

displaced by development, an unfulfilled promise made by the Housing Act of 1949 that was scorned by Moses. His extensive research, much of it in the Housing Authority archives, reveals ground-level photographs and aerial views that cause the viewer to question the definition of 'blight', the aesthetic underpinnings of which were masked by a massive superstructure of selective statistics. His before-and-after maps of blocks of building footprints startlingly illustrate what clearance and superblock consolidation did to the fabric of the city. Through his discussion of the East Harlem projects, the uneasy, decade-long accommodation between urban renewal enthusiasts, who advocated large commercial projects, and 'housers', who concerned themselves with the construction of apartments for the poor and lower middle class, is plain to see. Zipp's viewpoint is particularly interdisciplinary in his consideration of the Lincoln Center project, layering references to *West Side Story*, urban politics, neighbourhood activism, planning and Cold War ideology.

Some of the maps that are reproduced from existing sources rather than redrawn for this volume are so small that they are readable only at the level of shape or pattern. Some readers wishing a more particular reading of street names and building types may be frustrated by this cubist aesthetic. The phrase Cold War, deployed in the book's subtitle, can refer specifically to the battle of cultures and ideologies between the US and the USSR manifested on the streets of New York or, more generally to a period of American cultural life between 1949 and the demise of urban renewal in the early 1970s. One could wonder, therefore, whether to put Zipp's work on the same shelf as Penny von Eschen's or Stephen J. Whitfield's. Zipp masterfully demonstrates, though, that *Manhattan Projects* deserves to be surrounded by the best studies of the evolution of post-World War II urbanism, for it is surely one of them.

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Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010. xvi + 508pp. 42 plates, 6 colour. £25.00.
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This is a golden age for writing about sex and the city (and perhaps a good time to rescue a perfectly good descriptive phrase from the clutches of Carrie Bradshaw and friends). Following on from often rather broad claims about urban space and sexuality made in women's studies, 'queer theory', cultural studies, sociology and human geography, the past decade has seen a flowering of much more detailed, nuanced historical work. It is striking that much of the best of this work has focused on London, and even more striking that the period of particular attention has not been 'Swinging London' of the sixties or later developments associated with new 'liberated' identities, but what Frank Mort describes in *Capital Affairs* as 'the *longue durée* of sexual and social relations' (p. 5) that stretched from the inter-war years, through wartime, into the early sixties. This period was also the focus for Matt Houlbrook's *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) which completely reconfigured notions of 'homosex' in the city in the period before its legalization (at least between consenting adults in private). There have also been important recent

contributions by Stefan Slater on mid-century prostitution and its policing, and by Richard Hornsey on the intersections of the cultures of homosexuality and social modernism in post-war London in his *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

In all of this work, the city is much more than a passive stage for sexual practices and identities. As Houlbrook suggests in *Queer London*, 'they are shaped and sustained by the physical and cultural forms of modern urban life, just as they in turn shape that life' (p. 4). What this means is that the microgeographies of the city and detailed biographies of ordinary and extraordinary lives become more than just mere details, but modes of analysis. This body of work is also characterized by an unwillingness to keep sex chained up in its own den, but rather to think about its wider entanglements in consumer cultures, in cultures of policing and government, and even in planning regimes. As Mort claims in *Capital Affairs*, this approach is 'sex-centred but it is not sex-obsessed', focused on 'bodies, identities and desires but also on government policies and systems of representation ... breaking out of the discrete and compartmentalized way that post-war English history has been traditionally told' (pp. 6, 10).

Capital Affairs has a complicated relationship with this wider writing about mid-twentieth century London and its sexual cultures. It is tempting to describe it as both foreplay and climax, as Mort's work in the 1990s and early 2000s was the vital inspiration for this movement. *Capital Affairs* is also the culmination of a long-term project drawing upon several papers published in the past decade, that have influenced the development of other work. In places the *longue durée* of Mort's own project places him on the defensive; he comes from a tradition in cultural studies that gives primacy to the power of symbolism and representations. What was orthodoxy in the late 1990s is now being pressed by perspectives that emphasize the sensory, embodied experience of 'real' life, of obvious relevance to the study of sex. One of the triumphs of *Capital Affairs* is that it demonstrates emphatically the power of representations and their intimate relations with the practices and rhythms of everyday life. Mort insists that 'London as it was visualised and imagined during the post-war years cannot be divorced from all the other activities that shaped the city as a place of sexual danger and possibility' (p. 13).

Mort's sex-centred history of London is also centred on what might be described as the 'high fifties', the decade from the Coronation in 1953 to the Profumo scandal of 1963. The book works through a series of closely examined narratives, including the life and loves of the young Princess Margaret, and the emergence of the elite figure of the 'man-about-town' in the early 1950s and his night-time pleasures, both straight and queer. A key strand of the book is a distinctive kind of elite history that simultaneously charts the reinvention of upper-class cultural power in London during the 1950s, while indicating its fault-lines and weaknesses. London's distinctive metropolitan geographies meant that there was always a disturbing proximity between high and low life, as in the case of the Soviet spy, Guy Burgess, between the elite institutions of the Foreign Office, the BBC and the West End literary salons, and the homosexual clubs and pick-up sites in nearby Soho or Piccadilly. Mort brilliantly juxtaposes the Coronation with John Christie's serial killings of women at 10 Rillington Place in Ladbroke Grove the same year, emphasizing both the proximity of high and low society in the city, and the way that these sex crimes became mixed with newly racialized moral geographies in districts marked by Caribbean migration. The pivotal

case-study in the book is of John Wolfenden's government enquiry into homosexuality and prostitution. An immediate best-seller on publication in 1957, the Wolfenden Report has conventionally been regarded as an important progressive moment on the road to sexual liberation. Mort does not deny the significance of the report, but argues that it was more than the application of rationalist expertise to the issue of sexuality. For Mort, close examination of Wolfenden reveals a more 'dramatic and unstable picture' as the interpenetrations of the establishment and London's 'low society' became clear, and 'as sexual practices that were officially denied as socially marginal became symbolically central to public culture' (p. 23).

In the second half of the book, Mort turns to an exploration of the sexual geographies of 1950s Soho. Both homosexuality and prostitution, the main investigative issues of the Wolfenden enquiry, were concentrated in the district, and Mort shows that they were integral elements of an emergent metropolitan consumption culture, that fed off London's increasing racial and cultural diversity. Mort traces the history of sex for sale in Soho, not just as prostitution, but particularly concentrating on 'live sexual display'. *Capital Affairs* takes this story from the formal nude female tableaux at the Windmill Theatre to Paul Raymond's Revuebar, an explicit exercise in replacing a very circumscribed English tradition of female nudity on stage with an 'international world of striptease'. The main themes of the book come together in the final chapter on the Profumo scandal, with its connections between high and low society, between the Conservative minister and his royal connections, and the affair's cast of call-girls, Caribbean pimps and racketeers in Soho and Notting Hill.

Mort does not quote Philip Larkin's lament that 'sexual intercourse was invented in 1963' (supposedly a 'little too late' for Larkin), not least because *Capital Affairs* has copious evidence to the contrary. The book opens with a wonderful vignette of the American sexologist Alfred Kinsey astounded by the sheer amount and variety of sexual activity on public display in Soho in 1955, from prostitutes of both sexes 'letting their hands dribble across the crotches of passers by', to 'dare-devil' guardsmen 'all out for sex' in skin-tight uniforms (p. 2). Work on sex in 1950s London necessarily addresses what came afterwards; the brilliance of Houlbrook's *Queer London* came in the way it made real the strangeness of the world of male homosexuality in mid-century London, detaching that world from easy assumptions of a repressed modern gay identity. *Capital Affairs* has a rather different challenge to simplistic notions of sexual revolution and progress. It does not just catalogue that there was (rather a lot) of sex going on before Profumo and the swinging sixties, it also demonstrates powerfully that what came to be known as the permissive society, with all its contradictions between liberation and exploitation, had strong lineages in the sexual cultures of the mid-twentieth-century city.

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