



TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE OBSOLETE

Topographies of the Obsolete is an international artistic research project initiated by Bergen Academy of Art and Design that explores the post-industrial landscape and its associated socio-economic histories, industrial architecture, production remnants through a range of interdisciplinary artistic practice. The project primarily explores how ceramic and clay can be understood as both material and subject in contemporary art practice. Website: <http://topographies.khib.no>

Symposium details:

In 'The Natural History of Staffordshire', Dr Robert Plot, the first keeper of the Ashmolean Museum describes an early account of the county's pre-industrial pottery manufacturing during the late 17th century. Apart from documenting potters' practices and processes, Plot details the region's natural clays that were once fundamental to its rise as a world renowned industrial centre for ceramics. Yet in recent decades, the factories and communities of labour that historically developed around these natural resources have been subject to dramatic downturn. Global economics have resulted in much of the region's ceramic industry outsourcing to low-cost overseas production.

Today, despite ongoing attempts to regenerate the city of Stoke-on-Trent, the economic fallout and human cost of the decline of traditional industry remain omnipresent throughout the six towns. Plot's pre-industrial mapping of North Staffordshire in the 1680's, has been echoed through the artistic research project Topographies of the Obsolete, which has recently surveyed the region's post-industrial landscape through a range of multi-media responses primarily centred around the former Spode factory site. Through various phases of on-site practice-led investigation, interconnected strands of discourse emerged that examine the socio-economic impact of globalization upon community and place, the contemporary ruin, and the artist as post-industrial archivist/archaeologist.

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 processes of culture-led regeneration.

This one-day symposium will reflect upon this recent history. The topics uncovered through *Topographies of the Obsolete* will be expanded upon by a panel of experts previously unconnected to the project, from the fields of art and design, anthropology, urban sociology, critical theory and cultural geography. It will offer a broad range of interdisciplinary perspectives surrounding the effects of de-industrialisation upon communities and landscapes, and the urban renewal of such cities through art and culture-led strategies.

This symposium is organized by Bucks New University and Bergen Academy of Art and Design in collaboration with the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, and in association with the British Ceramics Biennial and The Clay Foundation.



Programme:

Please note that registration will take place at 10.00am, so please arrive early. The conference will start promptly at 10.30am

10.00 - 10.30am	Registration & refreshments
10.30 - 10.40am	Welcome Dr Jon Whiteley, Department of Western Art, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford
10.40 - 11.10am	Topographies of the Obsolete Introduction: Exploring the Site Specific and Associated Histories of Post-Industry Anne Helen Mydland and Neil Brownsword, Professors of Ceramics and Clay Bergen Academy of Art and Design/Bucks New University
11.10 - 11.50am	Key Note: Post-Industrial Ceramics Heritage: Jingdezhen, Stoke-on-Trent, and East Liverpool Maris Boyd Gillette, Professor of Museum Studies and Community History and Director of the Museum Studies, University of Missouri, St. Louis
11.50 - 12.30	Industrial Ruination and Shared Experiences: Narratives of Exceptionalism Dr. Alice Mah, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick
12.30 - 1.30	Lunch
1.30 - 2.10	Ruins are Everywhere Dr. Tim Edensor, Reader in Cultural Geography at Manchester Metropolitan University
2.10 – 2.50pm	Archiving Post-Industrial Heritage Jake Kaner, Professor of Furniture Bucks New University
2.50 – 3.20pm	Coffee/tea
3.20 – 4.00	Margins, Wastes and the Urban Imaginary Malcolm Miles, Professor of Cultural Theory in the Architecture School at the University of Plymouth
4.00 – 4.25pm	Plenary Led by Juliet Simpson, Professor of Art History, Chair of Visual Arts Research, Coventry University
4.30pm	Symposia close
4.30 – 5.00pm	Topographies of the Obsolete: Site Reflections Book launch (location tbc)

Abstracts:

Topographies of the Obsolete Introduction:

Exploring the Site Specific and Associated Histories of Post-Industry

Neil Brownsword and Anne Helen Mydland, Bucks New University/Bergen Academy of Art and Design.

The 'Potteries' - the name given to the six towns that constitute Stoke-on-Trent, remain one of the few cities in Britain still associated with an industry that for centuries has shaped the areas economic life and physical landscape. Yet during the last three decades, escalating international competition and economic unrest has destabilized Stoke-on-Trent's global monopoly. Throughout this period the physical evidence of the effects of deindustrialisation have remained commonplace throughout the city, as sites of historic manufacture and its related infrastructure faced closure and demolition.

Since 2008, the UK's 'recession dominated' financial climate has resulted in lengthy delays in attempts to regenerate the city. The former Spode Factory, a keystone of Stoke-on-Trent's industrial heritage, remains one such site at the beginnings of its contemporary re-purposing. In 2012, the British Ceramics Biennial invited Bergen Academy of Art and Design to develop a site-specific artistic response to the former Spode site, as a key element of their 2013 exhibition programme. Following six onsite residencies, more than 50 international participants, including artists, historians and theoreticians, have been involved in this project. Through various phases of on-site practice-led investigation, interconnected strands of discourse emerged that examine the socio economic impact of globalization upon community and place, the contemporary ruin, and the artist as post-industrial archivist/archaeologist.

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. The projects context and outcomes will be elucidated during this introduction, presenting a framework that will be expanded upon by the invited panel of speakers.

Biography

Neil Brownsword is a Professor in Ceramics at Buckinghamshire New University and visiting Professor in Clay and Ceramics at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Brownsword's artistic practice explores the impact of ceramic manufacture's recent downturn in his hometown of Stoke-on-Trent. Through film and the installation of appropriated remnants from ceramic production, Brownsword's work examines the complex knowledge systems within ceramic manufacture, and their displacement through advanced technology and policies of outsourcing.

Anne Helen Mydland is a Professor in Ceramics and Clay at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. Mydland's works evolves around the *rhetoric of narrative* and *the materiality of memory*. With a basis in clay and ceramic material, framed in contemporary art discourse. Her work involves installation, sculpture, (ceramic) print and site-specific projects, and she has specialised in the use of ready-mades and object culture.

Mydland and Brownsword are co-leaders of Topographies of the Obsolete

Post-Industrial Ceramics Heritage: Jingdezhen, Stoke-on-Trent, and East Liverpool

Maris Gillette

In this presentation I compare case studies of industrial ceramics heritage, paying particular attention to the role played by artists and other cultural producers in the reinvention of potteries. The last fifty years have seen ceramics manufacturers around the world go bankrupt, downsize, merge with other firms, and outsource production to areas with cheap labour. This spasm of global capitalism caused uncounted numbers of ceramics workers to lose their jobs: more than 60,000 in Stoke-on-Trent, 80,000 in Jingdezhen, and many more in places ranging from Lidköping, Sweden to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Numerous manufacturing facilities fell to the demolition ball: in Stoke-on-Trent, production sites for Meakin, Royal Doulton, Wedgwood, Johnson Brothers; in Jingdezhen, the East Wind Porcelain Factory, Flourish Jingdezhen Porcelain Factory, the Art Porcelain Factory, the New China Porcelain Factory; in Syracuse, New York, Syracuse China's plant; and so on. Deindustrialization's effects continue to hurt areas where ceramics manufacturing was central to the local economy. Yet in some places, a new aesthetic, economic, and historical field has emerged: industrial ceramics heritage. Looking at heritage initiatives in a range of former potteries, we find a mixture of strategies for preservation, conservation, and adaptive re-use; a network of ties between private citizens, government officials, and commercial concerns; and varying efforts to benefit those disenfranchised by deindustrialization and confront the historical processes that turned working factories into museums and heritage sites.

Biography

Maris Gillette is an anthropologist and filmmaker with long-standing interests in material culture and the sociocultural consequences of economic processes. She has conducted research on Jingdezhen, known to many as the porcelain capital of China, for more than a decade. Her articles on ceramics copying and counterfeiting, deindustrialization, and unemployment can be found in several refereed journals and edited volumes. Her ethno-history of Jingdezhen, *China's Porcelain Capital: The World's Most Famous Ceramics and the People Who Made Them*, is forthcoming with Bloomsbury Press. Gillette directs a graduate program in Museum Studies at the University of Missouri – St Louis.

Industrial Ruination and Shared Experiences: Narratives of Exceptionalism

Alice Mah

Around the world, the traces of old industry are embedded in material landscapes, from artistic warehouse conversions, to behemoth abandoned factories, to contaminated fields marked only by fences. This paper builds on the theoretical perspective of 'industrial ruination as a lived process' (Mah 2012), which argues that industrial ruins cannot be separated from the communities, histories, and places that surround them. People live in and amongst industrial ruins, relating to them through difficult memories and experiences of job losses, toxic contamination, and marginalization. Each post-industrial city is unique but also shares common features with others. Drawing on research across a range of western post-industrial cities, from old manufacturing cities to post-industrial port cities, this essay first identifies some of these common features and their relevance for other places, including Stoke-on-Trent. The essay then probes the relationship between unique and common experiences further, through critically examining the narrative of exceptionalism in post-industrial urban identity. Somewhat ironically, this narrative offers insights into commonalities of post-industrial experience. Many residents of post-industrial cities share narratives of urban identity: of being different, set apart from other places, distinct from dominant urban trajectories, with unique and proud histories of industrial and community strength, while also facing particular challenges. Narratives of exceptionalism are reflections of collective memory and nostalgia, simultaneously mourning and celebrating aspects of local history. These narratives mask uglier histories, of the entanglements of industry and empire, particularly in accounting for collective losses. Despite their connotations of parochialism, narratives of exceptionalism have been useful for making connections between struggling post-industrial communities, to think about shared experiences and challenges. The essay evaluates the contradictions, limitations, and possibilities of exceptionalism as a mobilizing narrative for post-industrial places, or as the starting point for a reflective conversation.

Biography

Dr Alice Mah is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick, UK. She is the author of *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), winner of the 2013 British Sociological Association Phillip Abrams Memorial Prize, and *Port Cities and Global Legacies: Urban Identity, Waterfront Work, and Radicalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). She is currently leading a European Research Commission (ERC) Starting Grant entitled 'Toxic Expertise: Environmental Justice and the Global Petrochemical Industry'.

Ruins are Everywhere

Tim Edensor

Certain kinds of ruinous sites tend to be fetishised by ruin enthusiasts and urban explorers and yet ruination is a mundane process that is happening everywhere all the time, as any brief inspection of one's everyday surroundings testifies. The rate and kind of ruination depends upon the constituent materialities of buildings, the agencies that swirl around them in local settings, and on decisions to continue maintenance procedures that provide an illusion of enduring solidity or that consign structures to obsolescence. These particular factors shape the destiny of industrial, commercial and official buildings, and underpin assignments of heritage value. In this presentation, I explore how in certain places – typically those that successfully continue to attract capital - certain strategies obfuscate the process of ruination, providing an illusion of polished and intact materiality. However, at other locations, notably in Stoke on Trent, ruinous textures proliferate because particular industries, infrastructures, forms of heritage and architecture have become devalued. I explore the vexed politics of this everyday, ongoing ruination and suggest that the values associated with buildings consigned to ruination should be subject to greater critical scrutiny and creative tactics can be devised to challenge the designations of particular spaces as abject.

Biography

Tim Edensor teaches cultural geography at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is the author of *Tourists at the Taj* (1998), *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (2002) and *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*, as well as the editor of *Geographies of Rhythm* (2010). He is editor of *Tourist Studies*. Tim has written extensively on national identity, tourism, industrial ruins, walking, driving, football cultures and urban materiality. Minnesota University Press will publish his forthcoming book, *Light and Dark*, in 2016.

Archiving Post-Industrial Heritage

Jake Kaner

Post Industrial Heritage plays a key part in the preservation and dissemination of British material culture. This paper examines how we can preserve the heritage of the post-industrial landscape of North Staffordshire through construction of an image management system (IMS). This will ensure important archival heritage is saved and made available for school education, artistic and historical research and is accessible for the general public. It will also offer artists and designers a repository of visual and text based information to generate responses and create artefacts. Furthermore, this would provide an invaluable resource for cultural commentators and human scientists looking at anthropological behaviours and practices.

With regard to the British ceramics industry, the proposed IMS will record lost and endangered heritage, haptic practices and manufacturing technologies as well as examples of 18th, 19th and 20th century industrial practices. A comparable model has been developed through the post-industrial heritage of the High Wycombe furniture industry. Here valuable archival material was thrown away by the fading industry, as it was perceived to be of no value by the companies that produced it. This short sightedness by the companies proved to be a poor decision as they realized later that the rich material had great value especially with those companies that managed to survive and reinvent themselves.

Spode offers many challenges for the preservation and dissemination of its moulds and related archival material. There is considerable time pressure from agencies wishing to regenerate the site and frankly the moulds are perceived as an inconvenience slowing down change. 3D scanning offers a solution as this will not only record the moulds but will also allow accurate 3D printing of the moulds and the artefacts they were manufactured to produce. This will preserve history and function as well as create a repository for cultural studies.

Biography

Jake Kaner is Professor of Furniture at Buckinghamshire New University, and a member of the Institute of Conservation. In 2005, he was awarded a grant by Arts and Humanities Research Council to create an Electronic Furniture Archive of High Wycombe, launched in 2009. In 2013 he was invited to join the REF14 sub panel UoA34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

Margins, Wastes and the Urban Imaginary

Malcolm Miles

From the 1980s to the 2000s, urban policy adopted culture as a means to the regeneration of de-industrialised places, economies and communities. The outcomes of the cultural turn were, however, uneven: in some cases, cultural and heritage quarters, flagship art museums and non-gallery art projects contributed to a city's renewal of confidence, leading to growth in investment, new building and cultural tourism; in others, projects failed due to unrealistic projections and unfavourable circumstances. Issues arose as to whether the aim was to regenerate local economies and communities, or to redevelop property in a global market.

Following the 2007 crash and a reduction in public investment in the arts, redevelopment has become a sector which no longer employs a cultural mask. Yet despite this tendency to postcode clearances, the need for genuine regeneration remains and requires new tactics which are more grounded in local conditions and are owned by local publics. These issues are examined through three kinds of response to de-industrialisation: the preservation and re-use of redundant industrial sites (as in the Ruhr); the insertion of new, often spectacular art museums (in the UK mainly lottery funded); and vernacular regeneration which happens anyway in everyday settings. There are always cultures (in an anthropological sense) in any site of human settlement. Difficulties arise when cultures are subsumed in predetermined constructs of Culture. This emphasises a need to ground projects in local conditions and to reclaim the materiality of work and place against the immateriality of global mega-culture.

Biography

Malcolm Miles is Professor of Cultural Theory in the Architecture School at the University of Plymouth; and author of several books on modern and contemporary culture, cities, and the relation of aesthetics to radical social change. These include: *Limits to Culture* (2015); *Eco-aesthetics: art, literature and architecture in a period of climate change* (2014); and *Herbert Marcuse: an aesthetic of liberation* (2011). His next book is *Aesthetic Revolutions: art practice and critical theory* (2016/17)