Red Road Re-visions

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ABSTRACT

Glasgow's Red Road flats, icons first of the promise and latterly of the perceived failure of modernist mass housing, are particularly visible even as they are being demolished, having inspired numerous representations. Critiquing the cancelled plan that would have made Red Road's demolition a spectacle for the 2014 Commonwealth Games opening ceremony, this paper moves on to a range of less reductive views of Red Road, drawing on the geocritical ideas of Bertrand Westphal, who argues that places are intertextual constructions constantly in flux, which call for multifocal, interdisciplinary analysis. Westphal's ideas resonate with the recent work of geographers Jane M. Jacobs and Ignaz Strebel and architecture scholar Stephen Cairns, which treats buildings as "always being 'made' or 'unmade.'" Comparably, Alison Irvine's novel *This Road is Red* (2011) explores how Red Road has been made by interactions between subjective experiences of residents and more objective facts of architecture and engineering. The novel itself exemplifies a geocritical – or geofictional – approach in using multifocal and multimodal means of textual and visual representation, and its linkage with the municipal Red Road legacy initiative is an innovative articulation across disciplines and media. Also significant are more abrasive works, such as Denise Mina's crime novel *The Red Road* (2013), which likens tower-block demolitions memorably to "public hanging[s]." The essay suggests that such demolition spectacles may also be read as metaphors for the vertiginous instability of financialised housing under neoliberalism, and as signposts to the needed re-emergence of social-democratic approaches to housing.

Fig. 1: Red Road from NW corner of site, 7 July 2014. Photo © the author.

Glasgow's Red Road flats, built between 1964 and 1969 in Balornock/Barmulloch northeast of the city centre, have been icons first of the promise and latterly of the perceived failings of modernist high-rise housing schemes. Red Road may have become more visible in 2014 than ever, even while disappearing from the city's skyline through the demolition process that has so

far removed one of the two 28-storey slab blocks and one of the six 31-storey point blocks. The visibility is both literal, as five of the remaining blocks wear bright red safety netting, and cultural or discursive, as the demolition has occasioned numerous additions to the range of scholarly, argumentative, and creative accounts of the buildings. Probably the crudest of these visions was the plan that would have seen the five red blocks subjected to controlled implosion or "blowdown" during the 2014 Commonwealth Games opening ceremony. This schemed spectacle was itself scrapped, and this essay reads its implications in the context of a range of less reductive representations of Red Road.

I draw on the geocritical ideas of Bertrand Westphal, who argues that places are intertextual constructions constantly in flux (Westphal 2011, 150). The premise is not that a place is merely a text, but that any significant place is a site where many texts – such as designs, biographies, debates – intersect and which therefore needs to be understood, provisionally, through multiple, multifocal accounts (Westphal 2011, 122). Buildings are main features that give a space definition as a place (see Westphal 2011, 5), but such definition does not account for all meanings and uses. Modernist housing schemes have been condemned as monolithic places whose designers sought to slot residents into prefabricated narratives of progress through technology, but comparing various views of Red Road indicates how even such imposing structures are subject to contingency and will inevitably generate a range of meanings, from the concrete and quotidian to the symbolic and virtual. The flexibility of literature accommodates "plural and paradoxical maps" of a particular place, diverse accounts of its history and its possibilities (Westphal 2011, 73), but geocritical analysis needs to recognize "that literary representation is included in the world" and to attend to places where literature meets other discourses (Westphal 2011, 116). Accordingly, I read literary representations of Red Road alongside accounts from architecture and urban studies and from visual media. Westphal's ideas resonate with the recent work of geographers Jane M. Jacobs and Ignaz Strebel and architecture scholar Stephen Cairns, who views buildings as "always being 'made' or 'unmade'" (Jacobs *et al* 2012, 128) and study Red Road as a site where "the technological and the human co-orchestrate the world" (Jacobs *et al* 2008, 167). Comparably, Alison Irvine's novel *This Road is Red* (2011) explores how Red Road has been made by interactions between subjective experiences of residents and more objective facts of architecture and engineering. The novel itself exemplifies a geocritical – or geofictional – approach in mapping the life-cycles of characters onto those of buildings by blending fictional and documentary techniques, textual and visual elements, and metonymic and metaphorical modes. The novel is part of an array of

municipally-sponsored works on Red Road's legacy, an innovative articulation across disciplines and media. I will also address, however, the value of more abrasive works, such Denise Mina's crime novel *The Red Road* (2013), in dramatising uncannily unresolved questions around housing.

I argue that through the interdisciplinary work Red Road has inspired, the scheme will last beyond its physical demise—and as something more than a cautionary example of failed utopianism, since even in its present near-spectral state it can be read as a signpost to the needed re-emergence of non-marketised approaches to housing.

"VERTIGINOUSLY STAYED": RED ROAD AS AMBIGUOUS ICON

Arguments about the relative successes and failures of Red Road as housing may outlast the flats themselves. What seems clear is Red Road's utility as adaptable signifier and as inspiration for comparably ambitious projects in diverse fields besides architecture. A 1965 image of the first two Red Road blocks rising against a clear blue sky illustrates the jacket of *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland* (1994), by Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius. Analogous to Red Road in scale, the book assesses developments that shaped British urban housing after the Second World War. The idealized qualities of the cover image evoke what Anthony Vidler in *The Architectural Uncanny* calls the "therapeutic program," linked to the visions of Le Corbusier, whereby clean-lined buildings "encouraging the ceaseless flow of light and air" were to foster individual and social well-being (Vidler 1992, 63). However, *Tower Block* is not an uncritical defence of modernist principles as put into practice. Glendinning and Muthesius point out that while design foundations for multi-storey flats as high-quality units of public housing were established in the 1950s by the modernist-inspired work of London County Council architects, initiative had shifted by the 1960s to "local politicians" in "Scotland and the English provinces" who prioritised quantity over quality (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994, 3). Glasgow's particular need for housing brought the ambitious scale of the city's high-rise programme and also many of its flaws: "Red Road… soon took on a spectacular life of its own [… as architect Sam] Bunton saw an opportunity to… 'build the highest blocks in Europe'" (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994, 233). The scheme's innovations fostered "calamitous overspending" in construction (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994, 234), so that it came to embody "the discrepancy between Modern ideals of technically and organisationally advanced building, and disorganized practice." As "a gigantic

project in a continual state of crisis, improvisation, and structural redesign" (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994, 318), Red Road thus also highlights the flux that both Westphal and Jacobs et al identify as built into any place.

Glendinning and Muthesius describe effects of the scheme's design flaws: "the high proportion of children, in 31-storey towers with only two lifts, created a reputation for juvenile delinquency which blighted the entire scheme even before its completion" (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994, 321). This assessment is challenged by other accounts, including *This Road Is Red*, but it points to another iconic use of Red Road, exemplified by the cover image of the 2006 book *Spaces of Social Exclusion* (Gough, Eisenschitz and McCulloch), which shows a man leaning from a high window in one of the slab blocks as though marooned in midair. The book addresses spatial aspects of poverty in Glasgow, but not at Red Road specifically, so the cover image tends toward the metaphorical. Glendinning and Muthesius cite architectural critic Colin McWilliam's description of the Red Road blocks as "'cynical population-containers'" (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994, 315), but they argue ultimately against broad dismissals of modernist approaches to housing, and the *Tower Block* cover image too is more metaphor than metonym, serving to evoke and reassert the ideals that inspired modernist high-rises rather than to represent Red Road itself. Overall, the book positions Red Road as a place of built-in ambiguity. Size and experimental boldness bring flaws that limit Red Road's service life, yet these qualities also inspire much of its ongoing life in representations, an irony compounding the uncanniness that, as Vidler's work suggests, arises from the incompletely-fulfilled promises of modernist regeneration schemes.

Encapsulating a variety of meanings and associations in and around Red Road, the final poem in Edwin Morgan's ten *Glasgow Sonnets*, written in the early 1970s, attends at once to the neatness of the blocks' form and to the risks of their ambitious scale:

> A multi is a sonnet stretched to ode
> and some say that's no joke. The gentle load
> of souls in clouds, vertiginously stayed
> above the windy courts, is probed and weighed.
> (Morgan 1990, 292: lines 4-7)

Hinting at the role of experimental, "stretched" design in Red Road's problems, the lines also model the capacity, the density, of sonnets, as high-rises are compressed into fourteen lines.

The phrase "vertiginously stayed" not only registers the blocks' noticeable windsway but also plays on the Scots usage of "stay" to mean *reside* (as in "I stay at Red Road") and on "stayed" in the related spatial, verbal sense of *held in place* – plus the temporal, nounal sense of a "stay" as a period of occupancy. The phrase expresses both the flux built into everyday life at the scheme and the impression of vertigo as a temporal as well as spatial experience: space is more than a receptacle for the progress time brings, and modernity is something much less settled than a utopian destination (see Westphal 2011, 9-10). The sonnet's final lines weigh the notorious "stalled lifts" of Red Road against the "stalled lives" of people in old slum areas, implying that the risks of high-rises are preferable to the toxic stasis prevailing in the tenements they replaced. Now, however, the poem seems most striking as an apprehension of Red Road's precarious place or limited stay in existence.

RED ROAD AND CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

Red Road's integral ambiguity shows in its current appearance: from a distance, the blocks in red might be new-builds or renovations, and with the netting blurring their angles, they can also resemble painterly or virtual renditions of some future addition to the cityscape. This residual utopian aspect serves their current use by their owner, the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA), as what amount to billboards, bearing banners with the GHA's white-on-red logo, matching the netting. Another carrier for the GHA brand is a mobile trailer, "Big Red," whose exhibits detail the GHA's history, from the 2003 tenant vote that transferred 86,000 council-owned units to the organisation, through the further transfer, starting in 2009, of GHA units to smaller, community-based associations, to the 2011 milestone of the GHA's programme, "Europe's biggest housing investment," passing the billion-pound mark. Under the motto "Better homes, better lives, a better Glasgow," displays in Big Red depict GHA projects and happy residents. The centrepiece is an interactive exhibit where visitors can launch videos of five blowdowns from the 2000s, including one at Dalmarnock, the area redeveloped for Commonwealth Games facilities. The exercise invites identification not only with the role of demolition engineer but also with assumptions that tower blocks are categorically obsolete and their clearance necessary for a better city. Demolition spectacles thus represent the extensive regeneration promised, and to some extent delivered, by the GHA: ironically, the size of the obsolete blocks, and the scale of their presumed failure, converts them into dramatic vehicles for new utopian promises.

Fig. 2: Big Red, Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow, 24 June 2012. Photo © the author.

A similar rhetorical manoeuvre produced the plan for multiple blowdowns at Red Road to replace fireworks in the Commonwealth Games opening ceremonies. As the *Observer* reported on 6 April 2014, "David Zolkwer, artistic director for Glasgow 2014, said: 'In just a few seconds the city's skyline will be transformed forever. It's a bold and confident statement that says 'bring on the future'" (McVeigh 2014). Through a kind of semiotic judo, plus explosives, the large unwanted buildings, their presence potentially embarrassing to promoters of regeneration, would have converted instantaneously into signs of progress. This particularly ostentatious piece of creative destruction was endorsed by prominent politicians, but as the same *Observer* article reports, the plan incited strong opposition. Alison Irvine emphasised its disregard for "'intricacies and complexities'" of the scheme's history (McVeigh 2014). Commentators less invested in Red Road were equally critical: Ian Jack observed that "[t]he misplaced civic grandeur that promoted the building of the flats now dresses up their demolition," and pointed to the plan's insensitivity to the Commonwealth context: "what will it mean to the viewer in Mumbai or Nairobi? That Glasgow is so rich and thoughtless that it will blow up sound buildings that aren't 50 years old?" (Jack 2014). In a similar vein, former MSP Carolyn Leckie drew attention

to the fact that the sixth and final remaining Red Road block still houses refugees, who would experience inconvenience during a blowdown, like other area residents, plus ideological insult: "'If the flats are not fit for human habitation, then what is the message we're sending to those residents in the remaining block?'" (McVeigh 2014). Backed by a petition, the arguments of Leckie and others may have swayed Games organizers, and cancellation of the blowdowns on safety grounds was announced on 13 April.

Photographer and filmmaker Chris Leslie, whose work features in the Red Road legacy project, suggested in his blog for 3 April that the "bizarre but vastly promoted" blowdown spectacle could at least publicise debate on regeneration. The abandoned plan's main achievement may indeed be in helping focus attention on the politics of demolition and housing generally. Social Policy scholar Gerry Mooney relates the plan to attempts by recent UK governments "to ensure that social housing is a residual category fit only for people with multiple and intractable problems" (Mooney 2014). This assessment echoes historian Patrick Wright's 1991 critique of the Thatcherite view which, overlooking the roles of "speculators… profiteering construction companies," and design faults, constructed failings of postwar housing schemes as evidence of the "evils of socialism" in contrast to the supposed virtues of property-owning individualism (Wright [1991] 2009, 107). While Wright emphasises the way "the council tower block [has] serve[d] as a generator of infernal meanings for people who only look at it from outside" (Wright 2009, 79), the Games plan reached new levels of glibness in envisioning the blowdown as bypassing any "infernal" stage and supplying instant regenerative meanings. Building on Wright's analysis, Andrew Burke cites Thatcher's caricaturing of postwar socialist principles in terms of a "'block mentality: tower blocks, trade union block votes, block schools,'" and argues that through this "chain of affiliation[s among] history, spatiality and ideology," schemes like Red Road have undergone a "process of dematerialisation, wherein the concrete form of the tower block circulates as a sign and visual image" of the supposed failure of postwar social programmes (Burke 2007, 182). The Games plan, neglecting to reckon the material ramifications of a quintuple blowdown, may have taken such ideological dematerialisation almost literally, as though thirty-storey buildings really could have been made to vanish in seconds.

A postscript to *Tower Block* suggests that the 1993 blowdown of another iconic-but-flawed Glasgow scheme, Queen Elizabeth Square in the Gorbals, during which an onlooker was killed by debris, ought to have "dealt a fatal blow to… the demolition of tower blocks as public theatre" (Glendinning and Muthesius 1994, 327). Whether or not the Games plan's failure now

signals the obsolescence of such extravaganzas, its combined ambition and incoherence suggests a need for new interpretations of this genre of spectacle, to which I will return below.

RED ROAD AS "BUILDING EVENT"

An antithesis to the blowdown spectacle is recent work by Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel, who have made an extended analysis of Red Road's demise – a de-construction process that has also in a way re-materialised the blocks, in several journal articles and most imposingly in Cairns and Jacobs's 2014 book *Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture*, where Red Road exemplifies buildings "in place but out of time" (Cairns and Jacobs 2014, 57, 103). While the title indicates the project's ambition, Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel do not treat Red Road as a conveniently dead object for forensic dissection. In a 2012 essay on their methodologies, they describe their work as "an investigation into architecture not as a formal, fixed thing, nor even as a meaning-filled, human claimed, symbolic thing, but as a building event" (Jacobs *et al* 2012, 127-128): something that happens in time as well as space. Their exploration of stages in Red Road's demise takes time and makes space to recognise its protracted "death" as a significant phase in its life, and points to its future as ongoing virtual and conceptual event.

Buildings Must Die emphasizes that obsolescence is "not simply a state that appears from nowhere as a categorical fact," but a "value judgement" (Cairns and Jacobs 2014, 133). Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel show how Red Road's obsolescence has emerged through decisions by GHA officials, technical experts, and some residents. In a 2007 article on technological aspects of Red Road, they point to the way influential social-scientific accounts of the shortcomings of such schemes have mirrored the assumption of Corbusian modernism that "technology [… can] have a determining effect upon quality of life" (Jacobs *et al* 2007, 612). In a 2008 essay they examine a specific feature that has certainly contributed to Red Road's obsolescence: the structural use of asbestos means the original single-glazed windows "cannot economically or safely be replaced" (Jacobs *et al* 2008, 168). Since asbestos is a safety material that has proven to make homes dangerous and unhomely, this assessment locates uncanniness built into the once-innovative technology of the scheme. Yet, the essay indicates that different decisions about technology could have produced more lastingly serviceable buildings, so that Red Road is obsolete because of cumulative, stacked (mis)judgements – a

series of determinations rather than an overall structural determinism – and not because large-scale council housing is inherently unviable.

The "Windows" essay is itself somewhat deterministic in its approach to its subject: "while the residents had their eyes (and narrative accounting) on what they could see, we had our eyes (and camera) on what they were seeing through" (Jacobs *et al* 2008, 174). Residents' views from and about the flats are of secondary interest. This predetermined focus does not invalidate the researchers' method; rather, it helps validate the multifocal and multimodal approach to place that Westphal advocates, and suggests the value of a complementary novelistic approach in attending to residents' "human claiming" of the flats. So does Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel's commentary on an April 2005 meeting of the Red Road Save Our Homes campaign (Jacobs *et al* 2007, 621-625), which shows how the scheme's obsolescence has been a contested judgement and indicates additional impetus for projects saving things – material, anecdotal, and conceptual – from the flats.

THIS ROAD IS RED

Though occasioned by the distinctive physical presence of Red Road, *This Road is Red* (*TRIR*) does not concentrate narrowly on this presence. The volume itself, a standard trade paperback, functions as a playful, non-monumental representation of a Red Road block. The back cover shows half the building in a wide-angle, upward-looking photograph by Emma Lennox; the front cover has the other half as a drawing by Mitch Miller; the physical book thus resembles a tower block in miniature, and the combination of photo and drawing indicates how, like Red Road, the book holds a range of stories in a blend of discourses. Like Jacobs, Cairns, and Strebel, Irvine did extensive research around the scheme, and the text includes direct quotations from her interviews with residents along with incremental narrative accounts of fictional characters based on people interviewed. Accompanying maps and illustrations by Miller are presented not as precise renderings of the scheme's features, but as complements to the textual accounts of everyday habitation of the flats. The text consistently locates imaginative perception within Red Road, as in a quotation from resident John McNally on the view from his flat: "*For… an old gas worker talking about sunsets, is there a name for it, aesthetic?*" (Irvine 2011, 298; original italics). Thus, Irvine negotiates the "barrier between the observer and the observed" that Alison Ravetz has identified as a problem for efforts to understand everyday life in housing schemes (Ravetz 2001, 158). In making residents' interpretations integral, *TRIR* registers the role of

story-making in place-making, and also the way novels can house nuance and understatement as well as imposingly imaginative visions. Westphal quotes Paul Ricoeur's observation that "'fiction alone' among representational discourses "can allow itself a little inebriation'" (Westphal 2011, 36), but Irvine's approach is sober compared with the extravagance of the Games blowdown scheme or indeed the boldness of Red Road's conception. At the same time, with the multifocal, multimodal method of *TRIR* de-emphasizing the author's individual vision, Red Road can be credited with helping to inspire a new kind of novel, "geo-centered" rather than "ego-centered" in Westphal's terms (Westphal 2011, 111, 114, 147). The author becomes collator, convenor, organizer of the work, rather than creator or architect.

A further geocritical "vocation" is attention to the "flux of space in time," a "diachronic delving" into layers of meaning coexisting in a given place (Westphal 2011, 122). Ravetz observes that "The commonest estate biography is a hopeful beginning" followed by decline (Ravetz 2001, 190), and this pattern has traces in *TRIR*, which is organized chronologically with section titles referencing specific years. Yet, by juxtaposing many individual biographies, Irvine indicates that, even in its grimmest era, the 1980s and 1990s, Red Road housed many kinds of people and experience. Metonymic detail registers the lack of facilities for children, but at the same time shows their imaginative adaptation of what was available, illustrating what Michel de Certeau celebrates as ground-level everyday use of the environment imposed by planners and architects (de Certeau 1984, 93). Team tennis on an improvised court is a communal reinvention of an individual sport (Irvine 2011, 45), while "giant headers" is a vertiginous individual variation on a team sport, involving a football dropped from high windows and headed by a player on the ground (Irvine 2011, 45-46). A moment of reverse vertigo typifies the novel's way of depicting social problems without reductive determinism. In a 1989 scene, Pamela, who has grown up at Red Road, awakens in a hedge after a drug-induced blackout as her name is called "from the blue sky" by childhood friend Nicola (Irvine 2011, 165). Grounded in Pamela's point-of-view, the passage avoids looking down on her as someone irreversibly fallen, and while her addiction persists, her final appearance in 2003 has her on methadone, vowing to survive (Irvine 2011, 262).

Political perspectives on Red Road's problems are also incorporated in ground-up ways. The most politicized major character, student Kat Fisher, works at a shop on the scheme, and her 1989 reflections on the injustice of the Poll Tax are interrupted by a knife-wielding but visibly "old and tired" man (Irvine 2011, 169); the juxtaposition casts such local crimes as an unofficial tax triggered by broader inequities. In 1995 Kat remains at the scheme, taking further robberies

and other hazards in stride (Irvine 216-217). Tenacity also characterises the parallel narrative of another fictionalized resident, Kamil, who deals with perceptions of his Asian otherness by pointing out that he is Glaswegian, from the former shipbuilding area of "'Govan, originally'" (Irvine 2011, 186), and faces down the BNP-sympathizing ex of his girlfriend Michelle (Irvine 2011, 194). His greater annoyance is a ghost haunting his flat. His refusal to be intimidated could evoke the ideal of modern flats as ghost-banishing spaces, but the persistence of the revenant, plus worsening conditions that impel Kamil and Michelle to move away in 1997, suggests that Red Road is increasingly haunted by the ghosts of its own unfulfilled promise (Vidler 1992, 64). So does a 1994 scene where Kamil's friends Michael, Kay, and Trish contemplate Red Road from ground level, seeing the high-rises as "'gravestones'" and the scheme as "'a cemetery'" (Irvine 2011, 211-212) and pointing to the way the buildings, in their last years, appear as their own monuments.

Yet, the novel's most strikingly extended metaphor, illustrating one way "the body confers a measure to the world" (Westphal 2011, 64), maps buildings onto human figures with an effect that is homely rather than uncanny. In an early, 1967 scene, a resident hangs washing "at the very top of Ten Red Road," and contemplates the adjacent, unfinished building in a metaphorical way arising metonymically from the quotidian task of laundry: "New Housing. New Glasgow. She looks at the half-finished cladding on Ninety-three Petershill Drive. Semi-clothed. A trouser halfway up a leg" (Irvine 2011, 27). As the woman and her family emerge as key characters, their story develops an extended metaphor of Red Road as maternal—or parental—space. Completion of the scheme in 1969 arrives as the woman's husband, Jim, carves her name, Colleen, into the crust of a pie, "the roof on a house." The two of them express mutual satisfaction at the "'[p]rogress'" the scheme embodies, and as they embrace on their veranda, Jim dwells upon "her body that was strong enough to keep them all, to house them all, to love them all. Her name forging in the oven's heat. A new oven in the new Red Road" (Irvine 2011, 42-44). These words play with the trope of womb as oven but also recall the earlier image of a man building food, and the passage envisions Red Road as a place where gendered role divisions need not be oppressive. Such early optimism, like the echoes of the GHA's contemporary utopian motto in the laundry passage, becomes poignant in time: the family's original flat is wrecked by the 1977 fire in the building (Irvine 2011, 86-95), and Colleen's health declines along with the scheme's. However, her death in 1997 is followed by a scene where Michael and Kay introduce their newborn baby to Kamil and Michelle (Irvine 2011, 232-233), and Red Road as a nurturing space makes a final appearance in a 2009 scene where a

concierge, John, assists a resident, Susie Ho, to deliver her baby in a disused office (Irvine 2011, 290-297). As sympathetic presences, the concierges in Irvine's rendition of Red Road counter dystopian views of schemes as environments requiring aggressive panoptic security.

In a further example of the juxtaposition of contrasting experiences, though, the birth scene is followed by the death of Jim and the suicides of a family of asylum-seekers (Irvine 2011, 2011, 297). The account of the suicides, based on a 2010 case, comes from the viewpoint of another refugee resident, Mariam. Westphal notes "an author's freedom to overthrow his own point of view through a... character with an outside perspective" (Westphal 2011, 129), and *TRIR* depicts Red Road's refugees as active users and interpreters of the scheme. The most prominent refugee character, Khadra, is a Somali who arrives "six months after the attacks in the United States" (Irvine 2011, 250). Putting up with occasional Islamophobes and persisting bureaucratic obstructions to her permanent residency, she recognises ways in which native Glaswegians share her concerns about housing (Irvine 2011, 269). Through Khadra's eyes, the novel depicts the 2007 bid by Didier Pasquette to tightrope between two Red Road blocks. She is interested, but once the artist, defeated by wind, has "disappeared and never c[o]me back," her attention, and the text's, moves on (Irvine 2011, 276): the spectacle is a passing anomaly. At the end of the scene, having gained permanent residence in Glasgow, Khadra looks back at Red Road as "the place where she'd endured the process that finally gave her leave to remain" (Irvine 2011, 278). For Khadra, as for other residents, Red Road's buildings matter for their use-value as shelter. Arguably, this is the reading *TRIR* as a whole conveys most strongly: Red Road is a large assembly of houses, which are integral parts of the biographies of those who have stayed in them and will remain reference points as those biographies go on, demonstrating one kind of intertextual (re)construction of place.

As mentioned above, *TRIR* itself is part of an assembly of works sponsored by Glasgow Life, the city's agency for culture and sport, and also by the GHA (Irvine 2011, 10). The project's online home, *Red Road Flats: Past, Present and Future...* (http://www.redroadflats.org.uk/), features a white-on-red logo with all eight Red Road blocks in silhouette and roots extending below the ground, a neat image of the flats' endurance as an organic if invisible part of the city. At Glasgow's People's Palace museum, an exhibit of the same title ran from February 2013 to May 2014, and as of July 2014, was recapitulated in a gift shop display emphasising the collaboration of "adult learning staff, performers, galleries, artists, writers, universities and museums" in "supporting the Red Road community during a period of massive regeneration."

TRIR itself is on sale in the shop, and the *Red Road Flats* website offers visual and textual resources – stories, photographs, paintings – that parallel the novel's multifocal approach. The very co-ordination and convenience of this legacy project could suggest some danger of Red Road effectively disappearing into a range of creative-industrial heritage consumer products, and a brief comparative look at another iconic modernist housing site undergoing "massive regeneration" may be useful here. Sheffield's Park Hill Flats are in throes of another kind of death: privatisation and rebuilding. The renovated section houses a sales office with exhibits on the vast structure's history and blurbs touting its rebirth as an "aspirational address." Here the curated, packaged product is the building itself, with little concession to any current idea of housing as a right rather than a commodity, or to the socialist traditions Sheffield shares with Glasgow. According to housing scholar Danny Dorling, sales of the renovated units are slow and most of the complex is empty, despite the city's "very long waiting list for [social] housing" (Dorling 2014, 82). I will suggest below that Red Road's legacy may yet help to represent a more constructive future for alternatives to neoliberal property regimes.

"A MODERN PUBLIC HANGING"

An alternative to potentially over-neat cultural-academic processings of Red Road materializes in recent works of crime fiction, a genre whose conventions encourage anti-decorous takes on cities. The crudest version of this approach portrays decaying housing schemes as natural environments, and partial causes, for bad acts. Hence the cover of Malcolm MacKay's *The Night the Rich Men Burned* (2014). Nominally set in Glasgow, this character-driven narrative about calculating loan-sharks names very few details of settings, but the cover features a current picture of Red Road, complete with red netting and GHA logos, against a lowering sky. The generalized relation of the image to the book's content illustrates how Red Road's reputation for danger and dysfunction is at least partly a fictional construct. Other recent appearances of Red Road in crime fiction, however, look past superficial meanings. Its use as a location for the 2006 television adaptation of Ian Rankin's 2004 novel *Fleshmarket Close* may seem another shallow appropriation of the visual impact of the buildings, since the story is set in Edinburgh and originally among much smaller blocks. Yet Red Road is a fitting location, since both original and adapted versions of Rankin's narrative dramatise the precarious situations of refugees in a way that complements Irvine's more understated approach. Another 2006 screen work, Andrea Arnold's film *Red Road*, views the scheme initially through the perspective of a

CCTV operator haunted by personal trauma, but eventually, like *TRIR*, looks past divisions between observers and observed. As Burke argues, the film thus challenges both genre conventions and related assumptions about schemes and their inhabitants (2007, 186).

Denise Mina's *The Red Road* (2013) also looks beyond clichés, but more grimly. In another indication of the interchangeability of housing schemes for book-marketers, the cover of the first UK edition features not Red Road itself but three smaller tower blocks. Characteristic of Mina's work, however, is detailed attention to Glasgow as built and inhabited city, from the condition of particular streets and structures to broader patterns of development juxtaposing aspiration and desperation. *The Red Road* is the fourth volume in a series centering on Strathclyde police Inspector Alex Morrow, whose background in a deprived district of the city's southside makes her both an informed observer of the urban environment and a critical outsider in the police. The layered plot centres on a murder scene at "The old Red Road flats" (Mina 2013, 27). Approaching them, Morrow recalls policing excited crowds at a blowdown in the Gorbals: "It was a modern public hanging. They were there to see something bigger than them die" (Mina 2013, 106). Figuring tower blocks as scapegoats more than causes for crime and social breakdown, the hanging metaphor implies an anthropomorphic rescaling of the condemned building, whereby its destruction is hinted to represent, for onlookers, a fitting fate for supposedly dysfunctional former occupants. Morrow's examination of Red Road continues to blend observations on different scales, illustrating fiction's capacity for plural perceptions of place. Inside the relevant partly-dismantled block, "the rotting remains of a housing revolution," Morrow climbs to the eleventh-floor murder scene, where removal of the outer walls has created an unexpected view over the city and a "confusion of scale [which leaves] her sick." Immediately after, she registers another uncanny rescaling of the once-orderly domestic space: "The girders were whining, the whole edifice swaying slightly as it caught the wind. The building felt as if it was crumbling, a skeleton dosed in lime" (Mina 2013, 109). As her vertiginous stay continues, Morrow ponders the meaning of the murder site (Mina 2013, 110), and her perception of the block as both crime scene and corpse proves significant.

The murder results from a collision between two people driven by different kinds of homelessness. The killer, Rose Wilson, is a survivor of care-homes and sexual abuse who has been adopted into the household of an unscrupulous lawyer, Julius McMillan, and implicated in his illicit dealings. The victim, Aziz Balfour, has come to Glasgow from Pakistan, doing charity work "for the people left homeless after the 2008 earthquake" (Mina 2013, 69). He has accidentally inflicted fatal injuries on the already-ailing McMillan during an argument over the

lawyer's associations with another Glasgow Pakistani, Dawood McMann, whose fraud and smuggling rackets obstruct Aziz's aid work (Mina 2013, 146, 202-203). As she confesses to Morrow, Rose has confronted Aziz at his office near Red Road, pursued him into the scheme, and stabbed him (Mina 2013, 260). Aziz's wife (whose first name is Mina) relays his view of Red Road – "'He used to say if that was in Pakistan families would be living in it'" – and his lack of fear of the skeletal structure after his experiences navigating earthquake rubble (Mina 2013, 203). Hence his attempt to take refuge in the dying building. Red Road is again figured as victim as well as setting. With the case solved but McMann set to evade justice, Morrow links the flats' future as "a cloud of grey dust and rubble" (Mina 2013, 295) with her sense of systemic disorder in the city. She opts to risk her own (career) demolition by exposing some of the high-placed corruption that is responsible for the crimes she has been investigating and implicitly for some of Red Road's fatal flaws. While there is closure to the complex crime plot, the case of the dying scheme is tied to larger questions of housing injustice that remain open.

CONCLUSION

In its red netting, Red Road is vivid yet insubstantial, fragile yet imposing: a bright spectre. Westphal remarks that "Nothing is sadder than a new city turned old" (Westphal 2011, 165) but also emphasises that representations can preserve detailed impressions of specific places at specific times (Westphal 2011, 157). And even, perhaps especially, in its present condition, Red Road calls for interpretations to supplement or talk back to those already circulating. In a blog entry from January 2015, Chris Leslie notes that the scheme's pre-demolition limbo continues, as though "someone wants these buildings to remain in their current partially disintegrated state to remind Glaswegians of how lucky we are to be on the cusp of this latest round of regeneration" (Leslie, 2015). The delay allows more time for the creation of vivid representations such as Leslie's photographs, and for consideration of the meanings of Red Road's disappearance. In an essay on tower-block blowdowns in London, architectural historian Joe Kerr, noting their crowd-drawing parallels with "public executions" (Kerr 2012, 164), suggests that such spectacles are more constructively understood as, among other things, challenges to "innate belief in the stability and permanence of architecture" (Kerr 2012, 166). I would suggest that demolitions of such large, once-new housing schemes now also invite reading as metaphors for the instability, or increased risk of dematerialisation, that neoliberal property markets have imposed upon buildings, and houses particularly. A variation on this reading might

focus on the labour that must occur before and after any blowdown, as a reminder of the materiality of buildings and houses. While one recent housing studies text concludes that "never again will most people think of their house as only a home" (Lowe 2011, 244), both Danny Dorling in *All that is Solid* (2014) and James Meek in *Private Island* (2014) argue persuasively that the financialisation of housing is leaving more and more people in precarious situations (or "vertiginously stayed"), and point to a need for increased public-sector initiatives, and a possible re-emergence of some form of council housing.

Considered more literally, Red Road's demolition suggests a rescaling of modernist utopianism to loom less large either for ill or for good, and it is noteworthy that numerous smaller high-rises in Glasgow, as elsewhere, are set to continue in service, under GHA or other auspices. Viewing Red Road less as the remains of a housing revolution than as a group of houses also helps to indicate why the GHA's promises, as advertised through Red Road, "Big Red," and elsewhere, need to be taken seriously. Both Dorling (2014, 138-144) and Meek (2014, 211-218) suggest that housing associations should be regarded skeptically, as possible vehicles for privatising agendas. However, equally significant may be the GHA's contribution to construction of Red Road's virtual future, a collaborative, multifocal project that might be one model for non-monumental but constructive approaches to housing itself.
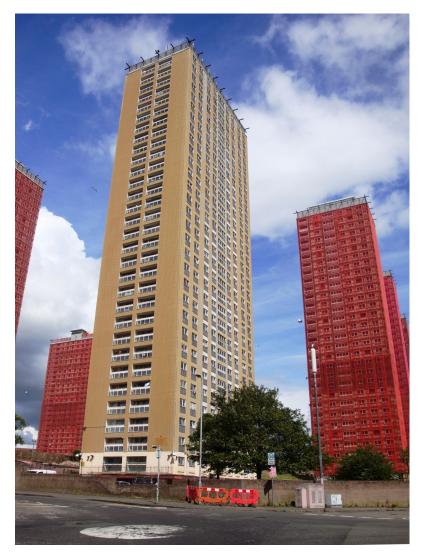
Fig. 3: Red Road's last occupied block from SW, 7 July 2014. Photo © the author.

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