

Heating Standards and Obsolescence in Post-War Britain's *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*

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Abstract

In 1962, a short film by Shell-Mex and BP Limited (Companies of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group and the British Petroleum Group) was prepared for the 29th Annual Conference and Exhibition of the National Society of Clean Air in Britain to encourage British households to shift from coal domestic fires to smokeless heating appliances. One year earlier, in 1961, the most influential report on space standards in Britain was published, titled *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (also known as the *Parker Morris Report*), which advocated for flexibility in the home through larger size homes and better heating. This article focuses on the report's emphasis on better heating as one way to fulfil the concept of the “adaptable home,” and it introduces the discussions about heating standards during the report's making, underlining the open domestic fire as an obsolete technology. These discussions, however, were entangled with socio-cultural endeavours and consumerist aspirations for modernisation, placing the removal of an otherwise pervasive domestic element within a broader net of forces, actors, and dilemmas involved in decision-making and planning. This article, composed as a historical acquisition, oscillates from the scale of the domestic fireplace to the housing scale, raising the issue of obsolescence in housing provision, which is still salient today.

Keywords

adaptable home; air pollution; council housing; domestic waste; heating standards; *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*; *Parker Morris Report*

1. Introduction

In 1962, a short film by Shell-Mex and BP Limited (Companies of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group and the British Petroleum Group) was prepared for the 29th Annual Conference and Exhibition of the National Society of

Clean Air in Britain (see Figure 1). The conference was dedicated to “fuel efficiency and domestic heating” to encourage British households to trade their domestic heating equipment in for smokeless appliances. Perhaps an early form of greenwashing practices from the oil industry (Parr, 2009), this 21-minute colour film depicted London’s grimy streets and aspects of everyday life affected by smoke, also including a comparison of lungs: one belonging to a countryside dweller and the other one to a city dweller (see Figure 2). According to the film, domestic fires were not only releasing smoke emissions lasting even after fires were extinguished, but they involved also an enormous waste of raw materials that could be better used for the production of other goods, such as soaps, disinfectants, scents, nylons, and ammonia—products that, ironically, some decades later, would be similarly characterised as polluting (Huber, 2013, p. 180). Measures to improve industrial chimneys were taken for them to burn fuel properly and remove grit and dust from flue gases. Steam railway engines were also shifting to diesel. Electric trains were producing almost zero smoke. It was now the time for domestic

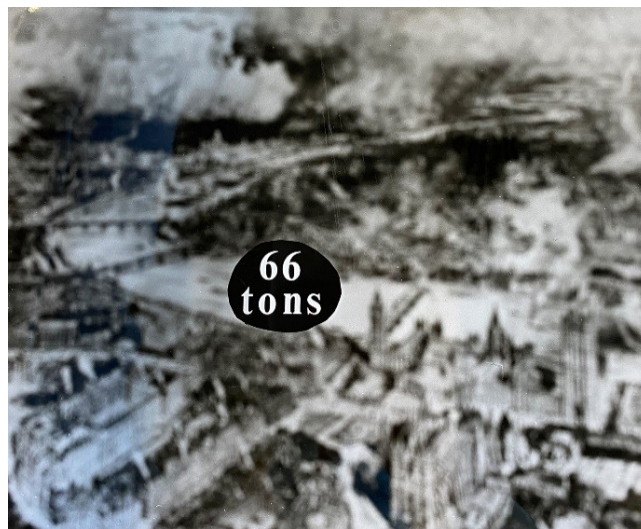


Figure 1. Still from the Shell-Mex and BP *Clean Air* film for the 1962 Annual Conference and Exhibition of the National Clean Air Society. Source: “*Clean Air*, a Shell-Mex and B. P. public service film” (1962).



Figure 2. Comparison of lungs. Still from the Shell-Mex and BP *Clean Air* film for the 1962 Annual Conference and Exhibition of the National Clean Air Society. Source: “*Clean Air*, a Shell-Mex and B. P. public service film” (1962).

chimneys and the traditional coal fireplace to be considered obsolete (Berry, 1958, p. 1074), a time when an abundance of choice regarding alternatives was also in place. The film aimed to raise awareness of the impact caused by the traditional coal fireplace, which was, during that time, the most common household heating device, convincing people to enhance the benefits of smokeless heating devices by gas, oil, or electricity. The coal industry, however, was still fighting to retain its share in the domestic fuel market, considering alternative smokeless fuels for household use (Kirk, 1961, p. 80).

The transition to smokeless heating devices in the home was already underlined a year earlier, in 1961, when the report *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (also known as the *Parker Morris Report*) was published. *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, perhaps the most influential report on space standards in Britain, underlined the importance of flexibility in the home, envisioning the “adaptable house,” “the house which could easily be altered as circumstances changed” (Ministry of Housing and Local Government [MHLG], 1961, p. 11). Therefore, the adaptable house could increase the longevity of housing, fighting against the “rapidity of obsolescence,” as mentioned in the first draft of the report (“First draft of the Parker Morris Report,” 1960), even if it was later abolished, with the final publication emphasising today’s abundance. The obsolescence of housing was considered a fundamental problem in Britain’s housing market, with studies in the 1960s depicting how the housing stock in Britain was one of the oldest in Europe. For example, an article titled “The Housing Crisis” (“The Housing Crisis,” 1961, p. 1149), highlighted that if most houses over 100 years old can be considered obsolete, along with the existence of slums, there was a need to demolish up to 200,000 houses per year if the nation was to start anew by 1980.

According to the report, there were two major components to achieve adaptability in the design of the home: larger size and better heating. This article focuses on the emphasis of *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* on better domestic heating as a means to fulfil the concept of the adaptable house and introduces the discussions about heating standards during the report’s making that aimed to dismiss the open domestic fire. The fireplace was rejected as an outmoded technology in the advent of cleaner and more efficient appliances, reflecting the prevalent definition of obsolescence, associated with temporality and transition in the face of changing technology, performance, and economics (Abramson, 2016, p. 3). The transition towards smokeless heating devices, however, was inevitably entangled with socio-cultural endeavours and consumerist aspirations for modernisation, placing the removal of an otherwise pervasive domestic element within a broader net of forces, actors, and dilemmas involved in decision-making and planning. This article, composed as a historical acquisition, oscillates from the scale of the domestic fireplace to the housing scale, raising the issue of obsolescence in housing provision, which is still salient today. It draws from archival documents, such as meeting minutes, written evidence, and correspondence, related to the making of *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* and the 29th Annual Conference and Exhibition of the National Society of Clean Air in Britain, now stored in the UK’s National Archives. These documents are complemented with articles, critiques, and debates collected from a series of historical journals published in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, such as the *Electrical Times*, *Housing Review*, and the *Official Architecture and Planning*.

2. Better Heating for Homes for Today and Tomorrow

Homes for Today and Tomorrow was the third report on space standards published by the government. It followed on recommendations suggested by the two earlier reports, the first one to be the *Tudor Walters Report* of 1918, which had coincided with the establishment of council housing following the First World

War (Swenarton, 1981), and the 1944 *Dudley Report* with the acute housing shortage provoked by the Second World War (Bullock, 2002). By the late 1950s, the minimum standards of earlier reports and hygienic preoccupations were no longer adequate, with the new report underlining that “an increasing proportion of people are coming to expect their home to do more than fulfil the basic requirements” (MHLG, 1961, p. 3). Indeed, the Parker Morris Committee convened for the first time in 1958 under the aegis of the MHLG for *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, which seemed necessary because “the country has undergone a social and economic revolution” (MHLG, 1961, p. 1), with full employment, national health services, and social insurance benefits, such as family allowances and retirement pensions. Better living wages and the affordability of labour-saving appliances meant that people could enjoy the comfort of their home, which was no longer merely “a shelter and a roof over our heads” (MHLG, 1961, p. 9). The Committee was chaired by Sir Parker Morris, a former town clerk of Westminster who was at the time chair of the National Federation of Housing Societies, and it was comprised of health service representatives and housing officers, deliberately including women members and members from across the various parts of the country due to evident financial asymmetries between the northern and southern areas. As the first report to prescribe standards for both council and private enterprise housing provision, the Committee included architects involved in council housing, as well as architects working with housebuilders in private enterprise. Even though the report became mandatory only for council housing, its terms of reference and, therefore, its making took into consideration the improvement of both council and private enterprise housing in an effort to mitigate the stigma between the two.

The Parker Morris Committee applied a sociological method through fieldwork and questionnaires, and the overall process involved over two years of meetings. A questionnaire was circulated to receive a meticulous collection of evidence from a long list of individual consultants, institutions, manufacturers, and housing organisations, which set out the report’s emphases on larger homes and better heating as the main components to achieve adaptability in the home: “The major changes required can be summed up in two words—space and heating” (MHLG, 1961, p. 2). On the one hand, the report called for larger houses because “homes are being built at the present time...too small to hold the possessions, in which so much of the new affluence is expressed” (MHLG, 1961, p. 2). The Parker Morris Committee believed that houses could be flexible only if they were large enough, also encouraging the architect’s creativity (Palate, 2023, p. 460). On the other hand, the report underlined the significance of better heating, where “a mother looking after a family wants a system that does not take too much of her time and effort and quickly gives her a warm house when she returns from shopping and taking the smaller children to school” (MHLG, 1961, p. 23).

During that time, Britain seemed to be far behind compared to other Western countries, with Abner Silverman, a US consultant to the Parker Morris Committee, expressing in puzzlement that “the only way to keep warm in this country was to take a hot bath” (“Oral evidence by Mr. Abner Silverman,” 1960). Efforts to install better heating in new housing developments occurred since the 1940s, with the example of the Churchill Gardens housing estate, designed by Philip Powell and J. Hidalgo Moya, when, coincidentally, Sir Parker Morris was still the town clerk at Westminster. The estate was the first to feature a district heating scheme in the country, with a central heating system connecting all separate buildings under one infrastructure (Manley, 2013). By the 1960s, the importance of domestic heating would become a widespread conviction, discussed in architectural circles, such as Reyner Banham’s seminal essay “A House is Not a Home” (Banham, 1965), referring to the importance of technological progress in increasing a building’s functionality and of mechanical services in securing environmental control in a building.

For *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, central heating was the ideal solution (see Figure 3). It was already popular in other countries, such as Scandinavia and the US, providing not only advantages related to warmth and comfort but also in terms of independence and privacy among the individual members of the household. According to the report:

Family life is both communal and individual. There is the process of coming together for activities in which the family joins as a whole—meals, conversation, common pursuits, and so on; and there is the need for privacy to pursue individual activities, such as reading, writing, and following particular hobbies. This dual tendency in family life has always been handicapped during the winter months, except amongst the well-off, because of the inability of most people to afford heating. (MHLG, 1961, p. 15)

The domestic fireplace as a heating device would mean that family life, “both communal and individual,” had to occur solely in the living room, as the only warm room in the home. Instead, central heating could improve the home’s usability, releasing the burden of enforced coexistence: “It seems to us entirely wrong to go on building homes in which so much of the available space cannot be used for day-to-day activities throughout the year” (MHLG, 1961, p. 3).

If better heating in the home was assumed to ensure privacy, flexibility, and freedom among all household members, the discussions around heating standards were much more complex, revealing competitive economies and socio-cultural dilemmas at a period of rising consumerist aspirations for modernisation and affluence (Kefford, 2018), as well as national efforts for energy transition and smokeless heating devices away from the traditional open fire. The urgency for smokeless heating in the home was simultaneously a human need associated with cleanliness, hygiene, and public health, as it was an element of comfort, convenience, and affluence.

3. Towards a Smokeless Domestic

The shift from the domestic fireplace to alternative smokeless heating appliances was urgent due to emerging evidence on air pollution and public health, leading to the formulation of relevant policies. Already, since the 1956 Clean Air Act, local authorities established smoke-controlled areas and fined domestic smoke emissions:

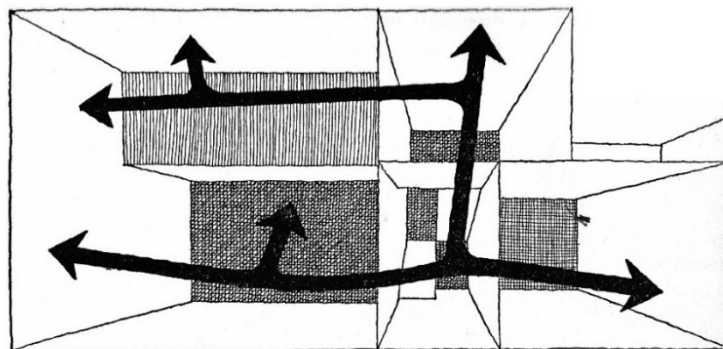


Figure 3. One of the six illustrations of *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* on central heating, drawn by Gordon Cullen. Source: MHLG (1961, p. 16).

£10 for the first offence and up to £100 for subsequent offences (Ashby & Anderson, 1977). These fines aimed to encourage families using coal and coke for heating to shift towards smokeless fuels. The 1956 Clean Air Act was the first step of the British parliament to overcome the “social and economic evil” of air pollution, as characterised by the report of the Committee on Air Pollution (“Committee on Air Pollution,” 1954), following the detrimental repercussions of the Great Smog of London in 1952. Even though, according to Charles Hill, then Minister of Housing and Local Government, in 1958, there was still “a long way to go before grimy big towns become clean” (“Dr Hill on clean air progress,” 1962), by 1962 improvements were achieved with more than a thousand Smoke Control Areas designated by the 1956 Act, with the potential to expand this designation at a rate of 350 new areas per year. These designated areas made smoke control orders applicable to nearly a million householders in England and Wales. The act had immediate consequences for the design of the home, renouncing the fireplace as obsolete, which was a much-needed change because “smoke-laden atmosphere harms health and costs the nation £250 million a year” (“*Clean Air*, a Shell-Mex and B. P. public service film—What the film says,” 1962). In the case of public health too, smoke emissions were translated in economic terms, referring to both state expenses and the workers’ productivity.

For the *Electrical Times* journal, however, the clean air campaign was not the driving force behind the rapid increase of electrical heating use in the home. Instead:

It has long since dawned on the housewife that the cheerful appearance of the coal fire is not sufficient compensation for the dirt, smoke, and soot which is inevitable accompaniment particularly in these days of poor quality, highly expensive coal. (“Electricity in the Home,” 1960, p. 341)

Gas and electric cookers were becoming popular appliances in the home, and by the mid-20th century, they were readily available in modern designs, appealing to consumers. Advertisements, manufacturers, and the media were all mobilised to promote the idea of a smokeless city, where coal fire as the traditional technology could only be antiquated (Mosley, 2016). The need for cleaner air was simultaneously a health and hygiene prerequisite in people’s lives, a political project for the nation’s economy, and a capitalistic endeavour of stylish commodities as alternatives to the domestic fireplace, associated with issues of class and gender.

There was, however, some difficulty in selecting which fuel was the best, mostly due to regional differences between urban and rural life in the northern and southern areas of the country. For example, in coal-producing areas, the open fire in the living area, installed either in the form of a combination grate or back-to-back grate, was still prominent despite the lack of efficiency or cleanliness (Charlton, 1959, p. 78), a case that was boosting the National Coal Board’s confidence “that solid fuel is the most satisfactory and acceptable means of heating in the average British home” (Kirk, 1961, p. 80). This reluctance, however, was not only financially driven. According to studies on various redevelopment schemes that relocated tenants from inadequate housing to newly built homes, there were several opinions. In the case of Hutchesontown-Gorbals, a 19th-century industrial suburb in Glasgow redeveloped in the late 1950s, the appraisal research report on tenants’ satisfaction demonstrated that almost half of the tenants, mostly elderly, expressed disappointment with the transition from a coal fire and gas cooker to all-electric heating and cooking appliances, with one or two tenants even regretting the change. There were also cases where a man complained that “without a coal fire he no longer had a convenient place to spit, and another considered that ‘an electric fire gives you a sore head—it burns up the oxygen’” (“The Design and Use of Central Area Dwellings,” 1961, pp. 8–9). Similar tendencies were observed in surveys and schemes by the

London County Council around the same time, with at least one survey demonstrating that over three-quarters of tenants living in flats preferred to retain their domestic open fire for heated water, good warmth, and its “cheerful” atmosphere (Carlsson-Hyslop, 2016, p. 90). It was evident that new technologies required new knowledge and social habits, leading local officials to start scheduling visits to houses to provide in-person information on alternative fuels, type of fittings, and the economic benefits that energy transition away from the coal fire could bring to each household in the long term. In addition, grants were incentively provided by councils for households to buy new heating equipment, which, for pensioners, could even amount to the whole bill (see Figure 4).

At the same time, the market was offering an abundance of choices on alternative fuels, such as oil, gas, and electricity, with a manifold of organisations submitting their views to the Parker Morris Committee, sharing their vision on the future of domestic heating. Among them, Shell-Mex and BP Limited provided the Parker Morris Committee with an extensive document on “The Future of Oil as a Means of Domestic Heating.” According to the document, oil-fired central heating has been available in Britain for years, but it was considered a luxury, suitable only for large houses. This changed because of “higher standards of living” and “an increasing demand for the comfort provided by whole house heating” (“Shell-Mex and B. P. Limited,” 1960, p. 1). The demand for domestic heating was estimated to rapidly increase, with the oil industry taking “its place alongside gas, electricity, and solid fuel industries satisfying the fuel requirements of the consumer” (“Shell-Mex and B. P. Limited,” 1960, p. 9). This future, however, seemed shared among almost every other relevant stakeholder: The British Electrical Development Association noted that “the future of heating lay with electricity” (“Oral evidence—British Electrical Development Association,” 1960). For them, “the fireplace has been superseded as the centre of the home round which the family gathers” (“Oral evidence—British Electrical Development Association,” 1960) because of the television, a significant element in shifting the focal character away from the hearth. Their focus was now on electric floor warming. That the television was enthusiastically taking the place of the fireplace was seconded by the Institution of Heating and



Figure 4. Local authority consultant during home visit: Still from the Shell-Mex and BP *Clean Air* film for the 1962 Annual Conference and Exhibition of the National Clean Air Society. Source: “*Clean Air*, a Shell-Mex and B. P. public service film” (1962).

Ventilating Engineers too (“Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers,” 1960), even though the Coal Utilisation Council insisted in their submission to the Parker Morris Committee that “there was still a big future for the open fire—people would continue to value its cheerfulness” (“Coal Utilisation Council,” 1959). The Women’s Advisory Council on Solid Fuel would agree, claiming that “the number of centrally heated houses will also increase, but a great majority of people will still prefer to have one solid fuel fire” (“Women’s Advisory Council on Solid Fuel,” 1959), demonstrating that not every housewife was on the same team when the ministry feminised this smokeless shift arguing that cleaner air could “not be achieved without the co-operation and support of the householders and—even more—of the housewives” (“*Clean Air*, a Shell-Mex and B. P. public service film—What the minister said,” 1962).

This multiplicity of voices in terms of heating was not coincidental. In fact, gas and electricity organisations have been in an energy battle since the 1930s, with the principle of “freedom to choose” becoming a political settlement reached by the parliament (Trentmann & Carlsson-Hyslop, 2018, p. 818). The battle started with lighting, then cooking, and peaked by the end of the 20th century with the popularisation of heating space and water in a domestic environment, which prevailed in the use of household energy. The Parker Morris heating recommendations became mandatory in 1967 for new towns and all council housing by 1969. According to the Parker Morris recommendations, kitchen and circulation space in the home needed to maintain a temperature of 13 °C, and living and dining spaces at 18 °C when the outside temperature dropped below –1 °C (MHLG, 1968, p. 38). By the time, however, the *Parker Morris Report* encouraged the installation of central heating in most housing estates, earlier agreements that provided tenants with the freedom to choose their preferred fuel for domestic use were outdated. If central heating was to be installed, the tenant had no choice. The choice was inevitably made by the local authority in council housing provision or the developer in private enterprise provision. In some cases, however, tenants were allowed to install additional appliances that could indeed choose, to complement, for example, electric heating with a gas cooker. In other cases, energy providers ensured to orchestrate future demand by expanding outlets, appliances, and wiring in housing (Trentmann & Carlsson-Hyslop, 2018, p. 822). For example, if gas were to be used for central heating, then it was probable that the home would be equipped with plenty of electric outlets to enable the simultaneous consumption of another fuel, underlining energy dependencies in the design of the home, and subsequently, in the tenants’ living patterns.

Beyond that, tenants had to either accept the choice of their local authority or make their own decisions based on the market’s availability, associated with their income group, regional situation, or the household’s size. Tenants did not only ask for better heating but heating they could control. According to studies conducted in the 1960s on tenants’ satisfaction with heating types, tenants were generally pleased when heating was controlled by them, meaning that they also held financial control of their consumption. Whereas heating was controlled by the landlord and the tenants were paying a fixed sum, abusive behaviours were observed, such as the tendency to waste water or to open the windows without switching the radiators off. In these cases, however, the heating was on only during “heating months,” meaning winter months, and in cold weather outside this period, tenants had to use their own personal appliances that were still costly (Bolser, 1962, p. 30), often resuming the compromise of having only one room warm, like with the fireplace. Tenants were inevitably caught between individual choice and individual responsibility, an embodiment of cultivating social habits and norms to responsibly stay warm, while evolving themselves into modern subjects, fully capable of choosing and using the latest domestic technologies. As explained by Rose (1989, pp. 205–213), in the 1950s and 1960s a fundamental shift in political rationality removed the state from being a coercive regulator

of moral conduct, placing the pressures of public opinion and personal conscience as markers in the private sphere of individual preferences.

Notions of warmth, comfort, and efficiency in the home were, by the 1960s, widely discussed and entangled with the advent of mass consumerism culture and the repercussions this affluent society introduced. According to *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, “the post war rise in living standards has eased one problem...[it] made another one acute” (MHLG, 1961, p. 28). The fireplace was not only a heating technology in the home, but it was also used for burning domestic waste. New estates using smokeless heating devices demonstrated a refuse overflow due to “the increase in the quantities of the empty cartons and packages that people throw away each week” (MHLG, 1961, p. 28). In fact, it was documented that, in 1968, 14 million tons of domestic waste were collected, doubling the average of eight million before the Second World War (Cooper, 2008). The issue was particularly delicate in flats. Waste, however, was the broader outcome of a series of obsolete technologies in the design of the home, superseded by new ones that were not the result of a throwaway affluent society, but hygiene improvements. For example, the refrigerator and the freezer entered the home to discard the unreliable larder, a cavernous room for people to store food and drinks in low temperatures. They increased, however, the decline of door-to-door milk delivery and the devouring of frozen foods, paper cartons, and other new forms of packaging food, which were conveniently consumed daily to release the working housewife from hours of cooking. Whereas the introduction of clean technologies was yet another relief to continue consumerism-as-usual, increased domestic waste embodied another controversy, one between the desire to install better heating for a controlled interior environment and the uncontrollable refuse disposal, that once outside the home could be interpreted, perhaps, as someone else’s problem.

The entanglements of efficiency and consumerism, as well as hygiene and waste, were already evident as early as in the 1920s when Christine Frederick accompanied her time-saving diagrams to release the housewife from the burdens of domestic labour using advocations, such as “Mrs Consumer [who] has billions to spend—the greatest surplus money value ever given to woman to spend in all history” (Frederick, 1929, p. 251). Frederick coined the term “progressive obsolescence” to describe consumers’ readiness to scrap old possessions and to favour new and better ones regularly, allocating their income to consumption instead of savings (Marchand, 1985; Strasser, 1999). Increased domestic waste caused the frustration of housing experts, planners, and municipal authorities, who were already troubled with refuse systems since the early 20th century. The *Parker Morris Report*, perhaps not surprisingly, did not offer an explicit solution to the problem, claiming that it required additional research. In the same manner, however, it would seem anachronistic to criticise Frederic today (even though many have done this already) because of the effort then to benefit the housewife in search of equality within patriarchal societal constructs (Rutherford, 2003). It would seem equally anachronistic to criticise the Parker Morris Committee for encouraging affluence and convenience in the home given that, for the majority of the British population, this was the first time to live and enjoy the comfort of one’s own home, away from overcrowding and unhygienic living conditions.

There is, however, a major dilemma in this story. The shift towards smokeless heating devices, involving the proliferation of central heating in housing provision, was rarely the tenants’ individual choice. It required legislation changes and the implementation of large-scale, regional infrastructure in the same manner that electricity became available in most parts of the country a few decades earlier. It was an incremental, yet relative transition, associated with the human need to be warm, as well as an element of comfort, and a technological device that turned into a major driver in energy demand and dependency. At the same time,

still, in 1960, more than a quarter of households lacked an indoor toilet, and 38% lacked a fixed bath, with the majority of people still taking one bath a week (Obelkevich, 1994, p. 142). Those without a bathroom were still bathing in a tin bathtub in front of a coal fire, highlighting perhaps the irony of requesting them to purchase a smokeless heating device instead. For the Parker Morris Committee (MHLG, 1961, p. 6), it was clear that “better homes will cost more money.” The confidence in better homes relied on “a sufficient number of people,” who “are prepared to pay the extra charges for a better article” (MHLG, 1961, p. 6). Better homes, and subsequently smokeless air, could be realised, so long as this “sufficient number of people” could push them forward. This exclusive, yet honest argument, underlines the contemporary question of the historical responsibility of fuel consumption in a system committed to the unequal distribution of wealth and power, reinforcing perhaps the so-called “capitalocene” argument that rejects anthropocentric flattening, moving from “humans did it” to “some humans did it” (Moore, 2019).

4. Conclusion

One of the major critiques that led to the abolishment of the Parker Morris standards and the fall of council housing was the state’s incapacity to provide affordable housing for those belonging to the lowest social classes. An example of such arguments was published in *Official Architecture and Planning* in 1969, in an article titled “Pollution by Planning.” The article included the findings of a broader study conducted by Jon Gower Davies at the University of Newcastle, later published in a book, *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat: A Study of a Planning Exercise in Newcastle upon Tyne* (J. G. Davies, 1972). Even though Davies’s work has been heavily criticised due to its focus on one case study and its innate prejudice openly admitted in the book (Darke, 1973; Dennis, 1973), the article’s approach towards “pollution” reflected on issues of class division and obsolescence in housing provision, reminding in a way Henri Lefebvre’s “sociology of the dustbin,” an exploration of the mundane marginalised aspects of everyday life that underlines the attachment of waste to the logic of modernity (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 43) to exacerbate power dynamics and asymmetries. One could argue that Davies saw himself as another Vance Packard, aggravating the negative connotation of consumerism associated with excessive materialism as Packard does in his seminal book *The Waste Makers*, published in 1960 (Packard, 1960, p. iii). Indeed, the study focused on the neighbourhood of Rye Hill in Newcastle Upon Tyne, which involved an ambitious regeneration scheme in the 1960s “to retain and modernise to Parker Morris standards all the dwellings within a ‘comprehensive development area’” (D. Davies, 1969, p. 687). However, comprehensiveness was more of an illusion than a realistic aspiration.

The area of Rye Hill rapidly shifted from a wealthy suburb to an industrial working-class urban area during the 19th century following the opening of Armstrong’s factory for coal exports and shipbuilding. The decline of the industry and changes in the economy gradually left the area derelict, vandalised, and abandoned. There were only a few residents left, and Davies categorised them in three collectives: “the immigrants,” in their majority Indians and Pakistani, but also from Eastern Europe and Ireland; “the respectables,” those unfortunate to have lost their past wealth; and “the deviants,” the social outcasts, associated with violence and misconduct. According to Davies, these vulnerable collectives and the diversity of residents in the area were blindly dismissed by the planners that put their aspirations first, embracing the *Parker Morris Report’s* “affluent thesis,” suggesting that “there is no problem in effecting consumption of higher standards of living because we are all rich these days” and granting planners with “the right to use public power to make consumption compulsory” (D. Davies, 1969, p. 688). Even though a newly redeveloped area, Rye Hill was already obsolete—a second-generation obsolescence in need of another redevelopment.

Whereas regeneration plans for the twilight area of Rye Hill are not to be criticised—people did need better homes—Davies’s study reveals a gap between the present and the future, a gap which was fundamental to anticipate the *Homes for Today and Tomorrow’s* afterlife. The report was, indeed, a much-needed document to secure better housing and heating and its significance should not be diminished. Its timing, however, was unfortunate. Rye Hill was a harbinger of a broken and unsustainable economy underway, a portrayal of the tensions among environmental concerns, social and class injustices, and the aspirations of modernisation. Post-war prosperity, as experienced by the majority of the British population in the late 1950s, was soon followed by an erosive economic instability that culminated in the turmoil of the 1970s. Financial misfortunes raised the public’s opposition against state interventionism and public expenditure, identifying the Parker Morris standards and, subsequently, the houses produced as “extravagant” and “ridiculously expensive” (“Parker Morris to go,” 1978). As a response, the Thatcherite government abolished space standards in 1981 as an obstacle to development, following the privatisation of council housing in 1980.

Perhaps an irony to the aforementioned critiques against the Parker Morris standards, their abolishment and the privatisation of council housing explicitly denied the right to adequate and affordable housing to those vulnerable social collectives, financially incapable of finding a proper shelter. The end of the welfare state reflects how the emerging middle class of the late 1950s envisioned homes for the future, guided, however, by short-term aspirations of the present. In the years that followed, the oil crisis of the 1970s and the resulting rapid inflation were detrimental to the wages of those in delicate situations, such as pensioners, retirees, low-paid workers, and civil servants, while even well-paid workers were becoming unemployed. In less than 50 years, the financial crisis of 2008 ignited challenges in the property market and called for the reinstatement of space standards as one measure against the making of tiny homes, often as small as 23 m², and described by some as “the answer to Britain’s housing crisis” (Hawken, 2017). The interplay among the housing question, modernisation aspirations, and early steps towards cleaner air reveals the contingent entanglement of agencies and mutual interdependencies from the interior of the home to the broader city, and from the local to the global. On the local scale, people with no indoor toilets were expected to go smokeless. On the global scale, the geopolitics of development still expect less developed countries to catch up with sustainability measures. The *Clean Air* film by Shell-Mex and BP Limited concluded with a question still salient, yet controversial, today: “We are in the middle of one of the most heartening endeavours of our time...of course it will cost us a few pounds on our fire places—but isn’t clean air worth a few pounds?” (“*Clean Air*, a Shell-Mex and B. P. public service film—What the minister said,” 1962).

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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