

Epilogue
Elizabeth Hudson

Anyone who likes a good story, knows the value of a tangent. These texts have sprung as a vital aside to BRUT Europe — a day of talks and workshops on modernist architecture, social housing and public space, organised by Lithuanian artist Marija Nemčenko, Hungarian curator Anna Tudos and the Lithuanian Cultural Institute as part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018. Before we regain the path, let me take you once more around the houses...

In a Glasgow café I met a storyteller from Moscow. She told me that an important trope in Slavic oral traditions is the wheel of fortune: a character at the bottom will rise to the top and those at the top will sink to the bottom. Fighting back images of cheesy game shows, I could see this as more than a literary device or wish fulfillment; we know the natural world is cyclical, but society too has a taste for turning.

In the tarot deck I've had since childhood, the Wheel of Fortune spins its rider from rainbow to lightning bolt (and back again). Card number X, it sits within a format that explicitly assumes that the elements of our lives will shuffle, rearrange and repeat. The cards that surface from the 78, their interactions and their order, affect outcomes, but do not provide for an alternative outside their cycle of possibilities.

A point on a wheel also cannot deviate from its circular path, and so it does not take the most direct route to top or bottom — its arc always first travels away before bending back to its destination. I imagine the external lift shaft of a high-rise replaced by a ferris wheel, its swinging pods merrily delivering residents to their floor via its circuitous route. The up to Carsten Höller's down. The around to Didier Pasquette's across.

Ernö Goldfinger built two iconic towers in London; not quite twins, but perhaps blood brothers.

Trellick Tower in the west. Balfron Tower in the east. Concrete bookends to London: the city with the greatest income divide in the UK: one of the most unequal countries in Europe. Both towers were built as post-war social housing solutions at a time when the British welfare state was at the height of its fortunes. Though alienating to some, high-rise living was seen as literally moving up in the world for many, when their previous accommodation had often lacked hot water, heating, private bathrooms and space.

Goldfinger's towers were inspired by the scissor sections of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation. Balfron was built first, with the architect living in it for two months to collect feedback from residents for improvements to the design of Trellick, which was built the following year. By this point however tower blocks were falling out of favour and had become bywords for crime. Whether through better design or, more likely, better location, Trellick recovered quicker than its older sibling from its "Tower of Terror" reputation and by the 1990s was described by architectural critic Jonathan Glancey as "an increasingly coveted address for the fashionable young things of Portobello Road Market".¹ Today its flats, once likened to Colditz, sell for three quarters of a million pounds. Balfron meanwhile, considered "not a fashionable address" in the mid 2000s,² has, a decade later, been approved for "reinvigoration", which sees its 27 floors of social rent tenants permanently decanted to make way for private purchasers of "Modern Urban Living... in London's East

¹ Jonathan Glancey, quoted by Paul Hyatt in 'Trellick Tower — a giant among high rises', *The Architecture Journal*, 1999, May 6, p. 20.

² Joe Moran, 'Living Space' in *Reading the Everyday* (Taylor & Francis, 2005) p. 143.

End".³ The wheel of fortune has turned again, for the building if not for its original inhabitants.

Goldfinger notoriously couldn't take a joke (hopefully the architect of Glasgow's Red Road Flats can), but did he like to play? As Anna Tudos wrote, Eastern and Western European post-war architecture, from Glasgow to Moscow, Kaunas to Marseille, Ghent to Kyiv, was built around the promise of a new future. So too were the playgrounds that accompanied them, which provided a space for the children that would become tomorrow's society. Later playgrounds — EU regulation compliant — looked to a different future using the same means. All are defined by movement: swinging, sliding, spinning, climbing, balancing... Empty playgrounds are conspicuous by their stillness. But perhaps, like Ivan the Fool in the tales I was told, an appearance of emptiness can belie something greater within; their fate may yet be on the way up. Let's just make sure no one gets left behind.

Elizabeth Hudson (Editor of Brut. High-rises, emptiness and play)

³ Balfron Tower development microsite. www.balfrontower.co.uk/#about