

Hated monuments

On Saturday October 24, 2019, I sat at the bus stop on Colney Hatch Lane and searched for *Daze* magazine on my phone.¹ After that, I went on the lower bus level (bus stop CN) and boarded the number 134 bus of London Transport. I sat down and glanced over 'Top ten most loved and hated London tower blocks'.² Promoting a photographic book, *Towers of London*, the article charted ten hated buildings. My eyes stumbled over the electronic text: 'Colliers Wood Tower 'most hated' building in London according to a 2006 BBC poll'; 'Caliban Tower, Hackney ... *The Tempest* this monstrosity is surely it.'; 'Fred Wiggs Tower, Leytonstone ... residents tried to stop high-velocity missiles being installed on top of their 17-storey tower block'; and 'HEYGATE ESTATE, ELEPHANT AND CASTLE ... crime-ridden and dilapidated'. Outside the bus window, Muswell Hill terminus passes by, and I recall the insipid words, 'Artists who don't paint aren't artists.'³

The bus moves off the main road to the bus lane past *Buildbase*. I pressed the buzzer and got off at the corner of Wood Lane. I sat down on the southbound platform in Highgate station and pulled from my bag *Critical Lives, Joseph Beuys* by Claudia Mesh. I flick through to *Crisis in Catholicism*. A Bank branch train pulled in at the station, and I stood near the door and watched the train rattle through the tunnel. The jet-black walls of the tunnel seem to soak up into a living past, while its smooth liquid mirror reflection in the window projected it to the future as time stood still on the surface of the glass.



Figure 23: *Heygate Estate Monument, 10 Hated Buildings*, (2019), Patrick Jones, Digital Image

The train arrived at the first monument. I got off at Elephant and Castle. A huge plastic tarpaulin covered a private brick construction, two metal towers on its side. It was on the erased monument site. Around me was a raft of gleaming empty private blocks, standing

¹I undertook a photographic research project on 10 Hated Buildings in 2019 and here explore how it might be reimaged in the light Smithson essay *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*, (1967). The text follows Smithson format in the article.

² Kathryn Bromwich, 'Top Ten Most Loved and Hated London Tower Blocks', *Dazed*, 2014 <<https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/18422/1/top-ten-most-loved-and-hated-london-tower-blocks>> [accessed 23 January 2021].

³ Ella Guru, 'The Stuckists Manifesto', *The Stuckists*, 1999 <<https://www.stuckism.com/stuckistmanifesto.html#manifest>> [accessed 29 January 2021].

on a past lost in the false dreams of the once resident community, now scattered in social housing at the far edges of the Borough of Southwark. The swaying plastic seemed to echo the eerie mournful silence. As I point my camera at the monument (Fig. 23), a security guard instructs me not to take pictures. I wonder if it is out of respect for the dead; however, I clarify with the supervisor that from the vantage of the public footpath I stand on, there could be no censorship as long as I use a handheld camera. I walk towards the shopping centre, and the bright sun moves from behind a cloud and briefly awakens the whole aspect of this site of a lonely abyss. The words 'disenchantment of politics by economy [...and...] inequality mounts up', seem to float in the clouds as I open *Red Pepper*.⁴ ⁵ I gaze at the serene black and white photos of the demolished estate in an entropic misty atmosphere. In the *Metro* and read: 'Every flat in a new development in South London has reportedly been sold to an overseas investor.' (Heygate Estate).⁶

I walk to the shopping centre and pass by the triumphant Elephant with an off-white castle strapped to its back guarding the gates. I stand at a booth and drink coffee and check the date of the next protest meeting about its imminent demolition. I wonder if Rome's monuments could offer such pathos as I wonder which monument to visit next.⁷

⁴ Williams Davies, 'Essay: Populism & the Limits of Neoliberalism', *William Davies*, 2017 <<https://williamdavies.blog/2017/04/18/populism-the-limits-of-neoliberalism/>> [accessed 29 January 2021].

⁵ Patrick Keiller, 'A Natural History of Heygate Estate', 2019 <<https://www.redpepper.org.uk/a-natural-history-of-heygate-estate/>> [accessed 29 January 2021].

⁶ Charles White, 'Every Flat in New London Estate "Has Been Sold to Foreign Investors"', *Metro*, 2017 <<https://metro.co.uk/2017/04/16/every-flat-in-new-london-estate-has-been-sold-to-foreign-investors-6577715/>> [accessed 29 January 2021].

⁷ Looking into the history of the Heygate Estate demolition reveals a twenty-year history of deceit and lies that led to the eradication of a community. At one time, the community had been lured into designing their supposed new flats, only to be suddenly told when the demolition was approved that they would not be rehoused on the site. There followed what was ultimately a failed struggle to save their community. The residents fought to have the estate refurbished at a relatively low cost rather than demolished. Instead, after a litany of local council errors, social housing was handed over to the developers at a financial loss. 'Heygate Timeline', *Southwark Notes - Whose Regeneration?*, 2014 <<https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/heygate-estate/heygate-timeline/>> [accessed 29 January 2021].