architecture institutions and change

Proceedings of the
Society of Architectural Historians
Australia and New Zealand
Vol. 32

Karen Burns and Paul Walker, University of Melbourne

Publicly Postmodern: Media, Image and the New Social Housing Institution in 1980s Melbourne

At the end of the 1970s, after intense resident opposition, a decade of land corruption scandals, one Royal Commission and another public inquiry, a 1979 Green Paper recommended an administrative and policy restructure of the Victorian Housing Commission. Under new leadership the reformed Ministry of Housing in Victoria embarked on a radically different social housing program, recruiting key staff such as architect John Devenish, Manager of the successful 1975-81 New South Wales Woolloomooloo development that included a significant public housing scheme. With Devenish's supervision of its new "rehabilitation and reuse" projects, the Ministry continued its rejection of high-rise, high-density accommodation and began an infill model of neighborhood housing. In a 1985 publication the Ministry described its new infill houses as postmodernist. This paper argues that the state agency's institutional renewal, transformation and new external identity found tangible expression in postmodern architecture. Architectural references to context, historical quotation and ornament publicly signified new relations between the state agency, local communities and place. This paper focuses on the renewal of the 'public image' of the Commission evident in the Ministry's own media production – their texts, photographs and an exhibition – and their understanding of social housing as a form of 'image', what we would now call a representation. Our case study parallels emerging research on the role of media production in the transformation of modernist institutions into new postmodern entities.

The public perception of the "commission" still remained in public and media minds.[1] (Robert Carter, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Housing and Construction, Victoria, 1988)

In 1985 the Victorian Ministry of Housing and Construction, formerly the Housing Commission of Victoria, developed an exhibition for secondary school students titled That's Our House. The following year the exhibition was published as a hardback book. The cover was dominated by a large colour photograph depicting three young children amid a tangle of BMX bikes outside the cheerful polychrome brickwork of new social housing in Kay Street, Carlton. The homes had been commissioned by the agency from Melbourne architects Peter Corrigan and Maggie Edmond. Inside the covers, the text and images told the story of the development of the Australian home, integrating social housing into this narrative. A second last chapter "What's new" described the new postmodern architecture as soft gelato colours, ornament and streetscape and illustrated this with photos of two inner city infill homes.[2] The two houses were social housing projects, one designed by Greg Burgess, the other by Edmond and Corrigan. This information was not included in the text or image captions. The infill projects looked the same as the other architect designed houses populating the last pages of the book. Which was the point. "Style replaces stigma" was an architectural journal headline to capture this shift.[3]

The book's cover placed the claim "That's Our House", with the Ministry's logo and name, alongside a picture of mostly happy tenants and their "suburban" (public housing) home. This book and other publications issued and written by the public agency in the 1980s, as we will demonstrate, invite questions about the centrality of media and images – including architecture as a visual identity and representation – in the redesign of the institution, its policy and its social housing product. This paper explores how the postmodernism featured in texts such as That's Our House expressed key policy changes in urban housing and signified the institution's new "consultative" style. In the following paper these changes are focused through the lens of the architectural media produced by the Ministry – texts, images and exhibition – in the renewal of the Housing Commission of Victoria. This study adds to recent research examining the role of media production in the transformation of modernist institutions into new (postmodernist) entities.[4]

Architectural discussion of postmodernism is often fractured between easy categorisation and scrutinised taxonomies.[5] We notice a gap between the working everyday architectural uses of the term "postmodernism" as a classifying category that one can apply guidebook style to buildings and the gap between this approach and a discourse focused on definitions. The definitional genre works through taxonomies of postmodern attributes, often producing internal oppositions (for example, between radical and soft postmodernism, between critical and "institutionalised" postmodernism). The definitional interrogation and the everyday classification are different genres with differing uses and different sites. But the same questions can be asked of both genres: how are these meanings produced and to what end? If we forgo an essentialist definition of postmodernism and take up a situational

one, we also attend to the meanings produced by historical actors in their own battles and struggles. Postmodernism was often used relationally, to declare differences: for example, in style, ideology and historical moment. In this paper we work with the definition produced by the Victorian Ministry of Housing to describe their new architectural turn: colour, ornament, contextualism, and recognise the agency's use of media – texts, images, books, journals and exhibitions – to visualise its new policy and identity as part of a postmodern (media) turn.[6]

The media life of social housing

In 1988 the Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Housing and Construction (Victoria) attributed some of the continuing difficulties of the agency to the social stigma still attached to social housing and public housing bodies. He wrote: "The public perception of the 'commission' still remained in public and media minds".[7] Through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s public housing became a highly mediated object in local and international reportage.[8] Media consciousness of social housing agencies and the media profile of public housing occurred within a larger transformation and international context that will be sketched in here. In 1960s North America social housing was reported on through mainstream press coverage, professional journal reports, ethnographic studies of housing estates as well as resident action protests against racism and rent strikes against local rent collection authorities.[9] In the wake of the civil rights movement, the political mobilisation of African Americans and urban uprising, public housing became a focus for academics and government agencies.

By the later 1970s North American social housing had become a notorious talking point in international architectural circles including Australia. Polemical arguments linking the "failure" of modernism to "failed" welfare state public housing were illustrated by images in both the mainstream and architectural media, most famously through representations of the St Louis housing estate Pruitt-Igoe. This social housing precinct achieved international fame through reproduction of photographs and film footage of the partial demolition of three estate buildings over three separate days in March, April and July 1972.[10] One UPI photograph was reproduced in architectural publications in the mid-1970s – in *Collage City* (1976) and *The Language of Post Modern Architecture* (1977; 1978 revised edition) – and film footage of the detonations was included in an episode of Robert Hughes 1980 television series *The Shock of the New.* Although the remaining 30 buildings on the estate were demolished by conventional wrecking ball technologies over the summer of 1976, these three exploding buildings from 1972 have continued to fascinate viewers.[11] The demolition photos were reproduced in different texts and accompanied different claims but their raw content signified rupture and change.

The commissioning of the detonations in 1972 was, arguably, a consciously contrived media spectacle. Local St Louis public authorities at war with their federal agency organised the original detonation experiments, and the public demolitions made a point "about the lack of federal funds for the long slated demolition of a vacant project".[12] In 1972 the Nixon administration had frozen funds for social housing. The public demolition was an unsubtle

communication via the media, from one housing agency to another but it was not intended to signify the end of public housing. When the footage was broadcast in North America on March 16, 1972, the voice over narration of the news anchor described the demolitions as a means to make more space in an on-going renewal program.[13] In 1988 the editor of *Casabella* noted that buildings increasingly cultivated the "spectacular" – a published image that strikes the reader at first glance – and guarantees its photographic reproduction. He attributed this to the influence of advertising aesthetics, although a broader cultural history might identify news media and pop art production as equally shaping forces.[14] The Pruitt-Igoe demolition image suggests that even ruined buildings could achieve this spectacular affect.

The Pruitt-Igoe image and footage are amongst the well-known examples of the mediatisation of public housing: illustrating media interest in public housing, a sense of housing as a form of image, and a consciousness in public housing agencies of social housing's media profile. A photograph of the Pruitt-Igoe detonation was available to Australian architects in 1972 through the pages of *Architectural Forum*, the *AIA Journal* and John Turner's book *Freedom to Build* (1972), all held at the Architecture Library at the University of Melbourne. The famous photograph was available to all members of the (Royal) Australian Institute of Architects in February 1975, in the pages of *Architecture in Australia*, the official journal of record sent to its members.[15] This edition opened with an interview with visiting architectural critic Charles Jencks and had been recorded at the end of his October 1974 visit to Australia. The text was accompanied by illustrations, including the image of the crumbling, exploding Pruitt-Igoe block.[16] On the cover Jencks posed with his palm turned upward to support a dinosaur figurine, presumably the spectre of modernism. In the printed interview Jencks did not comment on Australian housing estates but the Victorian Housing Commission was prominent at the time in local and mainstream media publications over resident battles with the institution's compulsory purchase and large-scale demolition policies in the inner city. In the architectural press the on-going reproduction of the demolition image of Pruitt-Igoe illustrated that "meanings and images" had now become a significant site of architectural production.[17]

Images and discussion of public housing produced in the 1970s and 1980s pinpoint growing recognition in architecture of "media" as a social construction of knowledge and judgments, and of architecture as a form of "image". From the early 1960s the discipline of architecture underwent a larger "media turn".[18] From 1960, descriptions of architecture and the city as "images" were an early acknowledgement of architecture as a form of representation.[19] An expanding realm of media production in architecture accompanied keen attention to the significance of representation, including communication codes, and theorisation of architecture and the city as forms of images.[20] This architectural shift can be placed within a larger historical paradigm described as postindustrial and postmodern, where "ever-renewed and ever-diversified images and meanings are a constitutive dimension of postindustrial economic activity".[21]

The idea of public housing as a kind of image that would produce effects in its residents was clearly articulated by New York architect Oscar Newman in his 1972 study *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City*. His book was based on a three-year research project funded in part by the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice of the United States and was underpinned by ideologies of urban crime and policing. In Chapter 5 titled "Image and Milieu" Newman used images of Pruitt-Igoe (along with five other public housing complexes) to examine the "distinctive image" of public housing. He claimed that the "government-sponsored housing developments in America, for a variety of reasons seldom articulated, are designed so that they stand out and are recognized as distinctively different residential complexes."[22] He noted that these differences produced "the visual stigma of public housing". This image and visual stigma produced a "milieu".[23] Newman observed the agency of the image in shaping occupant's identities, remarking on "the effect of the institutional image as perceived by the project residents themselves".[24] He singled out the estate's "institutional identity", noting that, "this attitude toward interior finishes and furnishings creates an institutional atmosphere, not unlike that achieved in our worst hospitals and prisons."[25] Some of Newman's phrases – stigma, segregation and institutional – would turn up in the Victorian Ministry of Housing's publications, as we shall see. Unhelpfully, just as the Ministry of Housing was undergoing renewal and redesign in the early 1980s the purported failure of a "large low income housing project" (Pruitt-Igoe) would be broadcast on mainstream Australian television, in the 1981/1982 screening of "Trouble in Utopia" written and presented by expatriate art critic Robert Hughes.

In the 1970s the institution of government commissioned and produced social housing appeared to be in inevitable fatal decline. North American public housing agencies were under fire from Republican and libertarian positions, but the rhetoric of failure and decline was also contested. In 1975 the urban policy expert Professor Eugene Meehan published an evidence-based book titled *Public Housing Policy,* a study of the St Louis public housing schemes undertaken between 1943 and 1969. He refuted the general claim of the failure of public housing symbolised "nationally and internationally" by Pruitt-Igoe, demonstrated the fiscal constraints on the program and observed in the final pages of the book:

> The evidence suggests, then, a break down in the fundamental institutions that make or administer policy, locally and nationally. Or more precisely they have been unable to adapt to changing conditions and continue to function when expectations regarding their performance expanded.[26]

As we argue in the next section the Housing Commission of Victoria was a public housing institution that successfully adapted to changing circumstances. When John Turner and Robert Fichter published their housing advocacy manifesto *Freedom to Build* in 1972, they declared their opposition to "contractor-oriented bureaucratic systems" and proclaimed "that the provision of housing for low income people through direct government action has generally been a failure".[27] Although eventually felled by state and international financial crises, the Victorian Ministry of Housing was an exceptional institutional adaptor in the 1980s.

Rebranding the organisation

In 1979 the Housing Commission of Victoria was a 42 year old bureaucracy having been established in 1937 after years of extensive lobbying by church and welfare groups.[28] The Commission operated across the inner city, the urban periphery and in regional Victoria but encountered its most difficult media coverage over its program in the older inner suburbs of Melbourne. By the 1950s urban residents were starting to contest the Commission's compulsory home purchase, large-scale demolitions, land clearances and construction of medium density walk-ups and high-rise towers. Even in the 1950s citizen resistance received publicity through activism led by a young Jim Cairns.[29]

By the later 1960s and 1970s the Commission and other government agencies were encountering entrenched resident resistance.[30] Inner city residents' associations were formed, often in opposition to State agencies. Citizens used community activist newspapers and undertook direct action protests.[31] In 1971 the Carlton Association burned an effigy of the Minister of Housing Ray Meagher outside the Queen Street government offices in the city. Media was a key part of resident resistance. Citizens used their own media production to promote their causes and sometimes their issues and actions were reported in the mainstream press. Book-length accounts of current local battles, local newspapers, direct public actions and the mainstream press were all engaged to share information, raise consciousness and exert pressure on government agencies.[32] Documentation of these "threats" to local communities appeared in publications by local writers and subsequently a growing body of academic research presented further evidence and community opposition and organisation.[33] In part, these local actions helped foster a coherent local identity.[34]

In parallel to this local opposition to State incursions, the mainstream media was increasingly inquiring into the Commission's land acquisitions in outer urban and regional areas.[35] The agency became engulfed in a public corruption scandal and 1979 was its nadir. It suffered both a Royal Commission and another separate, public inquiry. In 1988 a representative of the Shelter organisation observed that the land acquisition scandals served "to further impair public confidence in the administration of public housing …. coming, as they did, on the heels of the notorious slum clearance and high-rise programs of the 1960s."[36]

The Royal Commission investigated land purchases from 1973 to 1978 and the other inquiry was a broad consultative review, examining all aspects of public and private housing policy in Victoria. A separate agency (the Urban Land Authority) was established in December 1979 to dispose of surplus government land.[37] Some internal reform of the Commission had already begun with the 1977 establishment of the Housing Advisory Service.[38] In November 1980 the Ministry published the outcome of the review as a "Green Paper". Its cover displayed the Ministry's new name and a logo depicting a home sheltering a nuclear family within.[39] The report was prefaced with a statement from the Minister of Housing stating that:

> The Ministry should aim to assist its clients obtain home ownership or some
> form of partial equity in property … For people unable or not wanting to obtain

home ownership, direct assistance should be aimed at providing, or assisting with the provision of accommodation *at a level at least equal to the minimum standard provided to home owners*." (Emphasis in the original).[40]

The Green Paper signaled a major shift in the focus of the agency: it would now promote an owner-occupancy mix of policies. Renting would be seen as a temporary state and "the government's role in the rental sector would be to ensure that tenants' rights were protected and that families received adequate assistance and counseling to enable them to become homeowners."[41] Whilst the Green Paper contemplated breaking up the agency it finally recommended the role of a coordinated agency "because of the central importance of housing to people's wellbeing and life prospects" and "because of the increasing complexity of the issues involved". It argued that the agency should divest itself of certain tasks (such as rent collection). Instead the report stated that the Ministry should concentrate "on these more complex functions of analysis, planning, coordination and innovation."[42] The organisation moved away from its design and construct model dominated by engineering and accountancy, to a research driven agency.

Signs of this research driven agenda and focus on innovation were signaled in new key appointments. In the early 1980s resignations of senior figures was accompanied by retirements. "By the early 1980s there was a core of young professionals versed in planning, architecture, design, research and social policy."[43] Key appointments included planner Eugene Kneebone, architect John Devenish as Group Manager, Rehabilitation and Redevelopment, Ministry of Housing Project (formerly Manager for the Woolloomooloo development 1975-81 which included Devenish designed housing in Nicholson Street, Woolloomooloo) and academic and economist Robert A. Carter as Economic Consultant to the Ministry of Housing from 1982 to 1987.[44]

The renewal of the agency extended in every direction: from its policy agenda, to the redesign of its administration system, to its new recruitment criteria for regional managers and its relationships to external bodies. According to the Ministry's own tale of its recent history, the organisation "transformed from a culture dominated by engineers and accountants towards a social policy profile, with a more 'caring' and responsive culture in relation to tenant interests and housing needs in the community." Across 1982 and 1983 the agency moved away from centralisation to regionalisation, which stressed the importance of local factors and local groups.[45] In part this new direction focused on the community as active agents in housing. Writing in 1988 the Deputy Director General of the MOHC said that social trends had further influenced the state housing authority naming "community perceptions regarding the rights of tenants and the desirability of community participation in decision making."[46]

With the election of the first State Labor government in 27 years in late 1982, the reforming agenda accelerated. In 1983 the legislature passed a new Housing Act.[47] The Housing Act 1983 was an act "to modernize housing law". It specified the key objects of the Ministry: "to promote the integration of public and private housing", "To expand and develop the role of

the public sector in the provision of housing", "To promote consultation on major housing policy issues with all persons and groups of persons involved in housing" and "To promote public awareness of the role and functions of the public housing sector."[48] In the next section we turn to examine some of the physical, architectural translations of these policy agendas, including the mandate to promote the public housing sector.

The public image of the agency

Media, particularly architectural media – journals and publications in partnership with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects – became a key platform for disseminating new policy and design solutions. The Housing Act 1983 had established a promotional role for the Ministry, stating that an agency objective was "To promote public awareness of the role and functions of the public housing sector". Ministry publications demonstrated an eager desire to critically distance themselves from their former institution – the Housing Commission – and enact institutional renewal through this act of disavowal.[49] All extant publications issued between 1984 and 1990 were examined for this paper. All contained the story of the former Housing Commission's failures, briefly narrated resident resistance and balanced this history with a description of the new focus of the organisation.[50] For example, John Devenish (Group Manager Rehabilitation and Redevelopment), writing in a 1983 RAIA publication on medium density housing, described the high-rise tower program and its replacement in these terms:

> These projects attracted widespread criticism on social and environmental grounds and the Commission finally abandoned the slum clearance and redevelopment program in the early 1970's … The Ministry for Housing adopted new policies for rehabilitation and redevelopment of these areas and programs were set up in consultation with local communities … These new projects are intended to fit into their respective environments. This blending of public housing into established areas helps to upgrade the quality for the local environment while increasing the variety of public housing stock, but avoids the identification and stigmatization of public housing estates.[51]

The story of past and present was often told most simply in images. A number of publications included banner headlines from old newspapers: "Home Owners Hostile Collingwood Protest on Slum Reclamation"/"Angry Residents protest Against Housing Plan". In the 1988 Ministry of Housing and Construction book *New Houses for Old: Fifty Years of Public Housing in Victoria* the frontispiece photograph juxtaposed the new Robert Pierce designed South Melbourne housing (1982) with an early twentieth-century photograph of "slum housing" often used by the old Commission. Later in the book the reader would encounter the Nelson Road houses again in an illustration titled "post-modern architecture".[52]

The desire to rewrite the public image of the agency filtered down to individual estate works. Existing modernist housing estates were renovated and redesigned and physically inscribed with interventions and the Ministry produced information and publicity about these

transformations. As part of their 1982 election campaign the Labor Party had promised an allocation of $8 million for public housing estate improvement and maintenance. In 1984 the Ministry decided on a major redevelopment of the Dight Street Estate in Collingwood. This site and another in Canning St North Melbourne were chosen for the initial improvement program.[53] A working party was established and settled on seven priorities including an "improved identity and public image". The other six aims were extremely functional and listed six physical areas as a focus of improvement and repair (balconies, lift services, laundry facilities, foyers and car-parking, introduction of communal lounges).[54] There was a particular focus on appearance, on the symbolic as well as physical role of maintenance, and these interventions were presented in the full colour brochure published by the Ministry in 1988.

The brochure *Dight Street Collingwood* announced the successful completion of "the biggest redevelopment project ever undertaken by the Ministry".[55] It was subtitled "New housing, major renovation, private gardens and public spaces revitalize a neighborhood". The text opened by describing the old Commission's programs, acknowledged that the ageing walk-up housing had faced structural and privacy problems in the 1980s but emphasised the new partnership with communities approach, noting, "The Ministry began consulting tenants and other interested groups on ways of solving Dight Street's problems." The new project included the transformation of a former church into a community centre by Melbourne architectural practice Daryl Jackson and a photograph of this was included in the brochure. The pamphlet identified an Old Collingwood comprised of people and place: "a close-knit community of working people living in small cottages and terrace houses". Place, in particular, specific forms of historical domestic architecture became a marker of the community. And the text emphasised the architectural continuity describing its new 100 infill units as "units in a terrace house configuration".

The exiting 1950s walk-up flats on the estate were transformed into visually separate apartments using ornamental details. Pedimented roofs, semi-circular balconies crowning the stairwells, the division of the open public space in front of the flats into separate yards with picket fences surmounted by curved gates, differentiation of the upper story flats with timber cladding and circular lunettes beneath each upper story pediment broke the visual identity of the building down into smaller scaled components. New town houses were built in Perry Street and these party wall terraces were brick with galvanised iron balustrade verandah awnings, bay windows and a mix of triangular and curved pediments. It was postmodernism on a very small budget. But these elements could be varied so that one house did not immediately replicate the other. The published text explicitly identified replication and standardisation as problems, "a variety of brickwork colors were used to add individual character to the units", "the appearance and scale of domestic housing was achieved by extensive aesthetic treatment of the exterior", "The 4 new elderly persons units in Perry and Palmer Streets have been designed to harmonize with the Victorian terraces". The brochure contrasted these interventions with the former estate buildings, "Previously, regimented rows of flats surrounded a central open space. This suggested an institutional

environment – a feeling reinforced by the closure of all through roads at the time the flats were built."[56]

In 1972 Oscar Newman had associated institutionalisation with mean finishes and visual and spatial austerity. In the Dight Street brochure "institution' seems to signify standardisation and repetition. The word "regimented" faintly hints at a structure of top-down power relations. This preference for external features that would provide variation and endow each home with a sense of individuality was connected to the new home ownership, or partial home ownership equity policy focus. John Devenish made an explicit connection between policy and design in an essay in published in the Australian themed 1984 issue of *UIA*.[57] Devenish described the Ministry's new program as:

> … a most revolutionary social housing program (which) has consolidated the new housing policy … The policy was to invest social housing with the same dignity enjoyed by owner-occupiers. No more high-rise towers and no more concentration of social housing. The strategy was low-rise infill to integrate with existing neighborhoods. High-rise tenants were invited to take control and administer their properties (including the maintenance). Existing nineteenth-century properties were bought up and rehabilitated, conserving districts. Most significantly, young architects have been encouraged to develop the suburban house type. The researches have concentrated on restoring the street, understanding the semantic issues of the façade, and exploring the plan.[58]

In the caption describing Cocks and Carmichael's multi-unit development at Highett, the text notes, "the underlying notion is that the public tenant also has the right to the social dignity of home ownership" and that estates "still risk the social stigma of being branded welfare ghettoes".[59] In another 1983 publication issued by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Devenish wrote that, "This blending of public housing into established areas helps to upgrade the quality of the local environment while increasing the variety of public housing stock, but avoids the identification and stigmatization of public housing estates" and he noted of the South Melbourne housing "Individuality has been achieved by the use of simple decorative variations on straight brick walls" and "the expressions are as diverse as one would expect for private clients."[60] The Ministry consciously aspired to be the innovative leader in housing, using its research and design of social housing to break new ground. As Devenish observed in 1983, the Ministry of Housing would set the lead for developer's practice: "The object is to use the new social housing as a standard to be aspired to, leading, eventually to the full integration of both housing markets."[61] The Ministry's role as a commissioning agent of private architectural practices, its partnerships with bulk volume housing firms and the involvement of local council agencies in these partnerships, its funding of co-operative housing as well as tenant organisations, its investment in the important symbolic function of maintenance and renovation were significant innovations. However a very serious local and international financial crisis in 1989-90 dramatically curbed government programs in the

State of Victoria and the Ministry's ambitious, expansionist housing program was reined in by new budget priorities. Nevertheless its postmodern houses remain in the inner and outer suburbs of Melbourne and in regional areas.

Conclusion

The famous Pruitt-Igoe detonation image circulated in the architectural world not only as a symbol of failed welfare housing but as a sign of the "failure" of modernism. This image of destruction was consistent with narratives of radical change as a break or rupture with previous practice. Forever suspended in a moment of destruction, the final image of Pruitt-Igoe suggested that the institution could not be transformed but only torn down. This vantage point was congruent with historical studies from the period. From the late 1970s onwards the researches of French academic Michel Foucault on the birth of the prison, hospital and asylum institutions were influential in architectural circles.[62] Foucault's metaphors stressed the totality of the institution. Writing on the birth of the prison he described it as a "complete and austere institution" and "an exhaustive disciplinary apparatus".[63] Within this model there seemed little room for institutional renewal and reinvention. Although Foucault was involved in pressure groups against contemporary psychiatric and prison institutions his historical practice focused on the formation of modern institutions and their new regimes of knowledge in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and not on their current day incarnations and struggles.[64] He was writing as an historical actor in a period of institutional critique and it is no failing of his historical practice that he could not forecast how institutions might reinvent themselves.

But researchers, housing authorities and architects within the period could equally have paid attention to the 1975 analysis of the St Louis public housing program by Eugeene Meehan who attributed problems, not failure, to fiscal constraints and the incapacity of local and national institutions to adapt to changing conditions. The push to make a detonating Pruitt-Igoe stand for the failure of social housing and the failure of modernism drew on forces beyond the territory of one public housing scheme. Although early cultural theorists of postmodernism writing in the early 1980s pointed the finger of public demise at neo-liberalism, an examination of the mediatisation of social housing reminds us that not only neo-liberal and Republican, but libertarian voices raged against the institution.

The case of the Victorian Ministry of Housing demonstrates continuity between a modernist institution and its renewal as an institution after modernism. Its successful reinvention, its mandate to promote public housing and its use of media to shape a new image and recognise the representational role of architect designed housing in the image of social housing, place this case study amongst new research on the transformation of the modernist architectural institution into a postmodern entity. Now, in a time of conversion of social housing into private ownership, the 1980s Victorian Ministry presents an extraordinary case study from 30 year years ago, when a social housing institution committed to diversity of housing stock and diverse modes of ownership, promoting the "social dignity of home ownership" but committed to seeing rental tenure as a temporary mode for most of its residents as it aided

them on the road to becoming home owners. It imagined that a social housing authority would lead the marketplace and not the other way round. It was a brief, but remarkable experiment.

---

1   Robert A. Carter, "A Commission for Reform: Policy Innovation and Organisational Change in the Fifth Decade," in *New Houses for Old: Fifty Years of Public Housing in Victoria 1938-1988*, ed. Renate Howe (Ministry of Housing and Construction, Melbourne, 1988), 286.

2   Nicholas Hudson and Peter McEwan, *That's Our House: A History of Housing in Victoria* (Melbourne: The Ministry of Housing, 250 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, 1986), 72.

3   This was the headline London-based journal *UIA* used for an article by John Devenish, Group Manager, Rehabilitation and Redevelopment. The full headline is "Victorian Ministry of Housing John Devenish: Style Replaces Stigma," *UIA International Architect* 4 (1984): 20-27.

4   Irene Sunwoo, "From the 'Well-Laid Table' to the 'Market Place': The Architectural Association Unit System," *Journal of Architectural Education* 65, no. 2 (March 2012): 24-41.

5   Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xii, in part notes this problem: "there is little agreement as to the characteristics that make a particular building or project 'postmodern', only that such a designation is possible", *Utopia's Ghost*, xii, but doesn't outline the split we diagnose. A little further on he states, "in architecture postmodernism is generally used to denote discourse and production that dominated the international scene roughly from 1970 to 1990" (p. 2).

6   Martin notes, "A plausible homology between what Harvey called flexible accumulation and the economy of interchangeable images in which postmodern architecture partook," *Utopia's Ghost*, 3.

7   Carter, "A Commission for Reform," 286.

8   Rachel G. Bratt. "Public Housing: The Controversy and Contribution," in *Critical Perspectives on Public Housing*, ed. Rachel G. Bratt, Chester Hartman and Ann Meyerson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 354, identifies media reportage of "troubled" projects as one of the three reasons for the *perception* that public housing was a failure.

9   See Barry Checkoway, "Revitalising an Urban Neighbourhood: A St Louis Case Study," in *The Metropolitan Midwest: Problems and Prospects for Change*, ed. Barry Checkoway and Carl V. Patton (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 246.

10   Roger Montgomery, "Pruitt-Igoe: Policy Failure or Societal Symptom," in *The Metropolitan Midwest,* 229. Other notable architectural studies of Pruitt-Igoe include Mary Comerio, "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories," *Journal of Architectural Education* 34, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 25-31, Katherine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 3 (May 1991): 163-171, Elizabeth Birmingham, "Reframing the Ruins: Pruitt-Igoe, Structural Racism, and African American Rhetoric as Space for Cultural Critique," *Western Journal of Communication* 63, no. 3 (1999): 291-309 and Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City* (London: Architectural Press, 1976 rpt (1972)).

11   See the recent documentary *The Pruitt Igoe Myth* (dir. Chad Friedrichs, 2011) and the film *Koyanisqatsi* (1983 with soundtrack by Philip Glass).

12   Margali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-century America* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995), 273, footnote 102, based on personal communication from Roger Montgomery who had been involved with Pruitt-Igoe since 1966. Comerio, "Pruitt-Igoe and Other Stories," 27, notes that the Nixon Administration had frozen funds for public housing.

13   The edited voice over narration in the archival description reads in part, "Pruitt-Igoe housing project of 33 buildings. Became center of crime and violence. Now 23 buildings are empty. Project now being renovated to yield more space. (Tenant Ruby Russell – is hopeful but not confident.) Federal government hopes to lure families back, but will accept no welfare families ... to reduce size of some buildings with dynamite) says tenants are human beings and must be treated accordingly." Vanderbilt Television News Archive, CBS Evening News, March 16, 1972. Tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=222072 (accessed February 4, 2015).

14 Pierre-Alain Croset, "The Narration of Architecture," in *ArchitectureProduction,* ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), 203.

15 Architecture Library, University of Melbourne.

16 "AA Interview Charles Jencks," *Architecture in Australia* 64, no. 1 (February 1975): 50-57.

17 Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade*, 85.

18 Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006).

19 The term, focus and meanings of course changed across this period, from a 1960 use of image, in the later 1960s and 1970s a use of codes, to the 1980s interest in "reproduction" and "representation". For the 1960s and 1970s see footnote 20 and for the 1980s see footnote 14.

20 For primary text examples of this "media" turn, see Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (1960), Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) and Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia* (1976).

21 Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade*, 85.

22 Newman, *Defensible Space*, 102.

23 Newman, *Defensible Space*, 105.

24 Newman, *Defensible Space*, 107.

25 Newman, *Defensible Space*, 105, 107.

26 Eugene J. Meehan, *Public Housing Policy: Convention versus Reality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, 1975), 170.

27 John F. C. Turner and Robert Fichter, *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* (London and New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), vii, x.

28 The Housing Commission Victoria, *The Enemy Within Our Gates* (Melbourne: The Housing Commission of Victoria, 179 Queen Street, Melbourne, 1966), n.p.

29 David Nichols, "'Boiling in Anger' Activist Local Newspapers of the 1960s and 1970s," *History Australia* 2, no. 2 (2005): 1-12.

30 Residents opposed the Housing Commission, Victoria over its purchase, demolition and high-rise programs, the Metropolitan Board of Works over its freeway construction program and the edicts of the Department of Education around local schools.

31 Nichols, "'Boiling in Anger'," 1-12, focuses particularly on *The Melbourne Times* (founded mid-1971) to "provide a collective voice for individuals wishing to play an effective part in forming or changing the social policies which affect their community."

32 For example, the current freeway, education department and housing battles in Collingwood were described in the early 1970s in Neil Jillet, *Collingwood Fights to Survive* (1971), John Larkin, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1972) and Andrew McKay, *Collingwood: The Shattered City* (1974). See also Renate Howe, "'Nobody but a Bunch of Mothers': Grassroots Activism and Women's Leadership in 1970s Melbourne," in *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities,* ed. Rosemary Francis, Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, eScholarship Research Centre, 2012), 331-340.

33 Centre for Urban Research and Action, *The Displaced: A Study of Housing Conflict in Melbourne's Inner City* (Melbourne: Centre for Urban Research and Action, April 1977), 44, details gentrification, investor, council and statuary authorities and State Education department conflict but notes other public or semi-public bodies (including universities and hospitals) demolished substantial areas of inner city housing and displaced residents.

34 According to researcher David Nichols, new local newspapers created a coherent local community identity or served a pre-existing community or defined and created affiliation for a new one. See Nichols, "'Boiling in Anger'," 6. Another sign of local community identity was the local residents' associations. For example, north of the city, associations were formed in North Melbourne, Collingwood, Fitzroy and Carlton.

35 The classic account is Leonie Sandercock, *The Land Racket: The Real Costs of Property Speculation* (Melbourne: Silverfish Books, 1979).

36 Leslie Kilmartin, "The Land Deals," in *New Houses for Old*, 200.

37 Kilmartin, "The Land Deals," 179.

38 Tony Dalton, "Architects, Engineers and Rent Collectors: An Organisational History of the Commission," in *New Houses for Old*, 205. This service secured "a role for the Commission in the wider community". The Estates management Division was reorganised into the Housing Services Division and received higher status and higher resources.

39 This name continued until 14 December 1987 when the State Government decided to abolish the Department of Public Works and merge it with the Ministry of Housing.

40 Ministry of Housing, *Green Paper on Housing in Victoria volume 1* (Ministry of Housing, Victoria: Melbourne, November 1980), ix.

41 Ministry of Housing, *Green Paper*, ix.

42 Ministry of Housing, *Green Paper*, 87.

43 Carter, "A Commission for Reform," 249.

44 In March 1987 Carter would be appointed Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Housing and Construction and Devenish was new General manager Design and Construction, Peter Crone as his Assistant General manager.

45 Carter, "A Commission for Reform," 283.

46 Carter, "A Commission for Reform," 246.

47 Carter, "A Commission for Reform," 245.

48 Housing Act 1983, www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/ha1983107 (accessed January 15, 2015).

49 Housing Act 1983, www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/ha1983107 (accessed January 15, 2015).

50 John Devenish, "Filling in the Gaps," in *Medium Density Housing in Australia*, ed. Bruce Judd and John Dean (Canberra: RAIA, 1983), 51-60; "Victorian Ministry of Housing John Devenish," 20-27; Hudson and McEwan, *That's Our House*; Annette Wade, "Public Housing – A Viable Alternative in the Current Rental Crisis Tenants' Perspectives – Past, Present and Future," in *Housing Issues 3 Housing Affordability,* ed. Bruce Judd (Canberra: RAIA Education*,* 1987), 49-52; *New Houses for Old*; Ministry of Housing and Construction Victoria, *Dight Street Collingwood: New Housing, Major Renovation, Private Gardens and Public Spaces Revitalize a Neighbourhood* (Melbourne: Ministry of Housing and Construction Victoria, 1988); Ministry of Housing and Construction, *The High Rise: A Paper Profiling Ministry of Housing and Construction* (Ministry of Housing and Construction, December 1990).

51 Devenish, "Filling in the Gaps," 56. He concentrates on recent projects in South Melbourne and Carlton.

52 Carter, "A Commission for Reform," 261.

53 Jacki Holland, *Collingwood Draft Neighbourhood Action Plan*, Department of Human Services, Melbourne, 2002, www.collingwood.vic.au/collingwood-draft-neighbourhood-action-plan (accessed February 2, 2015).

54 Holland, *Collingwood*, 11.

55 Ministry of Housing and Construction Victoria, *Dight Street Collingwood*.

56 Ministry of Housing and Construction Victoria*, Dight Street Collingwood*, n.p.

57 "Victorian Ministry of Housing John Devenish," 20-27.

58 "Victorian Ministry of Housing John Devenish," 20

59 "Victorian Ministry of Housing John Devenish," 22.

60 Devenish, "Filling in the Gaps," 56, 59.

61 "Victorian Ministry of Housing John Devenish," 20.

62 The impact of Foucault's thought on architecture is traced in Gordana Fontana Giusti, *Foucault for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2013).

63 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), trans. Alan Sheridan (1977) (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1982 rpt), 235.

64 See Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).