[T]he only fitting tribute that could be paid to the devotion and courage of a brave people [is] to rebuild our City in a manner worthy of its citizens. ... Few of us will see the completion of the plan. But may we point out the road to a destiny that will be not unworthy of the great victory that the heroism and faith of our people helped to secure.¹

In the above introduction to the 1945 *A Plan for the City and County of Kingston upon Hull*, Hull’s Reconstruction Committee Chair, Alderman J.L. Schultz, presented a city at a critical juncture in its development.² He described a city that, having forged a renewed civic spirit in the fires of the Blitz, was ready to embark on a lifetime of reconstruction to create a comprehensively planned city of the future. It is tempting for urban reformers and historians alike to seek these moments of rupture and points of crisis, to try and find that crucial moment where something or perhaps everything might or did change. Historians reading the multitude of similar sentiments expressed in plans and in speeches by Britain’s local grandees at the end of the Second World War might indeed conclude that Britain’s cities stood at the beginning of a bold and transformative path. Yet, by 1955 architect and academic Prof. H. Myles Wright concluded that it was hard to remember the ‘passionate determination ... to lay out afresh the damaged and decayed portions of cities and rebuild them as far finer places’.³

Cities, of course, are always in the process of becoming something else, whether situated by politicians and planners at some imagined juncture on the journey towards a brighter future or merely through the incremental physical processes that shape the urban landscape.⁴ They rarely, if ever, complete these rhetorical journeys though: one generation of planners disavows the designs of their forebears, policies change with each election cycle, inhabitants use public spaces in ways that the designers never envisaged and developing technologies alter the infrastructural needs of urban life. Observing the unfinished slip road that hangs in
mid-air from the Mancunian Way (the ghost of an abandoned dual carriageway to Manchester city centre; see figure 0.1) or the burnt-out shell of the National Picture Theatre on Hull’s Beverley Road (reputedly the last untouched ‘blitzed’ building in Britain; see figure 0.2) reveals the scars of the never-finished journeys of cities towards the distant end-points proposed in 1945. 
This book examines Britain at one of the most symbolic of these rhetorical moments of crisis and opportunity – the end of the Second World War – to reconsider how competing interests shaped cities between the end of the war and the late 1950s. It asks how town planners, architects and local governments sought to create and govern urban space; it questions their objectives and examines the motivations that went into remaking British cities. Alongside this, it considers what consequences their successes and failures had for the trajectory of planned urban renewal that occupied the middle five decades of the twentieth century. In doing so, it asks how we might reinterpret the character of urban modernism that came to define these attempts to replan British cities. The decade that followed the war was neither the precursor to the triumph of architectural Modernism, nor a period of moderate, humanist modernism. Instead, the story told here evidences a decade of profoundly ambitious local government planning; a decade in which attempts to extend modernist practices, primarily at local-corporation level, to govern the totality of everyday life betokened the thoroughgoing radicalism of this phase of urban modernism.

The post-war period has been presented as the golden age for British town planners, a moment when their long-marginalised profession gained access to a state apparatus of urban transformation that their
continental cousins already enjoyed. It appears to be the high point of optimism during a process of planned renewal in British cities that began in the middle of the 1920s and lasted until the crises of the 1970s. Yet, in popular memory the period is characterised by a series of intersecting and contradictory narratives. These revolve around the rebuilding of blitzed cities, the desecration of built heritage and the proliferation of Modernist architecture. Scathing criticisms by public figures like Prince Charles and Margaret Thatcher have fixed a simplistic narrative of the post-war period as a time of left-wing, Modernist recklessness in the public imagination. In turn, these accusations have linked architectural and planning failure to the wider problems of post-industrial Britain. Emblematic ‘failed’ social housing schemes or aesthetically radical buildings like Sheffield’s Park Hill flats, Manchester’s long-demolished Hulme Crescents or London’s Barbican complex have anchored these popular perceptions to tangible examples.

The problem with these accounts is twofold: first, most of the truly Modernist architecture was not created until the very end of the 1950s at the earliest and the style only really took root as a built form in the 1960s; second, very little of this dominant narrative of reconstruction and irresponsibility has stood up to serious examination by historians. It might be comforting to think that so many of the infrastructural and social problems British cities encountered in the latter part of the twentieth century might be laid at the feet of a cadre of misguided, irresponsible or self-important planners and architects, but such easy explanations rarely hold water. A generation of scholars have, since the 1980s, demonstrated the complexity of the story of post-war urban development and planning. Architectural historians have shown the relative success of less emblematic forms of modernism in schools and housing, but also in the control of urban density and development of innovative building techniques. Town planning historians have pulled apart the motivations behind ambitious plans for the redevelopment of city centres and revealed the multiple challenges they faced in being realised. The visually exhilarating planning books and exhibitions produced by so many of the city corporations at the end of the war (the subject of chapter 1) have been dismantled and reassessed as useful, but utopian, fantasies or as pragmatic attempts at civic boosterism. The alleged failure of 1960s flats has been complicated by showing that many of their problems related to poor quality building, lack of facilities or governmental neglect, alongside the concomitant demonstration that similar issues persisted on more traditional cottage housing estates.

The purpose of this book is to re-examine the processes and actors involved in planning, regulating and producing lived-in spaces at the end
of the Second World War. Its objective is twofold: first, to build a picture of what happened when planners, councillors, civil servants and architects attempted to produce and enact visions of how cities should work by regulating the experience of urban space; second, to understand how this process in the ten years or so following the war helped shape the path of British urban renewal in subsequent decades. I argue that post-war approaches to urban space, which originated in the 1920s, were quietly radical, totalising and self-consciously modern in their approach to creating and regulating urban space, yet crucially not in thrall to architectural Modernism. Local corporations, the primary designers and deliverers of post-war redevelopment, demonstrated a growing desire to gain control of their cities in a holistic sense that began during the inter-war period. This desire was not founded on the production of an architecturally Modernist utopia, but in the control of building heights, land-use zoning, street widths, air quality, smells and noise. The defining belief lay not in the power of architecture to shape experience, though isolated and emblematic examples of this can be found, but in the power of highly regulated spaces, both extant and newly created, to produce specific, beneficial social outcomes. Though beyond the chronological boundaries of this study, the challenges faced from a range of actors in prosecuting this spatial project would have lasting effects on approaches to urban renewal throughout the 1960s.

The idea of planning for ‘reconstruction’ in two cities, Manchester and Hull, thus functions as a lens through which to examine the shaping of post-war Britain, with a particular emphasis on aspects of urban planning that dealt with producing lived-in spaces and everyday experience. Though there is much specific discussion of these two cities that I hope readers will find illuminating, the study of them is not an end in itself; rather, they are treated as exemplars of the time, as case studies via which we might reach some broader conclusions. Examination of continuity and change in approaches to urban space in these two northern cities reveals the way elite views of society were encoded in the schemes to develop post-war Britain and illustrates the evolving and contested character of British modernity – a term to which I will return in due course.

Discourses of bomb damage, wartime civilian sacrifice and what it meant to be modern played a crucial role in promoting ambitious and often radical proposals to shape the spaces of citizens’ everyday lives. However, actual approaches to the aesthetic of the built environment, though not identical in the two cities, almost always evidenced far less radicalism than the rhetoric espoused by planners and politicians. What the evidence shows is that in Manchester and Hull the common thread
was that imagining what being modern meant and how the modern city should function involved the belief that the expert, scientific manipulation of the built environment might solve the infrastructural and social problems – traffic congestion, insanitary dwellings, pollution and the distribution of amenities – that dominated urban Britain in the years before the war. The objective of the book is thus not merely to engage with the issues of planning or with the structures and attitudes of local and regional politics in the period for their own sake. Instead, it uses the study of these subjects as a way to draw wider conclusions about British society, modernism and the path of urban renewal in the twentieth century.

These approaches to urban governance were not, of course, monolithic, homogenous processes, and how the modern city should function and the meanings of modernity were contested at different levels of the state, by a range of different groups. Local corporations, ministers, civil servants, planners, retailers, traders, guild members and other influential groups contested the symbolic and material spaces of cities by producing conflicting designs or by deploying contrary notions of how the built environment should take shape. As we shall see, contests over who might produce spaces and what went on in them were not only being played out over emblematic schemes for the redesign of entire city centres, but also in small-scale disputes over waste ground, bomb sites, fairgrounds and grass verges.

Nor was it solely the rich, the expert or the powerful, the capitalist or the bureaucrat, who sought to contest the urban environment. As chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, citizens on new housing estates also subverted and shaped the uses and outcomes ascribed to certain spaces, often through the quiet and unconscious habits of everyday life. This book seeks to complicate the picture of ‘urban agency’, and show how some of the key questions of urban life were both posed and answered in the contests over apparently trivial matters, like taking short cuts, the playing of ball games, the location of shops or the siting of advertising. The book ultimately shows how conflicting constructions of ideas as varied as community, consumerism, visual amenity and youth were fundamental in shaping both the physical environment of post-war Britain and forming approaches to urban renewal that had implications beyond the 1950s.

**Continuity, localism and urban renewal**

Central to the discussion in this book are the effects of the historiographical periodisation of the mid-twentieth century on how we
interpret the processes of planning, modernism and urban renewal. David Edgerton has demonstrated how a reconsideration of the periodisation around the Second World War might alter how we view narratives of the welfare state and British decline, and here I want to suggest that we might productively engage in a similar, if slight, shift in perspective. This is because it seems to me that the way historians have dealt with the war has obscured some small but revealing elements of post-war approaches to the built environment, especially concerning the relationship between the local and national state. Understandably, the Second World War often looms as an exceptional presence in the historiography, punctuating the period and structuring historiographical understanding of change around notions of the periods labelled ‘inter-war’, ‘wartime’ and ‘post-war’. It often forms the end or the beginning of a study or is excluded on the grounds of its exceptionality. However, the most common treatment – following the much-challenged work of Paul Addison – has been to examine the extent to which it produced or catalysed change across British society.

In architectural histories this discussion of post-war continuity and change has tended to polarise around the extent to which the war created the conditions for the adoption of architectural styles and approaches pioneered during the inter-war period. Nicholas Bullock sees the war as a central driver of change, arguing that, whilst there were significant continuities in the design principles of the Modernist movements either side of the war:

The war opened up unparalleled demand for experimentation and innovation. The war both forced innovation on general practice and incorporated the avant-garde into the new order of production.

The problem with these types of conclusions is that, whilst there is certainly good evidence that austerity drove innovation in building techniques, they tend to ignore the pressure for change coming from the local state in the inter-war period. There is considerable evidence of a rhetoric of comprehensive planning (discussed in chapter 1), the increased dominance of the ideas of the MARS (Modern Architectural Research) group in Britain and the European CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’architecture Moderne) in planning discourse during the 1940s, and the creation of a host of new planning laws and regulations that all seem to have been driven by the war. The Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt reports, the Town and Country Planning acts of 1944 and 1947 and the raft of advisory pamphlets like the Ministry of Health’s Design of Dwellings and Housing Manual (both 1944) are just a few examples that represent a drastic alteration in approaches to town planning at national level.
While the local aspect of planning is not wholly ignored, architectural histories rarely set out to examine in any detail the motivations of and challenges faced by the local corporations responsible for delivering post-war buildings. The post-war period certainly was one in which a large amount of quite radical national legislation was produced concerning planning and design. However, as chapters 1 and 2 discuss, it was often preceded by and, perhaps, directly reflective of inter-war practices by local corporations. Understanding the character of urban modernity and modernism in the post-war period thus requires much greater attention to the role of the local corporation in the inter-war period, alongside an examination of the relationship between local and national government.

In contrast to their architectural cousins, town planning historians have asserted the importance of examining the unique circumstances of local corporations. In doing so they have sought to understand the complexities of individual cities in the story of how post-war plans were enacted or stymied. As Otto Saumarez Smith and Guy Ortolano have shown, however, too close an attention to local peculiarities has often obscured the intricate nature of the relationships between the national and the local in formulating approaches to the built environment. None of the processes governing approaches to space make sense without a multi-layered approach to the structures of the state, and the detail of these interactions is crucial to this study. The reason for this attention to these details will, I hope, become clear in the following chapters. The adoption of a particular policy towards housing discussed in chapter 3, for example, may look like radical post-war change if viewed solely against legislation and advice from the Ministry of Health. However, when compared to the very similar local policies Manchester or Hull produced in the 1920s or 1930s, we can start to tease out the influence and significance of the small, yet crucial differences. Paying greater attention to the complexities of national and local approaches thus not only moves beyond polar meta-narratives of continuity or change but also begins to unearth vital details that have been obscured by the distorting presence of the war.

What follows is primarily an examination of the motivations and difficulties behind planning British cities. Planning may initially seem, as urban historian Leif Jerram has put it, to be a concept that ‘sum[s] up irrelevance, boredom and small mindedness’. However, city planning represents, to quote Jerram again, ‘the “genius” of the twentieth century because it is both the means and the end of the last one hundred years of European civilisation, intellectual endeavour, and state formation’. It represents an all-encompassing scheme produced by experts along
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purportedly indisputable scientific principles to shape society through the total control of space.27 What is important for the arguments presented here is that town planning and plans articulate the social and cultural anxieties of their day. They are physical interventions into the lives of citizens on a permanent basis that seek to solve perceived problems and perfect the totality of urban experience and function through material means.

Planning strategies encapsulate and articulate the complex socio-cultural views of a host of influential state and non-state actors and provide a tool through which their views might be studied. Understanding the detail of what was similar or, conversely, unique about planning in the post-war period provides a way of examining how debates about urban society were encoded in space and thus played an active role in producing modern Britain and modern Britons. Planners and local governments emerge here as neither megalomaniacal, utopian idealists, nor pragmatists devoid of long-term goals.28 Instead, the local corporations in Manchester and Hull evidence a type of urban modernism that had parallels with and drew upon aspects of the Modernist movement, but was also deeply rooted in the practicalities of inter-war municipal government in ailing nineteenth-century cities. They were chiefly concerned with how the modern city should function, and organised their interventions around land-use zoning, the notion of ‘amenity’ and the belief that rationally planned, holistically ordered urban space would produce efficient, pleasant and functional cities and happy, productive citizens. In this they were quiet radicals whose intentions were a total control of new and extant environments. The currency of their ideas was not the grandness of architectural intervention, but the powerfully mundane potential of zoning, advertising control and smoke abatement. Their core belief lay in the power of expert manipulation of space to produce rationally designed places in which people could live, play, shop and work, in order to achieve positive social outcomes.29

The conclusions presented here about the character and challenges of post-war planning and the attention paid to periodisation also have a broader significance for our understanding of the trajectory of urban renewal between the 1920s and 1970s. This process fully emerged with the slum clearance programmes in 1930s Britain, Germany and North America at the same time as a rapid diffusion of modernist ideas about architecture and planning emanating from professional bodies like CIAM or the MARS group. In this timeline of urban intervention, as Simon Gunn has observed: ‘1945 was not so much a turning point as a catalyst to take up ideas and forms of expertise that had already been in wide circulation in Europe and abroad by the 1930s’.30 Opposition
to this urban modernism coalesced in the 1960s as the confident socio-spatial schemes of the 1940s and 1950s floundered, engendering challenges from citizens and scholars like Jane Jacobs, precipitating its collapse in the early 1970s. The post-war period thus represents a high-water mark of optimism and enthusiasm for planning amongst national and local planners and politicians. Unpacking this key period, as I have already indicated, requires considerable care, an understanding of the longer story of attempts at urban renewal and careful consideration of the motivations of those charged with the practical implementation of urban schemes.

Local corporations, as chapters 1 and 2 will show, were most adventurous and bold in urban planning between 1942 and the early 1950s, yet their desires to seize control of their cities went back much further, beginning in at least the 1920s. Construction of Manchester’s Wythenshawe estate, for example, commenced in 1928, and the regional plan of 1926 is a recognisable prototype for the 1945 plans. Evidence of bold planning for Hull city centre stretching back to 1918 shows a local corporation frustrated by the lack of national legislation to match its ambition in land acquisition. Though the importance of the emblematic moments of the modernist canon in the 1930s should not be dismissed, the type of urban modernism that flowered in local corporations after the war had long, practical roots that stretched not only to CIAM and MARS but also to the deeply down-to-earth concerns of municipal governance. Similarly, at national level, legislation, influential reports and advice emanating from central government were most concerned with planning and design in an unprecedented burst that began in 1940 and ran until around 1947. Yet the Barlow Report (1940), which marked a ‘turning point in the evolution of planning’, was begun in 1937 against a long-standing discourse of public opinion ‘deeply concerned about the need for effective town planning’ to mitigate the ‘inherent defects’ of British cities. The post-war high-water mark thus needs to be dissected and understood in context as a moment of alignment between local ambitions, modernist dogma and national legislation.

The upper limit of this period (and thus the study) represents the coalescing of initial difficulties into serious, though not unsurmountable, obstacles and is signified by two broadly significant changes. The first is the election of the Conservative government in 1951, whose modifications to the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act throughout the 1950s altered the ability of corporations to acquire land and whose deregulation of building licences facilitated much greater involvement from private developers. Secondly, the abandonment of controls on licensing for private house building in 1954, the Housing Repairs and
Rents Act 1954 (which recommenced large-scale slum clearance) and the Housing Subsidies Act 1956 (which subsidised high-rise building over six storeys) fundamentally altered the approach to housing. At a stroke the local state ceased to be the primary deliverer of housing (except in slum clearance areas) and private developers became the chief builders of houses. For these reasons, when I refer to ‘the post-war period’ I specifically mean this stretch of time, ending around 1957.

The late 1950s and 1960s were also broadly characterised by economic recovery and the final acceptance of genuinely Modernist architecture. The Conservatives’ new policies engendered state co-operation with private developers as a necessity rather than a mere adjunct, which produced symbolic Modernist interventions in cities, like Birmingham’s Bull Ring and Newcastle’s sweeping ‘Brasilia of the North’ programme of slum clearance and rebuilding. In Manchester and Hull, much like the rest of the country, the end of the 1950s was arguably the moment when the gentle neo-Georgian styles that had dominated the modest amount of post-war reconstruction gave way to truly Modernist designs. Peter House (completed 1958) and Piccadilly Plaza (1959–65) in Manchester, and the University of Hull’s buildings built between 1958 and 1967 show the emerging influence of genuine aesthetic Modernism. Yet, the end of the 1950s was also a time of growing disillusionment with the failure to satisfy post-war optimism. As austerity and lack of materials became less severe, critics of the lack of progress and seemingly diminished vision in planning became increasingly vocal.

Though we might rightly baulk at too rigid a periodisation, the broad period beginning in the 1920s and ending in the late 1950s thus seems to represent a distinct phase of a longer development of planning approaches that sought to remake the largely nineteenth-century British cities and render them fit for the future. The period is characterised by a growing belief in the efficacy of a type of urban modernism that I argue emerged both from the professional discourse at the heart of the modernist movement, and also from very practical considerations at the heart of local government attempts to reshape increasingly decrepit cities. Initially, the form of urban modernism that emerged towards the end of the war emphasised the total power of long-term state intervention in planning cities, but this was swiftly tempered, perhaps even derailed, by important lessons about the limitations of planning, the patience of central government and the practical size and capabilities of the state.

The period before 1953–55 has been presented as a kind of workshop for Modernists that pre-empted Modernism’s ultimate triumph as an architectural form in the 1960s. Here though I want to complicate this
explanation by arguing that whilst the 1960s might have produced the most emblematic examples of built, architectural Modernism, by the end of the 1950s the moment of urban modernism – as a force to intervene in the urban environment on a truly totalising basis: as a design for life, rather than an architectural style – had passed, although its exponents did not yet realise it. The mistake, if we might call it that, has been for historians to fixate on the way buildings looked at the expense of the much more practical, yet thoroughly important aspects of more mundane interventions in space. The radicalism of local planners lay not in specific built forms but in their belief that society might be rebuilt through the total control of the urban environment.

Favourable legislation in the core of this period – roughly between 1940 and 1947 – seemed to present a brief opportunity for local corporations to seize control of the space of their cities. Their attempts to exploit this opportunity had mixed results though. Some foundered on a series of challenges that came from central government, powerful non-state actors or even ordinary inhabitants. Central government, for example, gradually eroded its brief support for mass state acquisition of land, whilst local commercial interests – often partially ensconced within the local state – proved resistant to change. Retail and consumer trends proved too agile for planners’ rigid calculations concerning shops and spending habits, which were based on outdated models of need. In addition, as Klemek’s work on the 1960s and 1970s has also shown, the planned-for did not acquiesce to everything that was done to them, for them or in their name, undermining the strict socio-spatial schemes encoded in designs for estates and city centres.  

Yet, in other aspects planning was more successful: local corporations were supported by central government in their desire to control significant aspects of the sensory environment – gradually asserting their rights to limit pollution, advertising and noise – and few doubted the need for the continued expansion of housing provision. The story told here thus works as a ‘prehistory’ of the collapse of urban modernism as the core of urban renewal, but also asks questions about the nature and importance of architectural Modernism in the 1960s. As Gold has noted, little had happened by the mid-1950s to change the consensus that modernism was crucial to visions of the future, though the experience of the 1960s would. I argue here that whilst the 1960s might represent the apogee of Modern architecture as a dominant built form, the functional aspects of modernism’s nature – the aspects that were actually concerned with shaping society, not merely producing buildings – had already been altered or challenged in fundamental ways in the decade that followed the war.
Modernity, modernism and space

The history of urban renewal and state intervention in city space in this period is intimately bound up with understanding of how modernity and modernism produced particular approaches to the urban environment. A second major component of this book, and perhaps the most challenging to unpick, is thus the relationship between modernity, planning and modernism. It is important to understand and explain these ideas because so much of what was being planned in the post-war period was concerned with the nature of how the world should function and what characteristics made people and societies modern. However, ‘Modernism’ as an architectural and artistic movement, ‘modernism’ (not capitalised) as a practice of urban governance and ‘modernity’ as a historical process are different, but inextricably linked terms that have often proved troublesome to British historians.40 As Gunn has noted, ‘urban modernity itself has served less as a unified theory of the city than as an umbrella for a diverse set of ideas of the novelty and radical impact of city life since the late eighteenth century’.41

Given the elusive nature of modernity as an idea, it might be reasonable for the reader to stop here and wonder why modernity is worth bothering with at all. At its worst, modernity appears to be little more than a piece of jargon: a historical McGuffin that historians have used to subsume the processes and outputs that come from the sudden, rapid changes to Western society that occurred from around the middle of the eighteenth century. It can seem faddish and lazy, opaque and unnecessary, especially when the term seems to elude adequate definition. In scholarship on European history, however, clearer definitional categories emerge and it is worth briefly outlining how modernity has been envisaged to help explain the importance of its application in this book.

There are, in a general sense, two broadly linked aspects of modernity. The first, in which we are most interested here, ‘marks the triumph of western rationality’ and is characterised by the impulse to order and categorise space and society along scientific principles derived from a particular set of Enlightenment projects.42 Particular physical markers like industrial development, urbanisation and the production of modern art have often been identified as definitive of modernity, yet these particular forms are not ubiquitous.43 Instead, they are characteristic of particular iterations of modernity that are specific to different times and locations. In other words, various modernities have emerged from different cultural contexts.44 Crucially for this study, this ‘process’ of modernity (as we might conveniently label it), represents a set of principles that have shaped how planners have designed and regulated urban environments.
Reconstructing modernity

The second component of modernity, what I will call the ‘experience’ of modernity, is less relevant here. It is rooted in the forms of culture, social interactions and psychological responses that are generated as a result of people’s interactions with the ordering project described above. Though the characteristic processes of modernity seek to impose order, at the level of personal experience they often have the effect of disordering and dislocating individuals. In the city – perhaps modernity’s most conspicuous physical marker – for example, anonymity and the disintegration of traditional moral and social frameworks isolate and alienate individuals, but also create a seemingly limitless set of opportunities for stimulating encounters and personal reinvention.

Questions discussed here concerning the nature of British modernity in this period represent an attempt to understand what characteristics and underlying assumptions governed the application of expert, scientific interventions in the production and management of urban space. The intellectual underpinnings of modernity – a belief in the rational application of scientific method – may be consistent, but the assumptions and value judgements upon which the process is based are mutable. The particular characteristics of the British process of modernity in the middle of the twentieth century reveal how and why certain approaches and schemes dominated during the period. The Second World War has been presented as a watershed when the continuity and stability associated with British understandings of modernity as a gradual, moderate process, devoid of ruptures, finally collapsed. Despite considerable evidence of a radical shift in approaches to urban space though, this interpretation causes a problem because evidence from Manchester, Hull and other British cities suggests that many radical facets of post-war spatial policy were being developed and utilised by local corporations well before the war. The understandings of what it meant to be modern in post-war Britain were thus not exclusively a product of the war, but stemmed from different contexts and intellectual bases. Moreover, the brand of urban modernity produced at local level was sometimes at odds with that espoused at national level, by citizens or by local interests. Modernity is thus understood in this book as a fractured process that shows the role of local corporations, commercial concerns and even citizens in producing competing modernities that sought to define how urban space should and could work.

Modernity’s importance for histories of urban planning is intertwined with two other slippery concepts: modernism and space. Indeed, the relationship between Modernism as an architectural form and the practice of modernism as a more sober, ordering aspect of planning has been the source of some debate. The urban problems the planners and
councillors of Manchester and Hull perceived – problems of congestion, suburban anomie, pollution or ‘poor amenity’ – were being framed as products of the disordered growth of the nineteenth-century urban explosion. In turn, their responses to these issues in the post-war period were self-consciously modern, guided by the hand of rational, scientific thought, but also, importantly for what follows, promoted through the application of a textual and visual language that sought to communicate just how modern and expert-driven the planning process was. The city Plans, discussed in chapter 1, invoke both a technical language of scientific expertise through maps and tables, but also conjure notions of progress through illustrations of architecturally Modernist buildings.

The association between Modernist architecture and modernism as a practice though is confusing. Architectural historians have tended to use Modernism to describe a rigid aesthetic regime tied up in the grand schemes of architect–planners like Le Corbusier or Oscar Niemeyer and evident in a canon of Modernist buildings. Yet, the modernism of post-war Britain owed more to the ideas evident in CIAM’s Athens Charter of 1933, which argued that modernism should be just as concerned with producing a functional city. However, the primary drivers of this approach were not architects, but the rather more pragmatic councillors, engineers and planners who sought to remake their cities in response to some very ordinary municipal concerns. This form of ‘urban modernism’, as it has been labelled, had at its heart the essence of post-war British modernity: that the functional city could only be produced through the expert application of scientific principles to the production of space. As I will argue, this was the guiding principle of urban renewal in the post-war period, because, as John Gold has argued, ‘it offered unambiguous solutions to previously intractable urban problems ... untainted by the ways of the past’.

Urban modernism as a way of producing functional cities and improved lives was premised on the ability to manipulate space as an effective and knowable determinant of behaviours and experiences. Planners sought to produce the futures they desired in concrete and brick, and in doing so they encoded the most pressing anxieties about British society in the built environment and their plans for it. The study of the built environment thus offers the opportunity to understand a great deal more about the past than it might initially seem to. As Gunn has pointed out, the historiographical elevation of space from an abstract container for events to an active component in the constitution of social identities is crucial to understanding the process and experience of modernity. However, study of ‘space’ and its counterpart ‘place’ is, like modernity and modernism, a semantically complex field. Over the last 30 years there has
been a growing acceptance of space as an essential category in historical analysis, hinging upon the recognition that knowing *where* something happens is fundamental to understanding *how* and *why* it happens.\(^5\) In other words, all things that happen must happen somewhere as well as *somewhere*. However, space has often proved difficult to apply effectively as a category of analysis. Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad or Ed Soja’s invocation of the collision of the physical and the imagined in *Thirdspace* are just two examples of attempts to construct an explanatory spatial framework for a field where a standardised taxonomy of space remains frustratingly elusive.\(^5\) For example, when archaeologist James Delle talks of the ‘Cognitive Spaces’ of coffee plantations – historical conceptions of how social order might be reproduced through planning the physical environment – he is invoking a different concept to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who deploys the identical phrase to explain how individuals cognise the rules of social interaction within space.\(^5\)

The discussion over what constitutes ‘place’ is similarly complex, with little agreement on what it actually means.\(^5\) For geographer Yi Fu Tuan, place is formed from specific spaces imbued with meaning through practice, whereas space itself is abstract and interchangeable. Michel de Certeau’s description of space as ‘practiced place’ views places as fixed, unchanging locations and space as being produced as a result of movement through and use of places. What is crucial for this book is that both theorists posit a dichotomy between the material and the meanings mapped onto and associated with the material world, regardless of their conflicting phraseology.\(^5\) Following this simple dichotomy, I use ‘space’ to mean the purely physical, abstract material of the world and, broadly following Tuan’s definition, ‘place’ to articulate the idea of specific spaces (locations) mixed with interaction and conceptualisation of what that space *is* and is for. Space thus means the entire material world, including what we traditionally interpret as merely gaps between buildings or topographical features. At times I use ‘a space’ as a term to denote a place – usually a piece of land of limited size – that has somehow impossibly come into existence before human interaction. I am aware of this as an unreal and slightly naïve construct, but it serves here merely to facilitate a usable nomenclature.

Analysis of space and place is, despite its terminological challenges, an important tool for understanding modern Britain because of the supposed relationship between space and behaviour. The type of urban modernism practised by planners in cities like Manchester and Hull was predicated on the idea that space could be harnessed to produce knowable social outcomes. In other words, they were attempting to create places with specific meanings and behaviours attached to them.
Yet, ‘placemaking’, whilst intrinsic to strategies of spatial governance that shaped the modern city, is also crucial in producing resistance to them.58 The rigid calculations and spatial schemes produced by planners were particularly susceptible to how ordinary people negotiated the new or altered spaces they encountered. Inhabitants shaped places through the execution of mundane, everyday activities, challenging the meanings produced by the designers.59 As chapter 4 argues, the taking of short cuts across a verge or over a fence might play just as crucial (if not greater) role in the making of a place as the designer’s original plans. Placemaking was crucial to the project of urban modernism as a ‘strategy’ of governance in the toolkit of liberal governmentality – a system of governance which seeks to shape individuals by encouraging the development of a citizen that is reflexive and self-regulating.60 Yet, in their desire to produce greater uniformity of experience, planners often proved insensitive to local peculiarities and failed to account for the variety and perversity of people’s quotidian habits.61 This book thus shows how the project of urban modernism faltered not just when it clashed with powerful groups and state actors but also in the face of the apparently powerless in the practice of their everyday lives, which challenged the strategies of authority.62

Methodology and structure

It is worth briefly explaining my choice of Manchester and Hull as case studies as well as the limits of the enquiry presented here. The choice of these cities represents a desire to move away from examinations of post-war urban development which have centred either on London (as somehow symbolic or representative of Britain) or on the exceptionally badly bombed centres like Coventry or Portsmouth.63 Whilst both Manchester and Hull claimed (and to a certain extent still do claim) to have been heavily bombed, the difference between the two is significant enough to make them useful counterpoints.64 Figures vary between sources and even local government departments for both cities, but it is possible to say with some confidence that Hull suffered around 82 raids, with approximately 4,000–4,500 of its 92,660 homes damaged beyond repair and 1,200 deaths.65 Damage to a medium-sized, relatively isolated city like Hull was extensive, traumatic and lives long in local people’s memories. Even today it is not uncommon for people from Hull to feel bitterly marginalised in popular narratives of the Blitz that usually fail to mention their city.66 Manchester, on the other hand, escaped with a comparatively small amount of damage, suffering
approximately 44 raids, about 680 deaths and 2,000 houses recorded by the local corporation as damaged beyond repair. Manchester has been well covered by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship and, though this book contributes to the sparse work on both cities in the 1940s and 1950s, the two cities are used here as exemplars – one large and emblematic, the other smaller and somewhat marginalised – of British cities in this period. Hull and Manchester are examples of a number of previously thriving industrial and commercial cities that by the late 1930s faced challenging futures, despite the inter-war attempts to revamp housing provision, city centres and transport detailed in chapters 1 and 2.

What follows is not a comparative study and, whilst parallels are drawn at various points, I have not limited the scope of the investigation by only examining elements that occur in both cities. Rather, the two cities stand as specimens of how national and local governments, powerful non-state actors and inhabitants were dealing with the pressures and challenges of redeveloping cities in the mid-twentieth century. They were chosen for their ordinariness, their mundaneness and their typicality as cities struggling to adapt to a changing economy and a demanding citizenry. Finally, whilst the delineation of Hull as a city is relatively straightforward, what constitutes Manchester is a little more blurred. Attempts at planning for the region around Manchester – variously the unwieldy SELNEC (South East Lancashire North East Cheshire) conurbation and later Greater Manchester – as well as the blurring of the boundaries between adjoining authorities, particularly Salford, Trafford and Wythenshawe, make writing exclusively about Manchester rather challenging. I have decided for the sake of convenience to concentrate on those records and decisions concerning Manchester Corporation and its jurisdiction alone.

No doubt some will find that my choice of topics renders the study somewhat incomplete. Considering the industrial heritage of the two cities, I have offered no discussion of industry nor attention to Hull’s status as a port. It is not, however, my intention to produce complete histories of the cities; rather, I focus on what we might call the ‘lived’ city. As planning historian Alistair Kefford has shown in Manchester, examination of the Plans and committee records leaves little doubt that economic and industrial revitalisation were at least as important in post-war planning as the experiential and social elements examined here. Furthermore, as chapter 2 shows, the idea of separating industry through land-use zoning was a cornerstone of the visions of the future contained in post-war plans. Nevertheless, the location and programming of industry, except where they impinged upon people’s experience of the city through noise or smoke production were not conceived of in
the same way as the lived-in areas of the city. They were intrinsic to the city, but zoning practices, new road layouts and slum clearance intended to keep them, like developing motorway and road networks, hidden and separated from the eyes, ears and lungs of the inhabitants. As such, I have chosen to leave those areas for future studies and the cities studied here are places of housing estates and city centres, not industrial estates and docks.

The book is divided into four chapters: the first two deal with approaches to the city in a general sense, whilst the second two focus on housing and inhabitants. Chapter 1 starts by looking at the grand documents produced by Hull and Manchester promising an almost total recreation of their cities at the end of the war. Here, focusing on continuities in planning practice in Manchester and Hull, an examination of the role of the war as a discursive driver and attention to the pressures on local government, challenges existing interpretations of the Plans for each city. Presented as single-voiced and utopian, the Plans produced for public consumption at the end of the war were actually multi-vocal, pragmatic and deeply political documents. They were a product of a variety of discourses concerned with promoting the totalisation of spatial control of everyday life, legitimising the rights of expert planners and corporations to shape the use and future of the city, and communicating notions of modernity and progress to citizens. The dramatic visions of Modernist architecture, alongside the bewildering array of statistical tables and maps are viewed here not as realisable plans but as ways of communicating notions of progress through the visual language of urban and architectural modernism and the technical exercises associated with planning expertise. Careful interpretation of their contents and origins alongside plans for urban development produced in inter-war Manchester and Hull reveals the blend of fantasy and reality, of radical design and disguised continuity contained within the Plans. Rather than evidence of a tyrannical and destructive outbreak of architectural Modernism, the 1945 Plans are representative of the extension of modernist practice into the spheres of everyday life that was radical for the totality of its intervention, not its built form.

The second chapter shows further evidence of the way in which local governments’ radical and technocratic approaches to the city were being expressed during and after the war. It focuses on the practical application of spatial rules in this period, particularly in attempts to define what might happen where, not only through the application of land-use zoning but also via the control of the sensory environment. It explores the contingent and various ways that local and national experts, as well as residents and businesses, dealt with the mundane spaces of the inherited
city such as bomb sites, fairgrounds, advertising hoardings and partially damaged city centres. This approach provides a picture of the interaction between central government, corporations and local interests as they sought to define what space was, how it should be used and who should control it. Local corporations emerge as the primary drivers, and most ambitious sponsors, of post-war urban modernism defined by a quietly radical desire to gain control of the space of the city in a holistic sense.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore how planners sought to define a particular sort of society, and particular types of human interaction, through the use of physical space on social housing estates. Chapter 3 examines why the neighbourhood unit became particularly prominent in the design of post-war housing developments. Attention to the continuities and differences between inter-war and post-war estate design shows how certain persistent assumptions about inhabitants’ needs and lives shaped the arrangement of facilities on the new estates. Socio-spatial models of ‘need’ determined the location of shopping centres, which were envisaged as centres of face-to-face interaction that would generate suburban communities. Yet, the models of consumption encoded in neighbourhood design conflicted with both the shopping practices of the inhabitants and the spatial strategies of retail capitalism, which in turn restricted the provision of facilities on the new estates. The chapter shows the local state learning tough lessons concerning their ability to shape lives through interventions in space, which are also reflected in the final chapter.

The difficulties of producing homogenising models of people’s use of spaces that worked in practice informs chapter 4, which argues that the spaces of everyday life – community centres, grass verges, paths or gardens – were subject to various contradictory uses by the inhabitants of new housing estates that challenged the models of use envisaged by planners and local corporations. By consciously and unconsciously contesting what spaces might be used for, the habits of inhabitants’ everyday lives came into conflict with the spatial strategies of the local government. This process of contestation subverted and altered the purposes and practices associated with the spaces as places and caused clashes with local government and amongst groups of residents. Community centres form the first part of the study and the chapter demonstrates how these were contested sites themselves, despite the government’s vision that they should be neutral spaces, accessible to all. The second half of the chapter demonstrates how strategies of movement and usage caused conflicts between local government and tenants on the new estates, and how these tactics of everyday life played a role in subverting the original placemaking strategies of the corporations and, in some cases, actually reshaped the material environment.
Notes

1 Edwin Lutyens and Patrick Abercrombie, A Plan for the City and County of Kingston upon Hull (Hull, 1945), p. v, foreword by Alderman J.L. Schultz, Chairman of the Kingston upon Hull Reconstruction Committee.

2 Sir Joseph Leopold Schultz OBE was the Labour leader of Hull council from 1945 to 1979, Lord Mayor and earlier a councillor. He is a figure who stands astride half a century of Hull’s political landscape and is often referred to as ‘Mr Hull’. He is commemorated by a statue outside the Guildhall in the city centre.


6 Since the 1950s there have been successive alterations to the nomenclature attached to the processes of urban change, e.g. ‘renewal’, ‘reconstruction’, ‘redevelopment’. For more details, see: Andrew Tallon, Urban Regeneration in the UK (London, 2013), pp. 4–7, and Gold, ‘SPUR to action?’, 201–3. For simplicity I use the term ‘renewal’ – even though it did not become popular till the 1950s – to refer to the academic debate on the overall projects that took place between c.1920 and the mid to late 1970s. The first chapter addresses the uses of the term ‘reconstruction’ and its importance as a rhetorical device, but elsewhere I have used ‘redevelopment’ as a general term.


9 There are a host of popular books that both evidence and challenge these notions, some of the best are: John Grindrod, Concretopia: A Journey around the Rebuilding of Post-war Britain (Brecon, 2013); Lyndsey Hanley, Estates:
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12 Bullock, Post-war World, pp. 280–1, also chs 8 & 9.


19 Bullock, Post-war World, p. xi.

20 CIAM, formally Congrès Internationaux d’architecture Moderne, was formed in June 1928 by 28 European architects to advance the cause of architecture as a social art. The group was influential, but their most telling contribution was arguably the 1933 Athens Charter in which they put forward the principles of zoning, rehousing and traffic flow as a means of creating a functional city. MARS was founded in 1933 as an architectural think tank for British architects and critics, and is perhaps best remembered for its series of plans for London. See: John Gold, ‘The MARS plans for London, 1933–1942’, Town Planning Review, 66:3 (1995), 243–67; Eric Mumford, The CIAM Discourse on Urbanisms, 1929–1960 (Cambridge, MA, 2002).

21 The quantity of laws, reports and guidance booklets is enormous, but good summaries of the legislation and reports produced during the war can be found in Cullingworth and Nadin (eds), Town and Country Planning; Peter Hall, Urban and Regional Planning (London, 1992), pp. 63–89.


28 This binary debate is often represented in the historiography, for a good example see: Hollow, ‘Utopian urges’, 569.

29 Gunn, ‘British urban modernism’, 852 refers to a similar idea as ‘technocratic pragmatism’.


38 Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse*.


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46 For work on the city as a facet of modernity, see: Jerram, Germany’s Other Modernity; Jerram, Streetlife; David Thorns, The Transformation of Cities: Urban Theory and Urban Life (Basingstoke, 2002).


50 Gold, Experience of Modernism, p. 61.

51 Gold, Practice of Modernism, p. 10.


55 Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity (Cambridge, 2000); Zygmunt Bauman, Postmodern Ethics (Oxford, 1993); James A. Delle, An Archaeology of Social


62 De Certeau, Everyday Life.

63 Nicholas Bullock, ‘Ideals, priorities and harsh realities: reconstruction and the

Chapter 1 will argue that it was in the best interests of cities like Hull to emphasise the bomb damage they suffered to place them in a hierarchy of funding at the end of the war. For evidence of the claims, see: ‘Archive maps pinpoint Manchester Blitz bomb sites’, *Manchester Evening News*, 14 December 2012 (online source): http://menmedia.co.uk/manchestereveningnews/news/s/1596191_archive-maps-pinpoint-manchester-blitz-bomb-sites, accessed 9 January 2016.


This is perhaps exemplified in the unhappiness still expressed that Hull was only ever referred to as a ‘North-east Coast Town’ in wartime reports, which is produced as evidence of national disregard, despite this being a standard practice amongst newspapers for all cities. Manchester might be ‘a Northern Town’ or ‘a place in North West England’, for example. See: Geraghty, *North East Coast Town*; ‘From the archive, 30 December 1940’, *The Guardian*, 30 December 2010 (online source): www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2010/dec/30/london-blitzed-by-german-bombers, accessed 19 May 2016.


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70 Clapson, Invincible Green Suburbs; Alice Coleman, Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing (London, 1985); Power, Property before People.

71 De Certeau, Everyday Life.