

Utopia : Dystopia

774

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Contents

	Page
Preface	1
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Utopia	3
Chapter 2 House as a Home	5
Chapter 3 Grenfell	6
Chapter 4 A Response	9
Chapter 5 The Intention	13
Conclusion	17
Appendices	
List of Images	
Bibliography	

Preface

During this work I have been looking at the disrespect for the populace, the search for an imagined utopia and how this can lead to the degradation of the self respect of a swathe of the poorer classes. The greed of those who hold the purse strings not being held in check, how this can ultimately lead to death.

Introduction

In 'The Story of Utopias' Lewis Mumford opens by suggesting that "The word Utopia stands in common usage for the ultimate in human folly or human hope". (Mumford, 2001, p1). Our lives have plenty of folly and are certainly in need of hope. As a society we strive to improve our lot, to create a better way of living for ourselves and others. Oscar Wilde in *The Soul of Man* states:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias. (Wilde, 1900, p40).

So much of our towns and cities were once part of someone's image of utopia, they fought for and developed sewage systems, fresh water, inside bathrooms so many things that today we take for granted. Utopia is not fixed, it is constantly moving. As soon as something is achieved it is no longer utopian, the future is always out of reach, what we have now, however new, is imperfect. In our rush to gain the new thing we lose our care and cut corners so utopia fails us and we search for the new thing.

With this vision of a future we explore new possibilities. In the post world war 2 period local authorities and their architects were striving to provide what they believed to be a utopian dream of social housing. Following on from Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation architects were designing estates of brutalist concrete with many floors of flats and maisonettes, 'streets in the sky' as conceived by Alison and Peter Smithson. Nonetheless utopia as a term is misleading, Utopia comes from the Greek meaning No Place, used by Thomas More as the title of his book published in 1516. If you look in a dictionary today the definition you will find is 'utopia : an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect' (Stevenson 2010).

So many housing schemes that set out to be utopian have come to be described as 'dystopian : an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad' (Stevenson 2010).

Looking at the work of other artists helps to consider and reflect on what it is I am doing. I shall discuss some of the people whose work I have been regarding.

Silvia De Marchi creates beautiful layered works using primarily paper. With the building of layers she transforms a familiar material into something so delicate and fragile. The partially revealed underlayers show and don't show what is hiding beneath, encouraging imagination and speculation. She works between the seen and not seen in relation to the natural world. The use of a very limited colour palette appeals to my own aesthetic while also focussing the eye on the structure. I find the layers with their slightly distressed edges intriguing, the depth of texture and promise of more.

Ted Larsen's work could be described as architectural wall mounted sculptures. His compositions have a beautiful serenity, a pared back minimalism. Expressing as his influence American minimalist and High Art he creates restrained tactile sculptures that protrude from the wall at disjointed angles. The works are full of tension and expectation with a slight distressing of the surfaces. Using recycled materials the faces extend with what I see as a reference to newly designed tower

blocks. The works also refer back through time, their surfaces coloured using a palette reminiscent of old cars and diner tables.

Marte Johnsen, who like Larsen has exhibited at the Fold Gallery in London, is an artist from Oslo. For her PHD she looked at the production of titanium in Norway, relating to her ceramic sculpture work. In some ways her work initially looks very similar to the textures I am trying to create. Differences lie in her using a manufactured metal mesh as a reinforcing structure and at the moment, the scale of her individual pieces. Johnsen is also covering her pieces with a titanium dioxide glaze, part of her research looking at whiteness and how it has such a far reaching influence in our everyday world.

Chapter 1 Utopia

Building the utopian tower blocks of post war Britain was in part a dawning of a new modern age to dispel the shadow of war, a 'Brave New World'. Aesthetically very different from the quaint cottage or the Victorian terraces that have gone before. A large dominant dramatic building breaking the skyline, clean lines, no superfluous decoration - no nonsense. Architects 'could realise their secret dream of not simply glorified masons, but sculptors of space and designers of utopian communities (Harrison 1983 p206), what Mumford describes as a utopia of reconstruction, though he is referring to the inter-war years, it is still relevant post WW2.

Through the slum clearance programme followed by the building of new futuristic housing, part of the initial aim was to give the people of the UK hope for the future, to provide them with safe clean housing suitable for the 20th century. Many schemes were instigated in numerous cities across the UK using a variety of building methods. One that was proven to be cheap and fast was LPS, a precast concrete panel system which in the long run turned out to be a false economy. (Appendix 1)

Housing estates in the 1970's and 1980's suffered greatly due to a lack of care and maintenance, budgets were tight and bureaucracy difficult to navigate. This led to many estates looking tired and dirty with broken lifts and windows. Harrison (1983 p210) outlines the issues "poor design, bad management, worker-management conflicts in refuse and repair services, seven lean years of public spending restraint, community and family collapse". Even though this was written in 1983 all these issues are still relevant today. We have had to deal with austerity, budget cuts, low wages and a soaring housing market. The estates are struggling with what Andersen (2015 p80) refers to as the 'by-products that undermine utopias, even unbuilt ones; the pissed-in dysfunctional lifts, the anti-social proximity'.

Rundown estates have been used in films which only leads to enhancing their dystopian image. Particularly renowned is *A Clockwork Orange* filmed on the Thamesmead Estate around 1970. The depressed environment and lack of care meant that some "skyscrapers could easily become vertical prisons and the wide open spaces between them wildernesses" (Anderson 2015 p78). Many architects over time have sought to build a housing utopia, a housing scheme that will solve the problems of homes for the people.

You could say that those who aimed to construct a utopia had the best of intentions and it was all messed up by those who cut corners in the construction, who didn't follow the rules. Followed by those who didn't take care of the buildings having little or no respect for the occupants of them.

Among those that are listed, is Trellick tower in London W10 lived in by both owner occupiers, social and council tenants, flats being sold on the open market in the region of £700,000 for a 2 bedroom apartment. Trellick tower was designed by the superstar architect Erno Goldfinger in 1972 as council housing and was listed in 1998.

When an architect first envisages a building they are looking at an empty space, using walls and floors they divide up that space and apportion the light to each section creating separate cubes stacked on top of each other. Creating a compartment system which is meant to have inbuilt safety.

Chapter 2 House as a Home

It must be remembered that buildings are more than just boxes to contain people, they are homes that residents fill with their personality, their emotional being. “And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle” (Bachelard 1994 p7)

As people we become very attached to our homes they become an extension of ourselves, this is well illustrated by the numerous home design programmes and magazines encouraging us to put-our-stamp on our home. The fact that we become so attached can cause problems for those who decide that an area requires regeneration. In September 2022 I visited the Acton Gardens Estate as part of an Open City guided tour. The representatives of L&Q and Countryside talked in length about all the great work they were doing, the time (and money) invested, though they could not be meaningfully drawn on maintenance plans or the problems of gentrification. I went to take photographs afterwards and met a woman, let's call her Bea, who invited me into her flat. She was living in a building that looked uninhabited, Ludlow Court, a 1970's red brick building with a leak on the corridor by the lift. Bea has a two bedroomed maisonette where she lives with her son, she has lived on the estate for 43 years. They have offered her a one bedroom open plan flat, certainly not like for like. In looking at the L&Q Acton Gardens brochure none of the flats offer a separate kitchen and living room so Bea is not going to be content with whatever they offer her. The council made the residents give up their garages last May but they are now renting them out to people who do not live on the estate. There is no easy solution. there are communication issues between parties involved. Emotions of residents. If the blocks had been properly maintained would the rebuilding have had to happen? Bea said she didn't want to move, she just wanted a balcony. I am not sure how easy it would be to retrofit balconies.

Complications arise with people who have exercised their right to buy and so are offered what is considered the market rate but then can't afford to buy an equivalent property in the same area. In the next door block is one remaining family in residence. Yacob Woldehiwot lives here with his wife and two children, they bought their one bedroom flat via right-to-buy, it has been valued by the council at £285,000 (Haseldine 2022). The new one bedroom flats being built on the estate cost upwards of £380,000 unless people choose shared ownership. Mr Woldehiwot is still in the process of pursuing his case with the council, trying to fight a Compulsory Purchase Order (Haseldine 2022).

Chapter 3 Grenfell

Merely a mile away from the previously mentioned Trelick tower stands the remains of Grenfell Tower, destroyed by fire on the night of June 14th 2017, taking the lives of 72 people (Appendix 2). It stands in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, one of the wealthiest boroughs in the UK.

Grenfell Tower was part of the Lancaster West estate built during the 1970s. The estate was a utopian project, built on slum cleared land to provide decent homes, cleaner, better and more spacious. The whole project was designed to Parker Morris standards with a density of 137 people per acre. The Parker Morris report "Homes For Today and Tomorrow" was a comprehensive study of housing published in 1961 that looked at all aspects of housing in England and Wales and created a book of guidelines for future use (Morris 1961). Disappointingly these guidelines overtime became used as maximum measures and then became disregarded altogether. Britain has the unenviable reputation of building the smallest houses in Europe, according to a study from Cambridge University in 2014 (Morgan 2014).

The residents of this tower have been let down in many ways starting long before the fire itself. They had one stair well, no sprinklers, no universal fire alarm, erratic

lifts, all encased in flammable cladding. If you look at the reports from the Grenfell Tower inquiry you can read about the appalling behaviour of the cladding manufacturers who are still trying to dodge any responsibility for what happened that night. As the fire burnt so plastics bubbled and melted, metals twisted and fractured, leaving a building blackened, crazed, and distorted.



It is important to talk specifically about the Grenfell Tower fire as the work relates most closely to that. The refurbishment of Grenfell Tower was completed in May 2016. The intentions included a higher level of thermal insulation and aesthetic improvements. Though, as has been made clear during the progress of the inquiry, the work was completed without due care and attention to those living in the tower. As Apps explains (2022 p22) a 'rainscreen' cladding system was installed using both Celotex and Kingspan cladding, both flammable plastics that then release thick, black, toxic smoke. This smoke was able to enter hallways and stairwells which caused people to become trapped in their flats. Stairs are a very

important part of the whole picture. Kate Youde in The Architects Journal (January 2022) highlighted this important point around the risks of building high rise housing with just a single flight of stairs. But architects are still pushing ahead with this as it is within building regulations for England and Wales. “A research study comparing 30 building codes found that only England, Wales and South Korea do not have such a requirement.” (Apps 2022). The new blocks due to be built on the Ledbury Estate in Southwark replacing dangerous large panel system blocks (Appendix 2) are some of those designed with only one staircase (Karakusevic 2022), it can only be presumed that this stubbornness is due to respecting money over lives.

Grenfell is not the only serious tower block fire experienced in the UK in recent years. The Lakanal House fire on July 9th 2009 killed 6 people (Barling 2017), it should have raised a warning flag for construction and fire services alike. Karl Barling then a BBC journalist contacted Southwark Council who finally pledged:

Now, finally to great fanfare Southwark Council has announced that all its high rise blocks are to undergo full technical inspections for fire safety costing £192,000. They've set aside a whopping £19m to cover costs of likely "safety works". (Barling 2010)

It would reasonably be expected that Southwark Council would then get on with the job with the utmost expediency. However this was not the case. Following Grenfell, Southwark finally took notice of the tenants of the Ledbury Estate who had been complaining of cracks in their blocks between flats. What is vital about this is the stay put policy of the fire brigade and how this relates to safe compartmentation of flats.

The fundamental principle underpinning the safety of residents in high-rise blocks is that each living unit can contain fire for **60 minutes**. This compartmentation is designed into tall buildings, but can be easily

compromised through maintenance and refurbishments of older housing stock. (Barling 2017)

The danger of external cladding on high rise buildings was already known, the following is from a report after the fire at Garnock Court in Ayrshire on June 11th 1999.

We believe that all external cladding systems should be required either to be entirely non-combustible, or to be proven through full-scale testing not to pose an unacceptable level of risk in terms of fire spread. (Parliamentary Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee 2000)

Chapter 4 A Response

The reading of the matter of fact Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report alongside writings with so much emotional charge has been a difficult process, but one that has fed directly back into my work. I feel that the cold disregard for people's lives in favour of financial reward is a trait that highlights the worst of the human character.

The Grenfell Tower fire symbolises the ongoing issues in social housing in England and Wales. In Wales during 2021 there were 7 fires in high rise housing (Davey 2022) in England there were 767 equivalent fires (Home Office 2022) it shows that during 2021 there were 774 fires in high rise housing across England and Wales, this is all high rise housing, not just social housing. This is important as the cladding debacle affects social tenants, private tenants, right-to-buy leaseholders, shared ownership tenants, as well as those who bought on the open market. During the course of the Grenfell Tower inquiry, which is not due to publish its final report until autumn 2023, many witnesses have tried to dodge any responsibility.

Using the fire data I thought of creating 774 sculptures that could stand as a group but also stand alone. The impact of the volume of pieces to create one

coherent whole has turned out to be well worth the effort. I began by hand weaving stainless steel to create a metal cloth from which to form the sculptures. I have used my hand woven stainless steel not just as a means of strengthening my ceramic but as an integral part of the work. It contributes strongly to the aesthetic and references the steel structures used in high rise building. In the finished sculptures the woven steel is visible and not visible, it is distorted by the kiln. Just as the steel structure of Grenfell tower was partially revealed and left twisted and distorted by the fire.

Weaving with 304 stainless steel wire is a clean process, a widely used versatile mix of chromium and nickel. I needed to protect my loom, where the wire came in contact with the wood I had to wrap the wood with cloth to prevent the wire from digging in and damaging the loom. It had to be safely clad. Dipping the woven work into porcelain and semi porcelain slip coated the wire, so long as the slip was not too thin, it clung to the wire, wrapping it to protect it from the heat. This represents the concrete of so many large panel system buildings that have



cracked and split, ruining the compartmentation making them much more vulnerable to fire.

As the slip dries it forms a skin on the woven forms, it cracks and splits, creating fissures. These cracks can be seen to represent the cracks found in so many poorly built and maintained housing blocks. So I have coated them with a protective layer that does not really protect.

Each piece is then placed in the kiln where they are all beautifully lined up neatly, innocently waiting for the aggression of the fire.

The heat of the kiln causes the wire to become white hot. This heat sears the ceramic to the wire bonding the two materials together. The heat of the kiln can

climb to 1260 degrees centigrade. inside, the buildings have been subjected to this great heat where they have been twisted and distorted and damaged by the fire. There are reports that the temperature around Grenfell Tower itself could have reached 2000 degrees (Maguire 2018). A Cremation oven reaches temperatures of 1000 to 1300 degrees (DFW 2022). In the following days all through the tower teams went through each flat sifting the remains looking for ways to identify people who may have been in there, carried out by the forensic archaeologists of the Disaster Victim Identification Team. They were looking for hip replacements and pacemakers to help identify bodies. The woven grid structure that I have created also represents those sieves and the searching for the people.

When I first started firing the pieces in the kiln I was upset by the fact that after firing many of them no longer stood up, that subjecting them to the heat of the kiln had so distorted them that they had collapsed. I considered them failures and at



one point was calculating a 30% failure rate. I then reconsidered the pieces. Each piece had an inherent beauty. The fact that it could no longer stand was not a failure but actually added to the beauty of the piece and became an important and integral part of the whole installation. By embracing what I had initially considered failed pieces the whole work became stronger with a much deeper meaning.

How much my wire structures distort in the kiln is influenced by many factors. Using a thicker grade of wire would create a firmer structure, ultimately I chose the finer grade for ease of weaving and also for scale.

The fine annealed wire I have chosen to use readily distorts when exposed to the heat of the kiln, how it contorts depends partly on how I have woven it. Whether

my warp tension was even right across the cloth, if I kept the weft tension even in the converse direction. Then also how the cloth has been treated after it has been taken off the loom, how I have manipulated it to create the required form.

The pairing of the blocks back to two, sometimes three walls allows the viewer to see the inside where the core of the building may have fallen away. Showing the vulnerable inside, a view into what may have been someone's home.

As I worked on my final piece for exhibition so my feelings about it and my own interpretations of it ebbed and flowed with what I was reading. The work is still true to its original premise. The marking and representations of failures within social housing in the UK, not just to the inhabitants of Grenfell Tower but to all social housing tenants across the UK. All developments and improvements are too slow, they progress at such a dragging pace due to the lack of enthusiasm for true life changing investment. Only ever as little as they can get away with. A lack of true investment into the future of the population of this country due to greed— leading to the lack of collection of taxes.

As I stood at the loom weaving my preset pattern my mind journeyed through ideas, turning over challenges. The wire is a line, a drawn stroke, but a three dimensional line, a line with form, with depth and body. Construction uses a vast amount of steel to give rigidity and strength to a building.

The wire was tense, waiting to spring, I felt a contest with it. I had to show patience and care, move slowly and with consideration, gentle and measured. Each wire would flex and hold, a fibre of form, such strength concentrated in a single line. But bring those lines together and the embodied strength multiplies.

While passing the shuttle back and forth to interlace the wires and weave the cloth, so I was thinking of how all our lives are interconnected, how we all rely on each other for help and support no matter where we sit in society. The steel has come from deep in the ground, heated and manipulated to create a thin wire.

As the wire was woven so links were formed, as our lives are interwoven with the lives of others. Each shot of the weft holds the warp in place, anchors it in time and space, creating a rigid form. Each warp each weft is related to its neighbour forming a bond, a community of fibres, providing support.

Each piece was then dipped into the slip, into the muddy viscous pool created from the elements of water and earth, the requirements of life. After being subjected to fire the earth cracks, forms fissures, it creates a new beauty, a beauty of delicacy. It now carries a delicate fragility looking as though with the slightest touch it may fall and crumble to dust. A delicate beauty we dare not touch.

Seventy-two sculptures were selected and each was painted with a small red square of enamel, these were flash fired at 820 degrees to create a shiny red glass square. One for each person who died from the Grenfell Tower fire.

Intense and damaging, a short sharp burst. Red heat spots are left on the surface marking centres of extreme heat, concentrated damage. And still it all looks beautiful.

Chapter 5 The Intention

To make something beautiful from something so dreadful can be seen as a very brave endeavour. The intention lies in stirring the emotions, beauty and terror being intrinsically linked. It is hoped that the work on display can convey the fragility of peoples' homes, that homes need care and attention the same as the people who live in them. As a nation we need to look after all our people whatever their situation if we wish to be considered an ethical society. What has influenced me most of all is the event I am trying to encapsulate through this installation. Through the stages of creation I have tried to represent the devastation caused by the fire, portray the textures and destruction that the flames have wrought.



Considering how to display the work I contemplated varying layouts. Possibly spreading across the floor, maybe then with part of the work climbing the walls. Should it be laid out in a confined space like Ai Weiwei's 'Sunflower Seeds' in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern (Tate 2010)? Or on a large plinth like "Archive of the Mind" at Peabody Essex Museum in the US, by the South Korean artist Kimsooja (Cook 2019)? I also considered a series of plinths at varying heights. I used my Work In Progress Symposium on 18/11/22 to discuss these options with my audience, always useful to ask for other points of view. Obviously ideas were as diverse as the number of people there. Considering the room I would be exhibiting in and the architecture of that space I came to the conclusion, with advice, that it would be best to have a large rectangular plinth with curved ends to reflect the windows in the room. This created a beautiful serene installation, a large white plinth centred in a large white room covered in monochrome sculptures.



As the viewer walks into the room those pieces that stand the most squarely are the first that they see, those that have crumpled and fallen take a little more searching out. As you walk down the length of the plinth so the pieces become more damaged and twisted, finally lying flat.

We cannot clad our buildings so they look good without taking full responsibility for any problems this may cause in the future. We cannot brush aside complaints and walk away passing the buck to someone else.

Our political situation in the UK is slipping further from the grasp of the majority of the populace, Digital Media platforms are becoming more invasive and controlling

using technology to track our movements and behaviour not unlike in the book '1984' by George Orwell.

I have been thinking about the work I voted for in Y Lle Celf, 'Tagenni/Chockstones' by Rauni Higson. A basic necessity, a bowl, disrupted, split but cannot be repaired as there are "stones" in the crack, broken, blocking any repair. No matter how beautiful the material in this case sterling silver, when dirt gets in, grit in the gap, repair becomes difficult, signifying the breakdown of systems. Looking at cracks and fissures that form on the surface of what should be a solid base structure, so cracks and fissures in things that ought to be safe and reliable. This work can lead to further structures possibly wall based showing the breakdown of systems and the breakdown of reliability.

I am finding myself looking more often at the city itself, the varying layers of its make up. Not just physically and structurally but also the political layers within a city. Different financial positions and fortunes, the down-at-heel, the homeless versus the mega rich. The way some modern cities have become truly dysfunctional, are we as a society, as a world now so very close to our systems collapsing are we heading towards an apocalyptic incident and so therefore into a post apocalyptic world already portrayed so much in literature and film.

As the world moves on from one catastrophe to the next and the social and political structures across many countries slip and crumble, I look at my work and see how it can represent so much more than the problems in social housing. The multitude of shapes and forms filling a space, crammed together, seeking to break out of their restrictions are people all over the world. As we multiply and spread pushing from one area to another so we push up like a pustule spewing out squished and infected. Some find a way to spread away, vertically searching for clean space. However it is possible that as a species we have pushed our planet too far, we may be on the brink of our extinction. People have been on this planet for thousands of years and for most of that time we have managed a reasonably balanced and co-operative existence. With industrial development we have upset the equilibrium and pushed it too far. Greed drives development, development drives greed. Of all of Pandora's 7 deadly sins greed carries the greatest of

dangers as the ripples it sends out are the most far reaching. Its tentacles spread and entwine themselves into all the crevices of life. They are quick to entice people, even those who may consider themselves immune.

Conclusion

The realisation of this work has challenged me emotionally during the entire time spent in the studio. I have no recognisable direct personal connection with Grenfell and its residents but on the other hand we all have a personal connection with every person involved. The scale of the disaster and the information that has come out through the inquiry is utterly shocking and a very sad reflection on what we consider to be our civilised society. For a short time in my early 20's I lived on the Ledbury Estate in south London, through that experience I was able to see some small connection with the Grenfell residents.

An incident in one city has created an imaginary city, a sculpted city. This city represents the lives of 227 people who escaped from the tower and the lost lives of 72 people. It also represents so much more. To hint at our ideas of cities, of how we feel a city should be, how people should be able to live and function within a city, how it should enrich their lives. On reading More's Utopia it could be construed that life within a city should be a wondrous, equal and fair place for all. But Utopia is 'no-place' so maybe Moore is suggesting that though this may sound wonderful it is unachievable. On still closer reading possibly More's Utopia is not as fine as it initially appears with indentured labour and banishments for falling outside the rules. So as with all things we pick and choose what fits our cause from his text. Similarly Campanella (no date) suggests if all worked equally together it would lessen the burden on every person. "Those..... who benefitted from the status quo would not permit utopia" (Anderson 2015 p69) and so it is with most situations in a conservative 'money-based' society.

Creating work with such an emotional charge is an exhausting challenge. Ben Okri wrote in the Financial Times about the difficulties of expressing his feelings about the fire artistically. His response to Grenfell was a very moving poem first published in the Financial Times, now available on Ben Okri's website (Appendix 3). The challenge is to allow your own emotion to be revealed in the work without the emotion then tying you up into knots and being unable to work. This is a very fine line to tread. The people of Grenfell need us to all speak up, not to say 'ah well it doesn't involve me', it involves all of us, every person needs to speak up to support all of society. How we behave in the wake of this disaster, what the outcome of the inquiry brings will influence how we thrive as a society. Providing justice not only helps the survivors of Grenfell but the survivors of all the previous fires and protects people from the potential future disasters.

"Out of its ashes ought to rise not just the phoenix of truth, but the lions of justice."
(Okri 2018)

Appendices

1. Large Panel Systems

“What Is Wrong With Large Panel System Tower Blocks?”

There are two main areas of concern:

1. The structural design of large panel system blocks is weak, they could collapse in an explosion, high wind or serious fire.
2. There are frequently gaps between floor and wall panels, these gaps prevent the flats from containing a fire for one hour and lead to the risk of serious fire spread.

The highest risk blocks are those with gas in them.”

(TowerBlocksUK 2018)

The Tower Blocks UK website is a campaigning site which gives a basic understanding of the problems of the large panel system of building. It covers issues at Ronan Point, Ledbury Estate and Broadwater Farm Estate and how these are linked to the Grenfell fire. I have talked about many of these issues in earlier essays.

2. List of Deceased from Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report.

Floor 23

Fathia Ahmed Elsanousi (Flat 206)
Abufiras Mohamed Ibrahim (Flat 206)
Isra Ibrahim (Flat 206)
Mohammed Amied (Saber) Neda (Flat 205)
Hesham Rahman (Flat 204)
Rania Ibrahim (Flat 203)
Fethia Hassan (Flat 203)
Hania Hassan (Flat 203)
Marco Gottardi (Flat 202)
Gloria Trevisan (Flat 202)
Raymond Herbert (Moses) Bernard (Flat 201)

Floor 22

Eslah Elgwahry (Flat 196)
Mariem Elgwahry (Flat 196)

Anthony Keith Disson (Flat 194)
Bassem Choukair (Flat 193)
Nadia Choucair (Flat 193)
Mierna Choucair (Flat 193)
Fatima Choucair (Flat 193)
Zainab Choucair (Flat 193)
Hashim Kedir (Flat 192)
Nura Jemal (Flat 192)
Yahya Hashim (Flat 192)
Firdaws Hashim (Flat 192)
Yaqub Hashim (Flat 192)
Sirria Choucair (Flat 191)

Floor 21

Abdulaziz El Wahabi (Flat 182)
Faouzia El Wahabi (Flat 182)
Yasin El Wahabi (Flat 182)
Nur Huda El Wahabi (Flat 182)
Mehdi El Wahabi (Flat 182)
Ligaya Moore (Flat 181)

Floor 20

Jessica Urbano Ramirez (Flat 176)
Omar Belkadi (Flat 175)
Farah Hamdan (Flat 175)
Malak Belkadi (Flat 175)
Leena Belkadi (Flat 175)
Mary Ajayi Augusta Mendy (Flat 173)
Khadija Saye (Flat 173)
Victoria King (Flat 172)
Alexandra Atala (Flat 172)

Floor 19

Mohamednur Tuccu (Flat 166)
Amal Ahmedin (Flat 166)
Amaya Tuccu Ahmedin (Flat 166)
Amna Mahmud Idris (Flat 166)
Majorie Vital (Flat 162)
Ernie Vital (Flat 162)
Debbie Lamprell (Flat 161)
Gary Maunders (Flat 161)

Floor 18

Berkti Haftom (Flat 155)

Biruk Haftom (Flat 155)

Hamid Kani (Flat 154)

Isaac Paulos (Flat 153)

Sakina Afrasehabi (Flat 151)

Fatemeh Afrasiabi (Flat 151)

Floor 17

Vincent Chiejina (Flat 144)

Khadija Khalloufi (Flat 143)

Kamru Miah (Flat 142)

Rabeya Begum (Flat 142)

Mohammed Hamid (Flat 142)

Mohammed Hanif (Flat 142)

Husna Begum (Flat 142)

Floor 16

Joseph Daniels (Flat 135)

Sheila (Flat 132)

Floor 15

Steven (Steve) Power (Flat 122)

Floor 14

Zainab Deen (Flat 115)

Jeremiah Deen (Flat 115)

Mohammad Alhajali (Flat 112)

Denis Anthony Peter Murphy (Flat 111)

Floor 11

Ali Yawar Jafari (Flat 86)

Abdeslam Sebbar (Flat 81)

Logan Gomes was delivered stillborn on 14 June 2017.

Pily Burton was evacuated from her flat with the assistance of firefighters. She died in hospital on 29 January 2018.

(Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report, p727-729)

3. 'Grenfell Tower June 2017'

Ben Okri

It was like a burnt matchbox in the sky.
It was black and long and burnt in the sky.
You saw it through the flowering stump of trees.
You saw it beyond the ochre spire of the church.
You saw it in the tears of those who survived.
You saw it through the rage of those who survived.
You saw it past the posters of those who had burnt to ashes.
You saw it past the posters of those who jumped to their deaths.
You saw it through the TV images of flames through windows
Running up the aluminium cladding
You saw it in print images of flames bursting out from the roof.
You heard it in the voices loud in the streets.
You heard it in the cries in the air howling for justice.
You heard it in the pubs the streets the basements the digs.
You heard it in the wailing of women and the silent scream
Of orphans wandering the streets
You saw it in your baby who couldn't sleep at night
Spooked by the ghosts that wander the area still trying
To escape the fires that came at them black and choking.
You saw it in your dreams of the dead asking if living
Had no meaning being poor in a land
Where the poor die in flames without warning.
But when you saw it with your eyes it seemed what the eyes
Saw did not make sense cannot make sense will not make sense.
You saw it there in the sky, tall and black and burnt.
You counted the windows and counted the floors
And saw the sickly yellow of the half burnt cladding
And what you saw could only be seen in nightmare.
Like a war-zone come to the depths of a fashionable borough.
Like a war-zone planted here in the city.
To see with the eyes that which one only sees
In nightmares turns the day to night, turns the world upside down.

Those who were living now are dead
Those who were breathing are from the living earth fled.
If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower.

See the tower, and let a world-changing dream flower.

Residents of the area call it the crematorium.

It has revealed the undercurrents of our age.

The poor who thought voting for the rich would save them.

The poor who believed all that the papers said.

The poor who listened with their fears.

The poor who live in their rooms and dream for their kids.

The poor are you and I, you in your garden of flowers,

In your house of books, who gaze from afar

At a destiny that draws near with another name.

Sometimes it takes an image to wake up a nation

From its secret shame. And here it is every name

Of someone burnt to death, on the stairs or in their room,

Who had no idea what they died for, or how they were betrayed.

They did not die when they died; their deaths happened long

Before. It happened in the minds of people who never saw

Them. It happened in the profit margins. It happened

In the laws. They died because money could be saved and made.

Those who are living now are dead

Those who were breathing are from the living earth fled.

If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower

See the tower, and let a world-changing dream flower.

They called the tower ugly; they named it an eyesore.

All around the beautiful people in their beautiful houses

Didn't want the ugly tower to ruin their house prices.

Ten million was spent to encase the tower in cladding.

Had it ever been tested before except on this eyesore,

Had it ever been tested for fire, been tried in a blaze?

But it made the tower look pretty, yes it made the tower look pretty.

But in twenty four storeys, not a single sprinkler.

In twenty four storeys not a single alarm that worked.

In twenty four storeys not a single fire escape,

Only a single stairwell designed in hell, waiting

For an inferno. That's the story of our times.

Make it pretty on the outside, but a death trap

On the inside. Make the hollow sound nice, make

The empty look nice. That's all they will see,

How it looks, how it sounds, not how it really is, unseen.

But if you really look you can see it, if you really listen
You can hear it. You've got to look beneath the cladding.
There's cladding everywhere. Political cladding,
Economic cladding, intellectual cladding — things that look good
But have no centre, have no heart, only moral padding.
They say the words but the words are hollow.
They make the gestures and the gestures are shallow.
Their bodies come to the burnt tower but their souls don't follow.

Those who were living are now dead
Those who were breathing are from the living earth fled.
If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower
See the tower, and let a world-changing deed flower.

The voices here must speak for the dead.
Speak for the dead. Speak for the dead.
See their pictures line the walls. Poverty is its own
Colour, its own race. They were Muslim and Christian,
Black and white and colours in between. They were young
And old and beautiful and middle aged. There were girls
In their best dresses with hearts open to the future.
There was an old man with his grandchildren;
There was Amaya Tuccu, three years old,
Burnt to ashes before she could see the lies of the world.
There are names who were living beings who dreamt
Of fame or contentment or education or love
Who are now ashes in a burnt out shell of cynicism.
There were two Italians, lovely and young,
Who in the inferno were on their mobile phone to friends
While the smoke of profits suffocated their voices.
There was the baby thrown from many storeys high
By a mother who knew otherwise he would die.
There were those who jumped from their windows
And those who died because they were told to stay
In their burning rooms. There was the little girl on fire
Seen diving out from the twentieth floor. Need I say more.

Those who are living are now dead
Those who were breathing are from the living earth fled.
If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower.
See the tower, and let a world-changing deed flower.

Always there's that discrepancy
Between what happens and what we are told.
The official figures were stuck at thirty.
Truth in the world is rarer than gold.
Bodies brought out in the dark
Bodies still in the dark.
Dark the smoke and dark the head.
Those who were living are now dead.

And while the tower flamed they were tripping
Over bodies at the stairs
Because it was pitch black.
And those that survived
Sleep like refugees on the floor
Of a sports centre.
And like creatures scared of the dark,
A figure from on high flits by,
Speaking to the police and brave firefighters,
But avoiding the victims,
Whose hearts must be brimming with dread.
Those who were breathing are from the living earth fled.

But if you go to Grenfell Tower, if you can pull
Yourselves from your tennis games and your perfect dinners
If you go there while the black skeleton of that living tower
Still stands unreal in the air, a warning for similar towers to fear,
You will breathe the air thick with grief
With women spontaneously weeping
And children wandering around stunned
And men secretly wiping a tear from the eye
And people unbelieving staring at this sinister form in the sky
You will see the trees with their leaves green and clean
And will inhale the incense meant
To cleanse the air of unhappiness
You will see banks of flowers
And white paper walls sobbing with words
And candles burning for the blessing of the dead
You will see the true meaning of community
Food shared and stories told and volunteers everywhere
You will breathe the air of incinerators

Mixed with the essence of flower.

If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower.

Make sense of these figures if you will

For the spirit lives where truth cannot kill.

Ten million spent on the falsely clad

In a fire where hundreds lost all they had.

Five million offered in relief

Ought to make a nation alter its belief.

An image gives life and an image kills.

The heart reveals itself beyond political skills.

In this age of austerity

The poor die for others' prosperity.

Nurseries and libraries fade from the land.

A strange time is shaping on the strand.

A sword of fate hangs over the deafness of power.

See the tower, and let a new world-changing thought flower.

(Okri 2018)

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