



# EDITORS' NOTE

Born from the fusion of the shortlisted themes, *Life & Death* and *Uncanny Valley*, *Spectres* emerged as a theme capable of exploring both the enigmatic aspects of space and the intangible emotions that architecture evokes.

This issue explores the nebulous forces shaping our surroundings, from the ghostly presence of a building's former occupancy explored in Rhian Thomas' *Architecture After Life* to the symbiotic relationship between Literature and Built Form analysed in Tara Hodges' *Imaginary Architecture*.

The theme *Spectres* not only evokes the ethereal, unseen, and transient qualities of architecture but also prompts us to reflect on the passage of time and the stories lurking within forgotten spaces. Through the investigation of how individuals interact with their surroundings, this issue uncovers hidden narratives and poignant connections that shape our understanding of the built environment.

In true Paperspace fashion, heavier articles are interspersed with photography, comics, interviews, poetry, and artwork. The breadth and depth of this issue is a testament to the enduring creative spirit of our contributors, whose incredible responses to the theme we are immensely thankful for.

This issue seeks to serve as a reminder that architecture is a living entity with hidden stories to be uncovered — What Spectres might be lingering in your surroundings?

As always, thank you for reading.

Antar Ghazoul & Jesper-Jay Harrington

Editors-In-Chief

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Paperspace is an independent architecture and design magazine based in Bath. We host an array of international contributions and are entirely student-led.

Past issues of Paperspace can now be accessed digitally through the archive on our website:

[www.paper spacemagazine.com](http://www.paper spacemagazine.com)

This issue is limited to a print run of only 175 copies. So, if you hold in your hands a paper copy — the ideal format — we hope you read, enjoy, and leave this copy in public for someone else to discover.

Our estimations suggest each paper copy of Paperspace has an embodied carbon of approximately 59g CO<sub>2</sub>e.

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# HOW IS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE TIED TO ARCHITECTURE AFTER LIFE?

Words by  
Rhian Thomas

Graphics by  
Sebastian Khan

Mayerfeld Bell theorises ‘Humans personify the buildings they inhabit and give them a life of their own’. A physical, undeniable interpretation of this are the marks on surfaces, indications on walls and floors, telling the stories of people who once inhabited these spaces, and whose stories now belong to the place itself. Yet, a further extension of this physical relationship with architecture is the result of the deep emotional marks left by inhabitants, that can’t be covered by a new coat of paint. Perhaps strong emotions evoked by tragedy or intimacy could result in a part of us remaining within the walls we once occupied. Paranormal manifestations connected to old routines and feelings, that are now as unmoving and undying as the architecture of the space it is now a part of. These ghosts of previous inhabitants are now tangibly tied to the architecture itself, ‘giving [the walls] a life of their own’.

A family home, with stains of food on the carpet, faint marks of crayon on the bottom of the walls and a crack across the bathroom floor. We can physically see, experience second hand, imagine the setting of the family who once inhabited the space, having left shadows of their

own experiences for others to observe. The second floor classroom, the scribbles of pen across the desk, blending words and handwriting, encouraging the next student to add their thoughts to the collage of doodles. The creaking floorboards of a hotel, the watermarks, the 17th century authentic bed frame, with chips of wood and artisan engraving. These physical symbols of human life give a sense of comfort and familiarity. Perhaps due to our tribal instincts, we find ease and safety in recognisable signs, relating our own experiences to people we’ve never met. Drawing a parallel to prehistoric cave markings as a means of communication, now interpreted as signs of human life. These indications represent what once happened in the space; human experiences giving a history to the architecture itself.

Whilst these markings are being created as shrapnel of daily life, we are also building emotional connections to the environment we inhabit. When considering Bells theory, the tie between the human experience and architecture after life takes on an intriguing dimension when considering the supernatural. The notion that humans personify buildings

and saturate them with a life of their own, suggests that a piece of architecture can become a source of intense emotions and therefore, spiritual energy. Perhaps instead of just marks and hints indicating the physical movements within a space, our feelings run so deep a manifestation of us is left behind, becoming physically connected to the environment in which we experienced these emotions. These highly charged feelings, be they positive or negative, can leave an imprint on a space, creating an atmosphere that transcends the ordinary and manifests as spectres, symbols and shadows. Whether it be a haunted house or a sacred site, the idea of emotions lingering within architectural structures as paranormal indications, draws connections between the human experience and the afterlife. Consequently suggesting that our interactions with spaces may extend beyond the material realm.

Bell’s assertion that human life gives buildings a life of their own is clearly illustrated by the tangible and emotional imprints left within architectural spaces. The visible markings are now part of the physical form and history of the building, serving as visible narratives of human existence. Yet it is within the profound emotional connections forged within these spaces that truly give them life, as Moore suggests in his theory that architecture is shaped by human emotions and desires. The notion of supernatural manifestations can be reframed as remnants of human existence, intertwining with the architecture as a continuation of one’s emotional story. Thus, the human experience, eternally tied to the spaces we inhabit, is not only reflected in the physical marks on walls but also in the intangible, enduring emotions that linger within, shaping the history of every piece of architecture.

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Bell, M., 1997. The ghosts of place [Online]. Theory and Society [Online], 26, pp.813–836. Available from: <https://www.michael-bell.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/bell-1997.pdf> [Accessed 1 November 2023]



Multiple exposures by  
**Elliott Bryant-Brown**

# CONTEMPORARY GHOST TOWNS

Words by  
Emily Ackland

Graphics by  
Author

## THE FACADE OF NEW-BUILDS IN BRITAIN

The paradoxical idea of 'Contemporary Ghost Towns' describes the phenomenon affecting New-Build developments across the UK currently. This concept leads to uninhabitable, eerie communities that no one can either afford or want to live in, hence rendering them lifeless. When they're not falling apart, these artificial estates provide British citizens with shelters that barely meet Building Regulations, whilst simultaneously stripping towns of their character and identity, riddling them with mazes of red-brick husks. Unfortunately, although the issues discussed seem as if they're isolated to these communities, New-Builds have a much greater impression on British society as a whole, due to the housing crisis, car dependency, alienation, and even a severe environmental impact. Despite unsatisfactory housing design arising as a problem almost 20 years ago (Ing, 2020), it is still being constantly overlooked and ignored by the Government and large corporations such as the Home Builders' Federation and National House Building Council, that allow these homes to be built in the first place.

## QUALITY

Due to living in a consumerist society, mass-produced items are common and renowned for being cheap and low quality, a concept that has sadly made its way to residential architecture. On these projects, architects either have minimal input or none at all, which may explain the



homebuyers are becoming deterred from new-builds in general, leaving many of these plots empty and barren of life.

thoughtlessness behind some of the designs produced, both structurally and aesthetically. Those responsible for the low quality and poor construction – HBF and NHBC – refuse to acknowledge the damage they are creating to the living standards in Britain, describing them as "isolated incidents" (Kollewe, 2017). It isn't surprising that these buildings barely scrape a 10-year lifespan, which just so happens to be the length of the NHBC's warranties (Kollewe, 2017), and in itself resemble the fast-food-like quality of these homes – they are without a doubt, unsustainable. Fortunately, the public are becoming more aware of the dissatisfactory reputation of these new-builds thanks to homeowners speaking out and even a building inspector

turned viral influencer on Tik Tok, (New Home Quality Control) who highlights the many major flaws in these disgraceful homes. Due to this recent unveiling of the once-hidden issues with these structures, numerous potential

## REGULATION



At the core of these new developments, corporations such as the HBF and NHBC are responsible for mass-producing sub-par accommodation, due to the lack of regulation from government policy. Earlier this year, Housing Secretary, Michael Gove, issued his long-term plan for housing to help the Conservatives reach their goal of building one million homes over this parliament. His policies entailed ways to "unblock bottlenecks in the planning system", which were apparently slowing down new developments, preventing growth, and hindering investments. Firstly, £24 million would be invested into a Planning Skills Delivery Fund, to clear planning backlogs and get "the right skills in place", despite never clarifying what these skills were. Furthermore, a new "Super-Squad" team of planners would work across the planning system to unblock major housing developments, underpinned by £13.5 million in funding, specifically in the Government's eight Investment Zones (Gov.uk, 2023a). In total, £37.5 million of taxpayer money is going into the planning system with the means of churning out these new-build estates across the country, and more funding going to areas in which the Government

has specific investments in. This money also benefits the HBF and NHBC, since the Housing Secretary's main goal is to encourage these developers to "get building", meaning that even more of their poorly

designed homes can easily be pushed through planning. Although these developers will have to pay more in planning fees (Gov.uk, 2023a), in the long term this new policy will greatly benefit them financially due to the increased production, inflation, and investments into the housing market. The "Super-Squad" also oversees

what goes through planning, and what does not, therefore since new housing developments are the priority to meet this one million Government goal, they may potentially turn a blind eye to possible faults and poor design when evaluating applications from the HBF and NHBC. Sadly, there was no mention of increased quality regulation of new-builds amongst Gove's policies, or within the more recent Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill that has received Royal Assent (Gov.uk, 2023b).

## CONSTRUCTION

This poor quality is down to the overall lack of regulation from government policies, and the deficiency in onsite workers' experience. Under the HBF and NHBC within their projects, their construction workers are not legally required to obtain a license (Kollewe, 2017), or to have much experience in the field either, allowing these developers to hastily produce new-builds to meet the Government's goal of one million homes, which will only be exacerbated by the recent unblocking of the "bottlenecks in the planning system" (Gov.uk, 2023a). However, the 2020 Housing Design Audit for England found that 75% of new housing developments should not have passed planning, but since the NHBC employs its own inspectors, these projects are signed off instantly, meaning that more housing can be erected quickly (Greaves, 2020). Furthermore, the introduction of a new "Super-Squad" under Gove's policies, will only amplify the mass production of uninhabitable, crude homes.

This is the Government's idea of solving the housing crisis, which, in turn, will only make it worse. From their policies and goals, it is plain to see that the Government is prioritising the short-term effects of the

housing crisis over the long term (Greaves, 2020) and are not thinking ahead to the future and what potential issues that this type of consumerist construction will have on people, communities, architecture, and the environment.

## BREXIT & THE HOUSING-CRISIS

The Government does not seem to care that these

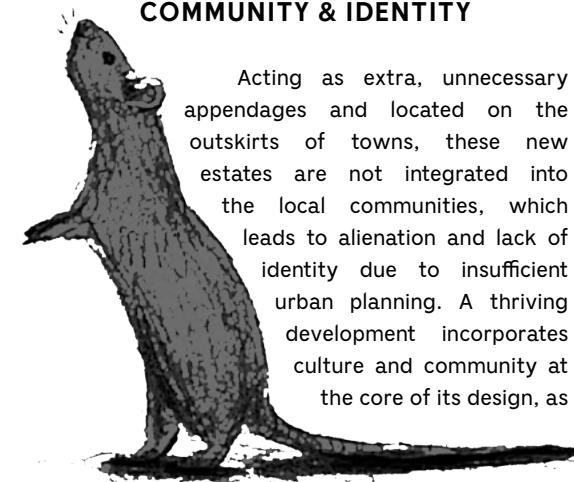


developments are void of life, or even if these homes are filled, just that they're built. Some could see similarities between these

empty new-builds and the propaganda town of Kijong-Dong in North Korea, which was purely constructed as a façade of prosperity to the neighbouring South Korea (Maragitoff, 2020). Within the UK, these new-builds could be serving a similar purpose, highlighting to neighbouring Europe our prosperity after Brexit and our ability to overcome the Housing Crisis, despite the majority of these homes remaining empty since no one can afford to live in them. Furthermore, North Korea itself runs off the political ideology of Juche, which evolved into three elements: political independence (chaju), economic self-sustenance (charip), and self-reliance in national defense (chawi); Juche requires people to think independently, while paradoxically requiring unquestioning loyalty to the leader (Szczepanski, 2018). Again, similarities can be seen between the UK Government's Brexit aspirations and the three elements of Juche, making people question why the Government really wants to produce one million new homes, as their efforts to solve the housing crisis have proven to be trivial.

## COMMUNITY & IDENTITY

Acting as extra, unnecessary appendages and located on the outskirts of towns, these new estates are not integrated into the local communities, which leads to alienation and lack of identity due to insufficient urban planning. A thriving development incorporates culture and community at the core of its design, as



architecture and master planning are created for the human scale. To be successful and functional as structures, they must adhere to the needs of people

- something which new-builds struggle to do. Homes should be designed to outlive us and be passed on for generations, however, the new wave of housing, again, fails to scrape past the 10-year mark (Kollewe, 2020), therefore making it one of the most unsustainable forms of architecture. From brick veneers to astroturf grass, every tiny detail of these new-builds is part of an artificial, sterile, low-quality façade (Wainwright, 2023). Rows upon rows of regurgitated homes create a sense of entrapment, as if you're stuck in a maze, due to the lack of nature, community spaces, or any form of focal point as an indicator of direction. The worrying and very limited concern for place-making from these large developers, removes the distinctive vernacular of the area (Ing, 2020), stripping towns and villages of their architectural and personal identity. This, in turn, creates disconnected, desolate islands of faux masonry that litter the outskirts and alienate them from the communities within these towns. Furthermore, also within the 2020 Housing Design Audit for England, it was found that less affluent communities were ten times more likely to have received poor new-build designs, even though better designs were actually more affordable (Greaves, 2020). This, therefore, shows how the negligence that the large developers have for people and buildings themselves is causing many of these modern developments to become uninhabitable.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT



Since the construction industry contributes 38% of the total global carbon emissions (CIC, 2023), we should be increasing the sustainability of our buildings, so that we as a nation can meet the 2015 COP21 Paris Agreement goal of limiting the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C and reaching Net Zero

by 2050 (United Nations Climate Change, 2023). However, if the mass production of highly unsustainable developments continues, the UK will not reach these goals. These estates are located outside of main towns, meaning that public transport and pedestrian access are scarce, therefore pushing the requirement for cars, especially since these developments tend to lack commercial or community spaces.

Furthermore, the deficiency in natural, green spaces and avocation towards artificial astroturf not only portrays an image of a dystopian nightmare but is extremely detrimental to the environment and people's well-being. The astroturf in itself, although low maintenance, is more expensive than grass; is not recyclable; is hazardous to wildlife; is produced in factories and transported to the site; and prevents biodiversity, (Fuller, 2023) which all could be prevented by having a grass lawn. This irresponsible type of urban planning leads to car dependency, and lack of nature, which increases the carbon footprint of these projects by two-fold. In addition, this phenomenon, along with scarcity of commerce; poor storage and bins; and sub-par parking integration, all create unattractive and unfriendly environments to live in, which causes negative health and social implications (Greaves, 2020), making people unwilling to leave their houses and leaving the streets barren. This is unfortunately the future of housing in Britain: repetitive, identical homes, where the only community one faces, is that of the office, or having to drive miles to the nearest town for an ounce of life.

## THE FUTURE OF NEW-BUILDS

Referring to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25: Right to an adequate standard of living, these new-builds being produced in Britain

fall short on Affordability, Habitability, and Location. Due to the cost-of-living and housing crises, many of these new homes are not affordable for the average income anymore, meaning that the cost threatens and compromises the occupants' enjoyment of other human rights since there are numerous cases of people choosing between food, heating, energy, or mortgage payments due to the interest on mortgages ever increasing, along with the cost of everything else. These homes also do not guarantee physical safety; adequate space; or protection from the elements, therefore threatening peoples' health due to their poor construction, planning, and likelihood of falling apart within ten years. Since they tend to be located outside of towns, with minimal transport links, these homes are cut off from employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, and social facilities, causing a dependency on cars, which some people cannot afford (United Nations Human Rights, 2023). As these new-builds do not meet the Right to an adequate standard of living, it should be extremely concerning that they continue to be constructed, and something must be done to prevent this disgusting practice, as it sets a precedent for living standards across Britain. To solve their housing crisis, Germany uses local and regional developers, who focus on prefabricated homes, which creates higher-quality and lower embodied carbon construction. Furthermore, their construction crews are trained and certified, ensuring that mistakes are minimal and the houses last (Kollewe, 2020). This just goes to prove that our housing crisis can be easily resolved sustainably too. These new developments should be made to last, and people should want and be able to afford to live in them; it is an investment to build high-quality homes, as in the long-term they will prove to be more economically beneficial to these developers and the Government.

Furthermore, architects should have a much larger role in the creation of these homes, overseeing and ensuring quality, integration of communities, vernacular, and environmental design, which would improve the standard of living for the UK as a whole.

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# OUR VERY DARK HOUSING FUTURE

BY SIRIO POZZI

Amidst an alarming 40% surge in homelessness in Bath, the architectural focus of the city remains fixed on creating multi-million pound 'Royal Views'. Compelled by this neglect, this piece vividly magnifies the consequences of inaction, capturing the primal tragedy at the core of this crisis.

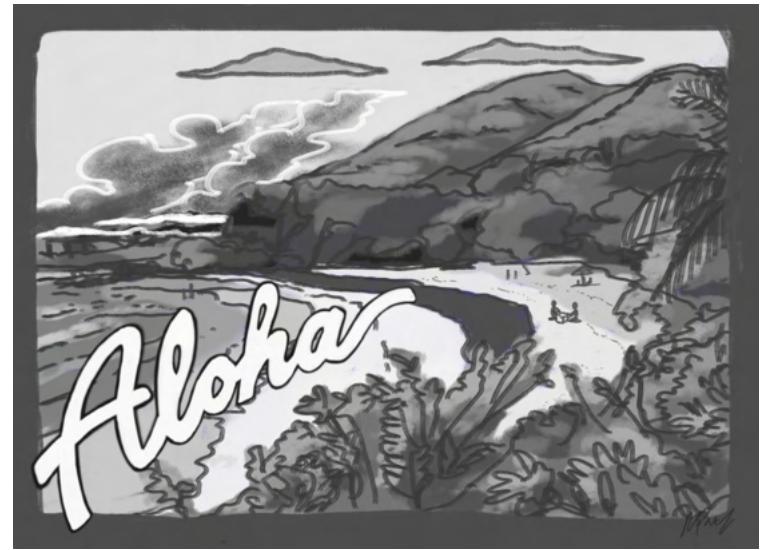


# LOSS OF 'HOME'

SCENES DEPICTING AN ASPECT OF 'LIFE BEFORE' AND 'LIFE AFTER'.

Words and graphics by  
**Meha Patel**

wildfires destroy homes...



whilst tourism continues...

mining companies drain water to form reservoirs...



whilst polluting the land - destroying nature and forcing indigenous people to leave their homes...

climate change causing extreme monsoons...



...creating large scale floods that destroy homes

20

over-grazing and increased droughts caused desertification...



...forcing people to leave their homes to survive

the cost of living crisis makes living unaffordable...



...leaving people without a roof over their heads

21

war and conflict...



...destroys lives, families and homes

# THE POETICS OF REUSE

IN CONVERSATION WITH CONNOLLY  
WELLINGHAM ARCHITECTS

Interview by  
**Jesper-Jay Harrington**

Graphics by  
**Connolly Wellingham Architects**

Connolly Wellingham Architects (CWA) is an architectural design and conservation studio focused on creative re-use, retrofit and cultural continuity. I visited their growing studio in Bristol's Spike Island Art Centre, a 1950s tea-packing factory turned cultural hub, to talk to directors Charlie and Fergus about their architectural approach and current projects.

**Jesper:** I first came to the attention of the studio through the AJ disruptor organisations list published a few years back, so the first question I wanted to ask is: How do you think that the approach of the studio differs from conventional practice?

**Fergus:** What do we do differently? There are two things of real value to me personally. Firstly I really love a kind of deep dive on context - historic, cultural and built context.

A deep and intimate understanding of place as a means of generating architecture - that's really valuable to me.

And let a place, if you listen carefully, let a place whisper to you what it wants to be. Then secondly and as part of that, there is an insistence as a practice that we'll always seek to use what's already there. As a practice, we're focused on existing buildings and using those where we can, but recognising that culturally they're a platform for much more than just that. So, we don't see existing fabric as a limitation. We see all this as inspiration for further work, and for architectural enrichment of place, as opposed to the constraints of the existing.

**Charlie:** I think the only thing I can point out that we perhaps did differently to other practices our size is that we made that commitment, and we pinned our colours to the mast right at the beginning. Before setting up CWA Fergus and I worked together for a number of years in the creative reuse team of FCBStudios, and that was the field of work we were passionately committed to. Our objective in setting up the practice was to keep doing that type of work - which distilled itself into this reuse, retrofit-first agenda, which then got picked up by the AJ and the Disruptors article.

Not so much now, because I think things have changed a lot recently, but five years ago or so many new practices that were starting up were a bit apologetic about having to work with existing buildings. Like it was a necessary stepping stone before moving on to bigger things. You get your first job adapting a house, putting a side extension on it, but always thinking 'I can't wait to stop doing this and start some real work.' But that challenge of getting your hands in the mud, and taking something existing and properly resolving it, was always the aspiration for us. Our ambitions for growth will just be to grow the scale of the projects that we're working on, but never to move away from the resolution of the existing.

**Jesper:** So your approach was almost the opposite of the conventional route which is to just get a new build project as soon as you possibly can. When founding the practice, I believe you pledged to never do a new build but I'm aware this has since changed. What was the background behind that decision?

**Fergus:** Yes, we have done a new build, which was really a bit of an accident. To put that project in context, it's a 50 square metre single-storey timber frame visitor kiosk for a historic ruin for English Heritage at Old Wardour Castle

down in Wiltshire. From the outset, we sought to adopt all the approaches we do with an existing building. So we started with that really forensic understanding of place before we set about building, and in some ways, although it was a new build, it was very symbiotic with the enormous scheduled ancient ruin right next door to it.



The new building is like a little 'pacemaker' within an existing architectural body, of the gardens and the ruin. It's a little moment of new tech that just helps bring the whole thing back to life. But there were no existing footings or anything to speak of that we could reuse, apart from a large concrete water tank that did get used. So again, you know

**we're desperately looking for what can we reuse.**

Then the question is how can we put something back here that has a negligible carbon footprint, whilst functioning so much better than what was here previously? So, as soon as we are past the concrete substructure we are into as carbon neutral, carbon negative building materials as we can; completely timber framed, timber insulation, timber clad, and then we're into thin membranes to support the green roof. Our project lead was Joe Hyett who did an exquisite job of crafting



that object and working with the team on-site to polish and hone it - and it's a very beautiful little thing. I like to think we're collectively proud of it even though we stepped out of our remit that one time!

Charlie: I think that it's easy to be dogmatic on this subject – what is new build and what is reuse, but in truth we are a bit more relaxed about the classifications, as they both follow the same design enquiry for us. I think of our work at Owlpen Manor in the Cotswolds, where we put a new extension on the side of a 15thC tithe barn – it's basically a new piece of architecture that has to respond to this incredibly sensitive setting, including this amazing barn, it just happens to touch and connect to this neighbouring historic building.

I think the pacemaker analogy is a good one. I've always seen the Old Wardour Castle visitor centre as an extension to the ruin - It just doesn't touch it.

Jesper: So, it's interesting that after such thorough analysis of the context and how it sits with the existing, the best spatial solution is to just build from new. And I suppose that if it's so low-carbon that it offsets it over the course of its functioning lifespan it's better than if it were left as it were.



Fergus: It's important to recognise that that can sometimes be the right solution. I don't want us to be a team who cut their noses off to spite their face by saying 'we will never do this' and forcing an agenda onto a scenario which isn't right for it. If it's absolutely called for, we will do it, but we'll see it through a very particular prism, which is that it's always part of a far larger organism, whether it's the city or the street or, in that case, the gardens and the ruin - so there's always a sense of fabric already there with which to build a dialogue. This is just about either mending the whole or applying a new patch - which, in this case, that was.

Jesper: Going into this idea of the spectres of the building's past and this almost archaeological approach you have to these projects in the beginning, one of your recent appointments is for Bath Assembly Rooms — I was wondering if we could get some insight into the design approach thus far.

Charlie: It's a real privilege for us to be working on that project. I'm going to tread carefully a little bit because it's a sensitive point in the process and not all of the proposals have been made public yet, but I think we can talk about the aspiration and we can talk about

inform and suggest possible answers to help fill in those gaps. So, the starting point has a bit of ambiguity in the history that I think has been really enjoyable to wallow in. Could it have been this? What if it was this? What does it mean for that? And if that was this and that was that then can this be this? That's the process we've been in, finding the gaps and inhabiting them with conjecture I suppose, or propositions of what might have been.

Fergus: There is a real aspiration amongst the client team that this project helps to set a new bar for the National Trust, but also sets a bar for ourselves and our process – because the opportunity for a research-led approach has been fantastic.

So, let's take a kind of couple of examples. One is that the whole building was razed to the ground during World War 2, the Baedeker bombing raids that specifically bombed the cultural highlights of the UK to demoralise the population. Which is fascinating for many, many reasons, some of which are architectural. So, the building by the late 1940s is an absolute shell and isn't really put back together again until the 60s, but it was done in a way that we've grown into calling a 'defiant restoration'. So, here is this exquisite restoration of the Assembly Rooms interiors, but underneath the surface it's steel, cement, concrete, brick, metal lath, and contemporary plaster. It's incredibly interesting to work with because we've got this Georgian vision which is now executed in 20th century material, and that affords us a lot of latitude in the adaptation of the existing fabric. It makes for a unique Conservation Philosophy.

Then there are things like the archaeological excavation of a cold bath under the building, which is quite a strange one. What's it doing there? Who's it for? The research shows us how through that



some of the interventions. To pick up on the preamble to your question, which was about archaeological research, I think that it's particularly important to this project, which is Grade 1 listed in the centre of Bath. There's a lot that's been written about it over the years, but there's also a lot that isn't known about it. I was surprised at the number of question marks that remained when we delved into that archive information. For starters, no one has yet been able to identify an original set of plans of what John Wood the Younger's 1770s floor plan actually looked like. Which is fine, we know where the Ball Room the Tea Room, and the Great Octagon are – but what happened in between? Where did people go to the loo? How was that serviced? These are just really, really fascinating questions that we're considering now, to understand the full context of the changes we are preparing to design.

There are whole teams at the National Trust of curators and archivists who are working on this, and the breadth of their knowledge is astonishing. They have this incredible awareness of the buildings that were contemporary to the Bath site. What were people doing at the same time in Assembly Rooms in London, in Harrogate, and so on, using that much wider grounding in the history of English architecture to

Georgian period, what started as a trend for cold bathing in one's own private bath in the basement, became the trend for seaside bathing which gave birth to the Victorian seaside resort towns. So, from these historic ruins and this lost culture, there are these whole new social developments across the UK.



For this project the brief, as per the NT's motto, is to make sure the building can be there forever and make sure the building can be there for everyone. Getting people to all these interesting bits of the building and making sure everyone can feel welcome doing it. Then on top of this we are looking to decarbonise the building. Increasing its thermal efficiency and managing its heat and electrical loads, but also preparing the building for a future of dramatic climate events, to ensure the fabric remains safeguarded. There are some quite fun bits of craftsmanship that are going to be revealed across that building as well, which we've really enjoyed thinking about in this spirit.

**Jesper:** I think it's interesting that as important as this intervention is in the here and now, In the grand scheme of things, it's just one stage of a series of interventions – if we're going to call it being bombed to the ground an intervention as well - since the 18th-

century. By peeling back these layers of the fabric you can reconstruct the narrative of the building which then continues from this current intervention into the future.

**Fergus:** These things are always an inspiration for us. It's never 'here is a catalogue of all the things that have ever happened, and we'll put it on the shelf and then that's that'.

**There are narrative themes here that we have the opportunity to weave in to our architectural intervention.**

I definitely want to be clear on that point; Yes, we work with existing buildings, but there's always a concern for the future narrative in that. It can be challenging, but that's what we love doing.

**Jesper:** What kind of challenges do you typically face when working with historic buildings, both physically as well as socially - convincing clients and stakeholders of your approach.

**Charlie:** We are currently working on the refurbishment of a Town Hall in Somerset that illustrates this point well. It's a really interesting brief to refurbish the town hall, which has a theatrical use predominantly, which the client wants to be able to improve and strengthen its flexibility for a myriad of other daytime uses, and increase the opportunities to generate revenue and support the listed buildings surrounding it.

The brief that came to us already had some initial design studies attached to it, which were all great, but each one was answering its own very specific question. We adopted all of this existing work, and our brief was to take these ideas forward,



but we soon realised that the proposals were not talking to each other in a way that supports a cohesive bigger picture. On the face of it, the brief was being met, so there was no requirement for us to revisit those proposals upon our appointment.

However, we could see that there were opportunities at the site that were not being capitalised upon. We went on a really quick exercise, completely at our own expense, to say 'ok, here's a scheme that does all of those things that you need the project to do, but also it unlocks these new things that you didn't even know you might benefit from. You haven't asked for us to do this, but it would be amazing because if you do this and this it would enable these parts of the brief to communicate with each other in a cohesive and convincing way.' The client could see that the value of the final scheme was significantly improved, and the revised proposals were adopted.

That wasn't us being 'entrepreneurial' or to try and change the scope of the project – we could just see, when we 'zoomed out', an opportunity for a holistic family of interventions that were much more effective for meeting the brief and

appropriate to the listed building. I do think that this is a skill of us as Architects, particularly ones who have spent so long working in this particular sector.

**Fergus:** We really insist on synthesis in our work, well-managed synthesis, where parts come together to make a better whole. You can crack on with each element of a brief in isolation, but you must bring them together at some point – and they must work cohesively and beautifully as a whole. Sometimes this means a correction of the existing. You can go one step further than just meeting the brief, and add a new language of additions that really enhance and enrich an architectural presence – beyond the 'didn't we do well' retrofit approach. I want that to continue to be the kind of architecture we strive for.

**Jesper:** I think this links back well to my initial question about the approach of the practice. You interrogate the brief just as much as you do the actual building itself, and you look for ways to flip the brief on its head.

Fergus: I used to have a tutor at university who just didn't care about the brief. He used to say 'Rem Koolhaas says f\*\*k the context'. That's wrong, because context is everything. I say f\*\*k the brief'. That really resonated with me. Some spaces are just beautiful - they hang together well in a sequence or composition, and they're just a delight to be in and move around and dwell in. People will always find a use for spaces like that, so there's a valid architectural approach there, as long as you build them in a way that is flexible and adaptable.

**The brief doesn't matter, it might last 10 or 25 years, but the building - all being well – should last much longer than that.**

So, there's actually a kind of responsibility as architects to say 'f\*\*k the brief!'

Charlie: It's an interesting tension because, as I like to remind Fergus, clients are very interested in the brief - and they are the ones who pay us. But I do agree - once we meet 'today's brief', it's our responsibility for a building that's been around for 200 or 300 years already, that we lay the infrastructure to allow it to evolve onwards, and to change in ways that our clients can't reasonably anticipate. Long-life, loose-fit.



PAPERSPACE

Fergus: Its relevant to all existing fabric, beyond just historic or listed buildings. We have just finished the feasibility study on this building that we are currently sat in. Spike Island Art Space, it's the old Brooke bond tea Packing Factory, from the late 1950s, and we're appropriating it right now as our office space. We're doing a study for them to do a deep retrofit here; improve their energy efficiency, improve access, and decarbonise the building. This is a massive part of what we want to do, and it doesn't need to be all fine Georgian columns or mediaeval timber framing, it's 20th century as well.

Jesper: The term 'Spatial Agent' has been gaining traction in recent years as an alternative to the conventional title of Architect. In the spirit of Cedric Price, It suggests a departure from the idea of the singular heroic architect towards a more collaborative approach to design whereby the agent mitigates between and collaborates with a range of stakeholders. Is this a term you would identify yourselves with? Do you think it's a good descriptor for the set of skills architects ought to possess?

Charlie: I think this idea of collaboration is hugely important in the work we do. The reason buildings are protected and listed is because their heritage belongs to everybody. That is something that most of our clients understand and feel really proud to be stewarding. But we have also had clients in the past who struggle with that. They think 'I bought this building, it's my building, and this is how I want to change it'. But no,

**the heritage of that building belongs to everybody, and the things that make that building special are a shared asset for us all.**

So yes, we need to collaborate with all of the people who have are using at building now, or have in the past, or people who walk past it every day - if they have opinions on how it should be used and how it shouldn't be altered then we need to collaborate with them. As a 'spatial agent', I suppose part of our role is curating that conversation, to navigate through toward a mutual agreement, and then an architectural proposal.

I would be really keen that nobody in the architectural profession diminishes the skill set that is required to do that, and to retain a design sensibility, and to meet the brief and the regs, and to be beautiful and delightful, and to satisfy the often directly contradictory input of your collaborators. So we are an agent in the middle of a sometimes contested conversation and that's part of the interest of the job. Our work at those early stages can be as much about forging relationships with stakeholders and understanding the characters of individuals, as it is about the buildings themselves.

Fergus: This is more important now than ever because people feel

so disenfranchised with their built environments, and they feel not listened to and they feel slightly like they'll get what they're given, and they've had decades of that in architecture. One of the privileges of working with listed buildings is that they come with the rigour of those consultative frameworks, which begin from an understanding that you won't be able to get away with whatever you want. Exactly as Charlie was saying, there is a shared public interest in the right thing happening with our collective heritage. If anything, I feel like this line of work is about demonstrating what trust in Architects and architecture can deliver.

Jesper: Going back to this idea of the public role of architecture and architecture giving back to the people, but also the sort of alienation people feel towards their built environment, a lot of the work the studio does is ecclesiastically focused. What do you think sort of draws the studio towards those sorts of projects? What role do you think churches have in a less formally religious 21st-century British society?

Charlie: We love working with churches, we think they are fascinating cultural artefacts. We can talk a lot about architectural history and religious iconography and all that (and we do!), but what we have come to understand is that there's 16,000 churches in the Church of England, and they are all astonishingly rich sites; they are either in stunning remote locations or they're right in the centre of the village or the town or the city. It is demonstrably demonstrable that they are all underused, and the congregations are all really keen to embrace more people and to better serve their community. This is at the same time that public services have been savaged for a number of years, with libraries closing, the local pub closing, and the local shop gone. Churches are a real

opportunity, as has been demonstrated through many successful examples, to step in and fill this void of much needed locally based community facilities – whilst being profoundly rooted in a place and its history.



Fergus: They're places for people to come together, and we love them for that reason. We do some private residential work, but we love projects that are about public benefit.

**The generosity of the public realm is what really excites us, and the gift of architecture to bring people together.**

Then further to that is a real weight and solemnity of churches that we are particularly interested in. We need cultural gravity. We need these steadyng forces that remind us of continuity and endurance. No one's rising to the challenge of how to secure this incredibly significant socio-historic tapestry, that is woven into the fabric of the nation, and is really vulnerable to being lost. We hope our work with churches is helping start to answer these questions.

Jesper: Going on from that, is there almost an opportunity in the renewed interest in the intersection

between heritage and the climate emergency? That in an age where we need to reuse and improve what we already have, we're increasingly becoming aware of the vast stock of churches and other historic buildings around us.

Fergus: I think you're absolutely right. We see keen congregations who want to do this work wherever we go, but they don't have the means or the funding to get started on that journey, and that needs to change. In terms of reuse, churches are quite challenging, because they are often so old, they come with a lot of problems: rotting roofs, zero damp-proof courses, zero vapour control. They're really hard buildings to reuse and that comes with specialist input, it comes with craftspeople, and it comes with a cost. But, I think the cost is far outweighed by their potential value.



Jesper: On the topic of sustainability, do you think that we almost approach retrofitting in an overly technocratic way, that we ought to strive instead towards a much lower-tech approach to design and building with local materials and techniques?

Fergus: We were literally just having this conversation this morning. I think that what we should not be doing right now is mystifying this process. We should be demystifying it. It's just a good thing to do, full stop. So, I think you're right – the simplicity of it is key. These are simple buildings, there is relatively simple building physics to them – there aren't membranes or layers or laps to consider. Anything you do is going to make it inherently better. Plus, the fact that you haven't added to the embodied carbon the way a brand-new building has.

Charlie: I think that's really clear in the conservation work that we do, when we are looking at much older buildings, and growing our familiarity with the regional vernacular building cultures in the UK, of which there are a million variants. But, they are all simple and they are all low-tech. Until you come to the 20th century, and all the problems we diagnose today come from that period when the building technology got too complicated (and incompatible). We see it time and again in the work we do, and it recommends simple low-tech additions.

Jesper: But also, beyond sustainability, that there's this massive decline in heritage crafts that are now almost on the brink of extinction.

Fergus: I remember someone showing us this video of ETH in Zurich who had made this robot that could build a brick wall. I just found it so counterintuitive. A brick is made to fit in a human hand. It's the first step in an intimate relationship between people and their built environment. To interject between this perfectly harmonious relationship between a person and a piece of building material that they could shape themselves – that for me was a striking example of a tendency toward over-complication.

Jesper: The point at which it stops being a craft and becomes a science. That's when you begin to lose the sort of poetry of building.

Fergus: For me, very much so. It seeks novelty in the wrong ways.

It depends on the scale of the challenges though. You can look at Thames Water sewer networks, or HS2, and clearly, there's a technological endeavour there that needs algorithms in their resolution. That's the appropriate scale and requirement for it. But the best cities have a finer grain, which is about smaller groups of people doing things they can at a human scale to contribute to the wider whole. There's space for novelty and nuance and creativity within that, absolutely there is, but it's also about that collective, that community, and that craft. Perhaps we're talking about a new wave of Arts and Crafts design thinking.

There is so much that's just been swept under the carpet with the built environment, we've just got to recover it all, and sort it all out, one building at a time. I think that, project by project, is what this practice is trying to do. There is no algorithm or macro-strategy, just a lot of unpacking to do before we get on a good trajectory.

PORT  
TALBOT  
35 MM

Photography and text  
by Eleanor Dudley



Exposing the amputated limb of utility driven industrial architecture and its dying spasms. While its human contact retracts, it becomes a monument of intimidation. It is a landmark with no scale or easiness.

# GENERATION LOST

## EXPLORATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Words by  
**Owen Hill**

Graphics by  
**Author**

In the early 2020s, liminal space crashed into the cultural zeitgeist as concepts like “the backrooms” took hold of the internet. It took full advantage of the eerie feeling evoked by the empty spaces that we’re used to seeing full of people. On the surface, the origin seems clear: the pandemic put daily images of desolate train stations, airports, and city centres on our screens. In actuality, the trend has existed in the background for decades.

In its basest form, liminal space describes any place of transition. Although this concept has roots in the early 1900s, it became an academic fascination around the turn of the millennium as people pushed

its definitive boundaries. This bled through into literature, with Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000) and Steven Hall’s *Raw Shark Texts* (2007) having liminal space central to their plot, with key differences in usage: in Danielewski’s work the space is the overarching villain, whereas Hall saw it as something with dangers, but potential for exploration.

However, while fictional fascination increased, interest in real-world exploration was in decline. Urban

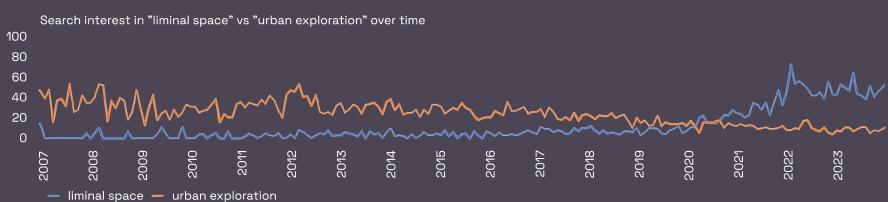


Figure 1. Interest in liminal space (blue) versus urban exploration (orange)

exploration, a hobby in which people explore a range of abandoned structures, was at one time as popular as liminal spaces are today. So what are the reasons for this?

As early as the 1850s, Karl Marx theorised the “annihilation of space by time” (Marx, 1993). Empowered by the drive for more capital, developments in technology increase the speed of both travel and communication. While our world remains the same physically, it feels smaller than ever. This creates psychological barriers to physical exploration. After all, what’s the point of exploring a world where every inch is already mapped and charted, and you can get from one end to the other in a day?

In addition to this, more public realm than ever is privately owned. These spaces allow private companies to assert rules over what the public can do within them. There’s no real opportunity to “explore” without being subjected to surveillance and (potentially) stern security guards. Starting with Canary Wharf in the 1980s, these concepts have spread across the UK. However, it would be wrong to suggest that having rules in place is inherently immoral. Even our public realm is subject to numerous by-laws.

Many have pointed out the comedic ridiculousness of certain British laws on the public realm – under the Metropolitan Police Act of 1839, it’s illegal to carry a plank of wood, shake a rug, or slide on ice on any pavement. Yet there is a more sinister aspect to the limits placed on public freedoms, especially when it comes to our

right to roam. Ever since the enclosures, the vast majority of land in this country has been privately owned, with just 4% remaining as “common land” (Minton, 2006). The result of this is that due to trespass laws, we have no right to set foot within most of our own country.

In 2000, the government introduced a limited Right to Roam through the Countryside & Rights of Way Act, though this only expanded the amount of land we can explore without fear of prosecution to 8%, granting the right to cross certain landscapes like mountains and coastlines regardless of ownership.

In contrast to this, the internet of the 2000s was bigger and more accessible than ever. In fact, it was growing exponentially. From the mid-90s onwards, the amount of traffic on the internet was effectively doubling in size year on year. By 2016, total internet traffic passed one zettabyte, or 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 bytes, a number so imperceptibly large that we lack the ability to conceive of it. Try imagining that amount of anything and you’ll probably still be massively underestimating.

As humans, there are many things we can’t conceptualise. Typically, when this happens, we resort to metaphor. The internet falls squarely into that category when considering the language used to discuss it: “Cyberspace”, “website”, and “domain” all come with the implication of physical space.

Combining both the scale and incomprehensibility of the internet, we have learned to imagine it as an effectively infinite space that we can ‘explore’. Unlike urban exploration, which often involves active danger and results in at least a couple of deaths every year, there’s no direct physical harm in sitting down and browsing the internet. Of course, that’s

not to say that there are no dangers – we grew up as ‘cyber-safety’ was being taught in schools – but there are very few psychological barriers. The internet is more accessible than ever, with 92% of people having access to the internet in their home in 2023 (Ofcom, 2023).



The internet has already superseded many things we used to have to go outside to do, from shopping to meeting

with friends. A transition from real-world exploration to online ‘exploration’ could affect younger generations in a multitude of ways. Going outdoors has a wide range of benefits for our mental well-being, some of which are only just being fully realised, so if the internet is working against people’s inclination to spend time in nature, then perhaps it has already been contributing to the worsening mental health of the generation that spends the most time on it – in 2023, 15-24 year olds used the internet for an average of 4 hours and 35 minutes daily (Ofcom, 2023). This could be attributed to the usefulness of the internet in academic work, and employed work beyond that. However, an accompanying study found the second most online demographic was 11-12 year olds at 4 hours and 10 minutes daily, the vast majority of which is spent on social media and games (Ofcom, 2023). If this supplants time spent outdoors socialising, then child psychologists like Helen Dodd fear it could have an adverse impact on “friendship development, social skills,

freedom, independence and negotiation of shared spaces” (Save the Children, 2022).

In many ways, the internet resembles the liminal spaces that it helped to popularise. A big part of the emotional impact of liminal spaces is that while they are created by people, they are devoid of life. However, unlike the empty, decaying abandonment of urban exploration, they’re often well-maintained and clean – The lights are on, but nobody’s home. On the internet you never really see people either, just the impressions they leave behind, through posts and comments and photos. When a website is abandoned, it doesn’t decay – it remains perfectly maintained.

So if the internet were a physical place, what would it look like? Would it be a liminal space, with their maze-like structures, endless corridors and doorways, and no exit? Never seeing real people, only the evidence that they exist? The internet has always been a place that we explore, liminal space just gave it form.

Recommended Reading:  
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The Raw Shark Texts, Steven Hall

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Ghost Sign, Beauford Square by  
James Lansbury

# IMAGINARY ARCHITECTURE

Words by  
Tara Hodges

Graphics by  
Haydon Carr

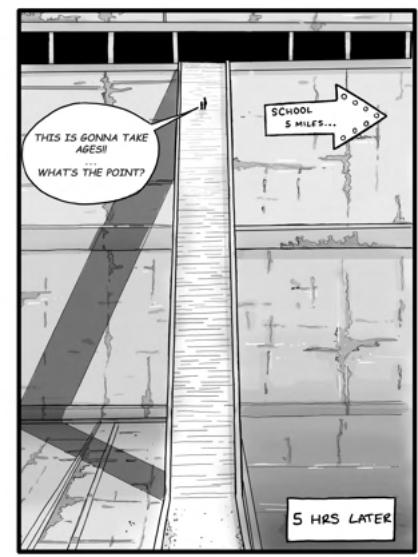
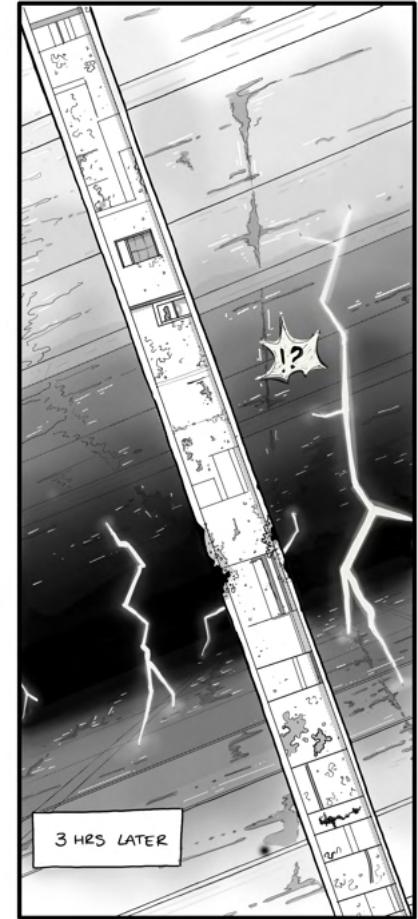
Imagination and creativity are fundamental principles within architecture, the baseline on which architectural education and practice develops. The infusion of scientific, logic-based principles with an artistic, conceptual approach is, in many minds, a defining quality of the profession. As such, the intersection between the creative arts and architecture is frequently made apparent, such as in an acoustically exceptional concert hall or a sculpted art gallery.

One less frequently explored is the interaction between the written word and architectural design. While each exists and is engaged with in a physical form, they both hold the capacity for vibrant abstract consumption. This is, in many ways, one of the primary intentions of each creative form. Just as literature seeks to inspire a reader's imagination, so does architecture aim to stimulate cognitive, emotive responses in its users. Beyond this, the two intersect one another in a cyclical relationship, each influencing and being

influenced by the other. A key example of this is 'imaginary architecture', the ominous, joyous, fantastical structures and spaces which exist solely in the collective or individual consciousness of readers.

In literature, the tool of imagery is vital in the author's efforts to create a compelling, dynamic narrative. It enables the reader to visualise an entirely fictitious scene in aid of generating a specific sequence of emotional responses, thereby transporting them to the unique, unknown world in which the story unfolds.

Within Gothic literature, this is particularly apparent, the genre itself in part defined by its harrowing landscapes and eery scenes. For example, the wild description of the Moors in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* enhances the chaos and turmoil of the characters and plot in its power to evoke a visceral emotive reaction. The condition of the house also fluctuates as the characters undergo radical emotional journeys, such as the decay and ruin



during the period of Heathcliff's despair and misery. In *Rebecca*, du Maurier's timeless classic, the Manderley estate acts as an impassive, foreboding backdrop to the most tense, uncomfortable scenes in the book. This symbolism culminates in the house's destruction, a devastating fire, which is used at the beginning and end of the novel to both build tension and represent the dramatic end to the characters' lives within this setting.

In each case, architecture and landscape are fundamental devices used by the authors in their endeavour to fabricate a narrative, without which the reader cannot be fully immersed in the fictional world before them.

Similarly, through the lens of literary motifs, the built environment can inspire a visceral response entirely separate to the reality of its existence. In this manner, a grand, stately home is instinctively associated with a Jane Austen novel, along with the author's typical themes of romance and Georgian grandeur. An imposing, sprawling castle, in contrast, evokes the eerie, supernatural atmosphere of *Dracula*.

In many cases, these associations, driven by widespread literary tropes, are capitalised to enhance the building's identity and aesthetic impact. For example, Castle Drogo, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in the 20th Century, is the last castle built in England<sup>1</sup>. Without the practical requirements of fortitude and security characterising this typology, it is clearly intended as a symbolic structure, engaging with the awe and drama typically associated with the castle typology. Now a National Trust property, the building benefits from the tourism generated by its mythological, fantasy associations. In the same manner, other historical pieces of architecture, such as those within National

Trust ownership, benefit from the role of their typology as literary backdrop to iconic written works.

In understanding and engaging with this intersection, the experience of architecture, physical and abstract, can be enriched. By observing how literature utilises and manipulates the built and natural environment, designers can gain a cross-disciplinary insight into the spaces they engineer, and in turn use this to create more dynamic, impactful designs. As a clear and significant influence for some of the greatest literary minds, architecture has the opportunity and responsibility to create a lasting impact on society.

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# A VIEW OF NEW YORK

Words by  
Sarah McLaren

Graphics by  
Author

The New York skyline dances on the horizon as towers reach out up to the clouds; businessmen and women walk tirelessly, ambition dripping from their eyes. The lush vegetation in Central Park floats below the city; the one green escape in the sea of concrete that infects the space. Autumnal colours cascade through the air as leaves are swept from the trees. Yellow taxis

create a dull hum in the distance, a city alive with movement. People shout across the road to one another in words she can't quite make out. She lifts the spoon to her mouth from a can of tuna. She ponders as her lips contort from the taste; what an inconvenience to be eating this way. New York fades to black, and her hand lowers the remote. She will sleep soon.

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green escapism. Yellowish dust rises from the epicentre.

A man stumbles across the street, both eyes lost as craters form his sockets. Blisters and burns cover his body, his skin hangs like drapes. His clothes disintegrated as he limps in stark nakedness. The injured carry the severely injured and they in turn carry the dying. All around him there is groaning. Voices call for loved ones. Voices speak their last words.

The woman wakes up and turns on her TV. She is bored of Autumn now. She picks a summer scene; she so dearly misses the fresh Summer breeze and the warmth of sun-soaked skin. She rolls over in her bed and looks at the ceiling. Just her and 54 other people in one bunker. How crowded. She hopes the nuclear war is over soon so she can go back to her apartment in New York.

*The sirens ring out through the radioactive smog, a blanket of poison over the city. The blast of brilliant white light had erupted over the landscape just moments before. People cease to exist in a cloud of atoms, their existence ends within a second.*

*"Stay safe. Do not panic. If you panic, you will make it worse. If you steal, you will be punished. Find a central room within your homes. Take iodine tablets if you feel sick. The government is in a safe location. We have not abandoned you." The speakers continue to blare throughout the city.*

*New York is a city no more. It is a barren nuclear wasteland. Cracks line the earth as the land rips open. Life ceases. Fire sweeps through the streets catching the roots of uprooted trees, it is the only light within the darkness. The Autumn colours of Central Park have faded to black. Debris covers what used to be a*

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## WHY DOES SPIDER-MAN HATE EUROPE'S MOST ICONIC CITIES?

Words by  
Lola Leforestier

Graphics by  
Author

*Spider-Man: Far From Home*<sup>1</sup> (2019) was a hit at the time of its release, scoring 90% on rotten tomatoes<sup>2</sup>. As much as I enjoyed watching it, as an architecture student something wouldn't stop bothering me since it came out.

Peter Parker, aka. Spider-Man, travels around Europe leaving a trail of architectural debris. He has major fight scenes in Venice, Prague, and London as well as frenzied detours to Austria, the Netherlands and Berlin. The film features extensive shots of the destruction being wreaked on each city's iconic monuments, with the grand finale set on Tower Bridge in Tom Holland's own hometown.

The destruction of landmarks is a major trope in Hollywood, dating back to the 1930s<sup>3</sup>, with directors frequently depicting the graphic destruction of iconic landmarks and cities. I began to question why this is so frequently employed and how this interacts with our perception of such events in the real world.

In some films, this is an explicit political statement, such as the destruction of the Houses of Parliament in *V for Vendetta*<sup>4</sup>, or the closing scene of *Planet of the Apes*<sup>5</sup>. This famously depicts the

remains of the Statue of Liberty buried in the sand, reminiscent of the statue *Ozymandias* in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem, which closes with: 'Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away.'<sup>6</sup>

The poem establishes monumental architecture as a potential symbol for civilisation but also the vanity of the tyrant *Ozymandias*. Similarly, the destruction of landmarks in film represents the destruction of whichever values the filmmakers assign to that architecture, whether that be freedom and democracy, or tyranny and dictatorship.

This is most effective in films that have something to say, such as in *V for Vendetta*, which depicts a vigilante revolting against a fascist UK government in a dystopian police state. The calculated destruction of the Houses of Parliament using the London Tube makes an explicit reference to Guy Fawkes' failed attempt 400 years earlier in response to government persecution as an act of revenge and uprising.

In many action and superhero films this has a different meaning. Rather than

meaningfully deconstructing a symbol, they instead repetitively demolish the world's most recognisable landmarks for shock value, such as the destruction of the Eiffel Tower in *G.I. Joe*<sup>7</sup>. This is an attempt to tug on the audience's heartstrings by utilising the familiarity of these landscapes whilst limiting graphic violence and keeping films family-friendly.

In such scenarios, the monuments represent civilisation and the existing social order. Their destruction helps to establish the villains as senseless forces for destruction and the heroes as the protectors of civilisation.

Rather than making a political statement this reasserts traditional values. Within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, showing the Avengers, who are actors of the US Government, shielding architectural icons asserts their position as the protectors of civilisation and reinforces the status quo, projecting the image of the USA as a benevolent protective force – this is a form of propaganda.

This trope occurs to an extreme in *Spider-Man: Far from Home* which sees Tom Holland's Spider-Man being chased from Venice to Austria, Prague, and London

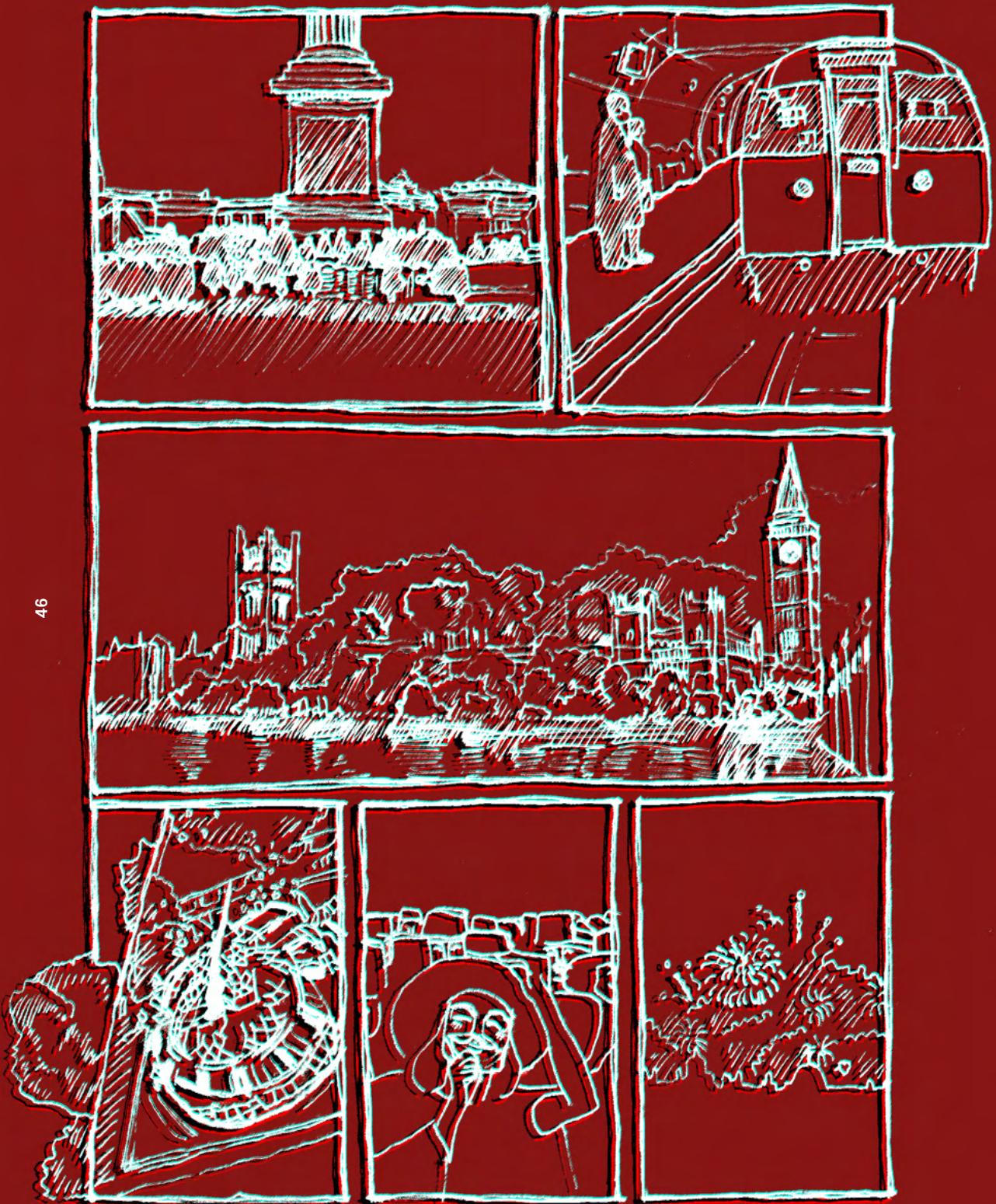
by both teachers and monsters. He leaves Europe's most famous

monuments falling like dominoes and departs before the dust has settled. The destruction surpasses mere shock value; Peter Parker crushes Europe's architectural icons faster than he can post them on Instagram.

This echoes the fast-track coach or cruise tours through Europe, often disliked by locals<sup>8</sup>, who step out of a tour bus long enough to snap a picture of the Eiffel tower before heading towards the Coliseum. This checklist tourism decontextualises each city, erasing its unique and layered history and instead contributes to the false idea of a culturally homogeneous Europe. In *Spiderman*, this becomes apparent through the representation of each city through a few architectural icons that could fit in a snow globe, and not through its people and character, rendering the destruction of each city somewhat meaningless.

The destruction of landmarks trope is not entirely bad. Used with intention it can be used to dramatic effect to convey political and existential messages. It can illustrate the downfall of humanity at its own hands, such as in *Planet of the Apes*, or make a political statement such as in *V for Vendetta*. However, the trope is killed by overuse. With every release of a new James Bond or superhero film, it's hard not to wonder which city will be next; Directors need to think of new ways to illustrate the scale and impact of devastation.





Closing sequence of *V for Vendetta*. The Houses of Parliament are destroyed to Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture.

The overuse of these images for cheap shock value impacts our perception of such events in reality, watched by the world through the lens of social media in Gaza and Ukraine. Our built environment is an accumulation of the stories of people's past and its destruction means the very real death not only of the people living there but also of the spectres of the people that came before them.

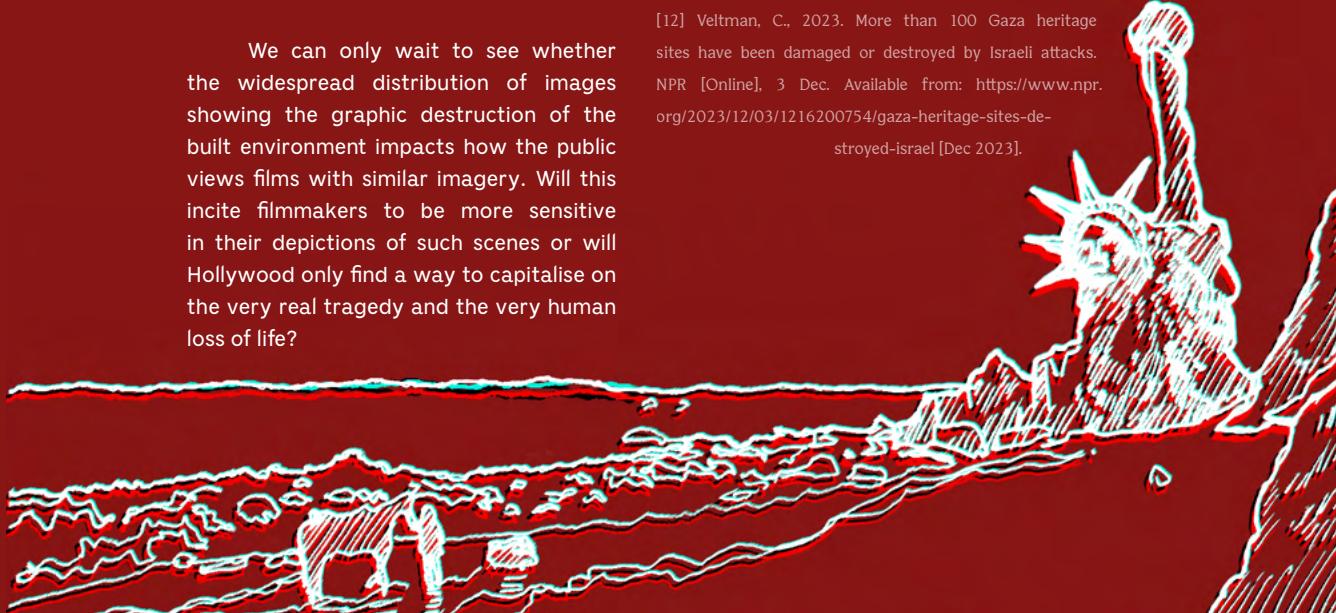
The Taliban were aware of this when they destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001<sup>9</sup>, as are both Israeli and Russian forces today when partaking in the systematic and intentional destruction of the buildings and people of Palestine and Ukraine. Monuments and heritage sites, such as the Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa<sup>10</sup>, the Church of St Porphyrius (with five hundred Christian and Muslim Palestinians sheltering inside)<sup>11</sup>, and the Great Omari Mosque in Gaza<sup>12</sup>, were intentionally targeted in a blatant attempt to erase cultural identity.

However, after having seen the destruction of monumental architecture trivialised in film for so long, the gravity of these images is lost. Where in Hollywood, the same city can be demolished and rebuilt on a whim, in reality when a city is destroyed the stories it tells about its people and past are gone for good. Filmmakers have a responsibility to convey such events with the gravity they deserve.

We can only wait to see whether the widespread distribution of images showing the graphic destruction of the built environment impacts how the public views films with similar imagery. Will this incite filmmakers to be more sensitive in their depictions of such scenes or will Hollywood only find a way to capitalise on the very real tragedy and the very human loss of life?

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# HEALING YOUR INNER CHILD



Words by  
Viviana Vargas-Sotelo      Graphics by  
Antar Ghazoul

If someone were to ask you to describe your childhood in three words, how would you respond?

I'm sure you'd pause, take a breath, and pull all sorts of facial expressions to find the correct words to condense the early years of your life. I'm also sure you'd answer them as best as you could. As soon as you finally decide, you'll say, 'oh wait!', and change one of the words. Even better still, I'm pretty sure that if given the opportunity to recount the events of your formative years, you'd pull up a chair.

If they were to then ask, 'describe yourself in three words', what chaos would ensue in your mind?

Are there any similarities between both of these questions?

Witnessing the evolution of my eldest niece, who is 7 going on 27, is a constant reminder of how eager children are to learn, and how much boundless love they are willing to give. I'm incredibly fortunate to have three nieces, the other two 3 and 1 (who are terrors wrapped up in tiny packages) who bring so much joy to the people around them. Seeing their personalities come alive as babies and develop as they grow is fascinating; it is so rewarding to be a bystander as they experience life and acquire new skills to make them well-rounded little people. It's not to say they will only see the world through rose-tinted glasses, but since the innocence of youth is so fleeting, there's a point to be made about preserving it, for as long as it's needed.

Whilst I wish this were the case for every child in this world, there are those, thousands of them, who have been stripped of this beautiful innocence much too early. Those caught in conflict,

famine, illness, those who have had to face the horrors this world can often present. What should be one of the most carefree times of life is suddenly faced with fear, insecurity, panic, and grief. After the loss of family and community, grief is the one that shakes to the core. It stays for a while and lingers long after you think you've come to terms with it. For a child to endure such an infancy, it's heartbreakingly agonising, and frustrating to hear. In wartime, they may be in close proximity to fighting, hearing planes fly past, shells explode, bullets fired in rapid succession, wondering whether they will live to see the sun rise. That takes a psychological toll on adults - imagine how much it would affect a child.

I can continue to delve deeply into the hurt ever present around the globe, but equally, every so often, there are glimmers of hope. Orkidstudio, a Scottish former humanitarian design organisation, now BuildX, constructed an orphanage for disadvantaged and abandoned children (Valenzuela, 2014), alongside the local community in Nakuru, Kenya, in 2013. Both men and women taking part in the work were paid equal wages, setting a standard that would ideally continue for employment around the area, and skills were exchanged to create this successful structure that is dignified and welcoming for the children to live in. The rooms are capped to a maximum of four children, providing generous space and streaming sunlight, unlike typical African orphanages, where it is common for many little ones to sleep in a large room side by side. It enhances tight-knit relationships, especially when the social spaces range from the smallest of study nooks to expansive common areas. The overall feeling of St Jerome's Centre seems warm and comfortable, particularly with the use of timber slatting, perforating the sunlight to gently illuminate the reddish undertones of the recycled wood. The main

building material is earth sacks, which are stacked like bricks and contain high thermal mass, for those colder nights, and every so often there are pops of colour dotted around the building: the corners of stairs, a door, a wall, a curtain. It's functional, but doesn't forget to be playful (Divisare, 2014).

Taking a journey east of just over 7,000 km, we arrive at Soe Ker Tie House in Noh Bo, on the Thai-Burmese border. Here live many Karen people, who have sought solace from the decades long conflict in Burma, and ended up as refugees. They've named the collective sleeping elements 'The Butterfly Houses' for their unique roof form, yet I think this goes further than just the physical. Giving a child their own space to live, and calling it a 'Butterfly House', fosters freedom and imagination, regardless of their past, to transform into something beautiful, to take wing and fly high. Just like a butterfly.

The project was 6 months of collaborative learning between the skills brought by Norwegian firm TYIN Tegnestue - who have retired since 2019 (TYIN, 2019) - and local construction techniques, the most prominent being bamboo weaving. The use of timber for the main structure and the familiarity of the weaving technique fosters a sense of comfort, both being natural materials and everyday sights for the children, so they can feel safe and in a place to call home. The inclusion of the local Karen community in its construction allows them to feel their input is nurturing the young generation who've lost their families. Whilst this is not a recent project (these were completed in 2009), it presents the opportunities available to bring back the joy to those displaced and often forgotten children (Divisare, 2014) (Saieh, 2014).

Both of these examples serve as precedents for similar projects in the future. They attempt to encourage healing, serenity, and fun. Not all orphanages are great, but children are strong and resilient. Naturally it all depends on the individual, yet it is a fact universally accepted that the bonds forged in the toughest of scenarios are those that are unbreakable.

There is hope, then, for all the little ones who have experienced loss, whose families and friends fade into memory.

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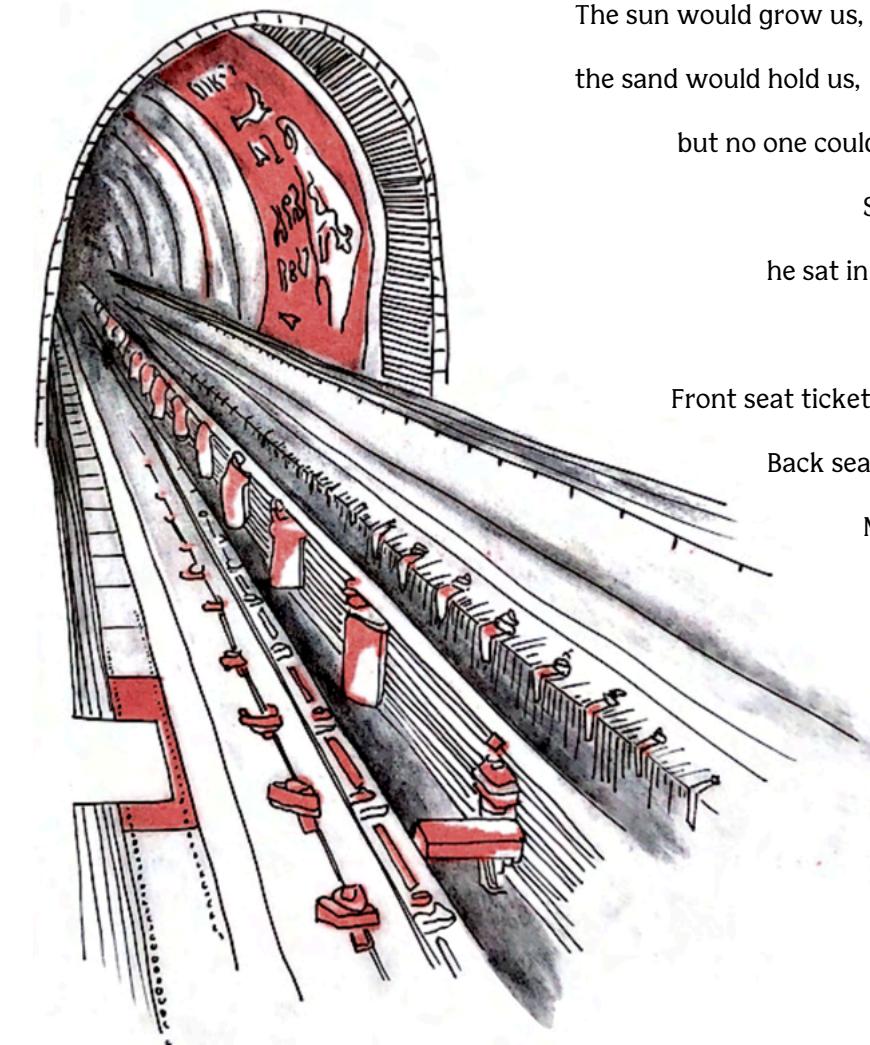
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# TRACKS

By Abi Webster



My brother comes home  
to dark tables  
to call for us to join him

The sun would grow us,  
the sand would hold us,  
but no one could walk the tracks.

So no one did and  
he sat in the empty theatre

Front seat tickets sold to wanderers  
Back seats kept for worriers.  
Middle rows all for him  
and me

# FROM BLOODSHED TO PRESENT ECHOES

## THE LINGERING SPECTRE OF 'KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON'

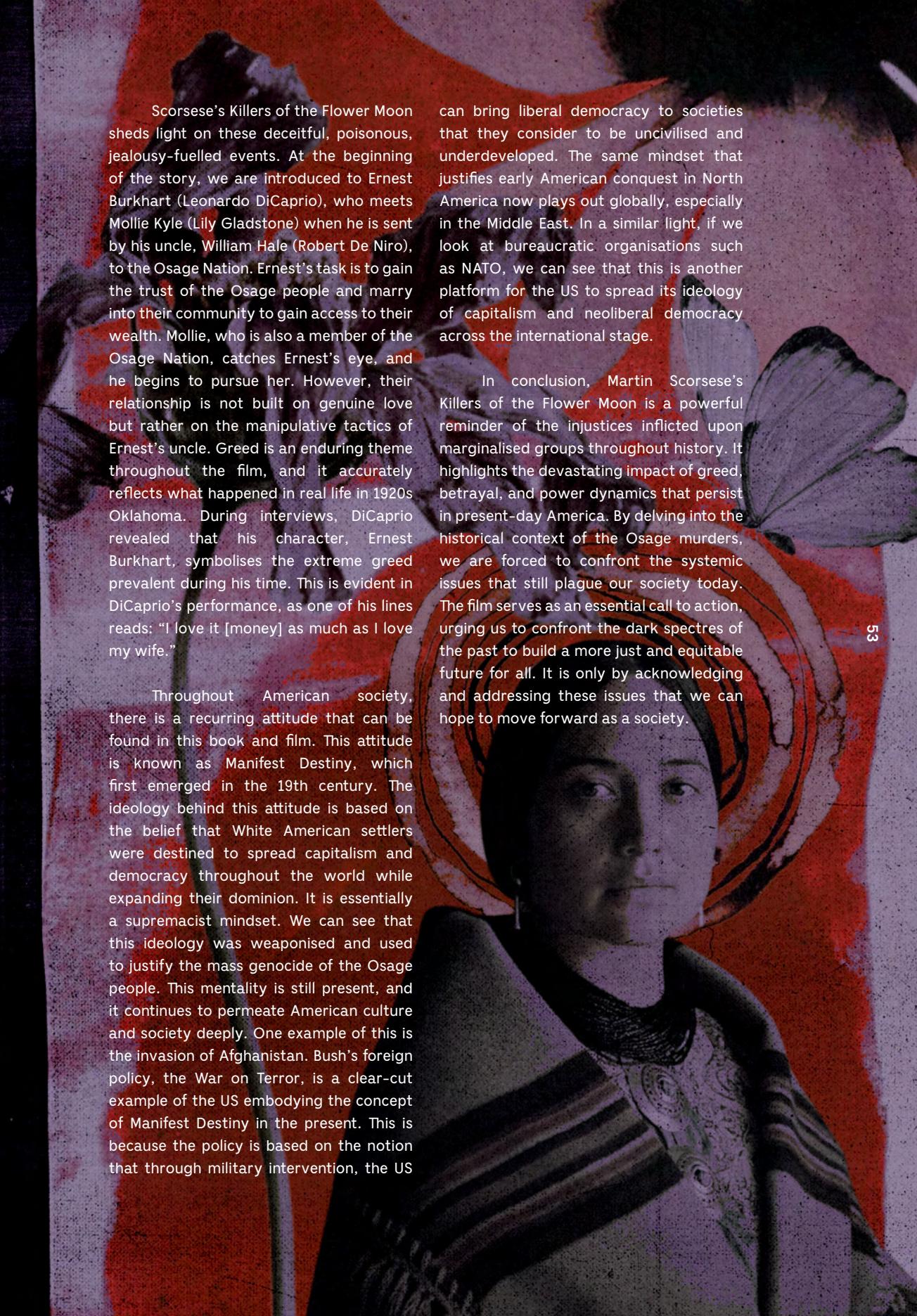
Words by  
**Angelica Reynes**

Martin Scorsese's film, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, takes us on a cinematic journey exploring the depths of the historical atrocity of the 1920s Osage murders, also referred to as The Reign of Terror. The Osage Nation commonly used this term to describe the murders that took place in their community. Both the film and David Grann's 2017 non-fiction book, on which it is based, focus on critical themes such as greed, betrayal, and money. Scorsese's powerful adaptation serves as a stark and moving reminder of the countless injustices inflicted upon marginalised groups throughout history. Its unflinching portrayal of these injustices demands our attention and compels us to confront the systemic issues that continue to plague our society today.

To fully understand the findings and interpretations, it is essential to consider the historical circumstances surrounding the Osage killings. The Osage Nation became immensely wealthy after oil was discovered beneath its reservation in the 1890s, amounting to around \$400 million

Graphics by  
**Author**

in modern-day currency. This wealth eventually transformed the Osage's lives, making them the "richest nation on earth" (Blakemore, 2023). However, the political and economic elite of the time considered Native Americans to be naive. The US government viewed Indian tribes as "dependent nations in need of federal protection." Although laws were implemented to "protect" the Osage people, they were never intended to empower them. Of course, with all colonial powers throughout history, their "protection" is often a pretext for continuing occupation. For example, in 1887, the Dawes Act was introduced to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream society by encouraging them to participate in farming and agriculture. However, this divided tribal lands into individual plots, leading to several tribes losing their lands. Those who agreed to the land division were allowed to become US citizens. As a result, the US government took more than 90 million acres of tribal land from the Osage people and sold it to non-native citizens.

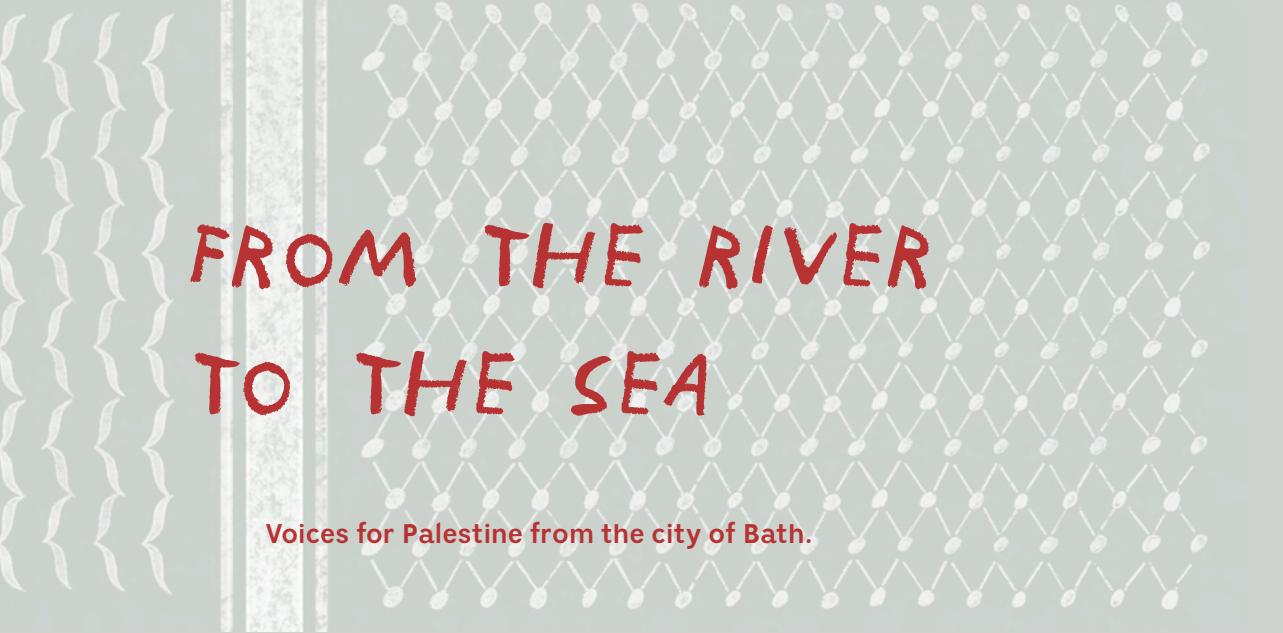


Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon* sheds light on these deceitful, poisonous, jealousy-fuelled events. At the beginning of the story, we are introduced to Ernest Burkhart (Leonardo DiCaprio), who meets Mollie Kyle (Lily Gladstone) when he is sent by his uncle, William Hale (Robert De Niro), to the Osage Nation. Ernest's task is to gain the trust of the Osage people and marry into their community to gain access to their wealth. Mollie, who is also a member of the Osage Nation, catches Ernest's eye, and he begins to pursue her. However, their relationship is not built on genuine love but rather on the manipulative tactics of Ernest's uncle. Greed is an enduring theme throughout the film, and it accurately reflects what happened in real life in 1920s Oklahoma. During interviews, DiCaprio revealed that his character, Ernest Burkhart, symbolises the extreme greed prevalent during his time. This is evident in DiCaprio's performance, as one of his lines reads: "I love it [money] as much as I love my wife."

Throughout American society, there is a recurring attitude that can be found in this book and film. This attitude is known as Manifest Destiny, which first emerged in the 19th century. The ideology behind this attitude is based on the belief that White American settlers were destined to spread capitalism and democracy throughout the world while expanding their dominion. It is essentially a supremacist mindset. We can see that this ideology was weaponised and used to justify the mass genocide of the Osage people. This mentality is still present, and it continues to permeate American culture and society deeply. One example of this is the invasion of Afghanistan. Bush's foreign policy, the War on Terror, is a clear-cut example of the US embodying the concept of Manifest Destiny in the present. This is because the policy is based on the notion that through military intervention, the US

can bring liberal democracy to societies that they consider to be uncivilised and underdeveloped. The same mindset that justifies early American conquest in North America now plays out globally, especially in the Middle East. In a similar light, if we look at bureaucratic organisations such as NATO, we can see that this is another platform for the US to spread its ideology of capitalism and neoliberal democracy across the international stage.

In conclusion, Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon* is a powerful reminder of the injustices inflicted upon marginalised groups throughout history. It highlights the devastating impact of greed, betrayal, and power dynamics that persist in present-day America. By delving into the historical context of the Osage murders, we are forced to confront the systemic issues that still plague our society today. The film serves as an essential call to action, urging us to confront the dark spectres of the past to build a more just and equitable future for all. It is only by acknowledging and addressing these issues that we can hope to move forward as a society.



# FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA

**Voices for Palestine from the city of Bath.**

On the day this was written, it had been 131 days since the ground invasion of Gaza, and 75 years and 9 months since the Israeli colonisation of Palestine, although the settler-colonial project started decades before the events of ethnic cleansing erupted in 1948. The *Nakba* – “catastrophe” – marked the creation of Israel and the devastation of the Palestinian society.

**This destruction was overshadowed by the death-rebirth dialectic – the (re)birth of a Jewish state by way of Zionism after the persecution of the Jewish people and genocide,**

conceived as an act of restitution resolving this dialectic, while Palestinians were excluded and disregarded<sup>1</sup>. The 1917 Balfour Declaration that announced Britain’s aim and intention to establish “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine created the conditions for building a Zionist state, through the British Mandate’s suppression of Palestinians and the facilitation of mass migration of Jewish communities, who were subject to antisemitism and persecution in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

Since the Israel settler-colonial project at the end of the 19th century, Palestine has been subject to violent military occupation and social segregation, with the Palestinians’ cross-territory movement greatly restricted, basic necessities withheld, and the right of return denied (as recognised in the UN resolution 194 in 1948). Today we witness yet again another *Nakba* in real time: harrowing images of the injured and dying, buildings destroyed in a heaping cloud of dust, never-ending descriptions of forced flight amidst endless bombardment – once again the overwhelming and unimaginable destruction of all the worlds in which the Palestinians had lived<sup>3</sup>.

The continuous decimation of Gaza and the West Bank for more than 125 days, and the dispossession of the Palestinian people in and outside Palestine for the last 75 years can be described as

**an ongoing *domicide*: the deliberate destruction of home, or the killing of the city or home**

– not only the reduction of institutions and neighbourhoods to rubble, but also the undermining of Palestinian belonging and identity<sup>4</sup>. In this series from 3719 km away, the illustration of Mahmoud Darwish’s *Earth Presses Against Us* provides a visceral description of the violence and oppression metaphorized as a delimiting burial, paralleling the trauma of Palestinians crushed by the rubble of their own homes from merciless bombardment.

those who stand will Palestine will never be alone: a collection of protest photography, some taken by Feilian Du, shows the support for Palestine from within the UK –

**similarly may this series be a record of collective solidarity from Bath with Palestine.**

8 February 2024 - With special thanks to Bath Campaigns Network

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Anon., <i>Earth Presses Against Us</i>	p. 54
Safa Al-Hamali, Olives	p. 55
F. L. Du & anon., <i>In our thousands, in our millions</i>	p. 56
BCN, <i>Palestinian children's names</i>	p. 57

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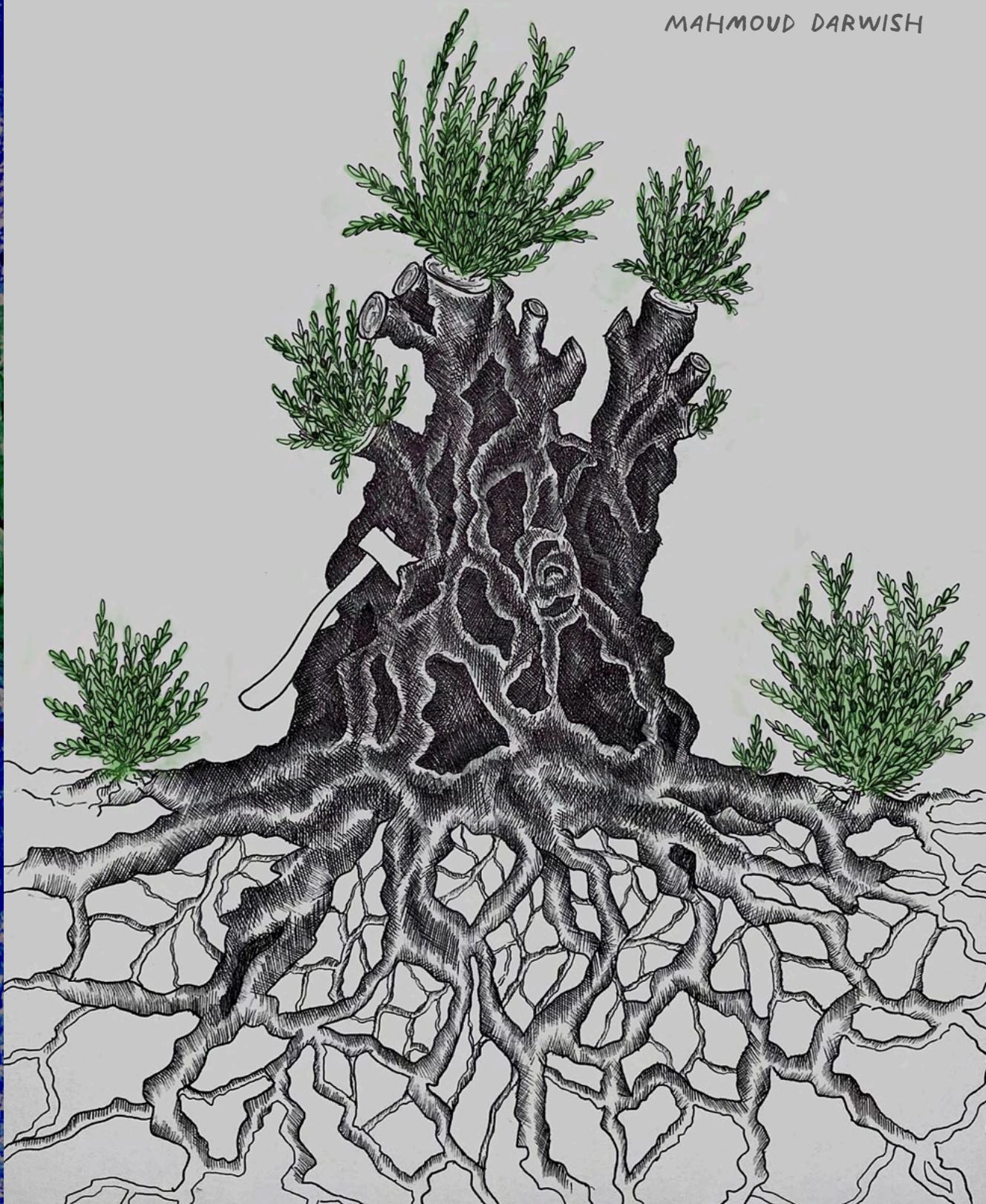
EARTH IS PRESSING AGAINST US,  
TRAPPING US IN THE FINAL PASSAGE  
TO PASS THROUGH, WE PULL OFF  
OUR LIMBS. EARTH IS SQUEEZING  
US. IF ONLY WE WERE ITS WHEAT,  
WE MIGHT DIE AND YET LIVE. IF  
ONLY IT WERE OUR MOTHER SO THAT  
SHE MAY TEMPER US WITH MERCY.  
IF ONLY WE WERE PICTURES OF ROCKS  
HELD IN OUR DREAMS LIKE MIRRORS.  
WE GLIMPSE FACES IN THE FINAL  
BATTLE FOR THE SOUL, OF THOSE  
WHO WILL BE KILLED BY THE LAST  
LIVING AMONG US. WE WILL MOURN  
THEIR CHILDREN'S FEAST. WE SAW THE  
FACES OF THOSE WHO WOULD THROW  
OUR CHILDREN OUT OF THE WINDOWS OF  
THIS LAST SPACE. A STAR TO BURNISH  
OUR MIRRORS. WHERE SHOULD WE GO  
AFTER THE LAST BORDER? WHERE  
SHOULD BIRDS FLY AFTER THE LAST  
SKY?  
WHERE SHOULD PLANTS SLEEP  
AFTER THE LAST BREATH OF AIR?  
WE WRITE OUR NAMES WITH  
CRIMSON MIST! WE END THE  
HYMN WITH OUR FLESH. HERE  
WE WILL DIE. HERE, IN THE  
FINAL PASSAGE. HERE OR  
THERE, OUR BLOOD WILL PLANT  
OLIVE TREES.

Day 59 of October 2023 war on Gaza. "Houses getting bombed and more Palestinians are getting killed minute by minute. More than 7000 person are missing and yesterday alone more than 1000 Palestinian got killed in the sameday." - motaz\_azaiza [Image caption on Instagram].

Poetry: 'Earth Presses against Us' by Mahmoud Darwish from his 1986 anthology, *Fewer Roses*.

IF OLIVE TREES KNEW THE HANDS THAT PLANTED THEM,  
THEIR OIL WOULD BECOME TEARS

MAHMOUD DARWISH

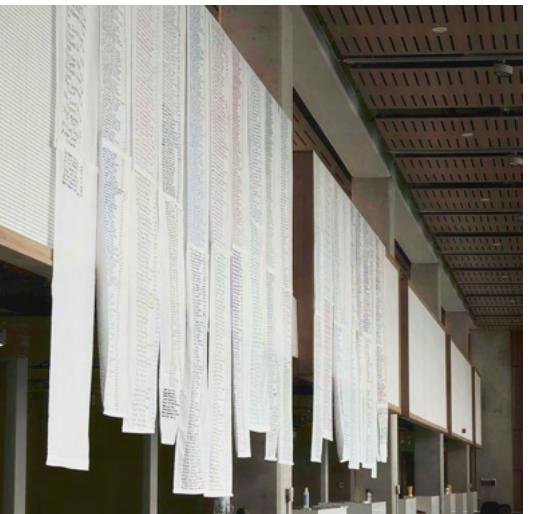




IN OUR THOUSANDS  
IN OUR MILLIONS



Since the colonisation of Palestine, civilians, including children, have been subject to arbitrary imprisonment and death at the hands of Israel. The aggravated assault resulted in even more senseless maiming and killing of Palestinians in Gaza, almost half of which are children. The names of martyred Palestinian children in Gaza since October 2023, published by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, are handwritten on fabric scrolls by community members in Bath, to be displayed across various locations in the city. The photos of scrolls, taken in the University 4ES studio, are only 2590 of more than 10 000 martyred children. Dozens of children share the same surname, as families in Gaza often live together in apartment houses and are wiped off the population registry from bombardment.



# CELEBRATING SPIRITS OF THE PAST

Words by  
**Jack Parmar**



Approaching the end of winter in the Indian calendar, the streets of Ahmedabad become a hive of activity in preparation for Uttarayan - a festival marking the coming of better weather for Gujarat farmers. Over 8 million Ahmedabadis come together to fly kites from rooftops in a spectacle of colour, laughter and wonder. Leading up to Uttarayan, people across the city transform small shops and narrow alleyways into bustling factories of kite production.

Manja - vividly coloured kite strings - are made by stretching cotton threads between wooden posts and coating them with a putty made of rice starch, powdered glass and coloured dye. This process leaves the ground temporarily covered in a glowing ethereal dust, the trace remaining on the ground until the monsoon washes it away, ready for another year.

The marking of nature's rejuvenation and the adaptability of spaces is something we continually explore in Architectural practice, responding to shifts in society that mean buildings can have second, third or fourth lives.



# TO SHAPE BUILDING FUTURES.

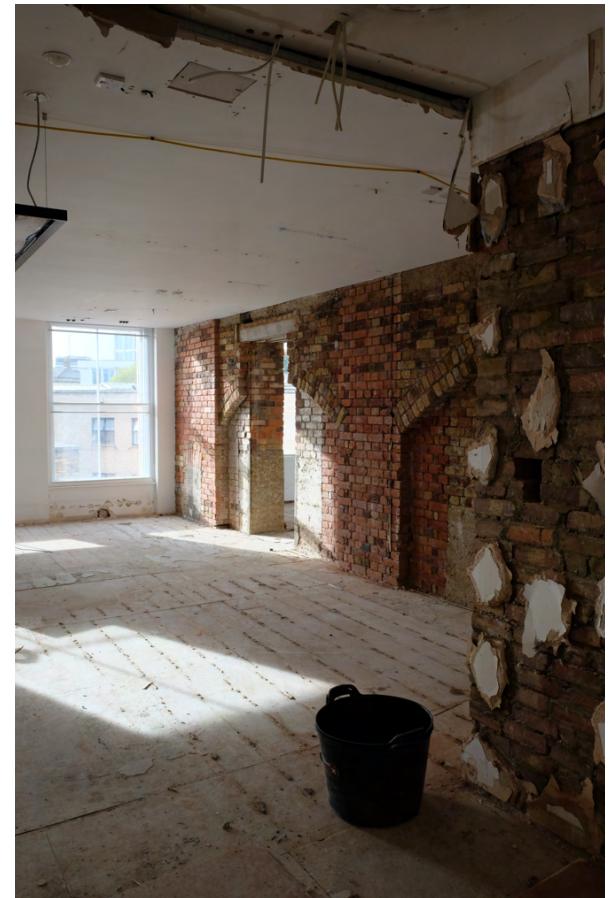
Graphics courtesy of  
**Fathom Architects**

At Fathom, we're currently creating new life for a series of Victorian warehouses in Farringdon. From an industrial storage facility to shops selling bicycles and printer ink, each era has left its mark over time. Rather than wash away traces of the past, we are delicately stripping back and celebrating each of these lives through our design, material choices and even the new name of the building referencing its original architect, Alfred Waterman, in 1896.

In this way, buildings can be seen to have regenerative seasons too by providing flexible, adaptive structures that allow for continuous architectural narratives. As architects, we need to ensure we're creating buildings with long lives ahead of them, and responsibly adapting existing ones to preserve their spirit and extend their lifespan for another season.

In giving The Waterman purpose as a characterful workspace, we've chosen to listen to the spirits of the past and include them in its ongoing story.

Find out more at [fathomarchitects.com](http://fathomarchitects.com)



# FREEZING A SOCIALIST UTOPIA

## THE WRONG WAY

Words By  
Caroline Rodrigues

Graphics By  
Author

In the wake of disaster, what remains? When people are forced to leave their homes, whispers of lives once lived can still be seen, forming ghost towns. For me, one of these examples is the abandoned city of Pripyat, infamous for the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. Radiation was an invisible danger, unseen by the residents of the town until it was too late. Their government failed them.

Pripyat, built in 1970, was once held as one of the great successes of Soviet urban planning. The city, through its architecture, attempted to embody the utopian future of the Soviet Union which would seek to contain the ‘impossible dream of a perfected society and universal happiness’ (Steinberg, M (2021)). Though the architects within the Soviet Union may be opposed to the term, utopia perfectly encapsulates the desired effect of their design — a stark opposition to the harsh realities of the revolution. However, a Western perspective has overtaken our perceptions and created a somewhat morbid fascination with the built reality of Pripyat today. When viewing these sites, we often disregard remnants of a past beyond their darker histories.

Soviet modernism was a rejection of ornamentation, built to emphasize function above all else. The people who lived in these spaces were surrounded by structures that stood out against nature and have often been criticised for alienating residents from their surroundings. But, to the families living there, they were home. Oftentimes, there is a dismissal of the individual communities that existed in the Soviet Union, as these structures have now instead come to serve as reminders of a totalitarian regime. However, their design was not one imagined by political bureaucrats, but by individual citizens.

Maria Protsenko was the lead architect for Pripyat, initially tasked with designing a town that could house over 50,000 residents. The main function of this town was to provide a place for workers within the power plant. She created a city full of facilities to ensure the comfort of its inhabitants, including schools, a local hospital, gardens, and much more. Her design was meticulous, as she oversaw the construction personally and, though it resembled the identity of other cities in the Soviet Union, her design prioritised the end-use of the spaces, creating an open,

yet compact city that allowed citizens to live comfortably.

The modernist architecture of Pripyat reflected the increased speed of construction in this period, directly resulting from technological advancements in construction and competition between the East and West. Moreover, the effect of modernism was an embrace of the practical, ensuring that people's needs were met in the built environment. The possibility of a utopia was within reach on either side, aided by the fierce competition. Overall, modernism promised efficiency in a future overshadowed by the Cold War, with Pripyat being a fast-growing example.

And then Chernobyl's nuclear reactor exploded.

The government's reaction failed Pripyat's residents. The bureaucracy and facade of the regime took precedence, resulting in a delayed evacuation. However, the eventual emptying of Pripyat trapped the growing city in a stage of disaster. But radiation is invisible and the subsequent destruction froze its architecture in place, becoming a haunting reminder of the tragedy, of all the people displaced and the failure of the Soviet Union. The longevity of concrete

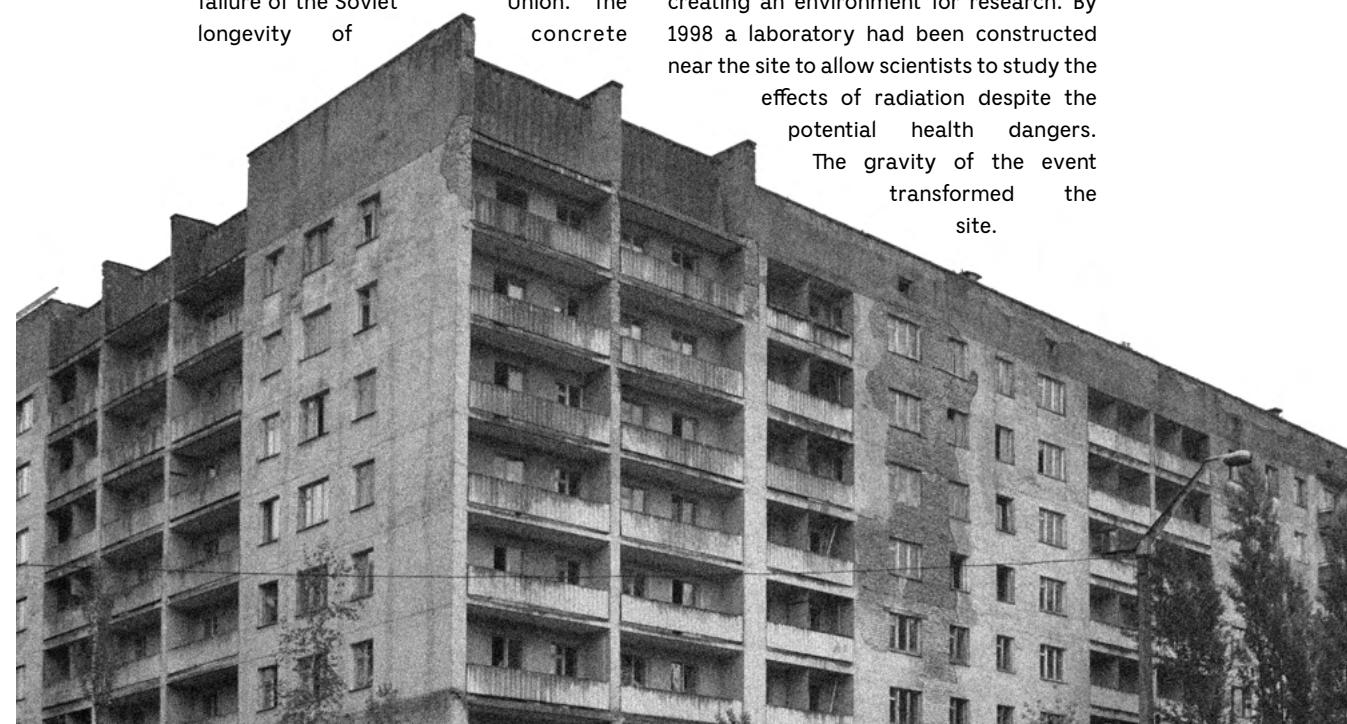
and steel allows the exteriors to fade and grey while the structure remains.

Most importantly, Protsenko oversaw its evacuation. Her knowledge of the site proved integral to the evacuation of the residents. This evacuation lasted only a few days but she stayed until the last bus evacuated but there was no hope for the city.

The existing structures are all fading, slowly being reclaimed by the nature surrounding them. Danger tourism thrives in this environment, allowing a wide audience to glimpse the disintegrating furniture and abandoned items through images online. The longevity of radiation has almost completely overshadowed the city. Pripyat has become a somewhat useful reminder about the dangers of nuclear power, and how it can erase any element of home from a city without having a visible presence. Furthermore, this form of tourism heightens the tragedy of the event, with reckless tourists wandering the frozen city among the ghosts of the residents forced to abandon their homes.

Though the radius of the nuclear fallout remains large, life has persevered, creating an environment for research. By 1998 a laboratory had been constructed near the site to allow scientists to study the effects of radiation despite the potential health dangers.

The gravity of the event transformed the site.



Pripyat was not built by a faceless government, it was designed by individuals who sought to improve their country. Why should its legacy be as a ghost town and a symbol of morbid fascination? To some extent, it is a tragedy, but remnants of hope continue to aid individuals affected by the events of the disaster. However, the narrative of Pripyat's architecture in the context of modernism often fails to appreciate Pripyat's legacy as a vision of utopia, especially in the case of socialist modernism. Can the ghost city exist as both a reminder of the danger of hubris and the passion of creation?

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Image Source:  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pripyat\\_-\\_building\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pripyat_-_building_01.jpg)

# WHAT THE POETS SAY YOU'RE GOING TO FEEL

By  
Abi Webster

I built my soul with the stones of emptiness,  
Shades of bodies and green fields;  
a lordly pleasure-house, an unprofitable space.

Don't call it a failure; call it knowledge:  
that Comparing dust with dust, and earth with earth.  
would make my soul a home

And slowness – then the scaffolds drop  
Affirming it a Soul

The house supports itself

The Palace Of Art  
Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Isaiah 34:11  
A CASTLE-BUILDER'S WORLD.  
CHRISTINA ROSETTI

Ruins of a Great House  
by Derek Walcott

In a Hotel  
BY DAVID CAPLAN  
Church Monuments  
by George Herbert

The Palace against the House 1770  
Emily Dickinson

# A CONCRETE HUT

Design Project by  
MRND

Photography by  
Hugo Santos Silva

The transformation of a tiny private hidden building situated in a rural area of Coimbra, regenerates MRND's research of the main ideas of — open(nings), unfinished, begin(ings)/assembling(s). Focusing on the action of engaging with the sensibilities (and the user's senses/sensibility) of a renovation project in a specific context. Additionally, MRND shares the ambition(s) of the photographer Hugo Santos Silva; regarding the materialization of content and the "investigation of situations that refer to the meaning of place recognized by a prospective body, which produces events and their remembrance, the indelible interfered by sensory mechanics". Borrowing the words of Lawrence Weiner 'As long as it lasts'\* the motif for the research could be a constant reminder that the ephemeral 'nature of art' is not only something to be celebrated but also a 'catalyst' for reflection.

Also, this particular research is something precious, referring to the 'meaning of place' recognized by a 'prospective body', which produces events/experiences and their remembrance. In the context of this investigation, place is not simply a location on the territory or

in space, but a human-made environment that has been built up over time and with specific intentions. The design (project) is a laboratory of ideas, where the main goal is to generate new potentials by confronting different forms of knowledge and interpretative frameworks. MRND tries to establish a dialogue with the context, in order to (re)think the 'meaning of place' and its relations (with architecture and art).

Considering as a motto that: 'Space(s) live through change(s). Space(s) (are able to) transcend/surpass from mere space(less) moments to places through diverse and unique phenomena (or singularities)'. MRND proposes, in this particular situation, to acknowledge, and recognize the existent status. Considering it as a possible tool and a means, as a theme for design, for the intervention to enhance its current space and place. In this case, the proposed limited interventions circumscribed and delineated the existing circumstances (from and of the place). Aiming to act alongside this while combining an interesting search for a 'contemporary' sense of scale and proportion.



Eventually, the end result is (aiming to become) a delicate balance between the past and present, between local culture and contemporary.

The current transformation as is intends to re-interrogate the (previous and current) relationship with space, matter, and its inherent materiality. This particular hut – usually defined as a small, simple, single-story 'house' or shelter – intends to focus on concepts such as matter, and its assemblage on the existing or remaining (unfinished). Functioning as a multipurpose space, its primary functions are as a storage hut / shed with an adjacent small kitchen. A peculiar contemporary design renovation concentrated on the inscription of the existing building. The building unfolds between two diverse places / environments either private or public. On the interior, the intervention consisted of maintaining a concrete floor, (three doors, and two fixed windows) in black steel, all concealed by a thin metal roof (supported by a steel structure).

Preserving (a familiar built) 'memory', the process focused on the inscription of the existing construction.

Embracing its shape, and never considering other form purposes. Initially, the design development/elaboration turned out to be a raw (and maybe naïve) approach to a(n existing) built structure, sited as a calm and composed demeanour. Initially, there was a principal prerequisite and requirement: to change the ceiling and entrances that were degraded/corrupted and revisit the previously chosen materials. The existing structure was conceived in a poor and vernacular way, both materially and in the construction itself. So, it became (always) an unfinished structure, as well as an imbalanced construction, serving its primary functions though. Nevertheless, in some way the (white-washed) structure always managed to have some spatial quality, due to its friction/contact with an existing wall assembled to divide plots, and its natural surrounding environment. So, somehow, without a 'clear intention', a unique 'identity' has revealed to this structure, as a construction that 'inhabits' between assembled parts and/or fragments; and faces itself to diverse environment and atmosphere(s), either private or public. Creating a curious 'spatial friction' and tension between different moments, the existent-built

structure rested static for several years as is, untouched (being degraded as time passed away, and permanently enduring ‘unfinished’).

In order to update its functions and proportions, it was necessary to renovate it. The design process focused on some ambitions to preserve the magnificent state of the site and its intrinsic relation between the ‘atmosphere’ of the place. As a part of the architectural design process, it felt crucial to identify the characteristics that enrolled the structure and its valued moments.

Could the friction between the existing structure and its following architectural interventions enrich the quality/value of the site? Could the materiality (matter) establish a more permanent relation with the existing structure, the landscape, and the ‘atmosphere’ of the site? Could the renunciation of the white, previously used in the existing structure, be substituted with a unique material, such as concrete?

Conceptually, the design aimed to by the construction of a building adjusted



to the existing (structure) – primarily, acquiring a (re)transformation and revival of a (almost ruined) contaminated space into a new revitalized contemporaneous place (although protecting the primary functions). Resulting in a contemporary approach and synthesis by continuing the shape of the existing structure. However, the proportions (not only of the space but also of the openings: doors and windows), after being analysed, were considered inappropriate for newer times. Conserving a clear intuition of co-existence with the surrounding environment, the existing structure was raised by 1/3 of its original dimension/proportion on the facade, in order to fulfil its purpose as a usable space on the inside. Functioning as a continuous method and procedure: the extension consisted in (a low budget/renovation) the use of concrete (both interior and exterior), that created and reconstructed a newer (assembled) element, made by local native workers, in a contemporaneous methodology and approach – possibly to be translated into an updated representation. Also, that intended to obtain a renovation process/progression, either regarding the ‘matter’ and the materiality of the contemporary structure, but also regarding

the transformation (as a merging process) of the existing (not even and degraded) structure to a (contemporary) construction/surface. Furthermore, focusing on its external planes: all the facades maintained the same number of openings, though their dimensions were altered by enhancing the height of the doors and redesigning them narrower (in black steel – matching the previous colour from oil tainted wood). Opposite to the present design decision, the windows became smaller compared to the existing ones, having perfect square proportions, – creating the possibility to reuse the glass panels, precisely cut and inserted into new black steel frames fixed to the facade. The desired approach (that the essence is that) the (newly constructed) element(s) circumscribes and delineates the existing degraded structure, providing a contemporary proportion to the new scale of the built structure. The design proposal did not intend to have a material uniformity, enhancing a continued friction between the existing structure, that would be decreased over time, by the continuous ‘emergence’ of nature and the degradation of the material – hence creating a ‘natural tensioned homogenization’.

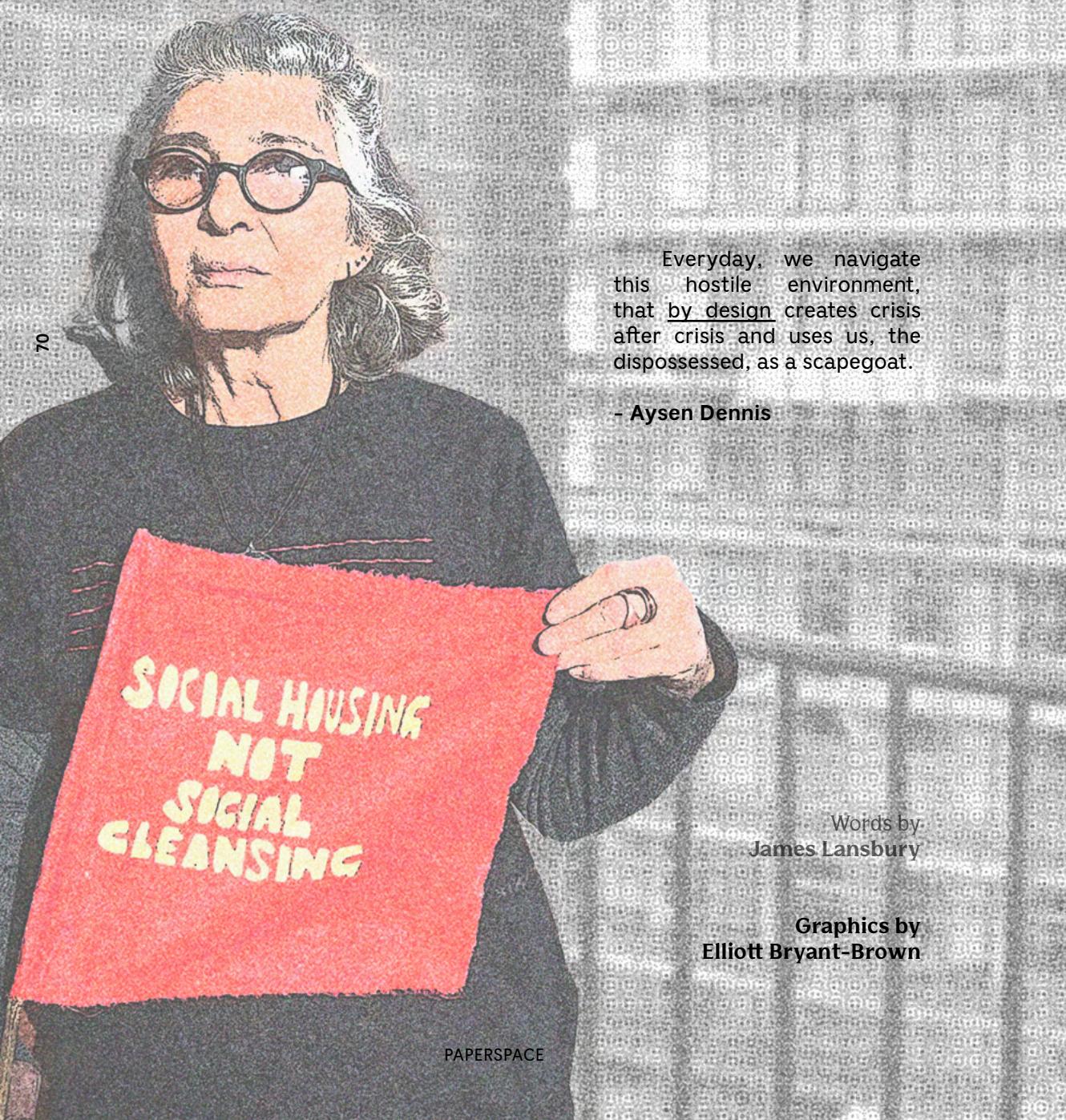
Also, a newer entity symbol will rise; — a ‘catalyst’ — that will somehow establish a new (exaltation of) spatial dimension with the landscape, the site, and its surroundings; intended to establish a relationship between a (stable) shelter construction. The stability that would represent the circumscribed built environment, that aims to be an order to the built chaos. The instability would arise from the natural emergence of nature ‘bending out of shape’ that eventually would embrace and inscribe into the (newly constructed) element(s), circumscribing and delineating the existing degraded structure. The idea of stability and instability would be a constant friction/struggle between the two forces, and

it will be represented by the actual built environment itself. The transformation by homogenization, as a manipulation, would in time create new spatial relationships within the natural environment. From a functional perspective, the concrete hut will remain as a steady outdoor element for personal needs: maintaining (for now) the previous live choreographies of: wood gathering/piling; and storage area for outdoor utensils; among others.

Maintaining its core expressive and meaningful spatial dimension (with the landscape, the site, and its surroundings), the matter becomes an unfinished theme to the built environment, due to its (new cycle of) degradation the concrete material (matter) becomes a ‘(re)assemblage’ element (and itself a process) as an ultimate praise/compliment to the existing structure, its site, its surrounding environment, and its unfinished ‘memory’.

Ultimately, it can be stated that the principal ambition has its origins in the quality of usage and results due to the continuous sensitive (and also naïve) approach of the design project over time(s).

# ARCHITECTURE IN CRISIS : THE AYLESBURY ESTATE



Everyday, we navigate this hostile environment, that by design creates crisis after crisis and uses us, the dispossessed, as a scapegoat.

- Aysen Dennis

Words by  
James Lansbury

Graphics by  
Elliott Bryant-Brown

The Aylesbury Estate represents a crisis being inflicted upon London. Once a vast declaration of the social ambitions of modern architecture, its history illustrates hostility to this ideal, as the urban process intensifies its assault on the qualities of daily life.

Aysen Dennis' apartment, one of countless to face destruction, was one of the last to contain colour and life, and became a focal point of resistance to degradation and demolition. Visiting the apartment in the final moments of her 30 years of life on the estate, with her possessions largely reduced to boxes anticipating relocation, I felt privileged to visit once again, a space host to discussions, art and resistance that will forever be impactful upon me.

Regeneration of the estate, although obstructed and being challenged at the Royal Courts of Justice, has since visiting dispossessed Aysen of her apartment and gradually erased the greater community, with this process characterising the last 24 years with temporality, insecurity and managed decline. Our amiable conversation on a cold autumn afternoon allows understanding of the self-destructive productive forces that render us all spectres to our own built environment.

Being welcomed once again to Aysen's flat, at first I noticed the bare walls and plain ceiling, a canvas celebrating everyday resistance to displacement and dereliction on my last visit. After offering me Turkish tea, chocolates and to smoke marijuana, and only accepting two, our expansive conversation allowed me to understand the vibrancy and culture that the Aylesbury Estate once supported. The echoes of childrens' voices playing in the corridor, the diverse smells, music from each apartment established 'a very colourful, very rich community', with two thirds of residents from a minority ethnic background, one third of who were African and African Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> Next door previously lived a family with twins, with Aysen and her sister regarded as aunties to the children, and on the other side lived a nurse. She saw 'the children grow up in front of our eyes, and then they got married, their own children started visiting here.'

The vibrancy illustrated by Aysen has now been replaced by silence and desolation, love and joy replaced by 'heartbreak', and the community Aysen thought would enrich the rest of her life reduced to atoms, scattered across the capital and beyond. Of the 240 flats in her block, 16 remain occupied, and a similar level of occupancy blights the 2758 homes that made the Aylesbury Estate one of the largest public housing estates in Europe.

'The subject bringing us together is the racism', remarked Aysen about the community living on the estate. Whilst the residents made their differences thrive, the authorities' treatment and media depiction of the Aylesbury Estate was characterised by animosity. Journalists condemned the estate to descriptions of 'Hell's waiting room'<sup>2</sup> and the 'estate from

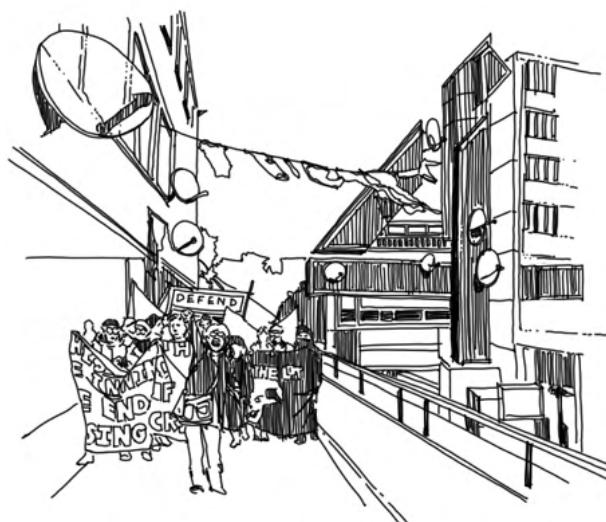
<sup>1</sup> Southwark Council, 2005. Community Impact Statement: Proposed redevelopment of Aylesbury Estate. London: Southwark Council.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, F., 2008. Demolition of the Aylesbury Estate: a new dawn for Hell's waiting room? The Times [Online], 20 October. Available from: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/demolition-of-the-aylesbury-estate-a-new-dawn-for-hells-waiting-room-jglhxhw396s> [Accessed 4th January 2024]

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4 Watt, P., 2020. Territorial Stigmatisation and Poor Housing at a London 'Sink Estate'. Birkbeck Institutional Research [Online], 8(1). p. 25. Available from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/30401/>

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This image was further perpetrated by Channel 4's infamous ident, televised from 2005-14, providing visual testimony of the Aylesbury Estate as a desolate concrete dystopia. Levitating concrete jigsaw pieces shift to represent the Channel 4 logo, and satellite dishes, washing lines, graffiti, discarded shopping trolleys and rubbish bags, absent in real life, illustrate the illusion of tabloid journalists. 'While most people watching wouldn't know the images of decay are from the Aylesbury, the local community certainly does.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1983, Sir Kenneth Newman, Metropolitan Police Commissioner, described London's council estates as 'symbolic locations' where 'unemployed youths – often black youths – congregate' equating them 'to the criminal rookeries of Dickensian London'.<sup>7</sup> inadvertently associating a fictitious conception of estates with racism.

Contempt for the working-class community of the Aylesbury Estate, and the structural racism demonstrated by this, is visible in the managed decline that has increasingly depreciated living conditions on the estate, providing impetus to the arguments of the council in favour of demolition of the estate and redevelopment by private developers.

Solidarity was found in their common position as council tenants, facing the same issues of neglect. In 1990, caretakers of the estate were lost to budget cuts, cleaning staff finished their last shift in 1991,<sup>8</sup> and beyond this the Aylesbury Estate suffered virtually no maintenance, with fire escapes being sealed off, bins not being emptied, and an intermittent loss of hot water, electricity, heating, lift services and internet access.<sup>9</sup> Since 1999 redevelopment and demolition has been asserted as the future

of the Aylesbury Estate, and has been resisted ever since.

### Have you felt a sense of temporality whilst living on the estate?

'Of course, mentally it has immense effect, because I already suffer from mental health. In the back of your mind, you think when is [demolition] going to happen, is it going to happen, and then it is affecting things you wanted to do in your home, in your life. But because we don't have lots of money to do this and that, you have to think carefully. And if they are going to knock it down next year, how can you spend that much money? As the council doesn't do [maintenance], it is up to you.'

This sense of temporality has pervaded the last 24 years of Aysen's life.

Built between 1963 and 1977, the Aylesbury Estate represents the grand ambitions of architecture as a social vision, to provide quality homes for ordinary Londoners. Built upon a fragmented area of the city following bomb damage of the Second World War, the construction retained social housing of the previous generation whilst introducing a colossal modern monument to the aspirations of the welfare state. Architect Hans Peter "Felix" Trenton, familiar with the visionary pre-war social housing of his native Vienna, was responsible for the design combining blocks 'immense in length' with low terraces arranged around verdant courtyards, juxtaposing the previous terraced housing.<sup>10</sup> Every flat had the provision of hot water, at a time when only 30% of residents in the area possessed such a luxury.<sup>11</sup> Aysen describes a certain 'positiveness' she associates with the 'very thoughtful' design, notable in her spacious apartment, that I hope to visit once more and see the light's welcomed entrance through vast, generous windows, and see the view beyond to London's extensive spectacle.

This architecture is under imminent threat of total destruction, with contemporary architecture's immersion in neoliberal economics, minimum space standards and speculation producing escalating spatial injustice. Southwark Council, working alongside the housing association Notting Hill Genesis and developer Barratt London, and assisted by deregulation, are those destroying the Aylesbury Estate, with the creative force of architecture as much of a tool as the bulldozer.

Simon Lea, Associate Director at Levitt Bernstein Architects, articulates this clearly, stating: 'if residents still refer to the [re]development as the Aylesbury Estate as the years progress then 'we've lost''. The article where this quotation can be found further expresses the explicit intention of the redevelopment, describing, somewhat elatedly, that 'the intention is to obliterate entirely all physical and historic reference to the current Aylesbury Estate'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Glendinning, M., Muthesius, S., 1994. Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. New Haven: Yale University Press. p.282.

<sup>11</sup> Romyn, M., 2020. London's Aylesbury Estate: An Oral History of the 'Concrete Jungle'. London: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Ijeh, I., 2012. Aylesbury Estate: Taking back the streets. Building [Online], 3 August. Available from: <https://www.building.co.uk/focus/alesbury-estate-taking-back-the-streets/5040143.article?adredir=1> [Accessed 4th January 2024]

13 Wilson, R., 2023. A little extra help: The Harriet Hardy Extra Care Centre by Mae. Architects' Journal [Online], 15 December. Available from: <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/a-bit-of-extra-help-the-harriet-hardy-extra-care-centre-by-mae> [Accessed 19th February 2024]

14 Harvey, D., 2019. p.160. Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution. 3rd ed. London: Verso. p. 160.

15 Park Central West and East by AHMM won the RIBA London Award 2023, Orchard Gardens by Panter Hudspith Architects won the RIBA London Award 2022 and RIBA National Award 2022, and was shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize 2022. Trafalgar Place by dRMM Architects won the RIBA National Award 2016 and RIBA London Award 2016, and was shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize 2016. All of these projects facilitated the erasure of the Heygate Estate and its community, to be referred to.

Hoxton Press by David Chipperfield Architects can be seen as a celebration of this process, where luxury flats stand displacing the previous social housing. David Chipperfield was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 2023. Is this the architecture we want to celebrate?

Several names also associated with the redevelopment include HTA Design, Allies and Morrison, Morris + Co, Haworth Tompkins, Sergison Bates Architects, Maccreanor Lavington and Mae Architects. With the latter's contribution described as containing a 'whisper of de Chirico and empty Italian piazzas',<sup>13</sup> the practice saw no irony in promoting this description of desolation on their social media, and my experience through this space I could certainly describe as *The Anxious Journey*. While the issue is systemic, 'and the coercive laws of competition force us all, to some degree, to obey the rules of this ruthless and uncaring system',<sup>14</sup> demonstrated above is that architects are active ideologues in this process, and celebrated from the RIBA awards to the Pritzker Prize.<sup>15</sup>

Comments suggesting the 'end of the serviceable life' of the buildings, with only 28 years between the completion of the estate and the decision to demolish it in its entirety, should not be taken seriously. Successful refurbishments of estates built using the same construction technique as the Aylesbury are abundant, however, as Aysen describes, the fact that the land of the estate is in London's 'zone one, next to [Burgess Park]', overrules practical sense, and motivation is instead subjugated by misaligned economic sense.



Our conversation at this moment was briefly interrupted and observed by a squirrel entering through the window, who Aysen explained had been fed monkey nuts for the past month. Quite a surprise on the eighth floor, and one of the last tenants remaining alongside Aysen.

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Along with her sister, Pinar, political involvement for Aysen began at an early age within anarchist underground circles. Growing up on the outskirts of Istanbul, activism would take the two revolutionary sisters travelling around the country, where cheers welcomed them at their destination. In Istanbul, Pinar managed Cafe Cello - opened to raise money to support Kurdish prisoners and their families. During this time Aysen studied filmmaking, and explained: 'I didn't get along with my tutors - I was always questioning certain things'. Exploring 'identity, [...] the gay scene' and 'gay nakedness' within a socially conservative 1970s Türkiye,

creatively and politically Aysen has always shown aversion to authority. The country in this period was beset by political violence, however the 1980 coup d'état led to political repression that demanded for Aysen and her sister to leave Türkiye, and they departed for London.

'I don't know anything else apart from fighting against injustice, because everywhere there is injustice',

remarked Aysen, and so her political life continued, and after moving to the Aylesbury Estate in 1993, this first culminated in a successful campaign against the privatisation and redevelopment of the estate in 2001. Between arriving to the estate and this success, and whilst Aysen was writing her dissertation, Tony Blair made his highly publicised speech the day after election victory declaring 'the poorest people in our country have been forgotten by government' with the Aylesbury Estate as a backdrop, that in hindsight reads more as an assertion to continue this injustice rather than to resolve it. The arrival of New Labour in 1997 led to 'state-led gentrification of British council estates',<sup>16</sup> contributing to the already existing neoliberal urge towards urban renewal since the 1980s.

The 2001 ballot resulted in 73% of residents voting 'NO', with a 75.8% turnout. In contrast to this overwhelming popular mandate, Southwark Council, who in 2005 decided to dismiss the result and advance plans of redevelopment and privatisation regardless, was elected with a 26.2% turnout. To justify this, the council's Head of Housing Regeneration, Nicholas Taylor, stated: 'The message that comes out of Aylesbury is you have to allow enough time for people to understand what's being offered.'<sup>17</sup>

Lord Adonis, a former cabinet minister under New Labour, clearly defined the motives behind the privatisation and demolition of the Aylesbury and other council estates by stating 'there are particularly large concentrations of council-owned land in inner London and this is some of the highest-priced land in the world'.<sup>18</sup> And, as Aysen questions, 'Who is occupying this invaluable land? Working-class, minority ethnic people.'

The urban crisis, therefore, has to be understood as also a democratic crisis. As the formal avenues to appeal to authority failed the residents, resistance turned to direct action.

Between January and April 2015, squatters and housing activists, in a show of solidarity with the remaining residents, occupied empty blocks on the estate and hung banners declaring 'No Demolition' and 'Fight for our City'. Pinar's support was demonstrated in the large pots of food, carried

16 Lees, L., 2014. The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London. *Antipode: a radical journal of geography*, 46(4). pp. 921-947.

17 Clark, P., 2002. A breakdown of trust. *Building* [Online], 18 January. Available from: <https://www.building.co.uk/news/a-breakdown-of-trust/1014845.article?adredir=1> [Accessed 5th January 2024]

18 Milton, A., 2017. Big Capital: Who is London for? London: Penguin Books. p. 67.



by shopping cart, she would cook and deliver to the squatters. For Aysen, she realised that ‘those squatters, those anarchists, are where I belong to’, and her life ‘became more rich’ as a consequence. While activists held film screenings, football matches, workshops and daily public meetings, police officers and contractors from the council vandalised flats to render them uninhabitable to prevent the occupation spreading. In response, residents and activists unceremoniously discarded the rubble outside the council office.

A fence, with hostility understood from the steel spikes at its height, was erected the perimeter of the occupied blocks, and torn down by activists two months later. For Aysen, this was one of the ‘greatest moments, seeing [the] faces’ of those in service of the council at this provocation, opposed to chants of ‘The Aylesbury Estate, repopulate’. The replacement fence, that tormented for two years, meant ‘residents were allowed to enter or leave Alcatraz (as it was then known) only through a single guarded entrance, which [meant] a walk of half a mile for people who live furthest from the gate.’<sup>19</sup> Meritless architecture, where access to natural light is evidently less of a concern than for its predecessor, obliterates all physical and historic reference to the once occupied blocks, the intention of the entire redevelopment only partially realised.

The fight subsequently entered the courts, resulting in a 2016 ruling finding the council’s treatment of some residents in breach of both the 2010 Equality Act and European Convention on Human Rights. However, this ruling was not sufficient to stop regeneration, and the struggle continues.

Alongside direct action, repeated again with an occupation in July 2023, the recent history of resistance at the Aylesbury estate was celebrated in the ‘FIGHT4AYLESBURY’ exhibition, in April and May. To document housing struggles and life on the Aylesbury Estate from 1999 to the present, and to remember Pinar who passed away in 2019, the flat was transformed into a monument of direct action.

Leaving the apartment, I found the lift I took arriving to the eighth floor now broken, providing testimony to Aysen’s stories of neglect. Descending the stairwell, I reflected on the vastness of the estate, with my experience reduced to only one of the 2758 apartments condemned.

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Visiting the Aylesbury Estate during the exhibition, the scene I first encountered on the eighth floor was a mass of people extending along the bright corridor, reclaiming an otherwise deserted space, attentively listening to a woman. The urban crisis, being explained, gave some context to the unsettling welded shut entrances to apartments where Aysen’s neighbours once lived. I soon learnt that this figure was Anna Milton, reading from her book *Big Capital*, crucial to understand the Aylesbury Estate not in isolation, but part of a greater process afflicting London and beyond,

<sup>19</sup> Milton, A., 2017. *Big Capital: Who is London for?* London: Penguin Books.

p. 57.

seen from ‘the failure of the democratic process’ (47), to the global influences reconfiguring the country.

The use of property purely for profit and no longer for social good (xii-xiii) characterises modern London, where ‘privatisation, deregulation and property speculation are now the dominant approaches’ (xv). The result is that ‘the ‘exchange value’ of housing in London, and many other parts of the UK, has entirely broken the connection with its ‘use value’ (7), and the free market has supremacy over the genuine needs of society.



Deregulation enables ‘global investment’ to have precedent over ‘local investment’ and ‘councils, working in partnership with developers, identify and earmark parts of the city for large scale schemes and then tout them to the audience of global investors’ (16). This is the process witnessed at the Aylesbury, with the accordance between developers and councillors even more apparent considering the former leader of Southwark Council’s defection to become a lobbyist for developers, and 20% of Southwark’s councillors working in the same career.<sup>20</sup> ‘The politics of space is replacing the traditional politics of class’, explained by our ‘property-based economy where the income from rent far exceeds economic growth and wages’ (111), and the Aylesbury represents one of the most violent extremes of this absence of democracy in spatial politics.

Central government has facilitated this dismantling of spatial democracy, removing ‘any mechanism to get developers to share the massive profits they make with local communities’ (39), and the brutal crusade against social housing since Thatcher’s bourgeois political revolution demonstrates the class power of capital exercised in the built environment, at the expense of working class standards of living. One adherent of this ideology is David Cameron, former Prime Minister who as of 2024 has reared his head once more in government, who stated ‘the bulldozing of sink estates’ was at the centre of his vision for Britain, and ‘that together we can tear down anything that stands in our way’ (66). When Aysen first arrived in London, 42% of Britons lived in social housing, but neoliberalism’s ascendancy has reduced that to under 8%.<sup>21</sup> After meeting Aysen through a network of housing activists campaigning across the United Kingdom, to see the Aylesbury Estate as an isolated incident

<sup>20</sup> 35% Campaign, 2022. Southwark Council’s Revolving Doors [Online]. Available from: <https://www.35percent.org/revolving-doors/> [Accessed 5th January 2024]

<sup>21</sup> Harris, J., 2016. The End of Council Housing. *The Guardian* [Online], 4 January. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/04/end-of-council-housing-bill-secure-tenancies-pay-to-stay> [Accessed 5th January 2024]

would be unjust to the countless affected by the greatest extremes of the urban crisis, and how this absence of spatial democracy devastates our entire society.

As I drifted through the streets of South London after leaving Aysen, equipped with an umbrella that she insisted I did not leave without, after some time I found myself wandering through Elephant Park, where the Heygate Estate once stood.

22 Milton, A., 2017. Big Capital: Who is London for? London: Penguin Books. p. 35.

23 Harris, K., 2022. Managed Decline: The Taking of Robin Hood Gardens [Online]. Available from: <https://kimberleyharris.co.uk/managed-decline> [Accessed 5th January 2024]

24 Milton, A., 2017. Big Capital: Who is London for? London: Penguin Books. p. 48.

25 Ibid. 33.

26 Gabu Heindl, In: Rumpfhuber, A., 2016. Story of cities #18: Vienna's 'wild settlers' kickstart a social housing revolution. The Guardian [Online], 8 April. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/08/story-cities-18-vienna-austria-co-operative-self-build-settlers-social-housing-revolution> [Accessed 5th January 2024]

27 Harvey, D., 2019. p.160. Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution. 3rd ed. London: Verso. p. 25.

28 Ibid., p.53.

29 Ibid. p.4.

To understand the fundamental economic question, of how do we define our relationships between one another, as also an architectural question, is crucial in demands of spatial justice. The basis of capitalism is

Of the 1024 residents decanted from the Heygate under the promise of a 'right to return' to Southwark only 0.08% have been able to.<sup>23</sup> The local has been expelled by the global, as 100% of the apartments in the first phase were sold to foreign investors.<sup>24</sup> An 'Orwellian definition of 'affordable',<sup>25</sup> as 80% of market rent, masks the catastrophic loss of social housing at the Heygate, as propaganda pervades every aspect of regeneration projects. The devoid and sterile landscape has obliterated entirely all physical and historic reference to the predominantly minority ethnic, working class council estate that once occupied the land, with diversity and community projected as a spectacle from advertising boards facing the pseudo-public space owned by the developer Lendlease.

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Our increasingly unlivable cities reduce us to spectres of our own context. The Aylesbury Estate, Aysen's apartment, and the fate of the Heygate are emblematic of the urban crisis characterising London, where our built environment is impoverished by financial wealth.

'There has to be a self-confident political strategy of redistributing common wealth – including the wealth of space and city-access – to all of society'<sup>26</sup>

This must be a demand voiced by architects, as design is complicit in the 'senseless creative destruction'<sup>27</sup> of cities and assault on the environment and well-being of all.<sup>28</sup> Architecture as simply a vessel for speculation, privatisation and financialisation is capitulation of design, and resistance can be found in the amplification of communities, of existing social relationships, and of genuine desires. As Aysen stated bluntly, 'Architects have to choose which side they are on.'

the separation of people from land, and to fight for the unalienated 'right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire'<sup>29</sup> is to arrive at a politics of the urban that will make sense. The immense environmental damage produced by demolition, dismissed in the uninhibited pursuit of capitalist urbanisation, must also be emphasised as a consequence of this process.

The last time I spoke to Aysen was outside the Royal Courts of Justice, in good spirits and once again in court against her greatest adversary, the corrupted benefactor, Southwark Council. Demonstrating more creativity than any realisation or proposal for the regeneration, she handed out T-shirts with 'Stop Social Cleansing' printed on them, mimicking the logo of Southwark Council.

The fate of the Aylesbury is now in the interpretation of law concerning planning permission, and justice has already been denied for the residents, as it has been for the residents of the Heygate. Architecture's crisis is an urban crisis, itself an intersection of the absence of spatial justice and democracy in our built environment, and if architecture cannot amplify it will continue to be an abstraction reserved for creative destruction. \*

Aysen Won! The planning permission for the redevelopment was ruled unlawful. A huge setback for Southwark Council & Notting Hill Genesis! The struggle continues, and it cannot end until total victory for the residents of the Aylesbury Estate.

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