



TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE OBSOLETE

SITE REFLECTIONS



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2015

Preface 1

Introduction 4

Jan Bäcklund **The Art of Fire** 8

Karin Blomgren **Place and Space** 20

Andrew Brown **Walking Through Post-Industry** 22

Chloë Brown **Dancing in the Boardroom** 28

Neil Brownsword **National Treasure** 36

Tim Edensor **Suddenly Obsolete** 50

Neil Ewins **Globalization and the UK Ceramics Industry (c1990-2010)** 58

Karen Harsbo **Lunar Labour** 64

Gwen Heeney **Shadow, Light and Reflectivity** 66

Traci Kelly **Apertures & Architectures** 68

Margrethe Kolstad Brekke **Topographic Watercolour** 76

Richard Launder and Julia Collura **Glancing at Spode** 80

Danica Maier **Foresaken Decoration** 86

Anne Helen Mydland **Notes on Spode Works** 92

Sabine Popp **Work Conversations Under Changing Conditions** 106

Toril Redalen **In and Amongst the Dust** 120

Johan Sandborg **The Random Factor of Dynamic Memory Allocation** 128

Erna Skúladóttir **Impressions of Matter in Motion** 130

Anne Stinessen **Interview with Spode Works** 136

Corrina Thornton **List of Occurrences During the Making of FALSEWORK** 138

Vociferous Void exhibitors 141

Topographies of the Obsolete: Site Reflections

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www.topographies.khib.no/



Preface

Topographies of the Obsolete: Exploring the Site Specific and Associated Histories of Post-Industry

Topographies of the Obsolete is an artistic research project initiated by Neil Brownsword and Anne Helen Mydland at Bergen Academy of Art and Design (KHIB) in collaboration with partner universities/institutions in Denmark, Germany and the UK. In 2012 the British Ceramics Biennial invited KHIB to develop a site-specific artistic response to the former Spode Factory in Stoke-on-Trent as a key element of their 2013 exhibition programme. The project explores the landscape and associated histories of post-industry, with an initial emphasis on Stoke-on-Trent, a world-renowned ceramics capital that bears evidence of fluctuations in global fortunes.

The original Spode Factory, situated in the heart of Stoke-on-Trent, was once a keystone of the city's industrial heritage, which operated upon its original site for over 230 years. Amongst Spode's contributions to ceramic history are the perfection of under-glaze blue printing and fine bone china. In 2008 Spode's Church Street site closed, with most of its production infrastructure and contents left intact. The site and its remnants has been the point of departure for the interdisciplinary artistic research of over 50 participating artists, historians and theoreticians over six residencies.

Topographies is a framework, formulating topics and research strands which are treated as questions and approaches that are addressed through artistic practice. By honing in on the particular history and the singularity of this site, Topographies questions what is, and how can ceramic and clay be understood as both material and subject in contemporary art practice. How can we perceive the material (clay/ceramics) to be or constitute a site? Moreover, how do ceramics and clay form and construct our understanding of the site? This publication is the third in a series which documents responses and reflections to the original Spode site from both artists and theorists connected to the project. Research outcomes from 'Topographies of the Obsolete' will continue to inform a programme of seminars, publications and exhibitions.



ONWARD AND UPWARD

Introduction

*And if, in the revolutions of time and events, a country should be found whose Porcelain and Earthenware are vended on cheaper terms than those of the Potteries of Britain ... thither will flock all the Earthenware Dealers; and neither fleets, nor armies, nor any other human power, would prevent the present flourishing Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent sharing the fate of its once proud predecessors in Phoenicia, in Greece, and in Italy.*¹

Writer and antiquarian Simeon Shaw's quotation from 1837 may seem uncannily prophetic in the context of North Staffordshire's recent ceramic manufacturing history. During the last 3 decades, escalating international competition and economic unrest has destabilized Stoke-on-Trent's global monopoly, resulting in many businesses 'struggling to adapt to changing market demands or compete, in both domestic and export markets'.² Throughout this period, the physical evidence of the effects of deindustrialisation started to appear throughout the city, as sites of historic manufacture and its related infrastructure faced closure and demolition. Stoke-on-Trent remains an 'industrial city in a post-industrial age', which has seen much of its historic fabric increasingly abused and eradicated to the point where now it is in danger of becoming alienated from the very histories that created it.³ In a recent Guardian article, Rachel Cooke has described the city as 'resembling a mouth that is missing several teeth'⁴. Yet to some the very term 'post-industrial' remains contentious when applied to North Staffordshire, as the area continues to provide one quarter of all ceramics-based jobs in the UK, and employs around 7000 people⁵. Firms such as Steelite and Portmerrion, have in the last 2 years posted increased profits and created new jobs⁶, but beyond this seemingly healthy statistic, the physical symbols of Stoke's recent economic decimation remain commonplace.

Since 2008, the UK's 'recession dominated' financial climate has resulted in many lengthy delays in ongoing attempts to regenerate the city⁷. The former Spode Factory, a keystone of Stoke-on-Trent's industrial heritage, remains one such site at the beginnings of its contemporary re-purposing⁸. Following the collapse of the factory in 2008, a unique opportunity was missed to preserve and archive the recent history of a British factory that had continued production for over 230 years. Following its gutting and vandalism by asset strippers, the Spode site fell into the hands of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, who in 2011 granted the British Ceramics Biennial⁹ access to the 10 acre site to interrogate and creatively redefine it. In 2012, the British Ceramics Biennial invited Bergen Academy of Art and Design to develop a site-specific artistic response to the sites and remnants of its production infrastructure, as a key element of their 2013 exhibition programme. Artists were granted access to work in the majority of the factory's public and hidden spaces, including its vast production halls, design studios, show rooms, smaller workshops, backyards/courtyards, alleyways, offices, shops, mould stores, cellars and attics. Participants encountered a mix of extreme dereliction with the forces of nature reclaiming the building, alongside more ordered and attended areas, where artefacts and documents connected to the specific areas of production were left more or less intact. Many artistic entry points evolved out of a dialogue with former Spode employees. Their individual and collective recollections provided an intimate insight into the skilled labour and the factories operational infrastructure, which greatly informed and helped to facilitate the reactivation of many spaces.

Following six onsite residencies, more than 50 international participants, including artists, historians and theoreticians, have been involved in this project, employing strategies that have mapped the site through various media, object appropriation and re-contextualisation, and performative gesture. Through these intense periods of investigation, the core of the project has evolved. Its methodology draws upon the rhetorical method of identifying 'a landscape' and different 'topoi' to ensure a multi-perspective approach. In her article 'Lighting from the Side'¹⁰ Aslaug Nymes proposes rhetoric as a way to understand artistic research:

In the side light of rhetoric (..) one stresses that research is a dynamic process, constantly moving around getting to know a topology of the art. (..) 'the research process is also a matter of how the researcher moves between the topoi; this 'how' can be identified as method. Method in research means finding a path that is reliable. (..) In artistic research the paths between the topoi is not a well-worn one. More often it is a question of shaping, reshaping, risking, generating, looping, observing, collecting, adapting, picking, examining, re-examining, digging, excavating, giving up, memorizing, forgetting, repressing, provoking, destroying, destructing, breaking, adjusting, listening, tuning, experimenting, copying, imitating, noticing, playing, sampling, recycling, repeating, again and again and again and again- and testing out different combinations of those actions.'

The project draws upon this rhetorical method of identifying 'a landscape' and different 'topoi' to ensure a multi-perspective approach. In relation to *Topographies*, artists must locate themselves in a 'topos', in an already existing landscape/topic/theme, to open up a certain perspective. They then move around in the landscape finding other 'topoi' providing different perspectives on the same landscape. This mapping of 'the landscape' is the research, and how the artists orientate themselves and find the different routes between these topoi is where the art and creativity occurs.

This method is suited to the project's diversity and to identifying the 'rhizomic' relationship between the individual and the overriding project. Before the initial residency at Spode there were no pre-constructed questions to direct this research. It remained fundamental that research questions evolved organically out of the experiences and processes that addressed the site. In this way the project was firmly rooted in the individual's practice, but also challenged and supported by its common platform. Reflective dialogue has been central to the sharpening, challenging, contextualisation and theoretical underpinning of shared points of interest.

Throughout each residency, structured improvisation and reflection in and on action played an important role in developing particular research foci. Via sustained periods of practice-led research, distinct and interconnected strands of discourse evolved to form the core of the overriding project. By honing in on the particular history and the singularity of a post-industrial site, *Topographies* has developed a framework for addressing these strands as questions and approaches through artistic practice. These currently explore:

The Socio-Economic/Post-Industrial Landscape as Site
The Globalized Landscape of Ceramics
The Human Topography of Post-Industry
The Topography of Objects/Archives and the Artist/Archaeologist
The Topography of the Contemporary Ruin

Through individual and collective artistic enquiry, the project questions and evaluates whether these foci have the potential for new understanding and knowledge concerning the post-industrial landscape. Integral to the project context is an expanded understanding of contemporary art that intersects other expressions and disciplines such as literature, philosophy, museum/archival practice and social/economic sciences. In *The Return of The Real*¹¹, Hal Foster suggests that art and theory have become grounded in the materiality of actual bodies and social sites. Through *Topographies of the Obsolete*, both art and the artist remain in constant negotiation with 'the real' to expose, reinterpret and reactivate the complex social, economic and cultural histories of the post-industrial landscape. The project questions how ceramic and clay can be understood as both material and subject in contemporary art practice through its associated cultural, historical, economic, sociological, and geological (to name but a few) perspectives. This interdisciplinary approach has contributed to a greater understanding of how to address a post-industrial site both artistically and ethically, and encourages the need for greater ethical scrutiny in ceramics 'post-studio'¹² situation – a discourse that still remains relatively absent and unexplored.

Topographies of the Obsolete frames a particular point in time, through which artists have opened up a different perspective to the complexities of socio-economic decline addressed by politicians, economists, historians and ex-employees. It documents both the aftermath of the Spode factory closure, and the repurposing of its post-industrial fabric through an early phase of its culture-led regeneration. Working with such a 'loaded' site has given rise to many conflicting issues surrounding the role and responsibility of the artist working in a non-art space. Do artists destroy the archaeology of a site or do they contribute another layer of production? As many artists came from Norway - one of the richest countries of the world, how can those from a position of privilege understand the devastation encountered by those whose livelihoods had been cut short? With a region in the throes of recovery from economic recession, what can the artist bring to such a place? Is the artist merely an apocalypse tourist cashing in on social misfortune with little long-term effect? Although these questions and paradoxes remain, a primary factor is that the site continues to be used, and it is good that its recent use has been a cultural one, as dozens of other heritage buildings in the area have been left in ruins or demolished.



This publication in part documents the site-specific outcomes realised in a major exhibition output of the project, *Vociferous Void* (2013)¹³, and draws a series of commissioned essays together with the reflections of a number of participating artists, that contribute to and extend the discourse that surrounds specific research strands. The texts function as integral elements in the dissemination of the artistic research journey, which illuminate and contextualise the different modes of research, embodied within creative outputs that 'would otherwise remain dimly felt'¹⁴. They expose the processes through which works are conceived and developed, and explore the decisions, questions and issues that are confronted and reflected upon 'in the realm of experience rather than in the realm of cognition.'¹⁵

Neil Brownsword and Anne Helen Mydland
Professors, Project Leaders and Curators

- ¹ Shaw, S., *The Chemistry of Pottery*, 1837 p535 https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=W4EOAAAQAAJ&pg=PA528&source=gbv_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false accessed 31 July 2015
- ² Lambert, N., 'Comparative Institutional Advantage and the Global Ceramic Industry: A Historical Analysis of the Stoke-on-Trent Ceramic Tableware Cluster.' King's College, London, 2009, p.1. http://www.wiwiiss.fu-berlin.de/forschung/pfadkolleg/downloads/summer_school_2009/Paper_Neil_Lambert.pdf accessed 20 June 2010
- ³ Matthew Rice presentation, *Lost Cities of Stoke-on-Trent* book launch, Fat Cats, Hanley Stoke-on-Trent, 14 November 2010.
- ⁴ Cooke, R., '£1 Houses and Thriving Potteries that are Making Stoke-on-Trent boom again', *Guardian*, 23 November 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/nov/23/thriving-potteries-the-rebirth-of-stoke-on-trent>, accessed 10 December 2014
- ⁵ Ceramics in Stoke-on-Trent Today, Stoke-on-Trent Tourist Information Centre, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery <http://www.visitstoke.co.uk/ceramics-trail/history-ceramics-today.aspx> accessed 25 July 2015
- ⁶ King, A., 'Steelite International Posts £86 million Record Results', *Sentinel newspaper* 3 April 2014 <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Steelite-International-posts-pound-86-million/story-20903010-detail/story.html>, accessed 5 April 2014
- ⁷ The Business Desk.com, 9, August 2010. <http://www.thebusinessdesk.com/westmidlands/news/48007-city-chiefs-vote-to-disband-regeneration-quango.html>, accessed 25 July 2015. With the disbanding of the North Staffs Regeneration Partnership in 2010, funding ceased for many proposed regeneration projects planned for Stoke-on-Trent and its surrounding areas. Despite this, numerous successful initiatives have been undertaken that were funded by the Princes Trust, HLF, the Arts Council and EU see <http://www.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/regeneration/regeneration-projects/>
- ⁸ Corrigan, P., 'New £19m Masterplan is THE Vision for Stoke's Spode Site', *Sentinel newspaper*, 10 March 2015. <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/New-19m-masterplan-Stoke-s-Spode-site/story-26148754-detail/story.html> accessed 20 March 2015
- ⁹ In 2009, The British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) marked a new cultural event celebrating the city of Stoke-on-Trent as a global centre for excellence in contemporary ceramics. Through its programme of artists' residencies and fellowships, educational projects, conferences and, major exhibitions, the Biennial is a recognised international platform that has significantly contributed to the expanded field of ceramic practice.
- ¹⁰ Nymes, A., 'Lighting from the Side', in *Focus on Artistic Research and Development*, No. 03, Sensuous Knowledge series, 2006, p. 13.
- ¹¹ Forster, H., *The Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century: Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, MIT Press, London, 1996
- ¹² See Adamson, G., 'And into the Fire: Post-Studio Ceramics in Britain', in Carlano, A., *Contemporary British Studio Ceramics*, Mint Museum of Craft and Design, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010
- ¹³ *Vociferous Void*, was part of the British Ceramics Biennial exhibition programme, 28 September 2013- 10 November 2013. To access information concerning this event, and for current updates surrounding phase 2 of the project visit <http://topographies.khib.no>
- ¹⁴ Davey, N. J. R., 'Writing and the In-Between', *Paint, Art and Design Research Journal*, Spring Summer, 1999, p.16.
- ¹⁵ Biggs, M. A. R., 'Learning from Experience: Approaches to the Experiential Component of Practice-Based Research', in: Karlsson, H. (ed.) *Forskning-Reflektion-Utveckling*. 6-21., Stockholm, 2004, p. 3.



LI TRE LIBRI DELL ARTE DEL VASAIO

Nei quai si tratta non solo la
pratica ma brevemente
tutti gli secreti di
essa

Cosa che per sino al di d'oggi è stata sempre tenuta ascosta.
Del Cavalier Cipriano Piccolpasso
Durantino.

IMPORTUNUM.



Figure 1.
Cavalier Cipriano Piccolpasso, *Li tre libri dell arte del vasaio*. Nei quai si tratta non solo la pratica ma brevemente tutti gli secreti di essa chosa, che per sino al di d'oggi è stata sempre tenuta ascosta. Manuscript 1548, Title page, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Jan Bäcklund

The Art of Fire: *Ceramics and Alchemy*

I

Before arriving for the first time at Spode, I brought a copy of Cipriano Piccolpasso's *The Three Books of the Potter's Art* with me. This is a unique technical manual of ceramics written in 1548, which art history has never referred to, in the way it has referred to similar technical tracts on painting or sculpture. The original autographed manuscript is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and it has only received attention by historians of majolica production in Italy.

Having no knowledge of, nor any special interest in majolica or the art of the potter, I had nevertheless stumbled across a couple of references to Piccolpasso's work via an unexpected source, namely the pseudonymous French alchemist Fulcanelli, writing in the early twentieth century. For him, *The Three Books* was not only a tract on ceramics; it contained in its images the most profound of alchemical secrets. One of these references reads:

The Sibyl, questioned on what was a Philosopher, answered: 'It is that which can make glass.' Apply you[rself] to manufacture it according to our art, without taking account of the processes of glassmaking too much. The industry of the potter would be more instructive to you; see the boards of Piccolpassi, you will find of them one which represents a dove whose legs are attached to a stone. Don't you have, according to the excellent opinion of Tollius, to seek and find the mastery in a volatile thing? But if you do not have any mud to retain it, how will you prevent it from evaporating, to dissipate itself without leaving the least residue? Thus make your mud, then your compound; seal carefully in [such a] manner that no spirit can be exhaled; heat the whole according to art until complete calcination. Give the pure portion of the powder obtained in your compound, that you will seal in the same mud.¹

'A dove whose legs are attached to a stone'. Being attracted by coincidences, you could, as a visitor at Spode's before the exhibition, not avoid being pointed toward a dead pigeon lying on one of the floors. In the abandoned industrial complex of the Spode Factory, some care had been taken over the security and hygiene, for sake of the artists working on the upcoming exhibition at the premises. This included the removal of a huge number of dead pigeons. Yet one pigeon could not be cleaned away, I was told, because it was fixed in clay. Every visitor was thus made aware of its existence, and at the same time it functioned as a kind of eerie post-industrial emblem. Indeed, the motto in Piccolpasso's emblem reads 'importunum', which means 'unapproachable', 'uncomfortable', 'annoying'.



Figure 2.
Pigeon fixed to clay, from Spode Factory, Stoke-on-Trent.

Alchemists invariably call themselves not only 'philosophers' and 'scientists', but, with reference to a certain trinity, consider themselves 'artists' as well, and the making of the stone consequently as 'the great art'. Philosophy, Science and Art here become three intertwined and irreducible concepts for the alchemical quest. Today, as we all know, alchemy is considered neither a philosophy nor a science, and definitively not an art.

I don't know if early modern ceramicists or potters called themselves philosophers or scientists, but they definitively called themselves artists. Claudius Popelin, a French nineteenth century enamel-painter, and the translator of Piccolopasso's tract into French, subsumed glass-making, enamel-painting, and ceramics as *les vieux arts du feu*, 'the old arts of the fire'. For Popelin, this art of the fire was inconceivable without philosophy and science. This is why Fulcanelli – who could have known of Piccolopasso only through Popelin – defines a philosopher as 'that which can make glass', without being too much concerned with glass-making as such, but more attentive to what it essentially shares with ceramics and enamel. For Fulcanelli, and for alchemists in general, ceramics is, in its essence – that is philosophically, scientifically, and artistically – identical with alchemy.

As we all know, Fulcanelli's view is not shared by the art world. Apart from being unconcerned with essentialisms, the art world is almost totally unperturbed by ceramic artists, the history of ceramics and ceramic works. The works of Piccolopasso, Bernard Palissy – who wrote *Art de la Terre* – or Josiah Wedgwood's Portland Vase, are of no consequence in the history of art as we know it today. Artists working after the late eighteenth century in ceramics are per definition excluded from this history, as they have their own history and their own museums, with The Victoria and Albert Museum being the most prominent.

The Fountain, arguably the most important artwork today, is a ceramic work, but it has nothing to do with ceramics. Jeff Koons' *Puppy (Vase)* from 1998 and Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* from 1979 both draw heavily on a discourse of ceramics, but in so doing, emphasises the unbridgeable gap between art and ceramics. It is actually the incompatibility of art and its material – ceramics – which produces the meaning of the works.

This is because art is not interested in 'essence', from which follows a disregard for materials, including pigments, metals and stones. The modern concept of art could be said to be fundamentally iconoclastic, in the sense that abstraction is a variant of iconoclasm, and in the sense that the iconic apathy of Pop Art is iconoclastic, not to speak of the different forms vandalism associated with Arte Povera, Fluxus, Futurism or Dada. When Ai Weiwei made his performance photography series *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* in 1995, he demonstrated that he had fully incorporated the Western concepts of 'readymade' and 'iconoclasm' into Chinese subject matter.



Figure 3
Ai Weiwei, *Dropping of a Han-Dynasty Urn*, photograph triptych, 1995.

The modern system of the arts, since its inception during the second half of the eighteenth century, is exclusively visual and conceptual, and *The Fountain*, *Puppy (Vase)*, and *The Dinner Party* are visual and conceptual works. The materials, of which they are made, are interesting only as long as they are visually and conceptually perceivable. Matter is relevant only as materiality: matter as a philosophical concept. Tactility is relevant only as a *haptic* perception, touch mediated by vision and imagination.

It is my firm conviction that the gap between art and ceramics is not a concern of ceramics, but definitively of our concept of art. This is not the place to develop this idea, partly because it would be too lengthy, but mainly because it has already been done, and from a variety of approaches.² The central point, however, concerns the impossibility of writing a coherent and meaningful history of art. This has become impossible, because what is lacking is a narrative upon which this history could be hinged, with all that it implies of protagonists and antagonists, crises and syntheses, causes and effects. For art history can no longer exclude its antagonists (ceramics inclusively). It can't discriminate, and the notion of

causality doesn't imply anything, all of which played a decisive role in the production of art historical narratives from Vasari and Winckelmann to Gombrich.

As this 'traditional' narrative is disintegrating, the art world has become much more inviting and generous towards different activities, which not so long ago would have been impossible within an art context. This is not because the art world has 'changed its mind', but rather it is out of necessity. As the avant-garde logic of readymade/iconoclasm³ has lost its steam during the last couple of decades, the very legitimacy of conceptual 'art' could be said to be endangered. Hence this renewed interest in adopting 'disciplines' with an inherent, yes, even ontological or essentialist 'legitimacy' into the discourse of art, but still without questioning our concept of art, including what it bears in terms of the visual, iconoclasm, disinterestedness, and the notion of 'the ready-made'.

III

In Imperial China, ceramics was never associated with the fine arts: i.e. the landscape painting and calligraphy of the scholar-artists,⁴ in the same way as Chinese fine art-sculpture – albeit provocative – could be said to be strictly limited to the carving of ink-stones.⁵ The advent of alchemy in China is curiously coincidental, not with ceramics in general, but with the development of porcelain wares during late Han (second to early third century A.D.), to the advent of true porcelain in early T'ang (seventh century), a compound of the two earthen substances known by their Chinese names kaolin and petuntse. The former is a white clay, forming the body of the vessel, the latter a hard feldspathic stone, constituting the glaze and giving it transparency.⁶ This development seems to be wholly indigenous, pushed on by the drug-hunting physicians of Taoism, 'since the preparation of clays and glazes is a matter of chemistry; that is, in ancient times, of alchemy'.⁷ Another technological development, not known in China before the Han dynasty, was the art of glazing. In Chinese it is called *liu-li*, a peculiar porcelain glaze, the forerunner of true porcelain, which started to appear on earthenware during late Han-times. This was a technological novelty, equally important for ceramicists as for alchemists. The science, philosophy, or art of alchemy was not indigenous to China, but connected with the western expansion and the newly-opened trade-routes across Central Asia inaugurated by Emperor Wu of Han.⁸ *Liu-li*, or the coloured glaze that these Chinese sources speak of, is probably of Persian origin. The oldest surviving technical recipes for the fabrication of glass and enamels are found in the Greek alchemical papyri, reminding us that ceramics – as alchemy – is a human endeavour, and seems to be perpetually transformed during the continuous reappearances at different times and places on earth, while still retaining its core of substantial invariability.

When the qualities of Chinese porcelain became known in the West during early modern times, alchemy was at its peak in Europe. It is thus not a coincidence that European porcelain was to be discovered by an alchemist. Furthermore, the concepts of alchemy were already at a predisposition to accommodate the processes of ceramic experimentation. First and foremost they share a focus on the elementary forces: earth, water, air, and fire, and most notably the concept of a mineralogical seed, variably named 'quintessence', 'internal sun', 'seminal force', 'archeus' or 'logos spermatikos', an aspect which is very prominent, albeit pragmatically, in Piccolopasso's tract when discussing rain, dryness of earth, drafts of wind and the administration of fire, all governed by a quintessential power, in Chinese called *qi* (). We see this in alchemical illustrations concerning how to obtain matter, digging in the earth, as were they constructing a kiln, which at the same time is an inverted mountain, which, without hesitation, I dare to identify with 'the Mountain of the Immortals' of the Chinese alchemists (and landscape painters, of course). This is because the mountain figures so prominently in the imagery of European early modern alchemical tracts.

During the final years of the sixteenth century, Heinrich Khunrath issued this curious depiction of the ancient hermetic text *Tabula Smaragdina*, or The Emerald Table. Located in a Dutch 'World Landscape', depicting an encyclopaedic totality of earth, water, air, and fire, is a gigantic mountain, containing the hermetic verses. The text is located within a mountain-shaped kiln, with the fire bellowing out atop, as if the text was the formed mud inside the kiln, waiting to be produced as an emerald, corresponding to the Chinese coupling of the mineral jade with porcelain.



Figure 4.
The alchemical 'kiln'. Illumination from *Aurora consurgens*. Cod. Rhen. 172 (544), Zürich Zentralbibliothek.

Figure 5 (previous page)
Tabula Smaragdina, "The smaragdine table", the image metaphorically depicts a text as if it had fired in a kiln.
 From Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum sapientiæ æternæ solius veræ christiano-kabalisticum, divino-magicum necnon physico-chymicum, tertrium, catholicum*. Excudebat Guilielmus Antonius, Hannover 1609.

IV

If it was impossible to be a man of science in the sixteenth century without some knowledge of alchemy, in the late eighteenth century, it became nothing but embarrassing to link any claim of science with an alchemical discourse.⁹ European porcelain was born during this period of disgrace for the art of alchemy. In 1708, when Johann Friedrich Böttger, an apothecary and alchemical charlatan (an oxymoron from this time onwards), finally succeeded in producing a clay with similar qualities to its Chinese prototype, August the Strong was still not satisfied, and kept Böttger in custody to produce the Philosopher's Stone for him. While European porcelain embarked upon its commercial adventure during the century of the 'Porcelain Craze', the humiliation of alchemy continued on the continent.



Figure 6
 The Portland Vase. Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, Etruria, 1790.

Another humiliation may have reached its climax in 1782, when the English alchemist and impostor (another oxymoron) James Price, after performing a series of successful transmutations before the local gentry in Guildford, was asked by the Royal Society, of which he had become a member the year before, to repeat the experiments before their representatives. Price declined with reference to the costs of the experiment, and that he had no more of the transmutation powder. The Royal Society insisted, and Price had to comply. In the following year, the three members of the Society travelled to Guildford, and were welcomed by Price, who, instead of staging his demonstration, drank a flask of laurel water he had prepared. The three men immediately noticed a change in his appearance, but before they could do anything, Price was dead, poisoned by Prussian acid (or hydrogen cyanide).¹⁰ The substance, now so well-known through Agatha Christie, had only been isolated by the Swedish chemist Carl Wilhelm Scheele only one year before. He, among others, was central in the industrialisation of the chemical knowledge of the time: A knowledge made possible through the scientific pursuits of the Royal Society, with the ideals taken from Robert Boyle's *Sceptical Chymist* (1661), explicitly reversing alchemical hermeticism. Instead of a dependency on astral constellations and the spiritual maturity of the experimenter, Boyle insisted on the *reproducibility of the experiment*: that is that an experiment should be repeatable by anyone, anywhere, at anytime; on an *unequivocal nomenclature* of matter, as opposed to the ever proliferating and fantastical names given to one and the same matter by the alchemist, (or the many different matters designated by one and the same name); and on an *open communication* between peers, instead of initiation and secrecy.

Probably during the very same year as James Price performed his 'transmutations' and eventual suicide, Josiah Wedgwood, who to my knowledge could have no affinities with alchemical thinking, although being of an inquisitive and experimental mind, wrote in his laboratory notes:

'Lime stone may be called a neutral salt in a state of cristallization consisting of: An alkaline, or calcareous earth. An acid, called fixed air, & water of [crystallisation]. In burning the lime stone the acid & water are dispelled & the alkaline earth only remains [sic].'¹¹

Albeit not susceptible to any alchemical influences, this note nevertheless shows how intimately the language of Wedgwood's experiments are linked to an alchemical discourse that insists on the elementary terminology of how air and water are dispelled from earth through fire.

Yet Wedgwood was not interested in the alchemical properties of his wares. He was particularly interested in obtaining an artistic legitimacy to his wares, to induce into them a feeling, or a token, of an educated taste. Instead of invoking an alchemical authority, as had been done by Palissy or Piccolpassi, but which now would be highly masochistic, considering the discredit to alchemical discourse at this time, Wedgwood opted instead for an artistic legitimacy. Despite its commercial success, its extremely supportive stance towards involving artists in production, its choices of subject matters and agile sensitivity with regard to style and innovation, *this* project had already failed even before the introduction of Jasper Ware. I believe that this failure of ceramics towards art was conditioned by the already established disgrace of alchemy at the inception of the system of modern science.

Two years after Wedgwood's production of the *Portland Vase*, the German art historian and archaeologist Karl August Böttiger published an article on antique vases and their imitators in the influential German *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*. Though he acknowledges the innovations of Wedgwood,¹² he dismisses Rococo tendencies in porcelain as kitsch, by quoting the judgement of Winckelmann from 1764: 'Our so beloved porcelain vessels have still not been refined by genuine artistry. Most porcelain is fashioned into ridiculous dolls, resulting in the spread of a childish taste.'¹³ Parallel with the embarrassment and humiliation of the alchemical discourse from the point of view of the scientific community, a remarkably similar humiliation of ceramics from the perspective of the emerging 'word of art'; an abasement of ceramics from the word of *fine* art which could be summarised with the alchemical 'formula' *opus mulierum* and *ludus puerorum*, that is: women's work and children's play.

The high quality not only of Wedgwood, but Meissen, Sèvres, and Spode's Bone China notwithstanding, Böttiger and Winckelmann's judgement has proved to be the lasting judgement of the art world. Kaendler's rococo figurines eventually pulled Wedgwood's *Portland Vase* with them in the art critical elite's condemnation of ceramics as such. This very same dismissal of ceramics *en bloc* is most recently repeated by Mario Perniola, writing in 1983:

'in art journals the advertisements of the galleries are not to be distinguished from the texts that discuss the luxury goods they sell. Conversely, the best camouflaged journals of the advertising industry publish cultivated and unassailable texts, which precisely deliver a culturally heightened image of the consumer of commodity production, while the wares (for instance cars or ceramics) are seen in a marginal or accidental way. In this way you can perfectly well advertise for a faience bathroom in a philosophical journal [...].'¹⁴

This to ensure that the dialectic between 'a philosophical journal and 'a faience bathroom' is not overseen by the casual reader.



Figure 7
Salomon Trismosin. *Splendor Solis*. MS. (1582). London: British Library, MS Harley 3469, ff. 31v and 32v.

V

Together with the heavy two-volume Scholar Press facsimile edition of Piccolpasso's tract, I brought with me to the pillaged Spode Factory a cheap paperback edition of Bruce Chatwin's novel *Utz* from 1988, in which some very acute art theoretical considerations are woven into the narrative, not the least in the *elusiveness, fraudulence, and sexual ambivalence* of its main character.

These 'exoteric' art-theoretical issues become clear already in the beginning of the novel, when we are told how Utz criticises Winckelmann's above-mentioned disdain for porcelain in an article, whereby he gives 'a lively defence of the Rococo style in porcelain – an art of playful curves from an age when men adored women – against the slur of the pederast Winckelmann: 'Porcelain is almost always made into idiotic puppets'.¹⁵

In a second article, called 'The Private Collector', he writes that an object in a museum case 'must suffer the de-natured existence of an animal in the zoo. In any museum the object dies – of suffocation and the public gaze – whereas private ownership confers on the owner the right and the need to touch. As a young child will reach out to handle the thing it names, so the passionate collector, his eye in harmony with his hand, restores to the object the life-giving touch of its maker.'¹⁶

The young child in Utz's world is precisely juxtaposed to Böttiger's and Winckelmann's 'childish taste' and Perniola's 'faience bathroom', because it is pre-conceptual in its visio-tactual *fascinosum*. It is the very negation of the educated disinterested pleasure that the museum encourages, and this *fascinosum* cannot be satisfied within an exclusively visual context. It is tactile matter that carries with it a certain magnetic allure, which conceptualisation always seem to fail to get a proper grip on. Art theory sublimates this allure, or desire, with the concept of the 'haptic', a kind of tactile disinterestedness. This compromise is unacceptable from Utz's position, and therefore he has to reject that art is a public matter altogether in much the same sense as alchemy had rejected that its science was a public matter or an 'open conversation'. Instead, for Utz, art rests on a private and possessive intimacy, by no means enlightening, and certainly not raising any ethical or moral standards, rather the opposite: double-dealing, deceitful, jealous, and secretive, not at all unlike most of the alchemical authors I know of.

This life-giving touch is mentioned a couple of times in the novel, first when we hear about the young Kaspar Utz receiving his first Meissen piece: 'Kaspar pivoted the figurine in the

flickering candlelight and ran his pudgy fingers, lovingly, over the glaze and brilliant enamels.' Much later, the same scene is repeated with the narrator observing how a figurine, pivoting in Utz's hands in the flickering candlelight, indeed seems to be alive.

I find it especially intriguing that Chatwin describes the physical touching of the porcelain figurines, which takes place in candlelight, as if the rejuvenating touch would be impossible in direct light. In alchemy, we also find numerous references to transformative processes that can only take place in indirect or diffracted light. Fulcanelli likens a secret alchemical substance with 'nostoc', a greenish dew or fungi-like cryptogam,¹⁷ first identified and named by Paracelsus. The nostoc is rarely seen, as it grows on stones during the night and disappears when the sun rises. It also has been called poetical names as 'Celestial fundament, Moon-Spit, Earth-Butter, Dew-Grease, Vegetable Vitriol, Flos Coeli, and the like. The greenish colour here invoked, nevertheless points at an immature stage of a vegetative, growing, but still *mineral* substance, reminding us of the Chinese notion of *liu-li* as a distant mountainous stone of a green colour,¹⁸ or, if we turn to the West, the green emerald hidden in Khunrath's cryptic kiln of the Emerald Tablet. In a similar vein, Piccolpasso, in a curious passage, urges the potter always to fire the kiln under a waxing moon, else the flames will lack brightness.¹⁹

The definition of ceramics in general, and porcelain in particular, is, as you all know, not an easy or uncontroversial issue. After the chemist Roald Hoffmann dismissed some general definitions of ceramics as 'inorganic, refractory, porous, brittle and insulating',²⁰ he set forth the more straightforward definition: 'transformation by heat, if not fire, remains the defining essence of ceramics',²¹ corresponding precisely to the title of Claudius Popelin's short historical work, *Les vieux arts du feu*, the arts of the fire, which consist of alchemy, enamel, glass, and ceramics.

Due to Utz's conspicuous references to Adam, Golem, Kabbalah, alchemy, or Christ giving life to clay birds, the narrator insists on the question as to whether or not Utz actually believes that his porcelain figures are alive – that is, in a non-metaphorical sense. On one occasion, Utz answers: 'I am and I am not. [...] They are alive and they are dead. But if they were alive, they would also have to die. Is it not?'²² I very much like this ambivalence, as if Utz were pointing to another concept of life, distinct from our notion of 'mortal life'.

I believe he was. On another occasion, the answer is somewhat different. After Utz had recounted for the narrator that during the inflation of 1923, the Dresden banks had issued emergency money of red and white Böttger porcelain, he continues to explain that most porcelain experts had interpreted Böttger's discovery as the utilitarian by-product of alchemy – like Paracelsus's mercurial cure for syphilis. Utz did not agree, the narrator continues:

'He felt it was foolish to attribute to former ages the materialist concerns of this one. Alchemy, except among its more banal practitioners, was never a technique for multiplying wealth ad infinitum. It was a mystical exercise. The search for gold and the search for porcelain had been facets of an identical quest: to find the substance of immortality.'²³

That is, we can conclude: 'Ceramics, except among its more banal practitioners, was never a technique for multiplying wealth ad infinitum'; that is, it was not a production of money as in the case of the prosperous European factories during the time of the porcelain craze. 'It was a mystical exercise [...] to find the substance of immortality.'

'The substance of immortality'? For me it is obvious that it is this defining fire, this 'secret' or 'hidden' fire that Chatwin alludes to, is equally essential for the perception of porcelain as the manufacturing of porcelain. Yet in this instance, 'perception' is the wrong term. The substance is not at all 'perceptible'. Any life-giving substance of ceramics is hidden inside, either in the womb of the kiln or in the matter itself. This matter affords the sensation of touch to the beholder. The touch itself makes imperceptible, blocking vision and light. When it comes to the 'life-giving touch,' it has to be protected from direct light, enlightenment, publicity, and direct visual exposure, as with nostoc or any other lunar activity.

I don't know if Roald Hoffmann has read *Utz*, but his final remark in his short essay makes some very similar points:

And yet, and yet, even as I imagine Böttger keeping careful laboratory notes of his formulae and protocols, I wonder if it could have been done without the underlying alchemical imperative. One could make stoneware and glass, and use them in everyday life. But anyone who has held a fine Song or Koryo vessel in one's hands, rotated it, followed the fine crackle, I think feels that porcelain is something more. It is sublime. To aspire to transform mere clay into that refined essence that catches light and begs to be held as no other ceramic does – that vision takes more than laboratory skill.²⁴

He could not have 'held a fine Song or Koryo vessel' in his 'hands, rotated it, followed the fine crackle', in an adequately illuminated museum of fine art. Nor could it be reproduced in any 'Journal of Tactile Sensation.' It implies that he has personal, *lunar*, access to the piece.

- ¹ Sworder, M., (trans.) *Fulcanelli, Master Alchemist, Le Mystere des Cathedrales. Esoteric Interpretation of the Hermetic Symbols of the Great Work*, Neville Spearman, London, 1971, p. 206
- ² Specifically I am thinking about James Elkins lucid and clear argument in *Stories of Art*, but also further on any discussion about 'The End of Art' or 'The End of Art History'
- ³ Just think about Marcel Duchamp's friendly voice when interviewed by George Heard Hamilton for BBC in 1959, when Duchamp had described the principles behind his concept of a 'reciprocal readymade'. 'You take a painting by Rembrandt and instead of looking at it, you use it plainly as an ironing board. It is rather hard on the Rembrandt', Hamilton answers, 'It is', Duchamp confirms, 'but we have to be iconoclastic'. Marcel Duchamp, 'A Radio Interview, by George Heard Hamilton (1959)' in *Duchamp: Passim*, Anthony Hill (ed), Gordon & Breach Arts International - International Publishers Distributor, St. Leonards, Australia - Langhorne, PA., 1994, p. 76
- ⁴ Alsop, J., *The Rare Art Traditions*, Princeton UP (Bollingen Series. XXXV. 27), New York, 1981, p. 223
 'The marvellous porcelains, the magnificent lacquers, the wonderful metalwork in gold, silver, and bronze, even the incomparable architecture and the vigorous sculpture – all these were thought unworthy of discussion by the numerous Chinese writers on art until a very late date, with a minor exception for Buddhist sculpture during the centuries of Buddhism's religious predominance. In consequence, after true art collecting began in China, the works of famous calligraphers and painters were the sole collectors' prizes for close to a thousand years.'
- ⁵ Gulik, R. H. van., Vetch, H., *Mi Fu on Ink-Stones*, Peking, 1938
- ⁶ Laufer, B., and Nichols, H. W., *The Beginnings of Porcelain in China. With a Report on a Technical Investigation of Ancient Chinese Pottery*, Publications of the Field Museum of Natural History. Anthropological Series, vol. 15, no. 2, 1917, p. 110
- ⁷ Laufer, B., and Nichols, H. W., *The Beginnings of Porcelain in China. With a Report on a Technical Investigation of Ancient Chinese Pottery*, Publications of the Field Museum of Natural History. Anthropological Series, vol. 15, no. 2, 1917, p. 118
- ⁸ Laufer, B., and Nichols, H. W., *The Beginnings of Porcelain in China. With a Report on a Technical Investigation of Ancient Chinese Pottery*, Publications of the Field Museum of Natural History. Anthropological Series, vol. 15, no. 2, 1917, p. 142
- ⁹ On this specific theme of embarrassment and shame linked to alchemy during the 18th century, see: Carl-Michael Edenborg, Alkemins skam, *No Fun*, Malmö, 2004
- ¹⁰ Duveen, D., *James Price (1752–1783). Chemist and Alchemist*, Isis, vol. 41, no. 3/4, December 1950, pp. 281–3
- ¹¹ Chaldecott, J et al. (eds), *Josiah Wedgwood – The Arts and Science United*, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Limited, Barlaston, Staffordshire, 1978, pp. 21–4
- An exhibition of Josiah Wedgwood's correspondence, experiment books and the ceramic products he developed and manufactured at the Science Museum, London 21 March to 24 September 1978.
- ¹² Böttiger, K. A., Ueber die Prachtgefäße der Alten, *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, 7. Jg., Juni, 1792, p. 286
 'Der berühmte Wedgwood hat durch die Magie seiner Plastik ein neues Etrurien -- so heißt, wie bekannt, der Landsitz in Staffordshire, wo die Herren Wedgwood und Bentley durch ihre vortreflichen Nachahmungen des Altherthums in Pasten und größeren Massen sich ganz Europa zinsbar zu machen wissen -- mitten in England hervorgezaubert, und liefert nun auch in seiner bis jetzt einzigen Manufactur, die täuschendsten Nachbildungen alter Prachtgefäße, die sowohl in Rücksicht auf Festigkeit und Güte des Materials, als in Rücksicht auf Schönheit der Formen und auf die Wahl der Gemälde und Reliefs alles übertreffen, was bis jetzt in Terra cotta, oder Biskuit, in Porcellan, Glasgüssen u. s. w. durch die mannichfaltigsten Versuche irgendwo hervorgebracht worden ist.'

- ¹³ MacLeod, C., *Sweetmeats for the Eye. Porcelain Miniatures in Classical Weimar*, in Moore, E. K., Simpson, P.A., (eds), *The Enlightened Eye. Goethe and Visual Culture*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2007, p. 47
 'Noch werden unsere so sehr gelibten Procellangefäße durch keine ächte Kunstarbeit veredelt. Das mehrste Procellan ist in lächerliche Puppen geformet, wodurch der daraus erwachsende kindische Geschmack sich allenthalben verbreitet hat.' *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*. June 1792, p. 284.
 Winckelmann, J.J., *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*. Sämtliche Werke, Joseph Eiselein (ed), Im Verlage Deutscher Classiker, Donauöschingen, 1829, vol. 3. p. 121. Quoted from MacLeod, 'Sweetmeats for the Eye', p. 47.
 The original passage from Winckelmann reads:
 'Wie unendlich prächtiger müssen nicht solche Geschirre von Kennern des wahren Geschmacks geachtet werden, deren schöne Materie bisher noch durch keine ächte Kunstarbeit edler gemacht worden, so daß auf so kostbaren Arbeiten noch kein würdiges und belehrendes Denkbild eingepreßt gesehen wird. Das mehreste Porcellan ist in lächerliche Puppen geformet, wodurch der daraus erwachsene kindische Geschmack sich allenthalben ausgeartet hat.'
- ¹⁴ Perniola, M., *La Società dei Simulacri*, Cappelli, Bologna, 1983, pp. 131–54, here quoted (and translated) from the Danish translation in UNDR. *Nyt Nordisk Forum* no. 56, Silkeborg, 1988, s. 82–3
- ¹⁵ Chatwin, B., *Utz*, Random House, London, 1988, p. 17
- ¹⁶ Chatwin, B., *Utz*, Random House, London, 1988, p. 17
- ¹⁷ Sworder, M., (trans.) *Fulcanelli, Master Alchemist, Le Mystere des Cathedrales. Esoteric Interpretation of the Hermetic Symbols of the Great Work*, Neville Spearman, London, 1971, p. 134
- ¹⁸ Laufer, B., and Nichols, H. W., *The Beginnings of Porcelain in China. With a Report on a Technical Investigation of Ancient Chinese Pottery*, Publications of the Field Museum of Natural History. Anthropological Series, vol. 15, no. 2, 1917, p. 140
- ¹⁹ Lightbown, R., Caiger-Smith, A., (trans), *I Tre Libri dell'Arte del Vasaio / The Three Books of the Potter's Art*, Scolar Press, London, 1980, p. 109
 Prayers are offered to God with the whole heart, ever thanking Him for all that He gives us. Fire is taken, having an eye however to the state of the moon, for this is of the greatest importance, and I have heard from those who are old in the art and of some experience that, if the firing happens to take place at the waning of the moon, the fire lacks brightness in the same manner as the moon its splendour.
 Popelin, C., *Les Troys Livres de l'Art du Potier*, du cavalier Cyprian Piccolpassi, trad. Librairie Internationale, Paris, 1861, p. 81
 Cipriano Piccolpasso, in Claudius Popelin's linguistically affected translation the passage (offset in parallel) reads:
 Tu prends du feu, consyderant toutes foys, l'estât de la lune, pour ce que c'est de grande conséquence. L'ay oui d'iceulx qui vieulx sont dans l'art, et ont expérience, que choisilant d'avoyr le feu sus le desclin de la lune, la clairté du feu vient à manquer tellement quellement icelle lune manque d'esclat. En le faicsant, consydere sur toutes chouses les seignes de pluye, ce qui seroyt grand dangier, et tu les lairras passer...
- ²⁰ Hoffmann, R., 'Meissen Chymistry', *American Scientist*, vol. 92, no. 4, July–August 2004, p. 312
- ²¹ Hoffmann, R., 'Meissen Chymistry', *American Scientist*, vol. 92, no. 4, July–August 2004, p. 313
- ²² Chatwin, B., *Utz*, p. 34
- ²³ Chatwin, B., *Utz*, p. 90
- ²⁴ Hoffmann, R., 'Meissen Chymistry', *American Scientist*, vol. 92, no. 4, July–August 2004, p. 314



Walking Through Post-Industry

Abandoned buildings are unique and yet share similar characteristics. In addition to the layers of residual dust and detritus, stale air, dampness and rot, one can experience a profound stillness co-mingled with an acute awareness of the forces of entropy¹ as all is inexorably drawn towards disorganisation. Although the Japanese term *mono no aware* conveys a delicate appreciation of the impermanence of everything, I detect in the wider culture a less wholesome response to the crumbling of empires, commercial or otherwise. For me, as witness to the process, I experience a sense of privilege in eavesdropping, turning things over, revealing personal and institutional histories, temporarily occupying once-private space, trespassing in what can feel like a parallel existence.

The village in which I grew up, and the surrounding landscape, was where my engagement with ruins and walking began. Several farms and other industrial buildings lay empty, and the abandoned railway line and the river led enticingly towards neighbouring villages and the local town. Having been a city dweller for the past three decades I now recognize that rural ruins are much the same as urban ones, and that the contemporary discipline of Urban Exploration best sums up my interest, in that such places are to be actively and physically engaged with. As for notions of the sublime and the transcendent within such sites, they are for me, by contrast, resolutely grounded in human reality.

My early artistic work drew on aesthetics derived from non-artistic sources such as industry, the health service and the military. Environmental sounds were incorporated into my music making, which took the form of free collective improvisation, of which Ben Watson writes:

For listeners, Free Improvisation is taxing music ...all sounds are (...) made alien, treated as flotsam from the shipwreck of bourgeois civilization (...) these fragments are worked on by the musicians in real time, an intensely subjectivist baring of soul, full of risk and opportunities for embarrassment.²

It is evident to me that collaboration and ordeal experienced in my youth have carried over into the soundwalks that I compose. Whilst the sites through which I lead walks can be unfamiliar and challenging to participants, the habitual and over-familiar, such as the paths one takes every day, can equally be productively disrupted and defamiliarised. Collectively straying into the unfamiliar can breed *communitas*, all the better to share our responses to the experiences we have undergone.

Whilst working on the Spode site I was struck by how we as a group of artists appeared to 'adopt' it, working towards, through, and beyond familiarity, and sharing our feelings, which resonates with my interest in the 'adoption'³ of marginal places, marking them out as somehow 'special', despite their abandonment. Hijacking the concept of 'city twinning', the Wasteland Twinning Network have examined such urban spaces in various parts of the world. I appreciate the apparent absurdity of collectively creating rituals to celebrate the overlooked, an urge with its roots in the likes of de Maistre⁴ and Perec⁵, elevating the heretofore unworthy.

Shortly after the British Ceramics Biennial at Spode in the Autumn of 2013, I led several soundwalks on Nottingham's Island site, formerly the location of the huge Boots pharmaceutical factory. As a consequence of the original buildings having long since been flattened, I found myself tested by the absence of reference points. Georg Simmel wrote that *the metaphysical-aesthetic charm of the ruin disappears when not enough remains of it*⁶ but the Nottingham soundwalks nevertheless provided a 30-minute immersion in an alternative reality, planned according to the roads and pathways located on old maps of the site. As the site is locally known as The Island, I opened and concluded the walk with the oppressive sounds of car engines and sirens in an attempt to convey its position as a form of traffic island situated between major arterial roads.

More recently, in Berlin, I composed a 90-minute soundwalk that guided participants through locations that conveyed ambiguity and operated as thresholds, from bridges to central reservations to corporate developments and the city's own 'adopted' Wasteland Twinning⁷ site.

Spode, despite undergoing an increasingly apparent descent into decrepitude, remains comprised of buildings that retain their sense of a role within the production process. Despite machines and product having been removed, the imprint of the former and the shards of the latter provided a consistent reminder of what once took place there. Consequently the thresholds that I sought out were located between interior and exterior space, stairwells, doorways and zones of production, each with their own baseline sonic 'footprint' that I was able to exploit in my compositions. The presence of key people such as Spode security guard Alan Shenton provided continuity with the lives of the factory workforce and a rich source of anecdote. Likewise Ray Johnson at the Staffordshire Film Archive helped me to better appreciate the site and its environs on a human scale.

In his introduction to *Landscape*, John Wylie poses the question whether landscape is *a scene we are looking at, or a world we are living in? Do we observe or inhabit landscape?*⁸ He cites Elizabeth Grosz who states that for Maurice Merleau-Ponty the body was not an object, but the means of relations with objects. In 'Eye and Mind' Merleau-Ponty described his body as *a thing among things... caught in the fabric of the world.*⁹ And for me this immersion, in the world of cities, ruins and social fabric, feels like an optimum state of being. All human beings are, first and foremost, pedestrians, with the capacity to encounter the city from such a perspective. A pedestrian is mobile, with the potential to control pace and direction. Both philosophically and literally, the pedestrian adopts an approach, a way of seeing, a way of being. Moving through a city at walking pace one is well-placed to perceive the structures (political, commercial, identities, expressions of power and control) and is at liberty to pause, retrace footsteps and adopt diverse strategies through which to deepen the encounter. This attention to one's environment ultimately connects inner and outer worlds (all the same world of course, all already interconnected), something we have a tendency to overlook and perhaps need to be reminded of.





Writing about Laurie Lee, Robert MacFarlane¹⁰ states that 'Walking refines awareness: it compels you to "tread" a landscape "slowly"... Lee believed in walking not only as a means of motion but also as a means of knowing'. My approach on finding myself in a new environment is essentially to walk in it, often exhausting myself in the process of getting to know it. It is not simply the generating of knowledge in the form of a workable map of my surroundings that drives me to act in this way, but rather to force open all my senses to the encounter. Yet despite all senses being brought to bear, I invariably lead with the auditory, and 'tune' myself into the sonic environment. Commonly considered to be intangible and non-object, my approach accords with those for whom sound is a form of touch, giving rise to a particular form of immersion; especially powerful as one actively moves through a continually changing environment. The first task I performed when I arrived at Spode was to purposefully walk through every indoor and outdoor space, 'feeling' the sound of each in a kind of psycho-geographical survey.

There is a strong historical dimension to my practice yet I set the soundwalks in no specific era, considering a palimpsest of traces from the sonic environment across generations. At Spode I had a consistent thread to follow, readily able to "visualise" the sounds of raw materials and product being moved around by horses, humans and motorized vehicles; the shift from manual to mechanical labour; and the voices (catcalls, banter, arguments) of the characters that worked there, which would have sounded throughout. Despite the Spode site being on the scale of a small town situated within the six towns of the Potteries, it provides opportunities for experience on a human-scale, in which history is not made by 'great' men, nor only made in monumental places.

To conclude, I would like to return to the consideration of change and the temporary nature of our conscious presence in abandoned places such as Spode, in which as artists we perform our particular form of labour. On the one hand, as Matthew Christopher has argued in his blog 'Confessions of a Ruin Pornographer',¹¹ ruins represent failure on both micro and macro level, with cracks appearing to spread between building, organization, town, city, nation state and beyond. However, more optimistically and in line with my own viewpoint, the Wasteland Twinning Network's claim that 'wastelands typify the cause and effect of our constant (re)development'¹² asserts that through our 'adoption' and investment in such places we are collectively defying the forces of entropy'.

¹ Peck, S., *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1978, p.264, in which he describes entropy as 'a state of total disorganization and undifferentiation'. The term is derived from thermodynamics as a measure of disorder in a system.

² Watson, B., *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation*, London and New York City, Verso Books, 2004, p. 374

³ For me, a form of advocacy coupled with tactical appropriation.

⁴ De Maistre, X., *A Journey Around My Room*, London, Hesperus Press, 2004.

⁵ Perce, G., *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. London: Penguin Books, 1997.

⁶ Simmel, G., The Ruin in Two Essays, *The Hudson Review*, vol. 11, No. 3, Autumn 1958, New York, The Hudson Review.

⁷ Wasteland Twinning Network (2011), available at: <http://wasteland-twinning.net/get-involved/> (accessed 17 July 2014).

⁸ Wylie, J., *Landscape (Key ideas in Geography)*, London & New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 4.

⁹ Merleau-Ponty, M., Eye and Mind in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p.163.

¹⁰ Macfarlane, R., In the footsteps of Laurie Lee, *The Guardian*, 20 June 2014.

¹¹ Christopher, M. Confessions of a Ruin Pornographer Part II: A Chronicle of Failure www.abandonedamerica.us/ruin-pornographer-part-ii (accessed 11 July 2014).

¹² Wasteland Twinning Network op. cit.



Dancing in the Boardroom

The ruin is a site not of melancholy or mourning but of radical potential – its fragmentary, unfinished nature is an invitation to fulfill the as yet unexplored temporality that it contains. Ruins...are freighted with possibility, even with utopian promise.¹

Such possibility is at the heart of my film *Dancing in the Boardroom* (Turnin' My Heartbeat Up), with the derelict Spode factory in Stoke-on-Trent acting as the post-industrial muse, fulfilling the role of 'Ruin', the sprawling site laden with promise and potential, draped in the dust and detritus of its history. During the time that I worked in and with the factory, it restlessly shifted and crumbled offering differing faces and perspectives at each visit. Likewise, the city of Stoke-on-Trent began to offer different perspectives and I became particularly fascinated in one aspect of its recent social history.

The Leopard Inn in Burslem is famous as the place where Josiah Wedgwood and James Brindley met to discuss building the Trent and Mersey Canal in 1765, a key moment of the industrial Revolution and the development of Stoke-on-Trent as the international centre of the ceramics industry. Like many pubs in the city, The Leopard holds regular Northern Soul nights where people, many of them ex-ceramics workers, come to dance. This uniquely British genre began as an exciting underground club movement in the late 1960s, and I became interested in the important role Stoke-on-Trent played in the history of this music and dance culture. The King's Hall (by coincidence, adjoining in the China Hall of the Spode Factory) is currently a famous venue for Northern Soul 'all-nighters' in Stoke-in-Trent but it was the iconic club, The Golden Torch (also known as The Torch) that was forced to close down in 1973, which firmly and forever links Stoke-on-Trent to the history of Northern Soul.

Let me just say this about Northern Soul: the centre is Stoke-on-Trent. I don't care what people say. Stoke-on-Trent is the capital of Northern Soul...I've been all around everywhere and the centre is Stoke-on-Trent. It was and it is.²

In my studio in Sheffield (another post-industrial city with strong connections to Northern Soul), I listened again to the music of Northern Soul and delved into its history from its heyday in the 1970's to this culture today. I found that this culture still has a passionate following of both original dancers plus a new, younger generation of advocates. It arose out of the escapist desire of largely white working class young adults who worked all week in mundane jobs, often in factories such as Spode, but at the weekend, often travelling hundreds of miles to north of England venues, danced all night until well after the break of dawn to raw, rare, emotional soul music produced in America's industrial heartland. These records were commercial failures when they were originally released in the USA, but those failures, and their consequent rarity, became Northern Soul.

It was a lifestyle that took people away from the humdrum of everyday, industrial life. Most people were working in common or garden jobs with no great career expectations or anything like that. They lived for Northern Soul and the weekend. It was everything to them.³

There are strong and enduring connections between the Northern Soul movement, class and labour. Moreover, there are powerful connections between the post-industrial towns in the UK and those in the USA, particularly with Detroit where much of the music venerated by followers of Northern Soul was either recorded or was imitated by other artists trying to copy the Detroit (or Motown) sound:

There's something weirdly romantic about unknown black kids from no-hope towns in America making these records that then communicate across time and space with white kids from equally no-hope towns in Britain.⁴

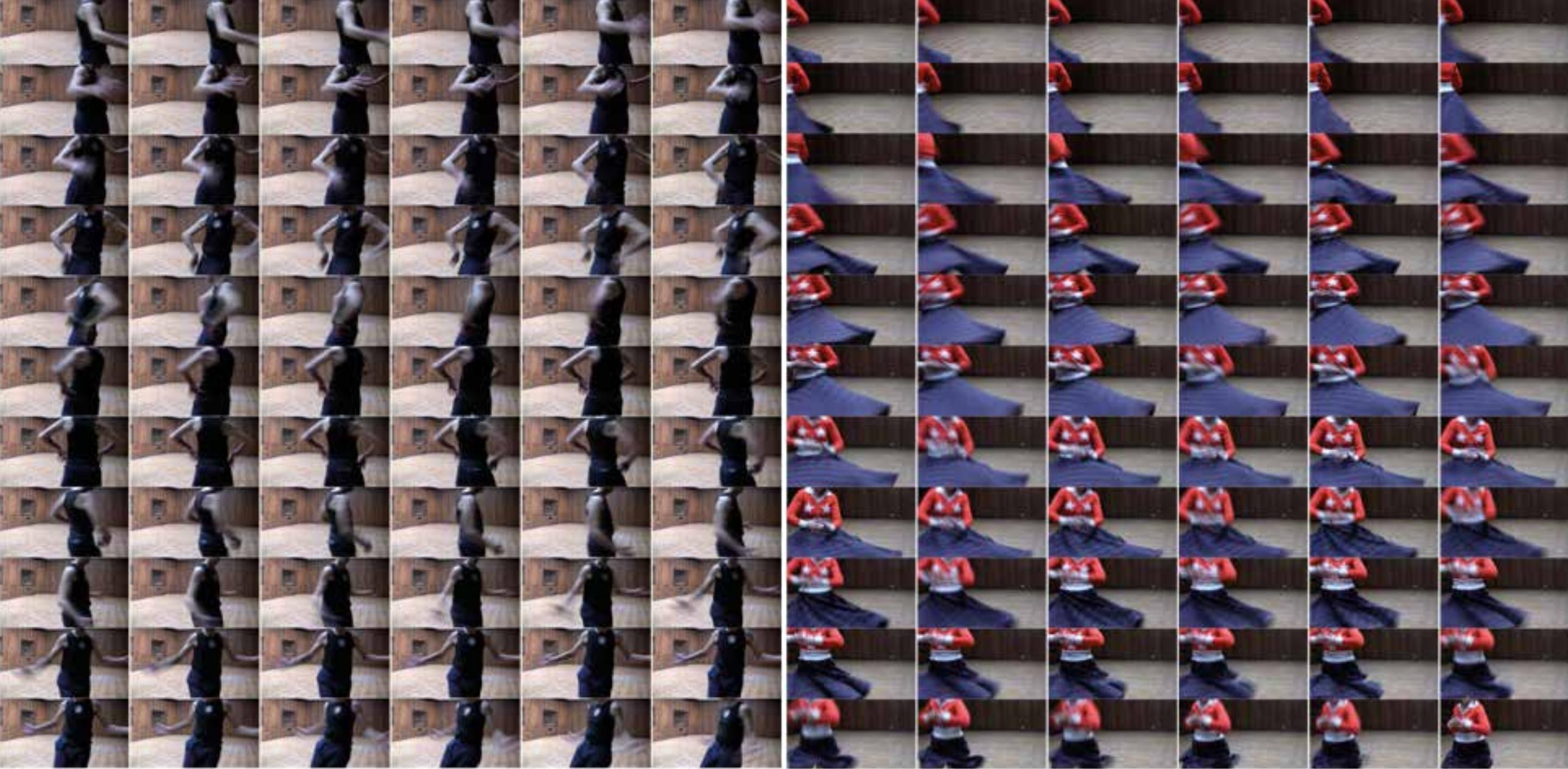
I began to develop an idea for a filmed event at the Spode factory. The regular Leopard Inn DJ, Vinny Soulshaker, agreed to provide the music. The venue would be Spode's once elegant boardroom and gallery, the Ronald Copeland Gallery. The parquet floor, the dusty, empty showcases and the natural daylight from the grimy roof-lights still had a special, powerful presence in the factory. This was a place where the ceramics workers were most certainly not allowed; a place where traditionally the Managing Director and the Board would entertain buyers and guests. There was once a grand piano here too: music tinkling, glasses clinking, chatter and talk of bone china and big business. This room had an exclusive history, far removed from the experiences of the people who worked in the factory on the shop floor. I wanted to challenge the past elitism of the space and question the sanctity of the room as a place where only the powerful and wealthy could go. The event would be the staging of a Northern Soul dance, with just two dancers: one male, one female.⁵ With this came the reintroduction of music into this place, but music of a different kind – emotive, energetic, rhythmic and often melancholic...soulful.

The resulting film of the performance, entitled *Dancing in the Boardroom (Turnin' My Heartbeat Up)*⁶ questions the traditional divisions of labour and class inherent in British industry, whilst also identifying the subversive nature of the Northern Soul movement by bringing the dancers, the room and the music together.

Two Northern Soul dancers are seen dancing with passion in the empty, once splendid Boardroom. The room is transformed into a ballroom, a dance hall, where uplifting music is played and a couple dances, absorbed in their own movements and thoughts. The footage is interspersed with short clips of details of the decaying building that almost act as freeze frames: a chandelier moves gently in the breeze caused by a broken window pane; a discarded fridge sits at the bottom of the spiraling grand staircase that leads to the boardroom. The soul music binds together these 'still lives' with the moving images of the dancers. Towards the end of the film, the footage is slowed down and the music becomes repetitive, machine-like, reminiscent of the mechanised elements of industrial production. The two dancers dance alone and separately, rarely acknowledging each other, lost in the music. At moments they seem to be in a state of rapture, in the sense of a heightened spiritual state. This is not so much a joyous dance on the grave of a doomed industry or an archaic class system; rather a momentary reanimation of a dying room in the fading light of an industry that has all but vanished here.







7

We were breathing life back into a beautiful room that had been forgotten and left for dead ... the warmth returned for a few hours as we danced and the room embraced people again.⁸

¹ B. Dillon, *Ruins*, London, Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2011, p.18.

² E. Constantine and G. Sweeney, *Northern Soul – An Illustrated History*, Virgin Books, 2013, p.70.

³ *Northern Soul: Living for the weekend*, UK, BBC, 2014 [broadcast].

⁴ *Northern Soul – Keep The Faith*, UK, BBC, 2013 [broadcast].

⁵ Peter Davies and Susan Davies: Northern Soul dancers from Nottingham who have been part of the Northern Soul scene since the 1970's.

⁶ *Dancing in the Boardroom (Turnin' My Heartbeat Up)*, 2013, duration 5:33 HD, <https://vimeo.com/75807622> was installed in the Managing Director's office at the Spode factory as part of *Topographies of the Obsolete: The Vociferous Void*, (an exhibition which was part of the third British Ceramics Biennial from September-November 2013).

⁷ Images: Susan Spinning and Peter Spinning were created for The Broadcaster in 2013. The Broadcaster project consists of two permanent notice boards located outside converted Chapels in villages in rural Lincolnshire - Waddington and Wellingore. www.the-broadcaster.co.uk

⁸ Peter Davies, Northern Soul dancer who featured in *Dancing in the Boardroom (Turnin' My Heartbeat Up)*.



National Treasure, film stills, featuring Anthony Challinor (right and overleaf)

For centuries, the transmission of manual dexterity in North Staffordshire's ceramics industry has remained an intergenerational practice. However, the continuity of skill supply to this sector has been severely disrupted over the last three decades, as tens of thousands of employees have been displaced following its subsequent contraction¹. Rapid advances in design and manufacturing technologies have without doubt revolutionized production, but they have also led to the simplification and substitution of the people embodied skills once needed to sustain product leadership. Companies that survived the impact of global competition, have in recent years embraced factory tourism as a means to capitalise on profit. Communities of labour that once coexisted in spaces devised to accommodate the flow of manual production have radically downsized, succumbing to the veneer of the visitor centre experience. In these situations, the reality of mass automation and cheap outsourcing is obscured by clever marketing strategies that heighten the hand made/hand decorated to strengthen sales². Many high-end skills that were once the flagship of renowned manufactories are nowadays deemed as outmoded, or economically unviable in terms of accommodating rapid shifts in consumer buying trends. As older tiers of highly specialised labour gradually diminish, there remain few apprenticeships to secure the effective transfer of this knowledge for the future³. The acquisition of these skills is such that they can only be transmitted via tacit exchange from expert to novice through a process of immersed observation, imitation and repetition⁴.

In an attempt to elevate the status of these threatened practices, the primary objective of *National Treasure* has been to restage the performance of high-end ceramic skill at a variety of loaded locations. The work has involved the hire of a small group of china painters – Peter and Marie Graves and Anthony Challinor, once employed by renowned manufactories that included Spode, Royal Doulton and Coalport. These remain amongst the last generation of china painters in Stoke-on-Trent, whose profession has gradually been displaced by the changing tide of fashion, and by ceramic print technologies for mass production⁵. Although *National Treasure* parodies museological and factory tourist models of the 'artisan on display', there are numerous factors that distinguish this work from these traditional formats.

To amplify tension points that subvert passive spectatorial consumption, the painters were set to work in a post-industrial context amongst the wreckage and disorder of the former Spode Factory. Separated behind glass as they ply their skills, the viewer is confronted with an ethical burden that evokes both admiration and discomfort. Objectified as 'exhibits' themselves, against a backdrop of abandonment and destruction, this situation serves a poignant reminder to the human fallout from the industry's recent economic downturn. Whilst in residence, the artisans were instructed to paint on the backs of damaged and discarded plates found on-site at the Spode factory, with imagery that aped 18th century ceramics' romanticization of British ruins⁶, though depicting picturesque decay was not the objective. The spaces within the foot of the plates, where a painter would traditionally indicate a pride in their workmanship with their personal insignia, were instead graced with images documenting the ruination⁷ and post-industrial wastelands of Stoke-on-Trent. Apart from my request for a monochromatic or full colour painted facsimile of the supplied photographic imagery, it remained key that the painters were free from interference to retain their aesthetic identity. Working within their own time structures for as much or as little as they liked, each artisan would occupy the space intermittently, dissolving the hierarchical relationship between employer and employee. In their absence, each vacant but illuminated workspace, together with the residues of half completed vignettes and palettes of mixed colour, only added to the works metaphoric 'presence'.

Paradoxically the delegation of this work itself became a form of outsourcing. However with the appropriation of people and their skill as 'raw material', the ethical implications of this process remained paramount. Artisans were employed at their indicated rate of pay and informed explicitly of the ideas and their role, and their role within that. Full recognition of their identity was credited in the installation during their activation of it⁸. As they were the very people immediately affected by the issues raised by the work, their willingness to participate in it only strengthened its realisation.

The status given to individuals with exceptional artistic ability has long been a concern of many Asian, Arabic and African countries as a means to preserve and cultivate cultural heritage, but apparently this value system remains alien to Britain⁹. *National Treasure* attempts to raise greater awareness of an intangible cultural heritage that is in dire need for greater recognition and protection, not from the point of nostalgia, but as a means of preserving a sense of identity and continuity to be shared and passed on. This performative installation is a collective strategy to invite eulogy, and to heighten public awareness of what are frequently overlooked forms of human intelligence from a rapidly disappearing culture of labour. The work attempts to highlight what is going and what has gone, with the hope to sustain and repurpose what remains of these cultural assets for future generations.



¹ thepotteries.org - the local history of Stoke-on-Trent <http://thepotteries.org/timeline/index.htm>
Since 1991 regional employment in North Staffordshire's ceramic sector shrank by 69% to the current figure of approximately 7000 largely as a result to policies of global outsourcing and other factors.

² King, A., 'Wedgwood Announces Major Expansion in China', *Sentinel newspaper*, 19 January 2015, <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Wedgwood-announces-major-expansion-China/story-25887930-detail/story.html> accessed 20 June 2015. A prime example of this is the World of Wedgwood visitor centre. VWRD continues to outsource around 50% of its production output.

³ <http://www.ceramicskillsacademy.co.uk/news/> accessed 22 August 2015
In September 2013 the Ceramic Skills Academy was established, 'as a virtual academy highlighting the ceramics opportunities in the Staffordshire Pottery industry and beyond, helping to grow and support ceramic entrepreneurs and investing in skills and training for the workforce so the ceramics sector can be sustained as a world class industry'. The CSA's mission is to 'ensure that those skills that set UK ceramics apart from the rest of the world do not become lost'. Its 2015 evaluation indicated a successful introduction of 64 apprenticeships in the sector which included IT, engineering, although the published literature does little to indicate the transfer of traditional artisanal knowledge/craft skills.

⁴ Procedures that follow the structure of a traditional apprenticeship system.

⁵ Lee, M., 'Ceramic Painters Fear Traditional Skills Could Die Out', *BBC News Online*, 9 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-20177913>. accessed 15 June 2014.
Peter Graves comments, 'It's shrunk to about 25 people in the UK doing completely freehand painting, because everything else is done with the aid of a transfer. There used to be an army of us in factories across the city and now we've been reduced to almost living museum pieces. The couple... fear their trade will not survive beyond the next 20 years because the skills are not being passed down to future generations'.

⁶ These followed the tradition of polychrome enameled painting evident in Caughley and Wedgwood ceramics inspired by topographical drawings and engravings by the picturesque movement. The Frog Service made for Catherine the Great of Russia, c1773 by the Wedgwood and Bentley partnership entailed some 1244 views of British country houses and gardens, landscapes and picturesque ruins.

⁷ The use of the term ruination rather than ruins draws upon urban sociologist Dr Alice Mah's definition as it is one which examines a process of constant states of change of places and spaces across time, alongside the aesthetics of disorder.

⁸ Printed name panels were assigned to each window space of the installation to clearly indicate the identity of each painter.

⁹ UNESCO and Intangible Cultural Heritage, Heritage Crafts Association, <http://heritagecrafts.org.uk/index.php/heritagecrafts/intangible-cultural-heritage> accessed 15 July 2015.
'In 2003, UNESCO adopted a Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, including 'traditional craftsmanship'. It stated:
'Any efforts to safeguard traditional craftsmanship must focus not on preserving craft objects - no matter how beautiful, precious, rare or important they might be - but on creating conditions that will encourage artisans to continue to produce crafts of all kinds, and to transmit their skills and knowledge to others.' 127 countries from Albania and Algeria to Zambia and Zimbabwe have signed up to the convention, effectively making Intangible Cultural Heritage part of their cultural policy. Unfortunately, the UK is not one of them'.



National Treasure, film stills, featuring Anthony Challinor



Royal Doulton Factory, Nile Street, Burslem in the process of demolition. Neil Brownsword, 2008.



Residue of performative installation *National Treasure*. Discarded (Spode) plate, found and painted at the former Spode Factory by Anthony Challinor during *Vociferous Void* (exhibition 27.09.13 - 10.11.13).



Abandoned employees canteen, former Spode factory, Church Street, Stoke-on-Trent.
Neil Brownsword, 2011.



Residue of performative installation *National Treasure*. Discarded (Spode) plate, found and painted at the former Spode Factory by Anthony Challinor during *Vociferous Void* (exhibition 27.09.13 - 10.11.13).



Derelict terraced housing, Middleport, Stoke-on-Trent. Neil Brownsword, 2011.



Residue of performative installation *National Treasure*. Discarded (Spode) plate, found and painted at the former Spode Factory by Anthony Challinor during *Vociferous Void* (exhibition 27.09.13 - 10.11.13).



Derelict part of the former Spode Factory, where *National Treasure* was performed.

Tim Edensor

Suddenly Obsolete: The Sensations and Affects of the Ruin

From 2002 to 2004 I travelled through the industrial towns of Britain in search of the numerous ruins that littered urban space.¹ The deindustrialisation fervently pursued by the government of Margaret Thatcher were still generating swathes of dereliction as mills, workshops, plants and docks fell into disuse, thought outdated and allowed to die without receiving any state support. The consequence was a swathe of abandoned, decaying industrial buildings across the urban centres of the UK, as coal, pottery, steel, cotton, wool and engineering production, amongst other industries, came to an end in areas where they had persisted for over a century. Most of the purpose-built structures that housed such businesses were immediately rendered outmoded since they were not adaptable to other uses, needed restoration or were conceived as blots on the landscape. They were often demolished and some were repurposed as flats, offices or housed smaller workshops, yet many other large brick built and stone factories lingered, slowly decaying into rubble.

In Stoke-on-Trent, like Sunderland, Central Scotland, the West Midlands and South Wales, ruins were easy to find. And yet during the early years of the Noughties, the most important industry that gave the city the moniker the Potteries, was declining only slowly. Many potbanks struggled on, though some had fallen by the wayside, joining steel production and coal mining as vanished industries. In present times however, the demise of the ceramic industry has gathered pace, and while the famous Wedgewood and Royal Doulton companies have closed major works and vastly scaled down operations, Spode had ceased to produce.

Rather later than many other heavy and manufacturing industries, decisions have been made by the industry leaders that pottery production at Stoke-on-Trent is no longer economically viable and must be located elsewhere, largely to China and the Far East. Such policies of abandonment epitomise capitalist tendencies towards 'creative destruction', the obliteration of economic orders and older modes of production to clear the way for the creation of new wealth.² Under conditions of globalisation, as investment has become more free-floating and production more flexible, capitalist space is increasingly transient. Cowie and Heathcott exemplify this speeded up evisceration of industrial production in describing how the flight of capital from Detroit precipitated the evacuation of numerous industrial buildings and widespread dereliction: '(T)he very set of political rules that created the industrial order that we once took to be permanent provided the means by which corporations could dismantle that order'.³

These economic decisions also instantly cut factories, suppliers, transport companies and subsidiary industries adrift from the network of which they were formerly such an integral part. Cities and their buildings are continuously reconstructed through their ever-changing connections with the material resources of other places, highlighting Robert Sack's contention that the 'flows through space are the strands from places that are woven and re-woven to become elements in yet other places'.⁴ Besides the importation of brick and stone to build and restore industrial buildings, the six towns were continuously refashioned by the materials upon which the pottery industry depended, but the import of china clay, bone and other mineral elements to the city is also suddenly curtailed when production ceases. The whole network becomes a ruin, and the institutionalised process through which matter is removed transported and processed from one place to another comes to a shuddering halt. At Spode and other derelict factories, this hasty severing of the links with numerous other sites is evident in the half finished products, the unglazed objects, the loading bays stacked with things that will never be sent away, the storerooms containing moulds and plates that will no longer be deployed, and by the clogged up rail tracks and empty parking bays. Abruptly, water and electricity supplies are cut off, instantly sending the building into a lasting gloom as the lights go out for final time. Detached from the city and the wider networks of which it was part, the abandoned industrial complex falls silent, no longer the site of power, energy and movement.

Ruinination usually proceeds as soon as a building has been evacuated. Almost immediately, the informal salvage merchants, always on the lookout for deserted properties to plunder, work out ways to strip roofs of tiles and lead, seek metals to recycle and other objects that may yield a price. Openings are forged by locals whose curiosity is piqued by the suddenly deserted building and children make their way inside through holes in the fence, prising open or breaking windows to gain access. Soon, those who take pleasure in destruction obliterate anything fragile such as windows, toilets and doors, enjoying an engagement with matter that is rarely permitted outside the ruin.





These economic practices and pleasurable adventures open up the building to ruination, to the array of agencies that were kept at bay when the factory was running and continually secured against intrusions of weather, fauna and flora. The speed of ruination partly depends upon the structure of the building and the materials out of which it is built. The industrial structures that evolved throughout the industrial revolution and were supplemented by new additions over the course of the 20th century tend to be durable, with their solid steel skeletons, unyielding brick and stone exteriors, and layers of concrete, reinforced or otherwise. Yet no building material is immortal and once structures are susceptible to the forces that circulate around them, it is just a matter of time before they crumble into rubble and dust, and are subsequently absorbed back into the landscape to which they belong.

Most destructively evident are the prevailing climatic conditions. In the UK, derelict buildings are typically susceptible to rapid ruination because of the combination of plentiful rain throughout the year and the wintry conditions that foster the freeze-thaw action through which water penetrates cracks, freezes, and in that expansion breaks up matter. In urban conditions, the weather also combines with the sulphurous cocktail of airborne chemicals present in poor quality air to erode stone and brick. Waiting in the wings are the usually unseen co-inhabitants of the city, the animals and birds that constantly seek places to shelter, prey, feed and breed. Pigeons, kestrels, jackdaws and sparrows search out nesting and roosting sites in the ruin and cover floors with their droppings. Millions of spiders and insects work away at matter and exploit cracks, woodlice penetrating layers and woodworm boring holes through timbers. Rats and mice emerge from the floorboards and from behind walls, and foxes undermine foundations as they dig out dens. In addition, plants and mosses find fissures in fabric and put down roots in gatherings of dust and debris. At most derelict sites in the UK, spaces are swiftly colonised by rosebay willow herb and buddleia which act to break up concrete and tarmac surfaces floors and prepare the terrain for larger shrubs and saplings. Equally destructive are biofilms, complex consortia of algae, bacteria, fungi, lichens and protozoa, that cause damage to stone and brickwork.

The rapid impact of these multiple agents of material destruction is possible because the ongoing maintenance and repair that was part of the everyday reproduction of industrial space has suddenly come to an end. An army of cleaners move across offices and factories to sweep away the dirt of the day that if left unchecked would exercise ruinous agencies. Heating engineers, pest-controllers, lighting designers, electricians, plumbers, tilers, glazers and double-glazers, air conditioning workers and lift repair workers are called in to restore systems that have temporarily failed. These tasks of maintenance, crucial practices that arrest decay, repair damage, replace worn out materials and keep ruinous agents at bay – the relentless, repetitive processes of maintenance that restore the shape and texture of the world – utterly cease⁵ when decisions are made that particular structures possess no current or future value, and ruination accelerates.

The suspension of such mundane tasks is particularly glaring at abandoned industrial sites because factories are exemplary spaces of regulation, ordering materials, bodies and meanings. Great effort is expended on ensuring the sustenance of a predictable material order: machines are laid out in accordance with the imperatives that are organised around each stage of production, shelves accommodate the correct tools for the job, and a host of receptacles, notices, utilities and equipment are similarly assigned to particular positions.

Safety procedures discipline the workforce and clocks impose a temporal regulation upon space and bodies. Without such stringent measures, production would decline.

The sudden ruination that devolves in derelict space swiftly undoes all this ordering as the materialities of the factory are catalysed by their own capacities and the ways in which other agents act upon them⁶. Pipes and wiring spring out from their confinement behind walls and under floors as plaster and wood rots away, skeletal girders and joists emerge from crumbling masonry, drainage channels and ventilation shafts become clogged with debris, and slates succumb to gravity and cascade to the ground. Mortar and brick crumbles, plaster cracks and disintegrates, wallpaper shears off walls in strips, and paint blisters and peels. As it disintegrates and other objects fall from their assigned positions on shelves and workbenches, matter becomes mixed, forming coagulated amalgams, weird aggregations and different concoctions of dust.

This disorder is compounded by the sudden obsolescence of artifacts that typically litter ruined industrial space, objects that like the techniques of the workers that used them suddenly acquire a venerable status as the recent past becomes ancient history. Besides becoming instantly obsolete, such things are often identified as waste, devoid of value, yet they are in between rejection and disposal. Because they have been devalued but not yet removed or erased, there are no sanctions on how they might be used or interpreted. Accordingly, ruins contain manifold surplus resources, materials out of which people can create forms, construct meaning and use as they wish.

The artifacts of production within industrial spaces may not necessarily be fully formed commodities-to-be but are things waiting to be affixed to other parts to make a whole. Such items can assume a mysterious form, having no evident purpose except for those who were formerly occupied in their assembly, the now absent workers who would be habitually familiar with their function. In addition to these unrecognisable things, there are the other forms of material debris that emerge during the production process, the residues, lumps, rejects and failures, off-cuts and by-products; the spirals, shearings, filings and excess substance that testify to the sensuous engagement through which workers shaped matter into form.

Indeed, the traces of these former habitués are everywhere⁷. Graffiti scrawled on the walls recalls their workplace banter, nicknames, the mocking of bosses, and the sums they carried out, and work stations are domesticated with minor embellishments: posters of pop stars or football teams, cuttings from newspapers, drawings and photos affixed to walls. The presence of tools and machines conjures up the bodies that skillfully used and operated them, vestigial objects that make possible an empathetic recuperation of what it felt like to wield a large implement, sit next to a throbbing piece of heavy machinery, stoop and lift heavy boxes, mould matter into a recognisable shape, sit in a dimly-lit office answering the phone, and dwell within a functional environment of hard stone floors, constant noise and repetitive manoeuvres. These working bodies are further summoned up a by other signs of their inhabitation of space and occupation of furniture that accommodated their bodies. In canteens, seats and tables are bent out of shape through use, the imprints of bodies remain embedded in comfortable chairs, grimy footprints track across floors, wooden stair-rails are polished by the countless hands that gripped them, and steps are worn from innumerable footsteps. Most profoundly, the bodies of the now absent workers are called up by articles of work clothing. Overalls, boiler suits and work jackets lie across floors and benches; some still hang on pegs and in cloakrooms. Hobnail boots, gloves and hardhats can be tried on to gain a sense of what it felt like to move and work in such a place. Not only do these garments recall the bodies which wore them but they also bear traces of their labour. Gloves are torn at the fingers and coated in grease, the knees of overalls are torn or have been patched up, the soles of boots are encrusted with thick detritus.

Local strategies have been designed to obliterate any trace of industry from the landscape. The 1986 National Garden Festival, as with the four others that preceded and followed, was situated on a key industrial site, in this case the vast complex that was formerly the steelworks of Shelton Bar, and is now Festival Park. Similarly, the huge Royal Doulton works at Nile Street in Burslem has recently been demolished as have many other derelict potteries. Moreover, the lack of upkeep that attends the remaining bottle kilns also threatens to turn the city into one in which few traces remain of the industry that was integral to its formation. These unseemly spatial erasures signify attempts to rapidly forget even the recent past in seeking to reimagine, rebrand and reinvent Stoke-on-Trent as a post-industrial city in a desperate desire to lure investment and new service industries. And where they flatten and clear, it is thought that would be investors can see the shape and size of the space, imagine what might be erected without the complexities of the past intruding. Yet these vast gaps also call forth questions about that which formerly filled them.





It is through such measures that the ghosts of the past are exorcised. Yet they always linger. This is intensified by the sheer sensual qualities of these abandoned industrial places⁸. The encounter with unfamiliar and unregulated materialities offers a visual and tactile experience at variance from the usual apprehension of the city, increasingly smoothed over, desensualised and antiseptic. In the ruin, we are free to pick things up, feel the textures of industrial matter, move through a disorderly space in which walking in a straight line is often impossible and our bodies must stoop and weave to manoeuvre through a debris-strewn space. Footsteps echo through large, silent chambers though stillness reveals faint whirs, creaks and the flurries of birds, as well as the muffled hum of traffic. Pleasurable and acrid smells assail the nostrils and unusual juxtapositions, assemblages and qualities of patina provide visual diversions. Pools of dank gloom collect in unlit corners and shafts of bright light flood through disintegrating roofs.

If they are not demolished, selective sites are chosen to serve as industrial heritage, and in such realms we may stroll, listen to the potted accounts of guides, follow tours, and look into the display cases that select and classify what is important. The space of ruin disrupts such practices though. The overwhelming sensory impressions, the curious objects and materialities, the processes of decay and the spectral presence of former workers capture our attention, cause us to surmise and dream, or wallow in immanent sensations. Yet whatever strategies are deployed by city managers and regeneration specialists, their attempts to erase the past are rarely complete, for a sensory memory and material substrate remain after the tidying up. A city such as Stoke on Trent is thoroughly entangled with clay and the brittle shards of porcelain. The skill needed to work pots is sedimented in the bodies of former workers. The city's hollows serve as testament to the extraction of clay, its mounds to the piling up of industrial waste, and the debris of the industry - the shraff - saturates the very ground on which the Potteries is built.

¹ Edensor, T., *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*, Oxford, Berg, 2005.

² Schumpeter, J., *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, London, Routledge, 1994.

³ Cowie, J., and Heathcott, J., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2003, p.15

⁴ Sack, R., 'Place-making and time', in Mels, T., (ed) *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythms*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, p.248.

⁵ Edensor, T., 'Entangled Agencies, Material Networks and Repair in a Building Assemblage: The Mutable Stone of St Ann's Church, Manchester', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(2), 2011, pp. 238-252.

⁶ Edensor, T., 'Waste Matter: The Debris of Industrial Ruins and The Disordering of the Material World', *Journal of Material Culture* 10(3), 2005, pp. 311-332.

⁷ Edensor, T., 'The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23(6), 2005, pp. 829-849

⁸ Edensor, T., 'Sensing the Ruin', *The Senses and Society* 2(2), 2007, pp. 217-232



Globalization and the UK Ceramic Industry (c1990-2010)

Stoke-on-Trent (the Potteries) has been synonymous with the UK ceramic industry for centuries. As late as the 1980s, it was calculated that of those employed in the UK pottery industry, 83% were still located in the Stoke-on-Trent region.¹ However, in Frances Hannah's *Ceramics: Twentieth Century Design* it was predicted that the future of the UK ceramic industry would inevitably be greater multi-nationalism, use of cheap labour abroad, and the emergence of design aimed to suit an international taste.² Today, the term 'globalization' is frequently used to describe the phenomena whereby the more traditional, centralized forms of production have declined.

In terms of how commodities might adapt to this changing environment, Lash and Urry's analysis of 'global sociology' foresaw a situation whereby 'Objects are emptied out both of meaning (and are postmodern) and material content (and are thus post-industrial)'.³ Based on Lash and Urry's theories, designing and design aesthetics become more important than the process of production. In theory, it would become the role of advertising to attach imagery and meaning to the product.⁴ But, how straightforward has it been to apply this theory to all aspects of the UK ceramic industry, especially when considering the actual ways in which the ceramics produced have been affected?

In 1991, the UK's largest proportion of imported porcelain tableware came from Germany. From the end of the 1990s, Chinese imports overtook European, and in a drive to bring down labour costs, shifting production from Staffordshire to the Far East and Asia (outsourcing) then seemed to many observers to be a cogent argument, if not the only way for businesses to survive. However, in the case of the UK ceramic industry, there has been a long tradition of backstamping that has reinforced the notion of place of production. Indeed, the marketing of place, craft and heritage was not in decline prior to the rise of Far Eastern imports, or outsourcing to the Far East, but at its zenith in the 1970s and 1980s. Typical of this tendency was a range called 'Eternal Beau' designed by Sarina Mascheroni, produced by Johnson Brothers of Hanley from the 1980s. The backstamp declares that it was manufactured in England (Fig. 1 and 2). Perhaps, previous marketing strategies have actually made it harder for the industry to adapt to the possibilities of globalization.

When Royal Doulton announced in 1995 the development of a manufacturing venture in Indonesia, the emerging debate drew attention to issues of a loss of local craft skills, potential quality issues, and whether the issue of the 'place of origin' was relevant to the post-modern consumer. Locally, outsourcing was a highly emotive issue because of job cuts in the Potteries. However, Wayne Nutbeen, Chief Executive of Royal Doulton, was later quoted in the local newspaper as stating that he had 'reinvented' the firm as:

'...a sales-led company marketing high-branded goods under the names of Minton, Royal Doulton and Royal Albert – rather than a manufacturer'.⁵

Typically, a detachable label might declare where the product was manufactured and this approach to marketing was widely used by many leading manufacturers. For instance, a Royal Albert surface pattern called 'Ruby Lace' of 2002, in the 'Old Country Roses' range, had a detachable label indicating that it was a Royal Doulton brand, but made in Indonesia (Fig. 3, 4 and 5). As new marketing strategies emerged due to the impact of outsourcing, the word 'England' came to signify the origin of the brand, rather than place of production. This is the case with a Johnson Brothers' cup and saucer made in China (Fig. 6 and 7). Manufacturers, such as Spode, proposed that ceramics could be more like a lifestyle brand. Alternatively, it was pointed out in the Staffordshire press that:

'...like in other areas of consumer goods, the backstamp is starting to mean less as companies spread themselves amid the sweep of globalization'.⁶

Research undertaken by manufacturers led Wedgwood's marketing director, Robin Ritchie, to declare that:

'If you ask a customer, they would prefer it to be made in England, but it's not an important part of the purchase. We have done considerable research to check this. The reassurance of the Wedgwood name is good enough for the consumer'.⁷

Later, when Tableware International published an article concerning the 'country of origin' debate, opinions of UK ceramic retailers veered towards the 'place of manufacture' having limited importance to the consumer.⁸

Nevertheless, the results of globalization on the marketing of ceramics could be

incongruous. For instance, in 2009 Wedgwood introduced a range to celebrate 250 years of business. A mug decorated with backstamps (some of which declare 'Made in England') was, according to the label on the cardboard box, made in Indonesia (Fig. 8, 9 and 10). In an article in the Staffordshire press entitled 'Stamping out the origins' the observation was that when receiving a ceramic gift, it was likely that the packaging would be disposed of anyway.⁹

Alternatively, a view expressed was that Staffordshire could be the centre of design, and not manufacturing. However, Anthony Wood, Chairman of Arthur Wood & Sons of Longport, took a more cynical view when he argued:

'A common sight is that of 'Designed in England' which is a deliberate attempt to mislead customers into thinking that it is made here, although it could be made anywhere'.¹⁰

Other forms of marketing developed which reflected the tendency of UK ceramic firms to import white-ware to be decorated in Stoke-on-Trent.

Interviews with manufacturers and retailers provide insight into the changing approaches to manufacturing, and how consumers responded to outsourcing. Apparently, attitudes to place of origin can evidently vary. For examples, in the case of the profitable Churchill China, which manufactures in Stoke-on-Trent and outsources to the Far East, a view was that as the younger generation of consumers were living in a global world, there was less interest in where ceramics were produced. However, in an interview, a retailer based in a department store in the north of England, with fifteen years experience of selling Wedgwood, and the other brands connected to this group, stated that:

'Yes, I think as a company, I think, it was thought they wouldn't. But, I think they [Wedgwood] under-estimated the customer, and I think the customer is bothered where things are made...'.¹¹

As far as the Wedgwood retailer was concerned, there was an acute problem in maintaining the prestige of the brand when outsourced to the Far East. There was a disruption of value, and no matter how much focus there was on emphasizing the brand name, the design, or the use of celebrities. It was apparently not enough to bridge the gap in the minds of many consumers.

A problem arose when prestigious UK ceramic brands attempted to place the product at a high-retail value when manufacturing took place in districts associated with cheap labour. It is not a prejudice against Far Eastern goods, as ceramic imports from the Far East and Asia into the UK are not objected to, but the combination of backstamps, and detachable labels creating convergent narratives that cannot always be disguised, and are not ignored, or irrelevant. Subsequent branding and advertising does not entirely create a new meaning, as envisaged by Lash and Urry. In addition, there was evidence that this industrial product still had connections, or pretensions to craft, which also potentially loaded the ceramic commodity with an additional sense of where it was 'crafted'. According to the Wedgwood seller interviewed, consumers were 'regularly' declining to buy Wedgwood when they discovered it was outsourced. Therefore, outsourcing could create perception problems, particularly when considering this prestigious brand.

Not all companies capitulated to outsourcing production to the Far East. Emma Bridgewater, a firm based at Hanley, Staffordshire, reported record sales of £11 million for the year ending April 2010 - an increase of 33% on the previous year.¹² The number of employees had risen from approximately 30 in the 1980s, to around 160 by 2010. The Crafts magazine (which is more accustomed to discuss studio ceramics rather than industrial production) also referred to the economic success of Bridgewater. The article stated, 'It's this very Britishness that defines the company— every piece is hand-made in Stoke-on-Trent, and Bridgewater herself has doggedly refused to outsource production overseas'.¹³ It is perhaps implied by this analysis that place of manufacture is central to the appeal of this particular ceramic product. Certainly, a combination of surface patterns and backstamps emphasize how and where Emma Bridgewater's ceramic products were manufactured (Fig. 11 and 12). But surprisingly, the motivation for maintaining production in Stoke-on-Trent stems from a desire to maintain jobs in the UK, not an intentional marketing strategy. Unlike shareholding multi-nationals, private companies are able to exercise a choice as to where to manufacture, and the degree to which this will impact on profits.

In some cases the marketing, and even the designs might suggest that there has been a reaction to globalization. A Staffordshire firm called Royal Stafford created backstamps that emphasized the Potteries, and surface-pattern designs included the phrase 'Made in Britain'. Their 'Britannia range' of c2009 incorporated images of Britannia, designs with a crown, and the statement 'Made in Britain' (Fig. 13 and 14). Unusually, it



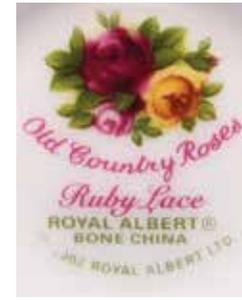
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- 1 Johnson Bros., Hanley, 'Eternal Beau', tea-ware, earthenware, from 1980s
- 2 Backstamp. Designed by Sarina Mascheroni, 'Made in England'
- 3 Royal Albert, 'Ruby Lace', teacup and saucer, bone china, from 2002
- 4 Backstamp, c2002
- 5 Detachable label
- 6 Johnson Bros., 'Fresh Fruit', tea-cup and saucer, hard paste porcelain, c2008. The detachable label indicates 'Made in China'
- 7 Backstamp. Johnson Brothers was established in Hanley in 1883. (Latterly part of the Wedgwood Group)
- 8 Wedgwood, mug, bone china, c2009
- 9 Backstamp

- 10 Label on packaging
- 11 Emma Bridgewater, mug, earthenware, c2010
- 12 Backstamp. Note decorator's mark, and inspection label
- 13 Royal Stafford, 'Britannia range', earthenware, c2009
- 14 Backstamp on tableware
- 15 The Figurine Collective. Established in 2009. This figure was presented to the Potteries Museum, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent
- 16 Spode's 'Blue Italian' plate, earthenware. An iconic ceramic design that first appeared in c1816. Manufactured by Portmeirion, Stoke-on-Trent, 2011
- 17 Backstamp

is the ceramic design itself that communicates to the consumer where it was made. This would be something of an anachronism prior to the impact of outsourcing, and here it can be argued that the impact of the globalization has influenced surface pattern design. Nevertheless, the choice to manufacture in Burslem is not based on the possibility of appealing to an Ethnocentric consumer, but maintaining design and manufacturing agility. In spite of the globalization theories that have predicted greater homogenization, ceramic preferences can still vary from country to country. Responding to demand as quickly as possible is harder when manufacturing takes place on the other side of the world. Thus, in more recent times economists have used the phrase regional resilience to describe tendencies in the UK ceramic industry that are responding to globalization in different ways.

A problem with applying the implications of globalization to the UK ceramic industry is that it ignores how versatile the ceramic products can be. Commemoratives and collectables have been a segment of UK ceramic production. In November 2009, Tony Young, Peter Holland and John Bromley established The Figurine Collective, and this is one example of a new company that has emerged in spite of Far Eastern competition. As the company's name suggests, it has concentrated on the production of figurines, and the company relies on Stoke-on-Trent manufacturers to produce their products, employing some ex-Doulton decorators. As part of the publicity surrounding the setting up of the new company, their first figurine was presented to the Potteries Museum of Hanley (Fig. 15). It was reported by one of the owners that people had given up collecting English branded figurines because they were no longer made in the UK, but with a renewed focus on Stoke production, individuals were now collecting again. For some aspects of the UK ceramic industry, distancing itself from the 'traditional' place of manufacture raises a complex philosophical question of what constitutes authenticity. Although some marketing theorists argue that 'authenticity is a contrivance rather than a reality'¹⁴, Walter Benjamin's description of uniqueness, or authenticity, was that:

*'Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.'*¹⁵

Paradoxically, even though the surface designs of UK ceramics invariably reflect diverse cultural and stylistic influences, a notion of authenticity often resides in the place and context in which it is made. Globalization impacts on perceptions of authenticity. Even if notions of the UK ceramic industry in the Potteries are in-part constructs (such as outsourcing occurring within Stoke-on-Trent, between different manufacturers), this does not make the consumers' interest in 'place of origin' irrelevant in an increasingly globalized world.

Without even considering the ethical issues of exploiting cheap labour abroad, or the environmental implications of increased shipping, the impact of globalization raises perception issues, as well as the need for manufacturers to maintain manufacturing and design agility. The impact of globalization has not resulted in a complete collapse of the UK ceramic industry. New forms of marketing, design and even small-scale businesses have emerged in the 1990s and 2000s.

However, the focus on the potential consequences of globalization has often been on the decline of regionalism. This is a rather narrow reading of the implications of the debate. As an example, in 1983 Theodore Levitt, from the Harvard Business School, wrote *The Marketing Imagination*. This influential publication apparently caused Saatchi & Saatchi to adopt more global strategies in terms of their marketing.¹⁶ However, an aspect of Levitt's investigation also predicted, '...the growth of so-called ethnic markets the world over – specialty [sic] segments in foods, clothing, entertainment, and even retail institutions such as delicatessens, boulangeries, and antique shops'.¹⁷ Levitt did not perceive these segments as a contradiction, but rather as affirmation of globalization.

In addition, Sternberg's 'Transformations: The Eight New Ages of Capitalism' argued that from the western, post-industrial age there would be a move to potentially eight alternative ages. In Sternberg's fourth age (called the new mercantilism), manufacturers set up foreign plants to hire low-cost labour, which has been shown to have often occurred within the UK ceramic industry.¹⁸ However, in the eighth age (the age of new fundamentals) it is argued that 'turbulent change' creates 'refurbishing antique cultures, rediscovering original values, reclaiming eternal truth'.¹⁹ Sternberg did not see his 'ages' as a paradox, but as reflecting the 'divergent possibilities of our time'.²⁰ In other words, some of the behaviour of the UK ceramic industry (which has avoided outsourcing abroad) coincides with what has been predicted, theoretically. For instance, Portmeirion of Stoke purchased the design rights to 'Blue Italian' and 'Woodland' ranges from Spode for £3.2 million in April 2009. At this time, it was reported that a certain amount of production would return to Stoke, rather than being outsourced to the Far East.²¹ This would not be at the old Spode works, but at the Portmeirion factory, also in Stoke. Rather than

Portmeirion continuing to promote Spode's designs as a lifestyle brand it developed a marketing strategy that encompassed a return to emphasizing place of production. Spode's 'Blue Italian' is an iconic ceramic design that first appeared in c1816. The reason why Portmeirion brought most of the Spode 'Blue Italian' production back to Stoke was in part due to the importance of the 'made in England' backstamp to its potential consumers (Fig. 16 and 17).

Examining just one industry, and the commodities it produces, demonstrates how a seamless transition to becoming something globalized is not as straightforward as Frances Hannah predicted.²² The pathway can be less clear, and far more uneven. There is not a straightforward answer as to whether a more globalized approach to manufacturing and marketing can work for the UK ceramic industry. This is due to the fact that in each case the nature of the ceramic product can vary in terms of function, status, demand, heritage, and meaning.

The above essay is based on Neil Ewins' PhD thesis entitled 'The impact of the Far East on the UK ceramic industry: design, marketing and consumption c1990-2010', University of Sunderland, 2014.

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¹ Imrie, R.F., 'Industrial Restructuring, Labour, and Locality: The Case of the British Pottery Industry', *Environment and Planning A*, Volume 21, 1989, p.6.

² Hannah, F., *Ceramics: Twentieth Century Design*, E.P. Dutton, 1986, pp.100-101.

³ Lash, S., and Urry, J., *Economies of Signs and Space*, Sage Publications, 1994, p.15.

⁴ *ibid*, pp.14-5.

⁵ *The Sentinel*, 18/9/2004.

⁶ *The Sentinel*, 19/11/2003.

⁷ *Tableware International*, March 1995, Vol.25. No.2.

⁸ *Tableware International*, May/June 2008, Issue 3, Vol. 130.

⁹ *The Sentinel*, 2/11/2003.

¹⁰ *The Sentinel*, 15/4/2002.

¹¹ Interview conducted by the author with anonymous seller of Wedgwood, in department store, north of England, 14th May 2009.

¹² *The Sentinel*, 5/7/2010.

¹³ Qureshi, H., 'From Brixton to Bond and Beyond' *Crafts, May/June*, No.224, 2010, p.14.

¹⁴ Alexander, N., 'Brand authentication: creating and maintaining brand auras', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 43, No.3/4, 2009, p.553.

¹⁵ Arendt, H., Walter Benjamin: *Illuminations*, Fontana Press, 1992, p.214.

¹⁶ Leiss, W., Kline, S., and Jhally, S., *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products & Images of Well Being*, revised and enlarged from 1st edition, 1997, p.171-2.

¹⁷ Levitt, T., *The Marketing Imagination*, The Free Press, 1983, p.30.

¹⁸ Sternberg, E., 'Transformations: The Eight New Ages of Capitalism', *Futures*, Cedar Falls, Iowa, December, 1993, pp.1025-26.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.1031.

²⁰ *ibid*, p.1037.

²¹ *The Sentinel*, 3/8/2009.

²² Hannah, F., *op.cit.*, p.100-1.



J Kay Aplin
Seguir - 30 de septiembre a través de móvil
cerca de Brighton, England, United Kingdom

Me gusta - Compartir

Aneta Regel Deleu le gusta esto.

Marc Robinson Top left corner. A pair of overall trousers with Robo written on them . They were my overalls from the casting shop when I was a caster for spode.
5 de octubre a la(s) 1:31 a través de móvil · Me gusta

J Kay Aplin Thanks Robo. I noticed the name when I saw the piece in situ. Did you meet Karen Harsbo (the artist?) Kay
5 de octubre a la(s) 9:58 · Me gusta

Marc Robinson No but I hope to before the event closes.
5 de octubre a la(s) 10:01 a través de móvil · Me gusta

J Kay Aplin She lives in Copenhagen so in any case I will certainly pass your comments on. I'm sure she will be very interested.
5 de octubre a la(s) 10:09 · Me gusta

Marc Robinson Cheers. Those whites could tell some stories.
5 de octubre a la(s) 10:11 a través de móvil · Me gusta

Marc Robinson
6 de octubre · Editado
My old whites in a display at the BCB . fame at last.
'Lunar Labour' by Karen Harsbo can be seen on the ground floor of the Meadows building at the original Spode site.
The date on the photo is incorrect - camera setting needed adjusting! - en British Ceramics Biennial - Spode Factory, Stoke con British Ceramics Biennial.



2 personas les gusta esto.

Vicky Mountain How good is that. Hope you got to tell the artist that you are the famous Robo. May I have your autograph please?
6 de octubre a la(s) 22:31

Marc Robinson ill think about it.
6 de octubre a la(s) 22:34 · 1

Sara Monaghan We r both famous x x
Hace 15 horas a través de móvil

Angela Robinson Oh the irony of Karen Harsbo's white flag!... Your surrender was so bittersweet x
Hace 12 horas · Editado

Shadow, Light and Reflectivity: Material and Metaphor
The Post Industrial Landscape as Site for Creative Practice

*All materials in nature, the mountains and the streams and the air and we, are made of light which has been spent, and this crumpled mass called material casts a shadow and the shadow belongs to light.*¹

Emily Eliza Scott states that since the 1960's and 70's, 'art in wasteland spaces represents a distinct branch of aesthetic practice.'² Working within many post-industrial landscapes both nationally and internationally, I have continued to develop meaning through a contemporary visual language within the field of brick sculpture. Recently the manipulations of shadow, light and reflectivity have been explored in both physical and metaphorical terms - shadow to reflect past industry and skill loss, and light to signify the creative regeneration of such sites through contemporary artworks.

In his paper *The Lume Materiale*, published in 1988, the American architect Sam Ridgeway describes how the Venetian architect Marco Frascari uses light in his building by 'literally trapping light and making it a material of construction', and how details and elements 'are defined by a piercing light, which engraves their lines and sublimates them to a symbol of repose, certitude and solemnity'³. Frascari uses light as a physical material, 'lume materiale', to translate his architectural language using cut stone 'pillaged from abandoned sites' around Venice. He describes the stone as 'transformed by technical operations proper to stonework', which enables the light to play on the built structures. For Frascari 'lume materiale' is 'a rich substance producing tangible built poetry out of elemental knowledge'. Frascari's aim is 'to emphasise the important architectural objective of embodying the intangible in the tangible'.

Frascari and Cultural Geographer Tim Edensor describe 'memory' and 'light' as tools of construction to 'inscribe' and 'engrave'. This sense of 'light' and 'memory' as intangible tools having the ability to manipulate space is an important aspect of developing artworks that in the method of construction and siting communicate a 'sense of place' and 'collective memory'. Intangible memory, projected through our own interpretation, perception and response to the post-industrial 'space' remains central to my practice. Geographer, Caitlin DeSilvey states that:

*The disarticulation of the object may lead to the articulation of other histories, and other geographies. An approach that understands the artefact as a process, rather than a stable entity with a durable physical form, is perhaps able to address some of the more ambiguous aspects of material presence (and disappearance).*⁴

Reinterpreting the histories and methodologies of past industries has been core to the development of works produced at the Petersens Brick Factory in Sonderborg, Denmark, where on the Baltic shores some 150 brick factories were once in production. The site retains layers of physical memory and is rich in association with the history of the industry. In the words of Iris Brook, 'A place that tells a story, where the layers of past history are evident, and preferably not consciously preserved, is one that expresses a spirit of place.'⁵ Developing a visual symbolism within brick sculpture to communicate the often intangible essence of memories we experience on many post-industrial sites is fundamental to my work. Philosopher Maurice Merleau Ponty states that 'It is our bodily intentionality which brings the possibility of meaning into our experience by ensuring that its content, the things presented in experience, are surrounded with references to the past and future, to other places and other things, to human possibilities and situations.'⁶

Reflections of sunlight on the water as it washed over the remnants of hundreds of years of brick production, shaped and disintegrated by the Baltic waters, were used as metaphors to investigate narratives of memory, cultural identity and the spirit of place. The physical contours of these ethereal elements were fed into new technologies to create traditional cutting boxes as used in hand brick making, again to reference the lost histories of production. DeSilvey states that 'procreative power of decay' sparks simultaneous - and contradictory - sensations of repugnance and attraction'. This juxtaposition of positive and negative has resonance with the articulation of shadow and light within my own sculptural forms to express ideas of hope; the new creative future 'light' and shattered hopes; the loss of skills, 'shadow'. In discussing the ruin, Emile Koefoed argues that; 'Its material remnants therefore conjure up visions of hope, promises and progress, but the state that many industrial structures have been left in by de-industrialisation seems to reflect the shattered hopes from this past era.'⁷

At the derelict Spode factory in 2013, my site-specific installation of abandoned plaster moulds further articulated issues of collective memory, place history and the mapping a sites creativity, through light and shadow. Like the shell of the empty Spode factory building, each mould represented the shell of a productive, creative past. Light at different times of the day played upon the moulds to expose shadows that revealed an anthology of the forms from within. Tim Edensor states that, 'the urge to seek out the ghosts of places is bound up with the politics of remembering the past and, more specifically, with the spatialisation of memory and how memory is sought, articulated, and inscribed upon space.'⁸ He refers to the ghosts of the post-industrial site as "fluid, evanescent entities" which disturb "the reifications through which performances, narratives, and experiences of memory become fixed in space."⁹

The significance of this process of placing artworks back into the landscapes that inspired their creation aims to rejuvenate and inject a new energy into those post-industrial sites by re-connecting visual narratives that explore memory, past histories and loss of skills with metaphors that signify new creative futures.



Detail of Light Entombed

¹ Lobell, J., *Between Silence and Light. Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I Kahn*, Boston & London, Shambala, 2008, p.5.
² Scott, E. E., *Wasteland Aesthetics: Art and the Post-industrial Landscape 1962-72*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2008, p.1, <http://americanart.si.edu/research/pdfs/scott.pdf>.
³ Ridgeway, R. S., 'The Imagination of Construction', *ARQ: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 2005; 9 (3-4):188-196. Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp.189, 191, 192.
⁴ C. DeSilvey, 'Observed Decay: Telling Stories with Mutable Things', *The Journal of Material Culture*, 2006, 11:318, p.324, <http://mcu.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/11/3/318>.
⁵ Thompson, I. H., *Rethinking Landscape: A Critical Reader*, Chapter 18, The Genius Loci, I. Brook, Reading, Routledge, 2008, 18.1 p 216.
⁶ Ponty, M. M., *The World of Perception*, Routledge Classics, 2004, p. 9.
⁷ Koefoed, E., *Battersea Power Station – A Disturbing Post-Industrial Landscape*, PhD Thesis, <http://www.spectacle.co.uk/uploads/other%20media/BPsthesis.pdf>.
⁸ Edensor, T., 'The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 23, 2005, pp. 829 -849.
⁹ Edensor, T., 'The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 23, 2005, p. 829.

Traci Kelly

Apertures & Architectures: the pOrtal and the g_pe¹

There is an open gate. Its aperture, red and proud, momentarily yawns and grants entry to ten acres of derelict buildings and land that make up the former Spode ceramics factory in Stoke-on-Trent. Doors thresholds abound, some open, others locked, with keyholes being the only view until Alan arrives with keys and knowledge.² Lichen colonised windows allow hindered two-way scenes, crumbling roofs permit the elements to pass through, and forgotten chimneys in the attic deliver dead birds in a ritual passing from one status to another. The portal is the invitation to work within the skeletal space, a rib cage mostly void of organs of machinery and the once countless hands to tease their output. The gape is the open, anatomous site evidencing a past critical point, a brutal and immediate wound created by the rapid disconnect between industrial heritage in the potteries and its almost instantaneous relocation into post-industrial reality. Reminiscent of a medical écorché, the numerous buildings display areas of flayed roofs and walls revealing the textures of interiority. Like unreliable archaeologists and fledgling surgeons, the artists enter this fissure, a site of loss, and probe that which remains.³ Their pleasure is indecent. In his reflection on culture in *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes states, 'What pleasure wants is the site of loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. Culture thus recurs as an edge: in no matter what form'.⁴ Part scavenger, part opportunistic predator and part grave robber, the artists search for morsels and scraps, fragments ²/₅ of ⁵/₈ artefacts, shattered stories, resonating and striking chords on intuitive and informed levels. Ideas begin to form and new mythologies start to shape. The artists are contagion as much as any pigeon shit and lurking asbestos to be found, but they are also the draught of longed-for air the yawn seeks in its opening up.⁵

//Pause for an opening//



Scientific research indicates that yawns are contagious, they multiply \times mathematically a critical point in a variable is any value in its domain where its derivative is 0. We return to the pOrtal. Appropriated from physics, a critical point is now applied to many areas of the social and physical sphere in the common term 'tipping point'. In economics the tipping point is when a dominant technology or player defines the standard of an industry, perhaps propelling the scale and scope of an economy towards the realm of monopoly... china migrates, **China** dominates... inverted 'c' of a dainty cup handle, strong '**C**' of **Made in China**. Abandoned workforces disperse and begin the process of finding new terms for livelihood. Tea makes everything better/Tea fights free radicals.

//Pause for a sip//



Free radicals researching together at Spode, like the federal towns of the potteries, are a gathering of critical mass. They are inter-national, inter-collegial, inter-disciplinary, peer enabling, polyvocal yet of critical accord. Critical space may be deemed as room for analysis, sifting, testing, aligning ideas and processes, discarding, developing, challenging... It may be the open-ended possibilities presented by navigable areas of physical architectures and industrial scapes as they witness the activities of pilfering, salvaging, and the remaking of impermanence. Ann Rae Jonas who poetically relocates principles from the sciences to human subjectivity reminds us that 'The purpose of structure is delay. Eventually, the weight falls, strain is released. Years, decades, centuries later the event occurs.'⁶ Arguably the most radically critical space is that which collapses in upon itself. With each successive residency KELLY/MARHAUG, upon returning to the site, would find that the space they had previously worked in was no longer accessible.⁷ The 'Curator's Attic', site of two video works, a live performance and several other discursive pieces, became out of bounds when a local council inspector fell through the rotten floor. The 'Old Mould Store', a two-storey housing for original moulds dating back to the eighteenth century, in which two video works were also made, fell victim to the weight of an upper level support column punching a hole through the floor, into which slipped centuries of weighty intellectual property in physical form. This collapse of the material world can be viewed as a void of transition from the familiar to the puncture of event, speaking to Alain Badiou's assertion that truth punches a hole in knowledge.⁸ As artists we insert our subjective plurality into the rupture of the site, or, the eventfulness of the site gives rise to our subjective plurality, thereby creating the socio-political. The unravelling of the knowledge, the site houses may expose it as a deconstructed monument, but perhaps more vitally, it is to leave it forever undone, fragmented and full of potential, for in Badiou's thinking there are grounds for carefully distinguishing between Truth-as-place and truths-as-veridicalities-to-come (i.e., Truth versus truths)...⁹ and the eventful rupture is a portal which compels us to establish new ways of being.¹⁰

//Pause for a slip//



On the most recent visit, the Great China Hall where KELLY/MARHAUG created two live performances, one video work and several photographic pieces, was similarly closed, notionally intact but harbouring asbestos. By mention of these spaces and works I do not intend to map closures or boast production, but rather give a sense of how critical these spaces are, compelling the artists to work feverishly in the wake of eventfulness. Into these failing structures and atmospheres the sensate and unreliable bodies of artists creep in at the edges. Over time the corporeal body is in contestation with its location. It starts to judder, vacuumed lips part, and the Oval cavity coughs oughs ughs and splutters, returning second-hand air to where it was sourced. Skin shivers and eyes itch. Lungs breathe shallow. The critical body surfaces. Drew Leder in his text *The Absent Body*¹¹ and its further citation in *The Body In Every Day Life*¹² states that, 'The body is taken for granted, other than in certain bodily states such as disease, pain and death (when Leder points out it tends to dys-appear, that is we become conscious of the body because it is in a dys-functional state)'.¹³ Body and habitat assimilate, the temperature of the space remains – the body drops.¹⁴ The discomfort of the flesh ensures the artist is present. Verdant breath.

// Interrupted // air flows // time + motion // production lines // economies //

//Pause for a breath//



Many years of silted dust in the mould store foregrounds imprints of footsteps evidencing curiosity and exploration. Together the artist and the site produce new emerging histories, histories that taste damp and feel silky, causing goosebumps and irritations. Space and user are critical to each other. Some buildings were conceived with human flow in mind, others evolved without thoughtfulness and have mirrors placed to prevent collisions on narrow stairways. There is a tension on a structural level between intent and adaptation that reflects in the artist's making. Structures are always tested by forces, that is the law of physics – Spode by capitalism, shifts in economies and investment, the elements and the strong drive of nature to overpower, the artists by time ÷ energy x cold + lifting strain to the √ of resources = output. The sites are peppered with presence and absence, additions and subtractions, (the artists constitute a surplus). Tunnel spider webs on windowsills offer a female registration void to match the male mould components. Invitations can be fatal and, like the spider, we too are predators and practice silence and stealth.

Reductive essence: we are surplus/we are predators

//Pause for a killing//



Time runs with simultaneous speeds and with different intent on the Spode site. The artists are frenzied, working against the clock, a week there, a day here, stealing minutes into twilight. Without electricity they scramble towards an anticipated blackout. The site runs slow - vegetation creeps, spores drift, asbestos floats, damp initiates a gradual rot. Though the site is bone-chilling with cold, biting air, its time is balmy, laid back and at leisure. In comparison time is improper as it chases out-of-work families hastily towards the due dates of bills and mortgages.¹⁵ In the pseudo-calm aftermath artists excavate the spaces and histories with due care, gradually coming to the workers, who form the greatest absence within the perimeters. In one cleared out office space constructed within a larger space there are no signs of documents or their keepers. It feels vacated and spent. KELLY/MARHAUG working processes begin to probe ideas around consumption and expiration. Fire finds place in poetic gestures, in breath, in sparks, in flames, and in smoky veils. The gestures are consuming oxygen, material burns until it is extinguished – a vital force snuffed out. On the last day of working in this space I receive family news - the unexpected death of cousin Elaine. Eyes burn/ heart fires. In the firing of a clay body there is a +/-3% variable in shrinkage. In the remains of humans there is a +/-3% volume compared to the unfired body.¹⁶ For the former it is variable and therefore always potential, for the latter it is fixed and declares an irreversible loss. Clay, the ground we walk on, the aperture, the things we pass through – Ground 0, a site of devastation. Waiting for light to flood. Too much water... water hiding between particles of clay and too high temperature cause explosion. Hot tears, groggy, sitting on the back of my eyes push through to visibility... implosion.¹⁷

//Pause for a loss//



Hauntology, a word coined by Derrida to supplant ontology, brings the figure of the ghost and ghostliness into cultural inquiry, not as a belief in the paranormal, rather as a positioning of 'being' as neither absent or present, alive nor dead but located in a series of simultaneous existences in relation to otherness.¹⁸ Colin Davis writes: 'Attending to the ghost is an ethical injunction insofar as it occupies the place of the Levinasian other: a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving. Hauntology assures the future as spectres appear in the present, preventing the end of history.'¹⁹ These hauntings create a gape, as accounts are open and we are confronted with histories that continue to demand our attention to politics in the world. Spectres invite us to rethink our political systems and hierarchies and give us scope to imagine things differently. In this mêlée the figure and craft of the artist rises. Ontology based in linguistics, text, labelling, fixing, knowing (coincidentally the language of the museum) is unsettled by hauntology's visions, spectres, and the un/familiar and surplus mythologising in contrast to knowing.

//Pause for a haunting//



It is difficult to write about the future, writing is always a past event... in this present I am scripting forwards and glancing backwards. I am leaving a trace, which anticipates a moment ahead of speech and writing. Similarly, KELLY/MARHAUG videos, First Form from Chapter 1: Holding on by Letting Go and Laying To Rest from Chapter 2: On Passing, exhibited as part of Vociferous Void,²⁰ are a result of light piercing the camera's eye, leaving a residual image. Their projection, an emanating light from a mechanical body, projects towards a future point bringing images to vision. Badiou would argue that infinity, which could be viewed as the future, is always already here. Rather than some notional ungraspable point on a perpetual horizon, it exists in the banality of here and now on the surface of an un/grounded existence. There is an uncertainty of Spode's continuation, though there are multiple hauntings of the has/now/will. The encroaching wildlife continues to find and build nests and raise young. Saplings take hold. The British Ceramics Biennial will seek a third term within its gates. A more stable part of the site is now used by local artists for studios. From the debris of the falling apart of a dominant industry rise small independent businesses offering mould making, decal printing and bespoke ceramics.

//Pause for a future//



Discography of a site

2008-2012: No new material released by American singer and Go-Go band member Belinda Carlisle. Spode has closure.

March 2013: On part two of the residency snow swirled around the bottleneck relics of the potteries whilst Belinda Carlisle released her first single for a home market in seventeen years entitled "Sun".

August 2013: Part three of the residency saw the deep summer sun shine on Spode, warming bones and hearts whilst Carlisle's "Heaven On Earth" was remastered.

March 2014: Just ahead of the fourth residency in June a collection with eighteen of Carlisle's greatest hits was released, the one new song being "Goodbye Just Go".

//Pause for an epilogue//



'Under enough stress, every material will fail. If it cracks first, it's hard; yields first it's tough. Both forms of failure are potential in all things.'²¹

Dedicated to cousin Elaine

¹ Apertures and Architectures refers to the significant body of lens-based work made between collaborators Rita Marhaug and myself Traci Kelly, in the spaces of Spode. It also positions the opening up of architectural spaces and subjectivity evidenced in the personalised writing and philosophical meanderings on voids and absences. My own performance practice unfolds the poetic body and is often imbued with a sense of loss – the aperture. Marhaug's performance practice is most often concerned with the concrete body, weight, dimensions and load-bearing capacities – the architecture of skeleton and muscle extension.

² Alan Shenton who worked at the Spode factory for many years has been kept on as caretaker to the site. His extensive knowledge of the factory site and working understanding of the spaces and work roles, as well as the political lead up to the factory closing, including Union meetings and co-operative purchase bids has been invaluable to all of the artists working on the site.

³ As Roland Barthes asks, 'Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes?' Barthes, R., *The Pleasure of the Text*, reissue, New York, Hill & Wang, 1998, p.12.

⁴ Barthes, R., *The Pleasure of the Text*, reissue, New York, Hill & Wang, 1998, p. 7.

⁵ Maria Konnikova writing on science and psychology for The Yorker (15th April 2014) reviews recent research on the yawn which suggests that it is less likely to be about tiredness, rather a signal that to/by everyone around that it is time to act.

⁶ Jones, A. R., 'Structures' in *A Diamond Is Hard but Not Tough*, Washington DC, Word Works, 1998, p. 29.

⁷ KELLY/MARHAUG is the collaborative research project of artists Traci Kelly UK/DK and Rita Marhaug NO.

⁸ Badiou, A., *Being and Event*, London & New York, Continuum, 2007 edn. Originally published in French as *L'être et l'événement* © Editions du Seuil, 1998.

⁹ 'There is Truth, and then there are truths – or Slavoj Žižek as a reader of Alain Badiou', *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, Vol. 1.0, p 149.

¹⁰ Badiou, A., *Being and Event*, London & New York, Continuum, 2007 edn. Originally published in French as *L'être et l'événement* © Editions du Seuil, 1998.

¹¹ Leder, D., *The Absent Body*, University of Chicago Press, 1990.

¹² Nettleton, S, & Watson, J. (ed.), *The Body in Everyday Life*, Routledge, 1998.

¹³ Ibid. p.10.

¹⁴ This is particularly pertinent to KELLY/MARHAUG, who made all their work in lightweight cotton slippers, mostly during inclement weather conditions.

¹⁵ On speaking to Rita Floyd, a china flower maker, whilst on a visit to the Gladstone Pottery Museum, she relayed how during the decline of the potteries, devastatingly, whole households became unemployed.

¹⁶ 3.5% for an adult, 2.5% for a child.

¹⁷ The bodies of groggy clays shrink less because they have channels for moisture to escape to the surface. They are termed 'open bodies'.

¹⁸ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, London & New York, Routledge Classics, 2006. First published in French as *Spectres de Marx* by Editions Galilée. Davis, C., *Ét at Présent: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms*, *French Studies* Vol. 59, No.3, 2005, p. 373.

¹⁹ Hughes, C. 2012; Dialogue Between Fukuyama's Account of the End of History and Derrida's Hauntology. *Journal of Philosophy: A Cross Disciplinary Inquiry* Vol. 7, No.18

²⁰ Vociferous Void is the title of the exhibition presenting site-specific work by artists researching as part of Topographies of the Obsolete at Spode. It formed part of the British Ceramics Biennial 28th Sep - 10th Nov 2013.

²¹ Jones, A. R., *A Diamond Is Hard but Not Tough*, Washington DC, Word Works, 1998, p.28.



Topographic Watercolor: Anthropocene Diorama at Spode Works

Humanize something free of error (Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, Oblique Strategy)

Entering the Contemporary Ruin: The Technofossil Record

When entering the site of the former Spode factory for the first time in 2012, the slow process of regeneration in Stoke-on-Trent gave our group a glimpse of the day when the factory closed in 2008. Piles of documents, cans of sardines, cups of tea, everyday mess on workstations remained as intact as the day they were left, by the employees who were escorted off the site.

Like the set of a post-apocalyptic Hollywood production, or a geological layer that might be called the technofossil record,¹ consisting of the material left behind by a species acting as geological force. If the Geological Society of London² decides that this geological force is sufficient enough - there will be a new epoch in its name placed on the geological timescale as the *Anthropocene*, taking over from the *Holocene*³ that we are formally still living in.

The Walk-in-Diorama⁴, the Manmade Cave

The former mould store I worked within had a moist cool quietness, and semi-darkness. Entering the cave you had to wait for your eyes to adjust to see the colours and textures of the walls. There seemed to be individual differences as to how long it took for people to see colours in the semi-darkness.

The Industrial Roustique⁵

While production is happening at accelerating speed in the Far East, the buildings left behind by western industries have been filled with 'creatives' and their hopes and dreams. When sociologist Ruth Glass introduced the term gentrification in 1964⁶ the pioneers of the process would be the creatives, then followed by the gentry. The creatives, like the remains of the working class, would later be later forced to move on when gentrification takes hold and inflates markets prices.

Yet we could imagine a million happy and inspired moments when creatives, like pioneers, were exploring the spaces and materials left by the industry. The touch, smell and feel of the industrial roustique has become the touch, smell and feel of creative opportunity.

The interaction between post-industrial sites and creatives might be a defining aesthetic within the last 60 years of western cultural history. There would be no such thing as rave

parties if it wasn't for the great abandoned production halls in Detroit in the 1980's.

An example from the history of industrial roustique is evident in the first *Wall Street* movie from 1987⁷, where the interior decorator played by Daryl Hannah, adorns a *nouveau riche* Manhattan penthouse apartment with fake red brick wallpaper. The style of the gentrification process, that we might call the industrial roustique, is mocked, and therefore apparently well established within the popular consensus at that time.

By now the cultural heritage of industrial roustique is proudly and effortlessly integrated with innovative and modern architecture. We also find its associated styles cleverly applied where there is no industrial heritage - this is particularly evident in the Dubai-based café chain MORE. Here, with the lack of abandoned factories to fill with the smell of French roast coffee beans and organic bread rolls, the ceilings in the coffee shops situated within various malls and hotels have been stripped, and internal ventilation structures etc, proudly exposed and painted purple.

Topographic Watercolor⁸

Entering the Spode works as a Norwegian art student, as part of a generously sponsored expedition to an area ridden with crisis and despair, the mood board of this experience would be coloured by the explorer's enthusiasm, tainted by guilt. Perhaps this is the mood board of the Christopher Columbus syndrome, as described by Spike Lee in his famous rant about gentrification which is to be found on Youtube.⁹ But without Christopher Columbus and the Christopher Columbus syndrome, there would be no such thing as Thomas More's *Utopia*, celebrating 500 years in 2016, written and inspired by the tales of travels to the new world.¹⁰ This is why the topographic watercolour in the tradition of the British explorer, could be seen as a tradition mostly embracing the great ambivalence and doubt of our times - post-colonial western liberal guilt.

Anthropocene Palette: Synthetic Remazol Reactive Dyes from the Hoechst Company

Throughout the Pleistocene¹¹ and Holocene periods, the colours used by humans for dying, painting and variations of decorations were done with a varied palette defined by certain limitations. When possibly entering Anthropocene, a synthetic rainbow is made available to the public. In *Synthetic Worlds*, Esther Leslie suggests:

Germany had few imperial possessions, but it had Coal. The government supported the cultivation of a dye industry in Germany. Factories sprang up along the German Rhine and Main rivers. The Meister, Lucius & Co factory was founded at HOECHST near Frankfurt am Main in 1863 for the production of Aniline Dyes... Made at the back of time and in the belly of the earth... in the 1830-ties the most spectacular transformation occurred. Coal gave up the entire spectrum of colour, releasing the deposits of the past that had been locked in to its compact darkness. Colour glittered forth from blackness. It was a kind of Magic. Dying and Magic were long connected... This was the future work of chemistry, the rising industrial science: to reproduce the world synthetically and from the cheapest stuff. The chemist Friedlieb Ferdinand Runge made the first step into this region. From the tarry waste of Novalis's coal Runge painted a synthetic rainbow.¹²

The colours I brought to the site to do topographic watercolour in the *Anthropocene Diorama* were synthetic reactive dyes from the Hoechst, a chemical company that has supplied dyes to Bergen Academy of Art and Design's Textile Department since the 1970's. In this way the closest thing I could do to re-enact this kind of topographic watercolour in the *Anthropocene Diorama* would be to paint the space 1:1 with dyes manufactured from the blackness of coal - made at the very beginnings of time and in the belly of the earth.

The Great Acceleration¹³

The Anthropocene (if we are in it) was first thought to date approximately from the beginning of the industrial revolution, but in the collected and compared data, a clear pattern has appeared to climate scientist Will Steffens. Human population growth, CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere, loss of biodiversity, international tourism, McDonald's restaurants, the damming of rivers, the use of the telephone - more or less date back to the period just after WW2. This epoch, known as the 'great acceleration' is assumed to mark the beginning of the possible Anthropocene.

Accelerated Expressionism

The Anthropocene Diorama was produced through a process of 'accelerated expressionism'. If Impressionism was developed and inspired by the view of the landscape from a speeding train¹⁴, we can imagine this speed accelerating throughout the century,

generating a style where the unintended aesthetics of human practice - like spilling, staining and making errors, becomes the core of its expression. This 'out of control sloppiness' could be a consequence of production taking place in the nervous modus of hypermodernity at accelerating speed - just as the possible situation of the Anthropocene is a great example of the unintended aesthetics of human practice.

In the Ratti Factory, among the greatest of the Como-region silk companies that supplied the fashion houses with the finest fabrics throughout the last century, this accelerated expressionism is evident in contemporary prints, resurrected from their rich archive, now redesigned in Photoshop. In the golden days, generous amounts of time were spent on watercolour designs for the young Emilio Pucci, Valentino Garavani and other famous costumers. Nowadays, the nervous mode of hypermodernity can be seen in the eyes of employees racing around open office landscapes, planning winter/spring/summer and autumn collections further and further into the future. Employment is dissolving in the region and young people on the commuter train to Milan are studying Chinese.

The Apocalyptic Sublime

Big Times, Big Times, we're all partners in crime (The Soundtrack Of Our Lives)

The dramatic style of the *Apocalyptic Sublime* painting developed in 18th century Britain, with inspiration from the 1st factories and the ongoing processes in Coalbrookdale, an hour's train ride from Stoke, through lush green countryside, the heart of the industrial revolution.¹⁵ In our times, climate scientist Will Steffen is painting the Apocalyptic Sublime on Youtube, with the Great Acceleration. As someone once pointed out, there is a very problematic aspect of naming the time we are living in 'the great acceleration'. Within physics, acceleration is a process going up to a point, and then...nothing.

¹ Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Waters, C.N., Barnosky A. D., & Haff, P., *The Technofossil Record of Humans, The Anthropocene Review*, Sage Publications, 2014.

² Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Haywood, A., & Ellis, M., 'The Anthropocene: A New Epoch of Geological Time?', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, vol. 369, No. 1938, 2011.

The Geological Society of London and the International Board of Stratigraphers will decide in 2016 or 2017 if we are now living in the Anthropocene.

³ The beginning of the Holocene approximately 11,000 years ago was the beginning of the agricultural revolution, and since then human life has developed into our current complex civilisation.

⁴ The diorama display method was traditionally used as pedagogical tool in traditional museum exhibitions. Nowadays the diorama is often experienced as problematic in the sense of being tainted with the experience of postcolonial guilt.

⁵ 'Industrial Roustique' is a decorator's term for a specific style of interior design.

⁶ Glass, R. & Centre for Urban Studies, *London: Aspects of Change*, Centre for Urban Studies report #3, London, MacGibbon & Kee, 1964.

⁷ *Wall Street*, dir. Oliver Stone, USA, 20th Century Fox, 1987.

⁸ 'Watercolor Artists', <http://www.handprint.com/HP/WCL/artist02.html>
Topographical watercolor was primarily used as an objective record of an actual place in an era before photography. Ink, pen and watercolor tints were common mapmaking tools, portable and convenient to use outdoors and in remote locations. So early topographical drawings were often the work of surveyors and mapmakers in the service of road building crews or colonizing armies; the techniques of perspective and topographical drawing were regularly taught in military academies and used to record enemy defensive positions or the customs of conquered peoples.

⁹ Coscarelli, J., 'Spike Lee on The Christopher Columbus Syndrome', *New York Times*, February 25, 2014.

¹⁰ Barzun, J., *From Dawn to Decadence - 1500 to the Present - 500 years of Western Cultural Life*, Harper Collins Publishers, 2000.

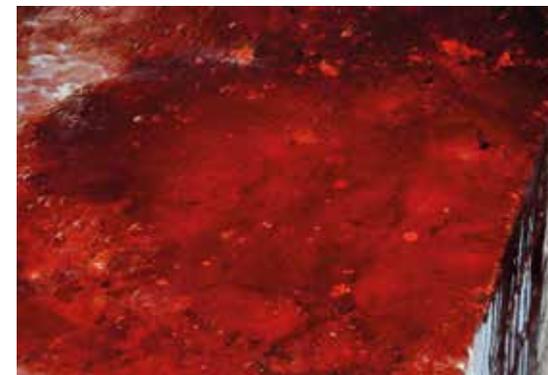
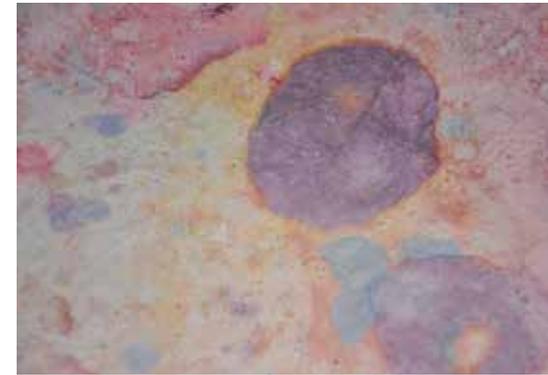
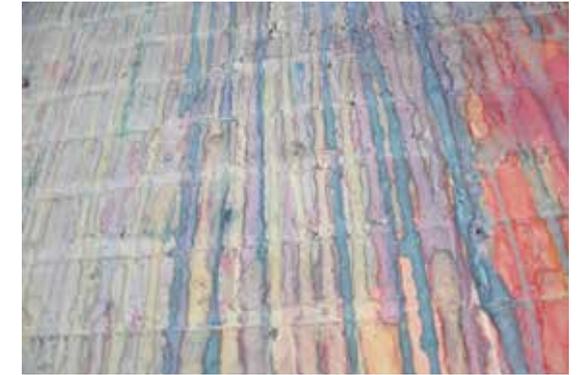
¹¹ Pleistocene is the geological epoch which lasted from about 2,588,000 to 11,700 years ago, spanning the world's recent period of repeated glaciations.

¹² Leslie, E., *Synthetic Worlds- Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*, Reaktion Books Ltd, 2005.

¹³ 'TEDx Canberra - Will Steffen - The Anthropocene', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABZjlfhN0EQ>.

¹⁴ Dixon, S., lecture, notes transcribed by the author, Bergen Academy of Arts and Design, 2009.

¹⁵ Paley, M.D., *The Apocalyptic Sublime*, Yale University Press, 1986.



Worker's Health Records '67.

ENGRA STREET

19-4-67. MURIAL MAIN

19-4-67. HR. E. ADAMS

ROLL UP PLASTER

YESTERDAY WK. HE SLIPPED OF THE GRIND... STEPS... REGION OF THE BACK SHOULDERS. (IN HY... HAS TRYING TO PULL A... ONE)

19-4-67. HR. DUCKERS

19-4-67. HR. EDWARDS

DISHMUTH.

CHLOROPICLIN. TOL. ETC.

23-8-67. Hi. W. Eagles.

23-8-67. Joan Woodcock 850A.

22-8-67. Jane

compresses at home. Trapped S. fingers R. hand between two trucks going to fetch tea. cup from the bench, when iron gate fell backwards onto back of R. arm. Reported to Burgate 3.5pm. Bis-butl. (Plasters, Calpols & Codeina for general use in dipping House.)

CHURCH STREET

Glancing at Spode
Collaborative performance
COLLURA/LAUDER
3 performances during Sept. & Oct. 2013
Each comprising of 3 fragments: 1960's/2008/1770's
Performed at the former Spode Works, Stoke on Trent, UK
in Launder's installation ROUTEMASTER SPODE OFFICE.



The Age of Enlightenment: Marie & Josiah Spode II, 1770's.



Glancing at Spode
 Collaborative performance
COLLURA/LAUDER
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 Each comprising of 3 fragments: 1960's/2008/1770's
 Performed at the former Spode Works, Stoke on Trent, UK
 in Lauder's installation ROUTEMASTER SPODE OFFICE

SPODE
 GROUND FLOOR AREAS
 SCALE ~ 30ft = 1 inch
 * BREAK GLASS POINTS



Sonata
 W. A. MOZART
 K. 311 composed in 1777

A Madame G. d'Ivry.
Valse Brillante.
 Fr. CHOPIN

ELLENORA STREET



Richard Launder: Timeline 2012 - 2014

Visit 1: Autumn 2012

Exploratory 1: find a plan/map* in trashed archive room, with a circle drawn on: Derive thro the site: 'walk circle', apply the rule 'open/enter any door/window/hole which is open'. Collected islands of coagulation, a site located (former Technical Office/the heart that kept production flowing), begin to stimulate comprehension – succinct moments of insight result in 1st sculptures (*Squeezed Spode*, *The Scales of Enlightenment*) /video (*White on White*) & initial staging of the office – a Baroque Decal is playfully photographed as a 'frame-mask'

Visit 2: Spring 2013

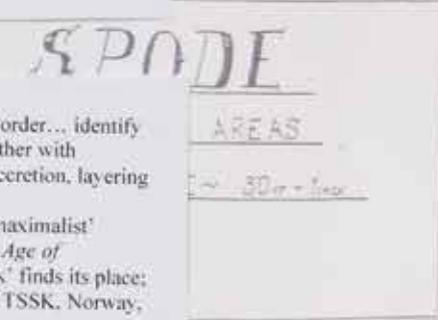
Stabilisation: *Routemaster@SpodeOffice* gets re-staged after thefts/disorder... identify core issue: re. Health of Worker's, Production, Market, Buildings; together with Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*. This is then constructed into the Office via accretion, layering of materials/atmospheres/phenomena: doctored tools/equipment, real records/tests/examples/fragments searched & found on site**. Apply 'maximalist' approach – rule: locate abandoned items of resonance – insert. Perform *Age of Enlightenment* in exhibition at Airspace Gallery – Baroque 'frame-mask' finds its place; *Routemaster* starts to curate: the above sculptures & video, exhibited at TSSK, Norway, perform *Age of Enlightenment* there & at Swedenborg Society, London.

Visit 3: Autumn 2013

Stabilisation - public: *Vociferous Void* contextual exhibition, BCB & Conference; *Glancing at Spode*, collaboration with Julia Collura performed 3 times within the installation *Routemaster@SpodeOffice* & environs (see previous pages) All at former *Spode Works*.

Visit 4: Early Summer 2014

Exploratory 2: another building made safe: enter with similar spirit to Exploratory 1 - eloquent objects/things, spatially activated & inserted into site to articulate visual narrative. Signals/indicators of contexts past life – the murmur of rumour of memories & futures: *Lens of Desire*, *Diaspora*, *The Pastoral* & *Ruination* are emergent loci.



*Plan/Map (background behind these texts) formed part of the installation *Routemaster@SpodeOffice*: a detail on the main entrance desktop together with a particular lens to view through.
**All items/materials including the grand piano - apart from costumes, music, typewriter & chocks - are original/authentic & were located, discarded on-site, the antique 1816 Spode Italian Coffee Cans bought on EBay as almost no finished wares were found.

CHURCH STREET



Forsaken Decoration

When the final bell rang within Spode on a cold November¹ day, work stopped at the Spode Factory and the work force were marched off site one by one. With the workers gone, everything has been left for scavengers both human and animal to peck through. Abandoned decorative transfers left piled in boxes: waiting to be placed on plates², platters, side dishes, fish platters, biscuit tins, tureens, dog bowls, teacups, tea saucers, teapots, coffee cups, coffee saucers, coffee mugs, lids, bread boxes, jam pots, lamps, thimbles, ornaments. Objects³ that will never be produced have no need of their ornamentation. So the transfers wait, packaged and stacked, for a new purpose and home. Now stranded from their original destination, the transfers become objects in their own right.⁴

¹ In 2006 Spode merged with Royal Worcester; unfortunately the newly formed merged company failed and entered administration on 6 November 2008.

² *Bear Pit* (2013), pictured above, is constructed of 100's of stacked plate decals found on site. Peeking out from inside is an original Spode figurine of a polar bear. Hunted for and recovered from Ebay, he has finally been brought home and now sits hopefully waiting inside his 'plate pit'.

³ Contextual referencing: Helen Frik as "both artist and director of the Frik Collection Ceramic Museum (FCCM). This museum collection consists of nearly two hundred pieces: strange vases, remarkable objects, weird utensils. The works are in all respects hybrid and contain remnants from other worlds and earlier times. Each object ensures that the overwhelming reality is tempered in the proportions of everyday life." (Frik) "She has a splendid disregard for the preconceptions, orthodoxies and history of the medium. It is, for her, another outlet for the things in her head and her hands. The results are joyous: useful, useless." (Risley)

⁴ "Every object has two functions - to be put to use and to be possessed. [...] These two functions stand in inverse ratio to each other. At one extreme, the strictly practical object acquires a social status: this is the case with the machine. At the opposite extreme, the pure object, devoid of any function or completely abstracted from its use, takes on a strictly subjective status: it becomes part of a collection. It ceases to be a carpet, a table, a compass or a knick-knack and becomes an object in the sense in which a collector will say 'a beautiful object' rather than specifying it, for example, as 'a beautiful statuette'." (Baudrillard).



Interest is found foremost in the transfer's decorative and domestic reference; each detail a fragment of pattern. To fit a coffee cup: rim { () }, handle { i }, base { [] }. These found fragments⁵ of adornment add up to a whole, but not the whole that was intended. They will never be brought together on the intended ceramic structure again; that time and those days are lost. Yet these fragments of the decoration⁶ continue to offer up notions of home and domestic space; gatherings focused on friends and family coming together through sharing of food {tea and biscuits} {coffee⁷ and cake} {dinner party celebrations} {Christmas dinner⁸} times when 'best' is brought out and used. They create nostalgia for a time and place that never was: dinner sets used for the perfect Thanksgiving or Christmas⁹ meal; plates filled with rural hunting scenes; Spode's Blue Italian set owned by past generations. An American's ancestral Euro-centric nostalgia for ones past that never was, as they were not part of it and can never be.¹⁰



Left now for years in cardboard boxes: rats, both human and rodent, have already started to work their way through the transfers. The neat and orderly, expected in a working factory, becomes disused chaos in the left wasteland. The contradiction of the cosy home, as indicated through these domestic decorations, versus the derelictions of the Spode

⁵ Image seen above is a fragment of the decorative detail to be used around the pouring spout of a cream jug from the Woodland pattern. The yellowing, not part of the original design, has occurred over time with age.

⁶ Contextual referencing: David Mabb's paintings found over top of William Morris patterned prints. Mabb's work leaves fragments of the pattern to come through and disrupt his own work, creating a slippage between the two. "Mabb never simply paints or covers over the Morris pattern with another image, elements of the Morris pattern always poke or burst through. This combination produces an unstable picture space that is never fixed, where a Morris pattern and the other image are never able to fully merge or separate. On the one hand, *Two Squares* reminds us of a nostalgia for a future that never transpired; Mabb's other work shows us the collapse of a utopian project in the face of capitalist mass consumption." (Fleming)

⁷ *Painter Encased by Coffee Saucer* (2012), pictured above, was made using the coffee saucers decorative edged transfers piled high on top each other, creating an open encasement for dogs found as part of a still popular Spode ware from the Woodland pattern. This was an early piece produced during the initial Topographies of the Obsolete workshop.

⁸ Originally created in the 1930's, the Christmas Tree pattern is still a popular dishware set continuing to be produced by Portmeirion under the Spode label.

⁹ When the Spode factory closed down in November 2008, Christmas lights had already been put up around the site for the upcoming holiday season. Still found on site today, artist Andrew Brown's simple use of fixing the Christmas lights created the piece *5/11/2008*. It is a suiting memorial to the human factor of the loss at Spode; as there is almost no worse time to lose your livelihood than right before Christmas. The remaining forsaken Christmas decorations are an ironic reminder that one of the few Spode designs that carries on being produced, by another company,¹³ is the still popular Christmas Tree pattern.

¹⁰ "Americans are people of conviction, convinced of everything and seeking to convince. One of the aspects of their good faith is this stubborn determination to reconstitute everything of a past and a history which were not their own and which they have largely destroyed or spirited away." (Baudrillard)

site offer up a jarring moment found in the slippage between the two. Speaking of the domestic location that the objects produced in Spode were destined; these aspirational patterns¹¹ now found in the empty site remind us of the double edge of value they hold.

Between valuable and worthless

Unable to be used for their original purpose, the transfers still hold significant value, while simultaneously being worthless. Human scavengers are drawn to them like magpies. Finding interest in nostalgic patterns they know well, seen in different form; objects or material to manipulate and use for new purposes; or fascination in the uniqueness found within the mass-multiple object.

Historical value

These modern transfers are the last tangible link of an important lineage of transfer ware¹² belonging to the Spode factory. Original designs find their last home in rotting cardboard boxes rather than everlasting protection on ceramic ware. While these current paper backed machine printed transfers may seem less important than the original hand engraved transfers, they directly link back to this heritage. One can look at the original copper engraving plates with a reverence that is lost on a modern production method, but we should not forget that the engraving plates were once the height of progression. These current sheets, flimsy and easily water damaged, may not yet be seen in such reverence, but once gone they will be lost forever.

Monetary value

Gold found on rims of your coffee cups come from these printed transfers. Found as sleek black lines on the transfers that only glisten once fired; the gold is unassuming yet there. Once, unused and damaged transfers with gold were melted down to reuse, so hesitation is found over the worth of these transfers. Usage for artwork is held back while the gold value and reclaiming mechanism is sought out. But only momentarily until it is discovered the smelting process is not worth the gold reclaimed: a potential value is lost again.

Selected lines of the leftover transfers are now owned and produced by the Portmeirion Group¹³. While these left over transfer sheets were offered to Portmeirion, the company was uninterested because they used different techniques to Spode. Tight rein is kept on these particular transfers, so a counterfeit ring of dishes does not find its way to the open market¹⁴. This tantalizing vibration of potential worth held within each transfer clashes with the snowdrifts of wet and muddy ones found kicking about the Meadows¹⁴ floors. Yet it is through this value clash of a sole transfer that the wider economic issues of Spode are implicitly spoken.

Material value:

Even these wet and muddy transfers become important nest building blocks for the mice, rats and pigeons that are slowly taking over. Artists have also become key scavengers of these important relics from Spode. A unique material found nowhere else; the Spode transfers are a hidden gem with a limited supply and restricted access. Artists find value in the lost and overlooked, the transfers have now worked their way into performance pieces, films, photography, re-creations of ceramics, sculpture and installation.

¹¹ Numerous blogs based in the USA, speak almost in panic of the impending closure at Spode, such as *A Thanksgiving Table Setting with Spode Woodland*, 25 November 2008. The blog's author, simply known as Susan, states 'I suddenly had visions of [Woodland] becoming unavailable. Now I've never done anything illegal, well at least knowingly...but if there's a black market for china, I might just cross that line!' (Susan) Woodland is used on her site as her Thanksgiving 'tablescape' for 2008.

¹² "Transfer printing is a particularly English form of ceramic decoration. Although printing on paper existed for centuries, it was the enterprising English engraver and printer who saw its potential as a means of decorating the hard, shiny surface of pots. It is not possible to credit one individual with the sudden flash of inspiration that led to transfer printing on pottery. [However] by 1785 Josiah Spode I had developed the first commercially viable blue printed earthenware. The factory continued in production for over two hundred years, and "Staffordshire blue & white" was shipped worldwide." This then 'modern' form of transfer printing onto ceramics created a drastic change in the ceramic market at the time. (Whiter)

¹³ Six months after Spode went into administration Portmeirion Potteries purchased the Spode Brand. This did not include its facilities but the copyright to the Spode designs. Portmeirion brought the production of Spode ware ceramics back to Stoke-on-Trent from the Far East, and continue to produce and sell its most popular patterns: Blue Italian, Christmas Tree, Delamere and Woodland.

¹⁴ The Meadows is the name used for the designers block building found on the Spode site. Once the home to Spode designers, artisans and manufacturers, is it now no longer safely accessible. Home to the room of transfer boxes, and before deemed unsafe, it was studio space for a variety of artists during the Topographies of the Obsolete workshops. Finally becoming an exhibition venue to the outcomes of the playful experiments produced within its walls.





Made to measure

A ceramic object such as a bowl or teacup offers a three-dimensional structure for the decorative transfer to be placed. The transfer image is printed onto paper and produced as a flat two-dimensional plane that is then slipped off by hand and, now flexible, placed on its volumetric ceramic home. Similar to pattern cutting for fabric,¹⁵ the flat transfer needs to fit onto a three-dimensional object. Multiple transfers are produced together flat onto large paper sheeting and then each is cut out. Produced in bulk, the transfers are found in large stacks of 50, 100, and 200, all cut in pragmatic yet curious shapes.

Two-dimensional and three-dimensional identities are combined together: a whole series of flat planes together unite into three-dimensional forms. The 'flat' transfer when stacked in multiples creates a new three dimensional form in space. These solid and wonderfully odd shaped structures are building blocks¹⁶ that can be used in the creation of towering plinths, canyons for hidden moments, and frames for other transfer images.

¹⁵ Contextual referencing: Polly Apfelbaum's work *Anything Can Happen in a Horse Race* shown at Milton Keynes Gallery her "new works used what appeared at first glance to be simple off-cuts [from garments made] of highly reflective, sequined fabric. These hard-edged, spidery forms contrasted with her previous work which involved the aggregation of similar shapes and sizes." Working similarity to Apfelbaum I relate to her discussion of "working on-site...over the course of five days. For the artist, it is important for the work to be 'situational' and to involve an element of performance, in direct response to the [exhibition] space." (Batchelor)

¹⁶ *Cream Spray Duck* (2013) seen above, is made from 100's of transfers from three different components and a single image detail of a duck. This work was developed and shown in the British Ceramics Biennale: Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void as part of *Plinths and Frames*.

¹⁷ A plinth being a base structure for a three-dimensional sculptural object. Similarly a frame is a supporting structure for two-dimensional work, commonly drawing or painting. Both are key standard support structure for the display of artwork usually found within the establishment of museums and galleries.

¹⁸ *Looking the Wrong Way* (2013) as seen to the right, is created from 1000's of side plate transfers laid out creating a large swath of colour. On first experiencing the work, the viewer is overwhelmed by the abstracted form of yellow billowing off in the distance. Yet as eyes 'adjust' small moments of detail begin to appear: small stacks of transfers with images of dogs and an original 19th century Spode dog figurine are all lounging while looking toward the viewer. As the viewer moves within the space a 'hedge' is revealed in which small birds and rabbits are hiding away from the danger found in front.

Plinths and Frames was developed as an over arching premise for the conception of a series of individual works: components that work together as a whole but can also be seen as individual. The transfers function as plinths and frames¹⁷ for themselves and other transfers, blending the boundary between what is the 'support' and what is the 'focal point'. Confronted at first glance with a variety of colour and shape, as the viewer moves through the space moments of hidden detail begin to be revealed.¹⁸ Idyllic 'nature/natural' scenes are found hidden in deep holes created by the stacks of transfer; tiny stacks of honey bees are hidden in plan site by their contrasting small scale; suggestive ceramic wares are used to prop and lift but also to reveal; antique/vintage Spode ceramics are placed within, on top and amid stacks of transfers; a greyhound figurine is found relaxing on top of a 'plinth' of transfers.

Similar to a fractal process or perspective of zooming in and out of the work: the viewer steps back for the long overview, moving closer for the individual view, further in for a detailed view and so on. This is comparable to the experience of the Spode site itself; like the fractal zooming in and zooming out of each layer {whether it be the site, a building, room, personnel, equipment, mould(s), computer, paperwork, transfer, mildew, rain water, dust} is new and unique yet all telling a similar story.



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Anne Helen Mydland

Notes on Spode Works

It was sometime before one could see, the hot air escaping caused the candle to flicker, but as soon as one's eyes became accustomed to the glimmer of light the interior of the chamber gradually loomed before one, with its strange and wonderful medley of extraordinary and beautiful objects heaped upon one another.

There was naturally short suspense for those present who could not see, when Lord Carnarvon said to me 'Can you see anything'. I replied to him 'Yes, it is wonderful.'
Tutankhamun: Anatomy of an Excavation. Howard Carter's diaries and journals.¹

Original Spode Works site, Stoke-on-Trent, February 2012

I am both stunned and excited upon first entering Spode - a vast factory site - in the heart of Stoke. We are walking through a labyrinth of rooms, workshops and both inside and outside spaces. I could never have imagined the complexity, the age or remains. Mostly excited, some sadness - some disbelief. But mostly very deeply excited and curious.

'Yes, it is wonderful.'

Original Spode Works site, Stoke-on-Trent, September 2012 - First residency

Days of walking, looking, walking, smelling, listening, squinting, taking notes, making images. As though in a state of feverish mapping and documenting: eyes, hands and feet searching through the array of corridors, rooms, light and darkness, rubble and tidiness, walking, looking, breathing in the different atmospheres, making more images.

Continuing walking, feeling and seeing in my sleep - the body and mind are trying to make sense, to inhabit and navigate the spaces. The experience of entering a site with endless choice is daunting. Every decision about engaging with the remnants of the factory site will have a meaning, a power, a rhetoric. So: how to engage, how to make sense of the spaces - make sense of all the remains? (Why make sense/what kind of sense?) 'See with the feeling eye - feel with a seeing hand'². I am acutely aware of how both myself and many of the other artists immediately started sorting and separating, categorizing and evaluating the remains: Making a hierarchy of attention; the value of attention; the value of being chosen.³

On my Desk

While writing, I have three postcards lying on my desk, acquired in museums on different journeys, times and places. They are together now on my desk, and I am attempting to make sense of my hierarchy(s) of attention. These artworks display the attention of the Boyle family, Richard Wentworth and Sir John Soane. Sir John Soane's⁴ Private Museum (which is a shrine to the classical ruins of the world) represents the structure and logic of the collection, the selection - the divine accumulation of stuff - stuff which by the power of *the display*, and by being *collected*, is given, even forced, to be significant and particular.



Another vista; The Boyle family are best known for their earth studies: three dimensional casts of the surface of the earth which record and document *random* sites with great accuracy. This random selection serves several purposes: nothing is excluded as a potential subject; the particular is chosen to serve as a representative of the whole; the subjective role of the artists and creators is re-designated to that of 'presenters'⁵. I am fascinated by the thought of the 'undiscriminating eye' - is it possible or is it a utopian ideal? It resonates with what I - over the years - keep coming back to: *Rhopography* (from *rhopos*, *trivial objects, small wares, trifles*) [that describes] *those things which lack importance, the unassuming material base of life that importance constantly overlooks*.⁶ This is exemplified in Richard Wentworth's work 'Making Do and Getting By, a Selection of Everyday Encounters'⁷: work which touches on the very reasons why I wanted to work with art (and archaeology⁸). It brings to attention the almost invisible trace of human gesture - *making do* - minute, unimportant, ephemeral gestures that one experiences a familiarity with over decades of past or future; of - *getting by*.

Three images, pointing to three ways, positions or topoi of my attention, my gaze, my actions and work at Spode - through **the collection**, (the act of collecting, the accumulation and order of objects and commodities), **the site** (found/random/constructed/given/imaginary/imagined/chosen), and **the trace** (gesture/evidence/fragment/relic). These forms are my navigation tools in 'the landscape' of Spode and Stoke-on-Trent.



¹ Carter, H., 'Tutankhamun: Anatomy of an Excavation. Howard Carter's diaries and journals'. <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/discoveringTut/>, 1922, (30.8.15).

² Leslie, E., 'See with a Feeling Eye: Feel with a Seeing Hand' *Sensuous Knowledge, Focus on Artistic Research and Development* No. 7. KHIB, 2014.

³ Caroline Slotte reflects upon the value of attention, time and care in her text, part of her Research Fellowship *Taking an Object and Staying with It*. 'The value of objects interests me. I closely examine that which is considered valuable, and even more closely that which is seen as worthless. Rearranging these attitudes, elevating the low, making the worthless valuable, appears both surprisingly easy and immediately satisfying. For it is as though by simply spending a lot of time with an object, I can increase its value.(...) Could it have to do with something as inestimable as care? That a transformation simply takes place when something is treated well? Through the act of caring, one encourages others to do the same: Look - this is valuable, because I treat it as such.' Slotte, C., 'Closer' KHIB, 2010.

⁴ Soane commissioned a watercolour 'The imagined view of the Bank of England in Ruins', his own building, for his 80th birthday 1830. http://www.soane.org/collections/soanes_london/bankofengland/8.

⁵ 'About' the Boyle family <http://www.boylefamily.co.uk/boyle/about/>.

⁶ Bryson, N., *Looking at the Overlooked, Four Essays on Still-Life Painting*, 1990

⁷ Wentworth Richard: *Making Do and Getting By, a Selection of Everyday Encounters*, 1970-85 (Wentworth/Lisson Gallery).

⁸ At the University of Bergen, I studied Archaeology in the 90's and worked at different excavation sites in Norway for several years.

On the Factory, the Ruin & Decay - Buddleia was Never a Pattern

Spode⁹: factory, home of the refinement and production of Bone China and underglaze transfer methods. Blue and White.¹⁰

Workplace for decades. All parts of production, distribution, managerial and publicity work done on the same site. Closed for production in 2008, workers left. The brand and intellectual property sold to The Portmerion Group; the site and buildings under City Council administration.

Further activity on site continued through the process of selling and moving valuables, kilns, decals, finished ware, unused materials, cables, moving of the collections, (to Spode Museum Trust¹¹ and Trelissick House¹²). The guards and other staff affiliated to the site are required for keeping it safe, caring. BCB¹³ as a massive explosion of activity. Scavengers and opportunists breaking in, taking lamps, copper wiring and lead from the roof; the rummaging of pigeons and other birds, cats, badgers, foxes, mice, rats, beetles, flies, ants and countless other life forms such as microbes, bacteria, fungus, together with plants of many sorts quite rapidly moved in (or were blown through a broken window) making the buddleia's purple flowers blossom triumphantly.¹⁴

It's both scary and reassuring to see how fast the process of decay and ruination happens. Water has been the most violent destructor/agent, paving the way for a new state of things. (Can one say that decay is not about the past - its about the transformation to something else, a passage from one state to another?)

Gilda Williams makes an interesting distinction: '[that one could] finally define a ruin as an architectural site whose inhabitants were forced out, whereas a derelict is a place so unwelcoming its residents packed up and left [...]'.¹⁵

Spode's workers were most certainly forced out. Under surveillance, they were asked to leave immediately one day in November 2008. The Christmas decorations were left as though evidence of a Pompeian catastrophe. Does this qualify Spode Works as a ruin? Or is it the trauma and impact of the closure? Or the overwhelmingly present past that makes it fruitful to coin 'Contemporary Ruin' as a description? The Ruin encapsulates the trauma which created it - not war or a natural catastrophe, but the slow and just as devastating economic failure. This situation is not exclusive to Stoke, but has, like a slow motion tsunami, been spreading across most industrialized lands. Yet the Contemporary Ruin does not pose. It carries none of the glorification or reverence of past grandeur. It screams at you. It laughs in your face. It mocks you. Is that why people get so angry and ashamed at the prospect of the Contemporary Ruin? Because it cannot be denied? One cannot turn a blind eye? Does it expose the failure, the mistakes, the fragility of the times and society that we live in?

Each time I returned, the site had changed. For being 'a dead site,' a lot happens. The expectation of a stand still was quickly refuted. Nature's invasion and reclaiming of the site has had a dramatic speed, and the trace of new human activity is similarly constant. Things/objects/stuff disappear and re-appear; a heavy metal band shoot a video leaving graffiti, stage props and a wig. Rooms and areas became unsafe because of asbestos findings or the architecture simply collapsing. We never knew which spaces would become out of bounds between each time, as well as negotiating for new spaces for investigation. Gilda Williams' text is partially titled: 'It was what it was', a phrase which became an important 'matter of fact' perspective regarding how to relate to Spode; the easily felt



nostalgia, mixed with 'ruin lust'¹⁶ and an 'allegorical impulse'¹⁷ needs a bit of resistance. So Williams' dry 'it was what it was' was given my own addition, 'it is what it is', to deal with the *current* state as well as my own role at the site. Activity at the site almost became an irritation. Why? Because suddenly 'Topographies' entry point in September 2012 became 'the standard' - a year 0, an expectation or a measure of 'authenticity', the 'original' state of the site. Such a perspective has validity for the museum, or an historian or archaeologist who has a *mandate*. A *Mandate* to preserve, collect and sort out the untouched from the disturbed: to sort out timelines. As artists, do we have a mandate to preserve or to save/rescue anything? What is our 'Arts mandate'? The site already contained evidence of a collecting, categorizing eye. 'Valuables', such as cabinets and furniture, finished products - the museum items - were already removed. Stickers saying 'Museum Trust'¹⁸ were to be found on 'everything' appearing to date from before 1900. Maybe *our mandate* is to question these processes: What is the criteria of selection? What stories are selected? Who selects them? For what? What is their mandate? What is the rhetoric of power in the collecting, selecting, and archiving? By interventions and other entry points, art and artist can question and challenge how an archive is created, constituted and understood.

Wandering through rooms of what was left, 'The concept of importance can arise only by separating itself from what is declared to be trivial and insignificant; 'importance' generates 'waste', (...) that which is excluded or passed over'.¹⁹
The site is whatever was there. The present site is 'authentic' as evidence of the here and now. It is what it is.



⁹ <http://www.thepotteries.org/potters/spode.htm>.

¹⁰ Spode as a leading developer and producer of iconic objects, patterns, materials and techniques in ceramic history resonated with my practice. I had worked with the ceramic object for years as a storyteller/cultural signifier, and in particular with the impact of the introduction of (Chinese) porcelain to Europe tracing and mirroring personal and public histories in art, object and trade history. <http://www.spodemuseumtrust.org/spode-collection.html>.

¹¹ The Spode Museum Trust was established in 1987, in order to protect the Spode Archive for posterity. The Spode Archive includes some 40,000 ceramic items spanning over 200 years from the late 18th Century to 2008. It also includes some 25,000 engraved copper plates from which transfer prints were made for printed ceramic wares. There are also collections of antique factory tools, furniture and moulds and ¼ million Spode and Copeland documents, including watercolour paintings of some 70,000 ceramic patterns. <http://www.spodemuseumtrust.org>

¹² Trelissick House: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/article-1355791834262/>.

¹³ British Ceramics Biennial.

¹⁴ In researching the numerous flower patterns so popular to ceramic ware, I did not manage to find a pattern or depiction of buddleia in Spode or Portmerion's pattern books. It seems that all the other flowers belonging to UK flora have found their way into being depicted on ceramic ware. Why not the Buddleia? Is it poetic justice?

¹⁵ Williams, G., 'It was what it was: Modern Ruins', in *Ruins, Documents of Contemporary Art*, London, Whitechapel, 2010.

¹⁶ Terziyska, Y., 'Ruin Lust: A Review of Our Fascination with Decay', *Drain Magazine* 2014, <http://drainmag.com/fascination-with-decay/>, (08.08.15). 'There were a few key themes concerning 'the ruin' present here; the German term *ruinenlust* (ruin lust) was resurrected by Rose Macaulay in her 1953 study, *Pleasure of Ruins*[2], temporally situating the phenomenon in the Modern period. She argues that *ruinenlust* is associated with the pleasure found in ruins - a pleasure that may derive from the beauty found in desolation and decay, from an imagining of a past (and thus a future), from destruction and the hope for rebirth or from an understanding of the passage of time and the inevitability of death.'

¹⁷ Owens, C., 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2', *October*, Vol. 13 Summer, 1980.

¹⁸ Or stickers with simply 'TRUST', as if to encourage a feeling of trust - but trust in what?

¹⁹ Bryson, N., *Looking at the Overlooked, Four Essays on Still-Life Painting*, 1990

On Digging - A Locus of Trouble For and In the Present

In the work- 'Digging - Wrestling with Dieter Roelstrate', I staged an archaeological test dig - 1x1 metre in the back yard of the AirSpace Gallery²⁰ in Hanley, when Topographies showed 'The Site is the Question'²¹, digging layer upon layer for 5 days. Dieter Roelstrate's article 'Why Dig - on the Historical Turn in Art' had made me defiant with his refusal and critique of art and artists turning their attention to the past. So I read, dug and argued with Dieter and myself while pondering, and reflecting upon Roelstrate's question: Why dig? Starting out, confident with the certainty of figuring it out, uncovering, triumphing with the power of the fragment, but... I soon realised that with the lack of parameters for a proper (archaeological) dig, the 'this has most likely been or not been taking place here' was pointless in my 'art dig'. So what was I looking for? What was the purpose or the parameter of my work? I reflected more upon *the choices* - or the limitations and possibilities I had set up when working. Archaeological methods have similarities to how I (and many others) work with art. Art seems to be able to appropriate any method.

Choice of site/theme/field of interest- and questioning that specific limitation. Then start to work, scraping and digging away through layers and layers of unassuming dirt and rubble, with the expectation of what might be found. Is the expectation equal to genre or tradition? And then hopefully to find the unexpected?

Dealing with futility: Why dig? Why art? How to make meaning out of shit and fragments (use the sieve, add some water - does it look better? No? Then you dig some more - maybe now?) Vague traces and gestures. The leap of imagination.

In my dig, I become merely a destroyer. What do the objects I find signify? What is my system of selection in terms of giving value and attention? I ended up discarding all the objects and fragments I had dug out - the beige tile ceramic shards, glass, pebbles, wood, coal, EVERYTHING - in the bin. Instead, what I found was a hole in the ground, a negative sculpture. Evidence of my labour and time, connecting me to both the present and the past - partaking in both. So what's the score? Roelstrate vs. Mydland I-I. In the last minute I found a 'knockout' in Nadine Attewell's text. She points to the possible 'dehistoricising' of society: 'It is important to contest this dehistoricising move, not just in the interest of a more accurate analysis, but because, as the debate over Education Secretary Michael Gove's plans to overhaul the national history curriculum reminds us, the past is among the most critical of the terrains on and over which the struggle to define belonging plays out. At the same time, the past functions as a locus of trouble for and in the present.' I-2.



²⁰ <http://www.airspacegallery.org> situated in Broad Street: http://www.thepotteries.org/streets/hanley/broad_st/

²¹ Roelstrate, D., 'Why Dig - on the Historical Turn in Art' *Kunstjournalen* 2010/2011 http://www.kunstjournalen.no/11_eng/dieter-roelstraete-why-dig (6.6.2011) See also 'The Way of the Shovel, on the Archaeological Imaginary in Art' 2009 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-way-of-the-shovel-on-the-archeological-imaginary-in-art/> for a bit of redemption. (2011)





On Layers: Simulacrum and the Expected

Contemporary Spode Landscape: Italian White

In the meticulous mapping of Spode, my eyes touching every surface, set to find the expected - my expectation is of the iconic blue and white bone china, the Italian blue, the willow pattern. My inner image of the lustrous blue glued itself to any surface, like the decals and transfers lying scattered around (not blue but brown and yellow as they are before firing - the yellow of 'cover coat' being like a traffic light - frozen on amber - holding its breath before red or green - stop or go - in suspense). This projection of expectation was like the slippery sliding of the printed decals from one surface (the paper) to another (the china)²². I go around with this sliding gaze - gluing, smudging gaze, imposing my expectations upon the surfaces I encounter. Yet without really finding it...expectation pauses at amber - in suspense, hesitating. But I realise that the surfaces are not blank - or unfinished - they are in a 'present state' filled with landscapes and patterns of their own; of another making.

The room was already there, waiting for plates again. In children's books about historic (ruins) places, there is often a transparent foliated page with the imagined past drawn on in fragments to let the image of the now merge with the image of the possible past, creating a vision, a space outside both the imagined and real remains. Is this place or site created - a simulacrum?

*A common definition of the simulacrum is a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be said to be a copy. It stands on its own as a copy without a model.*²³

In introducing the plates into the room, I am using the potential of the imagined 'real' (original) to turn over, to apply a foliated layer. It is the 'masked difference, not the manifest resemblance, that produces the effect of uncanniness so often associated with the simulacrum.'²⁴

Layer 1. Perception - expected imagery - imagined blue, is it a 'masked difference' also in the expected imagery itself? Or the 'images take on a life of their own' in dust or blue?
 Layer 2. Perception - an imagined past, the speculative present in the potential correctness of the room - the tension between expectation and experience.



²² The invention of how to transfer a graphic 2 dimensional print to a 3 dimensional object is also attributed to Spode. The graphic print (historically produced from a copper plate engraving), is made with ceramic materials such as cobalt, onto a paper covered with water soluble gum arabic, then covered with a layer of lacquer (cover coat). When immersed in water, the gum dissolves and the print and lacquer slide off to fix onto any glazed (3d) surface. These are then fired, activating the oxides and glaze to produce brilliant colours.

²³ Massumi, B., 'Realer than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari', in *Copyright* no.1, 1987, p.92. As argued in Deleuze and Guattari's writings, Massumi continues, *The terms copy and model bind us to the world of representation and objective (re)production. A copy, no matter how many times removed, authentic or fake, is defined by the presence or absence of internal, essential relations of resemblance to a model. The simulacrum, on the other hand, bears only an external and deceptive resemblance to a putative model. The process of its production, its inner dynamism, is entirely different from that of its supposed model; its resemblance to it is merely a surface effect, an illusion. (...) It is that masked difference, not the manifest resemblance, that produces the effect of uncanniness so often associated with the simulacrum. A copy is made in order to stand in for its model. A simulacrum has a different agenda, it enters different circuits. Pop Art is the example Deleuze uses for simulacra that have successfully broken out of the copy mold: the multiplied, stylized images take on a life of their own. The thrust of the process is not to become an equivalent of the "model" but to turn against it and its world in order to open a new space for the simulacrum's own mad proliferation. The simulacrum affirms its own difference. It is not an implosion, but a differentiation; it is an index not of absolute proximity, but of galactic distances.*

²⁴ Ibid.

On Scraping: Absence/presence

The Ronald Copeland Art Gallery²⁵: Thick air, the sound of pigeons, loud steps - as though the sound wouldn't stick. Water seeping in.

Facts: Built specifically for the Copeland's private collection of both European and Asian porcelain, china and ceramic ware. The space was used for board-meetings, corporate and private VIP receptions. Now owned by the council of Stoke-on-Trent. Public property? The factor of dynamic memory allocation refers to a mathematical problem in the construction of artificial intelligence. Simply put, it is the ability to forget in order to make available room to process something new. Computers have a limited amount of memory. Machines and computers don't forget, but they need to be programmed to delete, and erase information.²⁶

How does this mechanism work in humans? When is it time to forget? When do we hold on? When entering Spode and the art gallery, we questioned the mechanisms and the necessity of dynamic forgetting.

Through the gesture of a gift, this room was given to the Council of Stoke-on-Trent.²⁷ Now it is a piece of public art, pointing to the transition from a private to a public room, and marking that this room will nevermore be the home of the Copeland collection it was once built for. The collection was sold at Bonham's²⁸ just before we opened the exhibition. Now dispersed, it will never again be what it was.

We intervened the process of decay, that inevitability would bring the room into the state of being forgotten. Through a refurbishment, not a reconstruction, of the room to an idealistic "0-point", where the cracked and leaking sky light, the mould infected wooden walls and the water stained, damaged floor were cleaned and brought back to a possible new start, the project's intention was to revitalize and thereby enable the room to be remembered and reinvented...

In the process of disturbing the room, a lot of feelings were stirred:

We wanted: to refurbish - not restore - make a clean slate - draw a line - zero out - show that the past would not suddenly revive itself and become the present. We wanted to make it a public space - it's privacy had ended. It - whatever it was - could never really happen again - a closed past.

They wanted (speculation): as long as it was in a state of ruin, the potential of a reviving the past was there. This potential it seemed, was, better than a closed past and a changed present.

By mistake - a layer of 1.5 mm of shiny varnish was applied on the faded wood panels.

X: 'it must be restored back to how it was!'

Me: to a ruin?- can one restore anything back to a state of decay?

When was the 'was'?

Three sacks of scraped off varnish approx. 4 kg. and many hours later - the place is oiled, sanded, waxed, cleaned, painted, re-wired.²⁹ The sacks of varnish are captivating. Each scraping is like a thin layer of newness more disturbing than pigeon's droppings, moist and fungal. The shiny varnished surface mirrored 'the now' - is that why it was not liked?

I decided that the cabinets should be the only thing left untouched (by us) - but sealed shut. This action was so as not to have new exhibitions, not to be part of making an expectation of the past to be 'restored' or 'reconstructed'. The cabinets have now gained the ability to insist on a presence, the ever building layers of dust - the still evident dust rings loud with absence, pointing to the presence of an object removed and replaced. Pointing to the dispersed collection, to different sites where the objects actually exist. Not here.

Returning to the simulacrum again:

*A copy is made in order to stand in for its model. A simulacrum has a different agenda, it enters different circuits. (...) The thrust of the process is not to become an equivalent of the 'model' but to turn against it and its world in order to open a new space for the simulacrum's own mad proliferation.*³⁰

Can we hope that the room 'enters different circuits?' Can it open new spaces, territories and possible futures?³¹



²⁵ In 1950 Spode, under W. T. Copeland & Sons Ltd, commissioned a book about the firm from G. Bernard Hughes. 'The Story of Spode' is with the only historical/official material found on the art gallery. The name is wrong they say- it was Robert Copeland. But here history becomes a blur, as 'Ronald' is correct digging in the archival material. Were the many R. Copelands washed out by history? <http://spodehistory.blogspot.no/2013/05/spode-and-art-gallery.html>.

²⁶ Mydland, A.H. & J. Sandborg: 'The Ronald Copeland Art Gallery: The Factor of Dynamic Memory Allocation - 2014', in Vociferous Void, Original Spode Works, From the inauguration speech, see also Sandborgs section in this publication for the complete script.

²⁷ The gift was received on behalf of the Council by Counselor Ruth Rosenau. 'A gift is a magic object, it is restless and symbolically attached to the giver, binding giver and receiver together until it is returned or passed on. To keep a gift instead of passing it on is to arrest its dynamic nature, it quits working and loses its characteristics as a carrier of dynamic relations when removed from circulation.' Heier, M., 'Ex-Centric', Research Fellow Thesis, 2013, KHiO.

²⁸ <http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/21214/?category=results#/aa0=1&w0=results&m0=0>
https://www.bonhams.com/press_release/13208/ (31.8.15).

²⁹ We decided to take the lacquer away. We had not intended it in the first place, and it was causing too much controversy, which was not our goal or artistic intention. On the contrary, it was to create a place that people would be attracted to and where they could unite.

³⁰ Massumi: 'Realer Than Real, The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari', in *Copyright* no.1, 1987, p.92.

³¹ The room's timeline, has started again, ticking, dripping, crawling, with unexpected usage, for rave concerts, weddings etc.



On Returns

In the process of writing, I am digging, sorting, searching through my own notes, images, memories and impressions. It is an excavation of the excavation - of the layers of time and events that wedge themselves between me in the now, and me in the then. One of my first notes is questioning my dislike of the other artists' seemingly shameless/frivolous scavenging of the site - while I tiptoed around in the dirt, afraid to disturb, with some inner urge and desire to just preserve it as it was, to freeze it to a disaster diorama - with a sensation that I (or any) could not ever manage to reveal, recreate, or activate more beauty and sheer meaning from the place than was already there. Digging is a destructive practice. Yet in the digging lies the potential of change – an excavation of the future.²⁸

Our sensations were bewildering and full of strange emotion. We questioned one another as to the meaning of it all. (...) We closed the hole, locked the wooden-grill which had been placed upon the first doorway, we mounted our donkeys and returned home contemplating what we had seen.

Tutankhamun: Anatomy of an Excavation. Howard Carter's diaries and journals.



²⁸ Roelstrate, D., *The Way of the Shovel*.

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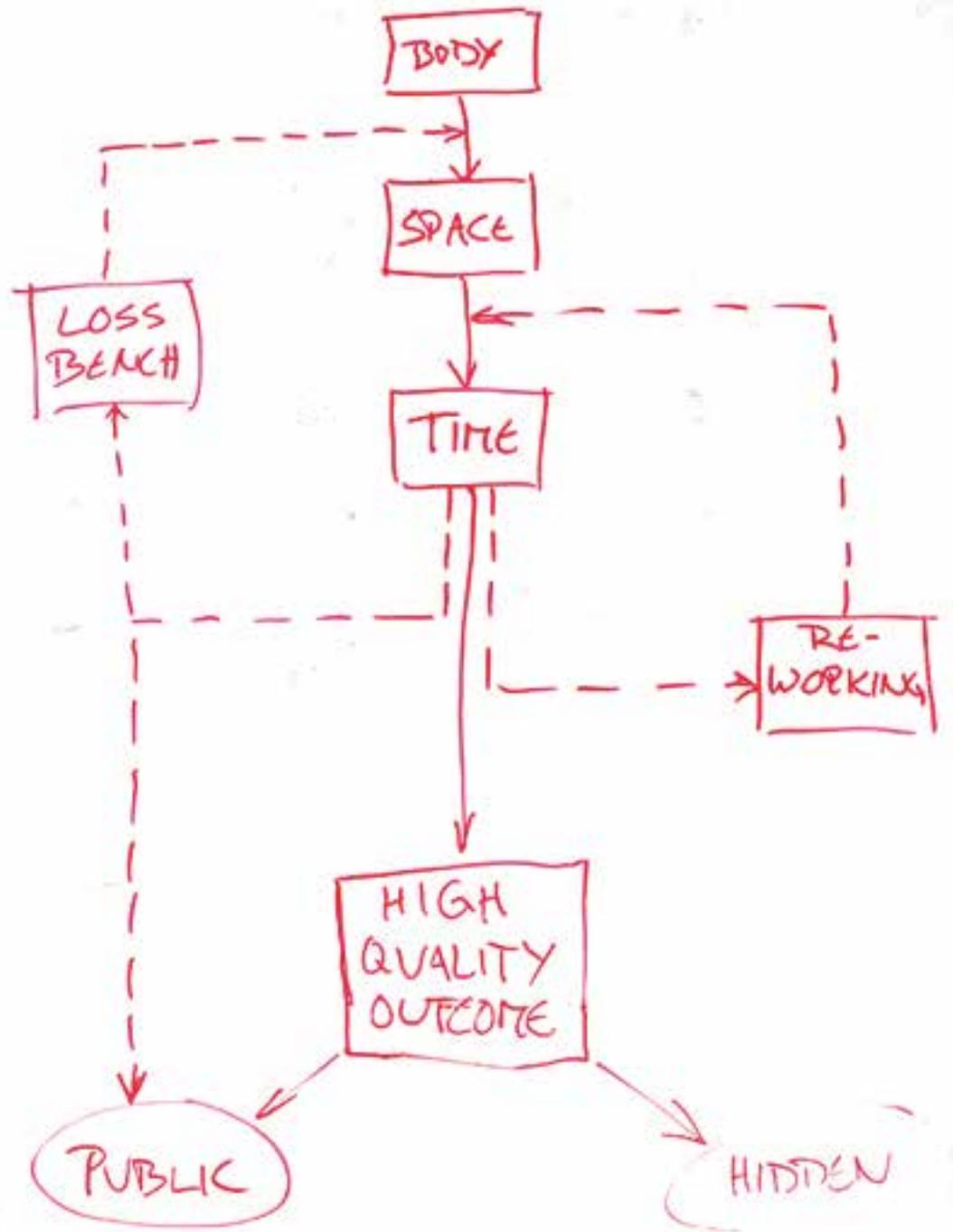
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Work Conversations Under Changing Conditions

To work on a long-term project seems like a journey. One doesn't know when it started, and one can't be sure when it ends. Experience of it doesn't unfold in a linear or chronological way. Companions might change and with them the issues discussed. The constant return is of importance – the return to a place, to a thought, to a term, to a person, to a theoretical discourse, to something observed, but not yet fully understood, not yet really reflected upon, not yet really seen. We never can be sure where we are situated on the timeline of an unfolding process – in this case of the Work Study Project. So I start in the middle of it.

In January 2014, the Hartware MedienKunstVerein (HMKV) in Dortmund, Germany, arranged a three-day conference as part of The New Industries Festival.¹ Part of the festival was the display of an archive of books, music, objects and videos, which documented some of the impact "old" industries have had on culture and arts, pointing to the fact that a relationship between arts and industries has already existed for a long time. This relationship – based on fascination, excitement and disgust alike² - might be conceived of as part of the historical background for the prevailing tendencies of the arts to move into and revive post-industrial sites – in the Ruhr area, in Northern England, in Detroit and elsewhere.³

To join the conference seemed a good opportunity to reflect on a variety of issues, which had been touched upon by developing Work Study for Topographies of the Obsolete at the former Spode Works in Stoke-on-Trent. Time wise the conference fell between the development and presentation of work on site in the UK, and the transfer of some elements to a gallery space in Bergen, Norway.⁴

Strukturwandel and Cultural Industry

The building housing the HMKV (and the conference) is called Dortmunder U and had hosted the former Union Brewery. The production was shut down in 1984 and the building "reopened" in 1998 for a short period as the location of an art exhibition addressing the contemporary ruin (Reservate der Sehnsucht). Subsequently it was made into a cultural centre and opened as such in 2010. The Dortmunder U is one of many transformative examples in the Ruhr district in the era of Strukturwandel (structural change), a buzzing word applied to a period of transition from – apart from beer production - former raw material extraction and heavy industry (coal and steel) to new industries like nano-technology, consulting companies, banking, knowledge production and education to redevelop the region, one of the most important (former) industrial areas in Europe, where several cities are grown into a huge cluster, and almost became one town. Monumental constructions over the Golden Age of industry became museums or festival and event sites, offering information in an obvious mix with entertainment, adventure and recreation. What is striking in some of the locations is the proximity of the past (even if the decline already started fifty years ago). Everyday life, still lived yesterday, put on display in a museum today, objectification of work and the worker's life on touristic tours; production halls as stages where workers play themselves. One wonders how this transformation affects individuals, whose (former) daily work (and identity) is now on show.

Creative industry is called upon for help to point towards new possibilities in the future. And – no doubt – it is astonishing and impressive to see what already has been made possible in the Ruhr district; even if applicable terms like "spectacular" and "sensational" provoke certain uneasiness in a critical mind. Inputs from the arts have increased since the region had status as European Capital of Culture in 2010. Politics in Germany seem to have been pushing hard to transform and mitigate the consequences of decrease in industrial production; subsequently much economic support has been given to culture as well.⁵ The conference of the HMKV questioned economic systems - creating new working conditions - and the role (instrumentalisation) of culture in the on-going processes alike. What are the positions and approaches of artists and organisations discussed? Are they critical enough? Do they feed into the event industry, which in turn becomes attractive for growing tourism? Who, finally, is gaining from this? Does it make a difference for the locals whether industrial sites get demolished or whether they are conserved as cultural heritage monuments, lit with magnificent installations, transformed into ice skating arenas or event sites for concerts, performances and art exhibitions? Or has art the potential to critically engage locals in taking part in on-going changes instead of just witnessing them? Some of the projects definitively do. Following a general tendency in the arts since the 90ies, participatory projects – as an example - have been part also here.⁶



Industry Safari

I spent some days after the conference with walks in the nearby area, searching for the (industrial) workers' bodies and the spaces they had acted in. I could find them on images in museums, archives and literature addressing health and safety issues. I found them staged for documentaries and demonstrations. They somehow appeared in the re-enactment of movements by visitors (in real or interactive 3D-animations). The one place I did not find them was in factories that were still in operation.

Following the routes of the Industrial Heritage Tour one encounters spaces, machinery, tools, objects, animations, documentaries, texts and photographs, presented in a way that intends to bring the former (working and living) conditions as close as possible, making them palpable. Some of these remain clearly in the past, like the historical site Zeche Zollern II/IV (Zollern II/IV Colliery)⁷, while others strive for making a link between past, present and future (DASA – Deutsche Arbeitsschutz Ausstellung⁸). The Cookery Hansa has been a site in controlled dilapidation, offering exiting walks and climbing tours with good shoes and hardhats, alongside botanical tours with information on protected endangered flora and fauna, finding new habitats on wastelands.

If one engages in what is offered, one might realize a certain discrepancy. Watching hands holding tools, and bodies almost acting like warriors when they carry out tasks of the steel industry, the question arises, if the workers' limbs easily learned the touch and application of instruments of (now existing) nano-technology, or if bodies, used to huge production halls, adapted straight away to smart open office solutions of today's corporations. Despite probable frictions, the all-over physical health conditions seem much to the better – on both a human and environmental level.



Unstable Memories

After having encountered the post-industrial site of Spode, and Stoke-on-Trent as a whole, it became of growing interest to explore this German region, not so far from where I had grown up. I had never been to this part of Germany before. The area seemed too unpleasing, the landscape too destroyed, the cities too little cultural to be interesting for a trip. I remember images and voices from my childhood in the late 70s and early 80s, broadcast on TV, about closing factories, strikes and the agitation of IG Metall⁹. What happened was rather abstract and distant then. It did not relate to my own reality at all – what were they all shouting about? To come across some of these images at the Hösch-museum in Dortmund (formerly the largest steel mill in the area) in 2014 or – already some months earlier, in a very different way – in Harun Farocki's fabulous video essay *The Workers Leaving the Factory* (1996), brought closer an industrial past, which has its parallels in Bochum, Detroit and Manchester. Faces dirty from the coalmining, men in overalls and hardhats sitting on top of closed gates and fences, protesting with banners and signs, blocking roads. I didn't even relate to these actions, when as a young adult, I spent two summers working at assembly lines in the ball-bearing industry of my school town. I was only bored and fascinated alike by the monotonous work, the strict time frame, the sound of machinery. I was able to see the "big money" and adventure by having access to these buildings, and was struck by the scale and exactitude of the objects produced, and the extent of global sale, when I sometimes got a glance of delivery destinations written on notes. I was affected by sensual experience, but didn't conceptualize what it meant. I took for given that these opportunities for employment existed. It did not occur to me to what extent this place, this factory, was part of a global system, in which the fate of an individual easily gets lost.

The experience, which *The Topographies of the Obsolete* opened up at the former Spode Factory in Stoke, personal histories encountered there and physical places of dilapidation visited, made this past re-emerge. I began to question it (and my attitudes), and put it into a different perspective – what will or would the town of my own past look like, when the same happened there? Or has it happened already? Much might have changed in 25 years without my notice. At Spode, the abstract and distant became more tangible, memories more unstable, and I wasn't sure about my ability to approach this kind of area of industry and mining, which had violated large territories of landscape, damaged and made sick a lot of bodies, but created astonishing achievements at the same time. But it is exactly here that art often situates itself to start digging and stirring: in places of friction, contradictions and unresolved encounters.



The Worker's Fate

Shortly after our first access to the former Spode Works in September 2012, it seemed right to approach the place through human narratives, through an investigation of the human condition – and not just by exploration of physical space. People who had

frequented this site of production should not be left out of the picture:

*One might say that while a site represents the constituent physical properties of a place – its mass, light, duration, location, and material processes – a place represents the practical, vernacular, psychological, social, cultural, ceremonial, ethnic, economic, political, and historical dimensions of a site. Sites are like frameworks. Places are what fill them out and make them work.*¹⁰

Learning the past by personal accounts - this is what micro-history is all about. In the moment of a personal narrative being given, the mass of anonymous workers, creating a large community of the factory, is split up into individual faces and voices. To be able to listen I have to immerse myself in given conditions: to partly simulate, or re-enact, in the attempt of breaking down alienation and strengthening empathy – by simply sharing the same space. It is a kind of participatory research similar to the method anthropologists might adopt, but not quite – as I am constructing my own framework to live and act in with the aim to create a rupture with what has been there before, at the same time as I partly simulate former or existing structures. However, there is a certain danger involved, for becoming trapped in an emotional space, conjured up by the feeling of loss, where nostalgia occurs due to a lack of new future perspectives. There is the danger of sticking with the past in one specific way. Narratives vary, if one listens long enough, and into different directions. Sometimes it is coincidence, sometimes an issue of power relations, which decide which part of a place one might meet first. After a while a counter-narrative potentially arises. What are the nuances in-between, growing from the everyday and having the potential to touch upon a shared experience of the human condition? The problematic of this way of working might be that one feels forced to choose sides, that one cannot be part of opposite positions at the same time. The challenge is the balance of being part and not-being part at the same time, and the ethical questions this might raise.

One can encounter some interesting approaches to keeping the balance between an individual's fate and more general reflections on society in Harun Farocki's work. He puts his focus on a specific spot – the gate – and a specific moment – the leaving of the workers. It is the moment when the worker becomes an individual with a particular fate. One thing seems crucial in his work: Farocki's figures don't bear any name; all of them are prototypes of the worker. Some of his fragmented image material is drawn from fiction, some from documentaries of cinematographic history, but there is always one man or woman – out of the many - the voice-over wonders about and discusses. It functions as a continuous reflecting on and questioning of the individual's role, position, losses and possibilities, under these specific circumstances in time and society. Farocki finds a way to touch upon a personal fate, without mentioning any name, addressing the experience of depression, but also the potential of upheaval.

The Body's Production of Space

Despite considerations regarding human beings filling out the site and making it work, the project at Spode had to start with the empty spaces inviting an approach to them as a specific kind of landscape in relation to my own body. It is difficult to trace the lost production when most of the remains of machinery and material are removed. These huge spaces stay behind, representing a big void. What is mainly left behind are moulds (the negatives of a final product) and papers (the administration of production and sales – thereby an abstraction of a final product). Some of the documents had meticulously recorded each step of the factory's manufacturing processes, and they became the objects in focus after a while. In the beginning there was a need to fathom the complexity of the site by its physicality. Empty spaces, which were formerly filled with activity and sounds, still vibrate from what had been there before. Present objects and (traces of) movements become very poignant, sounds reverberate, are amplified. Each object, each movement, is potentially staged for an invisible audience to be observed. Every movement of the body in spaces like this is acted out as an investigation and production of space alike; a mapping which in the sense of James Corner's writing¹¹ is a creative act, making visible what has not been visible before, or even has not existed. Each walk creates a line (literally on a carried GPS device); each step is an embodiment of space. The body knows how it feels to be there, according to what the senses perceive, and the body remembers¹². Lines create a network; the space embodied grows bigger in scale and richness of experience. Lines and marked areas on the floor in production halls still gave an indication of possible or forbidden movements. By walking the sensitivity grows for vibes of previously walked lines on site; lines of former workers entering or leaving their working places, to take breaks, to carry or push something from one place to another. Action filling the gaps between the actual stages in the production of objects, the main purpose of the site, is action to produce the space itself (as physical and social entity alike).

The search for these kinds of movements on the last found tapes of the previously operational CCTV system at Spode failed – as surveillance in production areas was not allowed for good reasons. The only interesting movement discovered seemed to mirror

Farocki's key moment: people leaving the factory gate – this time filmed from the inside. Meanwhile Farocki's cameras always stayed outside the gate.



Task Performances

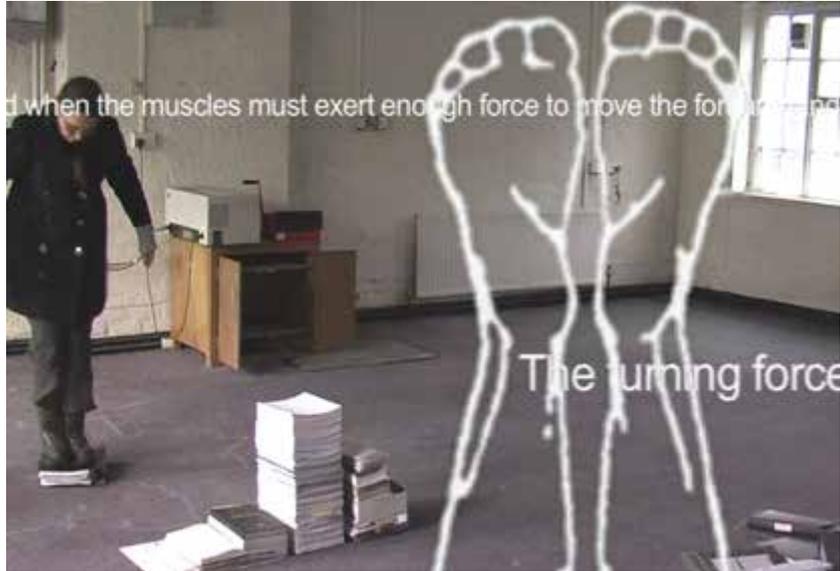
The aesthetic of abandoned spaces and the interest in simple - "in-between" - movements connects to task performances of the Judson Dance Theater in the 60s and the beginning of the 70s in New York. The difference between ordinary actions and dance movements were blurred. Elements were just what they were, here and now, without pointing towards anything else, without representing another reality and without the need to present a certain skill. Nothing was meant symbolically. Reality and real space was here, in real time, and movements carried out were meant to raise awareness of present conditions, recognizable by anyone.

Another reference point had occurred already throughout the first days at the Spode Works: On walks across the factory site images from the legendary movie *Rosas Dans Rosas* (1997) came to mind, a production/choreography by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker in an abandoned technical school. Dancers slide fluently from room to room, meeting each other in their repetitive movements. In much the same way I found myself constantly encountering colleagues and crossing others' way in a restless wandering about - bodies in continuous flow from one space to the other. 'Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered,' as Henri Lefebvre writes in *The Production of Space*¹³. But as much as the space commands bodies, these in turn are active in drawing, writing and (re-)creating the space, with their movements and actions.

The core of Work Study is the notion of engagement with a surrounding world and its materiality: bodily engagement in contrast to mere observation or reading-up to get to know something and to situate oneself in relation to this "thing". It means to break down

the distance from the object of interest, to bridge a gap established by the common subject-object relation – might this be a space, a material, a person or even a concept; “to act out” as a process of learning, understanding and being (or better: constant becoming). There is a parallel in this approach to the process of acquisition of skill, important for many tasks in the production of the former ceramic factory, and involving the repetition of movements for the purpose of learning. However, I wish to extend this thinking to include so-called unskilled work, or to transfer the thinking to other activities of the hours spent on a factory site.

A second aspect of engagement with surroundings is the perspective of creating anew what has been abandoned. This happens in the moment of re-search, re-development, re-enactment and similar approaches. This does not mean that intellectual inquiry of historical and archive material is not of interest – quite the opposite – but that it is not merely the content of information, but as much the materiality of the format or the space where it is preserved, the routines and rituals around the viewing of it, which provide a form of knowledge.



Human Metabolism with Nature

Hannah Arendt writes in *The Human Condition* (1958)¹⁴ – hereby referring Karl Marx – about work as ‘human metabolism with nature’. The image relates to my own idea of engagement, which conjures up physical interaction with, and corporeal experience of, human and non-human actors (which basically means that there are no objects any longer, only subjects encountered on an equal level). In Arendt’s defining system there are three categories of human activity. Labour is carried out merely to sustain a living (in hunting and collecting, already less applicable in farming). The outcome of invested energy is immediately digested and returns without further result or remnants into nature’s circulation of matter. Labour is coined by concentration on the body of the Animal Laborans in direct contact with materiality (in the moment of being absorbed in action).

The second category, work, is the production of surplus goods of the Homo Faber (the making/fabricating man), which leads to accumulation. It opens up for a world beyond pure materiality and experience of the common (by trade and a common work force identity). In transition from labour to work something happens to the value of the material handled. Whereas it had value in itself in labour, it changed in work to have a non-value-status to begin with, only acquiring value after being processed by man. Substance becomes a raw material to be worked on, and man the measure of all things. The final product is the only goal, behind which the importance and experience of process disappears (and the implications and consequences for man and nature).

In societies with increasing immaterial work (with growing service industry and administration) the third form of human activity comes to the fore, which is human interaction. Materiality only supports this and provides the circumstances. The notion of process re-enters in an altered form. It is not the material process any longer, but the time-based interaction with others, and the notion of mobility and flexibility this might involve.

This is a very short, simplifying version, but interesting to apply to the accounts of a factory’s period of former object production with its workers’ community, compared to the same factory in the time after closing (the so-called post-industrial site), in a limbo of uncertainty, and discussions on possible futures (here I think again of the process and

consequences of Strukturwandel, described in the beginning of this text, and wonder about potential goals for new use of the site apart from pure economical ones, touching upon notions of community, interaction, identity and/or re-naturalization).

Arendt’s categories were part as well of evolving conversations on the changing moments and elements in the art project itself, when our work became substitute for former production. The three types of human activity Arendt discusses are three ways to engage with the surrounding world (and to feel alive in one’s own existence) – through physical matter, thingness (objects) and interaction with other human beings – which were the core aspects of investigation and experimentation on site and later in a gallery space.



Affect and Concept of Documents

Part of the image of the abandoned factory (and other lost communities) is the view of archives and documents left in disorder and seemingly oblivion. Schemes for following up, exercising and renewing working processes were spread over the floor of an office space at Spode. This was the work study office, and its system had turned hollow and absurd with the ending of production.

The notion of efficiency of action and movement in relation to manufacturing processes has been ruling since the beginning of industrial production, with the goal of a larger volume and lower prices to compete with others and to maximize the profit (for the owner), and at the cost of the body (of the worker) or loss of employment. The worker has always been seen as a body, keeping up pace with the demands of delivery. The contrast between personal information and marks found in the papers (in the form of handwritten notes) and the meticulous system of objectifying analysis can be striking. Documents spread over the floor are for some an upsetting image of the annihilation of former value – the paper just being an abstract substitute for the whole effort of production and strive for perfection.¹⁵

What to do with what is left? Deposit, destruct, transform it? It’s a question of definition, vantage point and attitude. It’s a matter of time and thought invested. This investment can be the touch of each individual item, to turn it over, to displace it slightly – in the case of the documents – to coat each individual sheet with a covering layer of the same clay, whose handling the document had administrated before. To slowly wipe out information collected and not needed any more, thereby paying respect and attention to the process of former, patient accumulation, and re-introducing matter to the space wherefrom its processing once was structured; investment of time and thought in the moment of cutting by hand and thereby shredding paper and subsequently working it into the same clay to cover left office furniture and equipment. These actions create a repetitive and ritualistic space, and a form of re-enacted daily working routines. The absurdity of action might rather underline the purgative effect that seems to be needed.

Kate Lynch, one of the artists involved in the project remarked on our handling of the documents, that ‘these obsolete papers were not being destroyed or forgotten, but encased and preserved (...) Removing the previous markings in this new work place we had constructed became an equally important action as the creation of them for their original purpose.’¹⁶ Throughout the process she selected fragments from the documents. Isolated, silkscreen printed, photocopied and enlarged them to make them even more visible in her later art pieces – mirroring a mental state of forced labour.

Dialogue and Collaboration

Work Study wanted to examine and act out the absurdity of created and afterwards turned hollow analytical systems; it wanted to serve as a kind of catharsis. Instead of dealing with this alone, I felt the need to establish a dialogue around it, because – as Arendt writes about the third category of human activity - 'action (...) is never possible in isolation' and 'every reaction becomes a chain reaction and (...) every process is the cause of new processes.'¹⁷ Collaborators and dialogue partners in different parts of the project were Clare Reynolds (dancer and choreographer, Stoke), Kate Lynch (visual artist, Stoke), Carl Fedarb (musician/philosopher, Stoke) and Sofie Knudsen Jansson (visual artist, Bergen).

In the work study office threads of production from all spaces of the site once came together. In the same sense as clay – the material prevalent in different stages all over the site before - entered the office, production spaces themselves were meant to invade it by a series of video loops projected on dysfunctional office equipment, connected to each other with help of a moving body, entering and leaving one (projected) space at a time, appearing in another.

Clare Reynolds acted out movements to my request in August 2013, which were recorded with a video camera, to explore different spaces on site, and to discuss the body-space relationship by using questions from a specific document found as an instigator. It was the same issue when I later invited Kate Lynch and Carl Fedarb to carry out the same action that I myself had started, triggered by an impulse. I wished to discuss the effect of acting out (examination of space with my body by walking and coating documents and information with clay). Among other analytical papers regarding time and costing for a variety of production processes, there was also a questionnaire – the Body Part Discomfort Form - that obviously had been given to workers of the factory, who felt pain caused by the tasks they carried out. These questions touched upon general conditions of action: positions of body parts in relation to each other and working with or against gravity, questions of pace and repetition, breaks and flow, the body in space and in relation to objects. They touched upon the vulnerability of the body (and mind) in relation to its social and physical surroundings, and tasks carried out. Decisions about filming and the position of the camera were drawn from aesthetics of the former CCTV system. Rules were set up for the movements, broken and created anew.

Later in the process and as a result of on-going conversations throughout my stay in Stoke on issues relating to the work (industry, history, skills, identity, community and the role of the arts) Kate Lynch and Carl Fedarb joined the project to continue the coating of papers on the floor when I had to return to Norway after a six-week residency in the summer. They continued an extremely time consuming, repetitive process, which was impossible to fulfil. The task forced one to stay with the remnants of this meticulous system and questioned one's own position in relation to it. The physical result of one day's work was almost impossible to discern. They were asked to scrutinize their response to this in relation to the same questionnaire, which had been given to the dancer, and to record this response in some personal way. A couple of months later – and months after the finished exhibition on site in Stoke - outcomes of this were brought to Bergen to continue our conversation there, after having encountered some reactions from audience and former employees to the installation on site. The work had provoked new narratives on former working conditions – which were all but nostalgic – triggered by the encounter with the heap of discarded documents made accessible to the public, and projected and enlarged details from the questionnaire on one of the walls. For the conversation in Bergen, Sofie Knudsen Jansson, who had worked with a project connected to the same issues in Stoke by interviewing former workers about their tasks, brought in elements from this to join us (in the form of sound, text and drawings).

Repetition, Boredom, Freedom and Rules

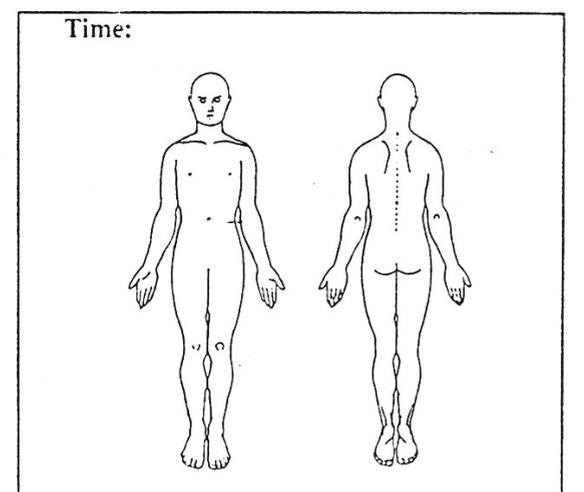
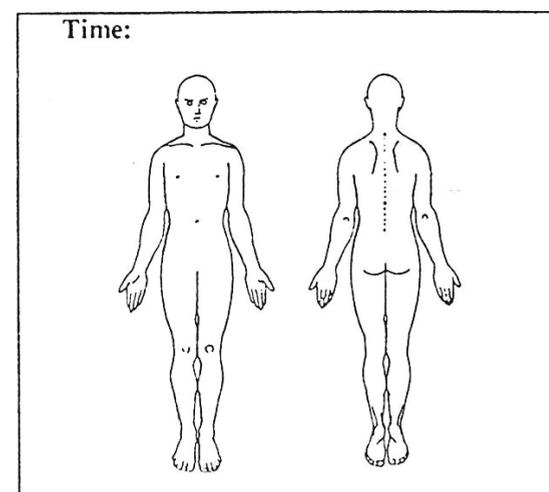
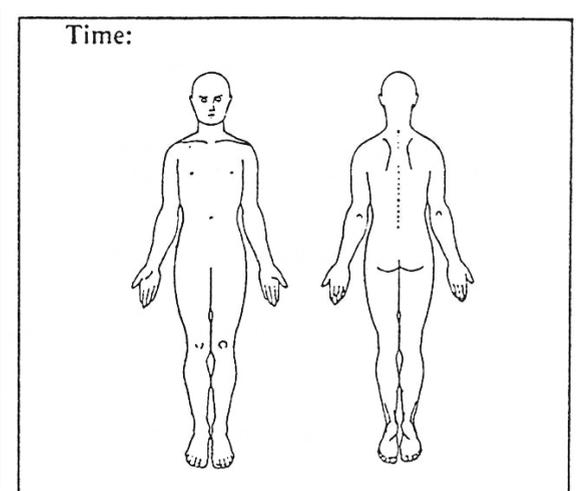
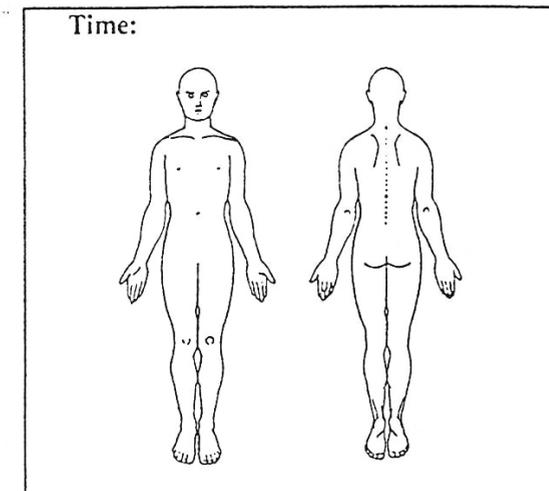
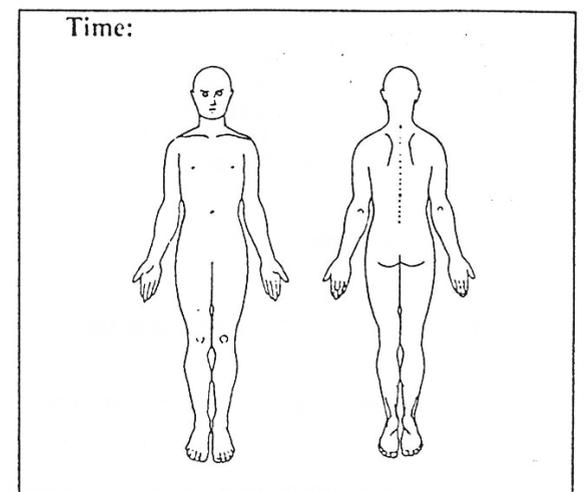
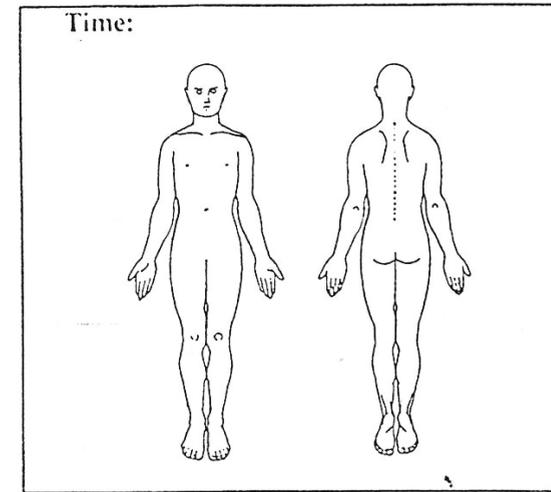
The tasks on site created space and time for knowledge to evolve; for myself about the site and imagined daily routines. They created a space for contemplation in acting. In the moment of giving tasks to others, it was on the one hand an invitation to enter the same space, and on the other hand the goal to create a common ground for conversations on issues appearing as a result of the acting. Clare Reynolds, Kate Lynch and Carl Fedarb had different background knowledge to myself from previous projects on site, a strong relation to Stoke's development and history, and firm opinions about the potential role of the arts in local future processes. I wanted to challenge how my rules of acting would affect others who did not choose it, but got told to do it; they would usually work independently in their own creative processes. In the frame of the project, these issues could be discussed in alternative fashions, not purely verbal, by sharing a work space for futile actions as a space to develop and visualize thoughts, not aiming primarily on production, but with focus on the process, pure engagement with space and objects, to open up for the unknown, with a strategy of stressing the limits of mental and physical comfort.

BODY AT WORK

Record Number:

Operation or Task:

Date:



The aim was to challenge reactions to set-up rules. And reactions are different. Some need to break them, others might feel the comfort of meditative freeing of the mind, some get bored and confined, others empowered by a rhythm. 'There is concentration on a job in hand, monotony, but isn't this interesting, there are worlds within these moments of monotony, that when looked at closely are most satisfying.'¹⁸ Factory workers had to deal with this for years or even decades – day after day.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, whom I mentioned before as one of the first inspirations for the project, applies repetition to an extreme extent in much of her work as dancer and choreographer. Asked about the limits and frameworks she puts up for herself and members of her company, she says 'there is no freedom in freedom, there is only freedom in structure (...) no freedom without rules.'¹⁹

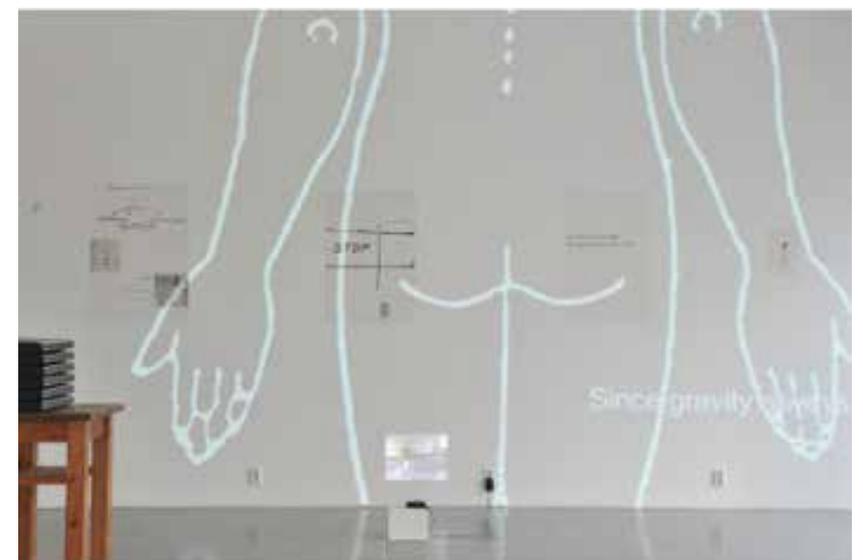
Transfer of Elements from Factory to Gallery

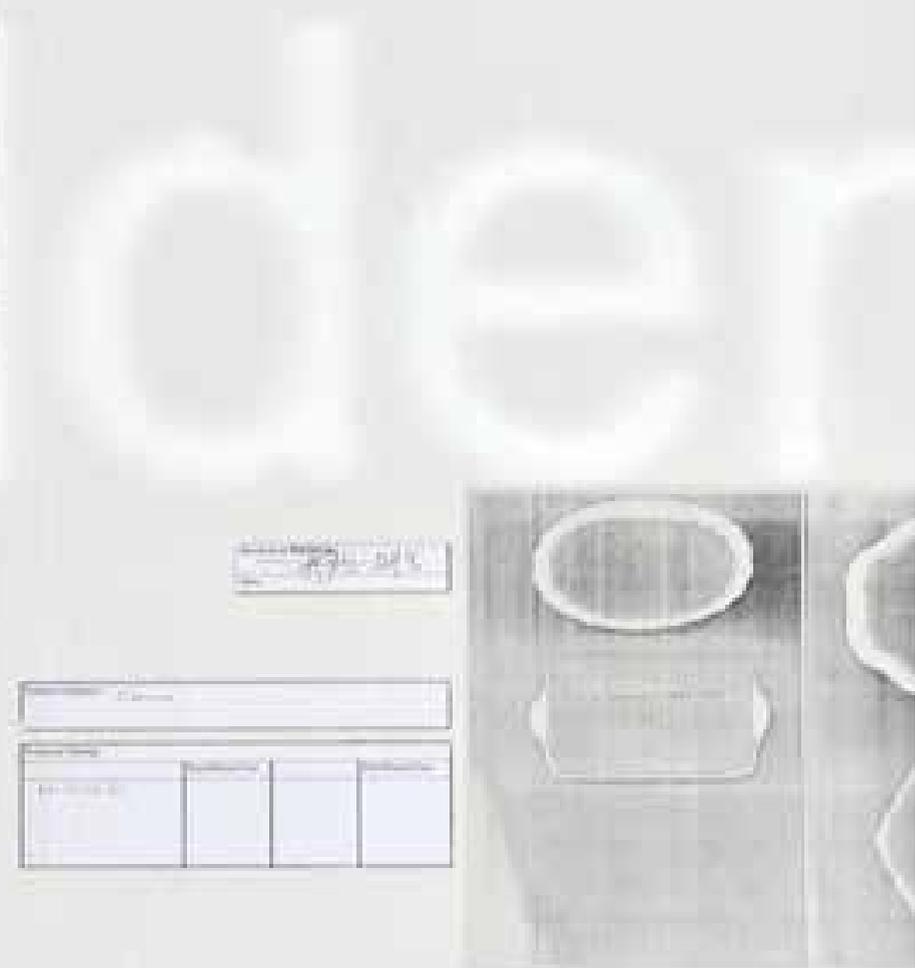
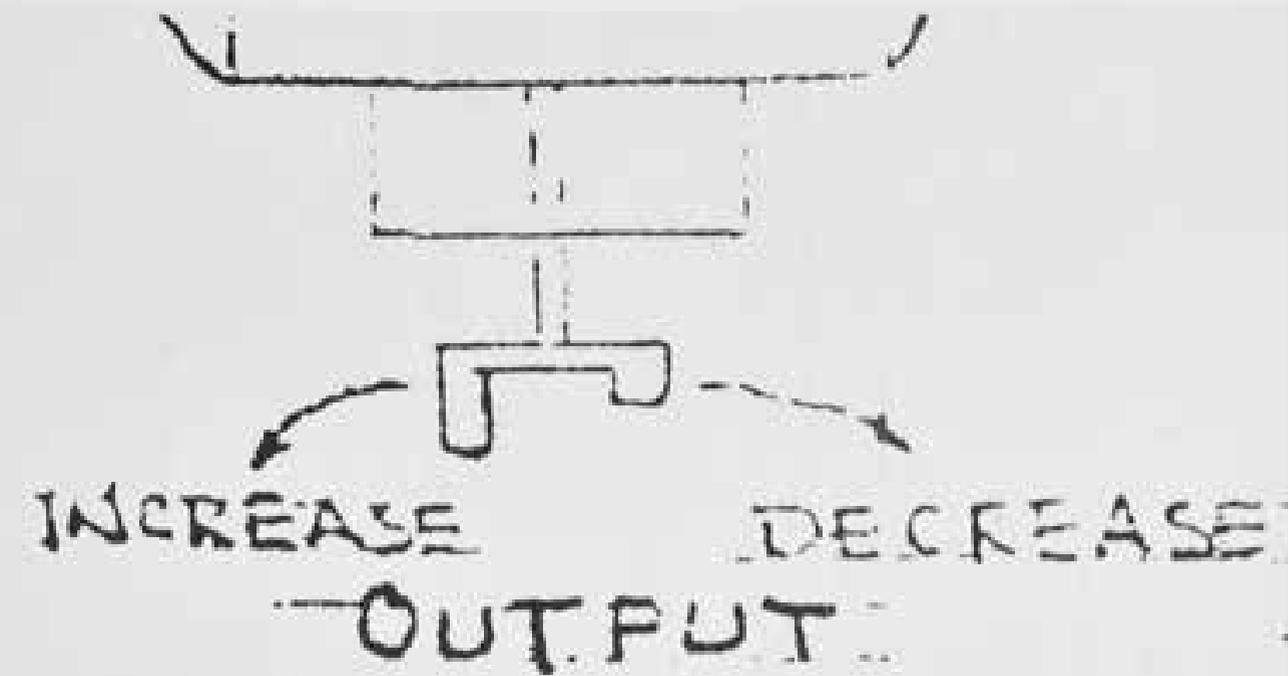
Discussing conditions of work in a factory, touching upon issues of skilled and non-skilled work alike, questions of productivity, effectivity and process, and all this effecting body and mind, we were looking at parallels with our own professions and working methods. The Body Part Discomfort Form made us addressing aspects of our work we otherwise would not have asked. The workers' bodies stayed absent. The task had become ours to produce the space anew.

The issue of the artist's work and its conditions became even more pressing in the context of the gallery space²⁰, as it is part of an art institution and educational system, which we also touched upon as the educational factory²¹. We saw ourselves confronted with difficulties of definition of what work actually is for us. Specifically in moments where process comes into focus, ignoring the goal of a final product (an object made) or the lack of audience as an otherwise given part of a performance - as it was an issue in the week of collaboration with the dancer Clare Reynolds. Does the disembodied eye of the camera act as substitute for the audience? In reverse – does any camera (or gaze, or any other kind of recording) turn any given situation into a potential staging? This would mean that unconscious movement is no longer possible – and with that the aimless exploration, which should lead to something you can't know in advance.

How to define, frame and present an ongoing dialogue? What happens to elements from Spode extracted and transferred into the white cube of a gallery space, cut off from the context of the factory? Can these elements then be read as a more general investigation of working conditions? I would say yes. The isolation, cutting and reassembling of elements in a different order and partly transformed or altered – written words, diagrams and signs, images of androgynous bodies, papers as objects, material and objects referring to the factory production and buildings, video loops, sounds and voices – created a distance to its origins that enabled the audience in Bergen to project their own work conditions into space and elements. On the other hand, the line to Spode was not cut entirely, and could be taken up and followed by an attentive observer. Elements were placed in a non-hierarchical manner without individual titles or artists' names, and the first encounter was the impression of entering a brain (underlined by hanging and connecting cables and time-based elements like sounds and moving text fragments), where a conversation of several voices was going on – all talking at the same time.

The transfer to ROM8, the gallery space for artistic research in Bergen, was approached as an experiment. Fragments of the process brought together as a collection without centre were meant to open up for an unruly reading, a rhizomatic connecting of its parts. The only centre should be the body – one's own or a universal one, and utterances didn't clearly belong to anyone specific any longer. Words, images, sounds and objects were the content of one or everybody's thoughts together, whose emergence and forming was provoked and supported by movements in space. Projections would run in a constant loop day and night, partly fading out in strong sunlight and – especially the ones projected onto the windowpanes - interfering with street life at night time. Thereby possible conversation extended into a public sphere, from whence the dialogue once had started.





- ¹ From September 2013 to March 2014 this comprised a programme of exhibitions, screenings, performances and other types of events. For the conference, international lecturers with a variety of backgrounds from economics, politics, arts and philosophy, discussed issues of globalization, the origin of monetary exchange, new capitalism and possibilities of resistance.
- ² Present in the arts of the 1910s-1920s, in Soviet Social Realism, in the 60s, the 80s of the 20th century, but even earlier in paintings contemporary with the first Industrial Revolution.
- ³ The more pragmatic argument is that abandoned spaces are cheap or for free, and that culture and arts therefore can afford to use them. By use and inhabitation, dilapidation is slowed down, which gives authorities and owners extended time to develop strategies for new usage.
- ⁴ Work Study (Exercises in Creating a Short Circuit) Part I was shown at the Vociferous Void exhibition, part of the British Ceramic Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent, UK, in autumn 2013, and Work Study (Exercises in Creating a Short Circuit) Part 2 was presented in ROM8 in Bergen, Norway, in April 2014.
- ⁵ Some of the initiatives supported by governmental ministries, are the New Industries Festival, others would be the Ruhrtriennale and Urbane Künste Ruhr.
- ⁶ One of these examples would be Invisible Playground's performance/project Utopia Stock Exchange at the conference, but it doesn't necessarily mean that only participatory projects can engage an audience in discussion.
- ⁷ Mining and coal processing plant of distinct architecture from the turn of the century, which closed in the 60s and re-opened as museum in the 80s.
- ⁸ Translates to German Working World Exhibition.
- ⁹ German trade union for heavy industry.
- ¹⁰ Kelley, J., 'Common Work', in *Mapping the Terrain New Genre Public Art*, Lacy, S. (ed.), Seattle, Bay Press, 1995, p.142.
- ¹¹ Comer, J., 'The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention', in Cosgrove, D. (ed.), *Mappings*, London, Reaktion Books, 1999.
- ¹² Tuan, Y.F., *Place and Space – the Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
- ¹³ Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space*, trans. Nicholson-Smith, D., Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishing, 1991 (1st edn. 1974).
- ¹⁴ Arendt, H., *The Human Condition*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998 (1st edn. 1958).
- ¹⁵ This reaction was obvious and articulated by some visitors to the Work Study installation on site, when audience members to the British Ceramic Biennial – among them many former workers – had access to spaces of the factory, which were closed since the factory's shut down in 2008. I found it also described in a publication from the New Industries Festival: Arns, I., '(No Such Thing as) Society', in *Industrial On Tour*, Arns, I., & T. de Ruyter (ed.), Berlin, Revolver Publishing, 2013, p.67. Essays in the book are based on a tour through Poland, involving screenings and electronic music performances in and influenced by (post-)industrial sites.
- ¹⁶ Lynch, K., cited from unpublished notes mailed between Stoke-on-Trent and Bergen in the spring of 2014.
- ¹⁷ Arendt, H., *ibid.* p.188
- ¹⁸ Fedarb, C., cited from unpublished notes mailed between Stoke-on-Trent and Bergen in the spring of 2014.
- ¹⁹ Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in an interview with Rudi Laermans, 'Sharing Experience', in *Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times*, Pascal Gielen and Paul De Bruyne (eds), Nai Publishers Rotterdam, Research Group Arts in Society, Fontys College for the Arts, 2012, p.90
- ²⁰ This became partly articulated in an evening discussion arranged in connection with the show and following a screening of Harun Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory* onto elements of the installation, and otherwise in discussions with students in Bergen.
- ²¹ ROM8 is part of the Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway.

Toril Redalen

In and Amongst the Dust

In my artistic research, I'm interested in how cities, town and valleys – let's just call them physical places – were founded on a particular raw material, one that was discovered there or shipped there to be refined in some way. Part of my project is to explore how people adapt to their surroundings through their work (particularly if it's physical work). Another part involves exploring how a place can develop into a resource centre for certain skills and specialized knowledge about a specific material. Every place has its own material; every place has its own dust.

Searcher, Sorter and Sifter

In Norwegian, *støv* denotes tiny particles or powdery substances, but in English, dust has a wider application that includes larger refuse, as suggested by the word dustbin. When you read the word dust in this text, I would like you primarily to think of it in the Norwegian sense, as finely particulated material.

When I first went to the Spode factory in Stoke-on-Trent, I thought all the dust would be white. I envisaged the remains of bone china production lying like a white film over everything inside the factory. But I didn't find any completely white dust; none could be found in the production halls or warehouse areas. I hunted in the hallways, stairwells and courtyards, in the employees' dressing rooms and offices. If one were to work once again with bone china in this factory, one would need to cope with 'the other dust' from the walls, ceilings and floors, not to mention the pigeon droppings, and the dust from the people who once worked at Spode.

Dust is a product of nature but also a by-product of refining natural materials in industry and agriculture. It necessitates specialized material-related knowledge and skills. During the period of industrialization in the nineteenth century, dust generated jobs that were performed around the clock. Charles Dickens, in his novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), wrote of dustmen, rag-pickers and night men¹. Also in *Dust; or Ugliness Redeemed* (1850), R.H. Horn described the process of collecting the refuse of people and industry². Atop grey mounds that grew as large as hills, people sorted through all sorts of rubbish and excrement, recycling it according to a well-functioning system. This was dust created by people, by-products from households, roads and industries. Thus it was that on the outskirts of cities a cultural landscape developed: immense dustheaps resembling volcanic hills.

Of the many different types of dust, I am most of all interested in the kind created by human beings. In this project I've been mainly collecting the types of dust we people produce and reproduce – cultural dust.

Dust can be indicative and descriptive of a specific place. In *Dust; The Archive and Cultural History*, Carolyn Steedman describes dust not merely as a substance but as an action – as a perpetual cycle where nothing disappears and things are in constant motion³. So how can dust be site-specific when its foremost quality is that it circulates? To understand the taxonomy of dust, my fieldwork at the Spode factory has been a means to enter into dust's cyclical existence. Even though the factory is no longer functioning, there are still things there that reveal knowledge of the life that once circulated around the clay material. There are traces of things that bespeak the way people worked in this particular place. When exploring a place where people used to work with a raw material, will I find the dust there to be heterogeneous? Or what is it that is the origin of cultural dust?

The Victorian dustheaps' most important components were fine cinders and ash. But what was this dust that was also described as 'soil'? This valuable material was subject to several processes: it was found, transported, sorted and sifted, and it was left to the older men and women working at any particular site to process it.

Could the various 'dust departments' of Victorian England – the searchers, sorters, sifters and their 'soil' – be a good starting point for me to enter into the cycle of dust? I am a dustman. Like the *Flying Dustmen*⁴ described by J. Thomson in 1877, I scavenge through different rooms, circulating along with whatever is there in my search for dust. I walk through the factory as a farmer would his field. I inhale the air. I pick, sweep, scrape, brush and vacuum the dust. Another room, another field from which to harvest dust.



At the same time as I open doors, cupboards, jars and so forth, my lungs fill with dust. Maybe I already have the dust I'm looking for in my lungs, under my fingernails or clinging to my boots. What am I actually looking for? I'm in an office. The blue-grey wall-to-wall carpet has loosened a bit in a corner of the room. The backside of it is yellow. I grab it and rip it from its grounding. The carpet glue turns into yellow dust. It stings my eyes. I roll up the heavy carpet, underside-out. The floor underneath looks like a new-mown field of grain, and I'm reluctant to tread on the straw. When I drag the rolled carpet down the stairs, the dried-out glue leaves a trail of powder, down all the floors and out onto the asphalt. I return to the office and begin sweeping. I sweep from the edges of the office in towards the centre of the floor. There's no end to this dust, but eventually I gather a large mound of yellow glue particles. At the same time, some of the dust has formed as smog in the room. Even though I wear a mask the air is unbearable. I cough, the photographer coughs, and the dust forces us out into the fresh air.

In the detective novel *The Law and the Lady* (1875), Wilkie Collins describes the search for a suicide note that will prove a man's innocence of the charge of committing murder by poisoning⁵. Through questioning people, examining places and retracing events, the sleuth eventually comes upon a housemaid who remembers having swept up bits of a letter strewn on the floor. These torn-up bits of documentation are located – through the efforts of the dustman who has the house on his route, and through the efforts of those who work at the dustheap where the household garbage is dumped. In the end, the sleuth manages to restore the letter and read its contents.

As artistic material, the dust at the Spode factory is imbued with stories – about the processing it has undergone, about its relation to a specific place, about an origin, and perhaps most of all about the idea or conception of an origin. One grain of dust can trigger countless tales about places, and can point to times both past and present.



The Art of Sifting

A sieve is a tool for separating wanted material from that which is unwanted, for sorting particles according to size. One puts the material into the sieve, holds it horizontally and shakes it rapidly back and forth. The small particles fall through the fine mesh whilst the larger particles remain in the sieve. In the essay 'Dust; or Ugliness Redeemed' from 1851, R.H. Horn explained how people's garbage and all sorts of curious things underwent the sifting process in order to be recycled, often as a specific type of dust⁶.

Another Victorian author, Henry Mayhew, in his essay 'Of the Dustmen of London', also described in detail the process of sifting dust at the huge mounds in London's suburbs⁷. A mound where rubbish was dumped was often located beside a canal or river. The water-side location made it easier to transport the large piles of ash and so forth to the brick-making fields. A dustheap was a large workplace where the various tasks in processing the dust were specialized. For example, the person who sifted through the material was called a 'sifter', and the one shovelling the refuse into the sieve was called a 'filler-in'⁸. When the sifter separated one material from another, alertness was her most important skill, and the fineness of the sieve's mesh was her most important physical tool. The goal was to recycle a valuable substance so that it could be used to create something new.

The recycling system was well organized: a wagon load of refuse arrived and was dumped by the dustmen, then the material was sorted and processed. The heaps of unsorted material were at the outer perimeter of the site, and at the centre were the most finely-grained and sorted heaps, with progressively staged heaps in-between. Sifters could be found at each stage; they sifted the soil from the 'breeze' (cinders) and carried the sorted material to other larger heaps containing the same sort of material. The more roughly grained dust was used in fertilizer or as a component in fired clay bricks. Cinders could also be laid between layers of bricks and on top of the kiln during the brick-firing process. The re-use of brick slag in the making of new bricks is a good example of how dust never disappears but is re-formed into new shapes and states of being. At the centre of the 'garbage dump' was a large heap of very fine dust referred to as 'soil'. Here each grain of dust was so fine that its material origin and identity could neither be seen nor smelt. Was this most sorted, most processed dust actually the most valuable in terms of content?

What happens to dust in the sifting process? The particles are sorted according to size, not according to their place of origin. In my project I have gathered dust from different places in the factory: green dust from copper pipes, white dust from the plaster storage area, black dust from the attic floor, red dust from work benches, dried glazing powder, the contents of a dustbin, coffee containers and ashtrays. Yellow glue dust from underneath a wall-to-wall carpet. Paint and grime from windowsills. Old, cracked and decaying bars of soap from the women's restroom. Crushed and dried bone china, bricks, moss and pigeon bones. Dust from work clothes and shoes. Everything goes into the sieve. The finer the mesh, the finer the dust, but so also the less homogeneous the material. Dickens, Horn and Mayhew, through their depictions of people and landscapes, described dust as something valuable. They imbued dustheaps with monumentality, even suggesting they could sustain life. Horn describes one as 'in fact a large hill, and being in the vicinity of small suburb cottages, it rose above them like a great black mountain. Thistles, groundsel, and rank grass grew in knots on small parts which had remained for a long time undisturbed.'⁹ In addition to plants being able to grow on the hill, all the debris constituting this dust-landscape had a purpose.

People who lived during the Victorian era experienced one of the greatest paradigm shifts in history. It was as if the 'plug was pulled' from time, so much so that people had to re-establish their relation to life on earth, to time and to history. When I read stories about early industrialization, about the processes surrounding a material, the dust helps create a narrative with unfolding action. All the actors are in some respect searching for something. Fragments of something are found, and this something conjures a past or creates an unexpected future.

The dust and dustheaps also created a backdrop: they had a geological timeframe that added insight into the laborious work with the dust as measured according to a human timeframe. At the same time as the dust workers – the searchers, sorters and sifters – strove to save urban England from drowning in refuse, the dust circulated in its own trajectories, and through being preserved and dissolved, established its own time. The dust workers accidentally became archaeologists whose tells were contemporary Victorian ruins. Not unlike archaeologists (also geologists), did they re-combine broken fragments to create complete stories. It is in this way that I also view my work; it is related to archaeological and geological digging. I am a digger who wants to reveal the past, simultaneously as I want to recycle the value of things I find in my own day and age. Ruins are also being formed with industrial by-products in today's urban landscapes. Like



geological log-books, these hills consist of slowly decomposing materials with no inherent purpose. Each and every thing will probably at some time or another dissolve and become the base material for something else.

On the outside, the Spode factory still looks like a factory. On the inside, one can see how the remains and the dust have caused changes in surfaces, rooms and even the interior architecture. Even though it is possible to find parts of interiors and materials in their original place, most things have been altered, mixed, gathered into small or large heaps, or been removed or swept away. The natural decomposition of materials, the lack of production and absence of maintenance have created a new interior topography. On top of these new formations there lies a thin, flour-like grey-brown dust. After the factory closed, it became its own material – a fallow field sowing and fertilizing itself. The Spode factory is today an in-door cultural landscape with a 'heartbeat' paced according to geological time.

Seen from far enough away, the factory looks like a micro-organism. A prick on the map, a speck of dust in the landscape. In the cityscape, it has the shape of a dustheap of post-industry. The mixture of materials becomes a large-scale structure in the landscape, slowly formed by both nature and human intervention.

Throughout the project, I have been a flying dustman, a searcher, sorter and sifter; an artist scavenging through organic and man-made microscopic structures. I found a workplace where nature-given and manmade patterns are barely visible due to their microscopic size. After working at the factory, I increasingly see the origin of cultural dust as a process. In contrast to the dust from nature, cultural dust seems quite different. Actually, I still do not know what it consists of. Looking back on the founding of industrial ceramics and the massive production of dust, I have discovered a certain pattern to the interaction between dust and people. I want to research this in further detail. Are we talking here about a material that is involved in an unstoppable production or mutation process? I see the dust's apparently endless possibilities for recycling and its uncontrollable components as suitable material for exploring our relation to the time in which we live, the landscape and space around us. Is it the case that through dust, everything can meet, mix and be recycled?

The place where the dust is dug up, harvested and processed will surely always also relate to where the dust has been and where it is going.

¹ Dickens, C., *Our Mutual Friend* (published serially in 1864-5; republished in London, Wordsworth Editions, 1997).

² Horn, R. H., *Dust; or Ugliness Redeemed*, in Dickens, C., (ed.) *Household Words* (weekly journal, 1850).

³ Stedman, C., *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2002.

⁴ Thomson, J., 'Flying Dustmen', in *The Dictionary of Victorian London*, 1877, available at <http://www.victorianlondon.org/publications/thomson-34.htm> (accessed 3 November 2014).

⁵ Collins, W., *The Law and the Lady*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1875, re-printed by Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁶ Horn, R.H., *Dust; or Ugliness Redeemed*.

⁷ Mayhew, H., 'Of the Dustmen of London', in *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. II (originally published in 1851, re-published in London, Dover Publications, 1968).

⁸ Stedman, C., *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, p. 158. Stedman mentions only women being sifters.

⁹ Horn, R.H., *Dust; or Ugliness Redeemed*, p. 380.



Johan Sandborg

The Random Factor of Dynamic Memory Allocation



A version of the following text was part of the inaugural speech at the opening of the artwork: The Ronald Copeland Art Gallery: THE FACTOR OF DYNAMIC MEMORY ALLOCATION - a collaboration with Anne Helen Mydland. The speech was performed as part of the ceremony, and Councillor Ruth Rosenau received the refurbished gallery on behalf of the City Council of Stoke-on-Trent. Due to the unstable nature of memory, it is highly probable that the following transcript differs from the inaugural speech.

The title refers to a mathematical problem in the construction of artificial intelligence. The random factor of dynamic memory allocation refers to a mathematical problem in the construction of artificial intelligence. Simply put, it is the ability to randomly forget in order to make available room to process new data. Computers have a limited amount of memory. Once that memory is filled and used; there is no room to accept new information. Without clear logical instructions, the computer freezes up, unable to make a decision on how to deal with the overload of data. This causes a mathematical, fundamental and even existential dilemma: how to decide what data is discardable. Machines and computers are not very dynamic, in the sense that they are not very flexible. Once you have understood and mastered a machine, it becomes very predictable and not very random. The world would be different if machines were so flexible that they became random. Imagine getting up in the morning and discovering that your toaster had forgotten how to make toast. You would consider that piece of machinery useless - at least as a toaster. One might consider using it as a door stop, but most likely it would end up in the room of broken objects, at the back of the house.

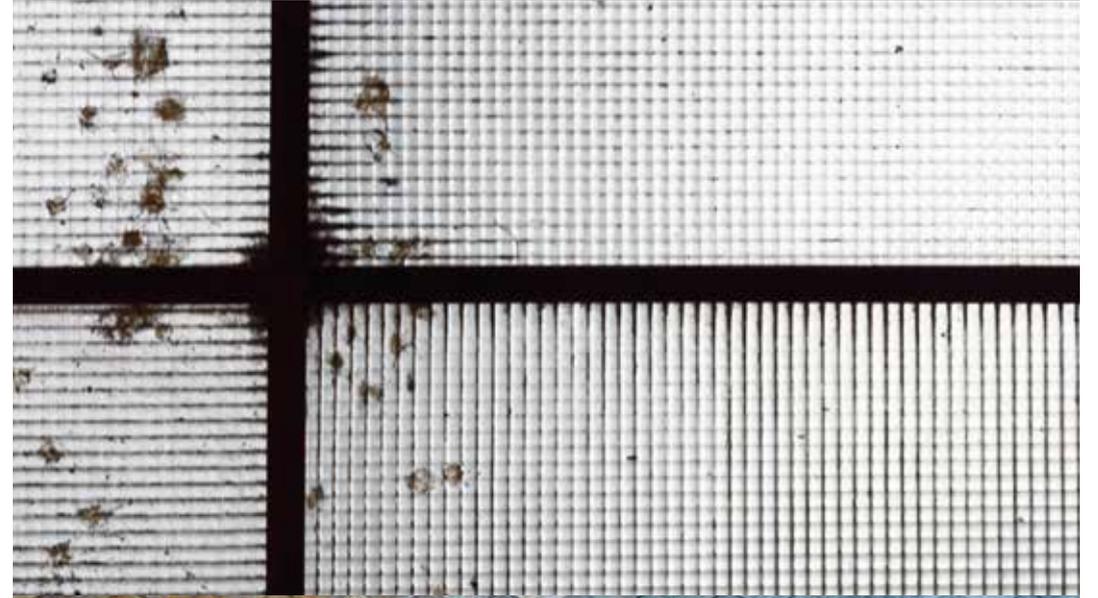
Unlike machines, when we as humans forget, we do not end up as door stops. We are very good at forgetting- at least up to a point. If we forget too much, we might become a problem to others or ourselves, but in most everyday situations, we have come to terms with forgetting as a useful ability. Randomly forgetting might even be one of our most redeeming abilities. We forget all sorts of things: where the keys are, birthdays, the importance of a place... There are plenty of times when forgetting is necessary. When you get a new phone number, you need to forget the old one. Where you parked your car this morning is - important information today, but it needs to be replaced with new information tomorrow when you park your car in a new, different space. Our astonishing ability to forget is equally matched with our remarkable ability to remember. From genuinely being in a state of forgetting to a state of remembering is an essential part of our ability to forget. Remembering is the ability to bring into consciousness a thing or place that is forgotten. We need to be able to update our memory so we can remember and react to that which is currently relevant.

As humans, our interest and attentions are governed by relevance. We bring memories in and out of consciousness according to need. Sometimes that flexibility breaks down and we need external help to trigger the process of refurbishing our memories.

The Ronald Copeland Art Gallery was the showcase for Spode, and helped in the telling of the history of the Spode firm and its products. The collection of products exhibited in the iconic bronze framed cases was sold at an auction in 2013. By then, the gallery had been left to its journey into abandonment and neglect.

This collaborative artwork challenges the abandonment of The Ronald Copeland Art Gallery. By intervening in the process of decay, we wish to bring into remembrance the uniqueness of the space.

Through a refurbishment of the room to an idealistic "0-point", where the cracked and leaking sky light, the mould infected wooden walls and the water stained, damaged floor have been cleaned and brought back to a possible new start, the project's intention is to revitalize the room and thereby enable it to be remembered.





Impressions of Matter in Motion

There is something strange about how the Spode factory feels upon first entering those vast spaces and small passage ways. One notices the strange accumulation of things, the rubbish and production left overs, emptiness, and lack of people and machinery. The most prominent presence is found in the silence. It is the silence that feels both oppressing and liberating, like the air is thick with it, like breathing dust, and ghosts, and earth and plants. Inside the factory is a contained world, protected by fences and guards and history. Dust and ghosts keep it silent and make you think of time. A world where the trash and dust, little by little cover the surfaces with a layer of silence, which is also a layer that erases colour. An abandoned factory is not a place of vibrant and bright plastic colours, or white perfect walls. It is desaturated, earthy, and smells like that. It is a place of silent colours, brown and grey, and moss... and dust and ghosts and earth. The exception is in the colour that comes in form of the new, the green weed, yellow dandelions, purple buddleia. The silence is broken by birds but underlined by the hum of faraway traffic.

"It was not decline but transformation."¹

Humankind has always been fascinated by the inevitability of death. Alchemists have tried to find solutions to the 'problem', and while most of us have fantasised about immortality, legend has that Walt Disney awaits in frost somewhere to wake up again in a distant future fairy tale where death is no longer an issue.



Past traditions of Still Life painting have fetishised the juicy issues of life and death. This is best seen in the Dutch 17th century depictions of Vanitas, where objects, such as over-ripe fruit on the point of bursting, skulls and broken pieces of glass on the tipping point between life and death, symbolically portrayed the transition. Ruins resemble a real time still life painting, an object caught in the limbo, hovering between life and death.² In the Spode factory, this is symbolised by an abandoned lunch pack in a refrigerator, the smell suggesting that it has reached its afterlife while the factory walls have in places slowly taken on a green aura.

After death the body continues to transmit life, it is still a matter in motion, all flesh is food. One lifespan is over, another is starting, all matter and all energy move on, all goes from dust to dust.³ The duration of the "other" reveals our fragility and ultimately our temporality in the world.⁴

We start from dust and return to dust, all flesh is food.



"It is hard to tell sometimes who is eating whom."⁵

Weeding is a way of cleaning, clearing away what is unwanted in the botanical presence of a place, because a weed is nothing but a plant in the wrong place, just as dirt is soil out of place. It is through weeding that mankind keeps nature and culture in its respective places. It has close ties to landscaping which originated in England as a way to turn nature into real life landscape painting.⁶ This was a tradition which became popular in the 18th century, at the time when porcelain and bone china production was taking off in England. The Spode Factory's historic output has a wide range of botanical patterns together with an Italian landscape pattern that was a great success (*on bone china as well as English gardens as it seems*). After the metaphorical death of the Spode Factory 'the nature of the Nature' has taken over the Site whose skeletal structure now remains inhabited by dust, ghosts and pigeons. The botanical patterns of Spode have been reincarnated as living decorative borders on and within the factory buildings themselves. But, here they remain in the wrong place. They find their niche in the weak spots of the architecture, the cracks, wounds and openings. Here they grow strong in peace and quiet until their world becomes too small and they start pushing the boundaries of their existence, expanding cracks and forcing bricks apart. The small scale and the trivial often has huge importance. Weeds are often categorised with trash, for accumulation of both shows neglect, abandonment and indifference. Both manifest a lack of control: the hallmark of ruination?

"That nothing lasts forever is perhaps our favorite thing to forget. And forgetting is the ruin of memory, its collapse, decay, shattering and eventual fading away into nothingness."
(Solnit, 2011)



Landscape is always shifting, there are subtle changes and there are drastic, dramatic ones which remind us for a moment that we are all mortal souls, making clear why religions, myths and stories exist. The ground's surface is decorated with lines and layers. A landslide covers the ground as paint does on the surface of a canvas, hiding what lies underneath and building up layers upon layers. When the mass gets thick the facade stretches, something gives and the surface breaks. The cracks become a complex drawing on the surface. Cracks and fractures leave empty veins to be filled with matter. Sometimes these shatter the solid mass, or occasionally assimilate to make beautifully lined rocks or landscapes. The method is simultaneously one of destruction and creation.

Just as water has a life cycle, so do rocks. Weather and wind grind stone into sediment, sediment forms into rocks, which get squeezed into the ground through tectonic movement and ultimately into the layer of magma which melts them down into a flowing mass of hot rock, that eventually finds a crack in the earth's crust and thrusts up to the surface where it becomes a layer of lava. Glaciers grind stones into fine sediment and rivers rinse them, separate the fine grains from the coarse ones and finally send some off to the sea, where they momentarily make watercolour swirl in the sea before the particles drift away. If the grind and consistency of the sediment is right it may one day become clay.⁷

Cracks visualise time. A crack in an old painting follows the same logic as a crack in the ground: a wall or a porcelain object, as paint, is generally made from ground up minerals, as is concrete and porcelain. Everything is connected in the world of dust.⁸ Cyclical stories can be found everywhere.

"Sensitive and porous, the pregnant body let in all sorts of impressions."⁹

Porcelain is a valuable material, made so through trade history and distinct appearances influenced by a global exchange of fashion. By trade from China over the Silk Route it reached the image obsessive European Aristocracy who loved its whiteness, tenderness and otherness so much that a materialistic Emperor captured an Alchemist and locked him in a tower for years to make him find the formula for the white gold. That beautiful story of desire, love and cruelty ultimately lead to a recipe for European hard paste porcelain which became highly prized, ruled with secrecy and produced mountains of money for a few people in England and Germany, with pale skin and wigs that matched their products. The story of porcelain is a story of creation and destruction.



"The viscous is a state half-way between solid and liquid. It is like a cross-section in a process on change. It is unstable, but it does not flow. It is soft, yielding and compressible. There is no gliding on its surface. Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own substances flowing into the pool of stickiness. Plunging into water gives a different impression. I remain a solid, but to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity. Stickiness is clinging, like a too possessive dog or mistress. In this way the first contact with stickiness enriches a child's experience. He has learnt something about himself and the properties of matter and the interrelation between self and other things." (Sartre, in Douglas, 2005)



Bone china was a life vein for the Spode factory when it was perfected in the late 18th century. It was an immense, commercial success that contributed greatly to the success of the factory and its long lifetime. It was the water and blood of the factory, a vibrant fluid running through its pipes giving life to its perfect white and translucent wares. A fluid containing the ghosts of the countless animal bones used for the process of making bone china and wares, containing traces and ghosts of the thousands of people whose living was making the products and later those whose life and love was using them, touch transmits life. Blood is transported through veins and veins of raw materials in the earth's crust contribute to the making of bone china. It carries with it ghosts of the scarred earth, that in the process transformed the skies from blue to black. Do the skies turn black because porcelain is white... Everything contains traces of its former story; everything is the ruin of what came before.¹⁰ All the four elements come together, each manipulated, for the success of the industry.

White is the colour of transitions and change.

When I swallowed the white pill, the pain disappeared. The presence of one thing amounts to the absence of another. A white pill is filled with kaolin; clay has always had the power to make me feel better. Clay has healing properties. That small white planet, bearing an imprint of a company logo, has been cast into a mould, the material has been carefully mixed and crafted for the consumption of the one in pain. They don't want us to choke on the white and drift off into the endless whiteness of death. The white stuff returned the red clouds to my cheeks, as my complexion was the colour of porcelain, not the highly esteemed one as has been immortalised by Victorian literature, but as in the absence of spirit, absence of life. Now my skin is feverishly rosy, as red is when spread thinly over a white luminous surface. The effect of the white is an illusion, I know it won't last. White never lasts.

The power of the white traces back, white has never been neutral, it is always all or nothing. It can never be in the middle, for that is the grey zone. It is always either presence or absence. An overwhelming presence which emphasises the absence. Or the loud absence which speaks of what is present.

People seek solace and solitude in the white, in white power, powder and light as well as in the whitish dusty surroundings of the desert; seemingly a place for finding one's spirituality, where the lost nations roamed about, a route for the lost and adventurous traveler.¹¹ It is a setting for miracles and origin of spicy metaphors about life and death. Enduring the harshness of the elements shows the strength of the spirit.

The Desert is more than a sandy, harsh and miraculous place from the bible. Everything always is more... everything is layered. The desert is simultaneously empty and full, life and death. It is full of moving matter, sand, dust and wind, solar energy and frosty nights, eroding salt.¹²

"There is a kind of white that is not created by bleach but that itself is bleach."
(Batchelor, 2000)



The desert ground is constantly shifting, dunes move around, usually on their own but that one time with the help of Francis Alys and a population of a Peruvian village: 'Faith moves Mountains', as we have heard. A desert is a layer. In some places a growing, moving layer occupying larger and larger areas. A process which is in the same instance of natural and human origins. The method of the desert is creation and destruction. It refers not only to a place, but also a state of being, that something which has been deserted - abandoned.

The desert contains the aesthetics of winter; the jungle those of summer.

The Jungle is green and lush and full of life, a wild maximalist landscape of tangled vines, plants, colours, textures, insects, animals and sounds... all those sounds! The desert is desaturated, achromatic, colourless, white, while the jungle contains all the colours in the world.

An abandoned factory holds the colour palette of the desert. As it is stripped of its function and dust settles on the surfaces the architecture becomes a skeleton, surrounded by the lush colours of plants and butterflies. Colour invades in the form of a new energy, a jungle.

Wittgenstein was dealing with mercurial, elusive problems regarding the opacity of white: 'Why can't we imagine a transparent white?'.¹³ He should perhaps have become a ceramist, for the greatest virtue and beauty of porcelain has always been its whiteness and opacity. The magic and value is found in its elusiveness. In Europe, the star of the opaque white matter has been bone china, a white powder with a power to amaze. Perhaps it gains its strength from the cattle whose bones are its substance. There is something ambiguous about a bone china object. In some cultures it has been maintained that one receives the strength of the soul of the animal one eats. Bone china is known for its strong body and chip resistance. All flesh is food.

White objects always seem untouchable. They come across as other worldly, sometimes radiating a sinister aura, as the albino crocodiles at the end of Herzog's film¹⁴, which seem unreal, beautified but terrifying images of the green reptile. They appear drained of colour, ghostlike and imaginary. White objects and beings are never passive. They seem endless, ageless and timeless. White can also appear to embody pure energy, pure beauty as anyone who has seen an albino peacock will agree to (it seems to be of the same origin as unicorns, white wizards and other creatures from fairy tales). Fairy tales always contain contrasting sides - there is no pure good without pure evil, no creation without destruction. There is always a balance between beauty and the gruesome.

Ruins, such as the Spode Factory, are as elusive as the White, as untouchable and mythical as bone china. A factory in its ruins has the aura of its workers and products, of life transmitted into the skeleton in forms of scars, cracks and pathways. The Spode Factory, just as the White and the rock it is built of, has a cyclical story, containing both a beginning and an ending.

"As long as a human eye is looking, there is always something to see. To look at something which is "empty" is still to be looking, still to be seeing something - if only the ghosts of one's expectations. In order to perceive fullness, one must retain an acute sense of the emptiness which marks it off; conversely, in order to perceive emptiness, one must apprehend other zones of the world as full."
(Sontag, 2006)

"Since the planet's rocks solidified from molten dust - or from accumulated coral skeletons - they have been thoroughly abused. In the past 4.5 billion years, most rocks have been folded, twisted, mashed..."
(Holmes, 2001)

¹ Benjamin, W., 'The Arcades Project', in *Ruins: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Dillon, B. (ed), 1st ed, London, Whitechapel Gallery The MIT Press, 2011, p. 28-30. (Benjamin, 2011, p. 20).

² Bryson, N., *Looking at the overlooked : four essays on still life painting*, London, Reaktion, 1990.

³ Holmes, H., *The secret life of dust : from the cosmos to the kitchen counter, the big consequences of little things*, New York, Wiley, 2001.

⁴ Deleuze, G., 'Intuition as Method'. In *Time*, Groom, A. (ed), 1st ed, London, Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery The MIT Press, 2013, p. 101-102.

⁵ Todd, K., *Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian and the secrets of metamorphosis*, Orlando, Harcourt, 2007, p.189.

⁶ Farley, P. & Roberts, M., *Edgelands*, London, Vintage, 2012.

⁷ (Fossen, 2008).

⁸ Holmes, H., *The secret life of dust : from the cosmos to the kitchen counter, the big consequences of little things*, New York, Wiley, 2001.

⁹ Todd, K., *Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian and the secrets of metamorphosis*, Orlando, Harcourt, 2007, p. 21.

¹⁰ Solnit, R., *Storming the gates of paradise: landscapes for politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007.

¹¹ Thesiger, W., *Across the Empty Quarter*, London, Penguin, 2007.

¹² Holmes, H., *The secret life of dust : from the cosmos to the kitchen counter, the big consequences of little things*, New York, Wiley, 2001.

¹³ Groom, A., There's nothing to see here, *e-flux journal*, 2012, vol. 37, September.

¹⁴ Herzog, W., *Cave of forgotten dreams*, 2010.

Side quotations

(Solnit, 2011)

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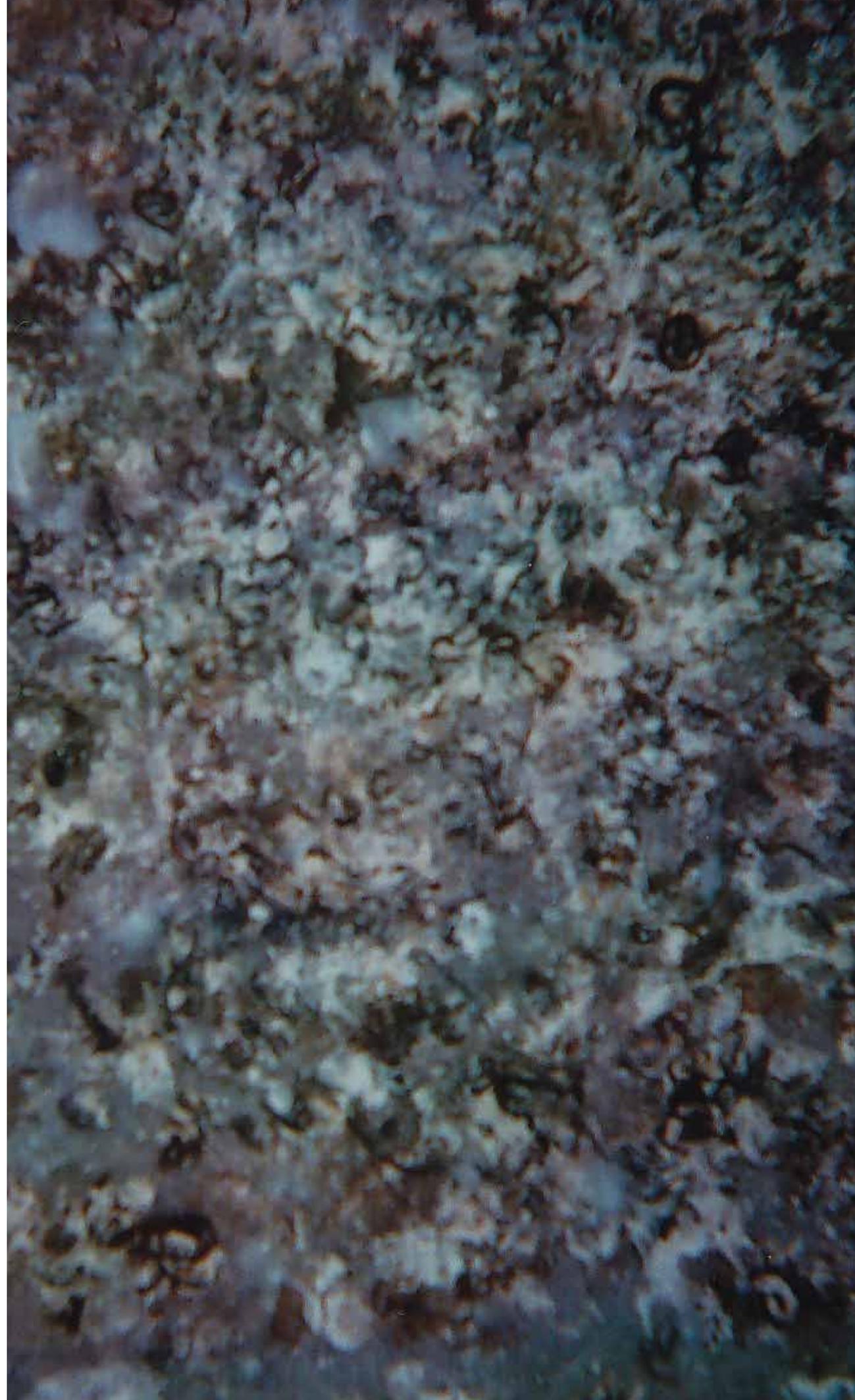
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AS I WALK AROUND I LOOK AT THE DYING PARTS, from the outside it looks more or less okay, but through the windows you can see death. Mould, asbestos, holes, pigeon shit and plants. Nature taking over, squeezing people out. She's letting us know we're not welcome here anymore. She's definitely shrinking.



Corinna Thornton

List of Occurrences During the Making of FALSEWORK

Die for supporting poles arrives too small. *Fire both support (stoneware) and poles (bone china) together wet, original plan to fire supports first and then to re use.*

Die for poles was the wrong size to account for over 14% shrinkage of bone china. *Order another but 4mm bigger.*

Many extrusions with bone china drop to the floor in lumpy white piles. *Re wedge and include floor debris.*

All poles in bone china break and crack during drying process, except 1. *Recycle clay and try again with some, saw ends off the others to tidy up. Add in fine molocite to next batch.*

All supports explode during firing. *Put in bin.*

Kiln fails and underfires to 600 degrees. *Fire poles again in the next batch.*

Second hand scaffold couplers arrive on site covered in machine oil which marks the bone china. *Cleaned off with white spirits, but forgot to use gloves and top layer of skin on my hands peels off and becomes very sensitive. Used hand cream.*

New die arrives for poles to match the standardized 48mm. Poles after firing now too big to allow for any warping or distortion of clay during firing, now don't fit the couplers. *Use original smaller one instead.*

Extrude second batch of poles, all except 3 break during firing. *Fire. Decided to include all occurrences in process as they are, no tidying, finishing etc. Either/or. Must go all the way with the integrity of process events, occurrences laid bare in work as well as in the site.*

New die arrives for supports, extrude new ones but all break in drying process and transporting into kiln. *Glue together with hot glue gun after firing to extrude bone china poles into.*

Kiln fails again. Found out kiln must be programmed in one ramp. *Re program, and try again.*

Run out of Bone China, re order, suppliers have run out. *Nothing to be done.*

Kiln fired low 1215 at the top. *It's ok, variations in colour, from blue white well vitrified to pink white lightly vitrified, various modes and characters of Bone China present.*

Lost original site for construction of FALSEWORK ironically due to internal collapse of building adjacent to original location to construct in. *Work in new space closer to fire exit route, mark off with safety tape.*



Photo Credits

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Peter Brown, Peter Craig Brown Photography, pages 60-61.

Neil Brownsword, pages 2-3

All other photos by the artists and authors.

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Jan Bäcklund, **The Art of Fire**, pages 8 -19

- 1 Cavalier Cipriano Piccolpasso, Manuscript I 548. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 2 Photo of a dove fixed to clay, from Spode Factory, Stoke-on-Trent. Photograph Bjarte Bjørkum.
- 3 Ai Weiwei: Dropping of a Han-Dynasty Urn. Photograph triptych. 1995. © Ai Weiwei.
- 4 The alchemical 'kiln'. a) Illumination from *Aurora consurgens*. Ms Rh 172, f.24v, Zürich Zentralbibliothek.
- 5 *Tabula Smaragdina*, "The smaragdine table", . From Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum sapientiæ æternæ solius veræ christiano-kabalisticum, divino-magicum necnon physico-chymicum, tertriumum, catholicon*. Excudebat Guilielmus Antonius, Hannover 1609. Courtesy of the Royal Library in Copenhagen.
- 6 The Portland Vase. Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, Etruria, 1790. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portland_Vase_by_Wedgwood_-_view_2.jpg.
- 7 Salomon Trismosin. *Splendor Solis*. MS. (1582). © British Library Board, Harley 3469, f.32v.

Neil Ewins, **Globalization and the UK Ceramics Industry (c1990-2010)**, pages 58-63

- 1 Johnson Bros*, Hanley, 'Eternal Beau', tea-ware, earthenware, from 1980s. © WWRD Group.
- 2 Backstamp on side-plate shown in Fig 1. Designed by Sarina Mascheroni, 'Made in England'. © WWRD Group.
- 3 Royal Albert*, 'Ruby Lace', teacup and saucer, bone china, from 2002. © WWRD Group.
- 4 Backstamp, "2002. © WWRD Group.
- 5 Detachable label. © WWRD Group.
- 6 Johnson Bros*, 'Fresh Fruit', tea-cup and saucer, hard paste porcelain, c2008. The detachable label indicates 'Made in China'. © WWRD Group.
- 7 Backstamp. Johnson Brothers was established in Hanley in 1883. (Latterly part of the Wedgwood Group). © WWRD Group.
- 8 Wedgwood*, mug, bone china, c2009. © WWRD Group.
- 9 Backstamp. © WWRD Group.
- 10 Label on packaging. © WWRD Group.
- 11 Emma Bridgewater Union Jack mug, earthenware, c2010. © Emma Bridgewater
- 12 Backstamp. Note decorator's mark, and inspection label
- 13 Royal Stafford, 'Britannia range', earthenware, c2009. © Royal Stafford
- 14 Backstamp on tableware (as above)
- 15 The Figurine Collective. Established in 2009. Courtesy of The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery
- 16 Spode's 'Blue Italian' plate. This image has been reproduced with the kind permission of Portmeirion Group UK Limited, to whom 'Spode' is registered and to whom all rights are reserved
- 17 Backstamp (as above)

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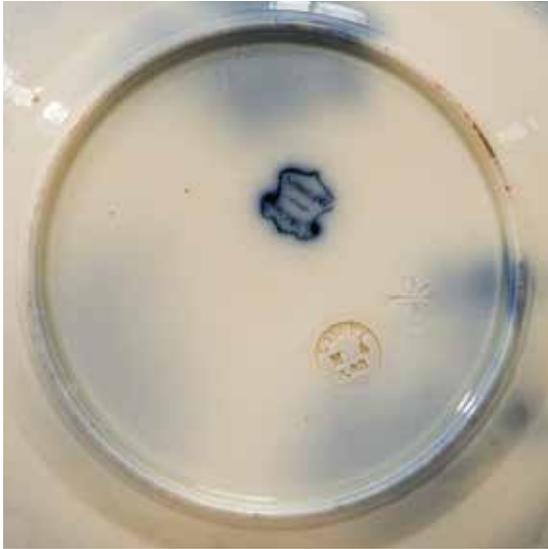
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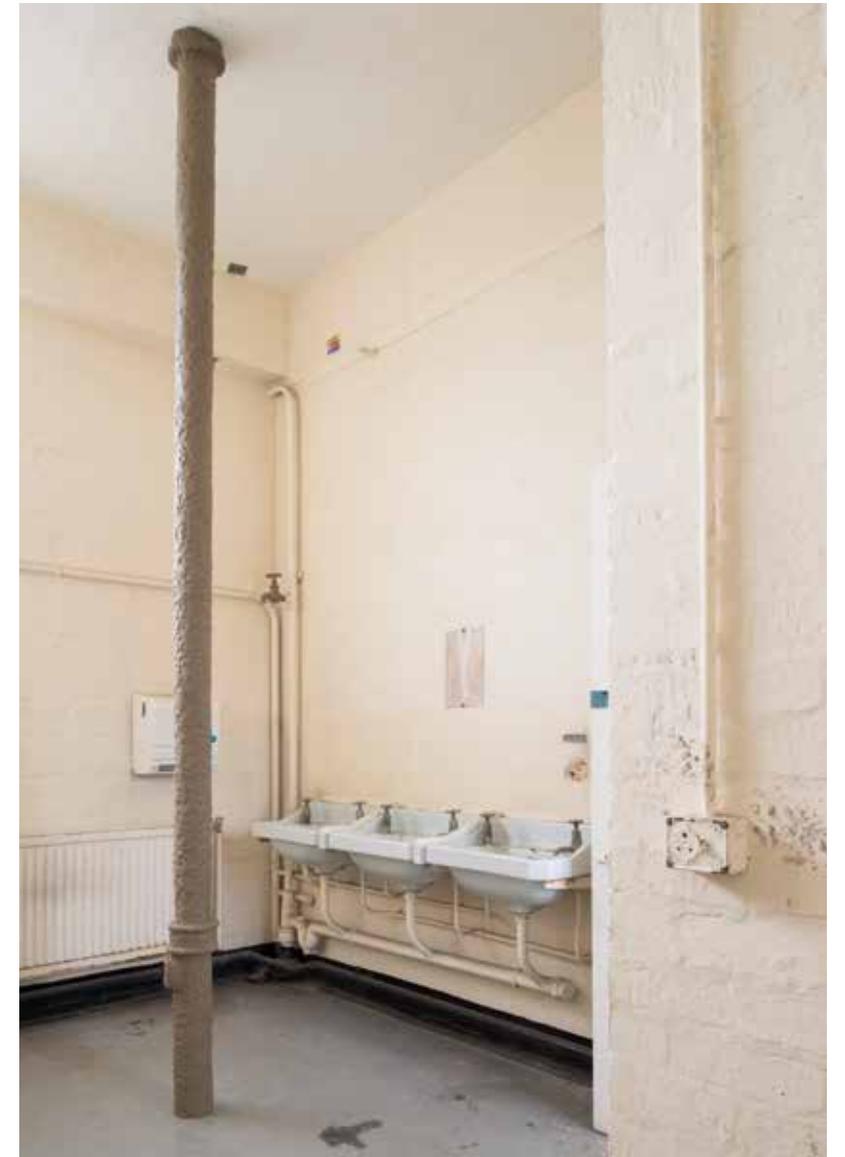
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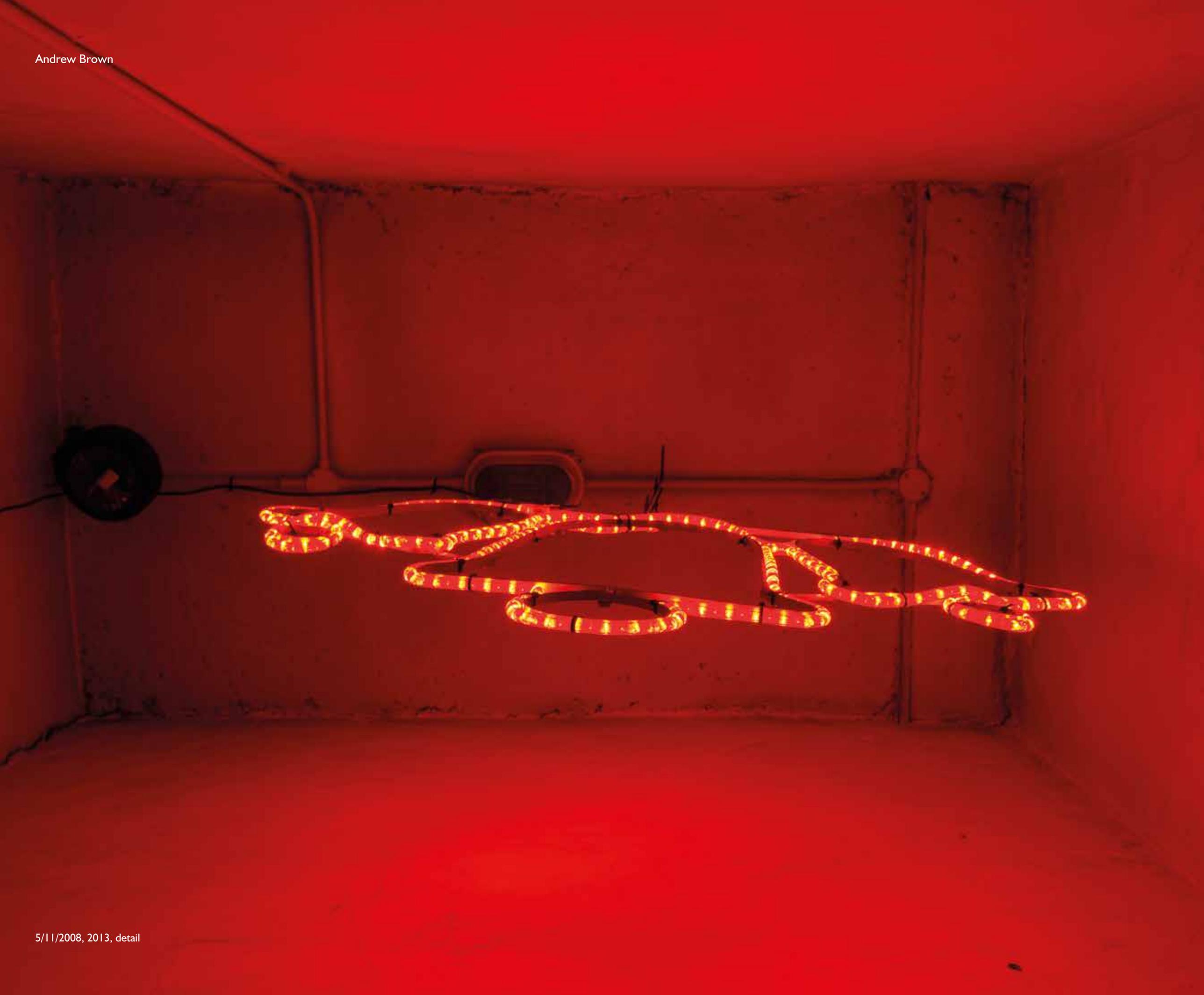
Exhibition 27.09.13 - 10.11.13

- Abraham 142
- Blomgren 144
- Brown 146
- Brown 148
- Brownsword 150
- Fabian 152
- Gibbs 154
- Harsbo 156
- Heeney 158
- Holm Birkeland 160
- Holten 162
- Kaapke 164
- Kelly/Marhaug 166
- Kolstad Brekke 170
- Lauder/Collura 172
- Maier 174
- Modin 176
- Mydland 178
- Mydland/Sandborg 180
- Nikolaisen 182
- Popp 184
- Redalen 186
- Saastad 188
- Sandborg 190
- Skúladóttir 192
- Slotte 194
- Stinessen 196
- Suul 198
- Thornton 200
- Thorvarsson 202
- Biographies 204

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Dancing in the Boardroom (Turning My Heartbeat Up), 2013



National Treasure, 2013, detail

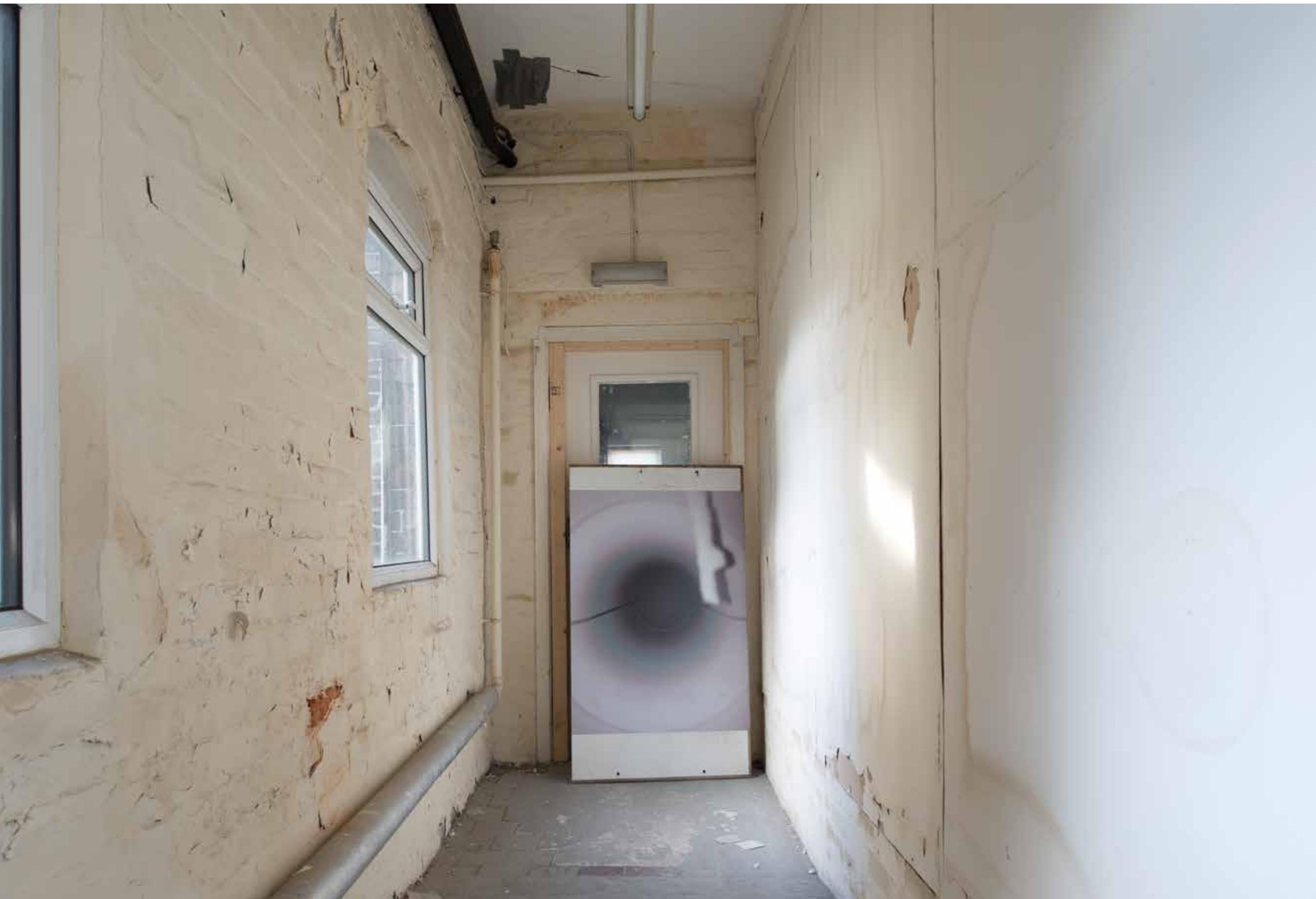




















Anthropocene Diorama 2, 2013









Spode Contemporary: White Italian, 2013

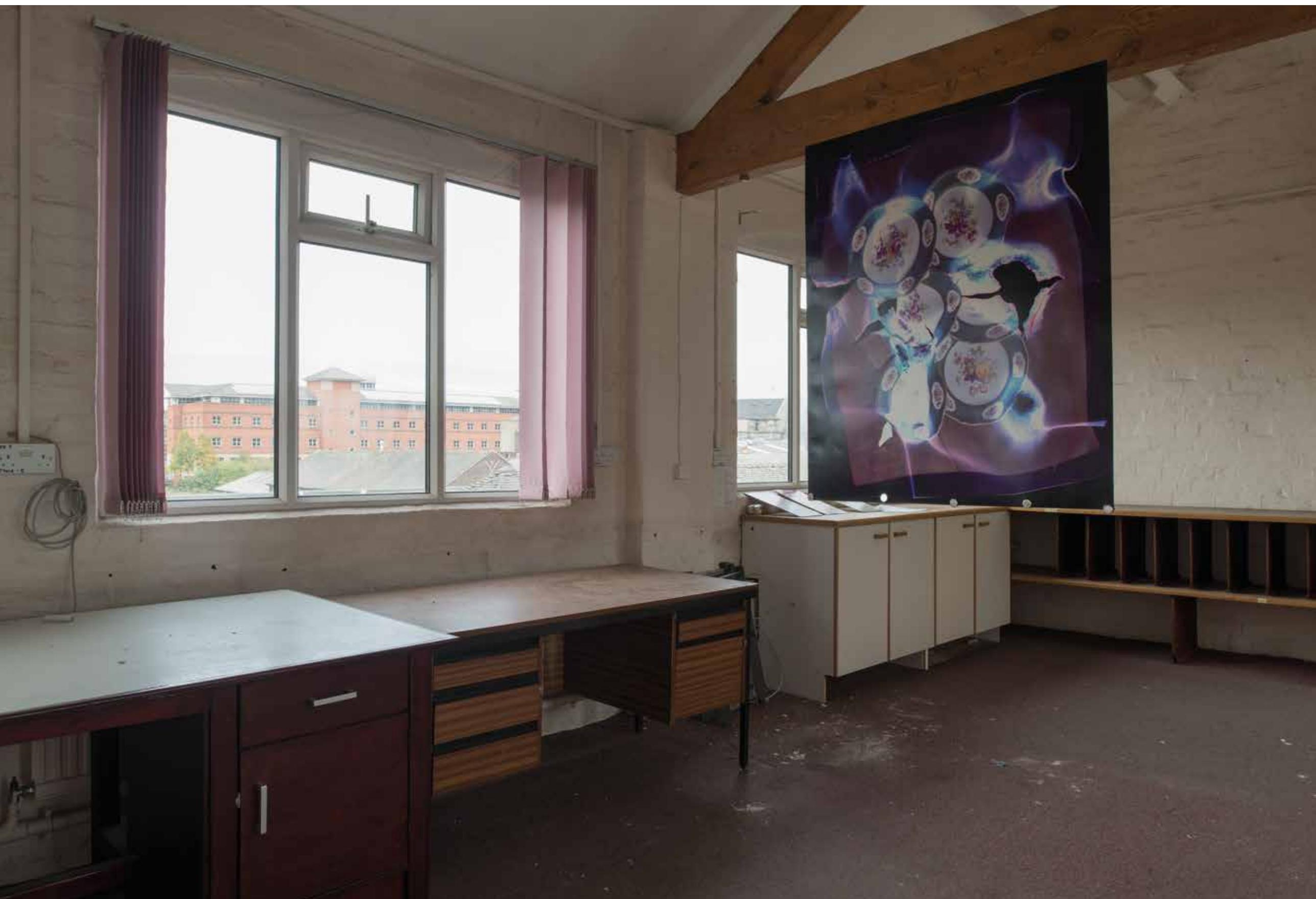






Work Study (Exercises in Creating a Short Circuit), 2013, detail





In This Green and Pleasant Land, 2013









Stitched Room, 2013, detail





Biographies

Dr. Kerstin Abraham (1956, Germany) Professor for Fine Arts and Ceramic Fine Arts at Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany. Education: PhD in Art Theory at Humboldt University Berlin, further studies with Gertraud Möhwald (Halle) and Polf Szymanski (HdK Berlin).

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Karin Blomgren (1987, Sweden) Education: BA Ceramics and MA Fine Art, The Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Blomgren focuses on temporary, site-specific installations, with an interest in transport and transition.

Andrew Brown (1959, UK) Senior Lecturer, Visual Arts, Nottingham Trent University, UK. Education: MA Performance, York St John; BA(Hons) Contemporary Art, Nottingham Trent University, UK. An artist augmenting reality by means of sound and participatory performance, exploring the irresistible processes of change.

Chloë Brown (1964, UK) Senior Lecturer/Course Leader in Fine Art BA at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. Education: BA Fine Art University of Reading, MA Sculpture Chelsea College of Art, London. Brown uses a range of media to explore various strands of research including the ruins of post-industry, Northern Soul, the representation of animals in society and culturally, and an interrogation into ideas of ‘The (extreme) North’.

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Julia Collura (1963, USA) Director of CPD and Careers, Drama Teacher: Arts Educational Schools, London, UK. Education: Bachelor & Master in Music: Piano Performance, Hunter College, City University New York, USA; Master in Educational Theatre, New York University, USA and Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK. Collaborates with artist Richard Launder.

Tim Edensor (1957, UK) Reader in Cultural Geography at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Author of *Tourists at the Taj*, *National Identity*, *Popular Culture and Everyday Life* and *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*. Editor of *Geographies of Rhythm* and co- editor of *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity*. Edensor has written extensively on national identity, tourism, industrial ruins, walking, driving, football cultures and urban materiality and is currently completing a book on landscapes of illumination and darkness.

Neil Ewins (1967, UK) Senior Lecturer in Design History and Contextual Studies, University of Sunderland, UK. Ewins’ research interest is the trade, marketing, design and culture of ceramics. His MPhil thesis was published as ‘Supplying the Present Wants of Our Yankee Cousins’: Staffordshire Ceramics and the American Market 1775-1880, Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent, 1997. Ewins’ PhD thesis (2014) examined the impact of globalization on the UK ceramic industry from c1990 to 2010.

Andreas Fabian (1957, Germany) Course Leader BA (Hons) 3D Contemporary Crafts & Products, Bucks New University, UK. Education: Design and Silversmithing at Hildesheim, Germany, and at the Royal College of Art, London. PhD, Brunel University, London. Fabians’ research interests focus on dining and eating, and how design concepts and archetypes construct new languages of objects and their practices in social contexts.

Tina Gibbs (1954, India) Education: BA (Hons) Ceramics and Glass and MA in Fine Art/Ceramics from Bucks New University, UK Gibbs’ work site-specific practice explores the history and memory of derelict space.

Karen Kitani Harsbo (1963, Japan) Associate professor, Royal Danish Academy of Visual Art, Copenhagen, Denmark. Education: studied ceramics at the Danish Design School, Copenhagen, Denmark. Harsbo’s current practice explores how thoughts and knowledge travel in, and through ceramics, and interrogates its long interconnection with history and culture.

Gwen Heeney (1952, UK) Senior Lecturer, Ceramics, School of Art, University of Wolverhampton, UK. Education: BA (Hons) 3D Design Ceramics, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK, MA Ceramics, Royal College of Art, London, UK. Currently undertaking a PhD at Newcastle University, UK. Gwen Heeney is a founder member of WABA (World Association of Brick Artists).

Camilla Holm Birkeland (1986, Norway) Education: BA Photography, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Currently studying MFA at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Works with the absurd, the hopelessness and the humour of the everyday through photography, installation and text.

Sofie Holten (1983, Denmark) Education: MFA, Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Denmark. Holtens’ practice explores buildings and architecture as surfaces and images. The way we build our houses is a mirror of a society’s ideals, dreams and self-understanding.

Lena Kaapke (1989, Germany) Education: BA Art, Muthesius Kunsthochschule, Kiel, Germany. Kaapke’s current practice explores relationships between art and science.

Traci Kelly (1961, UK) Independent Artist/Scholar. Education: BA(Hons) Fine Art Nottingham Trent University, UK. Master in Fine Art Birmingham University, UK; PhD Film, Television & Theatre and Fine Art, University of Reading, UK. Kelly’s work is frequently made for specific contexts and sites, embodying the hauntings of history, the specific vernacular of place and a poetic turn of materials; which are mobilised to

unsettle notions of corporeal and socio/political subjectivity and question the status of the lived and material body. Works in collaboration with Rita Marhaug.

Margrethe Kolstad Brekke (1979, Norway) BA in Textiles and MFA in Fine Art, from Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Since her involvement with Topographies of the Obsolete, Brekke’s work has continued to explore the post-industrial landscape throughout numerous sites in Europe.

Richard Launder (1953, UK) Professor of Visual Art: Clay & Ceramics, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Education: WSCAD, Farnham, UK. Launder’s often contextual, socially or politically engaged practice spans the fields of sculpture, installation & performance. Works in collaboration with Julia Collura.

Danica Maier (USA) Senior Lecturer Fine Art, Nottingham Trent University, UK. Education: BA Fine Art, Arcadia University, USA, MA Fine Art, University of Delaware, USA, MA Textiles in Contemporary Art Practice, Goldsmiths University of London, UK. Maier is interested in site-specific installations and events to explore ideas of expectations of site, traditional values, women’s work and labour.

Rita Marhaug (1965, Norway) Freelance visual artist. Former Professor in Printmaking, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Education: BA Art History University of Bergen, MA Fine Art from The Academy of Art and Design, Bergen, Norway. Since the early 1990s Marhaug has participated in a great numbers of solo and group exhibitions and performance festivals both in Norway and internationally. Works in an artist duo with Traci Kelly

Morten Modin (1981, Denmark) MA in Fine Art, Royal Danish Art Academy, Denmark. Modin works predominantly with sculpture, which intersects the boundaries of other mediums such as programming, 3d print, painting and text based works.

Anne Helen Mydland (1971, Norway) Co-project leader of *Topographies of the Obsolete*. Professor of Clay and Ceramics, Artistic Research Leader, Department of Fine Art, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Education: MA in Ceramics, Bergen Academy of Art and Design. Mydland’s artistic research explores how private and public narratives and memory functions, and is manifested through, and created by objects. In montages and installations using both found objects and sites she explores the different ways we use and relate to objects, both as evidence, cultural signifiers and personal souvenirs.

Heidi Nikolaisen (1973, Norway) Assistant Professor in Photography, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. BA in History and Art History, University of Oslo, BA and MA in Photography, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Works with photography, archive, text, video, sculpture and installation.

Sabine Popp (1970, Germany) Assistant Professor, Clay and Ceramics, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Education: MA Fine Art, Bergen Academy of Arts and Design, Norway, after studies in Bergen, Barcelona

and Glasgow. Popp is visual artist who explores questions arising from human beings’ relationship to their environment through work and their engagement with matter.

Toril Redalen (1973, Norway) MFA Fine Art, Bergen Academy of Arts and Design, Norway. Redalen has received several national research stipends and has been artist in residence at Porsgrunn Porcelain Factory Norway and at Kohler Factory in the USA.

Tone Saastad (1955, Norway) Associate Professor, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Saastad’s practice explores colour as phenomena, in space and in two-dimensional surface.

Johan Sandborg (1954) Pro-Rector and Associate Professor in Photography at Bergen Academy of Art and Design. Sandborg’s work ranges from personal snapshots, photographic landscapes to digitally generated images, and deals with the relationship between the reader and the photographic image.

Erna Elinbjörg Skúladóttir (1983, Iceland) BA Fine Art and MA Fine Art, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Through ‘Landscapes of Transformation’, Erna explores the relationship between the real and fantastical nature of change, especially as found in the performative aspect hidden within Raw Materials.

Caroline Slotte (1975, Finland) MA Ceramics, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norwegian Artistic Research Fellow, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. The reworking of second hand objects plays a pivotal role in Caroline Slotte’s practice. The tensions between the recognizable and the enigmatic, the ordinary and the unexpected, are recurring thematic concerns.

Anne Stinessen (1987, Norway) BA in Fine Arts, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Stinessen’s work combines a fascination for human nature with science fiction, the internet and the love of animals.

Øyvind Suul (1967, Norway) Former Head of Ceramics in the Department of Specialised Art, and Associate Professor in Clay and Ceramics at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. BA Fine Art and MA Fine Art in Ceramics both from The National College of Art and Design, Oslo, Norway. Suul’s work explores as a fusion between organic and industrial inspirations, aiming to create as many associations as possible and openings for a wide range of individual interpretations.

Corrina Thornton (1978, Wales) Education: BA Hons 3D Design: Ceramics, Bath Spa University, UK, MA Fine Art Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Research Assistant for Topographies of the Obsolete. Thornton’s work focuses on understanding and finding the essence of places, materials and the meeting points between these things and herself.

Numi Thorvarsson (1983, Iceland) BA in Fine Art, currently studying an MFA in Fine Art at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Thorvarsson works predominatly with photography and installation.

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