orth's book belongs on the reading list of all of us. We can all benefit from her insights, and then form our own opinions on how to use them.

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John Boughton: ***Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing***
London 2019: Verso, 336 pp.

In this book, John Boughton provides a deep and thoughtful account of the story of council and social housing in the UK from its foundations up to todays. The author traces the steps and phases that marked first the triumph and, later, the surrender of the political idea of council housing over the course of more than a century. The book is extremely rich in detail and Boughton uses an engaging style that keeps the reader fully captivated. However, Boughton does not just want to tell a story. He wants to act as a bridge between the past and the future of council housing and use the story he tells to acknowledge and justify the claim of the current need for a renewed *utopia* for council housing. He is convinced that the state should take up again a major role in the development of council housing, as it did in the first council development projects. More importantly, he supports the need for the kind of idealism that was initially at the core of the council housing dream. We believe that the pages of his book do not fully represent this idealistic claim. The focus seems to be more on highlighting mistakes committed in the past than on providing good and compelling strategies for the future. Nonetheless, there is much that should be learnt. If such key learnings from the past of council housing were more clearly brought to light and openly discussed, we would argue they could really play a crucial role in helping shape a better (and more ambitious) vision for the future of council housing.

The book can be divided into three separate and overarching parts: the dawn of council housing (late 1800s up to the Second World War), the reconstruction after the Second World War, and the dismantling of the council housing principle itself from Thatcher up to the recent Grenfell Tower tragedy. Each of these periods is described with its own historical context, ruling government parties, and urban policies. Accordingly, Boughton guides us through the changing vision and objective behind the development of council housing. From the late 1800s until the middle of the 20th century, council housing emerged as a concrete effort to get people out of overcrowded and unhygienic Victorian slums. Housing increasingly became a political priority, in accordance with the need to provide the British with what they increasingly believed was right, good, and better housing to all, and to limit social discontent. It was the years between 1945 and the late 1970s that marked the real and massive expansion of council housing. The end of the Second World War, naturally, sparked a significant wave of reconstruction since people of all kinds and social classes needed homes. Politicians had the duty to provide them as cost-effectively as possible, and therefore, during this period, modernism (and its nasty derivations) overtook tradition. Tower and high-rise blocks replaced the old-style English maisonette and new building technologies supplanted the mainly craftsman methods of the past. A third and different phase then arose with the nefarious advent of

Thatcherism. The arrival of the Rusty Lady at Downing Street marked the beginning of the decline of council housing. The rules of the market progressively overcame the role of state as a provider of public services, at the expense of municipal housing. At the core of this, the author points the finger towards the crucial shift in the logic behind the provision of council housing. Council housing was created in response to the claim that housing is a universal right and should be available to individuals from any social class and background. However, in the 1970s (when no less than 49% of the British population was living in council/social housing) a different logic started to predominate: 'council housing should be, at best, a social service, reserved for the most needy, and implicitly, at worst, housing of last resort' (p. 44). Council development increasingly became the place for those people who were marginalised in society; for those who, unable to survive under the harsh law of competition and the market, were forced into society's outskirts.

Among the attractive features of the book, the most valuable one is its interdisciplinary approach, which mixes information from the fields of architecture and design, politics, and economics in an effort to provide the most detailed and comprehensive historical account. The writing style is remarkable as well, thanks to Boughton's ability to shift from the normative to the intimate dimension. The characters shaping the destiny of council housing – principal ones such as Prime Minister Thatcher and also many marginal ones as well – are all included in this account. The relevant laws and juridical acts are also carefully reported. But the book is not a soulless history, it is, more importantly, also a testament that illustrates the thinking of people whose lives have been lived in, and who have often battled for, council housing.

However, as noted, Boughton's objective is more than just creating a great piece of social history. While the author is clear in his critique of the decline of council housing over time, he is less clear in how he wants to provide inspiration to change the status quo. He provides some good examples for how individuals are fighting for the needed new vision of council housing. Some successful stories of tenants' associations fighting against gentrification and expulsion are reported, especially in the last chapter, and they all provide a glimmer of hope. However, more space should have been dedicated to these initiatives in order to give greater concreteness to his claims and to strengthen the book's contribution to the definition of a more compelling utopian vision of council housing. While Boughton stresses the role that the state should take, he, conversely, seems to downplay the role of activism. However, is it not somewhat anachronistic to assign that much relevance to what politics and politicians can do for housing, but less to what residents can do? Maybe not, but we feel that the current context provides many new opportunities for 'ordinary citizens' to speak up. As a matter of fact, city residents seem to have become increasingly demanding with regard to their participatory role in not only shaping urban spaces (The Lefebvrian 'Right to the City' is now a motto that resonates with many) but also offering their views on current affairs.

Nonetheless, a greater achievement of this book is that it emphatically showcases a number of themes that lie at the heart of the housing issue. Regardless of the sharp time-based division of the chapters, Boughton keeps on recalling them multiple times, more or less subtly. For us, this exercise is extremely stimulating. Some of the principles driving the development of council housing, such as the deep relationship between its *spatial* and *social* features, the purpose of mixed developments or the promotion of the neighbourhood unit, con-

tinue to resurface over the decades. However, what is particularly intriguing is to see how these same ideals come to acquire a different and often even negative meaning over time. Regarding the relationship between *spatial* and *social* features, this is of utmost importance. Boughton gives us a glimpse of the importance of such a relationship when he shows how the development of a sound community and strong social cohesion among neighbours were the priorities in the building plans. He describes the process of urbanisation at the initial stage as a 'rebuilder of lost community sense' (p. 66), as a way to effectively respond to all those Londoners who, when dislocating from their overcrowded habitations to new and shinily built estates, claimed the loss of community and kinship networks that characterised their previous housing arrangement. Furthermore, over time new architectures and designs, on the one hand, and social dimensions, on the other, become increasingly intertwined. The history of Park Hill, built between 1957 and 1961 in Sheffield, is in this respect interesting to tell. The estate's design was based on an in-depth study of working-class life since it sought to replicate existing social dynamics – people who had previously been neighbours were housed next to each other again, and the former street names were re-used. Among the most innovative design features, there were 'streets in the sky' in the form of the decks that connected building blocks at different heights, which encouraged neighbourly chats and were free from the noise and traffic down on the street. However, as the author shows, this relationship could also develop in a negative way. When council housing became increasingly associated with social malaise, many of the architectural elements were also blamed for this. By the early 1980s, for example, Park Hill's 'streets in the sky' became a symbol of rising crime and anti-social behaviour. The 'design disadvantage' rule identified by Coleman (p. 179) represented a very naïve way to treat this complex relationship between the spatial and the social, trying to attribute all the social malaise that characterises social estates to a narrow number of architectural elements such as stairs and walkways. Looking more narrowly at mixed developments, these were initially encouraged in order to have people from different social classes living in the same area, and thus to promote social mobility. However, later on, mixed developments became one of the arguments that in the public debate were used to support the implementation of the 'right to buy', the ambiguous law approved in 1979 that allowed council tenants to buy the property they rented from the municipalities after a number of years, and that actually ended up being a disaster for the maintenance of the first and universalistic council housing aim. Finally, the neighbourhood unit, instead, involved having each neighbourhood develop as a self-contained entity with its own schools and shop. Initially, this was thought of as a way to make sure all new council housing residents had easy access to the most important services and facilities. This is indeed a very attractive design (ironically, it resembles the idea of the '15-minute city', proposed by Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo). However, if we look at the segregation and isolation patterns that characterised council estates over time and what Boughton tells us about them, we can see how building such enclosed areas could help pave the way for the negative fate that awaited council housing estates.

Overall, what emerges from the book also is that housing is not, and never will be, 'just' housing. Council housing was born with the objective to provide individuals with new opportunities to move up the social ladder by offering them access to cleaner and better housing conditions. What is important, therefore, is that housing politics be closely tied to other policy

areas, such as social security and employment. Boughton highlights how the decline in industrialisation, the rise of the service economy, and the consequent rise in unemployment were crucial factors in what became of council housing. This reminds us, therefore, that thinking about the future of council housing means rethinking also the future of the society as a whole. Doing one without the other is like betting on a three-legged horse and will not lead us to the utopian vision we so strongly need.

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