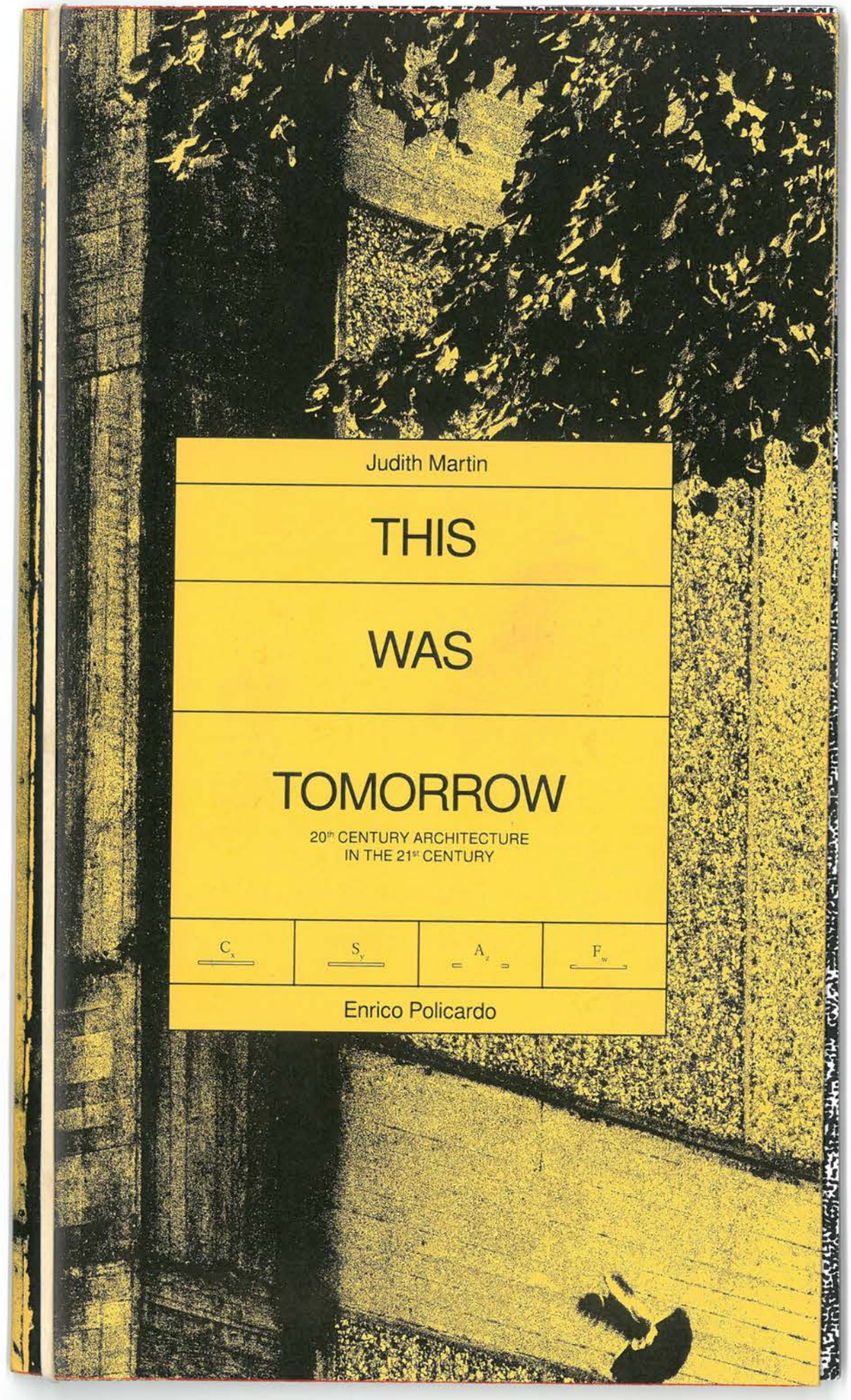

Judith Martin
THIS
WAS
TOMORROW
20th CENTURY ARCHITECTURE
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Cx
Sy
Az
Fw
Enrico Policardo



The world is full of objective real possibilities, which are not yet actual possibilities because they have not yet fulfilled all the conditions of their possibility, and may or may not ever become fully possible

¬E. Bloch

Judith Martin

THIS WAS TOMORROW

20th CENTURY ARCHITECTURE
IN THE 21st CENTURY

Enrico Policardo



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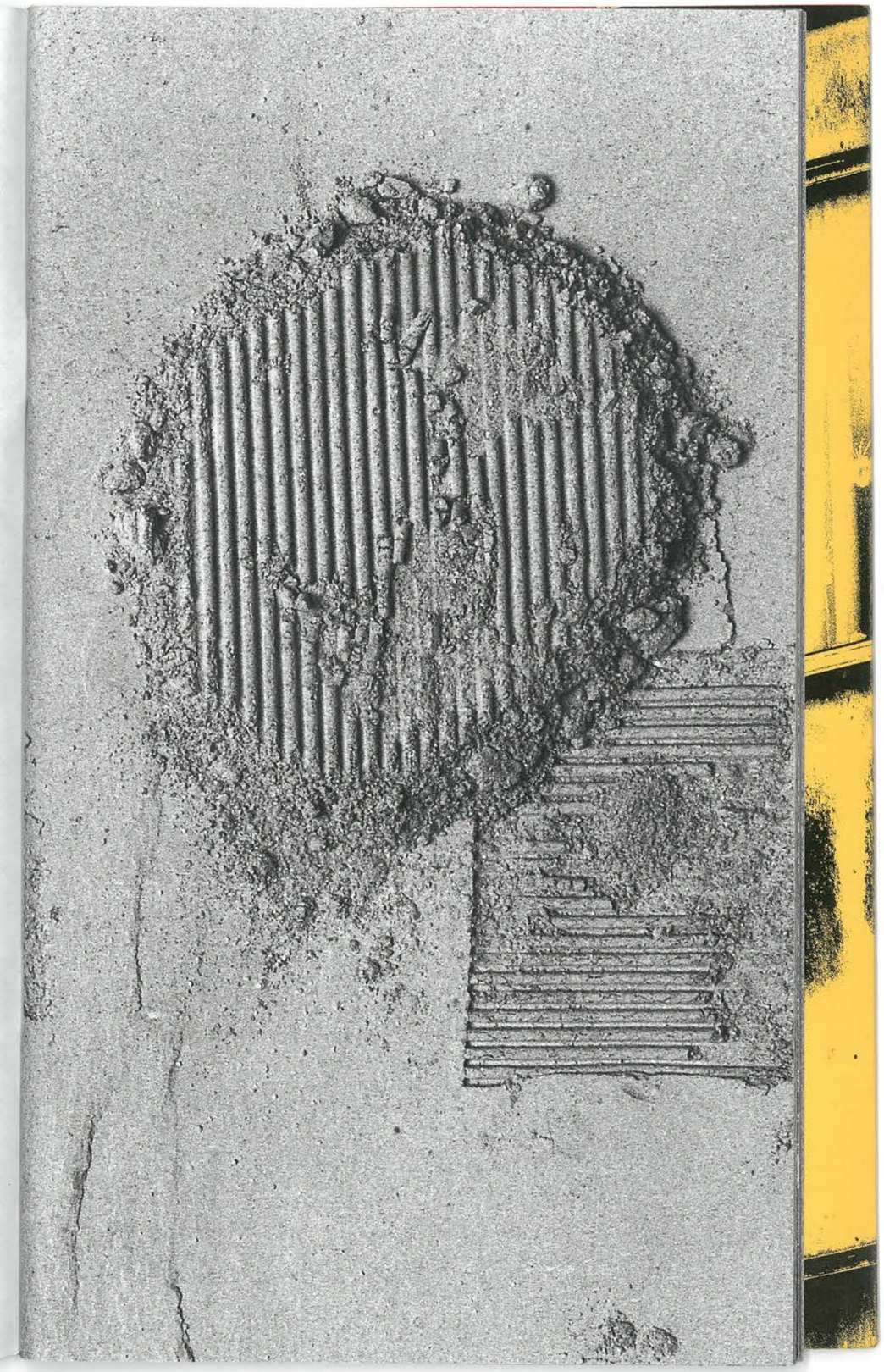
IT REALLY WAS STREETS IN THE SKY AND LOOKING BACK FROM A CHILD'S POINT OF VIEW. WE WERE CAREFREE, HAD LOADS OF PLAYING SPACE. OUR PARENTS DIDN'T EXPECT TO SEE US ON WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS, EXCEPT AT LUNCHTIME AND TEATIME!



CEMENT /sə,vmɛnt/

noun. a powder of alumina, silica, lime, iron oxide, and magnesium oxide burned together in a kiln and finely pulverized and used as an ingredient of mortar and concrete

C_x	S_y	A_z	F_w

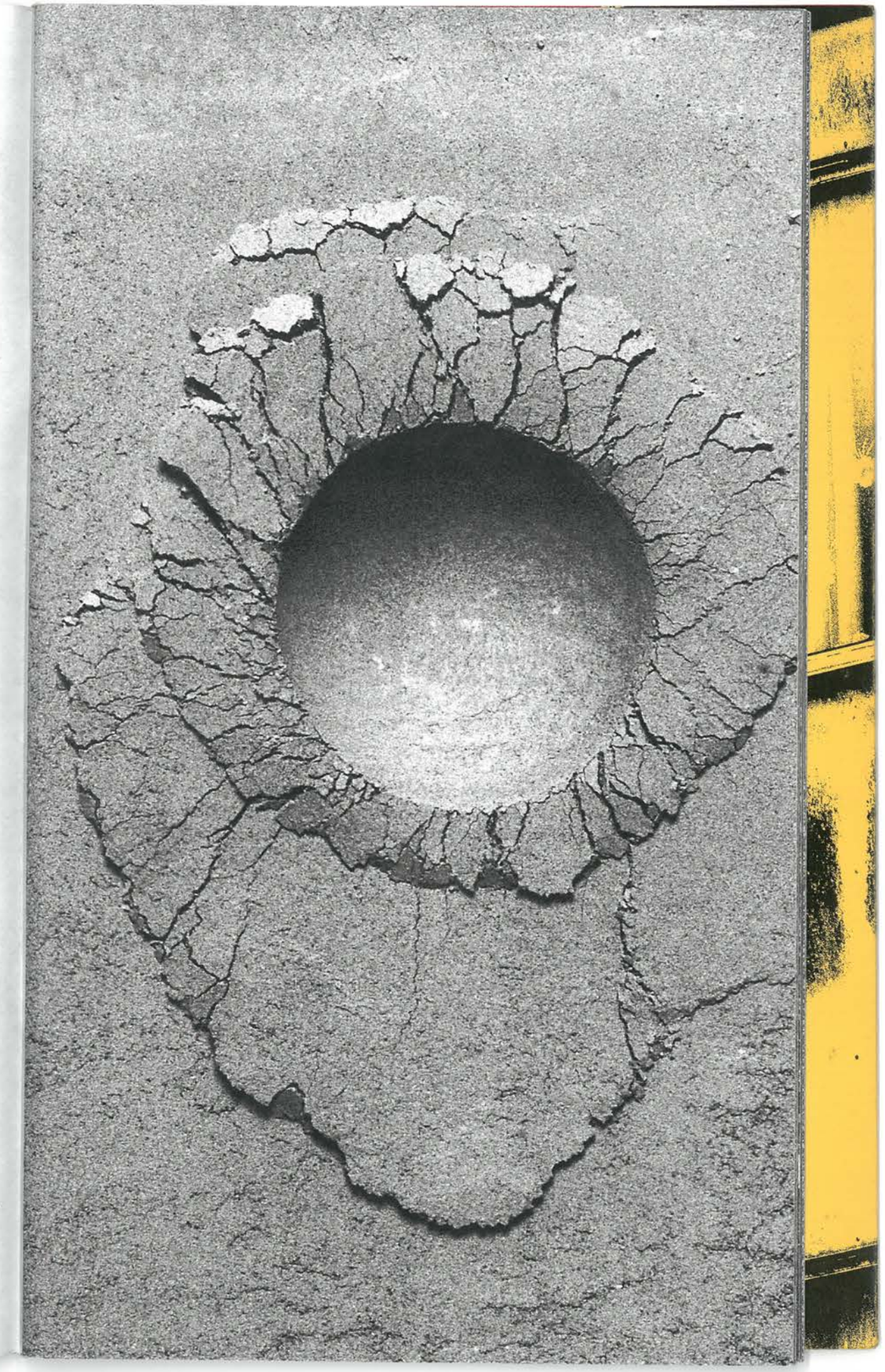


FOREWORD

The title of this publication is inspired by the exhibition 'This is Tomorrow', which opened at the Whitechapel Gallery in the east end of London in August 1956.

The exhibition layout was designed by Erno Goldfinger, and one of its most significant images shows Alison and Peter Smithson, with photographer Nigel Henderson and sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi. The catalogue cover was designed by Edward Wright, with the title all in lower case.

The design for Keeling House, the earliest in this short survey, would have been on the drawing board in 1956.



INTRODUCTION

Cement itself has been used in building since time immemorial. The manufacture of concrete involves some kind of cement, probably first made of naturally occurring gypsum in Syria and Jordan, long before the Egyptians used it in the Pyramids and the Chinese used it in the Great Wall, both around 3,000 BCE.

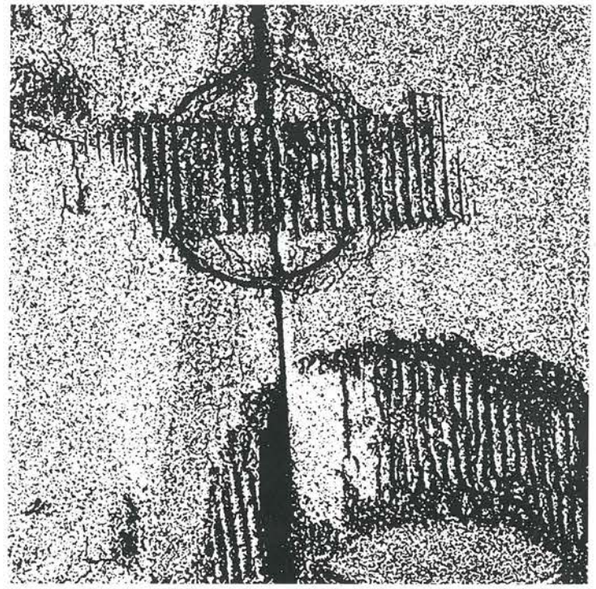
The Romans used it, possibly with even greater success, in the Colosseum, the Pantheon and in their baths. Their skills were lost with the fall of the Roman Empire, but rediscovered in France in the 12th century, with deposits of gypsum found at Montmartre.

The first reinforced concrete in the UK was made in Newcastle upon Tyne in the 1850s, using old wire colliery ropes, the ends frayed to bond with the liquid cement. Large-scale adoption of the techniques of metal reinforcement was enabled by the work of Francois Hennebique in France in 1880.

It is Le Corbusier who is most associated with the use of reinforced concrete in housing. L'Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles can stand for his visionary white mass housing; it was added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites in 2016, along with 16 others of his buildings, nearly 70 years after construction started. Every building in this short survey can demonstrate his influence.

The abstract cement photographs here were made using dry cement dust enclosed in a box, compressed with different geometric tools, echoing the way liquid cement is poured and shaped with shuttering. They were taken with a Nikon camera and digitally processed.

There are no alterations post-capture.Every intervention occurs in the studio within the frame.



Brutalist architecture was never about brutality, although it is about concrete. Much misunderstood, the term instead refers to rawness – béton brut meaning raw cement. Shuttering marks are left, the surface is unrendered. That philosophy of truth to material links back to William Morris, with his beliefs in the life of the middle ages transported to the 19th century.

The aims of the architects of the 1950s and 60s, rebuilding after wartime devastation and a long history of poverty and slum-dwelling, were to bring light and equality to society. But budgets were cut, compromises made, and ideals left to wither in the light of political reality.

Not only has London's east end been historically the most deprived, it was also the most war-damaged. But quality of life, as demonstrated by most of the instances here, is more intimately connected to public transport than it is to height or density or open space.

Unfortunately most of the buildings made of béton brut are of the era when the car was king.

These are just some of the examples still to be seen in London. Unsurprisingly most are in the east. All were built in the period when Parker Morris space standards (1961 – 1980) applied, giving more space and better facilities than most new public or private housing since. Several developments are just surviving, others are safe but their original purpose has changed.

Nikolaus Pevsner established the gold standard of 20th century architectural history. Not only did he appreciate Modern Movement buildings, he traced their origins to William Morris and other pioneers of the Art and Crafts movement.

He began his vast and most famous work, The Buildings of England, in 1945 – it is still in print, and still being updated by a host of current architectural historians. The BoE opinion is still the foundation stone for any researcher. Originally published by Penguin, since 2003 it has been published by Yale University Press, to whom we owe much thanks for the numerous quotes.

FURTHER READING

NIKOLAUS PEVSNER
Pevsner's Buildings of England, London volumes
The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design, Thames & Hudson, 1968
Pioneers of Modern Design, 1936 (reprint Penguin, 1991)

LAN NAIRN
Nairn's London, Penguin, 1966

JOHN GRINDROD
Concretopia, Old Street Publishing Ltd, 2013
Iconicon, Faber, 2022

LAIN SINCLAIR
Living with Buildings, Welcome Collection, 2018
Any of his London books

ELAIN HARWOOD
Space, Hope and Brutalism; English Architecture 1945-75, Yale, University Press, 2015
Any of her other books

ROWAN MOORE
Slow Burn City, Pan Macmillan, 2016

JOHN BOUGHTON
Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing, Verso, 2019
municipaldreams.wordpress.com

WAYNE HUDSON
The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst BlochMacmillan, London, 1982

ERNST BLOCH
The Principle of Hope, tr. N. Plaice
S. Plaice and Paul Knight, Basil Blackwell, London, 1986

RUTH LEVITAS
The Concept of Utopia, Syracuse University Press, 1990

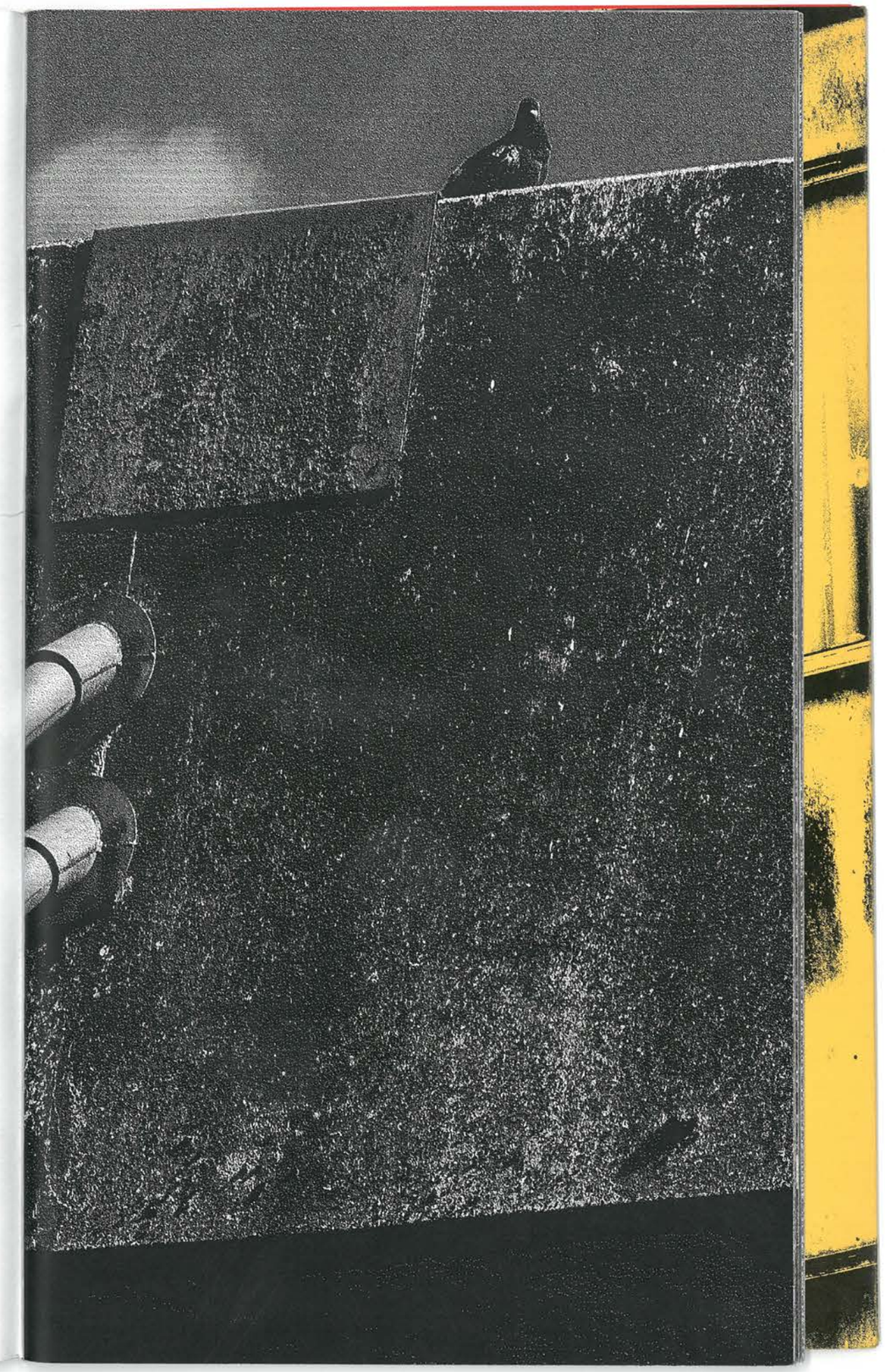
J.G. BALLARD
High Rise, Original publisher Jonathan Cape, 1975

MOVIES

TOM CORDELL
Utopia London, film, 2010
utopialondon.com

ORGANISATIONS

20th Century Society - c20society.org.uk
DOCOMOMO - docomomo.org.uk
Architecture Foundation - architecturefoundation.org.uk
Open City - open-city.org.uk
London Renters Union - londonrentersunion.org



A NOTE TO THIS EDITION

This is the third release of This Was Tomorrow. The original edition was designed and published by Sarsen Press, Winchester, under Judith Martin's guidance, with most copies going to RIBA and LBR bookshops. A second run corrected typographical errors and minor details, following the same design.

This third edition maintains Judith Martin's core vision, particularly in pairing still life images with architectural photographs. The text remains unchanged, preserving the original insights and context, while shifting focus towards sensory and emotional engagement.

My site visits shaped this edition. There's respect, and loss. The materiality, grit, and abandonment strip away the idealism these structures were built with.

These buildings need inhabitants to live. Despite their apparent solidity, the materials show fragility and transience.

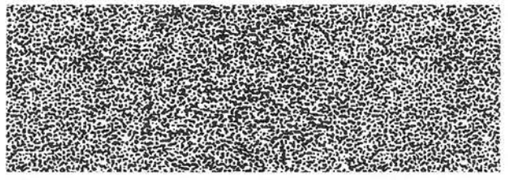
The cost of maintenance, combined with social housing privatisation and systematic council underfunding over five decades, has left its mark.

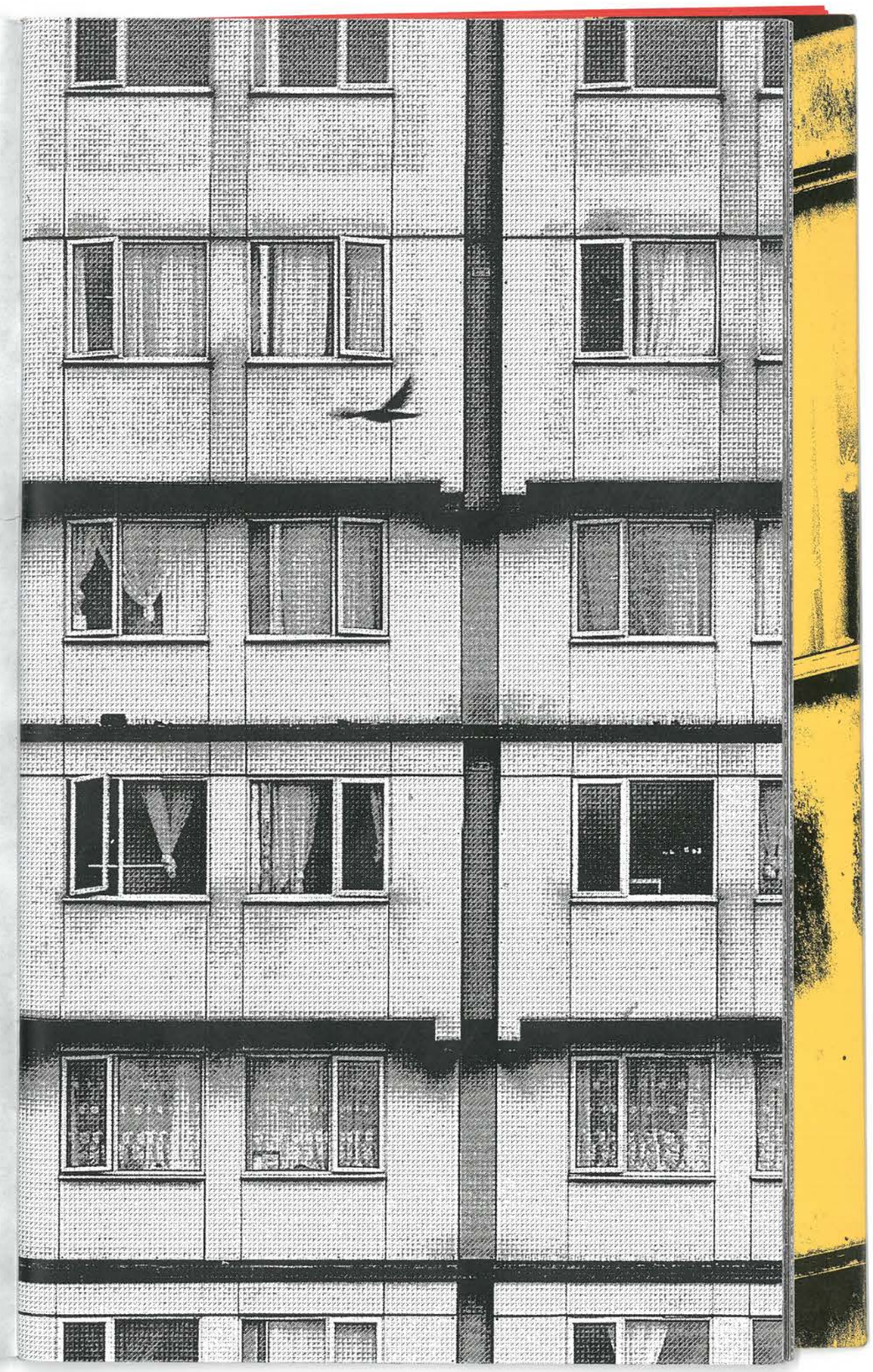
Nothing lasts forever.
Without maintenance there's omly decay. The perfect design not only doesn't exist but it's a dangerous misconception. Love is not forever, it needs work not only to thrive but to just survive.
These projects deteriorated because we stopped dreaming of better futures.

Richard Grainger's contribution was crucial to the design evolution. He chose the new font and created the graphic identity based on a rather loose concept I had around security patterns designs. I've made minor adjustments since, keeping the original design's essence.

We switched from Helvetica to FreeSans. Helvetica's corporate associations had grown distant from this edition's collaborative spirit. FreeSans, an open-source typeface, maintains the same functionality and baseline idea while emphasisin equity, collaboration, shared ownership.

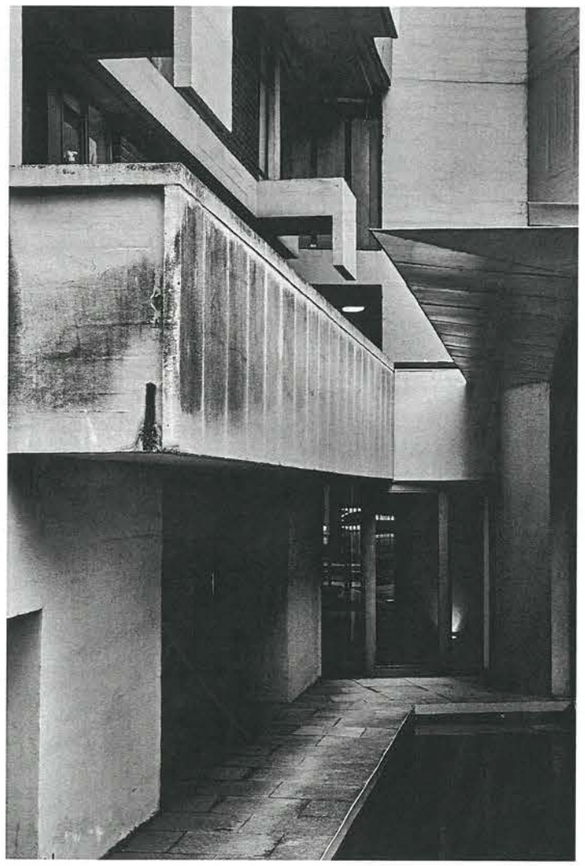
Enrico Policardo
London, January 2025

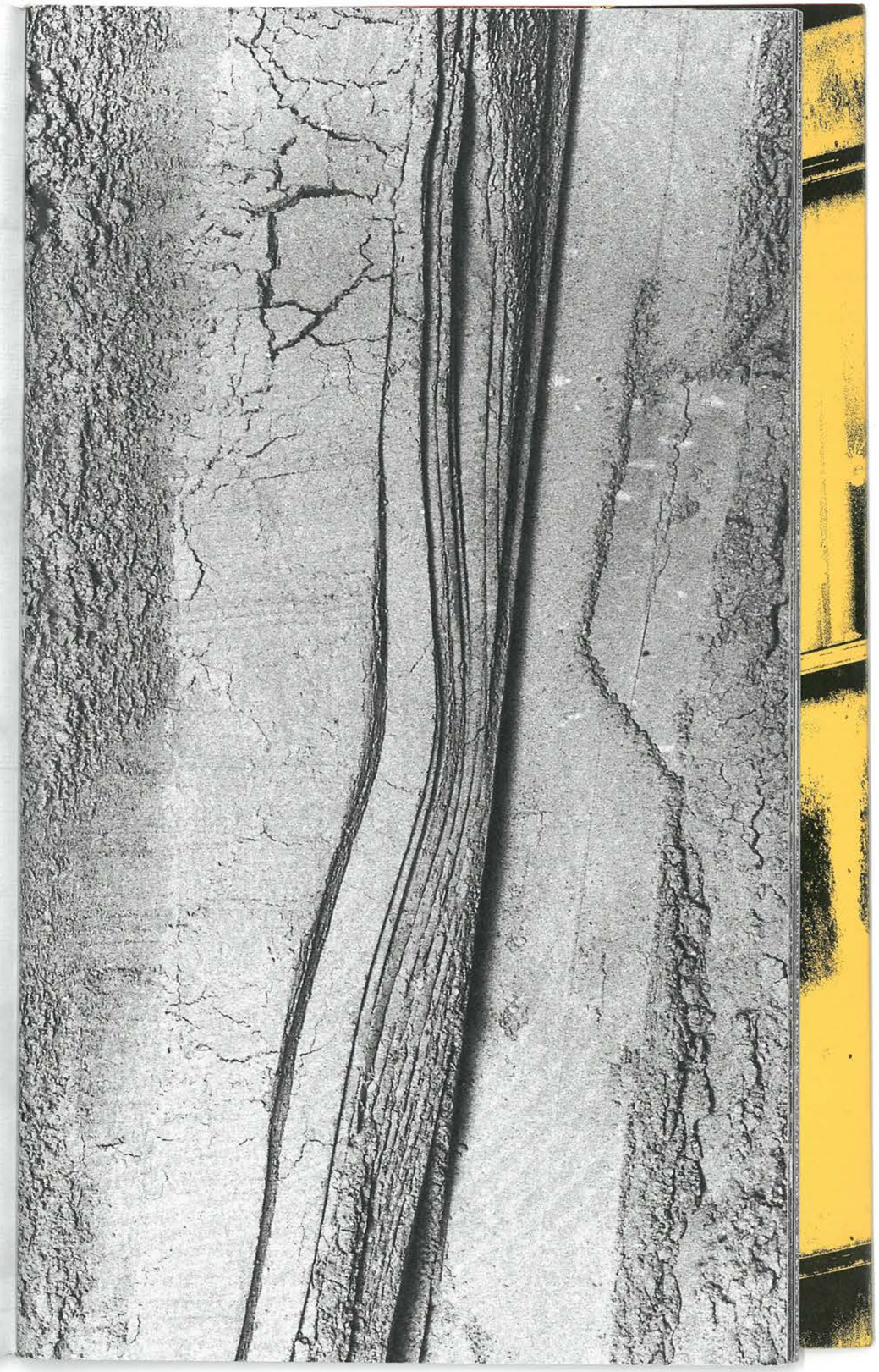




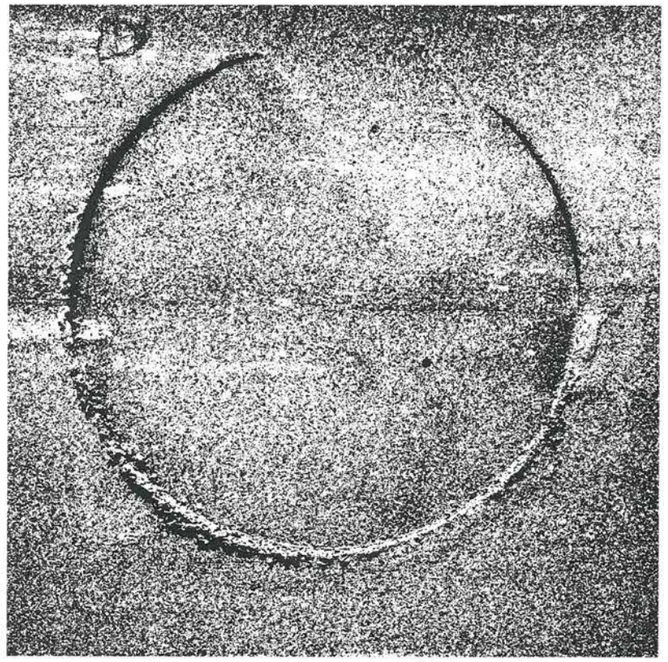
①	KEELING HOUSE	BETHNAL GREEN
1957	LONDON E2 6PG	¬ 51.53088, -0.0611

The earliest here, by Denys Lasdun, CH, CBE, RA, opened in 1957, closed in 1992 then listed Grade II*, the same as his National Theatre. The block is pictured on the back cover of Pevsner's volume London 5 – East. Built as social housing, with each home a maisonette over two floors. Pevsner notes that it 'has been loved and loathed more than most' tower blocks in the east end. Tower Hamlets evacuated the building 'partly for structural reasons'. It was bought by private owners, then finally restored by 2001 by Munchenbeck and Marshall. Lasdun advised on the work, while regretting it would no longer house the poor.



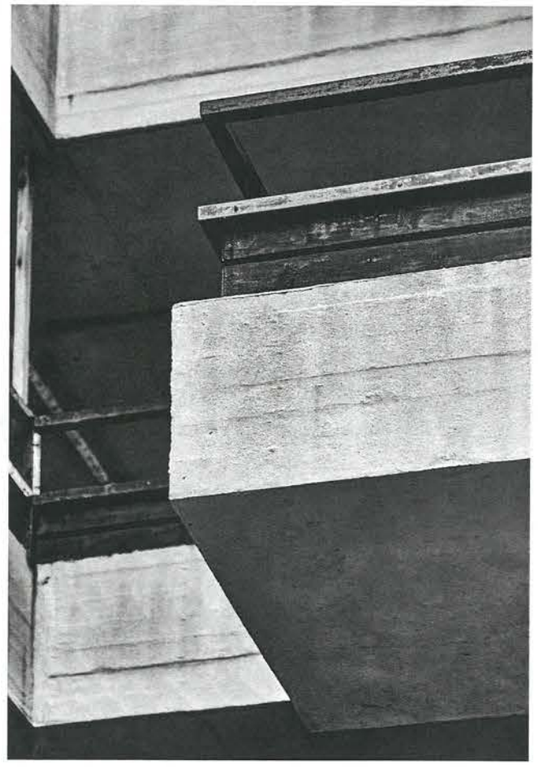


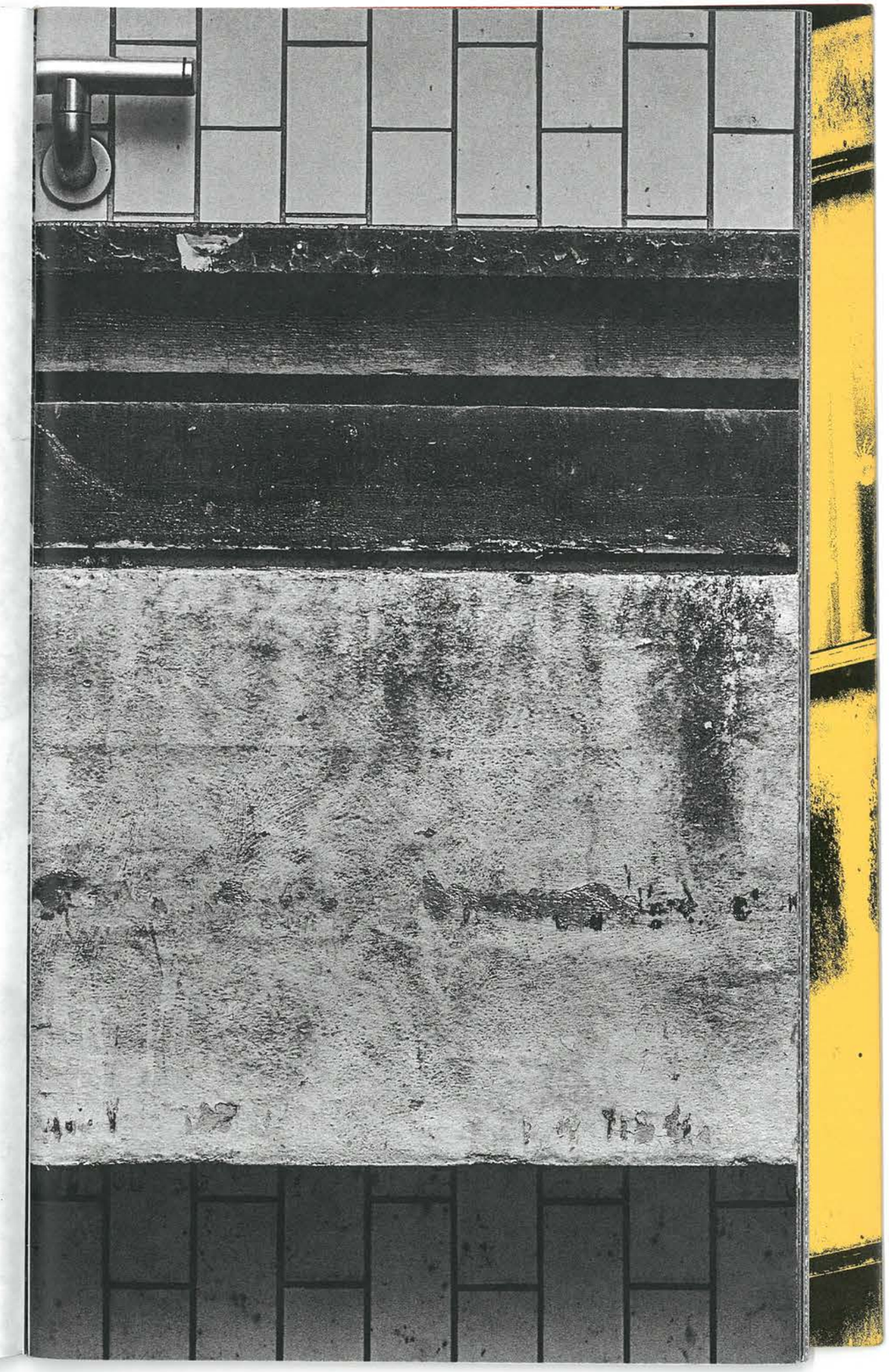


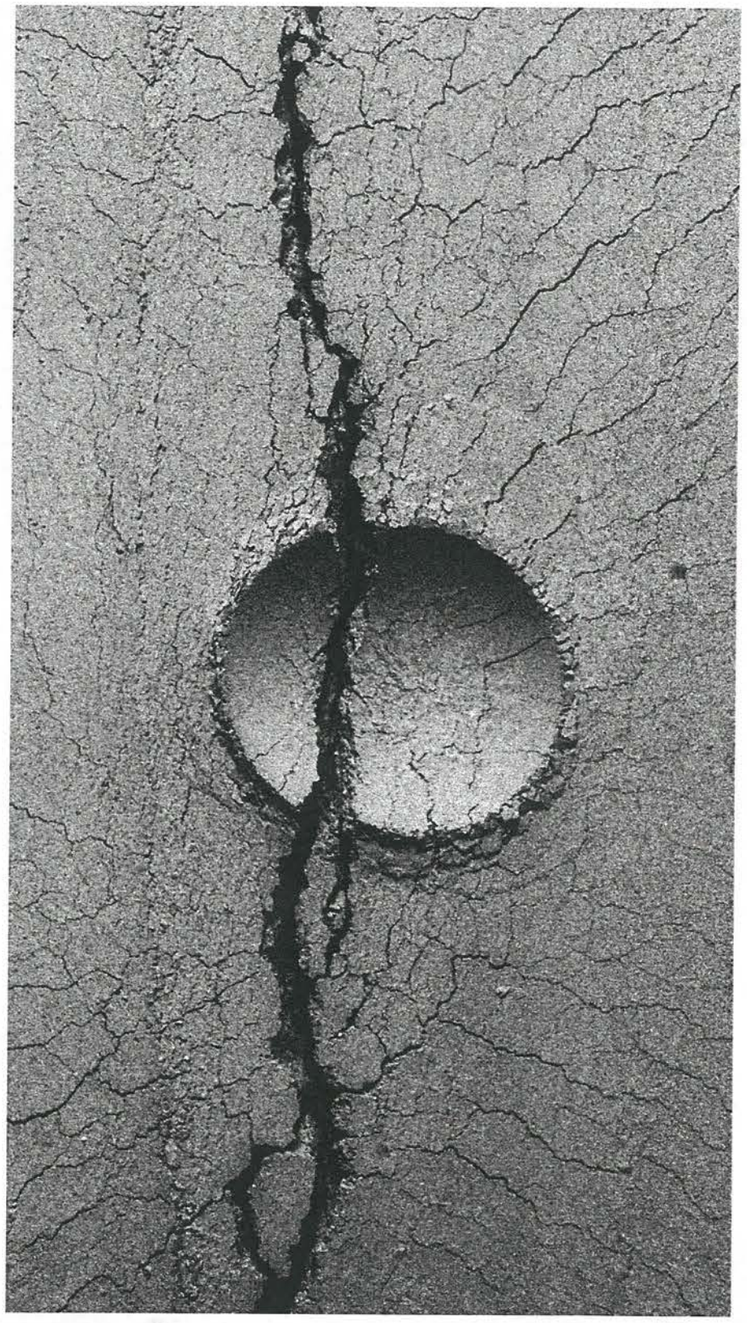


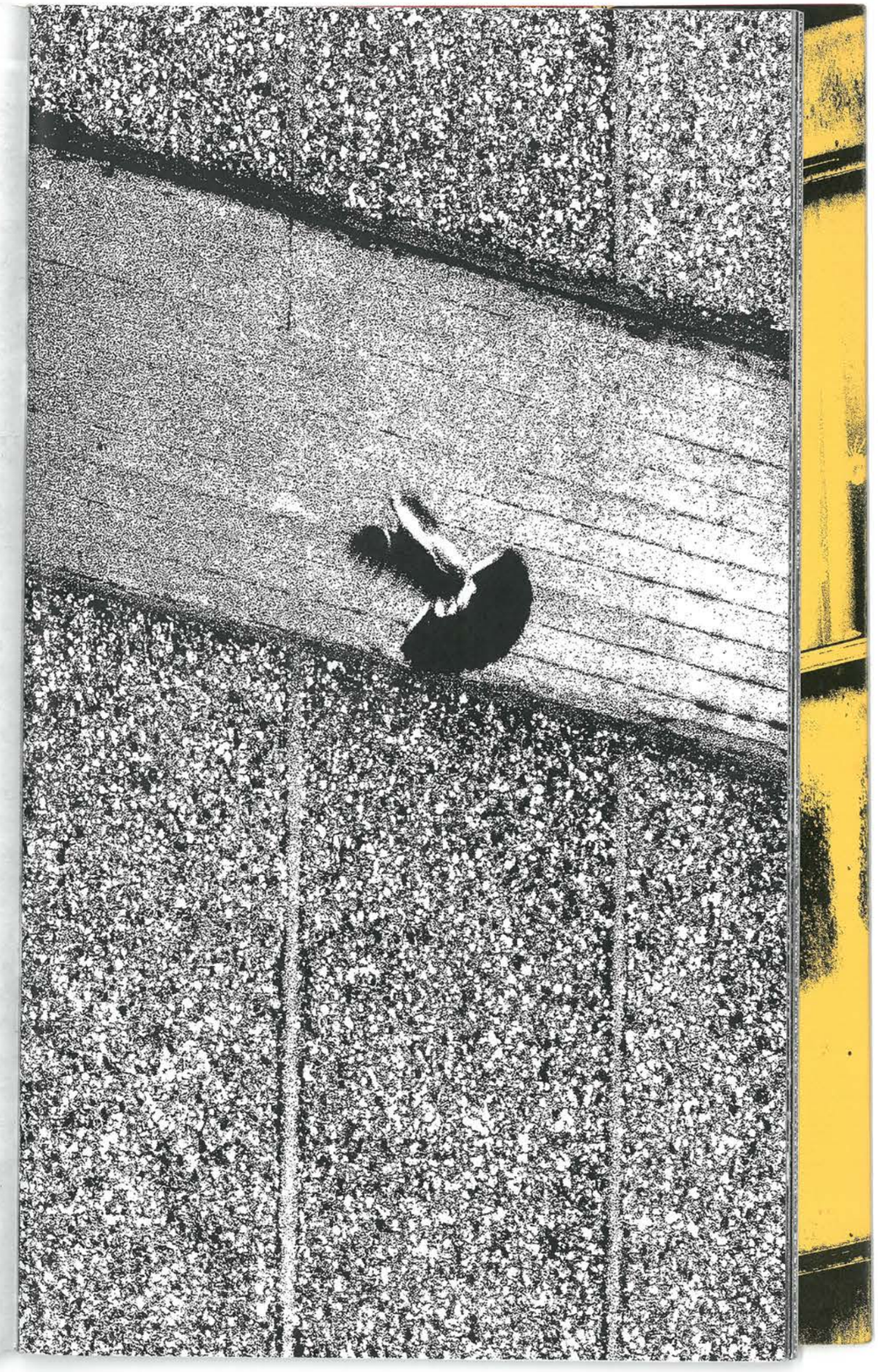
②	VANBRUGH PARK ESTATE	GREENWICH
1963	LONDON SE6 2EF	¬ 51.44576, -0.01869

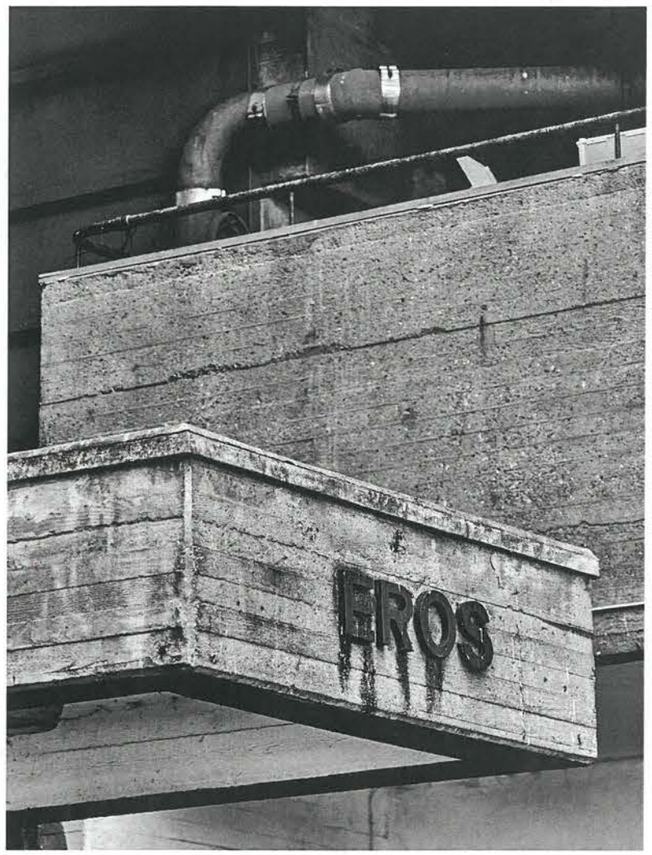
Part of a select development with only one tall (8 storey) block, 'its concrete frame expressed boldly' (Pevsner). It is brutal in the Smithson and Lasdun sense, with the marks of the shuttering visible in the concrete. By Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, 1963, who most famously went on to design the Barbican centre. Commissioned as social housing, now inevitably part-privatised, it is probably the most desirable site in this collection.





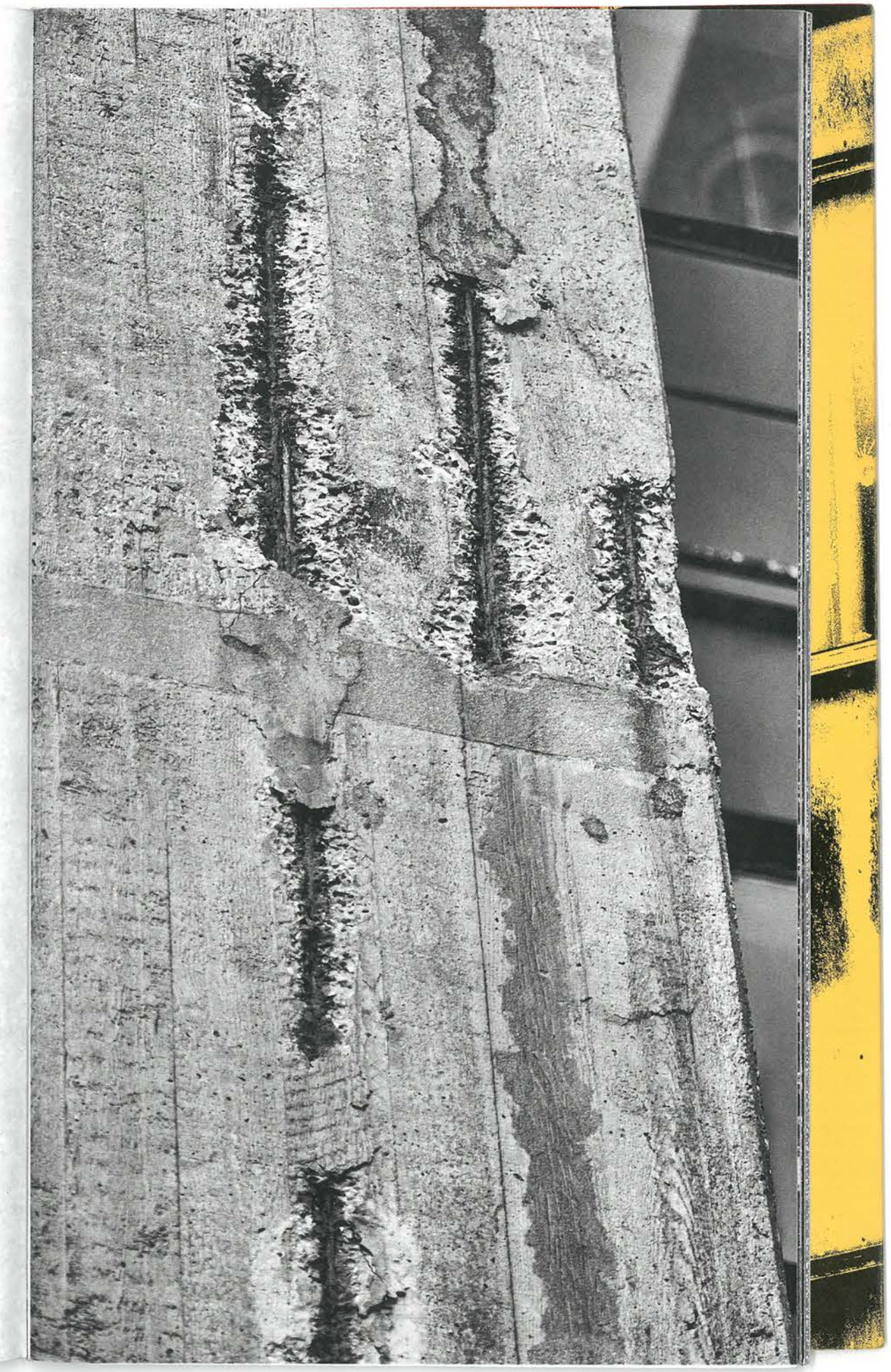


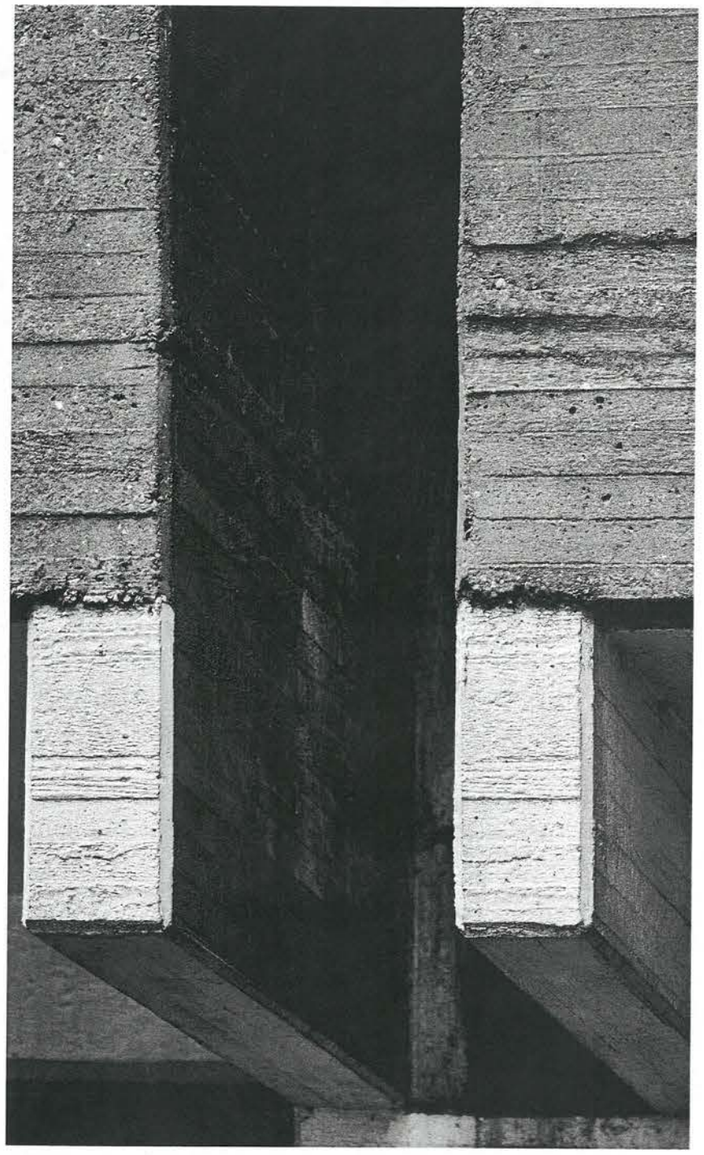




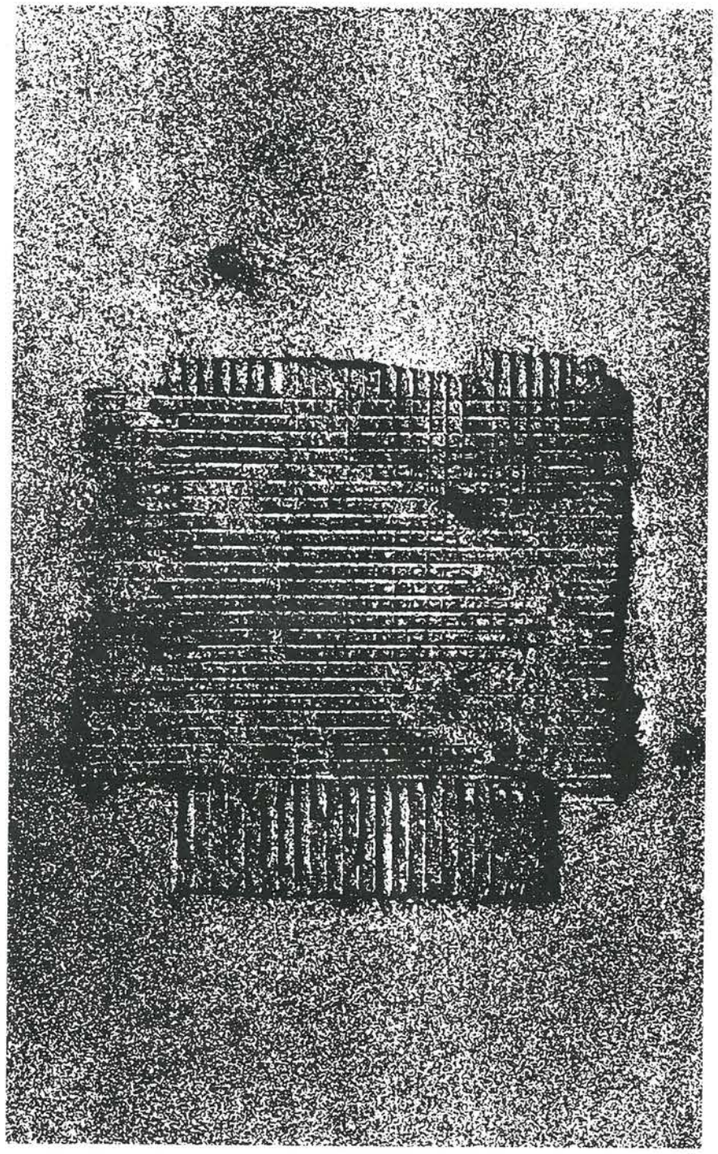
③	EROS HOUSE	CATFORD
1962	LONDON SE3 7PZ	¬ 51.47776, 0.0119

Eros House, Catford By Owen Luder, 1962, as offices for Lewisham council. Pevsner admired its 'tough urbanity' and Nairn its 'gaunt honesty', but conversion to housing and subsequent management by Lewisham and others was so damaging that in 2019 Luder asked to have his nameplate removed because of its 'dreadful' condition. It was turned down for listing in 2001. Most recently it has been short-term housing let by a private company, changing hands frequently for much profit, churning through various asset management companies, but with little benefit to its residents. Lewisham's Catford Town Centre Framework of June 2021 is indecisive: 'options for retaining or redeveloping Eros House have been investigated' but apparently no conclusions reached.





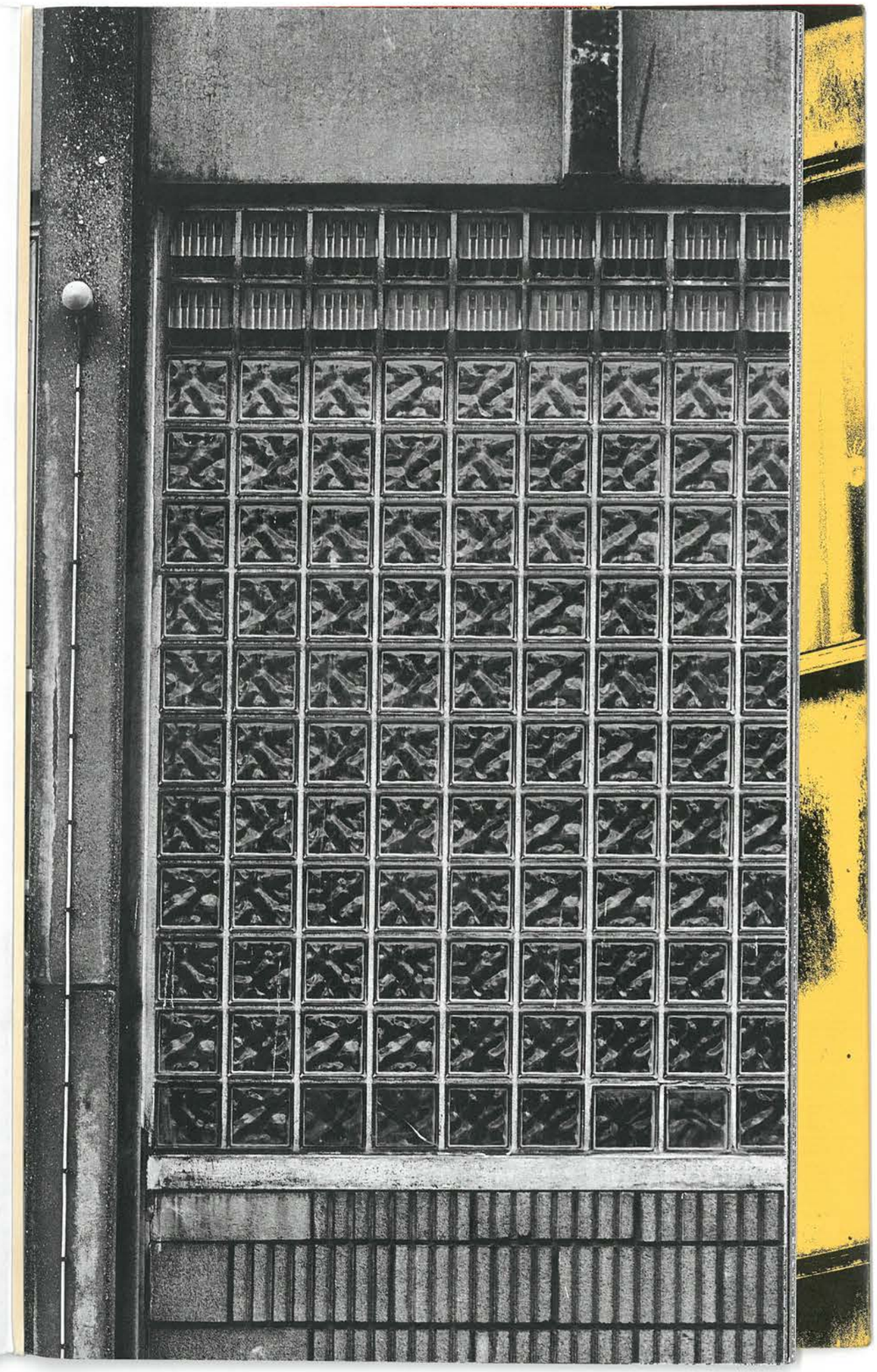
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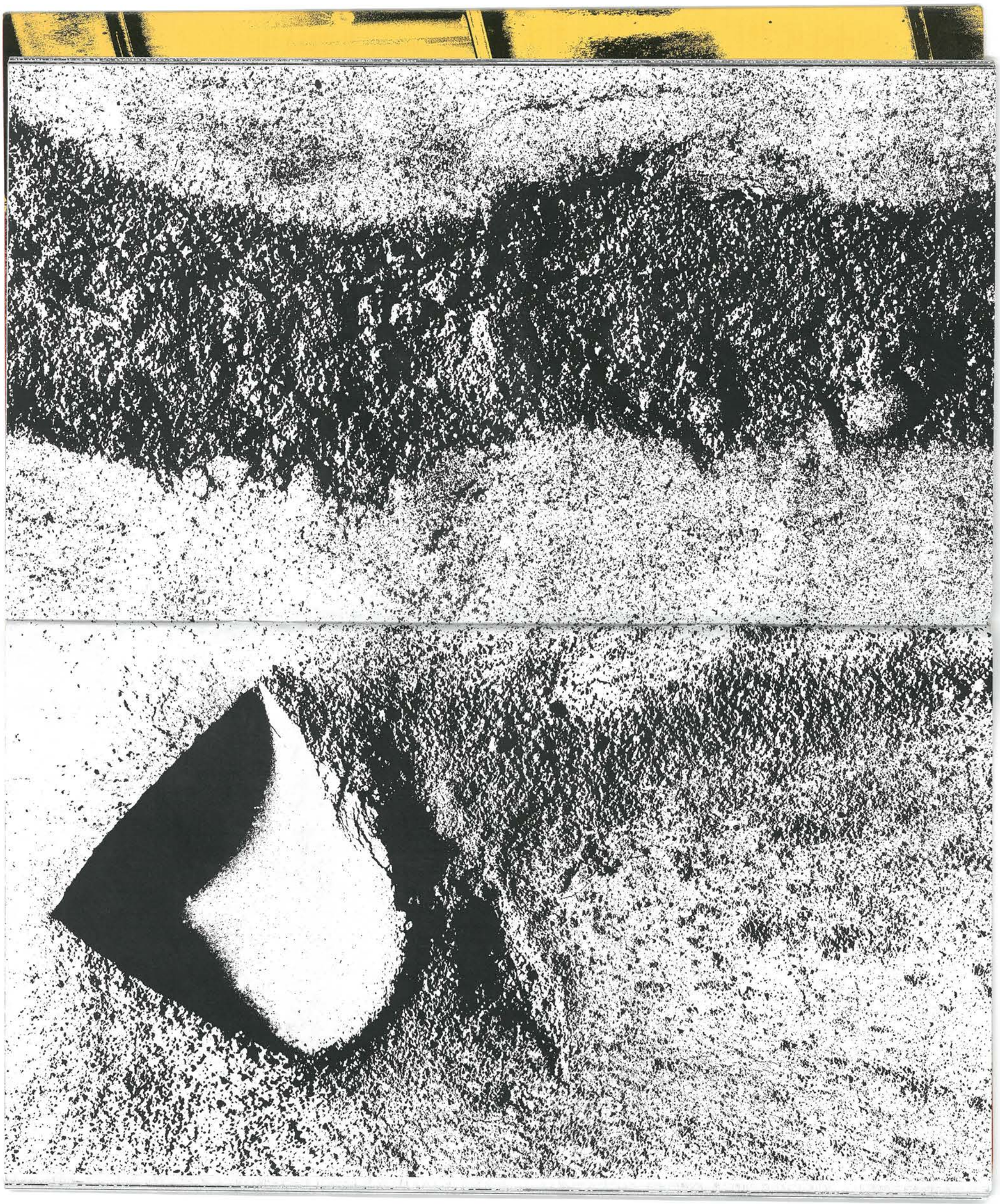




④	ROBIN HOOD GARDENS	POPLAR
1962	LONDON E14 0HG	51.50952, -0.00855

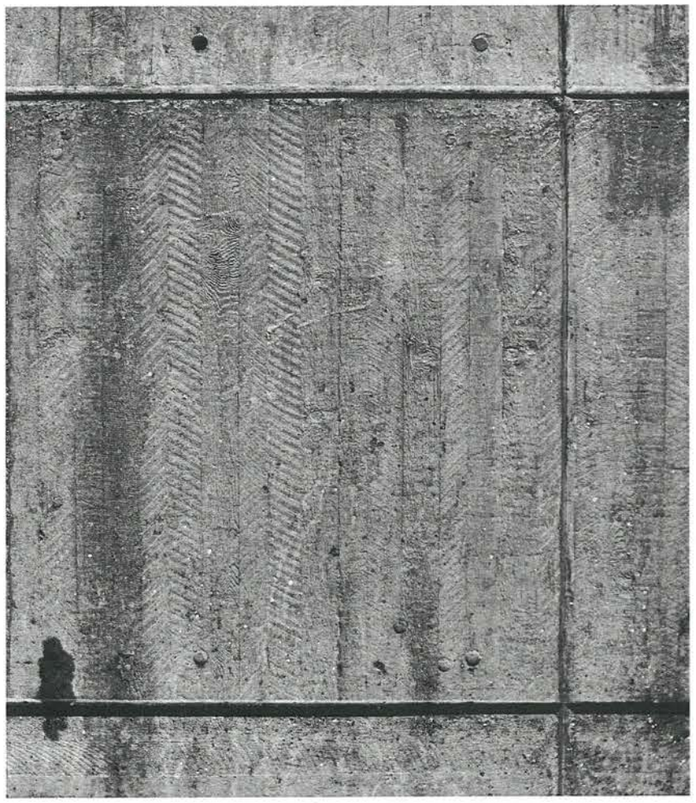
Robin Hood Gardens, Poplar By the enfants terrible of Brutalism, Alison and Peter Smithson, 1966-1972. Nikolaus Pevsner was not a fan. Despite saying it was the 'apotheosis of public housing in the borough', he accurately described its 'horrible site flanked by two trunk roads' and said it was 'ill-planned to the point of being inhumane.' Demolition began in 2017; part of the eastern block just about remains. The 20th Century Society was sorry to see it go, and the V&A acquired a section of it. No amount of hip glass and steel redevelopment will compensate for the site.

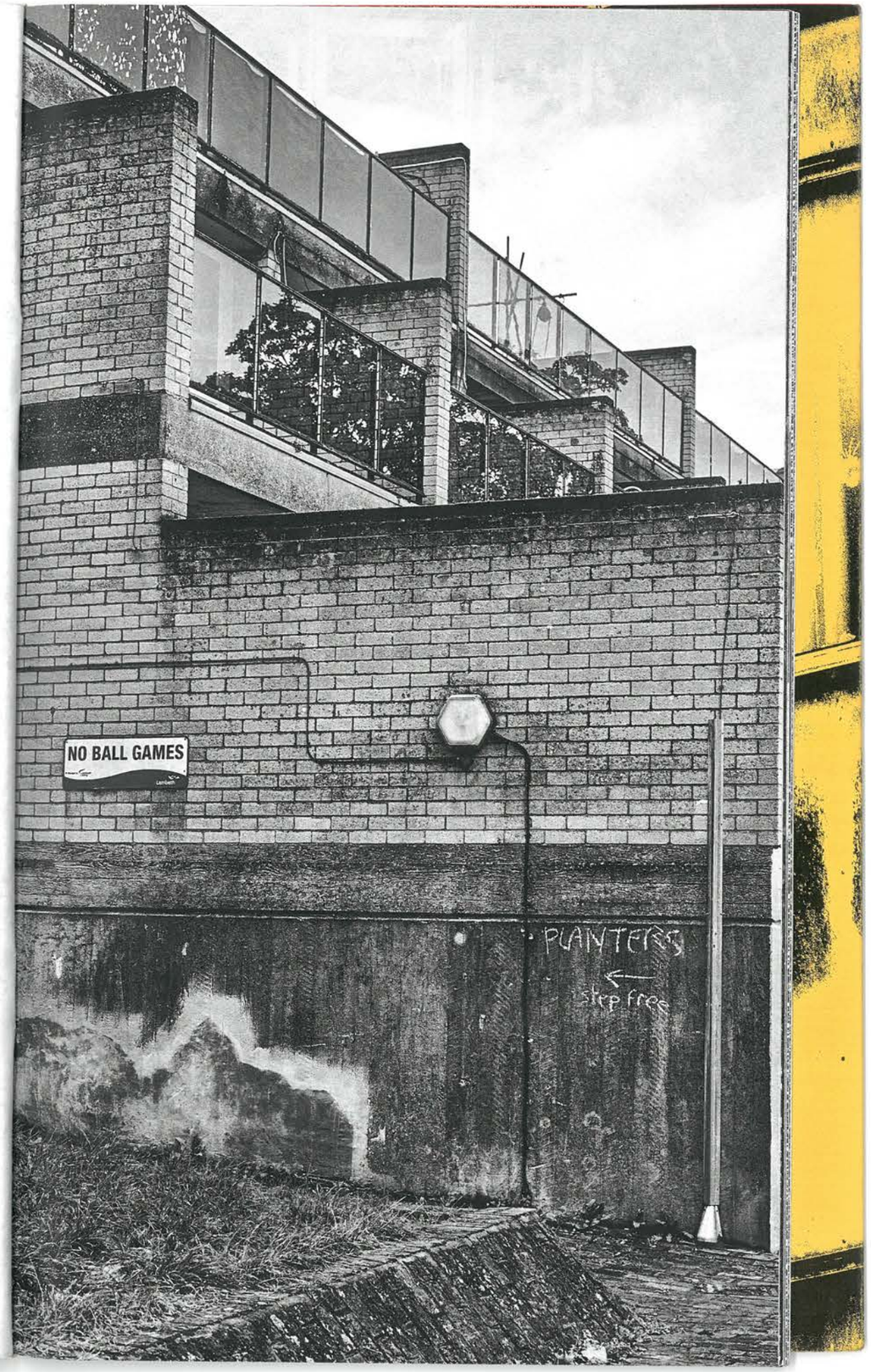


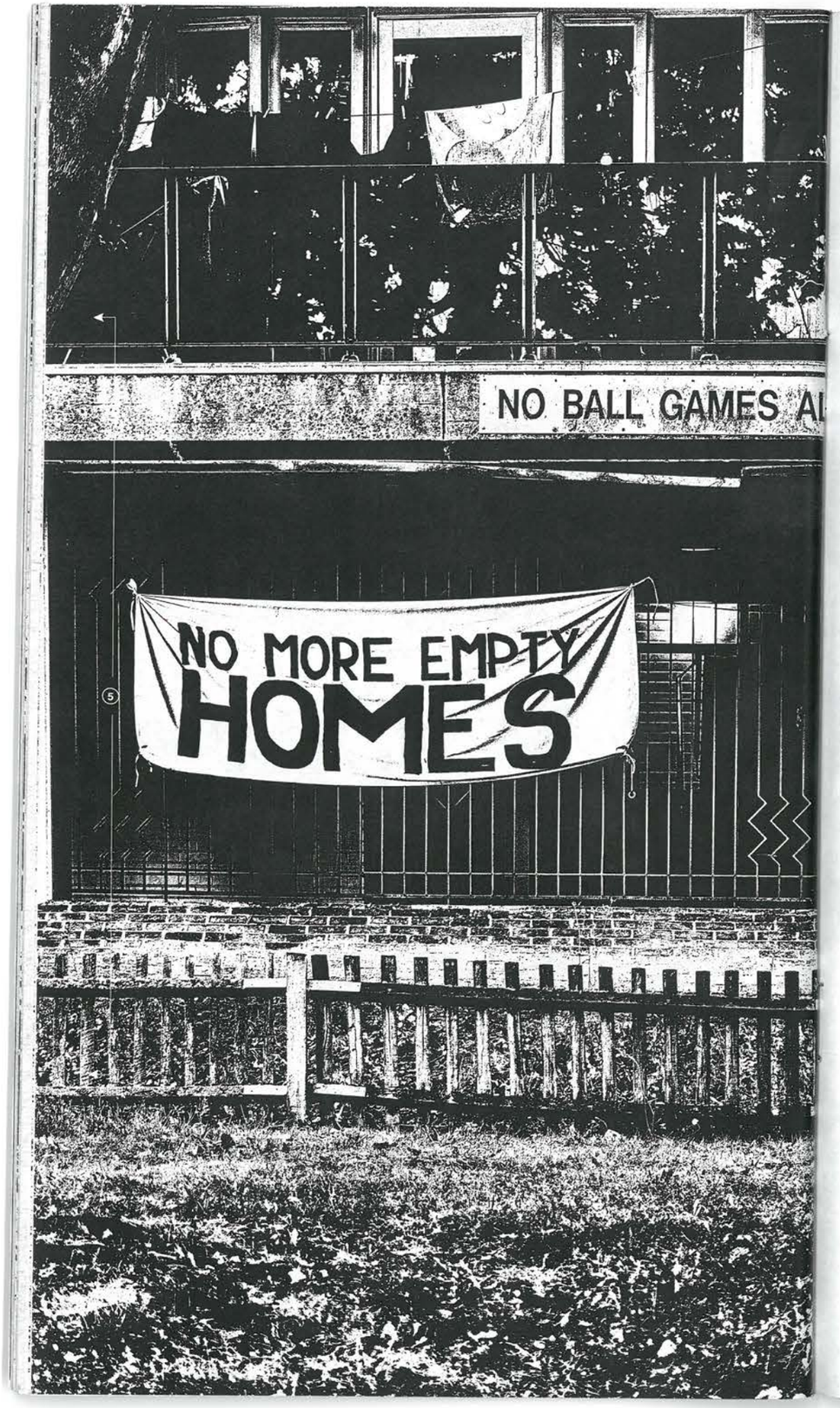


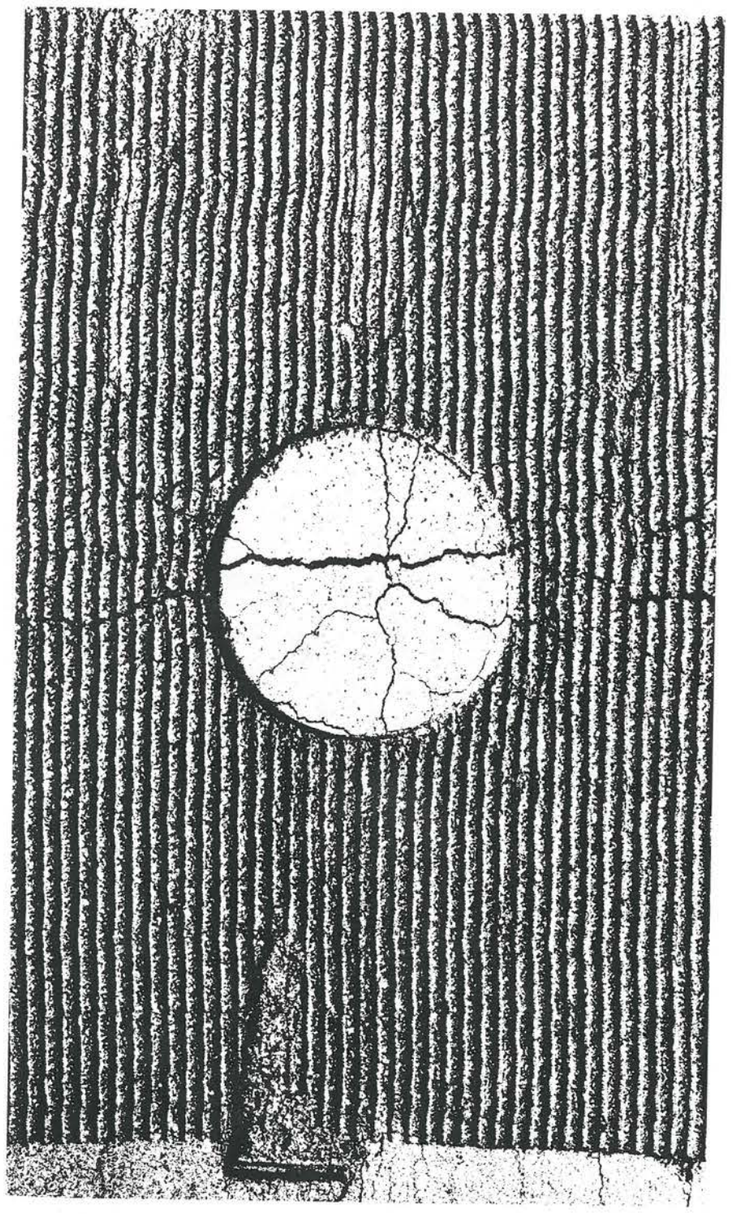
⑤	CENTRAL HILL ESTATE	LAMBETH
1967	LONDON SE19 1AB	¬51.42019, -0.08657

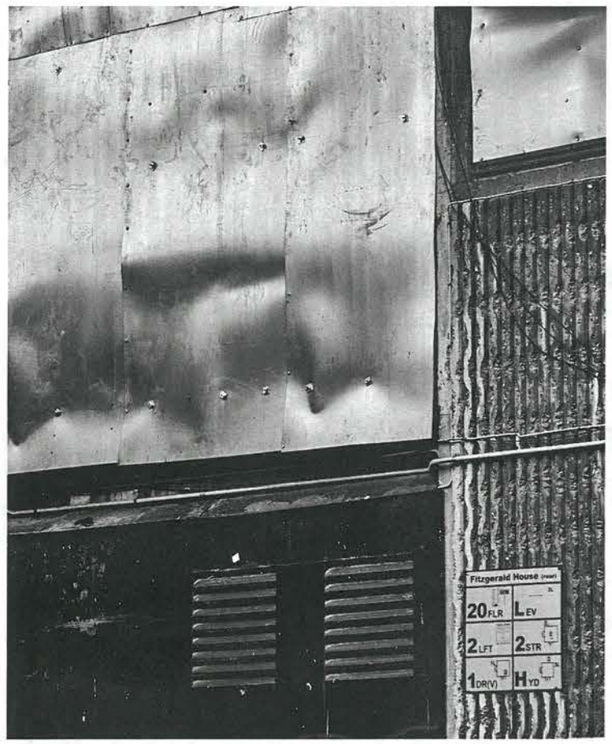
Central Hill Estate, Lambeth 1967, for Lambeth Borough Architects by Rosemary Stjernstedt, the first woman to head a local authority architects' department. There is brick as well as concrete but Pevsner described it as 'very much international modern', as well as praising the 'ingenious planning'. He also called it 'one of Lambeth's most ambitious housing developments'. Colin Amery in the Architectural Review admired its Puritan simplicity. It was built to house 1,300 people. Despite all that, Lambeth has been trying to demolish it for years. However it is popular with its residents despite deliberate neglect and with countless architectural luminaries, and the battle is not yet over.





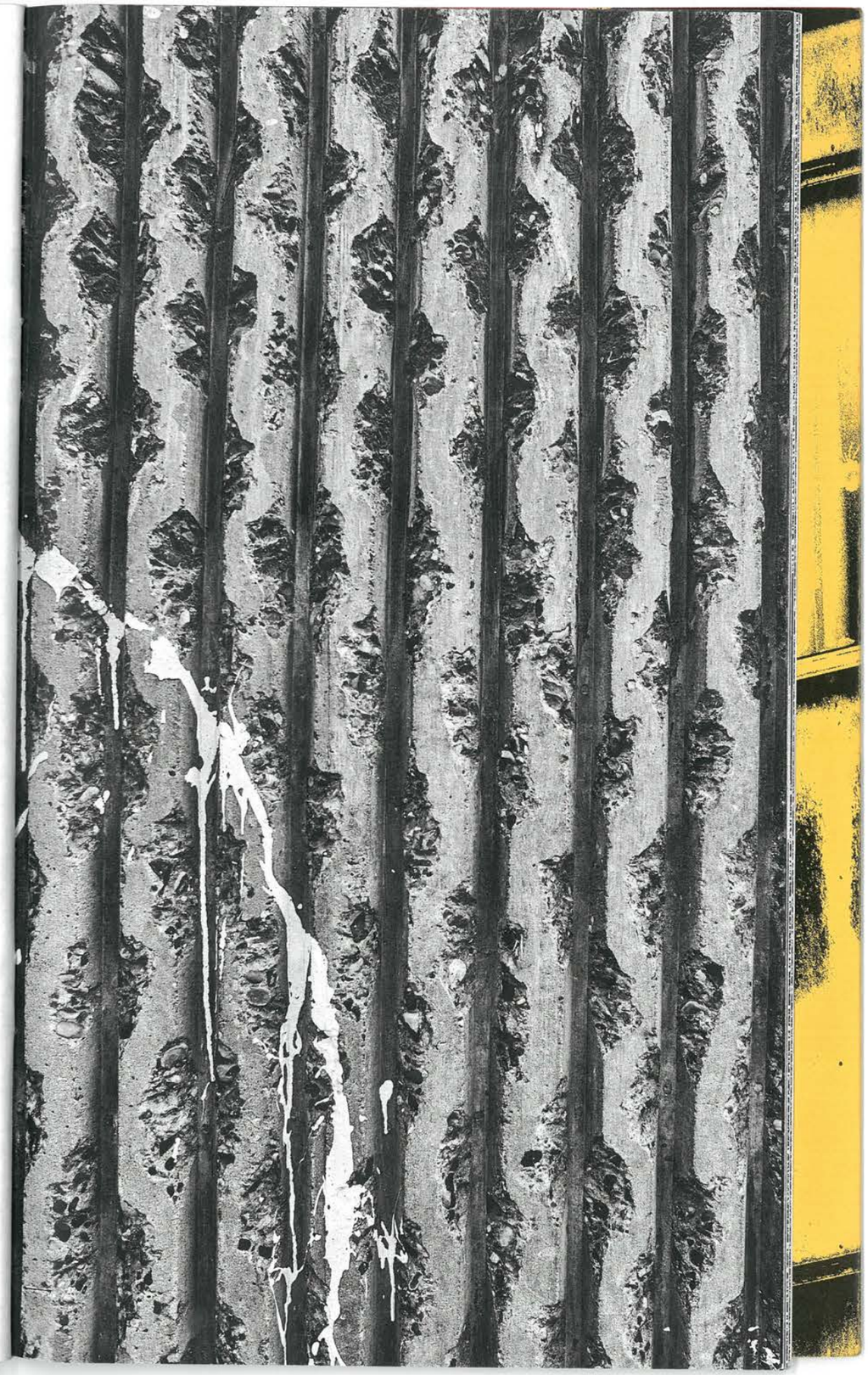

NO BALL GAMES AL
NO MORE EMPTY
HOMES





⑥	FITZGERALD HOUSE, LANSBURY ESTATE	TOWER HAMLETS
1960s	LONDON SE6 4SD	¬ 51.44671, -0.02169

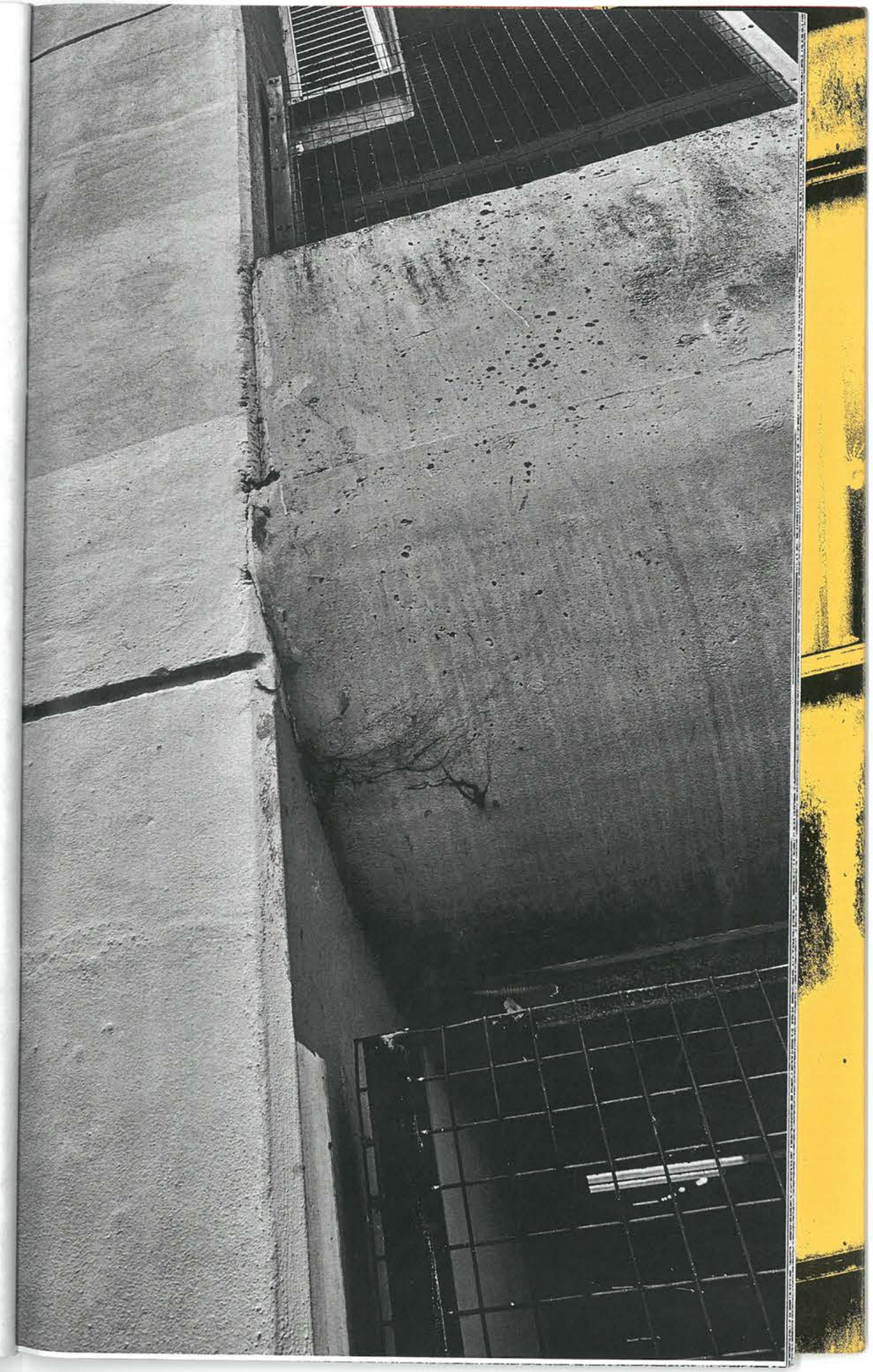
By the unnamed architects of the GLC, late 1960s. A denser and taller (19 storeys) continuation of the estate development by Frederick Gibberd for the Festival of Britain in 1951, where it towers over the buildings of Chrisp Street market with its listed clock tower. Redevelopment of Fitzgerald House was voted through in 2018 against the wishes of the 20th Century Society, and some mild disapproval by Historic England. Currently run by Poplar HARCA, it is hanging on in 2023 but likely to go in phase 2 of the plans.

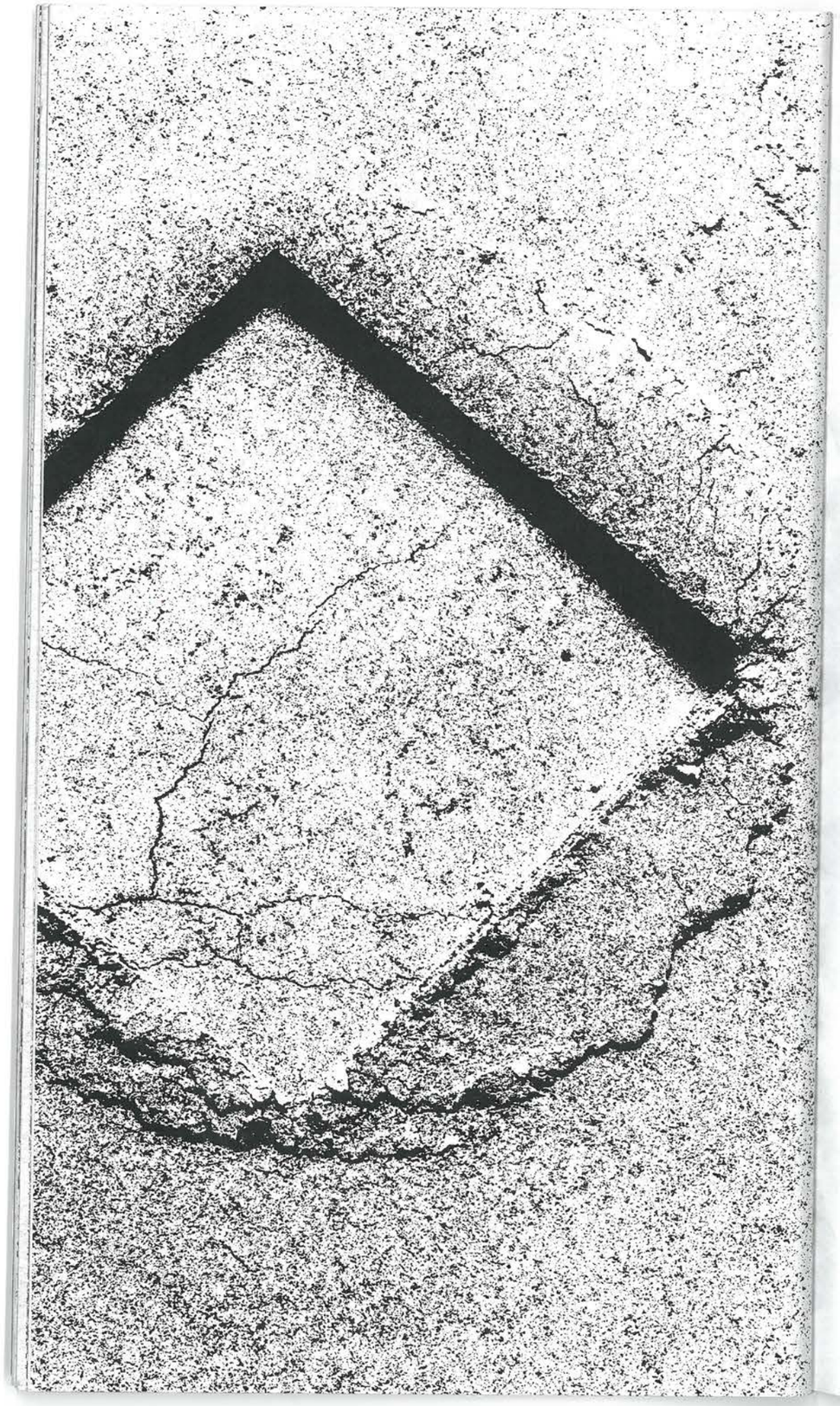


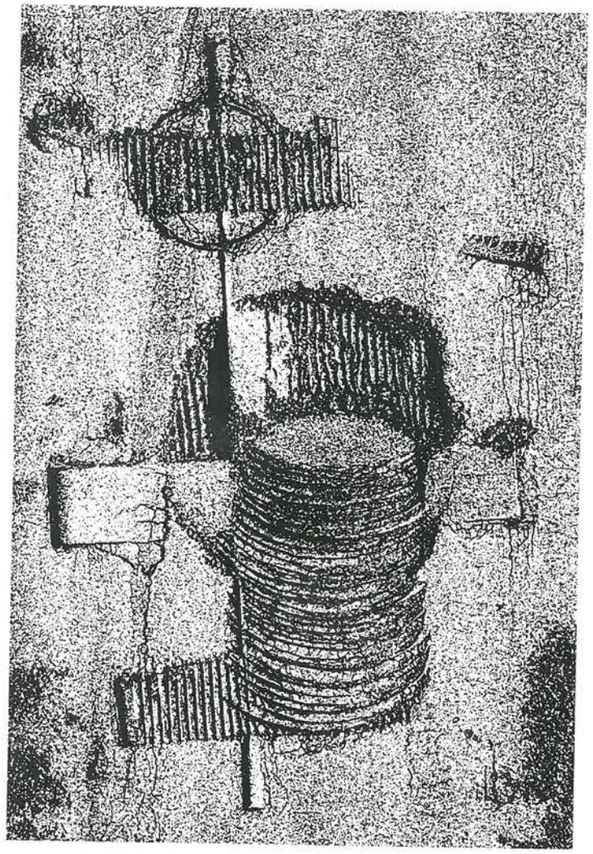


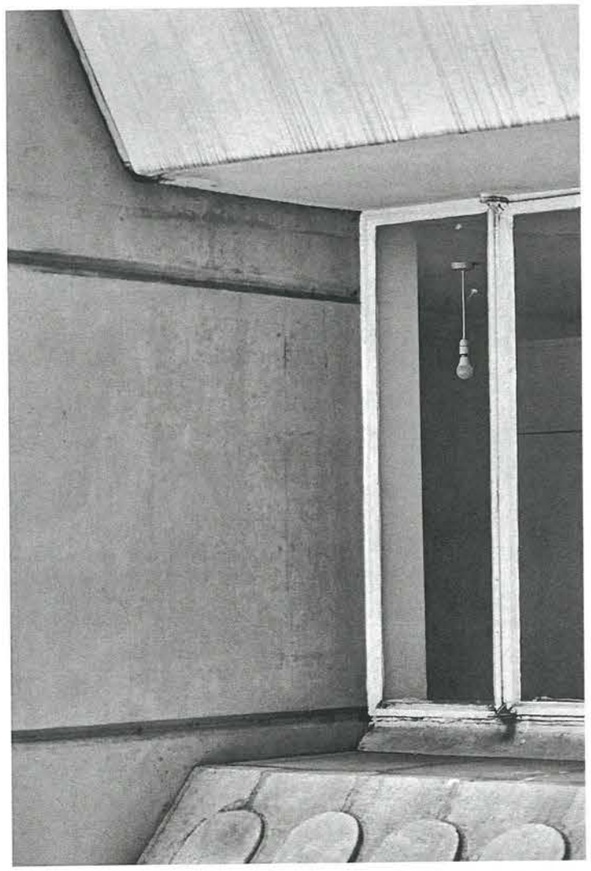
⑦	MILFORD TOWERS	CATFORD
1969	LONDON SE6 4SD	¬ 51.44671, -0.02169

Also on the Lansbury Estate, by the Owen Luder Partnership, 1969, built above a car park and shops. Described by Pevsner as 'a lofty cluster of council flats' but more recently by Lewisham council as bing in a poor state of repair with 'a chequered history'. They say it is 'not fit for purpose and perceived as unsafe.' Demolition was blocked in 2015 and a programme of repair and refurbishment started in 2018, with the balconies smartened up, but it was given a 5 year certificate of immunity from listing by Historic England in September 2022 and will almost certainly be lost.



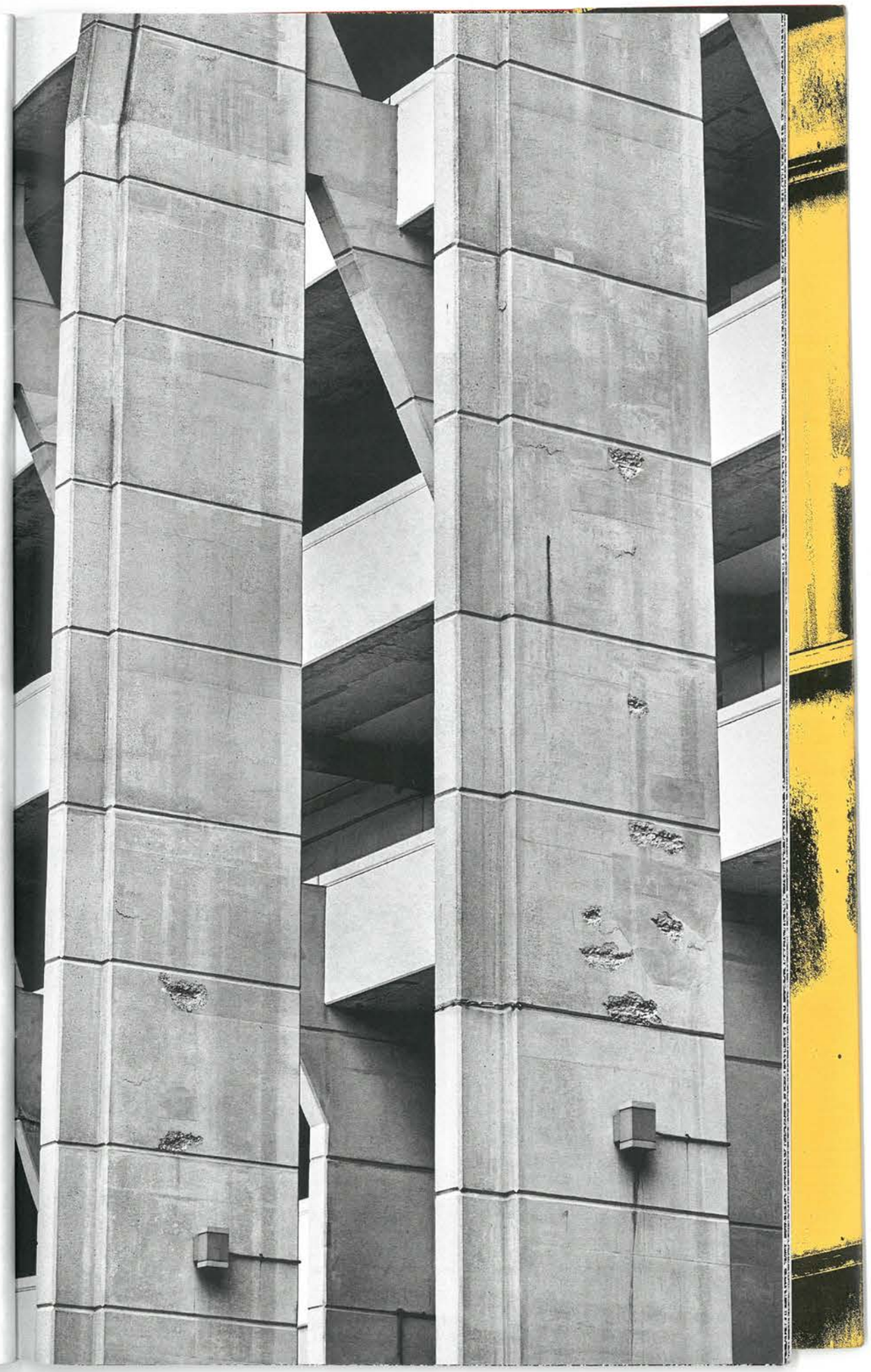




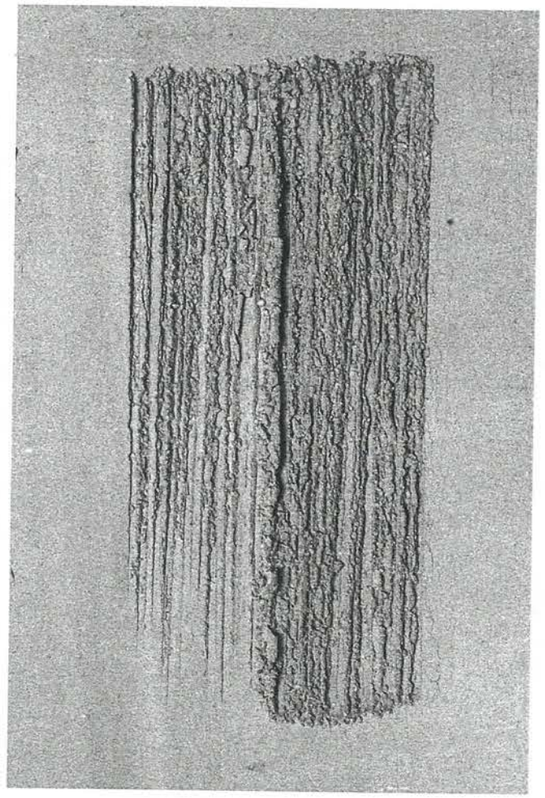


⑧	BRUNSWICK ESTATE	BLOOMSBURY
1967-1972	LONDON WC1N 1AE	¬ 51.52524, -0.12344

Brunswick Estate, Bloomsbury by Architect Patrick Hodgkinson. Begun in 1967, completed in 1972, listed Grade II in 2000. Originally a private development of flats over shops, the residential component failed to attract buyers and it was leased to the London Borough of Camden. Before being renovated early in the new millennium it followed the usual trajectory of decline into a sink estate. The accidental council estate is now reverting to plan with right-to-buy, many of the owners being architects and designers.

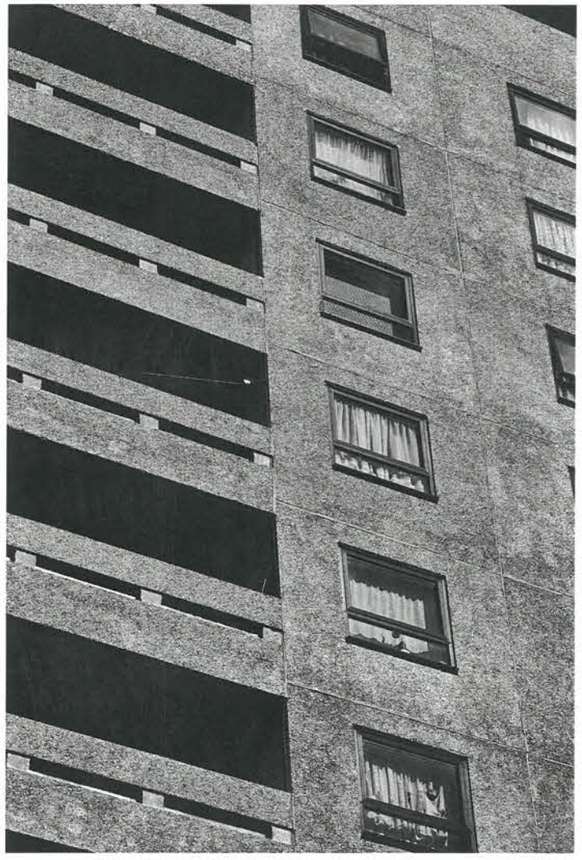


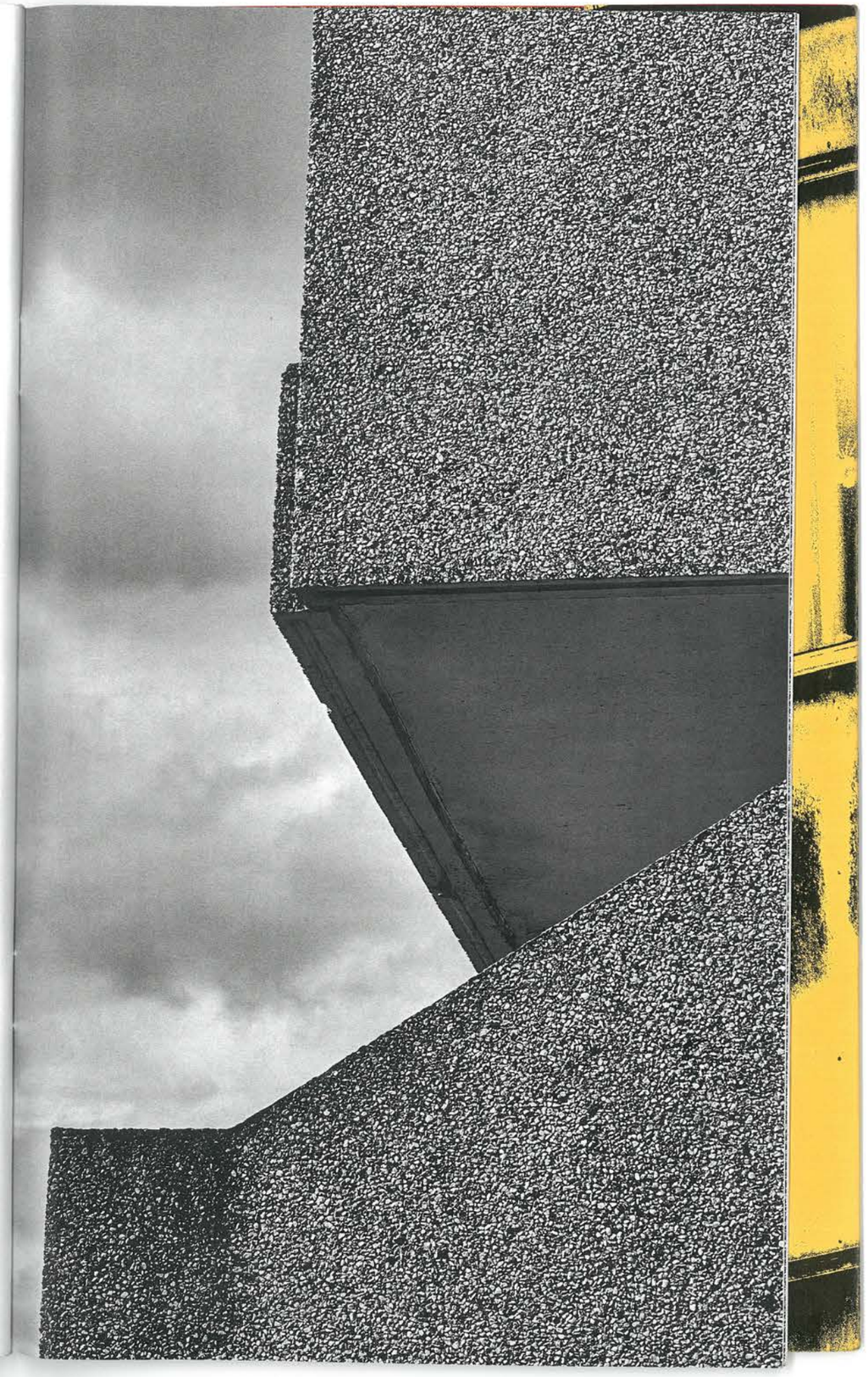




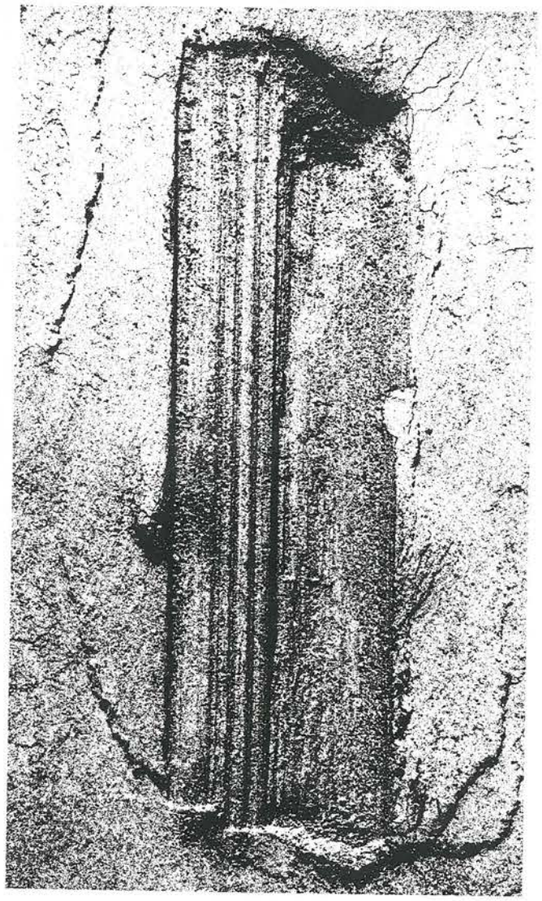
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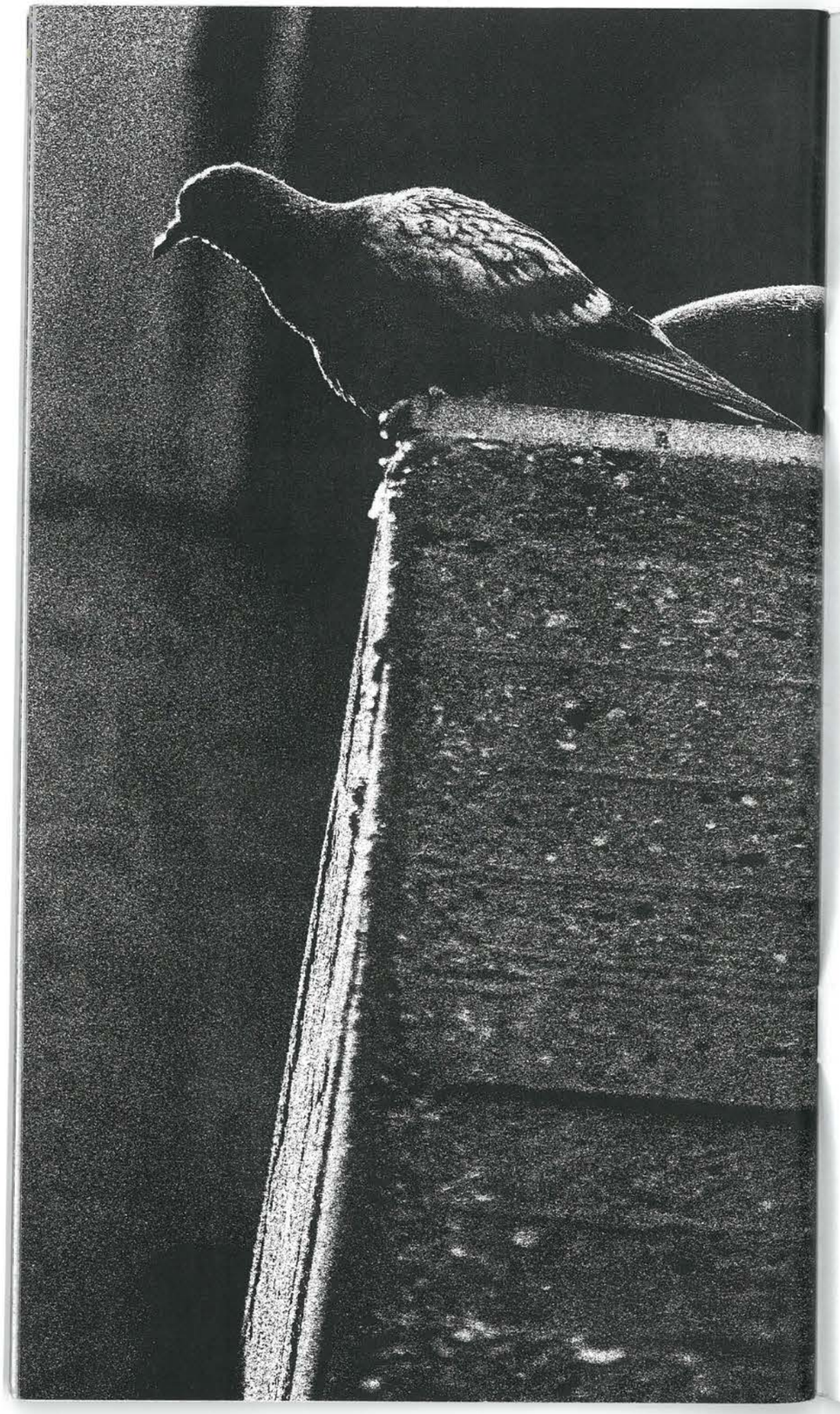
A byword for well-intentioned but unfortunate planning, most famously used for filming A Clockwork Orange. The lake is lovely but the real problem was always the lack of public transport connections. The site is bordered by Belmarsh Prison and two sewage works, plus the Southern Outfall Sewer now landscaped as the Ridgeway. Starting in 1967, and aimed at a population of 60,000, it was conceived and run by the GLC until its abolition in 1986. After various not-for-profit bodies and housing associations failed to make the place flourish, they were absorbed by the Peabody Trust in 2014.

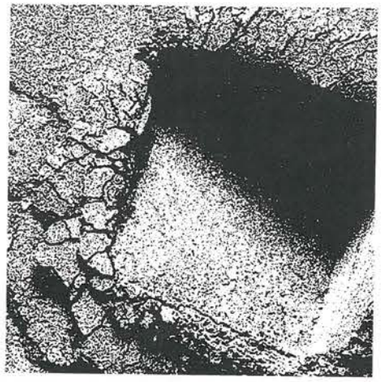












Enrico Policardo, born in Gorizia, Italy, studied in Udine and at the University of the Arts London. His work explores the spaces people inhabit, the homes they create, and the systems that shape them. Through photography and film, he looks at the emotional and societal aspects of modern life—how we live, where we live, and the often unnoticed cost of it all. His focus is on the everyday, the overlooked, and the quiet challenges of shared environments.

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Architectural historian and conservationist, Judith Martin studied at UCL and Oxford Brookes. Usually more at home with 19th century industrial architecture, this departure is driven by a recognition of both housing need and climate crisis.

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Richard Grainger is a multidisciplinary designer and creative based in London. With extensive experience in the music fashion & art industries he has exhibited works across the world and has been featured in various design publications.

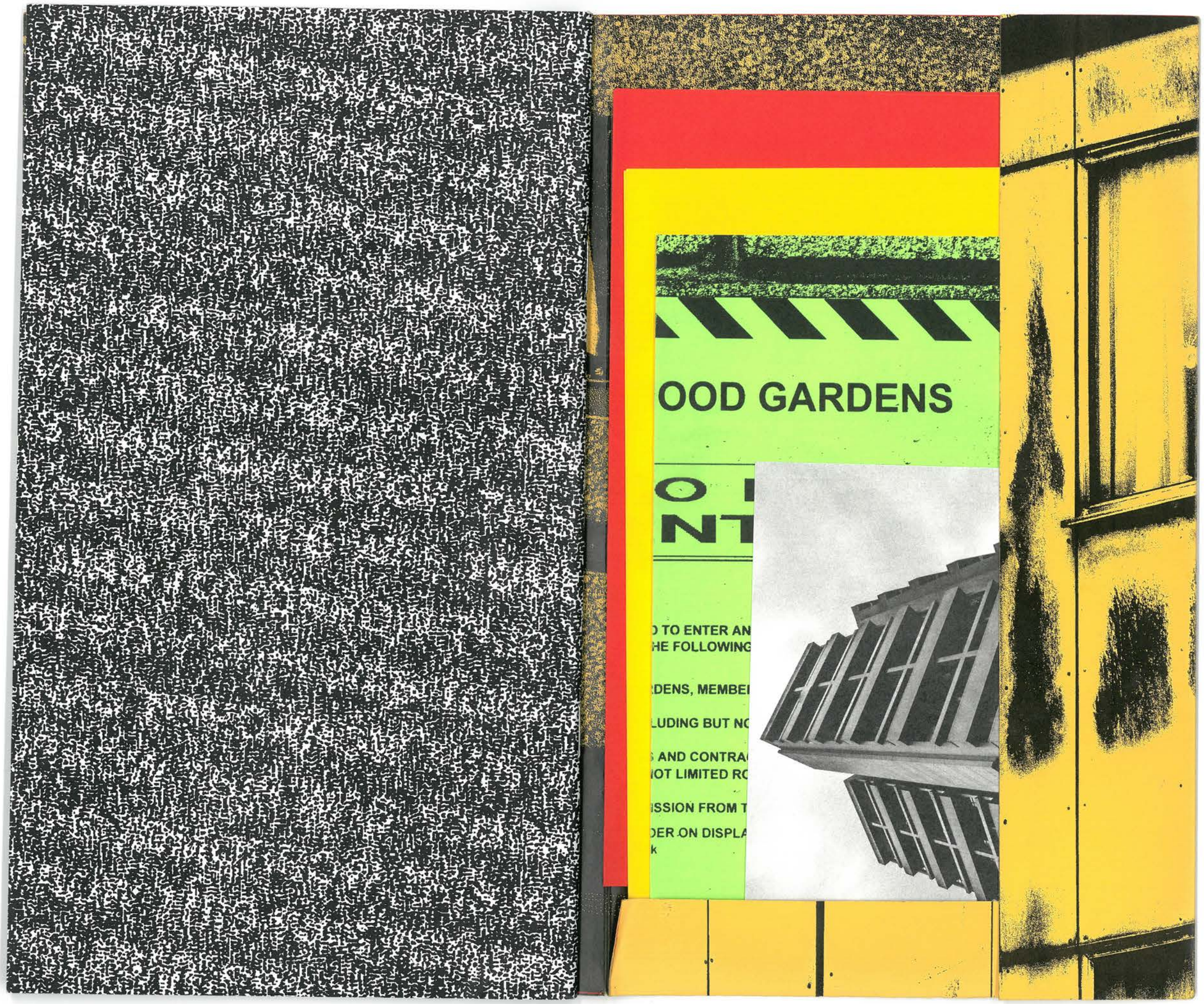
PHOTOGRAPHY - enricopolicardo.com
TEXT - Judith Martin
DESIGN - richardgrainger.co

UNCAPTIONED IMAGES

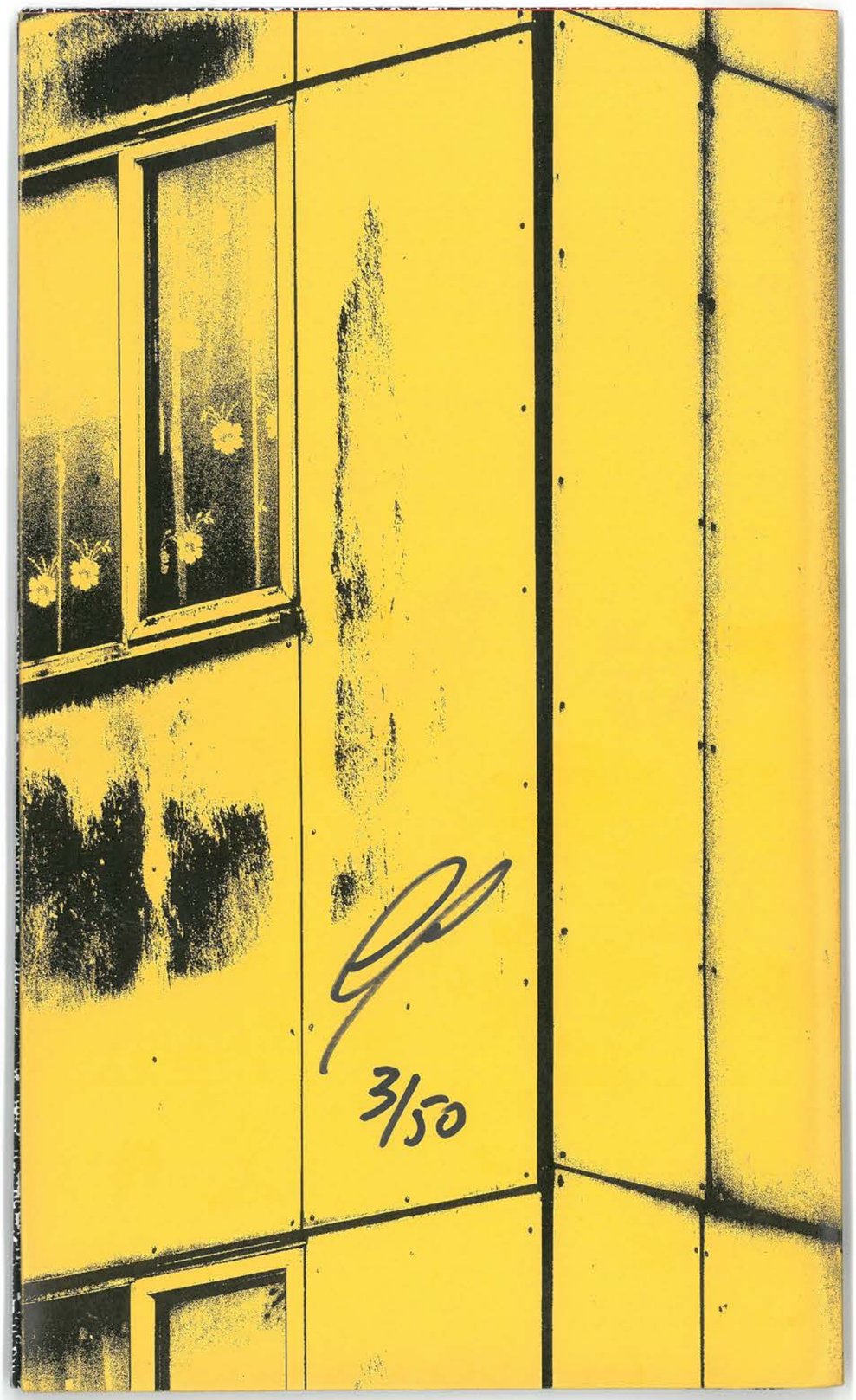
Page 6: Park Hill, Sheffield
Pages 4, 17, 25: Eros House
Page 15: Thamesmead
Page 7, 56: Milford Towers

ISBN: 978-1-916722-14-9

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