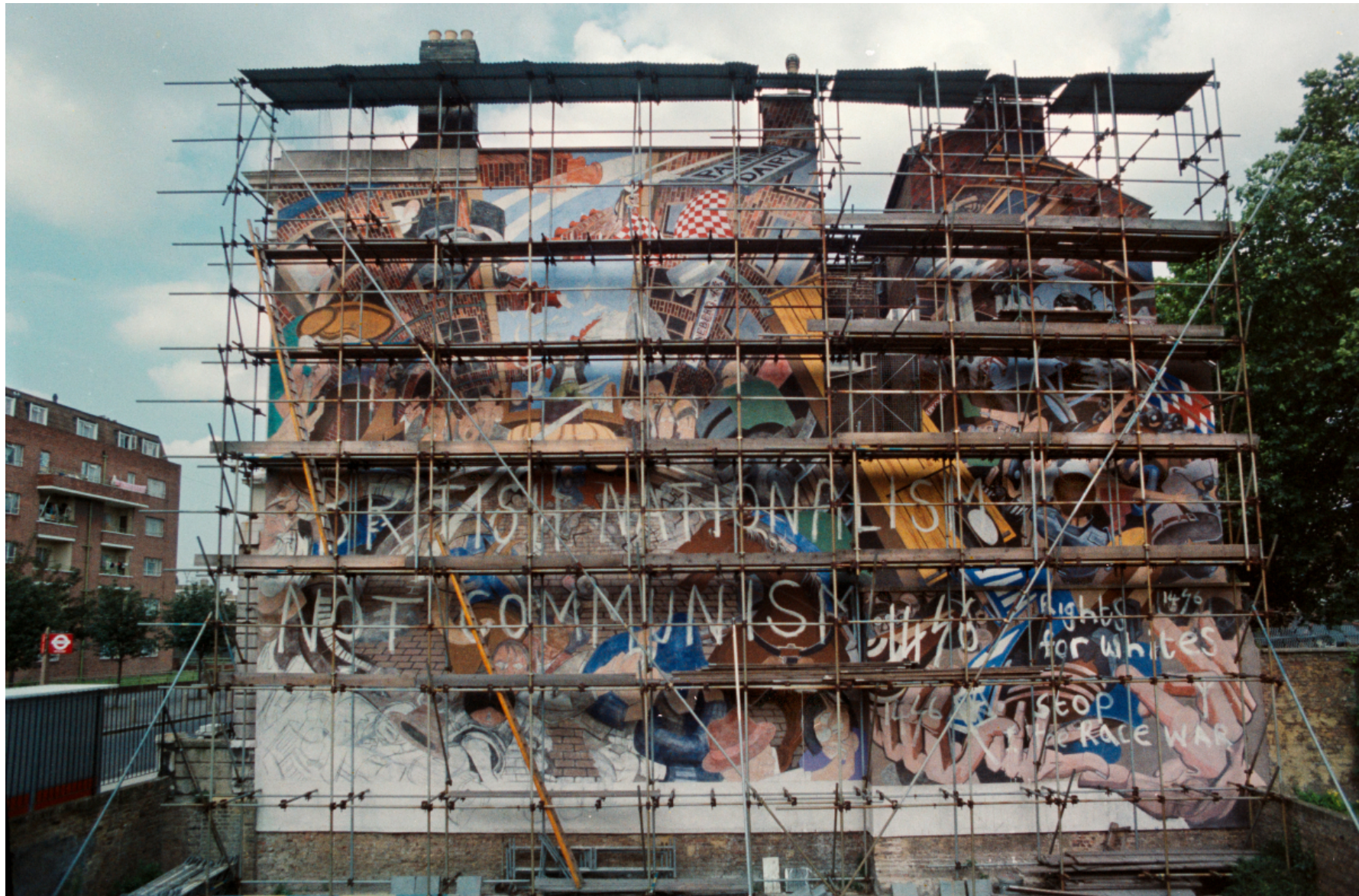
Figures 235
David Hoffman, *"British Nationalism Not Communism, Rights for Whites Stop the Race War"*, June 1982
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figures 236
David Hoffman, *Restorations begin,* 1982
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 237
Ray Walker, Army Recruitment Triptych, 1981

Figure 238
Ray Walker,, The Peasants Revolt Mural, 1981
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 239
David Binnington, Paul Butler, Desmond Rochfort and Ray Walker,
The Battle of Cable Street Mural, 1978-1983
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 240
Butler and Rochfort in front of the mural.
Initials marking sections:
RW - Ray Walker
PB - Paul Butler
DR - Des Rochfort
All 4 above
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 241
The Barricades at Cable Street, 1936

Chapter 3

Resisting Apocalypse: London's anti-nuclear murals, 1980-1985
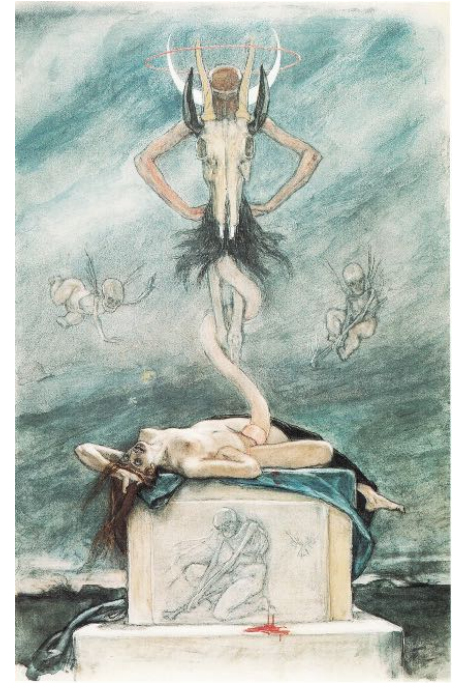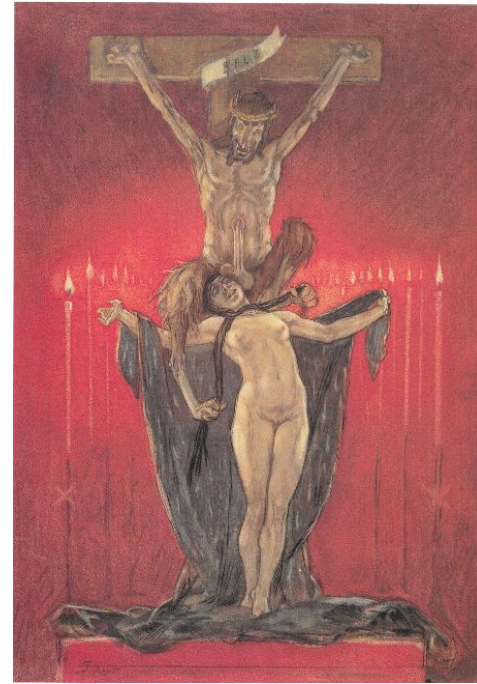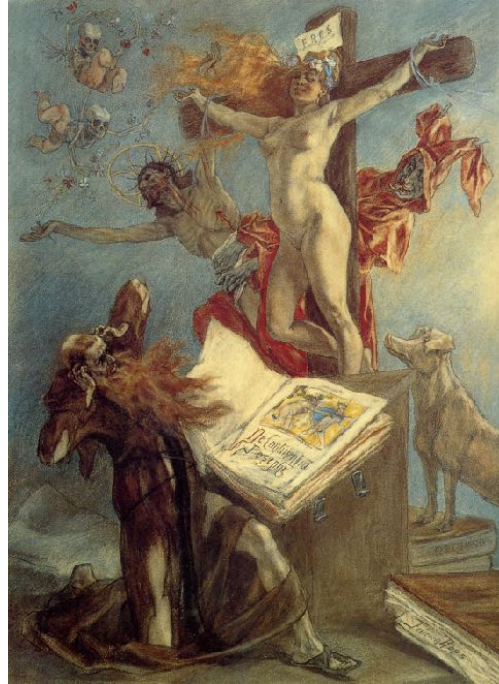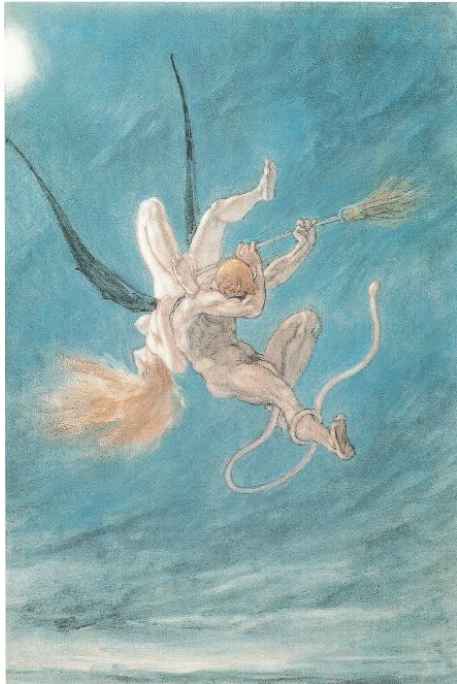
Figures 301-4
Felicien Rops, *Les Sataniques, 1-4,*
1882

Figure 305
Felicien Rops, *Satan Sowing the Tares*,
from Les Sataniques, 1882

Figure 306
Nuclear Dawn Mural,
Spring/Summer 1980, After 'hippy graffiti'
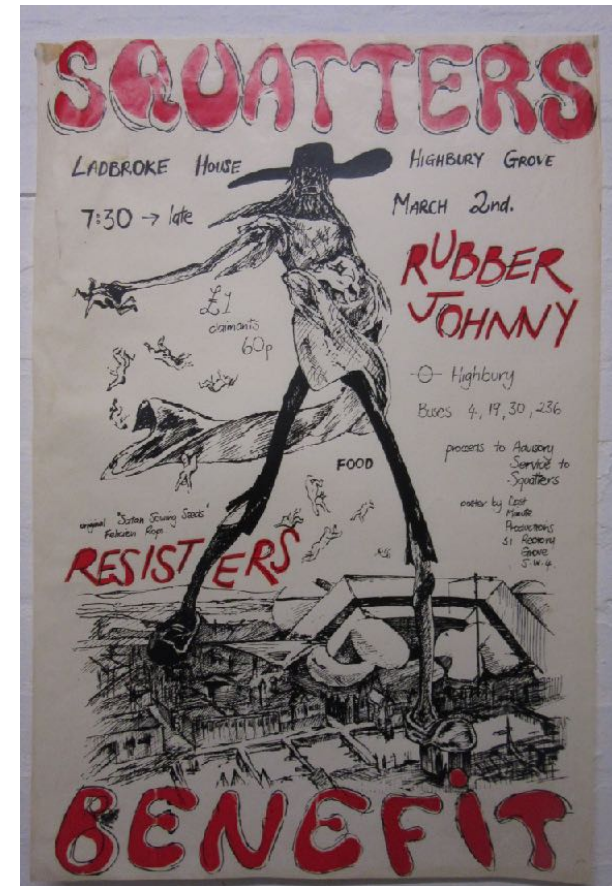
Figure 307
Brian Barnes and Dale McCrea.
Squatters Benefit Gig Poster
Screenprint, 1979

Figures 308 and 309
Brian Barnes, *Nuclear Dawn Scaled Watercolour*, October 1980,
Victoria and Albert Museum Collection
Brian Barnes,
Nuclear Dawn Mural, Coldharbour Lane, Brixton, 1980-81
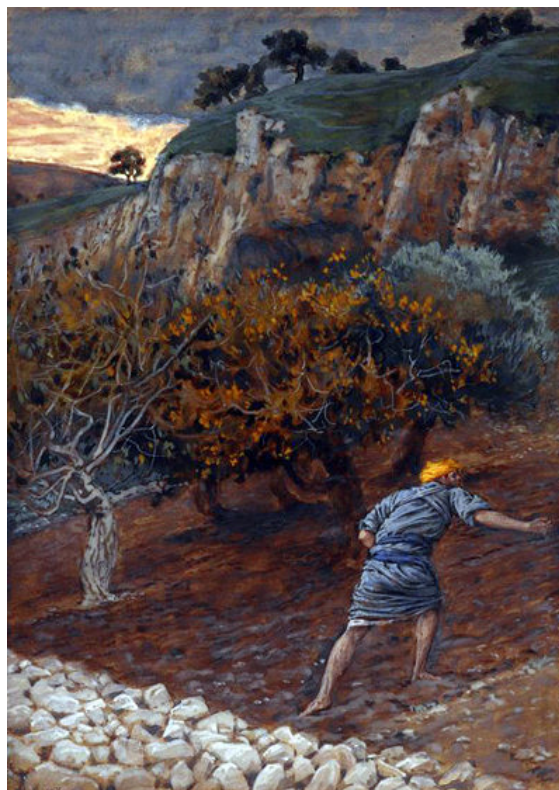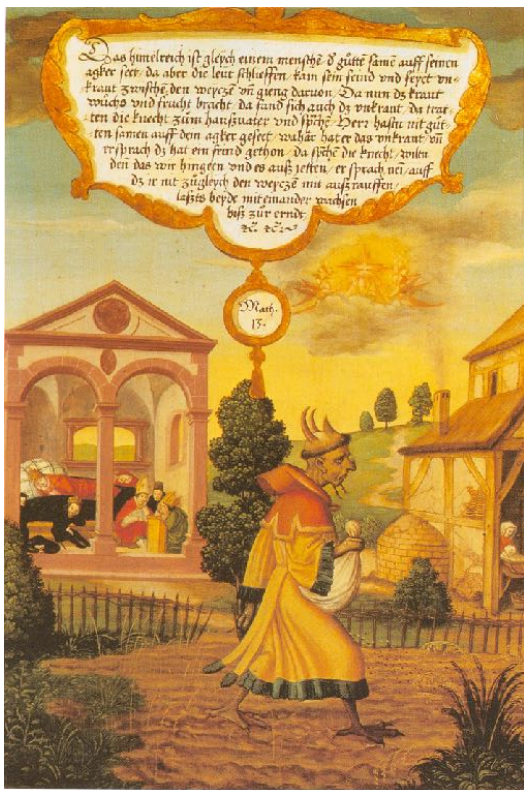
Figures 310-12
Heinrich Füllmaurer, *Parable of the Wheat and the Tare*s, c. 1540
James Tissot, *The Enemy who Sows*, c. 1886-1894
Adreien Bloemaert, *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares*, 1624
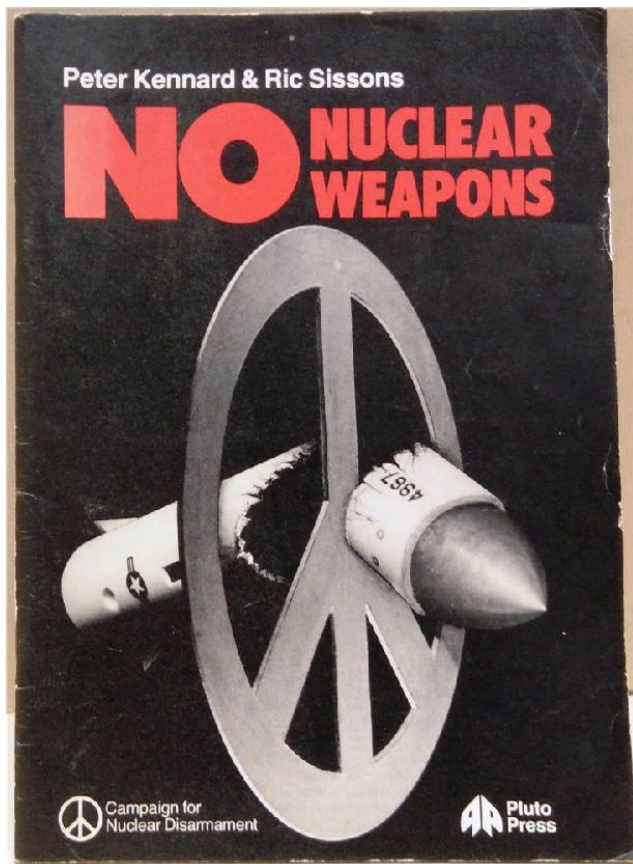
Figures 313-16
Peter Kennard, *Book Cover*, 1981
John Hodder, Annie Tunnicliffe delivering cruise missile
to Greenham Common, 1981
Peter Kennard, Photomontage, c. 1980
CND badge, c. 1981

Figures 317-18
Stanley Kubrick, *Dr Strangelove or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, Film Still, 1963
Colin Self, *Leopardskin Nuclear Bomber No. 2*, 1963
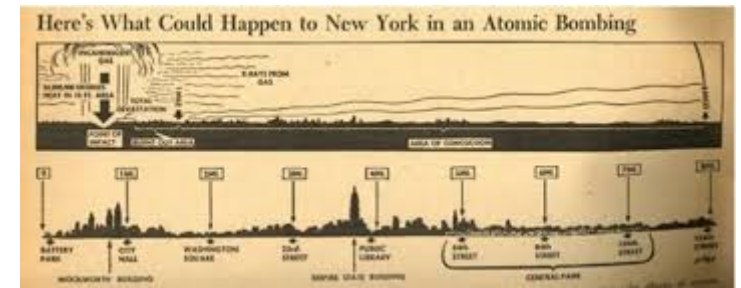
Figures 319-21
Picture Post, H Bomb on London, February 1950
The Atomic Future, Chicago Supplement, 3 May, 1946
New York Daily Newspaper, PM, 7 August, 1945

Figures 322-24
Coventry, Hiroshima and Dresden after bombing
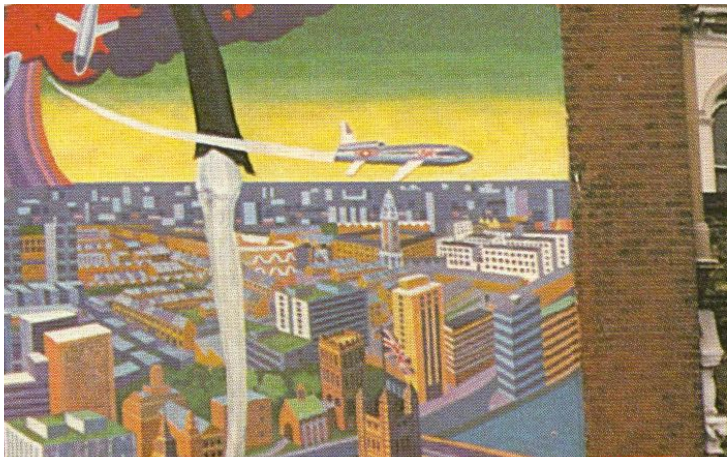
Figures 325-27
The Barrier Block, Lambeth Town Hall
and their representation in the Nuclear Dawn Mural

Figures 328 and 329
Otto Dix *Schadel (Skull)*, 1924
Edward Burra, *Skull in a Landscape*, 1946

Figure 330
Henry Kay Henrion, *Stop Nuclear Suicide,* 1963
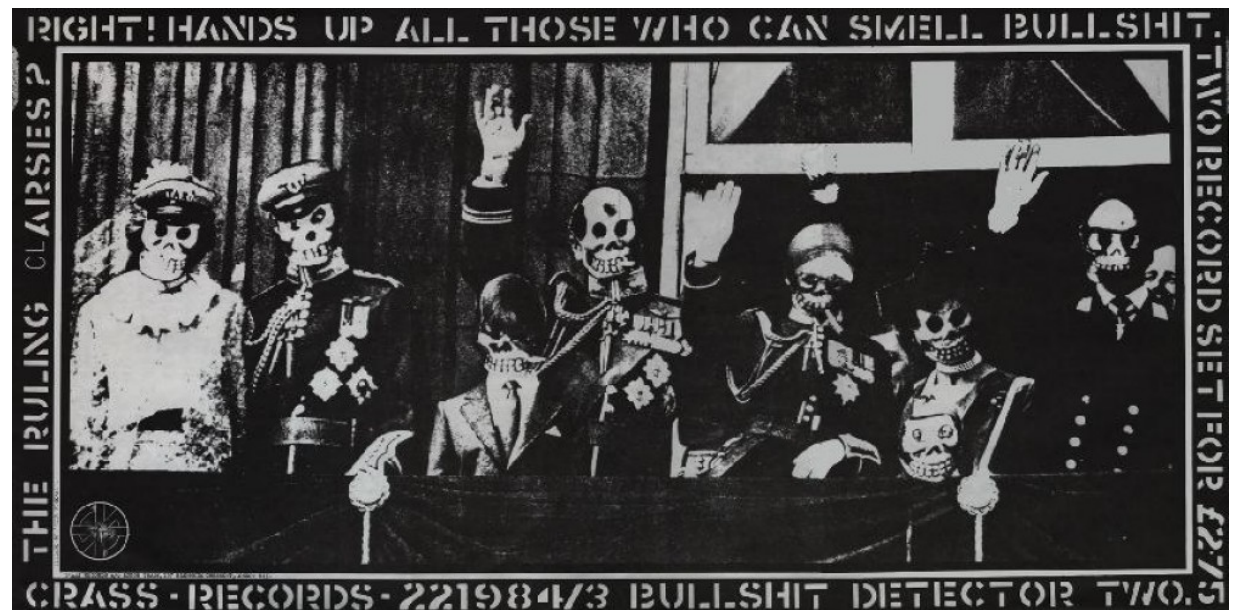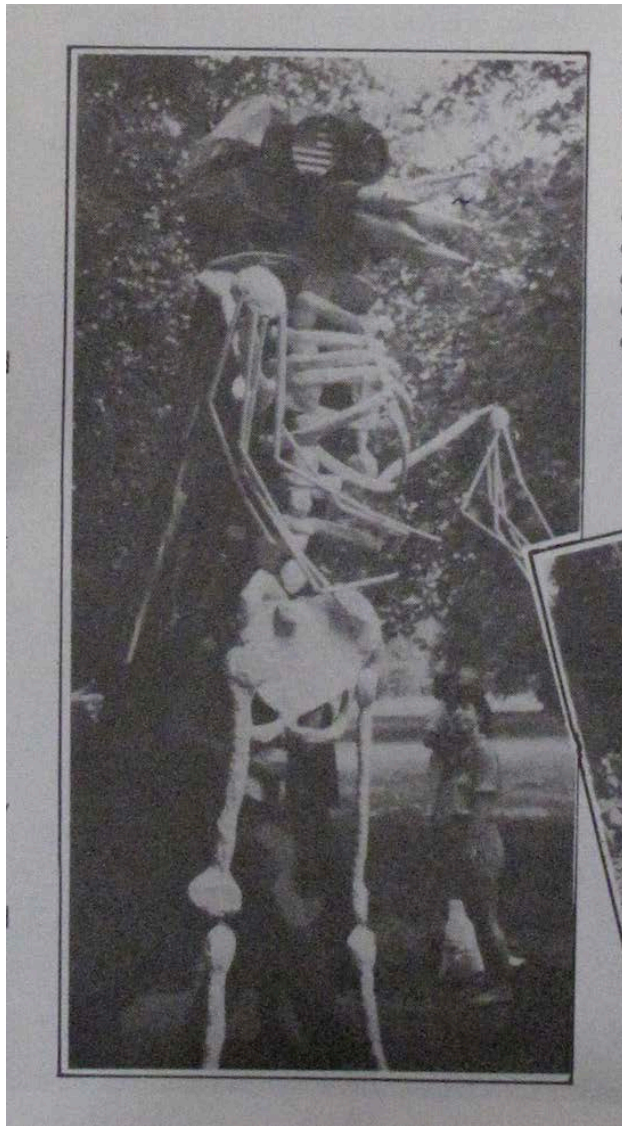
Figures 331-33
Photograph from 'Link the Embassies', CND action, June 1983, from Hackney CND Newsletter
Crass, *Bullshit Detector Volume 2,* Album Cover, 1982
The Exploited, *Lets Start a War…Said Maggie One Day*, album cover, 1983
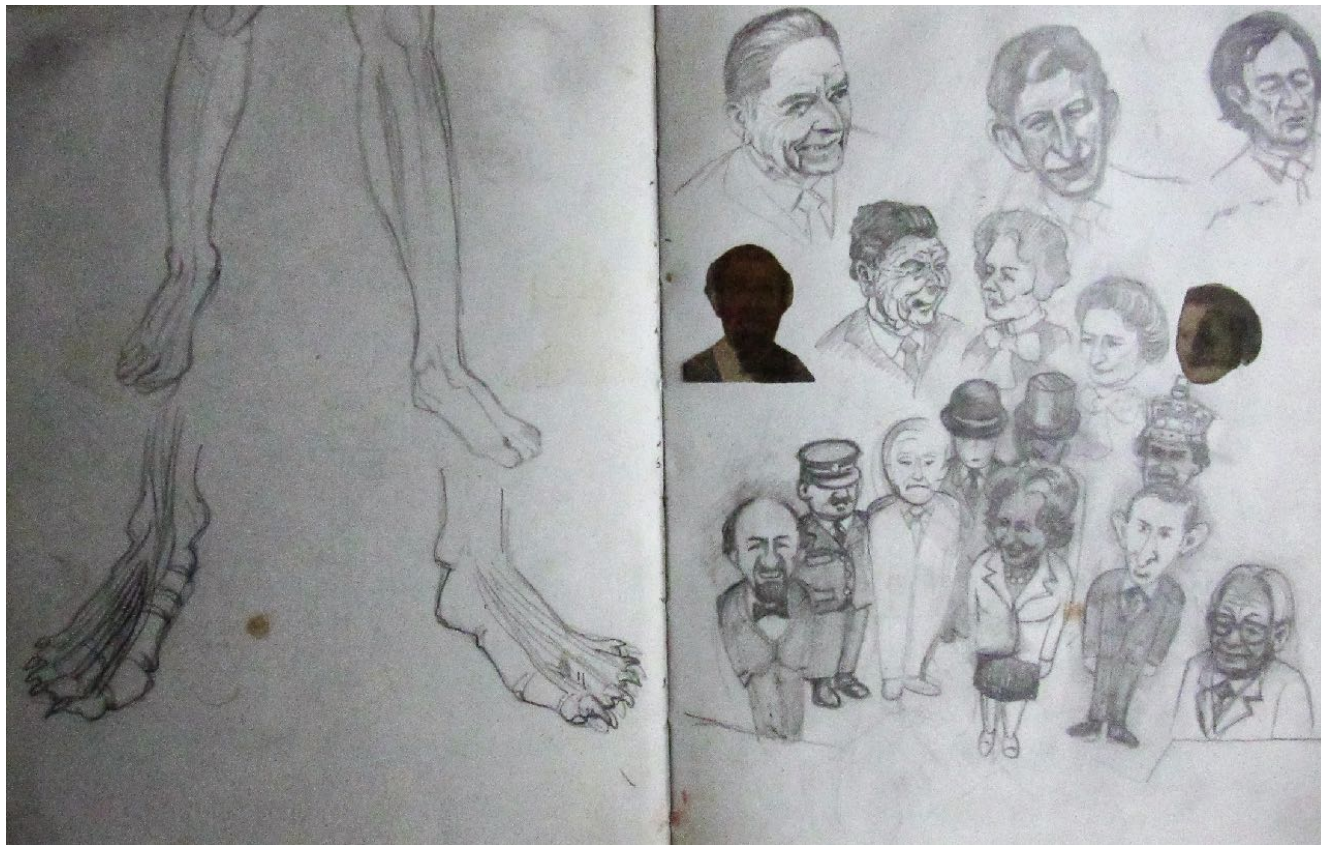
Figures 334-35
Brian Barnes, *Sketches for the figures of the First Bunker,* 1980
And the Second Bunker, 1985
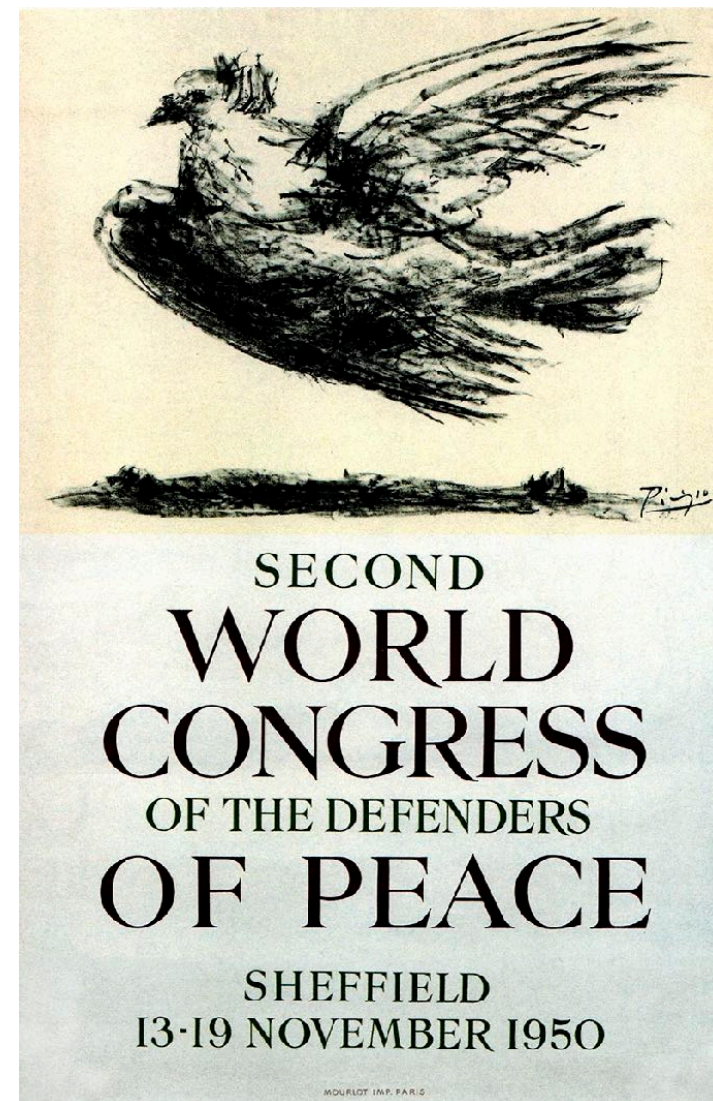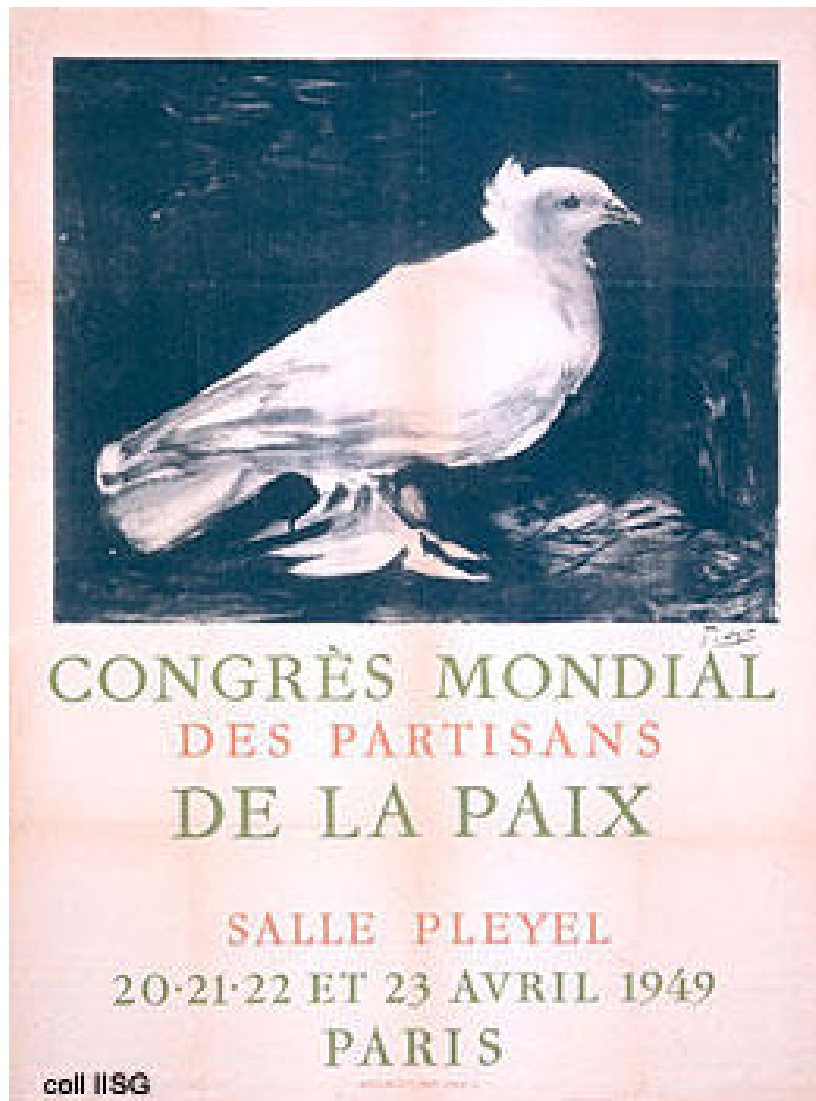
Figures 336-37
Picasso, Posters for the World Congress of the Defenders of Peace, 1949 and 1950
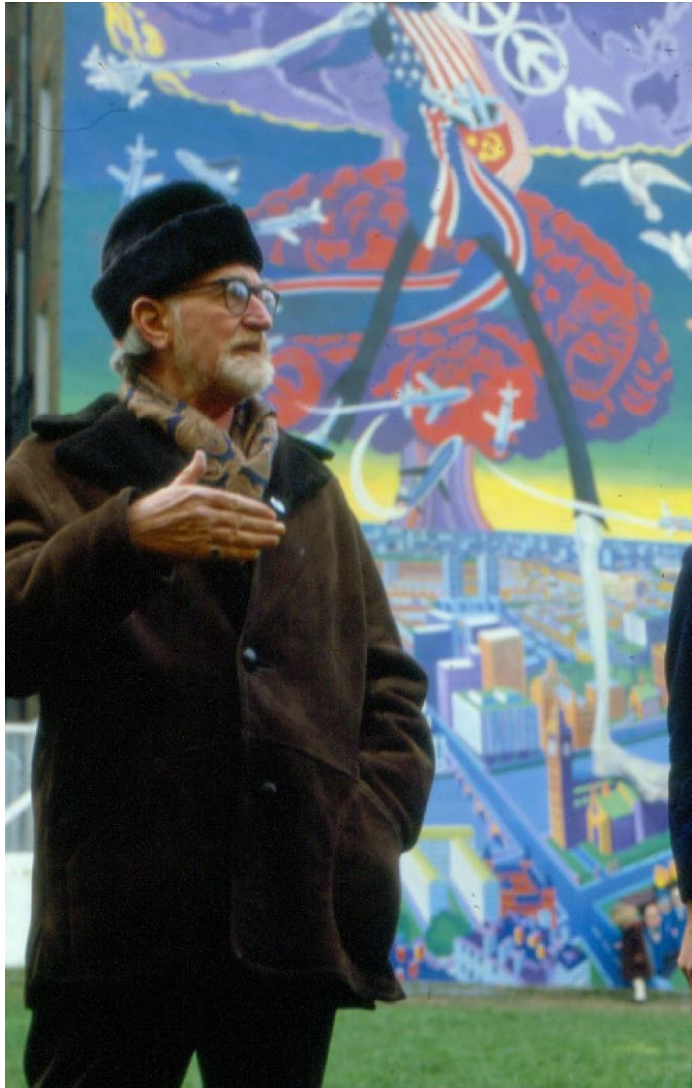
Figures 338-39
Mural Opening, with Hugh Jenkins, and McCrea and Barnes

Figures 340-41
David Hoffman, Brixton Riots, April 1981
Photographs © David Hoffman

Figures 342-43
Peter Kennard, Keep London out of the killing ground,
Billboard photomontages for the GLC's Peace Year

Figure 344
Greenwich Mural Workshop, *Winds of Peace,*
Creek Road, Greenwich, 1983

Figure 345
Paul Butler, *Shepherds Bush Mural*, 1983-1984
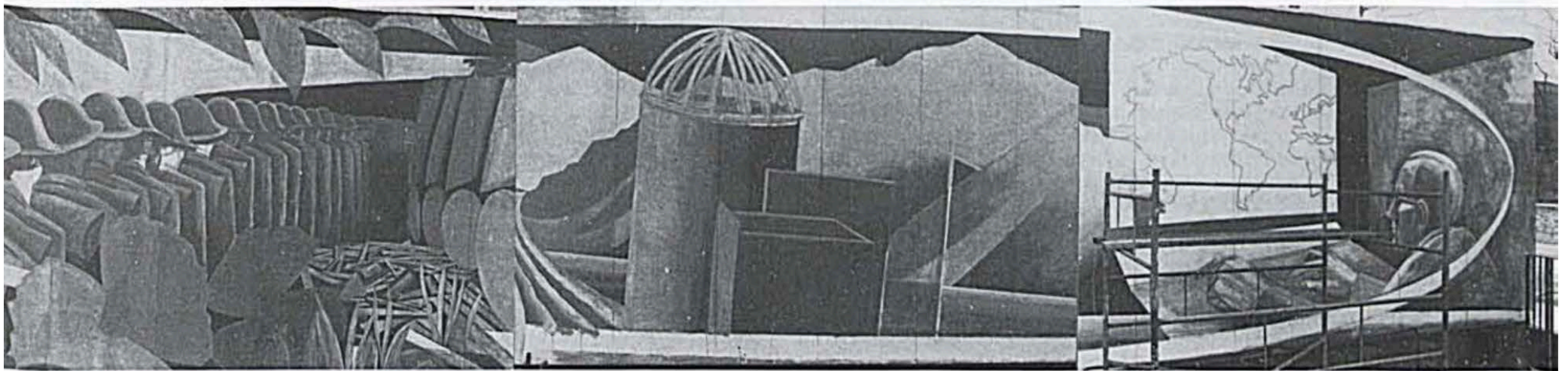
Paul Butler, *Shepherds Bush Mural*, 1983-84, details
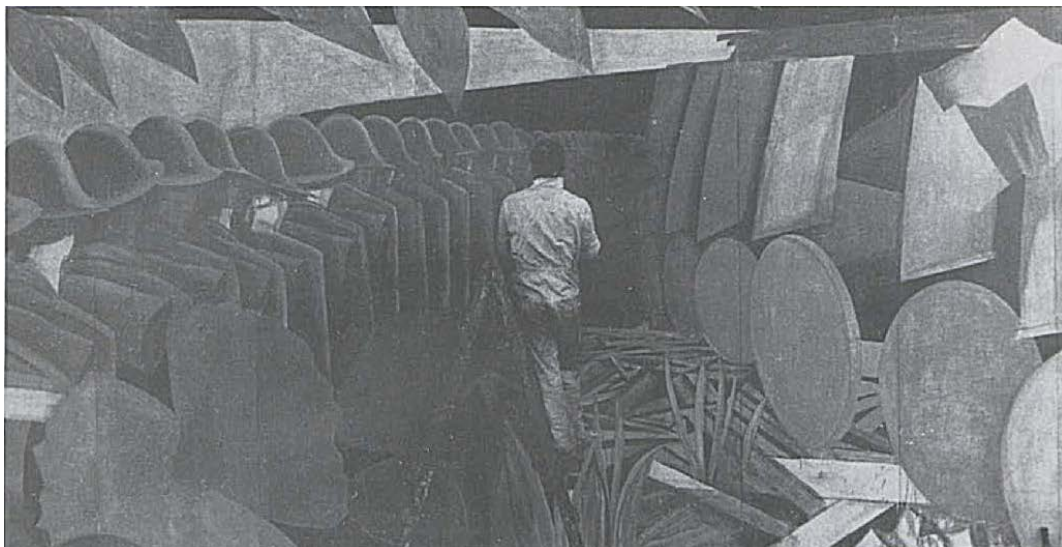
Paul Butler, *Shepherds Bush Mural*, 1983-84, details

Figure 346
Brian Barnes, *Riders of the Apocalypse*,
Sanford Housing Cooperative, New Cross, Lewisham, 1983
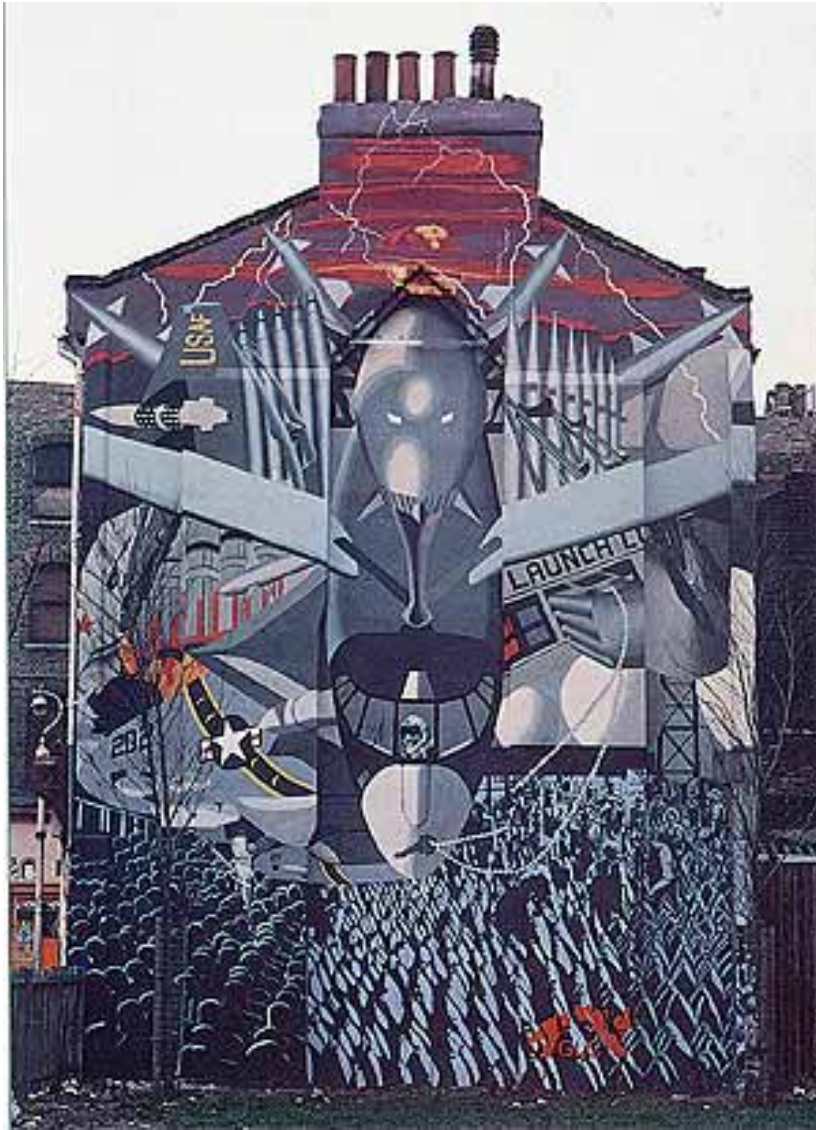
Figures 347 and 348
Pauline Harding, *War*, Vining Street, Brixton 1983-84
Dale McCrea, *Peace*,Vining Street, Brixton, 1983-84
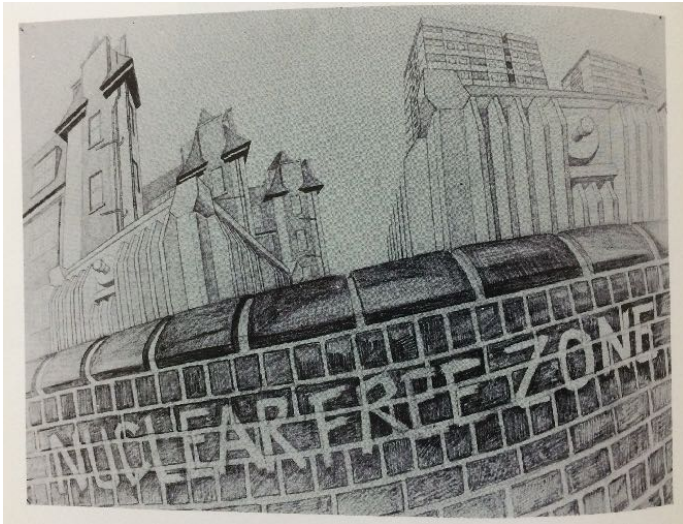
Figures 349
Ray Walker, *Sketches for the Peace Carnival Mural*, 1983
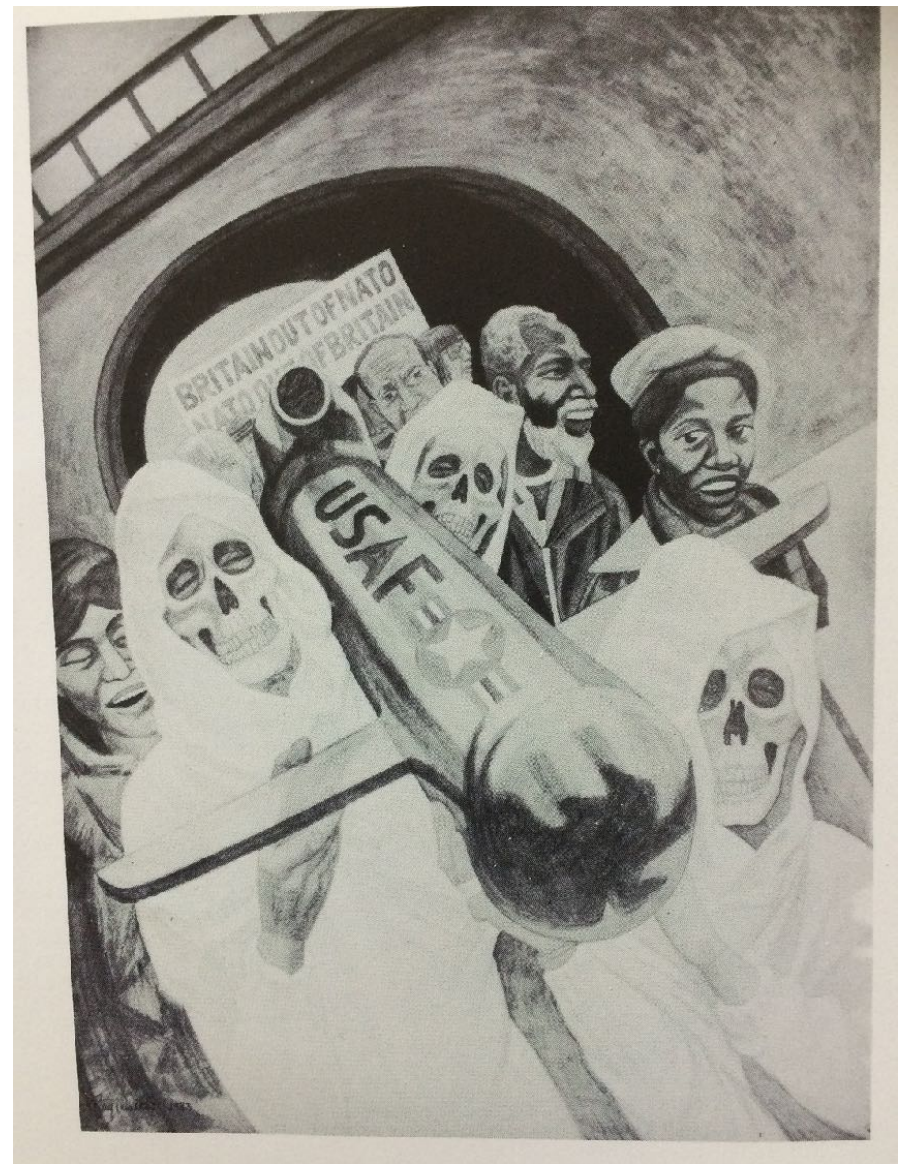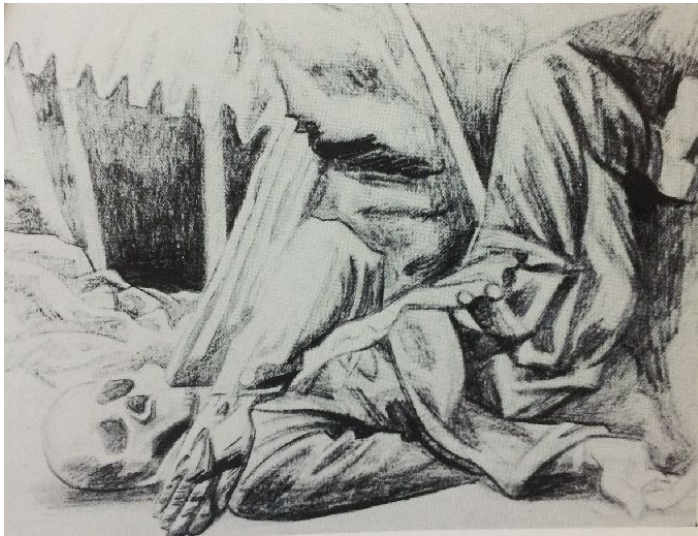
Ray Walker, *Sketches for the Peace Carnival Mural*, 1983

Figures 350-51
Ray Walker, *Hackney Peace Carnival*, Oil on canvas, September 1983
Ray Walker, *October Design for the Mural*, pencil on paper, 1983

PEACE MURAL

The picture on the right shows the latest design for the mural to be painted at Dalston Junction (see last months HPP).

The aim of Ray Walker, the artist, was to produce a design which is a positive celebration of life, as distinct from merely being an anti-nuclear character.

A meeting was held on 26 April to discuss the progress of the mural and plans for the peace garden. For the latest details of possible future meetings, contact either Ray Walker on 254 8892 or Bertha Turner on 249 5869.

The wall is expected to be prepared for the drawing-in around the middle of this month, with the actual drawing-in being done in June and July.

Two different types of uses and space have emerged for the garden: activities and events at the far end of the site and short stay transient use along the outer edges of the site along Dalston Lane.

Figure 352
Hackney People's Press, May 1984
Ray Walker, Design for Hackney Peace Carnival Mural, 1984

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Figure 353 and 353 a.
David Binnington, Paul Butler, Desmond Rochfort and Ray Walker
Cable Street Mural, 1978-1983
Ray Walker, Cable street mural detail.
Photograph © David Hoffman

Figure 354
Peter (Lazlo) Peri, *Aldermaston Marchers*, 1960

Figure 355
The Exploited, *Troops of Tomorrow*, Album Cover, 1982

Figure 356 -58
Ray Walker, Mike Jones and Anna Walker,
Hackney Peace Carnival Mural, Dalston Lane, 1983-85
The mural opening, 19th October 1985. The mural in the 1980s

Figure 359a
Mike Jones and Simon Barber, *Fitzrovia Mural*, 1980
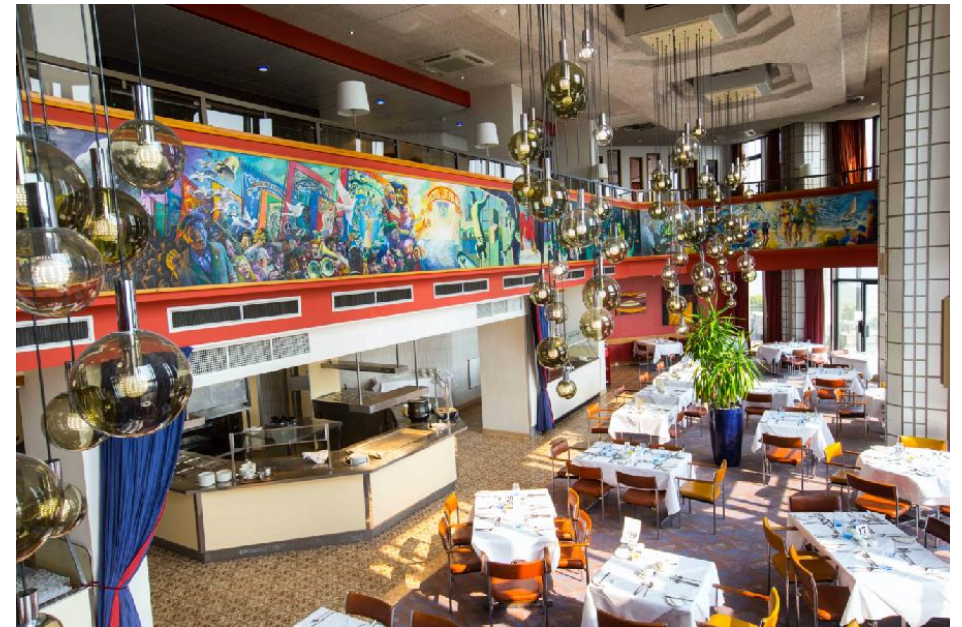
Figure 359b
Art Workers Cooperative,
(Mike Jones, Simon Barber, et al),
The Eastbourne Transport Workers General Union Murals. c. 1981-1982

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Art Workers Cooperative,
The Eastbourne Transport Workers General Union Murals. c. 1981-1982, Details.

STRIKING MINERS GET

There may not be any mines in Hackney but, even so, the miners' strike has generated plenty of activity in the borough.

The Kent area of the National Union of Mineworkers, who represent one of the country's most threatened regions, has been organising support in London. Kent miners have attended meetings and spoken at workplaces all over Hackney. Over 400 people came to two meetings at the Town Hall and a benefit at the Rio Cinema last month, and contributed £600 to the NUM strike fund. The Executive of Hackney NALGO branch has pledged £1000 and groups like the Socialist Workers and Revolutionary Communist Parties have printed posters and taken collections for the miners.

THE LABOUR PARTY held a meeting on 13 April which was addressed by TU officials and luminaries like Brian Sedgemore and Ernie Roberts.

Kent NUM President Jack Collins was the main speaker. He thanked Hackney workers for their solidarity, donations and accommodation.

Collins also noted how the establishment media sent up a chorus of opposition to the miners. "Don't listen to the Guardian," he warned.

Collins explained that Arthur Scargill had become a media bogeyman not because the establishment is frightened of Scargill, but because they were afraid of the miners and the organised working class as a whole. "They'll use the attack on the miners to smash all of you. If the miners go down, you'll all go down," said Collins.

Jack Collins was particularly outraged by the insidious behind-the-scenes role the state apparatus played in the dispute. He mentioned DHSS instructions ordering staff not to meet with miners, nor to take collections on their behalf and the vanloads of police.

"The jackboots are being pulled on. If you want to see it, turn on your television and watch the scenes taking place in the British coalfield," he said.

He also raised several points about the ballot issue. First, the effect of a national NUM ballot would mean that miners in prosperous pits like Leicester and Nottingham could vote away the future of Kent miners and undercut the fight to save other jobs. Second, the miners voted in 1981 in a national ballot for the NUM executive to call for

industrial action, up to and including strike action, to stop the Coal Board from closing pits for any other reason than exhaustion.

Third, Collins doubted that a democratic vote could be taken in the present climate of repression and with all the anti-NUM propaganda being put out by Fleet Street.

Jack Collins concluded, "I read that McGregor said to the papers 'You'll be out for a long time'. If we get defeated this time, we'll be out a lot longer. I don't intend to let the mines go down."

Several speakers pointed out that McGregor was a coal mine owner himself in the

"If the pits close, we will be living in isolated rural ghettos"
— Margaret Holmes, Kent NUM Women's Support Group

United States. Although McGregor accused miners of violence on the picket lines (in his view the police were only doing their job by protecting strike-breakers) the police road blocks and snatch squads were merely preventing breaches of the peace), it was noted that he had never condemned the vicious methods including murder, used by the strike breakers in Harlan County in 1969.

It was therefore fitting that Clare Fraenzl, a member of the Local (branch) 1197 of the United Mine Workers of America addressed the meeting. Fraenzl works for a project to help women get into the US mining industry and to defend women already in the industry. She said that she would be taking back the lessons of the NUM's struggle to America since the UMW was facing similar threats to their working conditions — wage cuts, reduced benefits and weaker safety regulations.

Clare Fraenzl ended her talk on a defiant note: "We beat McGregor in Harlan County. I'm sure the British miners will win."

North Hackney MP, Ernie Roberts told the meeting "My first job at the age of

11 was in a mine – the pit where my dad worked. And in the strike which led to the General Strike, the support given by engineering workers was the first lesson I got in trade union solidarity."

"There was an old fashioned air about the meeting which conjured up images in my mind of the 1930's. Gone were the tiresome acoustics of the television chat-show approach to industrial conflict. There was no need to analyse the economics of the NCB's productivity deal nor to wrestle with modern complications like ACAS. The rhetoric was that of class struggle pure and simple. Ernie Roberts' concluding remarks were a good example: 'The working class united can never be defeated. Let's put that principle into practice.'"

THE SOCIALIST WORKER Party held another 'Support the Miners' meeting at the Town Hall on 18 April. Malcolm Armstrong, a miner from the Tilmanstone pit near Dover, talked to the meeting.

He was worried about the NUM facing a serious struggle while the union was split and blamed the incentive bonus scheme for allowing the NCB to carry out its divide and rule policy.

The Nottingham miners who take home the biggest wage packets are the ones with the easiest jobs. Miners in Kent and other areas have to spend more time shoring up shafts than workers at shallower pits. A Nottingham miner's bonus payment is often more than a Kent miner's weekly wage. Armstrong was also irritated that miners who continued working during the strike were not adhering to the 1981 national NUM vote to oppose pit closures

"Loss of liberty is like going bald, it happens strand by strand."
— Dan Jones, Tower Hamlets Trades Council Secretary

except where the coal was unminable.

Nevertheless, even before the national delegate conference where Nottingham NUM leaders called on their members to stop work, the union reported that the strike was 80% solid. Kent miners have been picketing Tilbury docks and power stations in the South East.

The Miner, NUM's news paper also published photographs of coal tractors being used at the Drax power station to push dwindling coal stocks into

Miners get a taste of the Police State

During the course of the miners dispute, several incidents have been reported which indicate that the authorities have gone to frightening lengths to prevent pickets from reaching key pits, and to suppress the miners' democratic rights.

Police tactics have included:

– Roadblocks and checkpoints on all major and minor roads leading into the Nottingham

coalfield. Miners' freedom of movement has been restricted, and the impression of an abundant public have been harassed. A favourite police trick is to impound vehicles and arrest drivers, so that the passengers are forced to return

home by foot. One NUM official was arrested and had his windscreen shattered at a police roadblock.

Brian Sedgemore tells the story of a priest who was turned back by police who told him "you might be a miner in disguise".

– Telephone tapping. Kent miners received a telephone call at 2.30 in the morning asking them to send pickets to a pit in Barnsley. Less than 45 minutes later, they were turned back by a police blockade of the Dartford tunnel. A Welsh coach proprietor was asked to reveal

the destination of pickets under threat of losing his operator's licence just 10 minutes after miners had phoned through their booking. The speed of these responses could only have been permitted by tapping miners' telephones.

– Arbitrary legal proceedings. Arrested miners have had their trials delayed until June, and have been released on conditional bail forbidding them to visit any pit but their own

BLOCKED

HACKNEY SUPPORT

KENT is the smallest region in the British coalfields, with three pits employing 2,800 miners: Betteshanger (1,200), Tilmanstone (1,000) and Snowdown (600). Both Tilmanstone and Snowdown are earmarked for closure under the NCB's current proposals. This would destroy the small communities which rely almost entirely on the collieries for their economic survival. As Margaret Holmes of the Kent NUM Women's Support Group put it: "If the pits close, we'll be living in isolated rural ghettos."

KENT MINERS SPEAK:

We are on strike to defend our industry, our communities and their jobs.

The economic madness to run down the mining industry while Sea Oil and Gas are as short lived and when the miners in the Middle East can cause oil prices to go through the roof.

The Coal Board agree that British mining "productivity" is not setting new international and European standards. But the attack against the miners is not for economic but political reasons.

The government is determined to break the bargaining power of the National Union of Mineworkers as an important part of its overall strategy of repression against Trade Unions and other democratic rights.

We are moving — despite the dangers, hazards and economic costs — along the suicidal path of nuclear energy, intent on cutting coal production drastically through pit closures eventually to guillotine the highly profitable pits and areas remaining with rich pickings for the multi-nationals to mine and the publicly owned mining industry.

McGregor, himself an American multi-millionaire, was appointed to carry out this Tory conspiracy — only possible if the miners are defeated.

Miners have seen what McGregor did to the steel industry with steel towns and their communities summarily destroyed. We will not accept such a future.

We will not live on our knees. We will not be intimidated by the undemocratic and illegal actions of thousands of police nor by media distortions and exaggeration of our fight for justice.

We refuse to be the victims of Tory rule on behalf of the rich and powerful. No way will we allow ourselves to be asked to the obscenity of 4 million unemployed people in our country.

Nor will we Kent miners allow someone else to decide whether our communities and our families have a future for we have long since learnt how the undemocratic pressures of the media act against the democracy of a ballot.

We have taken our decision to fight in our traditional democratic manner at mass meetings throughout our coalfield — we are voting with our feet.

Meanwhile we need your help. Don't be intimidated by the climate of repression. Stand up against the erosion of democracy. We regret any inconvenience our struggle for justice may cause the public but what is at stake is of importance not just for us but for you and indeed for Britain.

Although the miners are not receiving any strike pay, their families are having £15 docked from Social Security payments under a provision of the 1980 Employment Act. They depend on donations to stay solvent. The Kent area NUM has been selling badges (produced by Hackney's premier badge makers, Trojan printers) to raise funds and is asking supporters to take collections in their workplaces and to send individual contributions. Please make cheques/postal orders payable to "Kent NUM", and your donations to the Kent NUM's London strike headquarters, c/o TGWU Offices, Headland House, Grays Inn Road, London WC1 8DS. Tel: 278 7801 x39.

militants of '72 & '74 were the area officials of 1984.

Speakers from the floor deplored the deafening silence from the higher reaches of the TUC and Labour Party. "Neil Kinnock

"The jackboots are being pulled on"
Jack Collins, Kent NUM President

is everybody's best friend, he's a nice guy. But he hasn't said a word about the miners strike until this week," said Sheila McGregor.

An HPP went to press, the Rio cinema was hosting a benefit for the miners, organised by Hackney South Labour Party. Over one hundred people, including 22 members of the Kent Women's support committee, watched the film 'Harlan County USA' and listened to an all-woman panel. Speakers included Margaret Holmes (Kent Y support committee), Rose Knight (GLC), Doreen Weppler (Hackney S Labour Party), Sharon Patrick (Trades Council), Frances Curran (Young Socialists) and Jo Thwaites (Hackney North Labour Party).

Chris Morris from Hackney South Labour Party felt the benefit was very successful. "The platform was impressive. It put across the fact that women are playing a leading role in the fight against Thatcher."

and their families are welcome to use Council facilities during the strike. Does this mean that miners will be accommodated in Stoke Newington's plush new Housing District office?

● One of Hackney's Co-ops has been giving the miners direct support in their struggle. Last month, Trojan Printers received the following letter!

"Dear Trojan,
May I on behalf of the Wheldale Branch of the NUM thank you for the kindness in supplying the Flying Picket badges free of charge. This we feel is a very kind gesture on your behalf and it does help towards cresting the feeling of comradeship when we see each other wearing the badge.

There is such a big demand for the badges I have sent your address to NUM headquarters.

Yours sincerely,
Malcolm Kitchen
Castleford, W. Yorks

● A coach is being organised to take East Londoners to

"We beat McGregor in Harlan County. I'm sure the British miners will win."
— Claire Fraenzl, UMW (USA)

Figure 360
Striking Miners Get Hackney Support
Hackney People's Press, May 1984

Figures 361-62
Hackney People's Press, April 1984, *Cruise on the road: Hackney Women Protest*
Front page and pg 3.