



TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE OBSOLETE

PHASE TWO:
RHIZOMATIC TRAJECTORIES



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Preface

Topographies of the Obsolete is an artistic research project conceived in 2012 by University of Bergen Professors Neil Brownsword and Anne Helen Mydland, in collaboration with six European HEI's¹ and the British Ceramics Biennial. Emerging through two phases (2012-15; 2015-2020) it has to date engaged ninety-seven interdisciplinary artists, scholars, cultural commentators and students from thirteen countries. It has transformed participants' practices, with works originating out of the initial research being celebrated on an international platform. *Topographies of the Obsolete* has received funding from a variety of institutions, alongside its core support from the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme (2013-15 & 2015-17), whose peer review system (2015) rated it as 'exemplary... strengthening artistic research and its scope beyond potential communities of practitioners/researchers'.

In its first phase, the project evolved out of six site-specific residencies² with a range of multi-media responses centred primarily around the former Spode ceramics factory and broader post-industrial landscape of Stoke-on-Trent. It positions itself within recent cultural discourse that critically interrogates the transformation of places, communities and sites of abandoned industry. The lure of ruination and 'materiality of dereliction' has endured in contemporary art to examine cultural and political concerns, which *Topographies of the Obsolete* extends, but has been distinguished by its analysis of a particular locality and industry. Focusing on the singularity and associated histories of the Spode site, phase one questioned how 'ceramics' can be interrogated via site-specific engagement beyond the traditional scope of its materiality. Through the perspectives of artistic research it has examined the geological, anthropological, socio-economic and global/historic dimensions of 'ceramics' to offer new insights into the complexities of deindustrialisation.

Through action/reflection strategies and Nyrnes' rhetorical method (2006), interconnected research strands have evolved to examine the socio-economic impact of globalisation upon community and place, the contemporary ruin and the artist as post-industrial archivist/archaeologist. Numerous questions have emerged through these topics surrounding the role of the artist in a non-art space, and how to address a post-industrial site artistically and ethically. These themes and methods have since been extended, juxtaposed and mirrored back to Stoke-on-Trent and other post-industrial regions to develop a second phase of *Topographies of the Obsolete*.

Phase two has extended rhizomatic connections between individual lines of enquiry and the project's overarching research strands to facilitate new trajectories where each partner institution has furthered discourse through an active and evolving process of investigation. This publication, the fifth in the series, draws together reflections nurtured through *Topographies'* contextualising platform from both invited scholars and artists who remain connected to the project. It comprises of a range of descriptive, narrative and poetic texts which elucidate questions, contexts and methods that offer an alternative historiography of post-industrial sites and situations.

¹ Initial collaborations with Higher Education Institutions included Bucks New University; Sheffield Hallam University; Nottingham Trent University; Newcastle University; Muthesius Kunstschule, Kiel; Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen.
In its second phase HEAD – Genève, Geneva School of Art and Design, joined the project.
² Phase one residency dates at Spode, Stoke-on-Trent: Residency 1: 8-18 September 2012; Residency 2: 9-19 March 2013; Residency 3: 8 July-19 August 2013; Residency 4: 29 July-19 August 2013 Residency 5: 9-26 September 2013; Residency 6: 15-23 June 2014.

Introduction

Since its inception in 2012, *Topographies of the Obsolete (TOTO)* has framed the complexities of deindustrialisation commonly addressed by politicians, economists, historians and ex-employees through artistic research. It has mediated and mapped the aftermath of the Spode factory's closure and its repurposing through culture-led regeneration in Stoke-on-Trent. *TOTO* is multi-disciplinary in its approach and is situated where art practice intersects and resonates with discourse from a variety of fields including archaeology, ethnography, cultural geography and urban sociology. Through action/reflection strategies and rhetorical method,¹ interconnected research strands have evolved to examine the socio-economic impact of globalisation upon community and place, the contemporary ruin and the artist as post-industrial archivist/archaeologist. In 2015 *TOTO* evolved into a second phase, where its transdisciplinary methodology has been extended as a model for interrogating the post-industrial site/situation through practice-led research. It shares many parallels with Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's metaphoric referencing of the 'rhizome', which through its 'planar movement... the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favouring a nomadic system of growth and propagation.'²

...the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the original source of 'things' and looks towards the pinnacle or conclusion of those 'things.' A rhizome, on the other hand, is characterized by 'ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.' Rather than narrativize history and culture, the rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a 'rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.'³

'Conducive to rhizomatic growth and nomadic movement',⁴ *TOTO* has resisted fixed trajectories to enable greater heterogeneity, where the clash of what are often disparate entities develop connectivity and lead to new approaches and thinking. A key factor to what we would claim is the success of the project has been that inquiry is centred within each participant's artistic practice. This ensures that the underpinning research remains fluid to facilitate new potentialities, where further questions and discourse can emerge through *TOTO*'s overarching platform of research topics. It has created a space for possibility, where multiple interactions can generate knowledge independently. Yet these often exist in a constant state of flux; in an 'in-between' state that should not be fixed through one dominant reading as they are constantly questioned, re-written and change over time.

In its initial development two 'Think Tanks'⁵ were arranged to facilitate exchange between new and existing partner institutions and identify other post-industrial regions that bear industrial histories adjacent to those associated with Stoke-on-Trent. The first served as an informal forum where participants reflected upon their earlier research to discuss new ideas for future collaborations. Experts from the fields of anthropology and cultural theory⁶ were invited to lead on core discussions to contextually extend and evaluate existing research strands developed in phase one (see *Ashmolean Papers*, 2017, pp 14-16 for a detailed description).⁷ Following a further period of reflection and development, a second Think Tank⁸ confirmed institutional entry points and new research strands. Phase two of *TOTO* consolidated further commonalities of discourse for exploration that include: the contemporary ruin and ruination; raw material and the role of the artist in a non-art space. It aimed to identify relevant approaches and further contextualisation of these topics through an engagement with new sites and projects coordinated via the critical perspectives of the different institutions.

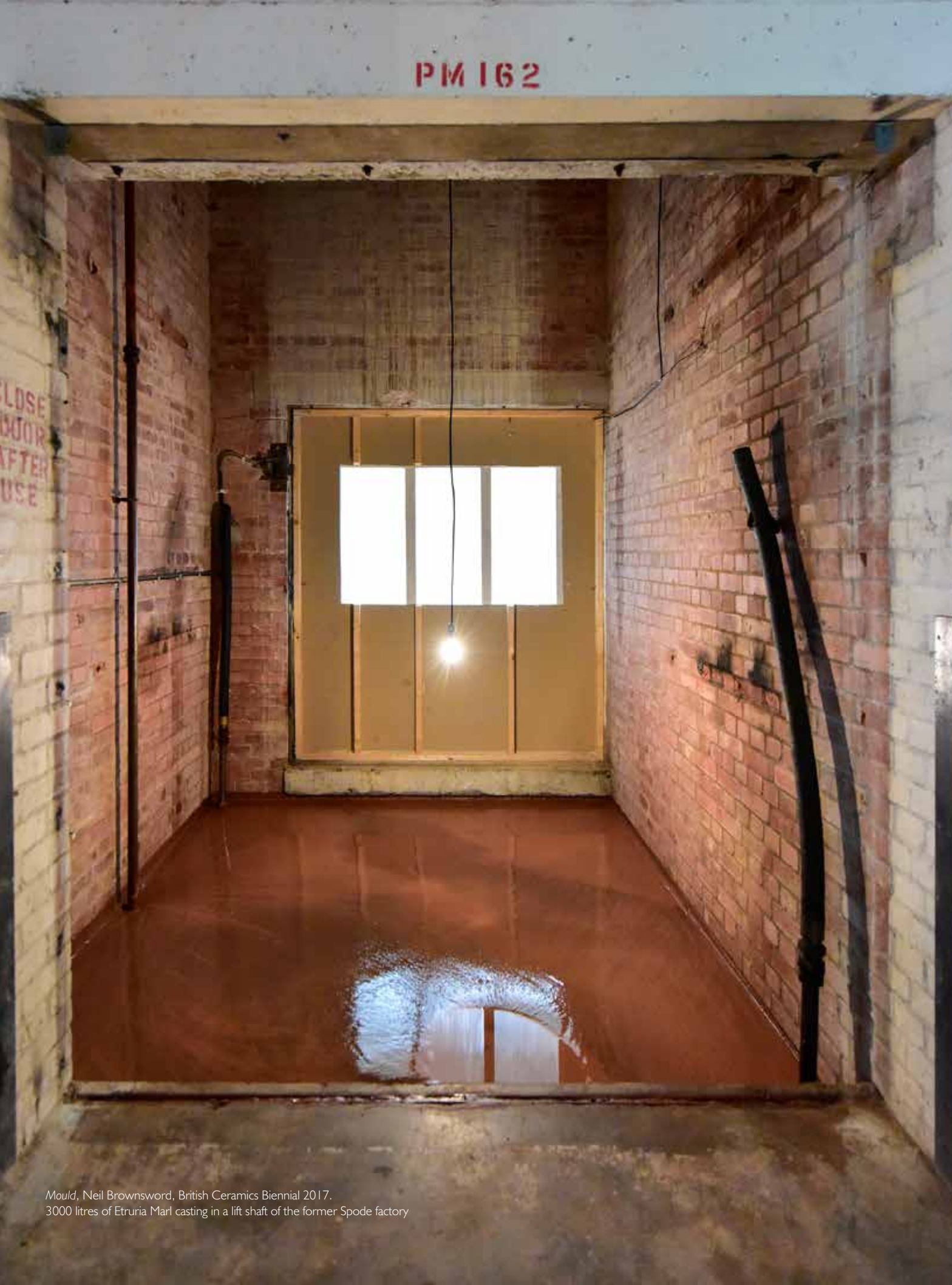
The Contemporary Ruin and Ruination

Often tainted by associations with urban exploration and ruin porn, exploring the contemporary ruin has proved a highly provocative strand of investigation that has demanded further detailed interrogation. Experiencing first-hand or through images, the direct consequences of failed economies - loss, decay, disinvestment, as cultural geographer Tim Edensor explains, 'offers an escape from excessive order... They're marginal spaces filled with old and obscure objects. You can see and feel things that you can't in the ordinary world.'⁹ The physicality of working with post-industrial sites through recurrent fieldwork has developed an intimacy that elicits new understandings and connections to complex realities that, as Edensor states, 'create a relationship with the past, to produce a history that's not been museumised or curated by experts.' Aware of the dangers of slipping into voyeuristic/aesthetic gratification, objectification or 'facile nostalgia', *TOTO* re-connects derelict landscapes through an interrogation of their broader contexts that include historical, socio-economic, geographic, psychological and cultural associations.

The ruin is often perceived as a venerated form of decay positioned in the respected traditions of art and culture. Romanticised and memorialised throughout the Renaissance, Neo-Classical and Romantic periods, it has endured as a common trope within art history. Recently the ruin has re-emerged as a prominent area of artistic and cultural discourse, with surveys by the likes of curator Brian Dillon (*Ruin Lust*, Tate Britain, 2014), Tim Edensor (*Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*, 2005) and urban sociologist Alice Mah (*Industrial Ruination, Community and Place*, 2012). The latter have negotiated the idea of ruination as a 'lived process' in the context of deindustrialisation. Mah frames this analysis through 'landscape, place and legacy', defining landscape as an 'ensemble of material and social practices, and as symbolic representations of these practices.'¹⁰ She conceptualises the legacy of ruination to theories of living memory, defined as 'people's present-day memories of a shared past, as opposed to official memory or collective memory.'¹¹ *TOTO* has critically engaged with the stories and lives of communities inhabiting the 'in-between' spaces of post-industrial change to uncover repositories of lost knowledge and first-hand perspectives where, in the context of regeneration, there 'is often an undue and unseemly haste to obliterate the past.'¹² Whilst Mah's work explores the relationships between industrial ruination and its specific contexts and geographies, Tim Edensor reflects on industrial ruins as spaces of 'otherness' that signify an alternative to the dominant over-regulated cities of capitalist progress:

*Though they may be conceived as signs of economic decline and stasis, these everyday ruins may be positively construed in that they add to the historical, sensual and aesthetic qualities of the city. These traces of ruination are rarely heralded, signposted and interpreted by heritage professionals, but the absences they signify can be sensed, conjectured about and affectively communicated. They are not the subjects of official or expert accounts. Instead they supplement, and perhaps challenge these narratives in offering a different engagement with the past.'*¹³

Contesting the 'notion that ruins are spaces of waste, that contain nothing of value and that they are saturated with negativity',¹⁴ Edensor considers their effervescent materiality as, 'emergent mosaics of various temporalities...subject to continuous re-composition through the accumulation of overlapping traces.'¹⁵ Encountering sites of disorderly material excess open to processes of mutability, has confronted participants with a multitude of artefacts, spaces and traces of history, whose interpretations have offered perspectives that delve beyond simple narratives of abandon and the abject. Autoethnographic methods, anecdotal and personal experiences have connected these entropic processes to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings, that intersect what Mah describes as 'narratives of exceptionalism.'¹⁶



Mould, Neil Brownsword, British Ceramics Biennial 2017.
3000 litres of Etruria Marl casting in a lift shaft of the former Spode factory

Raw Material

Recent shifts towards materiality in contemporary art offer new insights and possibilities of how to understand and develop reflections around 'raw material'. *TOTO* contributes to this dialogue through its focus on site-specificity. Through this strand, participants explored a much more expanded and detailed understanding of what constitutes a raw material in a post-industrial landscape, with specific focus on ceramic production in Europe. Initially the appropriation of the post-industrial site as raw material was explored, whereby its tangible post-production infrastructure and its related landscape were not seen as 'concluded' material heritages through their state of abandon, but as active ciphers that can be constantly remade in the present. *TOTO* also considered the human impact upon a site, and how the residues of activities such as manufacture blend into and contribute a new 'stratum' of raw materials that remain fluid and open to constant change.

The liminal space where raw materials and the immaterial intersect, evident in numerous performative works, has also been a point of departure explored by several participating artists. Yet when dealing with the practice of delegated or outsourced performance¹⁷ the ethical implications of appropriating 'surrogate bodies' and professions as raw material, have yielded the need for greater critical reflection. Since the 1990s artists including Jeremy Deller, Annika Eriksson and Santiago Sierra have adopted the strategy of using other people as their medium to carry out performances within the context of the gallery.¹⁸ Here much debate has centred upon the politics of representation and the uneven power dynamics between performers/spectators/artist through such collaborations. Although singular authorship is questioned through such collaborations, it remains the 'celebrity' artist who inevitably obtains the recognition for such work. *TOTO* has considered and built upon such complex questions through works that have evolved out of site-specific practices that entail rigorous research with particular communities. Whether it be the staged 'soft rebellions' - dancing, eating or applauding of Detroit tenants (Brown); or disruptions of endangered craft knowledge retained by former industrial artisans from Stoke-on-Trent (Brownsword) - both hire or deal with particular social groups. Yet, does this assurance of authenticity through its 'packaging' as a work of art, reduce underlying socio-political motives to mere aesthetic effect; or does it mediate a more nuanced understanding of everyday social realities that challenge the status quo? By delegating the control of work to the performers are they empowered through the artists' instructions/reconfiguration of their labour; or is their agency confined by just other hierarchical systems governed by financial remuneration? How does the social status of various sites affect or influence audience interactivity with context specific performative work? Despite the intentionality of the artist, does the culturally endorsed site reduce works grounded in their social context to spectacle or mere entertainment? Or, does the immediacy of first-hand experience offer an emotional experience through direct proximity with embodiments of knowledge, in an age where many of us remain disconnected or distanced from the sophistications of human endeavour?

Shifts from interactions with physical matter and embodied action to the 'energy' of the immaterial¹⁹ in the digital realm, have also raised many issues concerning virtual experience of site and its post-production materiality (Brownsword, Harper, Våge Berge). Through the partial digitisation of historic spaces and post-industrial archives whose future remains uncertain, a computerised surrogate surrenders physical experience for new modes of accessibility. This calls into question, somewhat contentiously, the need for 'actuality' in sites where its progress remains hindered by heritage protocol. Yet, is the immediacy of the digital facsimile or ability to encounter sites remotely any substitute for 'physical presence' of the site and its materials, where knowledge is gained through tactile and emotive experience? Does the digital remediation of material memory and the associated histories of such sites restricted by the 'passive gaze' enhance or



Factory, Neil Brownsword, 2017. Performative installation with Paul Holdway at the former Spode site

limit our understanding? Are the immaterial forces of the virtual essential to our 'conception of the real and how the virtual constitutes the real'?²⁰

The Role of the Artist in a Non-Art Space

Discussions surrounding the ethical practice of working site specifically throughout the project, have defined 'the role of art and the role of the artist in a non-art space' which has underpinned much of this research. 'Non-art space' is a term developed out of this research and builds upon Marc Auge, Robert Smithson and Miwon Kwon's discourse around place/space and non-site/place/space. The term 'art space' is understood to be familiar spaces and places where art resides - the studio, gallery, museum or public square. With the 'non' prefix, it introduces an unfamiliarity - a liminality, a place where art and artists don't have a pre-negotiated role. *TOTO* has contended with the notions of 'outsider' and 'artist from a position of privilege,' and remains sensitive to the problematics of spectacle and objectification when dealing with sites and communities affected by deindustrialisation. It has tried to consciously avoid the aestheticisation of socio-economic collapse through its emic perspectives and with the rigour apparent in participants' continued return to local contexts - spaces, situations and people. It considers reflections on the role of the artist and implications of socially engaged art and site-specific practice as discussed by cultural critics and commentators such as Clare Bishop and artist Theaster Gates.

Through participatory and relational art practices evident in individual projects, numerous debates have arisen which encompass issues surrounding the artist in a post-colonial perspective; the artist as social worker, and arts relation or obligation to sustainability and regeneration. Particularly in the 'ceramics field' the ethical

scrutiny and discussion of these matters has been relatively absent. Throughout *TOTO*, discussions concerning the ethics of working site specifically have included: How can the trauma of a site be considered/dealt with? With relational practices how do artists deal with the use of people as 'raw material' in their practice? Is the artist instrumental to reinventing place through challenging homogenous and prescriptive visions of post-industrial futures; or more concerned with self-indulgent practices which have 'little to do with present lived experiences and social realities'?²¹

This publication represents a diverse assemblage of reflections and critical perspectives from both invited scholars and artists/participants²² which deal with many of the questions and paradoxes that have emerged through the second phase of *Topographies of the Obsolete* (2015-2020). It comprises of texts that elucidate contexts and methods that overlap and deviate from points of tangency, to yield a polyvocal exploration of post-industrial sites and situations through the divergent and fluid perspectives of artistic research.

Neil Brownsword and Anne Helen Mydland

Professors, Project Leaders and Curators

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- ⁶ Invited scholars included Prof. Maris Gillette, Prof. Malcolm Miles and heritage activist Danny Callaghan, together with academics from collaborating partner institutions
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- ²² Partner institutions for phase two include Staffordshire University; Bucks New University; Sheffield Hallam University; Nottingham Trent University; and HEAD, Geneva School of Art and Design.



Introduction: The Salvage Business

Laura Breen

In 2005 Neil Brownsword produced an installation titled *Salvage Series*, which meditated on the fate of the embodied knowledge of former factory workers in his native Stoke-on-Trent. A later iteration of that work evolved into a four-artist exhibition called *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay* at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima). Those three intersecting themes; loss, salvage and possibility, form the core of Brownsword's works, serving as anchor points for discussion and the heritage they produce.

The term 'salvage' evokes scenes of scavengers picking apart a building that is about to be demolished. Whilst some parts may be deployed as they were intended, others become part of something entirely new. Loss looms large, yet materials that remain useful are repurposed for contemporary need, rather than being cast aside. This process not only describes Brownsword's approach to research, but also resonates with the tone of recent texts that characterise heritage as an ongoing negotiation between material and immaterial actors and past, present and future.¹

Taking the heritage of his hometown as subject and material, Brownsword's work is enmeshed with initiatives including the British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) and the development of the former Spode factory, which are central to Stoke-on-Trent City Council's ambitions for cultural regeneration. Such exercises are often part of the production of what Laurajane Smith has christened 'Authorized Heritage Discourse' (AHD), which attempts to package local heritage up as a manageable asset.² However, the spaces and memories they grapple with are contentious. Although companies such as Emma Bridgewater and Burgess and Leigh have successfully capitalised on the area's history to brand their 'heritage' products, the local economy is still suffering the after-effects of the decline of the industry that once provided jobs for half of the city's workforce.³ The abandoned buildings and remnants of activity that pepper the landscape are physical reminders of this shift and its continued repercussions.

Writing about other former industrial heartlands that are poised between dereliction and transformation, Alice Mah has described sites produced by capital abandonment as part of the 'lived process' of industrial ruination.⁴ She contends that they are not wasted, but can play an important role in the formation of collective memory. Navigating this terrain, Brownsword is mindful of AHD's propensity to disrupt that process by privileging concrete sites over less tangible ones. As Smith has warned, doing so naturalises the exclusions that are inherent in discursive formation, presenting heritage as a fait accompli, which cannot be renegotiated.⁵ Over the past five years Brownsword has staged a series of active enquiries that demonstrate that it can. Foregrounding sites of knowledge that remain after factory closures, these works illuminate the processual and constructed nature of heritage and its capacity to act in the present.

Re-apprenticed

The story of Brownsword's transition from industrial trainee to contemporary artist and educator is well-rehearsed. Following in the footsteps of his forebears, he worked in the Wedgwood factory as an apprentice modeller in the 1980s, later moving to the Design department before taking up a place at art school.⁶ Whilst he quit his job, he has never truly left the ceramics industry. Instead, his research has served as a means of negotiating ruination on a personal and local level.

Over the years, Brownsword has continually revisited the factory in literal and conceptual terms. For his PhD (2006), he went back to Wedgwood to interview and film factory workers. Using the process of making and talking to elicit stories,

he created space in which his subjects could articulate themselves in ways that were more closely aligned with modes of knowledge production within the factory. As his career has progressed, he has become increasingly engaged with the heritage potential of these transactions and their value.

In 2015, nearly three decades after he left, Brownsword made a spiritual return to the factory, re-apprenticing himself to copper plate engraver Paul Holdway, flower maker Rita Floyd and china painter Anthony Challiner in order to explore the complex transfer of tacit knowledge between master and apprentice. Once more, he recorded hours of film footage; this time editing it to spotlight the nuance concealed within repetitive movement. The resultant film was shown on a loop in Stoke-on-Trent's former Spode Factory during the BCB, in the V&A Museum's Raphael Gallery and at the Ashmolean Museum, alongside 'live observations' in which the former factory artisans performed the acts of making they once undertook on a daily basis.

Within the factory system, workers played defined roles in a number of carefully choreographed production sequences, only to be cut adrift when the ceramics factories they worked in were deemed economically unviable. By breaking down seemingly simple, repeated processes through video, Brownsword focuses the visitor's attention on the worker's skill and dexterity – the facture rather than the product. He asks us to look afresh at the actors and their capacities and consider how we might recast them. If, as Mieke Bal has argued, acts of exposition are discursive acts, which gesture towards something and say 'look! – that's how it is!'⁷, Brownsword's vignettes compelled us to reappraise our relationship with industrial ceramics.

Each venue represented a different kind of AHD. Firstly, Brownsword capitalised on Spode's liminal status as a place that had not yet been fully claimed as a heritage site. Opening up the abandoned factory to both potential foragers and heritage professionals, he directed their eyes to the riches that lay inside and the finite time they had to step in and rescue them. Those imperilled treasures were not objects to be whisked away to museum storerooms, but embodied repertoires of skills that must be used in order to maintain them.

In the V&A's Raphael Gallery, Brownsword's presentation spoke to another value scheme. There, the artisans worked before the products of the famous Renaissance studio system in which talented artists learnt at the foot of an acclaimed master. Shoring up the myth of the singular genius, the painters' names were largely lost to history, just as those of industrial artisans are often subsumed by a brand. Here the bit-part actors took centre stage instead. Moreover, sited in 'the world's leading museum of art and design,' it challenged the way in which museums, as what Bourdieu has labelled 'agents of consecration', focus their preservationist efforts on artefacts.⁸

The Ashmolean, which prides itself on being the world's first public museum, provided an equally loaded frame. Like the V&A's event, it consigned 'human endeavour' to a singular intervention, deployed to re-interpret the object, re-centring material heritage in the process. Juxtaposing spectacularised making with its historic displays, the museum claimed *Factory: Re-apprenticed* 'reconnects its esteemed collection back to the complexities of human endeavour, and offers rare insight into numerous threatened skills in action.'⁹ However, as the visitors' eyes moved from artisan to display case, it also exposed a lack in the museum's existing approach and its complicity in creating that disconnect in the first place. Adding a further layer of complexity, the three artisans were joined by Jon Gravid, the mould-maker to whom Brownsword was apprenticed at Wedgwood. Working before a film Brownsword made of him at work prior to his redundancy some thirteen years earlier, his presence raised questions about hierarchies of artistic expertise.



Fig. 1. *Factory*, with James Adams, Icheon World Ceramic Centre, South Korea, 2017

Factory

As Floyd made her flowers during *Re-apprenticed* observations, Brownsword instructed her to discard the exquisitely executed confections, leaving them to accumulate in a pile. The growing monument gave physical form to the wasted embodied knowledge that accompanied factory closures. Denied the chance to fulfil their potential, to give seed to future growth, the blooms were rendered impotent. This was a performance that would gain extra poignancy in its next iteration.

In 2015, when Brownsword won the Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennial (GICB) prize, it led to an invitation to return to Korea for the next Biennial with a work that showcased 'UK innovation and excellence.'¹⁰ *Factory* - the resultant installation - centred on six performances which foregrounded different modes of ceramic expertise. Providing an opportunity to build on *Re-apprenticed* and engage with the ideas articulated in the prize-winning work, *National Treasure*, it brought Stoke-on-Trent's heritage into collision with a different system of cultural value.

Korea was at the forefront of the campaign that led UNESCO to issue Guidelines for the Establishment of National 'Living Human Treasures' Systems in 1993 and now grants bearers of intangible cultural properties the status of National Living Treasure.¹¹ However, the UK is not amongst the 178 countries and states that have endorsed or ratified The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) to date.¹² Advocating support for 'persons who possess to a very high degree the knowledge and skills required for performing or recreating specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage,' the guidelines recognise the fact that, once depleted, those cultural resources are lost forever.

Addressing these ideas, Smith has argued that all heritage is intangible – it is brought into being through a series of constitutive acts, which make and re-make it.¹³ Alert to this, Brownsword used *Factory* as a platform to illuminate the losses incurred through the British government's disregard for intangible knowledge and forge an alternative vision of industrial heritage. Within this vista, Floyd made and discarded her blooms against a backdrop of two looped films from 2016, which showed scenes of former sites of production. The artisans appeared vibrantly alive in contrast to the locations they captured, challenging the notion that workers become 'redundant' when the factories they work in close. In Korea, where the master-apprentice relationship was revered, the squandering of this knowledge appeared as obscene as letting a historic building decay might to UK audiences.

Working side-by-side at another workstation, modeller and mould-maker James Adams and Brownsword created plaster moulds of partially formed moon jars made by Korean master potter, Handoyo Kwangsu Seo (Fig. 1). Constructed by joining two wheel-thrown halves together, the seams of moon jars bulge when they are fired due to shrinking and sagging. This creates a visible join and results in irregularities that the leading lights of the British studio pottery movement lauded as markers of a state of unconsciousness that Western artists had lost.¹⁴ Also characterised by their seams, but marked by their uniformity, industrial mould-made ceramics were long regarded as the antithesis of good craftsmanship. However, as Tanya Harrod has observed, although studio craft was once defined in opposition to industry, the distancing effect of industrial decline has provided opportunities to look back and revalue associated skills.¹⁵ In the sharp focus of the gallery lights, the knowledge deployed by the mould makers – the process of gradual refinement – was made manifest. This was not machinic replication, it was translation.

The direction of flow was reversed at the next workstation, where Korean master ceramicists Shinhyun Cho, Yongjun Jo and Wonjeong Lee applied their

much-heralded skills to the moulded prototypes Brownsword created during his period of re-apprenticeship. This time, the Korean artisans performed the translation, using knowledge passed down from previous generations to transform objects made with skills gained in the same manner. Like the moon jar performance, this performance pivoted on the dialogue between East and West, which is a key feature of industrial production and studio craft discourse. Conditioned to read Korean heritage as superior to the British industrial, these pairings forced viewers to reconsider the logic of their own attitudes to heritage.

Recalling enactments of endangered crafts in ethnographic displays, live demonstrations can objectify making processes, fixing them in the past so that they can be managed and reconciled with AHD. Yet, the performances Brownsword orchestrated were not comfortable spectacles. Visitors were faced with scenes that neither met expectations of heritage nor conformed to the demonstrations of skill and virtuosity that are central to studio pottery culture. Locating factory artisans beside 'national treasures' and blurring their practices, Brownsword prodded at the distinction between them. Confronting the premise that innovation and excellence demand a tabula rasa, the haptic knowledge of factory workers was legible as prized cultural asset, which had more to contribute to its future – living heritage that should be cultivated.

Pattern Book

Brownsword met the limitations of more conventional approaches to cultural treasure during his V&A residency in 2017-18. Invited to produce work that responded to the museum's collections, he was, again, inspired by objects that captured the transfer of ideas between East Asia and British industry. The traces of human intervention he found on objects produced in Staffordshire factories, such as the irregular painting of a child worker, also piqued his interest. However, the museum's mission to hold and preserve objects 'in perpetuity' for future generations posed a barrier to his attempts to excise and frame these aspects through scanning and casting. Reluctant to bend his ideas to these object-centric ideals, Brownsword built his own collection of 18th and 19th century Staffordshire ware through eBay purchases, which he was free to manipulate at will.

Montaging together his rudimentary scans, Brownsword assembled a further collection of fragments of detail that had captured his attention, using the format of the pattern book as a conceptual scaffold. On the pages of pattern books (the official records of the designs generated by each factory) now-familiar motifs sit side-by-side with others that never saw the light of day. They catalogue ideas and responses to different influences, offering glimpses of the unseen creative processes that lay behind factory production. Replete with irregularities and not traditionally decorative, Brownsword's pattern book underscored the active, processual nature of translation. Speaking of possibilities – of options explored and abandoned, of trial and error, it challenged the preconception that industrial designs merely replicated superior East Asian products. His pattern book didn't serve as a series of preliminary sketches, validated by its relationship to the complete: it represented several of the endless possible reconfigurations of artisanal knowledge. Rather than *being* the heritage, his objects were a toolkit with which to re-negotiate the past, constructing a version of heritage that served contemporary needs.

Compiling his selections into new patterns using digital imaging, Brownsword created prints that had direct relationships to the objects he took them from. Then, he turned his lens – literally – on the distinction between digital print and the methods used on the original objects. Returning to the observation format, he invited Holdway to the V&A to produce a copper plate engraving based on his prints live in the gallery. As he rendered his version, Holdway gave form to what anthropologist Tim Ingold has described as the lived experience of knowing as an active and embodied process.¹⁶ With a microscopic camera trained on his

hands and the feed projected onto a screen, visitors could watch him capture the digital imperfections of the print in minute detail. Translating elements that were, themselves, translations, he made a feature of the blemish. In doing so, he drew attention to the level of skill that underpinned industrial perfection. Whilst the child painter whose work Brownsword had zoomed in on had erred, Holdway had honed his performance over years in order to achieve this level of mastery. Wrenching objects out of existing histories and back into production, Brownsword once more highlighted the losses the UK's narrow approach to preservation engenders. One might endlessly revisit and reappraise the material in a museum repository, but Holdway's knowledge will eventually die with him unless it is kept alive.

Externalising the Archive

Recently, Brownsword has started to assemble another digital pattern book in response to a threat to a different aspect of Stoke-on-Trent's heritage: over 70,000 moulds from the mid to late 1800s. Housed in the former Spode factory, they are largely stacked up in rooms that are closed to the public. In variable condition, the moulds have no inventory and their sheer mass posed a challenge to the already-overstretched local museum services in terms of care and storage. In this respect, Brownsword's latest foray into the former Spode factory's seemingly endless repository of memories could also be his most fruitful. He has an opportunity to mitigate the losses and play an active role in opening it up for future use.

His conundrum will resonate with museum staff across the country who have been forced to 'rationalise' existing collections in order to accommodate new acquisitions. Although most museums now have collections policies which delimit what they take, earlier generations were often so keen to preserve, they accepted duplicate objects or others that may never see the light of day because they don't fit with their museum's contemporary focus. In response, the Museums Association created a disposal toolkit, which offered a series of steps institutions could follow to streamline their collections in an ethical manner.¹⁷ Nonetheless, it spotlights a fundamental issue for AHD, which Brownsword's work may help to address.

Faced with this dilemma, the City Archaeology Service selected a core sample of the moulds for retention on the grounds of their age, uniqueness or illustrative value in relation to technological progress and production processes. The others, which were deemed by some to have 'no historical value' remain at Spode, their fate undetermined. Yet, although they weren't made to be looked at, like archaeological relics, they can tell us about the society that used them. Without their compatriots, the core selection will only ever present a partial view of ceramic production – one that centres on the final object, officialised history and expert recognition.

For Brownsword, the moulds that could not be linked to known pieces, or which never went into production, still form an important record of failure and experimentation and offer critical insights into the durational nature of the design process. Adamant that this aspect of the past should not be lost to future generations, he has begun to explore how the collection might be archived in ways that are in keeping with the forms of knowledge they encapsulate. Inspired by the freedom digital technology afforded him during his V&A residency, Brownsword's focus is, first and foremost, on access and awareness.

Taking the core sample as a starting point, Brownsword worked initially with experts from UCL and Brighton University, and more recently with colleagues from Staffordshire to explore how the collection might be archived, both physically and digitally. The team was particularly keen to explore the potential of creating digital surrogates; could modern technology capture the minute traces of



Fig. 2. *Externalising the Archive*, 2019. Digitisation of moulds held at the former Spode Factory

human activity? These experiments furnished them with a better understanding of the archive, the potential of 3D scanning technology and the challenges they might face.¹⁸ In contrast to the V&A archive, where concerns about preservation overrode the benefits of access, here the team was able to set its own parameters, re-imagining the ceramic collection and its function.

With an eye on the funding, resources and time it would take to archive them satisfactorily, Brownsword also used the 2019 BCB as a platform to generate interest in the moulds. Elucidating the complex knowledge that lay behind their fabrication, he juxtaposed the forms with films of mould and model making. The installations he created showed off their architectural profiles. He also enlisted virtual reality to give visitors access to rooms that were closed to the public. As ever, these statements gestured to the value of the moulds and the legacy of factory labour, to bring critical attention to their potential – and to their fate, which still hangs in the balance.

On Usefulness

Whilst some might dismiss Brownsword's concern with the past as regressive, as Tim Strangleman discusses elsewhere in this volume, critical nostalgia can allow us to reflect on the here and now.¹⁹ Brownsword isn't suggesting we should go back to the 'good old days' by refusing to move on, but asking us to think about how neglecting the past might impoverish the reserves future generations draw on as they establish their place in the world.

Strangleman has drawn on the literary idea of the half-life of deindustrialisation to address the ongoing ripples the loss of the ceramics industry created in Staffordshire.²⁰ Like Mah's notion of ruination as a lived process, it describes the continued impact de-industrialisation has on the lives and identities people construct for themselves today. Acknowledging this imbrication, Brownsword works as part of the local community to re-model its collective heritage. Whether producing artworks, staging exhibitions or exploring alternative approaches to preservation, he is immersed in an iterative process of heritage production. As he does so, he creates what Kathleen Stewart has labelled 'bloom spaces,' which bring those he engages into a different, affective and connected relationship with the world and allows them to conceive it afresh.²¹

Generating new possibilities, the heritage sites these acts propagate have played their part in the re-evaluation of industrial production. Placing the knowledge of

Stoke-on-Trent's industrial artisans on pedestals alongside the riches held in our museums and Korea's national living treasures, they challenged the rationale of a Heritage Craft Association Red List of Endangered Crafts that included brick making and tile making but failed to accommodate china flower making.²² The fact that the Association, which Brownsword is now working with, added pottery (industrial) to that list in 2019 is testament to his perseverance.²³ He has also made a significant contribution to the reappraisal of industrial artisanship within craft discourse. Indeed, *Factory* was shortlisted for the Woman's Hour Craft Prize in 2019 – something that would have been inconceivable when he started his PhD.

As for salvage? Brownsword's input to the BCB has also helped to make the Spode site 'part of an ambitious plan to develop a hub of creativity which will revitalise Stoke.'²⁴ Housing a museum, and 43 artist studios, it will play a key role in the city's regeneration and an outlet for future creativity. Yet in many ways, his entire resumé is an extended salvage series. With each investigation, he helps to create and replenish a resource bank that he and others can deploy as they see fit. If heritage is discursive, then he maintains a threatened aspect of our collective cultural vocabulary. Throwing open the doors to his salvage yard, he invites people to seize the materials on offer and build anew. Which returns us to possibility... and to hope.

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- ² Smith, L., *Uses of Heritage*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 305.
- ³ The Work Foundation, *Transforming North Staffordshire*, London: The Work Foundation, 2008.
- ⁴ Mah, A., 'Memory, Uncertainty and Industrial Ruination,' *Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34.2, 2010, p. 399.
- ⁵ Smith, L., *Uses of Heritage*, p. 3.
- ⁶ Brownsword, N., 'Action – Reflection: Tracing Personal Developments,' *Interpreting Ceramics*, 2, n.p. <http://interpretingceramics.com/> (accessed 12 November, 2012).
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- ¹⁰ British Council, *UK/Korea 2017-18 Creative Futures* (London: British Council, 2017), n.p.
- ¹¹ UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Establishment of National 'Living Human Treasures' Systems*, Paris: UNESCO, UNESCO Section of Intangible Heritage; Seoul, Korea: Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 1993, p.3.
- ¹² UNESCO, *The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Paris: UNESCO, 2003.
- ¹³ Smith, L., *Uses of Heritage*, p. 3.
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- ²⁰ Strangleman, T., 'Introduction: Obsolescence and Industrial Culture,' in *Topographies of the Obsolete: Ashmolean Papers*, ed. by Mydland, A.H. and Brownsword, N., Stoke-on-Trent: Topographies of the Obsolete Publications, 2017, p. 7.
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- ²² Heritage Crafts Association, *The Radcliffe Red List of Endangered Crafts*, Edale, Derbyshire: Heritage Crafts Association, 2017.
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Re-apprenticed

Neil Brownsword

Re-apprenticed interrogates aspects of industrial craft knowledge considered outmoded or economically unviable for contemporary ceramic manufacture.¹ In 2015 I apprenticed myself to a senior generation of artisans hired to pass on expertise from their former practices. By deconstructing the skills of a china flower maker, copper plate engraver for ceramic print and china painter, I set out to elucidate overlooked forms of procedural and material knowledge. Culminating in a multimedia installation, *Re-apprenticed* comprised of a looped film projection of china enamel preparation (Fig. 1); taxonomies of component parts that constitute china flower making, and one of my apprentice copper plate engravings. In autumn 2015, the Victoria & Albert Museum invited me to develop a live version of *Re-apprenticed* in their Raphael Gallery, where near redundant factory know-how was performed alongside treasures of the High Renaissance.

The recovery and analysis of past material culture through a re-engagement with archives, obsolete technologies and living testimony has characterised much contemporary art in recent years.² *Re-apprenticed* explores a similar sense of historical revisionism, whereby it attempts to preserve and construct new insights into explicit knowledge through its revelation of neglected ceramic industry crafts. Articulated in response to recent decades of deindustrialisation in North Staffordshire's ceramic sector, it raises questions surrounding the value and contemporary relevance of intergenerational skills cultivated by instruction, and how these can be elicited and regenerated into new modes of expression by investigating their transmission and acquisition.

Utilising the vantage point of 'insider' from my former employment in the ceramic industry, together with methods of observation, repetition and imitation - analogous to those established in anthropology,³ I undertook twelve months of fieldwork examining and film archiving internalized procedures integral to the implementation of specialist know-how. Systems of preparation, timing, and tool use were appropriated in their intermediary stages via film, metal and clay to expose nonchalant repetitive actions and obscure nuances of dexterity. Reactivating implicit memory through the transference of haptic and material knowledge demonstrated a mnemonic device to retrieve intimate oral histories that recount socialisation into work culture, 'insider' tricks of the trade and industrial transitions resulting from the impact of globalisation. My active participation as apprentice offered innovative insights outside verbal/linguistic representation, into the embodied knowledge of a rapidly disappearing culture of labour.

Re-apprenticed challenged the dismissive/anti-progressive charge of nostalgia when dealing with the industrial past, demonstrating how artistic reinterpretation and representation of intangible heritage can create new synergies within and expand understanding of archival practice. It was endorsed by funders including Arts Council England (2015), British Ceramics Biennial (2015), Bergen Academy of Art and Design (2016). An object-based output *Relic* from the project was also acquired by the V&A 'as a significant addition to the Studio Ceramics Collection,' (2016).

¹ Initially developed as a commission for the 2015 British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent, *Re-apprenticed: Observation* has been disseminated at a variety of venues including: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2015; Raphael Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015; *Material Language*, Roche Court Sculpture Park and Gallery, Salisbury, 2016; *Re-Apprenticed: Factory*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2016; *First Central China Biennale* at the Henan Museum, 2016-17.

² Characterised by the works of Marc Dion, Tacita Dean and Jeremy Deller.

³ See Coy, M. W. (Ed.). SUNY series in the anthropology of work. *Apprenticeship: From Theory to Method and Back Again*. State University of New York Press, 1989.

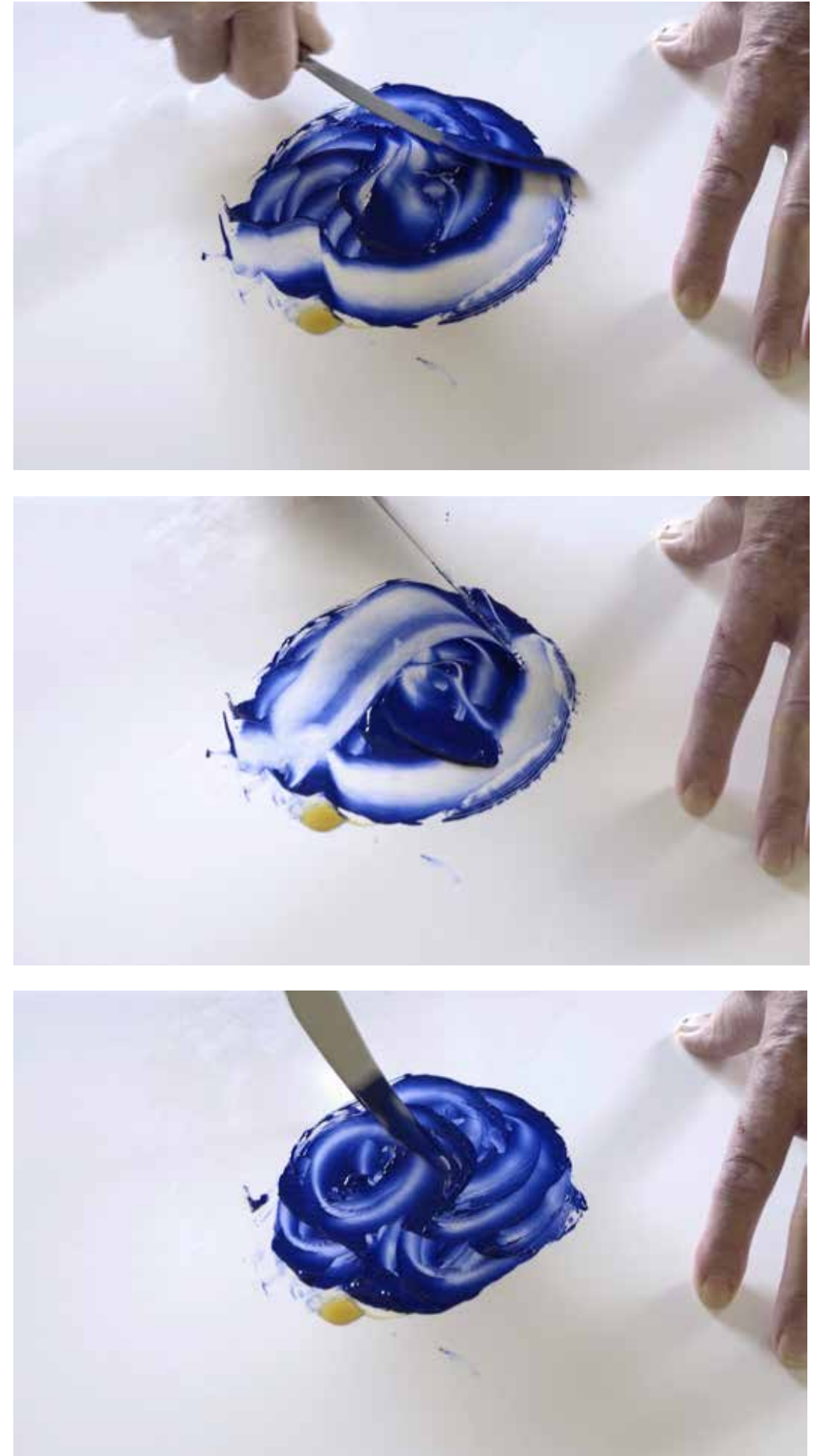


Fig. 1. *Re-apprenticed*, with Anthony Challiner, film loop (14 mins 44 secs), 2015

Watching the Hands (and Other Unregulated Movements in Real-Time)

Ezra Shales

The much-vaunted 'social turn' in contemporary artistic practice towards non-hierarchical and participatory experiences - performance, 'dematerialisation,' and post-studio practice - is oddly social without necessarily being socially-engaged; it is *experience as art*, a reversal of John Dewey's idea of increasing accessibility to creativity. Contemporary operators seem to believe they are engaged in democratisation by deterritorialising and deskilling 'making as learning', but they might only be buying into commercial concepts of access. In many museums and galleries, art experiences in the age of selfies and YouTube become thirty minutes of activities: 'creativity' is uploaded and downloaded online and experientially valid when third hand. For those of us for whom reality television or other types of bitstream exhibitionism is, well, not terribly real, and who still connect to people through work and materiality - activities like preparing a meal, weeding a field, and toe-tapping to a tune - time does not equal or randomise experience. A few minutes is how long it takes to simmer onions. To tend a row of vegetables takes a few hours. A dance can be minutes long or a night go beyond daybreak. These are modes of applied passion often reduced to amateurism by connoisseurs and sometimes even vilified by seemingly friendly Marxists, too, who see leisure and work as cleanly-cut categorical antinomies. To experience production is not the same thing as an 'art experience.' To experience cultural production requires visceral participation and engagement, either through prolonged involved observation or shoulder-deep immersion. Just being there doesn't count. Passionate work and implausibly immersive play both leave true grit under the fingernail, knees and elbows sore, and skin peeling like paint. To actually knead dough or wedge clay or split wood often is a humbling affair for the first dozen days one tries, and that is precisely the sort of thing that seems terribly unfashionable in today's self-televised world. We don't want to endure stumbling or admit to doing so publicly. In a sense, the digital medium has amplified Picasso's quip that he 'never drew like a child': the medium and the methods of broadcasting and reception are not slow enough to happen at a child-like pace.

So what happens in Neil Brownsword's *Re-apprenticed* (2014-2016), in which the artist forsakes his authoritative position as auteur or professor to be a novice learning from a copperplate engraver, a plaster modeller/mould maker, a china flower maker, and a china painter? Yes, this is a train-ride backwards into analogue, not digital culture. On the one hand, we can think of Brownsword's own labour that is transpiring over duration, now for more than a few years. Unlike many of us, he is not staring at the clock and watching the hands for the liberating close of the workday - even professors and students reading this text in an academic setting often have such a punch-the-clock outlook to 'work'. Brownsword is sitting for hours listening to instruction and exemplary demonstration, asking questions and testing out his lessons empirically as he goes, all the while recording the exchanges and labour on hours of footage. One gets the sense he likes being a novice and reducing himself to apprenticeship at the foot of an elder.

So far, all this sounds good, and hands-on: dirt underfoot and flesh pulling on bones instead of more dizzying digitisation. Explicit knowledge is building on top of tacit knowledge in Brownsword's *Re-apprenticed*, and not crowding it out. In fact, Brownsword actually is trying to give as much elbow room to 'knowing by feel' as he can. He constantly points out the rich terminology for states of process in these specialised roles. And these workers comprise factory knowledge built up after three centuries. If Josiah Wedgwood was apprenticed to the 'mysteries and art' of throwing on the potter's wheel, by the time he died in 1795 he and his generation transformed their manufactories into tightly regimented phalanxes of skills: no thrower ever again glazed, no decorator ever again built a saggar or

manned the kiln or emptied it again. Modelling was distinct from casting, transfer printing a job apart from gilding. One of Brownsword's self-appointed mentors, Anthony Challiner explains the consistency of lavender oil in the blue cobalt for underglaze painting has various types of meatiness, and that mixing the dry pigments is a slow process. China flower maker Rita Floyd, explains how the bone china at different companies had specific qualities. Ex-Wedgwood modeller Jonathan Gravil recalls his own education, jumping through layers of time together so that past and present merge: mistakes and mastery are a visual and verbal montage. An unforeseen lump of plaster requires coddling and more patient labour. Copperplate engraver Paul Holdway brings an antiquarian perspective, recounting the varieties of decal and transfer techniques from his father's time at Spode to those of Josiah Spode. The varieties of tacit knowledge are not simple or easily summarised.

What happens when the skilled crew of Rita, Jonathan, Paul, and Tony are set up inside the museum? Do they re-enact the factory or do they resemble a zoological display, like workers tightening the bolts of a Ford at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, the Centennial of Progress? Or do the British factory workers personify technological regression, like dioramas holding caged Native Americans at world's fairs, who 'played Indian' for audiences that wanted potters and basket makers to exist mainly to confirm their own sense of superiority and progress?

Curiously, none of these workers are the sort of ceramic artisan who is usually showcased in a craft context: we have no potter's wheel, which figures as a sexy sensual trope in the film *Ghost*, and a macho tool when used in the manner of Peter Voulkos or Michael Cardew. For most live demonstrations at craft museums and 'heritage' re-enactments, the thrower is a featured performer: rarely is slip casting or moulding plaster hailed as a virtuous skill. These are, in fact, usually seen as anathema to 'folk' traditions, however erroneous that may be. The copperplate engraver, plaster mould maker, flower modeler, and china painter are precisely the sort of specialised artisans associated with the industrialisation and commercialisation of craft. Is Brownsword challenging conventions by honouring these industrial crafts? Yes. Museums in the early twentieth century collected 'Old Spode' and old anything that they could rationalise as artisanal - usually resorting to a cut-off date of 1800. Regal porcelain is a slightly different story, but this rough date often figures in the conceptualisation of Marxist critique and snobbery when generalisations about the degradation of skill and the crafts.¹ Craft-lovers often fall into the 'older-is-purer' conceit, and even quote John Ruskin or William Morris. It is good to return to the *Stones of Venice* every now and then, if only to recall Ruskin's generosity:

It would be well if all students would keep clearly in their mind the real distinction between these words which we use so often, 'Manufacture,' 'Art,' and 'Fine Art.' 'Manufacture' is, according to the etymology and right use of the word, 'the making of any thing by hands,' - directly or indirectly, with or without the help of instruments or machines. Anything proceeding from the hand of man is manufacture; but it must have proceeded from his hand only, acting mechanically, and uninfluenced at the moment by direct intelligence. Then, secondly, Art is the operation of the hand and the intelligence of man together: there is an art of making machinery; there is an art of building ships; an art of making carriages; and so on. All these, properly called Arts, but not Fine Arts, are pursuits in which the hand of man and his head go together, working at the same instant. Then, Fine Art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together. The intellectual spirit of the present day is doing great good in its own way; but the intellect alone is sure to mislead. Our present condition of mind tends too much toward undue exaltation of abstract intellectual speculation, and society will never apprehend the true meaning and use of Fine Art until it gets its heart open.²

Brownsword is honouring 'the hand' and 'the hands': these are manual skills

by the invisible hands that made high-quality skilled products in a key sector of British industry (if measured by national pride, not monetary numbers alone). Brownsword is also honouring the art of making machinery and probing if there actually might still be 'head' and 'heart' in manufacturing jobs - a possibility Ruskin did not rule out, but which was not his focus. His narrowness of understanding or defining 'heart' we can return to momentarily. But Ruskin's warning that 'the intellect alone is sure to mislead' in retrospect can be read as understanding the dangers of explicit knowledge - and is a danger even more prevalent now than in his own day. Art schools in 1850 were not clogging their arteries with theory, degrees, and meta-commentary, but gorging on colonial riches and ingesting the fruitage of empire. Rapture over ornament in art schools and industrial manufacturing was another aspect of Ruskin's age that he despised - and just as much as over-intellectualisation - so Brownsword's artisans stand as a rebuke to Ruskin in many more ways than they epitomise the Victorian's views. Also, in the *Stones of Venice*, Ruskin argued:

*You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanise them.*³

Ruskin was vilifying pin factories, not Wedgwood or Spode, but his anti-industrial attitude is well documented, as was his inveighing against molded ornament: 'Casting ornament is mere trade, not art,' he wrote. China painting Ruskin would have lamented as mere copying, too, and not as a skilled endeavour worth describing as 'fine art'. And few museums have risen beyond such connoisseurship. Rarely do the skills Brownsword has assembled receive aesthetic commentary or museological attention. The art museum generally has not moved beyond the masterwork as an ontology and taxonomy.

Brownsword's fellow Royal College of Art graduates have rarely publicly demurred from Ruskin on the value of slip casting or other ceramic manufacturing skills. Nostalgia for past glory is everywhere, even in Oxford and Cambridge where many colleges maintain allegiance to domestically made tableware. But Brownsword's own tacit knowledge as a factory apprentice in his teenage years and first-hand perception of work in Wedgwood's block and mould shop might be what permits him to esteem these 'hands' as worth watching - and as artistry worth preserving. Many in England do sentimentalise the Potteries of Stoke-on-Trent in a wistful way that Americans reserve for tractors, Chevrolets, and guns. The fact that England's potteries came to compete with the aristocratically-sponsored continental European ones was one large reason that the ceramics sector became a British industry fired up with national pride - and one reason that ceramic skill is valued and not seen as a frilly ornament or expendable artisan.

Recently, in her book *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community* (2016) Jenni Sorkin argues that 'As a live form, ceramics embodies the vibrancy of performance, teaching, and object making through communal practice and collective skill building.'⁴ Her overall thesis is an attempt to pull women and craft out of the shadows of 20th century art history in order to credit potters like Marguerite Wildenhain and Susan Peterson for the 'social turn' in avant-garde fine-art practices. Did the performative components of craft education, and especially in its less institutional formats, give rise or influence the 'happenings' of Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg?, Sorkin suggests. If British patriotic consumption cuts across class lines, Sorkin's location of ceramics as an influential model of egalitarian practices seems hopeful but unlikely to be inclusive of manufacturing artisans, either in England or the United States of America. The porosity, fluidity, and lack of art regulation, especially in terms of monetary values, seems to be unlikely to trickle down to humans and process.



Sorkin ends her book by citing Theaster Gates's Rebuild Foundation in Chicago's 'blighted' South Shore and co-operatives like Mildred's Lane where J. Morgan Puett and Mark Dion have built a place that supports 'an experiential making-doing-thinking process with our fellows, friends, and visitors. It is rigorous and creative domesticating as a highly intuitive aestheticism of all things at all times, in every aspect of life.' The former is an attempt to ward off gentrification with a settlement house that spans entrepreneurship, welfare, job-training, food, and housing. The latter is utopian and typically Anglo-American private equity venture in operating at a remove from urban reality and seeking a rural retreat.

Curiously, the type of 'community building' that I witnessed when Brownsword staged *Re-apprenticed* at Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum was central to tacit knowledge, pivoting off of ceramics as a shared process. Numerous visitors lingered by the workstations of the copperplate engraver Paul (Fig. 1), plaster mould maker Jonathan, flower maker Rita, and china painter Tony. Each of these artisans had distinct levels of comfort and discomfort in being staged. All were very modest about their skill level - perhaps too modest. There were plenty of pottery amateurs who cruised by and got mesmerised watching the hands - or is it 'the hands'? Was the virtuosity demonstrated riveting or was it abstracted to simply be anonymous labour? None of the demonstrating artisans told the visitors to bugger off despite the egocentrism of many comments and questions. Many visitors started talking about relatives who worked in the potteries, visits and factory tours they had made, pots and knickknacks that they owned which might have been made at the factories where these artisans once were employed. But many of the amateur potters talked about themselves as if they were in a confessional or psychiatric session, explaining their travails and loves and personal interests in clay work. A woman with a white fur stole stood beside Rita watching carnations multiply for more than 30 minutes, talking about her own amateur pots and sculpture and asking if Rita thought bone china would be too tricky for her to handle. The values of materiality and class boundaries could be said to vanish in these interactions but not in a cognitively sensitive manner. The performers became objectified more than they were imbricated deeper into the community of the Ashmolean. In fact, one might argue that the museum is inhospitable to active experience and to labour; as a context it preternaturally tends toward epistemological classification. Non-verbal action cannot withstand the force of narratives regarding civilisation and the positivist notion of a graduated ladder of culture. The European figurines that imagineer loin-clothed potters squatting by their wheel cast a story of primitivism into our minds, a story that seems re-enacted by our physical posture in that we look down on most artefacts, seeing them from above. Does this refute Sorkin's thesis or simply describe the socio-economic status of the representative visitor to the Ashmolean - Anglo-Saxon women aged 50-60 who are of independent means. Brownsword's well-intentioned attempt to honour these artisans as national treasures is undermined by the museum as a classificatory scheme but also by the accessibility to clay as a primary school experience. We all share a degree of tacit knowledge, but unfortunately most of us only know the plasticity of clay, not its difficulties and tendency to not follow our scripts. If clay had been a complete mystery or rarity as an experience, would our reverence have been more ready? If visitors had seen a tool and material that they knew nothing about would they classify it less swiftly?

What is most provocative about Sorkin's book is that she locates televised craft as a significant part of its potency-seeing McLuhan's cold medium as having greater potential to influence the world than hermetic events in art museums or art schools. She does not flesh out contemporary hubs of craft as performative rituals in the same way that she sees early public television, which in her eyes was a revolutionary territory before it became commodified. So, the next step in Brownsword's *Re-apprenticed* project is to wonder where and how the footage and objects will be circulated and to what effect. Brownsword's own process of



Fig. 1. *Re-apprenticed*, with Paul Holdway, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford, 2016

writing, full of prescient observations and incisive critiques, might figure large in positioning Rita, Tony, Paul, and Jonathan in the public mind.

The videotaped hours of *Re-apprenticed* prompt many questions and few answers: What good is an embalmed primordial civilisation? Are we witnessing the dissolution of the last remaining closed pathways of guild specialisation and expertise in *Re-apprenticed*, or is it a radical bomb to chuck into the dematerialised art school and prompt scepticism about the human uses of our digital arsenal? Gutenberg's moveable type put countless scribes out of work, but in the 20th century an amateur calligrapher contributed one of the most enduring and original typefaces, *Johnston Sans*. There was not a transmission of tacit knowledge that permitted this creative act. Explicit knowledge swirled in the hands and brain and heart of an artistic autodidact, and then Edward Johnston made us all see the tool of the quill as relevant once again. Am I an elitist to believe I am left waiting to see what Neil Brownsword does with the skills of the copperplate engraver, plaster mould maker, flower maker, and china painter?

Brownsword's *Factory* project at the Ashmolean is a natural offshoot of his *Re-Apprenticed* studio labour. He is testing out his ambition to repurpose accumulated knowledge, asking himself and us to look at ways in which it can be used on a viable platform. *Factory* re-deploys observations made from Rita's systems of quality control, and the knowledge of James Evans - embodying Wedgwood practices - of making moulds of moon jars by a Korean 'Intangible Asset.' Brownsword is montaging together hierarchies of labour in one space, so that our invisible value system and assumed taxonomies might be disrupted. *Re-apprenticed* is an enigmatic and potent work, as it leaves me questioning Roland Barthes's 'Death of the Author' (1977), a text I had long taken as gospel. Is the art museum simply unfit as a stage to harbour human communion? Is it a place for narcissistic introversion, where individuals and nations can appear unfettered and genius apart from its material and social milieus? Meaning becomes clear only over time. But this is fact: all the visitors were watching the hands.

¹ Braverman, H., *Labour and Capital Monopoly: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974. For a corrective see Raphael Samuel, 'Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain', *History Workshop Journal* 3, no. 1, Spring 1977, p. 6-72.

² Ruskin, J., *The Works of John Ruskin*, Volume 5, New York: Alden, 1885, p. 38.

³ Ruskin, J., *The Stones of Venice*, Penguin Books Ltd, 2001, p. 192.

⁴ Sorkin, J., *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 246.



Factory

Neil Brownsword

This invited solo exhibition at the 9th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale (GICB) 2017 was commissioned as a result of receiving the 2015 GICB Grand Prize and endorsed by the British Council Korea's Creative Futures 2017-18 UK/Korea exchange.¹ It involved six performances by ex-ceramic industry artisans and Korean master potters, choreographed to re-evaluate Stoke-on-Trent's post-industrial legacy. Two looped films (2016) that document this period of industrial change, juxtaposed demonstrations of ceramic 'know-how' against a survey of former sites of production.

Through its interrogation of cultural value systems assigned to traditional industrial crafts, this performative installation extends a recent genre of art practice involving live ceramic manufacture in the gallery. Aligned with contemporary contexts that deploy relational structures, implicate the viewer to political situations and socially-engaged acts of temporary skills transference,² *Factory's* use of human interaction as a primary material confronts the impact of globalisation upon North Staffordshire's intangible ceramic heritage.

The indigenous ceramic practices of two ex-factory personnel from Stoke-on-Trent and four Korean artisans were re-choreographed to pose questions surrounding the hierarchies of cultural production, and to re-negotiate value to people and practices displaced by global economics. To avert passive spectator consumption, the rhythmic intricacies of china flower making were disrupted by instructions to discard every made output, forming a linear deposit of waste as metaphor to this marginalised/endangered craft. Objects found deconstructed to protect the intellectual property of former factories in Stoke, were remoulded and put back into production by Korean artisans - each imparting culturally inherited notions of perfection to fragmentary post-industrial discard. Traditional moon jars partially formed with a raw immediacy of touch by a Korean Living National Treasure Kwangsu Seo, were taken into a less revered North Staffordshire craft - mould-making, which standardised production through eradicating traces of human contact.

Factory's collision of two distinct traditions offered new insights into East/West cultural transference, prevalent in ceramic history. By instilling inquiry with ethical sensitivity through innovative methods of reactivating obsolescence, this factory of 'knowledge production, tactile pleasure and non-commercialised materials lay counter to the rampant exploitation of most artists and factories.'³ *Factory's* tour to a post-industrial context, introduced a cross-cultural dimension to the British Ceramics Biennial 2017, enriching Stoke-on-Trent's regeneration initiatives as a centre for ceramic excellence and cultural place making.

Factory was supported by a consortium of funders including Korean Ceramic Foundation; British Council Korea; Arts Council England; and by the British Ceramics Biennial and Korea Culture Centre through its subsequent iterations in the UK.

¹ *Factory*, Special Exhibition Hall, Icheon World Ceramic Center South Korea (solo). 22/4-28/5 2017. Tour to *Place and Practices*, British Ceramics Biennial (UK/Korea exchange) former Spode Factory, Stoke-on-Trent, 23/9-5/11 2017. Selected works from *Factory* have been exhibited in: *Woman's Hour Craft Prize*, 2017 Victoria & Albert Museum, (BBC, Crafts Council and V&A partnership, touring); *60th Faenza Prize*, 30/6-14/10 2018, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche Faenza, Italy; Ceramic Art London, 22-25 March 2018; *Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials*, Kunsthhaus Hamburg, Germany, 11/09-25/11 2018; *FABRIK*, Gustavsbergs Konsthall, Stockholm. 3/10 2019 5/01 2020.

² Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled 2015 (14086 unfired)*; Theaster Gates, *Soul Manufacturing Corporation*, 2011.

³ Shales, E., 'Soil so Good', in *Factory*, Korea Ceramic Foundation, 2017.



Obsolescence and Renewal

Neil Brownsword

Deindustrialisation has a half-life, and like radioactive waste its effects remain long after abandoned factory buildings have been torn down and workers have found new jobs. We see the half-life of deindustrialisation not only in brownfields too polluted for new construction but also in long-term economic struggles, the slow, continuing decline of working-class communities, and internalised uncertainties as individuals try to adapt to economic and social changes. It is not yet clear how long it will take for the influence of deindustrialisation to dissipate, but the half-life of deindustrialisation clearly extends well into the twenty first century.¹

Since the 1970s and 80s, progressive deindustrialisation in the United States and in Western Europe has resulted in many profound social, political and economic transformations across the globe. Displacement of productive industrial capacity has in many cases accelerated urban decline, outmigration and gentrification. High culture has tended to be the universal panacea where policies of regeneration assimilate former sites of production into art venues and cultural spaces, transforming industrial ruins into aestheticised backdrops for leisurely consumption.

Following decades of industrial transition Stoke-on-Trent, the historic capital of British ceramic manufacture, is one such city that today remains at the early phase of its contemporary repurposing. Yet narratives that explore the recent collapse of industry or the communities still affected by the legacy of deindustrialisation remain inconvenient truths eschewed by many in local government and organisations profiting from culture led redevelopment. Finding value in the active memory and former practices of those affected by industrial change often provokes simple assumptions of nostalgia, or an unchecked idealisation of the past. Thus, the psychological and emotional dimensions of industrial history, the first-hand recollections surrounding the complex networks, social bonds and pride forged by collective skill, can be all too easily side-lined.

Factory is a performative installation that reflects upon notions of place, skill, people and material objects left behind following the process of industrial change. In Stoke-on-Trent, global outsourcing and high yield production technologies have substituted many of the people-embodied skills that once sustained company leadership. Like many hand skills in the ceramic industry, dexterity is transmitted from generation to generation. As the tertiary or service sector has largely replaced traditional manufacturing there now exists a significant skills gap, and with few apprenticeships there is a danger of specialist knowledge disappearing.

Following the legacy of William Morris and the Arts and Craft Movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much attention has been dedicated to the preservation of vernacular crafts. Since these neo-traditionalists remained diametrically opposed to industrialisation, they also marginalised the know-how of those employed in factories, albeit sometimes unintentionally. In 2003 UNESCO implemented a convention to safeguard intangible cultural heritage. 178 countries have now endorsed this, effectively making Intangible Heritage part of their cultural policy, but this value system remains alien to the UK.

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.²



Fig. 1. *Factory*, with Wonjeong Lee, Icheon World Ceramic Centre, South Korea, 2017

Factory re-evaluates explicit systems of know-how, specific to North Staffordshire's ceramic industry. In 2017 china flower maker Rita Floyd and mould maker James Adams, two artisans with long careers working and residing in Stoke-on-Trent, restaged their former working practices at Icheon World Ceramic Centre, South Korea. Yet the live transmission of these contrasting modes of ceramic manufacture in the gallery space were not intended as nostalgic demonstrations of pure skill constructed for heritage tourism. To accentuate these overlooked forms of intelligence, numerous strategies that disrupt and re-navigate prescriptive skill are adopted to offer rare access into haptic and material knowledge from the routines of the production line. Staging *Factory* in South Korea, a country that gives status to individuals with exceptional cultural ability to preserve and cultivate living heritage, provided a prestigious platform to question the value and relevance of embodied practices that continue to remain marginalised in the very nation where the industrial revolution began (Fig. 1).

¹ Linkon, S., 'The Half-Life of Deindustrialisation: Twenty-First Century Narratives of Work, Place and Identity,' unpublished presentation to *Deindustrialisation and Its Aftermath: Class, Culture and Resistance*, Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling/Scottish Oral History Centre, Montreal, Quebec, May 1-4, 2014, pp. 1. Cited by Tim Strangleman in *Topographies of the Obsolete: Ashmolean Papers*, 2017.

² UNESCO and Intangible Cultural Heritage, Heritage Crafts Association, <http://heritagecrafts.org.uk/index.php/heritagecrafts/intangible-cultural-heritage>, accessed 8.12.2019.

Nostalgia for a Lost Work

Tim Strangleman

I was lucky enough to visit Stoke-on-Trent in the late autumn of 2016. Artist and academic Neil Brownsword showed me around the city and the various sites of its industry – newly established, clinging on and abandoned. The highlight of the visit was the call we made to Rita, a friend and collaborator of Neil's who had worked as a china flower maker at numerous factories in Stoke-on-Trent for over thirty years. Over coffee in her kitchen we talked about the pottery industry both in its heyday, as well as through its decline and largescale closure in the late twentieth century. Rita had begun her working life at fifteen, in the early 1970s and was put to work training to make the delicate clay flowers used to decorate certain types of fine chinaware. I grew up in a house that had 'best china' which very rarely got used, but was to be found in a display cabinet which my mum is still proud to display. These were ordinary functional china pieces but were the closest my parents came to owning 'art'. I never gave much thought, I have to admit, to the manufacturing process that created the pieces, nor the flowers that decorated them, but in Rita's warm and inviting kitchen I felt inducted into a strange new world. I felt guilty for not having paid more attention to the prized objects of my parents' pride, and especially that I had not considered the labour of decoration that finished off the pieces. It also started me thinking about how we under-estimate the importance of art in everyday life, and the relationship between art and labour.

After a little while Rita asked if I would like to see her make some flowers, and she then started to roll and shape, poke and pull at small amounts of china clay. Using the right amount of material every time her hands became a blur of seemingly unconscious activity while Rita continued to talk to Neil and I. At the end of each process the finished flower would be casually dropped on top of a growing pile of other examples created earlier as a part of an installation Neil had commissioned Rita to do. The first couple of times she did this I was shocked. Not understanding the purpose of the artwork for which they were destined I mistakenly assumed that they were being wasted, that these beautiful objects were simply being casually discarded. This set of actions started to make me think about Rita's craft and the extent to which what she did, and what she had done was 'art' or simply labour. What was the dividing line between these two social forms and was there a clear line at all? As Rita continued to work, she told us more about her working life and how she had begun in the pottery industry. She described her first day on the line learning, through one failed attempt after another, how to make basic flower shapes, and, through practice to ensure each was of a consistent size and shape. Rita reminisced about the female supervisor who was at first deadly strict with her new charges, brutally discarding the multiple failed attempts at the specified flowers. Initially Rita had wanted to give up, but a mixture of family pressure and well-timed encouragement from her supervisor made her realise that she possessed the talent and ability to succeed in her new trade. Rita's story of her early working life is at once both unique to her, but also shared. It is a description of the socialisation into economic life that many working-class people share. Of course, the material conditions vary enormously, the type of work clearly adds an important dimension and the people we work with make a huge difference. However, there is a common experience of people socialised into work culture in traditional industries that transcends these differences. I think what Rita was describing, and what I have been lucky enough to record in my work, or read in the autobiographies of countless workers, is the process of being and becoming, of maturing in and through one's work. Fundamentally though this is a social activity, for what Rita and many others describe is the act of creating the social, of forming social bonds and relationships. Often times these experiences are taken for granted, they are, after all, the run of the mill encounters one has during a life. But equally in the process of looking



back at early work experience in later life people are more able and willing to reflect on the complexity of earlier interaction. It is perhaps only then that this early socialisation into work takes on a more complex hue, we start to appreciate the complexity of the processes we had undergone. Importantly we may not have enjoyed these early experiences, indeed we may have hated them, loathed the people in charge of us. It is the passage of time that reveals a more rounded sense of what was at stake, what was of value.

Rita described beautifully her respect mixed with fear for the woman who taught her to make her first flowers. After a while this changed to a far warmer relationship as the trainee proves herself capable, worthy of attention, and so the bond can form. Rita's story reminded me of countless examples from my own research. The best I have come across is not from an interview but an autobiography of a railway worker describing his early initiation into an adult world. Here Roy Bradshaw discusses his evolving relationship with the signalman who trained him in his first signal box:

*At fifteen and a half years of age, I was quickly to learn the meaning of maturity and manhood, for here I was a lone teenager thrown into a world of adult working men, without a single person of my own age group for companionship or consolation.*¹

But this loneliness is quickly transformed by being enrolled into the adult world of work:

*By the eighth day that hitherto impenetrable barrier had been conquered and Ted Cox's face broke down into a satisfied smile. With a pat on the back he announced 'You'll make it lad. Now we'll show you how to write. Your script is appalling.' ... Up to then, I had secretly feared him; now I felt a conversion to almost hero worship.*²

What is captured here is the process of a worker being embedded in their work. It is an instance of an occupational identity being formed, or to be more precise the narrator recalling a significant moment, a privileged occasion, when working life goes way beyond the cash nexus but speaks to us as a process of human bonding and maturation.

However, finding value in an industrial past can be difficult, and can open oneself up to the charge of nostalgia. I will never forget my first attempt at a paper at an academic conference. Making, what I thought to be a good fist of actually presenting the early findings from my project I was then subject to questions and comments from other, more senior academics. What I was not expecting was one from a person who accused me of being nostalgic, even romantic about workers and the working class more generally. This seemed to be on the basis that I had found value in aspects of work life which, in her eyes was irredeemably suspect. At the time this worried me, it made me examine both my academic practice as well as my own experience of blue collar work. In the medium and longer term this piece of criticism has been incredibly useful as it made me more sensitive to issues of how we remember and deal with the charge of nostalgia when looking back to the past.

With the collapse of traditional industry, and the widespread spectre of deindustrialisation the issue of nostalgia has once again come to the fore. As community after community suffers the loss of the industries that once defined them as places and as people, we often witness a need and willingness to make sense of the past. This need is something that seems to irritate some for a variety of reasons. On the one hand those involved in economic boosterism chide former industrial workers for being wedded to the past, unable and unwilling to change. The answer to the problem of industrial decline is not to remember the past, but rather that the communities involved 'just need to get over it'; essentially burying the past in an unmarked grave. In a slightly different

register, a number of academics have alerted us to the dangers in idealising an industrial past. In their important edited collection *Beyond the Ruins*, Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott return several times to the theme of nostalgia that they fear is in danger of crowding out more critical attempts to make sense of the deindustrialisation process in the US. They speak of preventing a 'creeping industrial nostalgia from dominating the debate,'³ creating what they memorably label 'smokestack nostalgia.' As they say, 'we have to strip industrial work of its broad-shouldered, social-realist patina and see it for what it was: tough work that people did because it paid well and it was located in their communities.'⁴ Similarly, industrial anthropologist Kate Dudley noted more than a decade and a half ago in comparing anthropological studies of primitive societies and those of communities being deindustrialised:

*This form of lament is not limited to anthropological writings about non-Western societies caught in the grip of brutalizing 'development' and 'modernizing' programs. The rhetorical bells toll just as dolorously in the newly emerging ethnography of deindustrialisation. As titles like Rusted Dreams or The Magic City suggest, American industrial workers are also subject to the kind of historicizing and romanticizing imagery that characterizes nostalgic treatments of more distant but nonetheless passing ways of life.*⁵

What Cowie, Heathcott and Dudley are doing is providing a check on the danger of an uncritical celebration of the past. All of them, in slightly different ways, alert us to an uncritical account of the working class past which prevents proper and full historical scrutiny, that is nuanced enough to guard against an uncritical embrace of a narrow, relatively privileged section of the working class. Other aspects of this smokestack nostalgia are the ideas of 'rustbelt' or 'ruin porn', where there is a fetishisation of the material remains of industry, or in the celebration of the artisanal in its various guises.⁶

I want to make a distinction here about nostalgia. While it is correct to guard against false memory, it is equally important that in the process we don't obliterate the kind of subjective reflection that can reveal a greater insight, even 'truth,' about the past. In short, what would a critical nostalgia look like and is that phrase an oxymoron? In the wake of those critical comments I had at the beginning of my academic career I started to examine the whole question of nostalgia more rigorously. The more deeply I looked the more it became apparent that nostalgia was far from straightforward, indeed there was a sociology of nostalgia. For most people, be they academics or non-academics, nostalgia is usually a pejorative term which describes an uncritical or over-sentimental view of the past. Nostalgia is a 'nice type of sadness' the invocation of loss, or of an imagined past. However, there is a longstanding critical literature on nostalgia which makes problematic many of the simple assumptions people hold about this emotion. The classic sociological analysis of nostalgia is Fred Davis's *Yearning for Yesterday*. Davis suggests a taxonomy for studying this elusive emotion, identifying three orders of nostalgia: *first order* or *simple* nostalgia (the past was better); *second order* or *reflexive* nostalgia (was the past really that way?); and *third order* or *interpretive* nostalgia (why am I feeling nostalgic? What might this mean?). The essential point to note in Davis' writing is that almost all nostalgic reflection questions memory in a critical way. We have, therefore, to be careful not to dismiss memory as 'simply nostalgic'; rather, we have to be far more attentive in interpreting what that critical account of the past and present represents.⁷

But let us return to work and the memories that surround it. How and why do people attach themselves to work? Why would they display a nostalgic bond with what was often an experience that was far from perfect? Finally, what can that tell us about working class work? In trying to answer these questions and make sense of some of the wider issues that emerge from their consideration it helps if we keep in mind Fred Davis' taxonomy of nostalgias. What most people

think of when they hear or maybe use the term nostalgia is that of first order, or simple nostalgia. What they dismiss is this basic idea that 'things were better back in the day'. What this reflects is however a failure to really listen to those giving the accounts who may actually caveat positive sentiments with others that temper the account being related. In my career I have interviewed hundreds of workers, often older ones, who will often talk positively about their working lives, especially their earlier years. In all those discussions I can't think of a single instance where my interviewee has displayed 'simple' nostalgia. For leavening the tale being told and the anecdote relayed is a far more critical appraisal of the past. So, for example shift workers hated getting up at different hours in the day, missing out on countless family occasions, struggling to get to sleep in the middle of the day. The former coal miners interviewed about their working lives told me they hated the work but loved the people they worked with, and that they would go back to the pits tomorrow if they could. The point here is that work, and our relationship to it is complex and complicated, it defies reduction into simple binaries of 'good' or 'bad', positive or negative. Just as in life more generally, the consideration of work involves far more reflection and thought. There is an acknowledgement that the actual labour itself may lack intrinsic meaning, but the joys of work are found in different places, especially in the sense of being embedded within a community. Importantly this sense of being embedded is not something workers are always consciously aware of; it may only be revealed when a job is lost or a factory closes. It is in these moments where the taken for granted is breached and reflection is necessary and possible.

Towards the end of Kate Dudley's book, *End of the Line*, she quotes Donna, a former auto-assembly line worker, discussing her desire to obtain a memento of her former work life:

*When they start tearing [the plant] down, I'm going to go get a brick. I would just keep it. My kids know mama spent fifteen years of her life [in the plant] working, and to tell my future grandkids about it. You know, tell them that it was a place where we worked and that when they tore the building down, Grandma went and got herself a brick. For all that I put in there, I figure at least I deserve a brick.*⁸

In virtually all the research projects I have been involved in, the workers I encountered have had mementos of working life, and this impulse to preserve physical reminders of their industrial past is a very common one. What I think lies behind it is the desire to remember the intangible through the presence of the tangible – in Donna's case a brick. These physical mementoes then serve to preserve and to prompt, to remind and elicit ideas about the past. For what Donna, Rita and countless other workers are trying to hold on to and make sense of is the sense of the social which they enjoyed, that allowed them to experience being embedded in their work, to be part of something bigger than themselves.

So therefore, the nostalgia that workers like Rita and her colleagues may feel for their industrial past is complex and mixed. It is a lament for the loss of what were 'good' jobs, in terms of the pay and conditions that were enjoyed by generations. But it is also a more critical account both of the past and of the present and future. For in finding value in the past we are engaged in a reflection on the here and now. One of the common observations about nostalgia is that it almost always tells us more about the present than it does about the past. Nostalgia as an emotion is stimulated by a sense of loss, a meditation on change. If there is a nostalgia for the type of industrial work of the past its explanation is not to be found in a desire to return to routine factory work, repetitive labour and the associated pollution. What is being evoked here is a troubling sense that what work afforded in the past, the ability to be and become has arguably become eroded in the context of contemporary employment. Therefore, it is incumbent on all of us interested in work to listen to the stories of labour in the past, and not to be overly hasty to urge people or whole communities to 'get over it.'



In the redevelopment of place there is often an undue, even unseemly, haste to obliterate the past. In eradicating the physical reminders of an industrial past, we should also think about the attachment to the past and how this allows for a critical account both of history and the future.

¹ Bradshaw, R., *Railway Lines and Levers*, Unicorn Books, Paddock Wood, 1993, p.25.

² Ibid., p.21.

³ Cowie, J. and Heathcott, J., (eds.), *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 2003, p.14.

⁴ Ibid. p.15.

⁵ Dudley, K., *The End of the Line: Last Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*, Chicago University Press, Chicago IL, 1994, p.179.

⁶ See Strangleman, T., 'Smokestack Nostalgia', 'Ruin Porn' or Working Class Obituary?: The Role and Meaning of De-industrial Representation. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Number 84, 2013: pp.23-37.

⁷ Davis, F., *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, The Free Press, New York, 1979.

⁸ Dudley, K., *The End of the Line: Last Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*, Chicago University Press, Chicago IL, 1994, p.173.

Distancing and Nearness

Tan-dem

When Giorgio Agamben writes *Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it*, the stickiness and distancing he describes, *the fluctuations*, find a parallel in the telling of histories of Stoke-on-Trent; both the archive and anecdote must have their say. *At all events, it is essential that we manage to be in some way contemporaries of these texts.*

This essay comprises a collection of textual fragments that share a common theme: the livelihoods, processes, and practices of Stoke-on-Trent’s ceramic industry. Sources – archival and informal, narrative and critical – are positioned alongside each other, sometimes interpreted, sometimes left to speak for themselves. Together they amount to a *post-industrial scattering*, traces that demonstrate the robustness and relevance of Stoke’s production and, in their reconfiguration, give different insights into the past.

Paintress I

I was a paintress, and then I went to, uh....
A paintress in a local pottery?
Yes, at Spode. Then I went to Trent Staffs – Greens it was then.
[...]
How did you learn to be a paintress?
Oh, we had to learn on...the plate, put pothooks and strokes in red. It was - I liked work - I loved the work. In fact, I liked Copeland’s, it was lovely, but if I was working today I wouldn’t like it, cause they work on conveyor belts [and] nobody smiles. We didn’t get much money; if we got three pound we were well off.
But what you seem to be saying is that it was an apprenticeship?
Oh, an apprenticeship at Copeland’s. But you’re s’posed to be [in] that apprenticeship for seven years.
What did you make a start on? What did you actually have to learn to begin, because it’s a very skilful craft?
Oh, we had to - pothooks and strokes, and how to hold a pencil, see. How to mix colour.
Pencils meaning brushes?
Camel-hair brushes. They cost an awful - they cost three and six to buy a small pair.
[...]
No, you had to have camel-hair brushes. You had “shaders” and “palers” and - what you pale and shade with.
So your work is all over the place on countless plates?
Oh yes, I had a - I did - five years I did Forget-me-not only!
So you won’t forget Forget-me-not?
I will not forget Forget-me-not. I loved it so. And we used to get five pence - nine pence a dozen for that. Marvellous.

PAINTRESS. Occupation. Decorating department. The person, a girl or lady, who applies finely ground and unfired enamel colour suspended in a mixture of fat oil and turps onto a pot in a decorative fashion (Fig. 1).

PALER. Equipment. Tool. Type of pencil (potter’s name for a small brush), in which the soft camel hair bristles are spread out to allow the painter or paintress to create a shaded effect when painting.

Agamben

Topographies
of the
Obsolete

Britton

Revealing
Voices

The Minton
Archive

Brownsword

Oliver

The Potbank
Dictionary

The Potbank
Dictionary



Fig. 1. “Paintresses” – a term peculiar to the potteries - fill in the coloured portions of the design, before the next firing which fixes the colour.’

J. E. H.
A lot of criticism has been made from time to time at the poor standard of design of products turned out by a number of firms in the Potteries. While many of these criticisms are justified, long experience has shown us that one of the greatest difficulties in educating the public to understand and appreciate the difference between good and bad has been lack of proper knowledge by the retailer about the goods he is selling, although there have always, of course, been notable examples.

Jamie
Not knowing whether I was looking at an artwork or a contemporary relic of the recently departed Spode works, I noticed a sample board for Jamie Oliver’s ‘Cheeky Mugs’ range. I was ambling, most definitely ambling, through the exhibition *Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void* (2013), pouring over the *undisturbed context* surrounding the artists’ interventions. The impressive factory complex at its height housed thousands of workers, part of the larger pottery-opolis of Stoke-on-Trent, but you know all of this already...

The mugs, large and with generous handles, are daubed with casual, pithy endearments: ‘Cool Dude,’ ‘Big Fella,’ ‘Top Totty,’ ‘Cheeky Monkey’. These words are deliberately scruffy, as if cooked up by Jamie in the short space between making a *funky little salsa* and *getting stuck in*. These are mugs aimed at the perennial gift market – more alluring at a knockdown price, or if you know someone who likes a proper cuppa in bucket-load quantities.

The mugs took my mind back to Jamie’s vogue in the 2000s, before his corporatisation and earnest political lobbying, when *The Naked Chef* cookbook and TV series tore apart the formality of cooking, encouraging more men to cook and earning him a place in the nation’s heart. No surprise then, that he would commission Royal Worcester to produce a series of mugs that bring his boyish lingo to the kitchen cabinet.

To many, the casual writing, cavernous size, and naughties informality holds no appeal – visitors to this exhibition, perhaps, and the wider *British Ceramics*



Fig. 2. Sample board of Jamie Oliver 'Cheeky Mugs' (detail), 'undisturbed context,' *Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void*, 2013

Biennial of which it is part. They might be a passing fad, destined to become charity shop finds for future generations. Yet this, surely, is a barometer of success: I got to know about Stoke from reading the back of plates, like they do on *Antiques Roadshow*, wondering from my Southern shore what 'Made in England' meant.

I muse on the economic robustness of the 'Cheeky Mugs' (Fig. 2). They are the sorts of ware that lines the shelves at department stores, fills the warehouses of international stockists, and thus keeps factories alive. Artisans are employed; skills passed down and across the factory floor; local economies are supported.

The sample board struck me as evidence of large-scale ceramic production to which the nation is ambivalent. Ceramic enthusiasts are likely to pay little heed to this voguish production line, so far from ethos of studio pottery or ceramics as sculpture. Advocates of Stoke's industrial heritage wouldn't salvage the 'Cheeky Mugs' either. The recent past is no match for the good old days of booming bottle kilns and unhealthy air. But maybe it is the middlebrow taste represented by the 'Cheeky Mugs' – not the heritage industry or arts funding – that is the surest way of preserving the artisanal skills of the factory floor. More buyers of Jamie's 'Cheeky Mugs' and other ranges like it might well have kept this place going, keeping British production alive and aesthetes of industrial decay like me out.

I feel close to the nation's heart, but the blood runs thin.

Painteress 2

I got this job at Lancaster's; there was a place for me there. So, I went the first morning. And the boss over us in the shop, named Mister Mullock, and he was very stern; no talking or anything like that. He gave me a tile with some red colour, and some turps, and I was grinding this colour with me knife - palette knife - *I got to make it nice, but not too sloppy*. And then he gave me a pencil, with some turps. I used to have to dip it in, and try to make strokes on the tile, and of course when you've done that he gives yer plate - when you've learnt that he gave you a plate, and you've got to do strokes all the way round it until the end. He'd look at it and he'd say, *Wipe that off! Do it again!* And he'd start saying; *Now, do a curl, like that, with the red colour, you know?* And, err, of course when you'd got all through that, you'd learnt all that - it took, oh, weeks and weeks, to learn

Revealing
Voices

to stroke a pencil. And then of course he'd say, *You can do a pattern on it now; whatever you wish to do, do a pattern on*. And if it was all right, that was fired, and it was given to you at the end of the term, like. Then of course that went on for twelve months, learning in red colour, and then had to - after twelve months - yes, I was paid twelve shillings a week. And that went on for twelve months. And then the next year, I was put in gold, and err I had four shillings a week. And all's we did, we did strokes in gold like we did in the yellow colour, on the handles of jugs. And, um, that was four shillings. And it went on, until each year, it went up a shilling a week until I got to six shillings. I should be sixteen then. Sixteen. And of course, they sort of put you [on] piecework, you see.

John

Stillness. A common way to describe post-industrial Stoke-on-Trent. Whether you are walking down streets adjoining abandoned factories, or watching the virtual walkthrough of *Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void* (2013) in the former Spode Works. The latter is so still to the point that it resembles a crime scene, time and space frozen, presumably to give us the best chance of discovering what happened.

We tend to see this quiet as reflective of current economics of outsourced production and – that word again – decline. But we shouldn't presume the fervour and noise of the past. It was still then, even in its prime.

A couple of incidents of stillness came to light in the Minton's Archive at Stoke City Library from the diaries of John Boyle, business partner of Herbert Minton for what was evidently a fairly ill-tempered five-year relationship from 1836–1841. In September 1836, Boyle reported on the workers laying down tools in a co-ordinated action that for him was about *whether the employers or the employed are to be [the] masters*. More evocative is his account of freezing weather in February 1838:

The canals have been frozen up for several weeks – the wharves are full of crates and we have stored as many as we could in the crate yard and in the lower start of the straw building. A great deal of distress has been occasioned by the state of things. Most manufacturers have been at a stand.

At any moment, successful business and booming production can suddenly be arrested, whether by foul weather or a shift in political climate. Just consider how the hustle and bustle of cross (English) channel trade can quickly transform into the epitome of immobility if the ferries can't run: the lorry park on the M20 known as 'Operation Stack' (or for no-deal Brexit, 'Operation Brock'). Commodities do not thrive in conditions of stillness; orders are not met, profits drop, no one gets paid.

Yet the stillness evoked by frozen canals, quelling the noise of perpetual trade, turns the busy commodity into static archaeology, allowing us to see that *part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living*.

Boyle

Agamben



Fig. 3. 'Handles for Cups and Jugs are cast with the same meticulous care.' Mintons Ltd, Stoke-on-Trent, 15 March 1946

Handle maker

Handles for cups and jugs are cast with the same meticulous care. Mid-morning in the cup shop – (you can tell by the way the light falls) – and the handle maker (a woman?) carefully removes the soft, cast handles from the plaster working mould. Positive from negative. Row upon row, three high. Slip cast or cast aside, their imperfections invisible to the untrained eye. These unblemished clay parts that form in *hand-poured moulds*, not yet fettled or handled, will later become the *detritus*; smeared with fingerprints, chipped, or broken. Yet the process will repeat itself. People will always need cups! *Similarly Brownsword is fascinated [...] by the chain-like structures that are created by a worker's repetitive action.* Positive from negative. Row upon row, three high. Slip cast or cast aside.(Fig. 3)

Rita

FLASHBACK. Picture Rita, aged fifteen, among benches of women eighty strong. *You started on your rose, because you got your round shape. You're rolling your clay and it's easier to get a round shape; when you're training, it's easier to do that. It was very, very boring when you first started, cause I just sat like that, just rolling the clay. And then she'd say, You can make a petal. Try a petal. You put your petal down, and she'd come and squash them all and say, No, not good enough. Oh, I thought it was all right? But you've got to be spot on. So it was about two or three weeks before I actually put a flower together. But it didn't look like a rose; it just looked like a cabbage.*

There it is again. *The skilled practitioner takes proficiency for granted, her talents so well practised that they disappear. I used to make one a minute, between 35 and 40 dozen a day.* Or are others' skills always revered, subject to our untrained minds? *Skill is something that seems noteworthy only from the position of the unskilled.* How deftly her hands move. Unthinkingly. (Fig. 4)

Harrod

Floyd

Adamson



Fig. 4. *Factory*, with Rita Floyd, Icheon World Ceramic Centre, South Korea, 2017

Neil What the critics have said. <i>Like an archaeological field worker, he collects pieces and fragments that tell the story of human activity...</i>	Veiteberg
<i>His career as an artist can be read as [a] mediation on the area in which he grew up and on the decline of its pottery industry [...] He collaged an archaeology of broken shards...</i>	Harrod
<i>... from whole sculptures to horizontal planes of fragments, like an archaeology of the declining potteries...</i>	Britton
<i>... variants of labour, residual evidence of the story of artisanal skills enmeshed in piece work.</i>	Shales
<i>These dislocated shreds of fired clay [...] are sweepings from factory floors and 'schraff', the industrial clay inside the kiln residue that in effect forms the ground on which Stoke-on-Trent [...] was built.</i>	de Waal

Keywords: ARCHAEOLOGY – DECLINE – SHARDS – FRAGMENTS – SKILL

Critical reception, historiography, what has been written – this is the textual *schraff* on which the writer and historian rely. We excavate words already committed to page in writing anew, ignoring so many others as we go. Walter Benjamin uses the idea of the *Angel of History*, or the ragpicker, as metaphors for the process of writing history from *fragments* and *shards*. But the *schraff* of Stoke – the debris the city is built on that its factories were responsible for – is as effective a metaphor, articulating a greater reciprocity between salvager and the salvage. Writing extracts as it deposits.

If writing can be seen as a form of archaeology, it would possess the self-same focus on the present as Brownsword, far removed from some nostalgic iteration of the subject. Putting pen to paper is not a nostalgic act; neither is laying slumped saggars, kiln furniture, and other scraps on a plinth. Ezra Shales sees Brownsword's work not as romantic eulogy but as *trudging on* through Stoke's history and the *brownfield* nature of artistic production, which is always palimpsestic. To trudge through history would seem wise, tramping into the stickiness of the subject, but ensuring that you struggle free of its claggy hold if only to take a step forward.

There is a lot of *trudging* in *Marl Hole* (2009), in which four artists including Brownsword were invited to respond to Ibstock Brick's Gorsty Quarry of Etruria Marl. The artists slog away with the sheer enormity of the site: slipping, wrestling, squelching in the clay. Brownsword says of the project:

<i>The great thing about this place is the abundance of stuff, of matter [...]</i> <i>Inexhaustible, really... We've only just scratched the surface.</i>	Brownsword
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Their toil is analogous to that of the historian: only ever scratching the surface, but exerting much effort in the trudge.

Agamben is all-too-aware of the pull of the archive, that matter-of-factness of the historical record. But far from being a place of immutable fact, remote from the present time, it is tangible and enduring and <i>nowhere pulses with more force than in the present</i>.	Agamben
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The origin is not only situated in a chronological past: it is contemporary with historical becoming and does not cease to operate within it, just as the embryo

continues to be active in the tissues of the mature organism, and the child in the psychic life of the adult. The residual objects, documents, and assemblages of Stoke-of-Trent, its surplus – much of which remains intact – are evidence of this encounter between times and generations. Stoke's histories are still unfolding, becoming known.

And this is where the artist comes in; *the contemporary [who] puts to work a special relationship between the different times*. Brownsword's artistic practice, his particular form of archaeology, always has its gaze on the now. His excavation of discarded objects, clay detritus, and other fragments is not about wistful reflection, but about flexing that *distancing and nearness* that is intrinsic to our understanding of the present. Brownsword is simply sifting, gathering, and laying out, although – as with all archaeologies – there is no definitive answer, no *aha!* moment. We just need to keep on.

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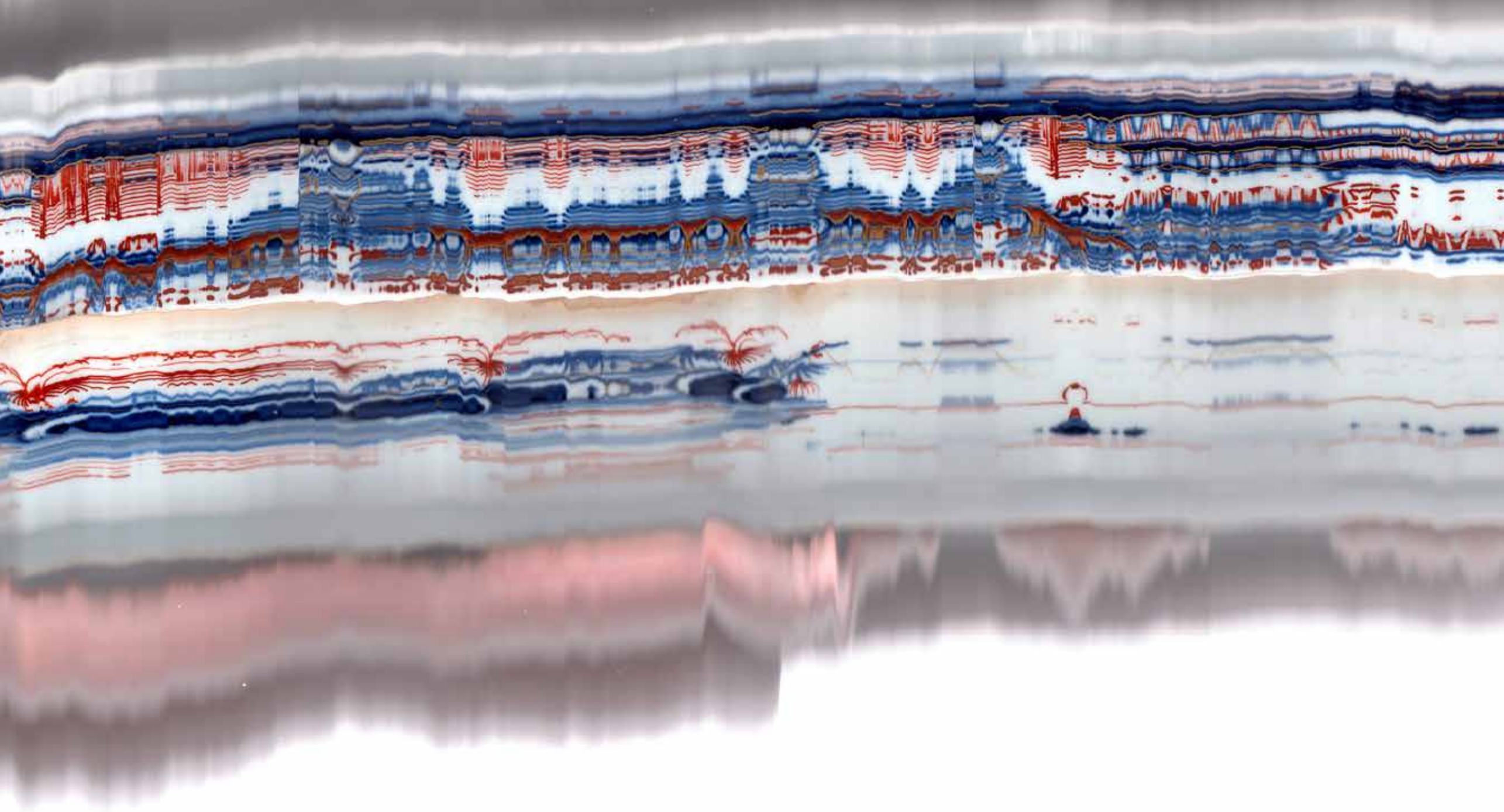
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Pattern Book

Neil Brownsword

Pattern Book evolved during a six-month invited artist in residence at the Victoria & Albert Museum as part of the UK/Korea 2017-18 season.¹ Working in response to the V&A's ceramics collection, research focused upon early ceramic industrialisation in North Staffordshire and the artistic/technological advances that evolved out of this legacy of cultural borrowing and assimilation. Curatorial handling limitations at the V&A resulted in my purchase of my own collection of Staffordshire ceramics influenced by East-Asia via online auction websites. This facilitated direct contact with the physical objects to reconfigure their decorative language. Further investigations into historic factory pattern archives that record and convey ceramic production 'know-how', influenced the creation of my own pattern book. This, together with a taxonomy of original eBay collection were exhibited and activated in a live performance at the V&A's Daylit Gallery in collaboration with Paul Holdway, former Spode master engraver.

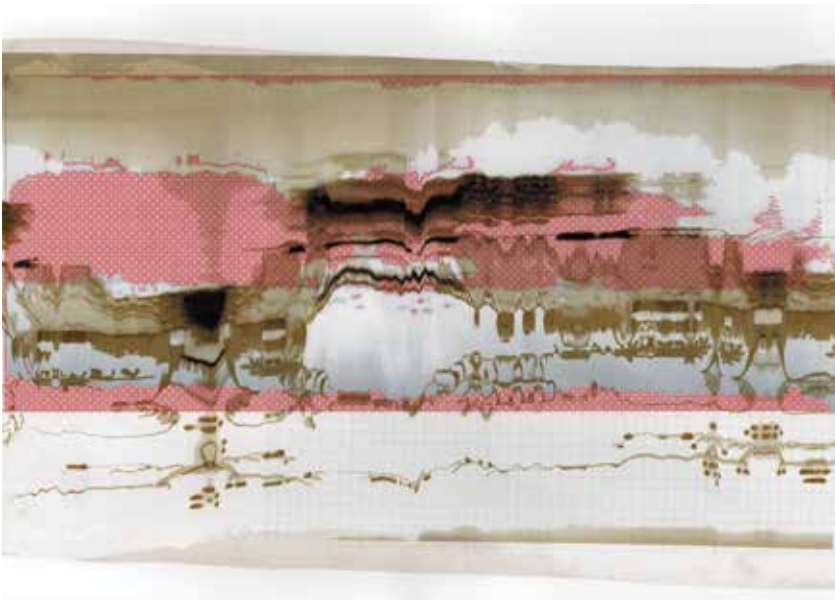


Fig. 1. *Pattern Book*, detail, Neil Brownsword, 2018

Enquiry into the 'slippage' within appropriated cultural images evident in Staffordshire Chinoiserie, led me to collect and access 18th and early 19th C ceramics akin to those held at the V&A. Rendered with varying degrees of skill to their East-Asian influences, nuances of painting and print unique to ceramic production were digitally extracted from their form using rudimentary scanning procedures (Fig. 1). Greater proximity to improvise with these objects, fixed spatio-temporal linear gestures and rotations of patterned objects, yielded morphic/fragmentary materialisations. These were digitally printed and subsequently overlaid with a palimpsest of further printed and painted imagery, constituting the production of my own pattern book.

Questioning of the 'idealised perfection of the digital,' through this interrogation of traditional practices within North Staffordshire's ceramic sector displaced by advanced automation, led to one of the interlaced image deconstructions being replicated via the honed dexterity of a former master copper plate engraver. The live performance of this now defunct system for ceramic print was projected using a microscopic camera, amplifying the interstice between the immediacy of digital imperfection and its remediation via the slow paced tactile and material interactions of handwork (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. *Pattern Book*, with Paul Holdway, Day-Lit Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2018

Pattern Book's research subverts the hierarchical strictures of museum archives to offer new modes of visibility explored through digital and analogue remediation. It is positioned in recent post-digital paradigms where critical methodologies addressed by artists and theorists including Menkman and Betancourt explore socio-cultural impact of the glitch aesthetic beyond formalist technique.² Building upon this discourse, I developed an innovative methodology that disrupts the functional continuity of digital reproduction as a means to reactivate ceramic traditions and sustain the continuation of endangered intangible heritage relative to North Staffordshire. These digital deconstructions of the archive and reconstitutions of its visual histories, combined with social practice, challenges perceptions and assumptions of what constitutes 'ceramic' materiality within contemporary practice.

¹ Victoria & Albert Museum (residency - 1/10/2017 to 31/03/2018). Exhibition performances - Daylit Galleries 20 and 21/04/2018. This research residency was kindly supported by the Korean Cultural Centre UK, and Samsung.

² See Menkman, R., *The Glitch Moment(um)*, Network Notebooks 04, Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2011, and Betancourt, M., *Glitch Art in Theory and Practice: Critical Failures and Post-Digital Aesthetics*, Routledge; 1 edition. 2016.



Externalising the Archive

Neil Brownsword

Externalising the Archive is a multimedia installation which reconnects aspects of industrial craft knowledge to an endangered collection of historic moulds housed at the former Copeland Spode Works in Stoke-on-Trent.¹ This was one of the few ceramic manufactories in Britain to have operated continuously for over 230 years on its original site. World renowned for its perfection of bone china and underglaze blue printing techniques, the legacy of this factory was assigned to the Spode Museum Trust in 1987. Yet prior to the factory's closure in 2008 the vast majority of its production moulds were not accessioned, due to their perceived value and sheer space required to house such material. An ongoing survey undertaken by Stoke-on-Trent City Council has to date recorded in excess of 70,000 moulds that still remain within eleven buildings. As the site is currently in the process of regeneration, *Externalising the Archive* attempts to reappraise the cultural value of this archive, as only a small percentage of this material has been recommended for retention.²

This installation juxtaposes archival footage illuminating the complex dexterities involved within mass-production,³ against an architectonic assemblage of production moulds from recent history. The majority of moulds from this period are regarded by some to have 'little historic value,' – but why should these be differentiated from earlier periods of manufacture? Do they not equally constitute an important piece of the factory's history? To pose questions upon how we determine future views of the past through what is considered worthy of archiving, a significant volume of contemporary moulds were presented in an external environment (Fig. 1), where they were exposed to the elements and potential theft. The fact that the intellectual property of the moulds resides with another factory, prohibiting reproduction, together with the repurposing of buildings where this material is stored means their fate leans towards impending disposal.⁴ This deliberate provocation was often met with contempt as, somewhat ironically, the public voice was one which expressed a need for the protecting of these heritage assets.

As 'by-products' of ceramic manufacture, moulds are rarely valued or preserved for posterity; the 'finished' ceramic artefact has always taken precedence over those objects associated with labour. Yet they illuminate the evolution of important technological change in design and industry that revolutionised mass-production. As embodiments of 'workmanship' – they can offer valuable insights into the complexities of dexterity, material knowledge and tool use behind the objects revered in cultural institutions. To elucidate both systems of knowledge involved in their fabrication and the mechanics of how the moulds operate, I cast the moulds using bone china and silicone rubber, constituting a new layer of production. Yet his subversion of traditional methods obscured the design data within them, yielding fragmentary and deformed intricacies available for public scrutiny.

In the ceramic industry, many design prototypes undergo a sequence of trial phases and if deemed unviable/too expensive, do not proceed into the later stages of production. So, within Spode's mould chambers there possibly exists a unique decorative design archive from various periods of history that have been retained since their rejection. Given the complex nature and mass-scale of this issue, a further aspect of *Externalising the Archive* explored the use of photogrammetry and 3D scanning to support the creation of digital surrogates as a means of preserving their physical information. Working in conjunction with Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Archaeology Service, an initial feasibility study⁵ was extended to a series of events which engaged the public with the 'live digitisation' of a selection of mould typologies and shapes.⁶



Fig. 1. *Externalising the Archive*, Jubilee Kiln site, former Spode Factory, 2019

The hidden design data/mechanics encased within the negative voids of these objects was not the only attribute deemed worthy of digital preservation. Despite their archaeology being disturbed in recent years, the mould stores themselves represent unique environments specific to North Staffordshire's industrial heritage. As health and safety restrictions render these spaces inaccessible; four mould stores were scanned enabling visitors to navigate their way into buildings and spaces through both touch screen technology and virtual reality. The long-term ambition of this ongoing project is to develop an interactive digital resource which disseminates aspects of tangible and intangible heritage associated with British ceramic design and manufacture. It aims to enhance the interpretation of the Spode mould archive and be of benefit to a range of researchers, artists, designers, historians and general public interested in design, industry and social history.

¹ *Externalising the Archive* involved partnerships with Staffordshire University, Spode Museum Trust, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, University of Brighton, ACAVA studios and the British Ceramics Biennial.

² Sutherland, Z., *Quantification and Assessment of Moulds at the Former Spode Pottery Factory, Church Street, Stoke-on-Trent*, NGR SJ 87726 45330 Produced for Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Report No. 401 Feb 2017. p. 2.

³ The Ceramic Century project initiated in 2000, film documented model, mould-making and casting methods associated with various departments of the former Spode factory whilst it was operational. Footage was supplied courtesy of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery.

⁴ Sutherland, Z., *Quantification and Assessment of Moulds at the Former Spode Pottery Factory, Church Street Stoke-on-Trent*, NGR SJ 87726 45330 Produced for Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Report No. 401 Feb 2017. p. 2.

⁵ The feasibility study was undertaken over 3 days in July 2018 with digital experts from UCL and University of Brighton, to determine the most appropriate strategy for the documentation of the Spode moulds.

⁶ An adjunct laboratory space set up within the Spode Museum Trust Heritage Centre.

The Displacement of the Real

Arild Våge Berge

12.09.19. I am sitting in my room in the Potbank Hotel, located in what was a workshop of the former Spode Works factory in Stoke-on-Trent. It's now over a decade since the factory closed, and the difficult decision of what to do with the site is still partly unresolved. Yet slowly, new impulses are emerging such as the hotel complex where I reside, its cafe and its hosting of the British Ceramics Biennial. The presence of new ideas and new initiatives co-exists with the other factory ruins on the site that remain in a constant state of flux. The situation conveys a feeling of something not being fully decided, a lack of a larger plan, as if the previous history of the place is too overwhelming for the new initiatives to fully take on.

In his text *Authentic Ruins*, theorist Andreas Huyssen writes 'The presence of a ruin lies in its absence.'¹ Not the absence of the ruin itself but the absence found in the ruin, in the melancholia of the feeling of something being lost. What constitutes the meaning of a ruin is that it represents the fear of loss. But this fear is something that calls us to action to try to prevent the loss from occurring. We often exhaust the absence of the ruin; we fill up the void it shows us. Replacing nothing with something, often in a symbolic gesture to preserve or reinstate a lost dignity. But what if the absence in the ruin is something which we need to project our ideas of loss or mortality; or offers a way to process these aspects of our being?

In his project *Externalising the Archive*, for the 2019 British Ceramics Biennial, Neil Brownsword has collaborated with computer programmers with a background in visual effects and forensic archaeology to generate digital surrogates of a mould archive stored in the decaying buildings of the former Spode Works. By photographing and laser scanning the objects from multiple angles, a three-dimensional digital render is created, that provides high resolution detail concerning the colour, form, surface texture and dimensions of the objects. There currently exists over 70,000 moulds on site, with the intellectual property of some being absorbed by the Portmeirion Group, the current owners of the Spode brand. Despite this, the destiny of the physical moulds themselves remains uncertain. Digitising such a huge archive of course is not feasible, but Brownsword has sought to document a core sample of mould typologies to raise awareness of the moulds being heritage at risk.

The moulds themselves represent a curious kind of object. They were used to create the much celebrated and iconic Spode ceramics, synonymous to the cultural heritage of Stoke-on-Trent. Yet the moulds themselves are not celebrated in the same way. They served only as industrial vessels in the process of making the pottery. Now that production at the site has ceased they have, in contrast to the pottery itself, become invisible to the public. One might argue that this is no more unreasonable than the factory itself decaying, hidden away from the public in closed off areas. After all are the moulds not only a part of the industrial process just like the factory? It's common to consider the ruins of factories as dead places, and that the products that resulted from those industrial eras are what's kept alive in museums. However, one may argue the contrary that moulds are still in a process of decay, and the museum objects are in a way the conserved dead artefacts. Vitrines and pedestals isolate the artefacts and insist on how their narrative should be told, efficiently closing them off from the political and material contingency and historical negotiation of the state of decay.

Through *Externalising the Archive*, both the moulds and their storage environments are digitally recorded to create a virtual representation preserving the objects and their location. But exactly what is being preserved? According to

French theorist Gilles Deleuze: 'the virtual is a kind of surface effect produced by actual causal interactions at the material level.'² In other words, the virtual is real, but cannot exist independently of its physical origin. From a certain perspective, the material side of the object is kept intact and preserved as both meticulously recorded spatial dimensions and surface textures. So, in a way they remain frozen in a state of decay. But is this a moment chosen because it represents the pinnacle of its authenticity; or an immediate need for preservation before decay progresses any further?

Many museums have large parts of their collections in storage, unavailable to the public. Digitisation can make these collections accessible online, for people to explore without the risks involved in handling the physical artefacts themselves. With online databases, the need to actually travel to museums or collections to experience cultural artefacts is no longer necessary. This is an obvious advantage as it cuts travel costs, cuts carbon emissions from travelling, and makes cultural heritage available for education and experience for those who cannot afford to visit cultural institutions. Virtual moulds can also be used to print new 3D moulds, that in turn can be used to generate new production. So, these digital surrogates preserve the functionality of the moulds and make them readily available to experience online. But what then about the dimensions of melancholy, the narratives of disintegration which are found in the physical ruin?

It can take on average approximately three minutes to handle and examine the physical mould and its details; and about the same time to explore a virtual mould. However, with the physical object, haptic connections are made expanding sensory understanding. When examining the virtual moulds, the process of time and material change has seemingly stopped. The mould remains frozen in time even though time is spent moving the digital model around in a virtual space. There is an illusion of immortality in the object. The same thing happens when navigating the digital mould store through virtual reality, but this remains in temporal stasis. There exists an uncanny displacement between body and the virtual space, like a light nausea. This is not really a ruin anymore, its an image of a ruin, but the ruin is not present in it as far as the process of ruination goes. If the ruin is something we define by a material process of deterioration and is determined by an absence, this means that in the effort to preserve the authenticity of the moulds and the storage room, its nature as ruin disappears. One might say that the true ruin disappears when the effort to preserve it succeeds. This is a paradox of preservation of the authentic ruin.

Some may argue for the complete sufficiency of the virtual object, and that it is all we need to substitute the real, thus the physical objects can be abandoned. It seems that digitisation is a double gesture. It shifts our emphasis of what is valuable about the moulds from the physical to the virtual. So if we record the moulds and make their virtual counterparts accessible in museums and schools, deciding that they are sufficient for our need to preserve what is valuable about them, then there is no reason why we should not surrender the physical moulds to be left in the crumbling buildings, to become obsolete once again, and reappear as authentic ruins.

¹ Huyssen, A., 'Authentic Ruins' in Dillon, B., *Ruins*, Whitechapel Gallery and the MIT Press, 2011, pp. 52-55.

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtuality_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtuality_(philosophy))

The Digital Void

Richard Harper

As a digital imaging specialist, my contribution to Neil Brownsword's project *Externalising the Archive* was to create faithful digital surrogates of a sample of historic mould typologies housed at the former Spode factory. The process involved shooting 160 photographs of each mould under controlled lighting conditions, capturing accurate surface geometry, colour, and scale. A custom turntable was built for the project, so every mould was captured systematically - 40 photographs in 4 loops, 9-degree increments, by all researchers. During the data capture, I had the unique opportunity to learn stories of the moulds from the visitors, staff and volunteers of the Spode Heritage Trust Museum, some of whom were previously employed at the site. What struck me was how much value the moulds represented beyond their physicality, beyond the accuracy of the scanned model or the tactility of the original. It was instead the human connection to these objects that was what we were trying to keep intact.

As part of the exhibition, Brownsword installed a collection of moulds in the shell of what was the former factory's Jubilee Kiln site, exposed to the elements (see Fig. 1. page 55). These moulds were from contemporary production c.2005 onwards, representative of the hundreds of copies with little remaining purpose. Their construction of plaster entirely functional, to wick away moisture from the slip and solidify the clay, transferring a design from negative to positive. Once a mould was worn, it would be discarded like countless thousands before them - their role complete. The moulds we were digitising however were very different. They were old, cracked, fragile and brittle; dirty, dusty and some without identification or matching parts. They could no longer be used to fulfil their original purpose, but now they have something more to them, what I could only describe at the time as a 'soul' - something deeply human.

The moulds carried the traces of those who once worked with them; the hand-carved script of people long gone; knife markings where clay was cut loose - all emphasised by a fine layer of black dust that had settled on all surfaces exposed to the air (Fig. 1). They each held a story of their life beyond their perfunctory role to be cast. The importance of capturing these stories alongside the digital scans is imperative to maintaining their context beyond what is present inherently contained within the mould. My current thoughts on collecting this information is to rally the support of the local community. The passion for ceramics is undeniably strong in Stoke-on-Trent and is a continuing source of pride for the city. One possible option is the construction of a public facing website, with sufficient ability to record comments of each digitised mould, allowing the wider community to contribute to our understanding of each piece through their own observations and connections.

Yet, a question kept returning to me while digitising the moulds - why does an original mould appear to hold so much more value than a replication? A theoretical replica could be made as an exact clone, down to the atomic level - but would it wholly embody the symbolic values attached to the original? These digitisations, however accurate or descriptive, have a hollowness to them. While demonstrating the scanning process, I would show people the digitisation, comparing the likeness to the original, with interested responses. Their expression was often of impressions of 'detail' and curiosity to the process, whereas upon holding or touching the originals, far more emotion was displayed - sustaining a sense of attachment and intrigue.

There currently exists a void between the real and the digital, between the original and the simulation. If this technological void should one day be filled - the simulation would exert upon the human user the same sensations of sight, touch



Fig. 1. Spode mould store, 2019

and smell as the original, as if it existed before them. But it will not be the original. Is this all we can expect for the future of heritage? Collecting ghosts of the past? What value does the construct of a digital mould hold, if any at all?

I don't believe we will ever be comfortable with the idea of replacing the physical with a digital simulation. No matter how convincing, it would always be a 'replica'. Perhaps the solution lies in our perception of the simulation, like how a photograph is an abstraction of a scene. It does not present itself as the original, but attempts to capture the feelings, emotion or essence of its subject. The simulation presented as a surrogate of the original - a cognitive stepping stone to link ourselves with the object we are trying to experience.

The teletransportation paradox¹ offers a curious point of view - that should the original be destroyed during the act of replication, then a perfect replica could now, for all intents and purposes, be considered the original. Should however the original continue to exist, as in our digitisation, the continuity of the original is uninterrupted, and the replication stands independent. This leads to further questions of what happens when the original inevitably decays, and the replication, perhaps immortalised digitally, still remains? Which now holds the symbolism, story, meaning and value of the original?

As humans, we struggle with the concept of time beyond the length of our own lives. The moulds at Spode, which have survived relatively intact for tens, if not hundreds of years, are seen by the public as something to save, something to cherish; are seen as something that can be saved. But that is only within the context of their own lifetimes. How long can a plaster mould be expected to resist decay? Perhaps another 200 years? With sufficient resource and controlled environments, perhaps longer. But probably not all 70,000 of them. Digitisation may hold the key to preserving these unique and fragile records of human skill, passion and achievement. But how then, do we ensure the survival of the digital?

¹ Parfit, D., 'Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons', in Schneider, S., (ed.) *Science Fiction and Philosophy*, doi:10.1002/9781118922590.ch8, 2016.

Is it on a list?

Vicki McGarvey



Fig. 1. Demolished front of Price and Kensington Factory, teapot manufacturer, Stoke-on-Trent, 2019

The sense of decline and decay in the pottery industry, has been a major factor in focusing attention upon the evidence of man's past in bottle kilns and the factories.¹

Ceramic designer and artist Reginald Haggard's comments remain particularly poignant with the demolition of the street side frontage of the derelict Price and Kensington factory in Longport, Stoke-on-Trent in November 2019 (Fig. 1). The sadness of some local people mourning this loss was not laced with nostalgia, but powerlessness and pride. People were genuinely shocked that a Grade II listed building, with its own entry on the Historic England register was not enough, 'to make sure that any future changes to it do not result in loss of its significance.'²

Despite four years of meagre legal interventions, not the local community, not safeguarding organisations, not even the law, could restrain the owner's will to make Price and Kensington's Longport landmark obsolete. Price and Kensington was, and still is, a tangible heritage asset, as the fate of the rear of the building with its feature Bottle Kiln, as of late 2019, has yet to be decided. However, the loss of a tangible asset often leads to the loss of the intangible, evidenced in the hidden industrial objects within the factory which have not been rescued or recorded. Concentrating on the tangible asset, does not guarantee the integration of the intangible. Historic England's inventory of Price and Kensington does not include fixtures and fittings, and therefore does not assure its physical safeguarding, or the safeguarding within our collective consciousness.

We live in a metrics driven society, from the education we choose, to the food we eat, to the places we stay. Seek and you will find a review, ratings and top 10s guiding your way. Metrics can measure quality of service and preference, 'if it's in it's in', 'if it's out it's out. The phrase damned lies and statistics, which Mark Twain attributes to Benjamin Disraeli, refers to the use of numbers to help with feeble arguments. Although metrics and measurements imply a level of empiricism, with respect to tasteful judgement, dig a little deeper and it is not difficult to encounter a subjective personalised element. Being on the list can inform opinion, not being on the list can lead to the taste scrapheap or simple obscurity. In the case of heritage it can lead to social amnesia and the possible eviction from social memory.

Heritage has its own lists, which supposedly helps protect skills, objects and buildings. Having a place on a heritage list, it is thought, can lead to social and economic investment and collective protection, although as with Price and Kensington this is not always the case. However, classification, even if it does not provide physical safeguarding, can facilitate documentary preservation, even if the object cannot be displayed or is sadly lost. The Historic England website provides a heritage list of lists; listed buildings, building preservation notices, scheduled monuments, registered parks, gardens and battlefields and conservation areas. The UK is a signatory of the World Heritage Convention set up in 1972 by the United Nations Education and Scientific Committee, commonly known as UNESCO, which has established a list of world heritage sites. For the United Kingdom, of the 27 sites which include the expected castles, stately homes and cathedrals, industrial heritage also features and is represented by Ironbridge Gorge, Derwent Valley Mills, The Forth Bridge and Saltire. To get on the 'list' according to UNESCO, 'sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria.'³ The criteria uses words and phrases such as 'a masterpiece of human creative genius,' 'exhibiting of human values over time,' and 'a testimony to cultural tradition.' UNESCO also considers 'the protection, management, authenticity and integrity of properties.'⁴ Nation states which have signed-up to the UNESCO convention submit tentative lists put together by stakeholders which should be re-examined and resubmitted every 10 years. It is not clear who are the State stakeholders. The UK's tentative list can be found on the UNESCO site, last dated 2014, it does not list any site relating to ceramics industrial manufacturing within Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire. UNESCO lists now extend to intangible cultural heritage (2009), to acknowledge that cultural heritage goes beyond sites and objects.⁵

It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.⁶

The importance of intangible cultural heritage in maintaining cultural diversity with growing industrialisation is also emphasised. The list includes traditional and contemporary practices, not focusing on cultural specificity but acknowledging that a skill can relate to one or more different communities. However, the skill must be recognised by the communities, groups or individuals that have contributed to that aspect of intangible cultural heritage. If you visit UNESCO's intangible culture web presence you will notice that information about the UK and Northern Ireland is sparse. This is because it did not sign up to the 2003 convention for the 'Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.'⁷ For those nations that did sign the convention, the nominated aspect of intangible cultural heritage proposed for preservation is not representative of industry, unlike UNESCO's tangible cultural heritage list, which may say something about how industrial skills are valued culturally.

The challenge is to identify what can be done if lists of intangible and tangible culture appear to be not fully representative of the cultural contribution of a

community or society. Maybe it is possible to create your own list or even ignore the list. The Heritage Craft Association (HCA) is an advocacy body for traditional heritage crafts and is trying to address this challenge. It states that 'In the UK traditional crafts are not recognised as either arts nor heritage so fall outside the remit of all current support and promotion bodies.'⁸

The HCA, with reference to the UK's decision to not sign up to UNESCO's 2003 convention, has set-up a petition to rectify this. However, it acknowledges that this is not the only route to the recognition of intangible culture and would support an alternative government approach. It refers to the Newfoundland Model,⁹ for safeguarding cultural heritage via policies and initiatives. The HCA has also created 'The Red List of Endangered Crafts' a classification scheme for intangible cultural heritage. A new entry for 2019 is industrial pottery, defined as the 'skilled hand processes required at various stages of the pottery industry (see also studio pottery).'¹⁰ Its status is classified as 'critically endangered', the historical area of significance is Stoke-on-Trent. Neil Brownsword, artist and Professor of Ceramics at Staffordshire University is currently working with the HCA to ascertain the number of practitioners of each of the industrial pottery sub-crafts. As part of my research into the safeguarding of industrial ceramics skills, I am also assisting with the updating of the industrial pottery entry so that it accurately represents the existing knowledge of crafts embedded within industrial production and the extent that these skills have diminished.

Brownsword's artistic practice has challenged the established cultural hierarchy which has excluded the intangible culture of industrial ceramics by seeking unique and creative ways to preserve industrial ceramics skills before they are lost to us all. He has collaborated with artisans, raising and presenting their skills in the formalised setting of the museum, to address the exclusion of industrial ceramics skills from established heritage listings and classification. At the recent British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) Brownsword's multimedia installation *'Externalising the Archive'*,¹¹ reconnects industrial craft knowledge to an important collection of historic moulds housed at the former Spode factory. Through the application of digital technology visitors could interact with objects that are logistically out of reach. They could, also, witness the live digitisation of historic moulds using scanning technologies in the role of heritage preservation. This free immersive experience was not dependent on the permissive formalised presentation values and classification adopted by museums, or the recognised display barriers of the glass case, the podium, the 'do not touch' signs and contextual references. The affordance of this cross-disciplinary participatory exhibition was to circumvent the conventional controlled predefined presentation of heritage. Value is placed on processes and artefacts of production, the beauty of the ordinary, the mould as opposed to finished material object. As Brownsword says 'to reinstate these heritage assets back into contemporary consciousness' allowing the audience to be part of an out of bounds experience without waiting for the authorisation to enter.

Perhaps the reimagining of heritage, as illustrated with Brownsword's installation, could be the alternative to the curated endorsement of encased listed methods of preservation. The Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Centre in downtown Asheville in North Carolina no longer has access to the original buildings, which are privately owned, and many of the Black Mountain artefacts were dispersed after its closure in 1957. It does have a collection of books and videos, but its focus is on the people and ideas of the Black Mountain College rather than the material objects. The outreach manager calls it a living museum, encouraging people to interact with the Black Mountain College legacy its 'art ideas and discourse'¹² through a public programme of exhibitions, discussion and performances.

As evidenced with the demolition of the front of Price and Kensington, listing is



Fig. 2. Rear yard of the Price and Kensington factory, Stoke-on-Trent, 2019

not a guarantee of building preservation and equally museum status does not guarantee the preservation of skills inherent in the objects it presents (Fig. 2). What needs to be encouraged are different safeguarding methods to society's existing accreditation systems, as exemplified by 'the list', for preserving intangible and tangible cultural heritage. This will require the continued challenge of heritage didacticism and the promotion of critical discourse through practice, education and open public engagement, with integrated reinterpretation and re-imagining.

- ¹ Elliot, G., *Potters: Oral History in Staffordshire Ceramic Industry*, Churnet Valley Books, 2004, p.28.
- ² Historic England – What is designation. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation>.
- ³ UNESCO - The Criteria for Selection, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.
- ⁴ UNESCO - The Criteria for Selection, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.
- ⁵ UNESCO, *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity 2009*, UNESCO, 2009, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/06859-EN.pdf>.
- ⁶ UNESCO - What is intangible heritage, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>.
- ⁷ UNESCO, *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO, 2011, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/15164-EN.pdf>.
- ⁸ Heritage Crafts Association - What we do, <https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/what-we-do/>.
- ⁹ Heritage Foundation Newfoundland and Labrador – Intangible Cultural Heritage, <https://heritagefoundation.ca/programs/ich/>.
- ¹⁰ Heritage Crafts Association - Industrial Pottery, <https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/industrial-pottery/>.
- ¹¹ British Ceramics Biennial, *International Festival Celebrating Contemporary Ceramics in Stoke-on-Trent 7th September until 13th October 2019*, BCB, 2019, p.20.
- ¹² Black Mountain Museum and Arts Centre – About -<http://www.blackmountaincollege.org/about>.





Fig. 1. *Returns*, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, 2015

Introduction: A Series of Returns

We first came to the derelict Spode factory for a series of residencies as part of *Topographies of the Obsolete*, which brought artists to investigate post-industrial landscapes associated with the global context of ceramics. The site no longer exists as it was then: some parts have decayed further whilst others have been renovated and put to fresh use, but it has continued to author our research. Returning repeatedly, we have explored its prompts through diverse practices, including working with clay and sound, walking, collecting artefacts, making drawings, writing and taking photographs. Having developed from the provocation of a specific time, site and situation, this project has been re-informed by continually returning to a place.

Our process is thought of as a 'back stitch' methodology. In the craft of embroidery, the back stitch is defined by a double-length stitch on the underside of the work, from which the thread emerges above in a visible loop back towards its origin, before plunging underneath again, and then forwards in the direction of travel; this completes the stitch just made, and gains the ground necessary for the next one. For us as artist-researchers, each exhibition is such a re-emergence, an explicit opportunity for dialogue with one another, and with others who know this place, but it is the momentum produced by these returns backwards and beneath, and the reinforcement of the hidden under-thread that sustains the investigation. In the back-stitch, much more thread is carried invisibly underneath the work than is seen on top, and thus it is in our project, where the explorations we pursue out in the city, with participants or alone in our studios generates and strengthens the research. We are interested in the way diverse investigative strands can be brought into proximity through artistic-research, and in the dialogue that occurs whilst working alongside one another and with participants: *Returns'* interrelated inquiries and multiple voices address the complexities of the places we explore.

We have so far developed three group exhibitions, as well as a host of independent outcomes emerging from the individual threads we continue to pursue. *Returns*, the first exhibition in Bonington Gallery Nottingham (Fig. 1), focused closely on the Spode site and its environs: we recontextualised existing objects and used performance and sound to respond to materials and histories encountered there, and we developed site-specific, lens-based work which attended to the particular aesthetics of this post-industrial place. Our work for *In Return*, SIA Gallery, Sheffield (Fig. 2), involved large scale wall drawings, sculpture, video, sound, photography and practices of walking. Here, we widened our research to incorporate brownfield sites in Sheffield, the mould-making practices of a Staffordshire brick works, and the ways in which contexts could be further shifted through the use of audio, the performed repetitions of domestic labour, or the repurposing of historical ceramic patterns.

Most recently, we came together again for *re-turning* at AirSpace Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent where we paid close attention to the overlooked everyday, and to the ordinary materials to which little time is usually given. We thought too about the inter-relationship of nature and culture, about contested ideas of home and belonging, and the very human processes of touching and making. We were alert to the way surfaces make history visible or efface certain stories, recognising how specific sites and objects contain complicated memories and provoke imaginative possibility.

Throughout the project, we have created spaces for participation and for discussion about making and re-making in the post-industrial age. For the *Returns* exhibition, Nottingham (2015) the first of a series of seminars considered the archaeological dig experienced from an artist's perspective and the ruin as site for artistic enquiry; a second considered regeneration through artists' repurposing of



Fig. 2. *In Return*, SIA Gallery, Sheffield, 2016

the premises discarded by industry, asking how creative practices contribute to a city and its cultural economy beyond purely monetary gain, and a third reflected on the loss of industrial craft skills and the implications for making. In Sheffield, meanwhile, a collective audio walk and gallery conversation engaged participants with the particular resonance of place and artworks, and the Stoke-on-Trent exhibition (2018) involved workshops in and out of the gallery with those seeking refuge or asylum in the UK, who used clay as a medium to share experiences of home. Residencies at Primary, Nottingham and AirSpace Gallery, where we sought the dialogue of critical friends, have also enriched the work.

Our *Returns* project continues. As we return to specific sites and to each other, we find that neither these places nor ourselves are the same. What we know is that we will return again, and each time it will be different.

The *Returns* group is Andrew Brown, Joanne Lee, Danica Maier and Christine Stevens. We are grateful to Chloë Brown, Ciarán Harrington and Debra Swann, whose participation at the project's outset helped shape the initial path.



Fig. 3. *In Return*, SIA Gallery, Sheffield, 2016

Material Transcendence

Andrew Brown

As an artist I am reluctant to generate yet more objects to add to the pile of physical stuff in the world, hence my decision to work principally with the medium of sound. However, I am not averse to tweaking things that already exist. In the Bonington Gallery in 2015 I displayed an illuminated tangle of Christmas lights that had once adorned the Spode factory in Stoke-on-Trent, a poignant reminder of a community on the receiving end of the relentless logic of globalisation (Fig. 1). Two years later, at AirSpace gallery fellow *Returns* artist Christine Stevens and I exhibited clay artefacts created by local residents, many of whom were seeking or had been granted asylum, their lives intertwined with flows of global capital. On this occasion the emphasis was less upon the objects themselves and more upon the stories that lay behind each of them, captured as digital sound recordings. The AirSpace exhibition also took an interactive and generative approach, with gallery visitors invited to create clay objects of their own and to record and share the stories behind them.

For all three iterations of the *Returns* project I have used the gallery as start and end point for site-specific soundwalks. In Nottingham I combined contemporary recordings with archival sounds that culminated in the recreation of a huge sonic explosion at the spot where a bomb struck in May 1941. The artworks created by my fellow *Returns* artists in Sheffield became the prompt for a soundwalk through and in between the two levels of the SIA gallery. And for AirSpace I based the walk upon Victorian maps, evoking Hanley's social and industrial past. On each occasion the gallery could be seen to operate as a portal, between the imaginary worlds evoked by the works displayed within and the 'everyday' world beyond its walls. However, I consider this threshold to be an artificial construct, the sound walks continually juxtaposing the 'real' with the imagined, in an ever-changing live aleatoric composition that directs the senses towards what is otherwise ignored.

From its origins in the *Topographies of the Obsolete* project, *Returns* has opened up new territories for my practice. I have worked with several sites, each with its own rich post-industrial landscape and legacy. Through my collaboration with Christine Stevens I have been introduced to a medium - raw clay - that shares several features with sound, namely tactility, malleability and communality. The clay structures that we and others created during the project have functioned as vessels into which otherwise untold stories have been spoken and shared, and continue to resonate.

Throughout *Returns* I have experienced a sense of being situated at a confluence, of flows of people, technologies and materials. At times this has aroused dizzying feelings of dislocation but has also provided memorable encounters with diverse groups of people. I feel privileged to have been able to witness them share important aspects of their lives and as a consequence have a greater appreciation of the importance of collective creative endeavour to all of us.



Fig. 1. 5-11-2008, Andrew Brown, 2015

In the Midst and In-between

Joanne Lee

Spode, Stoke-on-Trent

Close up against surfaces, a camera lens grazes the dusty, rusting, mouldering site, looking in microscopic detail at the result of global capital's ebb and flow. Decay's relentless creativity extends across post-industrial places as commerce and production shift elsewhere.

Vague places have potential. No longer used for what they were, they become fit for other things, other beings, other ways of being. Buddleja sprouts and seeds. Broken and unmended windows let in the pigeons. Snails graze fields of algae. An artist finds room to think – of this place, and others like it that they have known before, places after quarrying, mining, manufacture – and reckons too something of art's in-betweenness.

Neepsend, Sheffield

Recurrent walking, photographing and writing.
A place of birdsong, silver birches, bicycles, where goits still channel water past now derelict mills. The Don flows past metal fabrication, body shops, spray booths and powder coating, waste transfer, off-roading, fly-tipping, past those smashing up stuff and setting fires. Graffiti writers drip acid green and shimmering silver. Diggers churn old earth ready for new construction.

An artist explores past and present, lingers with natural and cultural entanglements and wanders further in the vague terrain.

Elsewhere, in between returning, in other projects and in other places the thinking continues. From high rise flats on the edges of England (Grimsby and Brighton) an artist thinks about utopia – 'the good place that is no place', and about deprivation and decent housing in contemporary England, as well as just who gets to feel at home here. In Sheffield, at other times, an artist essays everyday signs and surfaces, remarking supposedly unremarkable things. Photographic flatness and acts of describing defamiliarise what is encountered during the daily commute.

re-turning, AirSpace Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

Back in the midst of England, the Six Towns have streets named for the stars and planets, for Zion, Spode and for the Corporation. A shop advertises out of date pop and choc, and lingering posters exemplify entropy.

An artist seeks out utopias. They exist, outcropping temporarily.
People always make space for alternatives, creating havens, refuges and community. Lollardy, Primitive Methodism, evangelical churches and new age spirituality.

The Workers' Educational and Esperanto Associations. Northern Soul, Rave and even the swingers' scene.

An artist walks circles around the sometimes radical middle ground. She remembers 'The structure of thought is not a straight line, but a wandering, an ambling, a meandering, a walkabout.'



Looping Back

Danica Maier

As I reflect on the continual looping back to Stoke-on-Trent and Spode (whether literally or metaphorically) I find a number of distinct threads which weave together and interconnect. In the various public outings of the project, sometimes only a single thread is visible, but this is always bound together with the whole, twisting a lush rope out of diverse themes and practices: history, ornamentation, value(s), scavenging, re-familiarising, attention / detail, blurred boundaries, contra-harmonies and re-coupling.

Scavenging has been prominent throughout as a core methodology – first in the Spode factory, and then further afield through antique, seconds and charity shops in Stoke-on-Trent. Initially, the Spode site offered a rich and rare ground filled with unwanted and left-over materials ranging from historical moulds to office paperwork. It was the unused transfer decals (Fig. 1) though which engrossed me, boxes filled with stacks of ornamentation ready for ceramic wares that will never come into being.

Everything I have worked with has been found, though not always made, in Stoke-on-Trent. Hunting through the city for discarded, unloved or abandoned ceramic objects in the Aladdin's cave of its various second-hand shops, it was the decorated domestic ceramic object(s) that held my attention. During the search, Spode ware caught my eye, as well as ridiculously ornate yet functional pottery. I was excited to find mass-produced duplications with subtle differences in sizes and decoration: Falstaff jugs whose cheeks were rosier in some versions than others; a different wood pattern appearing on handles for the same creamer; the various versions of Willow Ware. I feel a strange sense of wonder for these same but different objects – a repetition, a copy, a mass-produced commodity and yet the hand of the maker clearly shows through, creating an unexpected original.

In this research journey I have found the meeting, blurring and intermingling of boundaries significant. I have explored the space between a variety of oppositions: value and worthlessness; art object and found artefact; drawing and ceramic; fine art, craft and design; functionality and ornament; artist and audience; economy and excess; small details and bigger picture; hiding and revealing; studio and gallery. Questions are asked about where the work begins and ends; what is the holding structure (plinth/frame) and what is the artwork. Craft and fine art abut and share a common plinth: a drawing becomes the table for a tea set and pattern spills from the milk creamer onto the wall. The highly ornate fights against the purpose of its functional design.

Spode, and the initial Topographies residency as the starting point, have been like an anchor for a line of exploration and artwork, considering place through the industry that has shaped its histories and people. The journey is the line that holds it all together.



Fig. 1. *Cabinet Collection*, detail, Danica Maier, 2015



Fig. 2. *Nesting: Milker*, detail, Danica Maier, 2018

On the Non-Verbal Transmission of Knowledge

Christine Stevens

The Big Pot

We found through trial and error that there was an optimal size for the coils; too small and the walls collapsed, too thick and they became bulky and unwieldy. The clay had to be wet enough to work, but stiff enough to hold weight. It was the product of many hands, co-operating, competing, problem-solving, pulling, pushing, smoothing, beating, shaping, building. The form of the pot became a record of our relational process.

SIA

The brick moulds were an odd combination of accurate dimensions and tightly mitred corners, with roughly angled screw holes and rudely carved or scribbled symbols on their sides to signify their use – now forgotten and obscure. They were dirty with clay residue and gritty with sand from their last use. Some were wedge-shaped, part of an arch; others were half-moons, or dog-legs. Some had internal braces to support cut-off corners, and others were complicated combinations, rounded, with straight sections and cut into by protuberances. None of them were a conventional brick-shape, and no two of more than 230 moulds were exactly alike. Here was a rich legacy of skilled hand-crafting once common utility objects from humble materials, which was just on the cusp of passing into obsolescence and industrial history.

Workshops

Our haptic senses are enlivened by touching clay. It is evocative, yet grounding and concrete. Opening up communication beyond words, it can become a meaningful way of bridging dislocations in our experience between the 'there and then' and the 'here and now.' Workshop participants told stories into the Whispering Pot about everyday clay objects from their homelands. The recorded narratives emanated from the pot with a thin, fractured and sometimes indistinct quality, which was in keeping with the difficulties and discontinuities of life experience so many of the contributors had encountered.

AirSpace

The Listening Pot was made from two hundred and fifty kilos of terracotta crank in the gallery over a week by 30 passers-by. During its making, it became the vehicle for conversations among the visitors and makers; children on school holidays, students, former employees in the ceramics industries, asylum-seekers.

Sometimes the imperative of the material took over; the squeezing, rolling, pulling, smoothing. The repetitive placing of one piece on top of another, the struggle with the growing shape; dips and bulges; the periodic emergency of the impending collapse requiring improvised props, supports and bindings. The physicality of engaging with such a large vessel, irrevocably marked by the hands of the labourers inevitably evokes reflections on the body-to-body connection between vessel and maker.

The 'hearing' qualities of clay reside in its capacity to receive the marks we make in it, to hold the things we put in it, to reflect back the sounds we make to it and to absorb the energy we give to it. It is a surprisingly versatile material for helping us to understand more about ourselves and the world we live in.





The Soft Rebellions

Chloë Brown

I am done with ruins and with 'ruin porn;' the aestheticised photographs of post-industrial cities and their crumbling buildings. These cities contain people who live their lives against a backdrop of misrepresentation and although there is poverty, social and racial injustice, unemployment, corruption and crime, there is another more hidden narrative, a more positive one, perhaps even a narrative of empowerment.

Having previously made a film entitled *Dancing in the Boardroom (Turnin' My Heartbeat Up)*¹ of two Northern Soul dancers dancing in the disused boardroom of the former Spode factory in Stoke-on-Trent (effectively the first *Soft Rebellion*), I chose to look towards Detroit. Detroit, a city that is the poster girl of a post-industrial city in crisis, illustrated by an abundance of photographs of beautiful ruins; a city that declared bankruptcy on July 18th 2013 with debts estimated at around \$20 billion, a city ranked number one for violent crime in America² where the population has declined by over 50% since its height in the 1950's, the so-called 'white flight' accelerated by the 1967 Detroit Riots (or Rebellion), where people of colour represent over 80% of the current population with 40% of the residents living below the poverty line. The city is also called The Motor City, built up (and in part brought down) by the powerful 'Big 3' US car manufacturers (General Motors, Chrysler Corporation and the Ford Motor Company). However, Detroit is also the home of sweet Soul Music, of Motown and in its heyday in the 1960's of hundreds of small recording studios pumping out Motown-inspired, raw and rare soul; music that became Northern Soul in the UK.

The history of Detroit is a complex one but to some extent it finds shared narratives in many post-industrial cities globally, including my hometown of Sheffield (UK), cities that are still in the process of trying to work out their reason for being once their founding industry has changed so radically that it no longer defines the culture or the citizens. In August 2015 I visited Detroit for the first time, returning a further four times up until November 2019, resulting in six pieces of work, an exhibition in 2016 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD), with several pieces in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) and many friendships forged.

The Soft Rebellions of Detroit began before I was able to visit when, frustrated by this fact, I began 'walking' its streets through Google Maps Street View. I became particularly interested in a route that starts at a large area of scrubland and ends at the world's largest Masonic Temple. Until they were demolished in 2014, the Brewster-Douglass Housing Projects stood where I was now seeing scrubland; the site of the public housing where many of the Motown stars grew up including Diana Ross, Florence Ballard, Mary Wilson and Smokey Robinson. At the other end of the route and social demographic, stands the Masonic Temple, a towering skyscraper containing an entire hidden floor containing numerous Masonic Lodges whose membership included industrialists and local politicians who played a key role in the history of the city.

To connect these two points on the map I made a 9 metre-long scroll-like ink drawing of the route entitled *From Alfred Street to Temple Street, Detroit* using the still images from Street View to create a piece that references animation or film. This route informs the first *Soft Rebellion* made in Detroit in 2015. *Dancing in the Street* is a short film of a series of Detroiters dancing along this route whilst listening to the Martha Reeves and the Vandellas song of the same name on headphones, connecting soul music with the historical industrial and political powerbase of the city with a song that is both a party song and was reinterpreted as an anthem of the Black Panthers.

Following these initial pieces, I went on to make further *Soft Rebellions*, including a participatory event, *The Detroit Dinner Service* held in Palestine Lodge at The Masonic Temple: the lodge where the controversial figure of Henry Ford, of the Ford Motor Company, was a member. The dinner part was exclusively female, the twelve guests (including Martha Reeves herself) representing women who are engaged in empowering activities in the city, eating food prepared by a female chef and grown by a female urban farmer, served on a 36-piece bone china dinner service (also named *The Detroit Dinner Service*), which I designed using the drawing *From Alfred Street to Temple Street, Detroit* and made in Stoke-on-Trent, a nod back to the post-industrial city where the *Soft Rebellions* began. The 12-track vinyl LP *A Toast to Detroit* charts the toasts each guest made to the city they love, a celebration giving a voice to a place cast as a dangerous underdog.

Next came *The Clapping Piece*, a series of filmed portraits of activists and creatives who are working towards the empowerment and reinvention of Detroit. Each individual or group was filmed performing *The Wigan Clap*, a type of applause described to me by Motown icon Martha Reeves that she experienced when performing at the legendary Northern Soul venue in the north of Britain, Wigan Casino. Again, this acts as a celebration of the underdog and offers the agency of the citizens as an alternative future and is my final *Soft Rebellion* in Detroit (so far).

The final *Soft Rebellion* included here is *A Soft Rebellion in Paradise*, a short film made in Sheffield with a cast of 200 women, performing a series of actions in Paradise Square, the site of historical protests in the city, filmed by an all-female film crew. The film focuses on the silencing of women's voices throughout history and at its heart is a poem *A Soft Rebellion in Paradise Squared* by Geraldine Monk - part incantation, part song, part chant, performed by Monk and the crowd.

Here follows a series of images reflecting on the *Soft Rebellions* with text by my daughter, Grace Higgins Brown, with whom I frequently collaborated on this body of work; my left-hand woman, together experiencing strange and fantastical moments in the research and production of the pieces. Anecdotes and memories.

Soft Rebellions have so far included:

Drawing	Dancing	Eating	Talking
Applauding	Gathering	Chanting	Yelling

Softness

Softness seen as a female attribute. Here softness is re-appropriated as power, revolt. Power to embrace a soft rebellion; celebratory rebellion that captures the pain of past and of present realities, but doesn't linger on woe – it strives to move forward.

Rebellion

There is something joyous in the idea and indeed in the acts themselves. The push and pull of boundaries and crossing them is an expression of freedom, desire, danger, of jouissance. To rebel is not necessarily to reject, but perhaps to accept alterity; to approach potentiality.

The work is site-specific in a loose, connective sense; this specificity travels with the work, with screenings and showings imbuing spaces with convivial strength, emotion. Here, movement is moving. Momentarily connected bodies extend across places, and beyond the screen to an audience over and over.

¹ HD Video 2013, Duration: 07:37, <https://vimeo.com/75807622>, made in response to the Topographies of the Obsolete workshops at the Spode factory, Stoke-on-Trent, UK.
² FBI crime data statistics, 30th September 2019.

From Alfred Street to Temple Street, Detroit¹

Arduous work

Painstakingly mapping a route not yet walked, or driven, or danced.

The route takes on the desire lines of longing, of veneration through distance.

I recognise that patch of grass!

I can't believe we're actually here.

It looks so different on Google Maps but I know the way so clearly.

The task is long, women's work is long and hard.

And beautiful.

The glorified unknown.

The streets, the trees, are alien, they look similar but they are Other. They were built by men who sat comfortably in Masonic rooms held at the end of the route.

These roads took over the city, then were taken to in order to protest, then to flee.

A pilgrimage is taken symbolically, thousands of miles away.

The beauty of the work lies in the time and distance inhibited in order to create it; in its poesis.

It is fantastical in this sense, but also in the idea of the glorified unknown.

Otherness is fascinating but also it is uncomfortable.

¹ From Alfred Street to Temple Street, Detroit, Chloë Brown, 2015, ink on paper, 8m 80cm x 22.9cm, collection of the DIA.



Dancing in the Street²

Calling out around the world

Are you ready for a brand new beat?

Summer's here and the time is right

For dancing in the street³

Rebellious freedom.

Whether or not Martha Reeves saw her call to dance as a call to riot is irrelevant. Eschewing inhibition to take up space. In Detroit there is so much space. Space to be travelled and interrogated.

Joy shouldn't delegitimise productivity, power, protest. The music is seen and not heard, the dancers are seen, the streets are momentarily occupied. Travelling from Alfred Street to the Masonic Temple, the streets once travelled in ink become a stage for direct, physical interrogation. Dancing in the street is awkward, but it is also so joyful.

You're a great dancer!

You go girl!

The middle of the road is not often trodden, let alone danced upon. The streets not often walked upon. In this context even the act of walking in the street becomes contentious; dangerous in popular opinion. The act of taking to the streets opens a sense of freedom, crossing that social boundary at once expresses a sense of gentle subversion.

The Masonic pilgrimage is joyfully trodden upon, stomped upon, kicked upon, twirled upon.

² *Dancing in the Street*, Chloë Brown, 2015, HD Video, Duration 02:40, <https://vimeo.com/154508784>.

³ *Dancing in the Street*, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, songwriters: Ivy Jo Hunter, Marvin Gaye, William Stevenson, 1965, Duration 02:40, Motown Records.



The Detroit Dinner Service⁶

Palestine Lodge, the Masonic Temple, Detroit.

Through the previous two works we are drawn to this site; the culmination of these led to an occupation of this particular 'men only' lodge, once a meeting place for Henry Ford, now the meeting place for female Detroiters; one night of female presence; a gendered reversal.

Sharing

Sharing food, sharing stories, sat atop the Mason's trap door.

That's where we keep the virgins.

Handmade

Cooking as a feminine pursuit, the absence of machine; all food was prepared by hand, prepared and eaten lovingly. Female touch.

The food was served on a dinner service full of industrial memory, branded with 9 meters worth of ink; a stretch of ruin not lusted over, but celebrated as active, ripe.

Surrounded by the leather-upholstered seats where favours and power were, are, exchanged. Fingers in pies; now the pie is quite literally shared.

They're filming a new superhero film here in a week.

They're shooting a fight-scene in the elevator shaft.

Have you noticed that we're travelling across more floors than it appears in this elevator?

I can't let you see the bits in-between.

Physical presence comprising that which is symbolically held; male-only quarters are opened wide to only women.

⁶ The Detroit Dinner Service, Chloë Brown, performance/event, Palestine Lodge, Masonic Temple, Detroit, 4th April 2016.

A Toast to Detroit⁷

Let's make a toast

Toasting the city apparently so left-behind – a fallacy carried by most outside of the city itself. Its inhabitants are vibrant. It is irresponsible to ignore its issues, but this is not what's happening, it is also important to sing its praises.

Please say nice things about us

The LP played anywhere holds the significance of this evening; it is etched into the grooves of each record. Each woman holding their moment with dexterity, recent history posited all around.

The ominous pillars of industrial masculinity humbled by the industriousness of imposing female presence.

On the walls you can see painted frescos of the true attributes of women

Chastity, honour and so on.

Although, not many women seem to follow these nowadays.

Suffragette colours replaced the little Masonic leather aprons – a cultural collision in a multitude of ways.



⁷ A Toast to Detroit, Chloë Brown, 2019, 12-track vinyl LP, design Dust Collective, edition 200.



The Clapping Piece⁸

The Wigan Clap
Weekend Warriors.
Northern Soulers.

Clap slowly.
Gradually build up.
Then, at the crescendo – stop.

A united front; acting in unity, unity formed through hours and hours and hours of working together. Of tacit and not-so-tacit collaboration. Activists re-empowering a city, noble labour commemorated.

Returning the phenomenon of the Northern UK back to the place of the music's birth; Northern Soul is comprised of songs largely created in Detroit. On Motown's democratic conveyor belt. Workers built the songs, workers danced their leisure time away to them, workers now take the clap associated with these long weekenders and all its glory back to some kind of origin. An altered context is carried, the result remains celebratory.

Listen to the sound of the drummer, thumpin' to the beat of my heart

Body and beat in unison, the factory is transported into leisure.

Turnin' my heartbeat up⁹

Bodies push rhythm into space, carry it home with them.

Get around town, no need to stand proud
Add your voice to the sound of the crowd¹⁰

Open hands.

'Post-Industrial' is a fetishised notion, it is alienating; the reality of such cities is quite the opposite.

⁸ *The Clapping Piece*, Chloë Brown, 2017 - ongoing, <https://vimeo.com/230828080> The footage shown represents the raw material and the basis for a multi-screened installation.

⁹ *Turnin' My Heartbeat Up*, The MVPs, 1971, Bobby Flax and Lanny Lambert, duration 2:16, Buddah Records.

¹⁰ *Sound of the Crowd*, Human League, 1981, Philip Oakey, Ian Burden, duration 3:58, Virgin Records.

A Soft Rebellion in Paradise¹¹

Paradise
 The rebellion took place in Paradise Square; a mass gathering of female-identifying bodies in a place of historical political dissonance; the Chartists, the Suffragettes, now enveloped by Solicitors' offices.

Paradise, a utopia.
 A utopia of the un-silencing of subjugated voices, The Unquiets. Female screams, hands placed over mouths; indicative absorption of the past and future ideals.

A utopian film set:

Never have I ever worked on an all-female film set.
Never have I ever worked with an all-female cast and crew.
Never have I ever experienced such a smoothly-run shoot.

Conviviality in the wake of anger, of desire. Incantations were spoken to a crowd of expectant participants from a Juliet balcony; here Juliet addressed other Juliets.

Silencing themselves, there was so much noise, pauses pregnant with protest.

Unity can develop through pain, but it should not be indulgent.
 Community can be experienced across space, but it does not always have to be physical or even conscious.

Here paradise was not lost but momentarily stood-in.



¹¹ *A Soft Rebellion in Paradise*, Chloë Brown, 2019, HD Video, Duration 09:24, Northern Order Films & Pencil Trick Productions.



Langenthal Project
HEAD – Genève, Geneva School of Art and Design

Introduction: Ghost Factory

Magdalena Gerber and Katharina Hohmann

It was not so long ago that people met together for coffee and cake on Sundays. The table was set with care. An attractive fabric tablecloth was spread on the customarily uncovered table. The silver cutlery was laid out. Baking was firmly in the women's hands, and the cake recipes were handed down from generation to generation.

Such stories are told by the objects once manufactured for ceremonies of this kind: coffee pots and teapots, milk jugs, sugar bowls, cups and saucers, cake plates, and of course the porcelain platter for the cake – all matching perfectly: 'Originally, a service was only used for festive occasions, and it was mainly reserved for the rich upper classes. With industrialisation, the table service also found its way into bourgeois circles and, during the 20th century, it was among the essentials of most family households in the industrialised countries.' Or at least, this is what can be found on Wikipedia when entering the word 'Essgeschirr' (dinner service).

The last great invention of Langenthal Suisse originated in those – so-called – 'good old' days: BOPLA, le beau plat – the beautiful plate, with its extremely colourful decor and exotic product names such as Firebird, Nautilus, Herodot or Unicorn – a series of crockery that must have appeared somewhat alien in fine Swiss parlours. 'Porcelain has never been so imaginative! BOPLA! was born in the small Swiss town of Langenthal in 1993. In a porcelain factory founded in 1906, which sold its high-quality porcelain all over the world under the name of Suisse Langenthal. It was the high quality of this porcelain that spurred on the artists of the School of Design in Langenthal to such masterly creative heights, so ringing in the magnificent era of BOPLA! porcelain.'¹

It is doubtful whether our students – most of them were born in the 1990s – ever knew the classic ceremony of coffee and cake. Everything has long been patchwork: the families, the cultures, the ceremonies, and the objects involved in them. And the 'magnificent era of BOPLA! porcelain' began in the very years in which the lights were starting to go out at the porcelain factory in Langenthal. Since 1992 Suisse Langenthal has been produced in the Czech Republic under the umbrella of the company G. Benedict.

Our project participants found their first excursion to the former porcelain factory in October 2017 all the more remarkable as a result: for the halls in Langenthal to have been abandoned only yesterday. In the porcelain factory and Kunsthau, nothing suggested that there had been no future for the production of crockery at the location on Bleienbachstraße for more than twenty years. We found out this and more, by the way, in the context of a guided tour given by Markus Leuenberger, one of the few employees who still works in various functions at the Porzi, as the former factory is known affectionately by the locals. Today, his main task is the repacking and distribution of hotel crockery that arrives in Langenthal from the Czech Republic to be sent out, under the label Langenthal Suisse, to hotels in Switzerland.

Immediately, the students were simultaneously overwhelmed and shocked, as well as being filled with enthusiasm by the remaining objects, tools, machines and an archive of approx. 14,000 decors in the form of transfers and pattern books. The fully equipped screen-printing studio with the screens, sieves and drying trays seemed to have only just been abandoned. In the design and photo studio, it looked as if coffee cups recently used stood on the worktables, and in the drawers there were personal items that had belonged to the workers: hand

cream, hair brush and tissues. The designers, plaster mould makers, porcelain painters, firing specialists, distribution staff – to name only a few of the former 1,000 employees – all seemed to be still present somehow.

A ghost factory. Only the factory shop in the courtyard is astonishingly well frequented, and the BOPLA! range is selling quite well with a reduction of 30%. Even the junk shops known in Switzerland as 'Brockenhäuser' – that is, as 'Brockis' –, which have rented parts of the building once belonging to the factory, keep some of the local crockery in stock. Here, it is actually still the old, often even complete 'service' lots that are tucked away on the shelves.

We prepared our Langenthal project for two years; two years in which four different directors passed on responsibility in the management office of the cleared factory. Directors administering a business that has long since been abandoned in principle, and who frequently travel to Karlsbad to answer to those ultimately responsible at the Czech concern. A newly founded business to save the traditional brand Langenthal in Zurich had to be closed again within a year. Two years ago, the extensive site was sold to a Zurich-based investor – including the buildings, some of which are listed. Now, it is chiefly the members of the association 'Porziareal' – which is making a stand to preserve a mix of handicrafts, art and commerce on the site – who are waiting for the next steps and hope to gain a say in future planning.

In this both necessary and painful phase of slow farewell, we burst in with twenty-three fine art students and five staff, following the course option Construction – Art et Espaces. Thanks to friendly assistance above all from Ruth Jäggi, trained porcelain painter, and from Markus Leuenberger, caretaker and distribution worker, but also owing to support from former director Adrian Berchtold and his successor René Trösch, we visited this unique place several times. Within eight months we were able to conduct research, work creatively, and finally, on the 'Night of Culture', exhibit our work here for an evening.

Raffael Dörig, director of the Kunsthau Langenthal, and Eva Maria Knüsel, his academic associate, were key partners from the beginning of the project. For almost two months 170 plates were hung on the walls of the Salon Bleu in the Kunsthau Langenthal. We particularly liked these white porcelain plates from Langenthal porcelain production – a discontinued model from the 1970s – because of their formal reference to plastic crockery. Each of the students designed a set of six plates using different techniques.

Additional important aspects of the project included two one-week workshops in the rooms of the former porcelain factory. A visit to Musée Ariana in Geneva with its well-documented collection of Langenthal porcelain served to consolidate our knowledge of this unique Swiss manufacturing business and its historical significance. In autumn 2018 we re-presented our exhibition Soucoupes Volantes (Flying Saucers), in a completely different way in the foyer of the Museum Ariana. The two workshops in the Musée Ariana were followed by a study day with British researcher and artist Neil Brownsword, co-leader of the research project *Topographies of the Obsolete*,¹ which had partnered with the CERCCO (Centre for Experimentation and Realisation in Contemporary Ceramics) at HEAD – Genève, since 2016. Neil Brownsword held a very informative cultural-historical talk on the industrialisation of porcelain production in England, and the post-industrial structural change that has come about over the last decades. He demonstrated this impressively using the example of the former Spode factory in Stoke-on-Trent. Much as Brownsword, as a former Wedgwood model maker, regretted the cultural loss signified by the closure of porcelain production in Langenthal, he encouraged students to consider the environmental and exploitative histories of industrialisation. The students thus attended to political, economic and cultural questions like these as they developed their projects.

The materials and furnishings, lithographic stones, moulds, porcelain colours and transfer images made available to us by the employees of the former porcelain factory enabled students to work on their pieces with few restrictions. Outcomes were complex, site-related objects, installations and videos – in full accord with the principle of cultural re-evaluation described by Boris Groys:

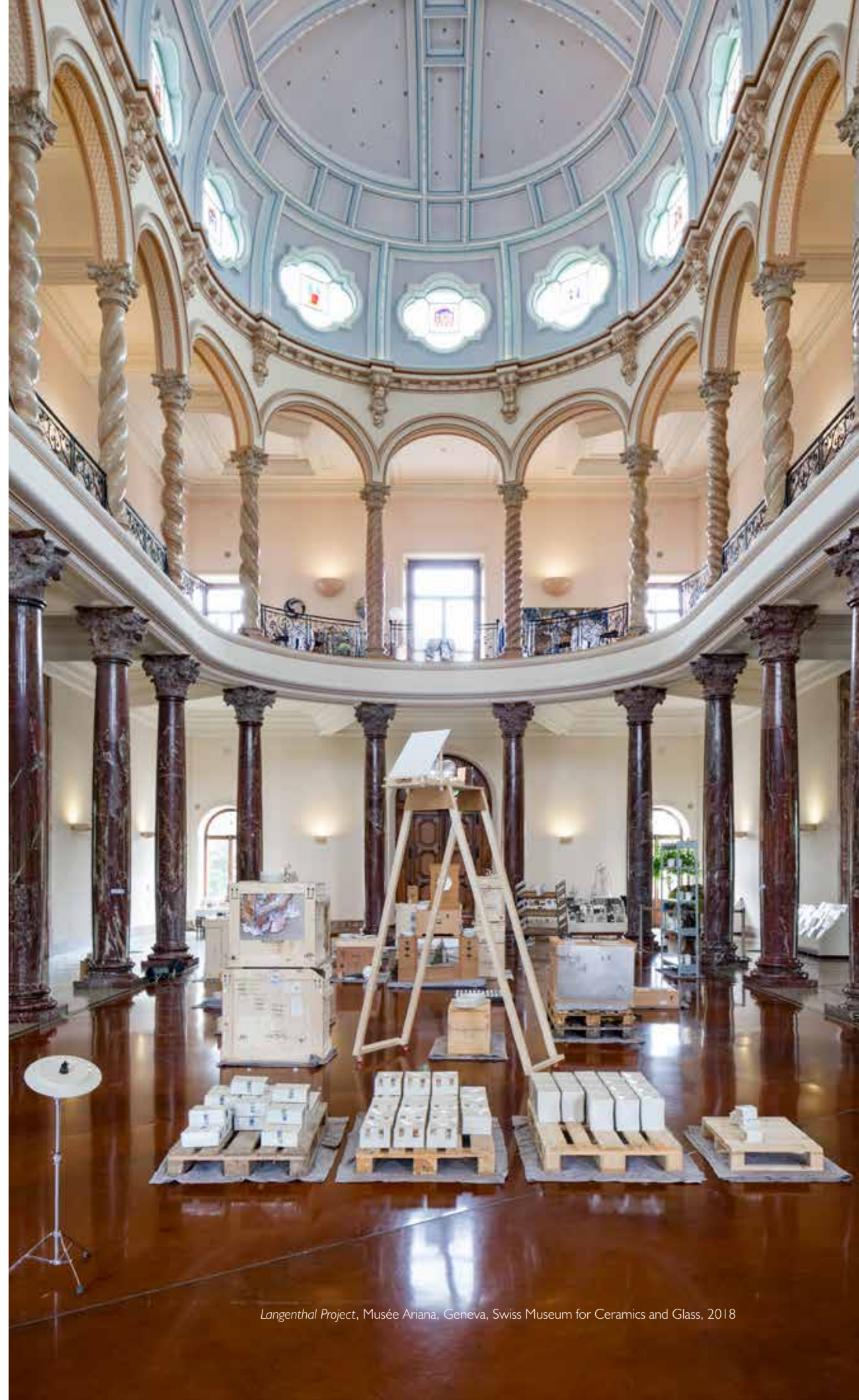
the elements left behind by the withdrawal of production have become worthless, but by means of artistic recontextualisation they are given fresh cultural value: Re-assessment of the values of what exists creates (...) a completely new situation, from which the entirety of culture may be seen, described and commented upon as if from the outside.²

The numerous visitors to the 'Night of Culture' at the Kunsthaus Langenthal, the porcelain factory the Musée Ariana, Geneva in October 2018, were confronted with far-reaching changes to a field of industry. But the young artists, each in their own ways, generate both proximity and distance, and draw inspiration for innovative art from the melancholic atmosphere of a craft in transition.



¹ <http://topographies.khib.no/>

² Groys, B., *Über das Neue: Versuch einer Kulturökonomie*, Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 93



Langenthal Project, Musée Ariana, Geneva, Swiss Museum for Ceramics and Glass, 2018

Flying Saucers and Falling Plates: A Tour of the Exhibition Soucoupes Volantes in the 'Porzi' Langenthal

Eva-Maria Knüsel

It is twilight in the suburb of Langenthal. In the mid 19th century, a flourishing industry developed in this town following its link to the national railway network. The brickworks, and factories producing textiles, machinery and porcelain shaped generations of workers and in the 20th century they made a decisive contribution to the upward economic trend in the town of Langenthal. Today, the way to the former factory site Langenthal Porzellan AG is fringed by a carpark, the factory shop, a thrift shop, bushes, and streetlamps. The otherwise abandoned building seems lively, bicycles are leaning against the wall, a car is parked here, and the windows are lit. People smoking and talking are standing by the entrance, voices and music echo across the courtyard.



Fig. 1

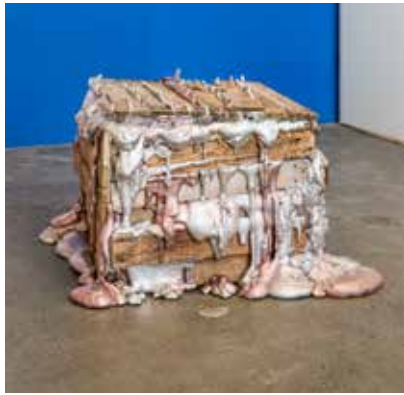


Fig. 2

Opening the entrance door, I am surprised by a deafening din. A WARM WELCOME– white writing on a blue wall greets the visitors, and in front of this I see an industrial rack equipped with a motor and laden with porcelain jugs. The jugs are grouped in pairs; one pair in each section of shelving. They vibrate with a chinking and clanking, the porcelain threatens to fall off and shatter on the stone tiles. There is something violent about the noise, the delicate and fragile material being in stark contrast to the metal shelf. But the coffee pots keep their balance, move almost as if dancing, and so turn into amorphous figures. The work *Caresses / Quotidien* by Baptiste Bonnard offers a starting point to the site-specific interventions made by students into the former production areas of Langenthal porcelain factory (Fig. 1).

Marco Simao, Alexander Fritz and Anaïs Bouvet make references to the company history and its end, characterised by the unresolved shift in production to the Czech Republic and mismanagement: their packing case placed in the entrance area seems ready to burst, a shining metallic mass bulges and drips through its roughly worked wooden planks. Symbolically, it stands for the destruction of a business from within, the title *Závodu Mirù 891/111, 360/7, Karlovy Vary* refers to the address of the factory in Karlsbad (Fig. 2). Via the stairs, we arrive on the upper floor of the factory building, where the abandoned office and production rooms are situated. Alexandra Barreto's interest lies in this emptiness and the absence of the workers. For *A Container* she combed the building for unused office materials like empty transparent folders, unprinted sticky labels or index cards that have not been written on. These can now be seen, sorted into strict order, in a found filing shelf (Fig. 3). As possible potential they wait for future use, and like an archive they convey an insight into the artefacts of analogue office work, which appears antiquated today. Walking on into the next room, the eye is caught by fine tendrils of ivy above the door frame. A dandelion plant peeks out between beam and hinge. Made from porcelain and glazed in delicate shades of

green, it fits into the architecture in an organic way – as if it had grown on the spot, as if it had reconquered the abandoned site. Araya De Rossi imagines a poetic scenario with *Es ist Zeit (It Is Time)*, one that could come about in these rooms in the near future (Fig. 4).

Today, a layer of white dust already covers the furniture, machines and window panes of the former production rooms. This observation is intensified by Emilie Triolo using subtle artistic interventions. In her two works *Manteau (Coat)* and *Rideaux (Curtain)* she covers over found objects like e.g. chairs, pallets, toilet rolls still sealed in plastic, a mouse trap, or a protective curtain with a powdery mix of kaolin and alumina, which is used as a separating agent in ceramics production (Fig. 5). The matt, chalky-coloured powder smooths all the surfaces, obscuring traces of use, and turns the everyday objects into marble-like sculptures. In a long corridor we find Pablo Rezzonico's four wooden pallets loaded with white cubes. For *Stock* he first cast the cardboard packaging of crockery produced in Langenthal in porcelain, using a complex process, and then reproduced this several times (Fig. 6). Fragile volumes evolve, fluctuating between functional and model status, and pointing to the long tradition of transport and trade with porcelain. The transfer images that have been used for so long as ceramic decor are now attached to the porcelain boxes in the form of sticky tape.

In the former darkroom of the factory building, Marjorie Kapelus and Benoît Renaudin present strange found objects from the factory collections in combination with their own creations. These are brought to life in a performative act by a figure in a close-fitting body stocking: a phototechnical enlarger becomes a futuristic device in stroboscopic light, apparently archaeological plaster casts in drawer units are dramatically illuminated in the red light of the photographic lamps. Ceramics tools with mysterious functions are found beside three-dimensional, rastered models of a cup, reminiscent of digital renderings. In the work *Prospective Lab* different periods of time come together in a panoptical scenario, and are examined with reference to their respective production-technological means and conditions (Fig. 7).

A chapter of the company history shaped by disturbances is reactivated by Katharina Hohmann in the series of works *Tourbillon (Turbulence)*. She links this to evidence of the specific technical knowledge involved in the refinement of ceramics. She decorates found sample plates, which served as a kind of model range and documentation of the reactions of the glaze at different firing temperatures, with transfer prints of archive photos from the 'Porzi' showing everyday life at the factory as well as demonstrations by the workers (Fig. 8). They were struggling for equal pay and improved working conditions, later against the outsourcing of production and the closure of the factory. Around the corner in the long corridor, an avalanche of plates seems to fall from an imaginary wall unit. Heaped up, overlapping like scales and wedged together, Langenthal porcelain produces the monumental installation *Brakes*, which tells of the fragile balance between productivity and over-production. Beside this, Sophie Conus and Henry Drake have produced casting moulds from existing crockery in *Mould Time* and used these in their turn for fresh casting. Located between a performative act, an absurd chain of production and an archaeological reconstruction, new objects evolve – touching in their faults and lack of precision (Fig. 9).

In the video work *Memory Space*, Noémie Gambino inspects the sample depot in which all the company's own products are archived (Fig. 10). The accompanying audio track evokes shattering porcelain, and surprises us with the painful effect of this noise in conjunction with the crockery shown. The artist is interested in our emotional ties to everyday functional objects and the personal value that we attribute to them: how much of this will continue to exist, what will enter into an archive or a museum, and what will be lost and forgotten?



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

In addition, it is possible to spot small towers of saucers in the lens. Inspired by the reduced and repetitive formal language of isolator shields, which were produced here at the 'Porzi' for electrotechnology alongside crockery, Viola Poli has positioned her work *Isolateur* here. She is searching for spatial references to the large factory hall or to the electric cables hanging down nearby, as well as the view out towards a high-tension mast in front of the window (Fig. 12). The viewer finds himself in an industrial situation that has burst its bounds in the case of Alexandre Aynié's installation *Jour de fête*. The artist imagines a surreal scenario, which could have come about on the last day of work in the factory: the lithographic stones used for the production of decor motifs experience a functional and material reinterpretation – as imitations made from porcelain, they casually tip the furnishings into a slanting position, a stool is stuck by its feet vertically to the wall, in a completely matter-of-fact way the Christ child stands on his head, and the loosely grouped objects in the room are set into indeterminate motion (Fig. 13).

With *Komm und spiel Kugel!* (*Come and play ball!*) artists Jonas Meyer and Julie Grange invite visitors to interact: on found furniture and wooden elements they have constructed apparently archaic tracks to roll marbles along (Fig. 14). Called upon to set the little balls in motion, the visitors find themselves back in a game from childhood: the balls, which originally served to grind ceramic materials, turn loops on the tracks prescribed, hit ceramic obstacles with a light clash, pick up speed, bump over steps, and finally crash down hard on the factory floor. As a metaphor for the course of events, the work opens up a wide spectrum of references. The video work projected onto the big wall, *Voucoupes Solantes* by Ludovic Vial, is a composition of found, animated plates and documentary recordings (Fig. 15). In long interviews with Adrian Berchtold, who was managing director of Langenthal Suisse for some years until 2017, the issues touched on are both the past and the future. Adrian Berchtold, along with others, supports the preservation of the site as a place for culture and handicrafts. Plates, some of which are printed with Elvis' face, turn in circles to the music of Elvis Presley's *Only You* and so recount in a humorous way the emergence and passing of twentieth century icons.



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

Vincent Kohler, for his work *Papa Maman*, replaces the cymbal of a hi-hat with a porcelain plate and plays the instrument until the plate shatters. The tense wait for this moment to happen captures our attention, the specific sound of wood on porcelain, the rhythm increases, one more hit – and the plate falls (Fig. 16).

On the floor of the impressive factory stairwell there is a flat plate of deep-black chamotte with regular indentations and an inlaid geometric pattern. The work *Shareholder* by Magdalena Gerber is based on a Chinese counting frame (Fig. 17). Using this system it is possible to represent numbers by means of specific placings in the grid. The artist visualises, in an associative way, a constellation comprising economic calculation and personal emotion: the arrangement of the balls shows the sum of 2.5 million Swiss Francs, corresponding to the sales price of the company's share capital after it went bankrupt in 2002. The individual balls made from adamantine spar (they were used in the grinding mills to break down the raw materials for porcelain production) are printed with photos of eyeballs. On the one hand, they are symbolic of the craftsman-like precision in ceramics production, on the other hand they represent the employees and shareholders of the business.

When climbing up the stairs, visitors encounter the word FRAGILE applied in stencilled lettering. We are familiar with this information, as it resembles the security technology lettering on transport crates of all kinds. It now appears in a range of places in the building – by the chimney, on a cloth sack in the cloakroom cupboard, drawn with a finger in the dust, above the door in place of EXIT, or on the fire-extinguisher. Only when appearing repeatedly is the artistic intervention by Victor Delétraz obvious; he uses it to thematise the fragile mechanisms of industrial production and the state of the abandoned building (Fig. 18).

On the topmost floor, below the roof, we enter a cloakroom probably used by the male staff. All around, there are permanently built-in lockers made from wood with some of the doors broken off. The centre of the room is provided with a freestanding water trough, the panes of the windows are covered in dust. In the cupboards there are abandoned personal items and photos and calendar pictures hang on the walls. It almost seems as if the users had left the rooms after their daily work without knowing whether they would be returning the next day. In *Un nom s'il vous plaît*, by means of subtle shifts and irritations Gregory Bourrilly creates a situation in which the present and absent nature of these individual stories and people can be experienced. In the corner lies the skeleton of a dead cat, an ensemble comprising a table, a chair, and ceramic vessels with porcelain sponges is lit by a heat lamp. A gilt light switch and imitation soap made from porcelain, fresh clothes in a cupboard compartment, tiles splashed with glaze on the walls all create a surreal atmosphere somewhere between the homely and the morbid - it is hard to determine what was found here, and what has been staged by the artist (Fig. 19).

Biographies

Arild Våge Berge (NO)

Visual artist and publisher, research assistant within *Topographies of the Obsolete* and previously assistant professor at The Art Academy – Dept. of Contemporary Art, University of Bergen. He holds a BA in Photography and MA in Visual Art. Berge explores topics such as technology, hydro power industry, archives and landscape, through sculpture, text and photographic practice. Co-founder of the independent publishing house *Topos Publications*, Norway.

Laura Breen (UK)

Dr Laura Breen is Impact and Engagement Manager at Manchester Metropolitan University. She was part of the AHRC-funded *Ceramics in the Expanded Field* project at the University of Westminster (2011–2016). Her monograph, *Ceramics and the Museum* was published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2019. Laura's writing also features in *Intersecting Practices: Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces* (2020), *The Ceramics Reader* (2017) and *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture* (2016). Prior to her PhD she worked in the museum sector at institutions including The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Bolton Museum and Art Gallery and Tameside Museums Service.

Andrew Brown (UK)

Andrew Brown is an artist, augmenting reality by means of sound and participatory performance, exploring the irresistible processes of change. Brown is MFA Course Leader and Senior Lecturer in Visual Arts at Nottingham Trent University, UK. He holds an MA in Performance, York St John, and BA(Hons) Contemporary Art, Nottingham Trent University, UK.

Chloë Brown (UK)

Chloë Brown is an artist and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University. She has an MA in Sculpture from Chelsea College of Art, London (1994), and a BA in Fine Art from the University of Reading (1987). Since 1987 she has exhibited widely in the U.S.A., Europe and in the UK. Her work has been included in international biennials: British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent (2013), 'AbbaraCadabra', Mardin Biennial, Turkey (2010) and Istanbul Biennial (2009). Since August 2015 Chloë Brown has been visiting and working in the US city of Detroit to conduct her on-going practice-based research into what she terms 'soft rebellions'.

Grace Higgins Brown (UK)

Grace Higgins Brown graduated from Sculpture and Environmental Art at Glasgow School of Art in 2018 and has exhibited and curated widely in the UK and Canada. Higgins Brown's practice manifests itself as text, video, audio, and sculptural installation, seen personally as an altogether filmic process; screenshots framed in the historical narrative expectation of the viewer. The abject-grotesque is explored in terms of its potential for political transcendence and empowerment, particularly through the idea of the subversive power of laughter.

Neil Brownsword (UK)

Dr Neil Brownsword is a Professor in Ceramics at Staffordshire University and visiting Professor in Clay and Ceramics at University of Bergen, Norway. Brownsword's artistic practice explores the impact of transitions in ceramic manufacture in his hometown of Stoke-on-Trent. Through film, performance 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. Brownsword is a co-leader of *Topographies of the Obsolete*.

Kimberley Chandler, Tan-dem (UK)

Dr Kimberley Chandler is a London-based researcher, writer and editor, and holds a PhD in Design and Architecture from the University of Brighton. Her particular focus is craft theory and practice, material agency, and temporality. Kimberley has worked closely with cultural institutions including the Centre of Ceramic Art at York Art Gallery, Yale Center for British Art, and Casco–Office for Art, Design and Theory, as well as with many artists and designers. She regularly writes about contemporary craft and design for publications such as *Crafts*, *Art Jewelry Forum*, *Interpreting Ceramics*, and *3rd Dimension* and is the former assistant editor at *Ceramic Review*. She recently took up the position of Exhibition Reviews Editor, UK and Europe for *The Journal of Modern Craft*.

Magdalena Gerber (CH)

Magdalena Gerber is Head of the Centre of Contemporary Ceramics (CERCCO) at Haute École d' Art et de Design, HEAD–Genève, where she is a lecturer in Art and Design. She studied Ceramics at École Supérieure d'Arts appliqués, Genève and holds a MAS Art/Design and Innovation, University of Art and Design Basel. Her artistic research examines the tradition of the applied arts to establish a dialogue across disciplines, through object and installation. In 2013 she led the research project *GraphicCeram*.

Richard Harper (UK)

Richard Harper is an interdisciplinary researcher and lecturer in Games Arts at Staffordshire University. Harper's work looks to integrate the digital technologies of games and visual effects to help solve challenges within broader disciplines. His recent collaborations have included projects within forensic archaeology, ceramics, environmental conservation and interactive filmmaking.

Katharina Hohmann (CH/DE)

Katharina Hohmann is an artist and curator interested in the transformation of specific sites as well as public space. She uses a broad range of materials for her interventions, exhibitions and site-specific projects which are underpinned by a focus on historical research. Alongside industrial ruins she is especially attracted by former churches, abandoned parks and the desert, where she has developed temporary installations in the Mojave (California) and the Karoo (South Africa). Since 2007 Katharina Hohmann has led the Sculpture Department, option Construction - Art et Espaces, at Haute École d' Art et de Design, HEAD–Genève (CH).

Joanne Lee (UK)

Joanne Lee is Course Leader for Graphic Design at Sheffield Hallam University. She is an artist, writer and publisher of the Pam Flett Press, a serial which essays everyday life. Her work has a particular focus on post-industrial sites and littered landscapes, and she explores the interdisciplinary, imaginative and collaborative modes of attention through which research into place can be conducted.

Danica Maier (USA)

Danica Maier is an Associate Professor in Fine Art, Nottingham Trent University, UK. She has a BFA and MFA in Painting and MA in Textiles. Her practice uses site-specific installation, drawing and objects to explore expectations, disrupted repetition, and line. Through various collaborative projects she explores process of practice as opposed to outcome; investigates unseen parts of archives as catalysts for artworks; and the drawn line as graphic score.

Vicki McGarvey (UK)

Postgraduate research student at Staffordshire University, focusing upon intangible cultural heritage and the safeguarding of ceramics skills. Chartered Librarian, Manager of Resources and Library Systems at Staffordshire University. Education: Med eLearning University of Hull; PostGradCert European Design & Visual Culture Staffordshire University; PostGradDip Information & Library Studies Manchester Metropolitan University; BA (Hons) Sociology Staffordshire University.

Anne Helen Mydland (NO)

Anne Helen Mydland is Dean of Research at the Faculty of Arts, Music and Design at the University of Bergen, Norway. Mydland's artistic practice evolves around the rhetoric of narrative and the materiality of memory, 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 is a co-leader of *Topographies of the Obsolete*.

Stephen Knott, Tan-dem (UK)

Dr Stephen Knott is a writer, researcher, and lecturer in craft theory and history. He is author of *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* (Bloomsbury, 2015), a book that derived from his AHRC-funded PhD at the Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum. He is one of the editors of *The Journal of Modern Craft* and has written articles for *Design and Culture* and *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History and Material Culture and Crafts*. Stephen was the Founder Post-doctoral fellow in Modern Craft at the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, and teaches at Kingston University.

Eva-Maria Knüsel (CH)

Eva-Maria Knüsel is a research assistant at Kunsthau Langenthal, Switzerland. She studied Art Education at the Bern University of the Arts, and Art History at the University of Bern.

Ezra Shales (USA)

Dr Ezra Shales is a curator, art historian and Professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston whose research dismantles the divisions between art, artisanship, and industry. He is the author of *Made in Newark: Cultivating Industrial Arts and Civic Identity in the Progressive Era* (Rutgers University Press, 2010) and *The Shape of Craft* (Reaktion Books, 2018).

Christine Stevens (UK)

Dr Christine Stevens is Director of Clay Studio Nottingham and graduate in Fine Art, Nottingham Trent University. She is a Gestalt Psychotherapist and Faculty member of the Doctorates in Psychotherapy at The Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University, London. Her inter-disciplinary research interests are concerned with clay as a therapeutic assistant in psychotherapy. Her artistic practice explores the haptic qualities of clay, and clay as an organising principle for social engagement.

Tim Strangleman (UK)

Dr Tim Strangleman is Professor in Sociology at the University of Kent. He is President of The Working Class Studies Association and author of *Work and Society: Sociological Approaches, Themes and Methods* (2008), and the *Voices of Guinness*, published by Oxford University Press (2019). Strangleman's research interests span the sociology of work and its historiography, work identity and meaning; deindustrialisation; visual approaches and methods; corporate photography; working class studies; the sociology of nostalgia and mass-observation.

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TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE OBSOLETE

Topographies of the Obsolete has involved: 97 participants from 13 countries; 9 partner institutions; 9 affiliated institutions:

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Erna Skúladóttir (IS), Anne Stinessen (NO), Númi Thorvarsson (IS)
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University of Missouri (US), Professor Maris Gillette (US)

University of Kent (UK), Professor Tim Strangleman (UK)

Kingston University (UK), Dr Stephen Knott

Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), Dr Tim Edensor, Dr Laura Breen

Massachusetts College of Art and Design (US), Professor Ezra Shales (US)

Plymouth University (UK), Professor Malcolm Miles

University of Sunderland (UK), Dr Neil Ewins (UK)

University of Warwick (UK), Professor Alice Mah (CA)

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