

# Introduction

A first encounter with the 1935 film *Housing Problems* is like a Virgilian journey into a netherworld where our recent ancestors are gathered and speak to us. The eponymous ‘*Problems*’ of a century ago – poverty, squalor, distinctions and prejudices of social class, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and structural weaknesses – are disappointingly still familiar, though the absolute qualities of precarity and suffering there are relative to the material circumstances of that time. I first saw the film – on the Vimeo platform with Spanish subtitles – while browsing online in search of material for a course, ‘Poverty and Rapid Urbanisation’, that I intended to teach about the effects on living conditions of rapid urbanisation during the Industrial Revolution. The appropriateness of this film made in the inter-war period as an exhibit/evidence for such a purpose is, of course, questionable. Nonetheless, this particular historical gem provoked my interest. Such are the hazards and the serendipities of the Google Age. I took my researches further into the film world, and a whole occulted genre was unveiled to me: the housing film.

While I carried on the rapid urbanisation in the Industrial Revolution work in more standard and recognised bibliographic formats, I continued the online search and survey of housing films in other sources: publications, regional film archives, the Scottish Centre for the Moving Image in Glasgow and the British Film Institute Media Lab in London. Ultimately, sufficient material was gathered and ordered such that this resulted in two separate undergraduate courses: the originally intended one and another follow-up course, *Housing and Film*.

As that latter course progressed for several years with the aim of following British housing history through films on the topic, mutual engagement in research and analysis between myself and students saw resources