

A hundred years in the future,  
many buildings designed to  
process extracted fossil fuels  
will no longer exist. But once  
they are demolished, will all  
memories of them disappear too?

## West Burton A: 1968-2122

is an archive of recollections,  
and of imagined futures  
for the area.

West Burton A, near Gainsborough - one of only three remaining coal-fired power stations in the UK - is scheduled to be decommissioned in August 2022. This collection of posters pays tribute to the building, to those who participated in its existence, and to the surrounding landscape and habitats.

Designed by socially engaged artist Dana Olărescu, in response to four months, in 2021, of workshops, informal conversations, and interviews with relevant communities, these posters form a creative response to the station's decommission. The designs incorporate memories of those who worked at, lived near, or even simply glanced in the direction of West Burton A - as well as future scenarios for the building and landscape in 100 years' time, as imagined by the same people.

The collection was informed by conversations with: Ian Waites; Maddy Holroyd; x-church artists and the young people who attend its alternative youth club; former and current West Burton A staff; Years 5 and 6 of North Leverton Academy and Sturton-le-Steeple C of E Primary School; the West Burton Residents' Planning Group; Sturton-le-Steeple, North Leverton, and Gainsborough locals; and Gainsborough Heritage Association.

Images by [Michael Bowdidge](#) and [rest0fthecake](#)  
Archival images taken from Midlands Region General Electricity's *West Burton Power, 1968*

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*Live Collage 317*  
*How To Say Goodbye To A Power Station (2021)*, Michael Bowdidge  
Digital collage from a leaflet by Dana Olărescu with additional materials,  
created as part of Slumgothic Live Collage project



Time and again, we have been told that industrialisation led to this moment in the Anthropocene: one of panic, chaos, and climate anxiety. But the difference between being told and living next door to buildings that have contributed to this outcome is a lived experience rarely listened to, documented, or considered relevant to research into alternative solutions.

In 2007, a report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), *Dirty Thirty: Ranking of the Most Polluting Power Stations in Europe*<sup>1</sup>, gave West Burton as the 21st most polluting power station in Europe, and the third most polluting in the UK. Yet buildings like West Burton secured power for millions of homes in the UK - a utility so ubiquitous that it is habitually taken for granted. Given imminent decommission, what does it mean to say goodbye to these anthropocentric structures that have exploited the Earth and its natural elements, and polluted the air and waterways, yet also served communities, providing stable income and unforgettable moments for workers and those living nearby?

This dissonance is key to understanding the situation's complexity. Simple answers won't solve the colossal mess we're in. Electricity is a growth industry, but living on a planet with finite resources means that we must unlearn existing forms of problem-solving and instead envisage less extractive practises. Though it is convenient (and less mentally overwhelming) to leave big decisions to those with expertise, power, influence, or finance, we have repeatedly witnessed disastrous decision-making at this level. If we are truly interested in changing our approach, we need everyone on board - irrespective of age or experience; a close collaboration encompassing many strengths. Diverse participants lead to more layered approaches, yet how often do we listen to those who don't participate in decision-making processes? And if so, do their views permeate into actual policies? When will organisations manage to go beyond box-ticking consultation exercises into meaningful engagement with under-represented groups?

In the 1950s, architects and designers such as Victor Papanek<sup>2</sup> were taught

<sup>1</sup> Dirty Thirty: Ranking of the Most Polluting Power Stations in Europe, WWF, May 2007, accessed 10 January, 2021

that their products and buildings should not last beyond 20 or 30 years. Politicians have four-year mandates which lead to short-termism rather than long-term sustainability. Western doctors focus on immediate alleviation of symptoms rather than on establishing root causes. The dominance of this myopic perspective inhibits collective imagination and the possibility of alternative means of inquiry.

Taking West Burton A as a case study, how do we construct a regenerative future which centres the experiences of those living here, and their hopes and desires for the area? What will this landscape look like in 100 years' time, once the station has been decommissioned? Over four months, this question was asked of people from all walks of life, allowing them to temporarily become designers and makers and participate in this imaginary process as equals. Considering a future beyond our own lifespans forces us to acknowledge the influence of today's decisions and actions on the wellbeing of future generations. Generations of both humans and wildlife which we can have no direct relationship with. The necessary emotional intelligence hinges on extending radical generosity and compassion to complete strangers. Can we invest altruistic care into making the future less bleak than the present?

To construct a dignified future, our demands must be translated into action **right now**, at a hyperlocal level. If people are hungry, we start empowering them to grow food, now. Similarly, if fossil fuel dependency is to end, we must divert all investment and profit into green jobs aiding those in transitional industries. Temporary financial loss can be replaced by long-term employment. Local communities must be listened to, empowered, and given the tools and resources to steward their immediate area.

If you are an educator, introduce your students to alternative energy options, and encourage them to critically engage instead of conforming to exploitative procedures. If you are a stakeholder, cultivate alternative work cultures by listening to your employees and reaching out to local residents to understand how you are perceived. If you are an elected official, suspend your disbelief and try to think beyond the endless bureaucratic structures that burden your

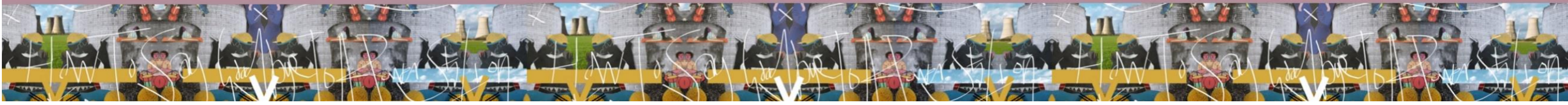
<sup>2</sup> A designer, educator, and pioneering advocate of design for human need, who explained that academic education in the 1950s revolved around building for convenience, and short-term use

workload. If you are a young person, keep your creative energy and passion alive: it is a gift for fighting against systems that don't serve us. By relying on what we can each do, according to our circumstances, these changes amplify collective resistance.

When asked about ideas and hopes for the landscape in 100 years' time, answers were based on a visceral connection with the West Burton A building and its surrounding natural environment. While fully aware of the station's negative externalities<sup>3</sup>, every participant preferred to save and repurpose the structure, given fears of the impact of its demolition on wildlife. Young minds facing an unprecedentedly daunting, geopolitically and environmentally uncertain future were particularly vehement and bold in their suggestions. Their future was one of consideration, but which also prioritised fun and play, equality, community interaction, abundant nature, and heritage preservation. From water parks, eco and heritage centres, and shelters for the homeless, to extreme sports hubs with tickets charged on a sliding scale, graveyards for those who worked on West Burton A, and vertical farming projects in the cooling towers, every idea embraced respect, interest in community-owned and shared assets, and nostalgia for the past - but also excitement for an uncertain yet renewable future.

This series of posters translates some of these ideas into a visual format, aiming to bridge the past and the future in order to pay tribute to and archive specific moments of West Burton A's existence. But will these voices be heard in future planning meetings; will consultations ever substantially engage with a full range of relevant parties? The project extends an invitation to all planners and stakeholders to try out similar methodologies **right now**, in order to put them into practice as soon as possible. Open communication, transparent processes, and keeping people informed at all stages of the development are only first steps in the right direction. We may not have legal acumen, but by creating non-hierarchical structures which prioritise co-operation, health, and wellbeing, we can change prevailing mindsets and values, and imagine new currencies. Using culture as a catalyst for behavioural change, we press on.

<sup>3</sup> Negative externalities occur when production or consumption of a good has a harmful effect on a third party (such as air pollution, which substantially damages human health)





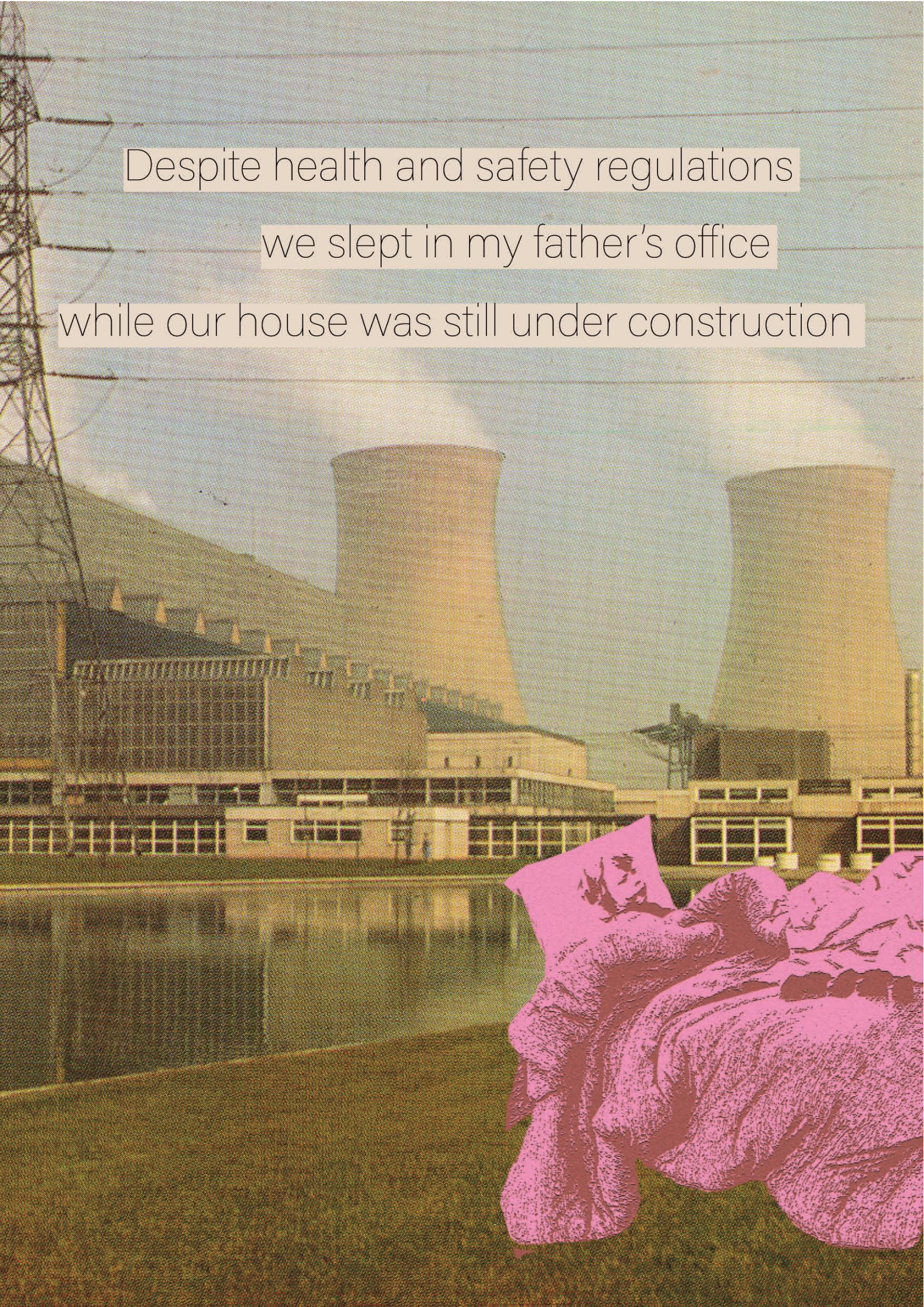
TRO  
PI  
CAL

TAKE-  
OVER





Despite health and safety regulations  
we slept in my father's office  
while our house was still under construction

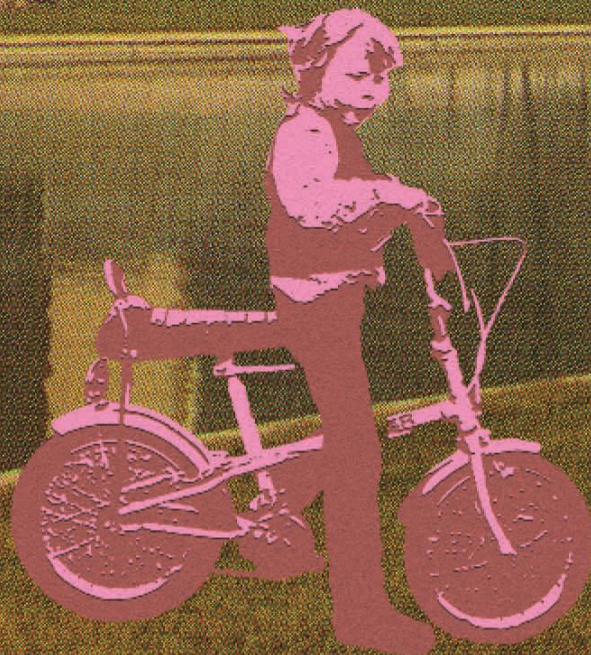




And we rode bicycles on the premises

after school

waiting for our parents to finish work





# POWER OF FUN

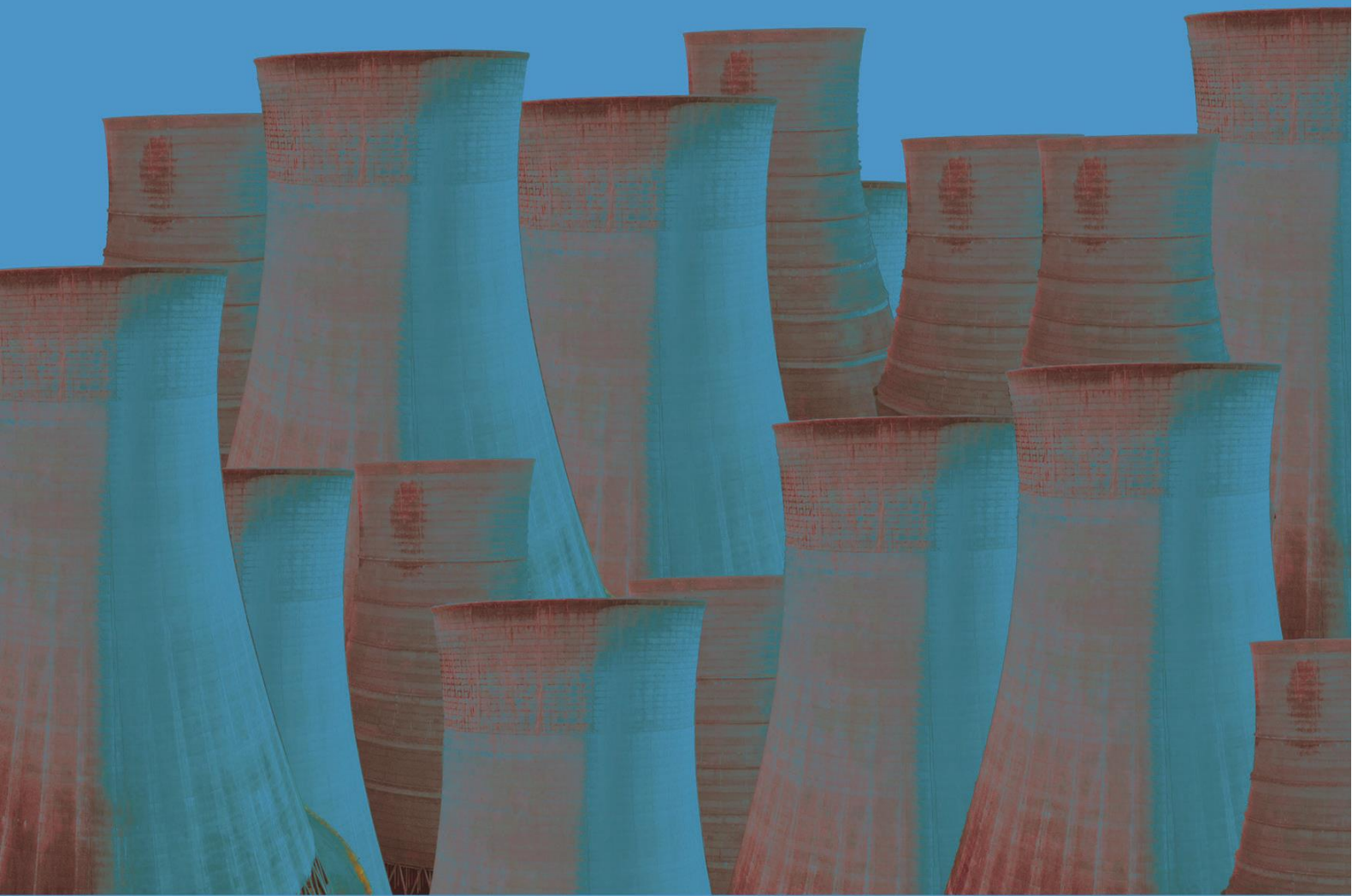
Waterslides into the lake,  
where residents can also fish again







**PLEASE LET US  
HAVE A HOME**



NEW YORK

NEW YORK

BECAUSE IT'S LIT UP AT NIGHT



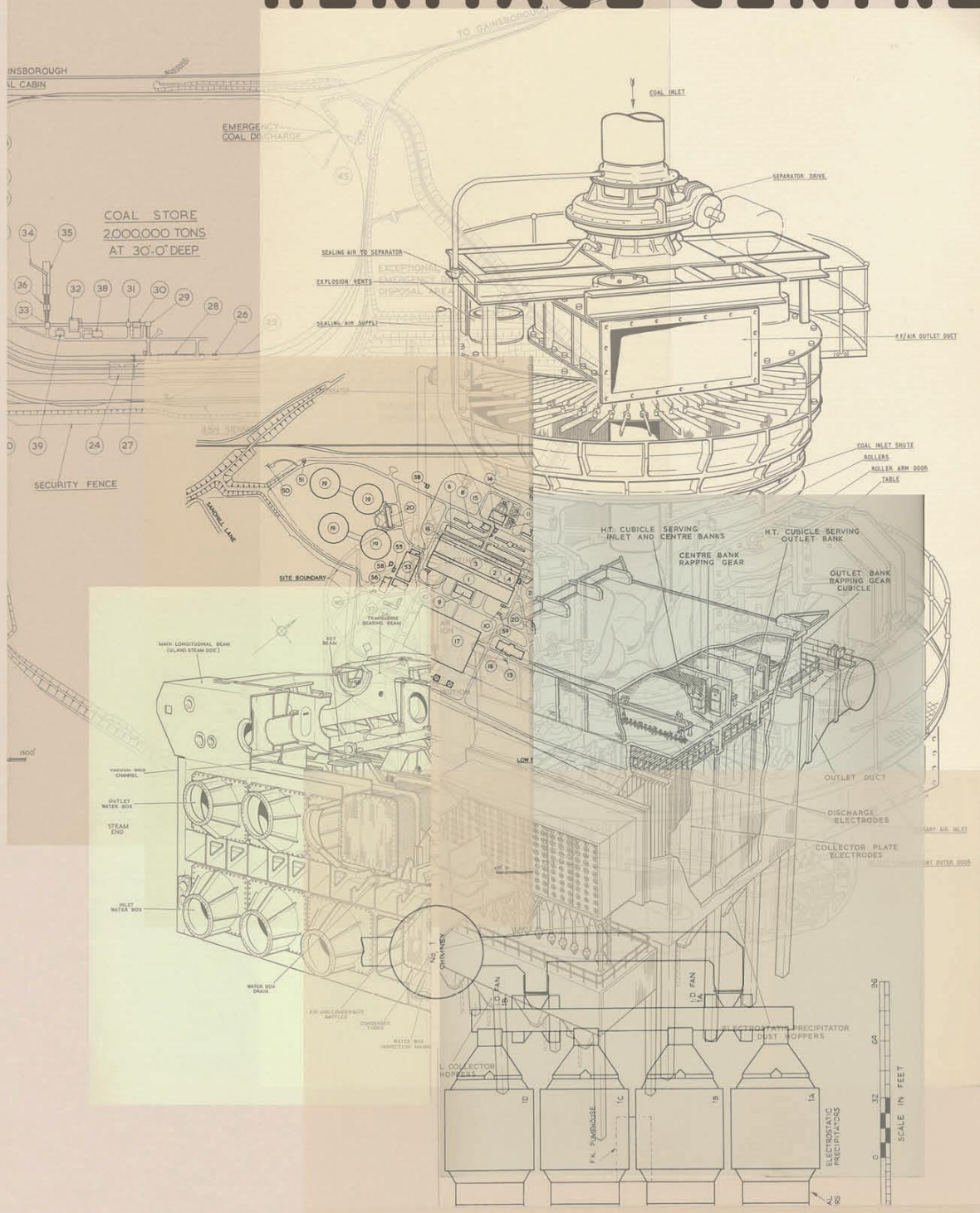
# LET IT STAY LET IT RUIN



MODERN SCULPTURE WITH PURPOSE



# WEST BURTON A HERITAGE CENTRE



## NO MORE SMOKE



I LIKED NIGHT SHIFTS - WE'D GET



CUSTARD

CRUMBLE



FROM A WENDING MACHINE



I liked being close to  
the **towers**

I found  
them **quaint** and peaceful

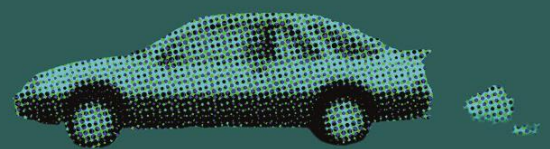
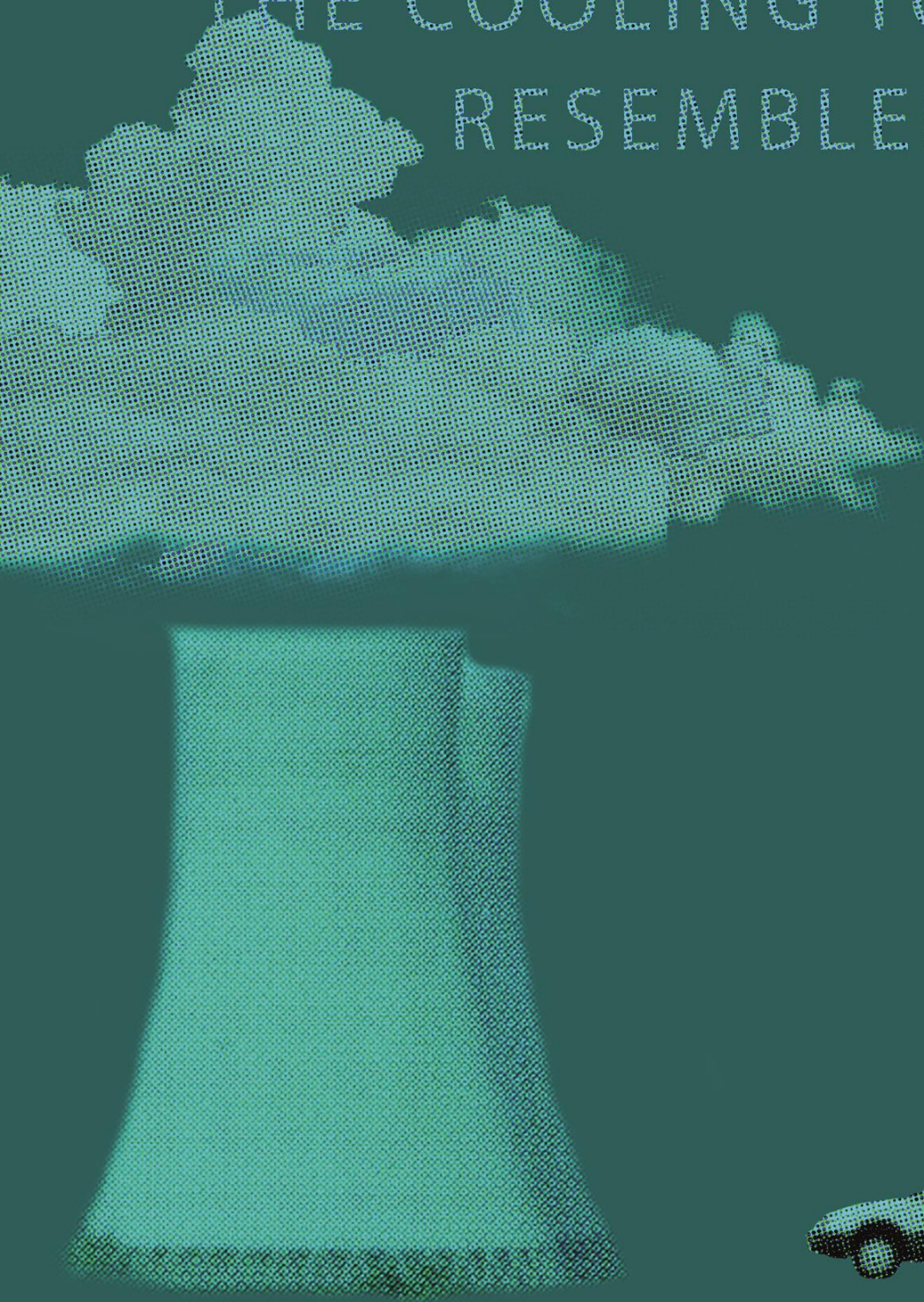
those tall,  
**concrete**  
statues  
with water



at their feet



FROM MY DAD'S CAR  
THE COOLING TOWERS  
RESEMBLED



A CLOUD-MAKING MACHINE