



TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE OBSOLETE

VOCIFEROUS VOID



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2013

Abraham
Blomgren
Brown
Brown
Brownsword
Collura
Fabian
Gibbs
Harsbo
Heeney
Holm Birkeland
Holten
Kaapke
Kelly
Kolstad Brekke
Launder
Maier
Marhaug
Modin
Mydland
Nikolaisen
Popp
Redalen
Saastad
Sandborg
Skúladóttir
Slotte
Stinessen
Sul
Thornton
Thorvarsson

Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void

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Kerstin Abraham, Karin Blomgren, Margrethe Kolstad Brekke, Andrew Brown, Chloë Brown, Neil Brownsword, Andreas Fabian, Tina Gibbs, Karen Harsbo, Gwen Heeney, Camilla Holm Birkeland, Sofie Holten, Lena Kaapke, KELLY/MARHAUG, Richard Launder & Julia Collura, Danica Maier, Morten Modin, Anne Helen Mydland, Heidi Nikolaisen, Sabine Popp, Toril Redalen, Tone Saastad, Johan Sandborg, Erna Skúladóttir, Caroline Slotte, Anne Stinessen, Øyvind Suul, Corrina Thornton, Númi Thorvarsson

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This publication is dedicated to Alan Shenton, for his dedication and passion, and to the original Spode factory site for being a challenging but fascinating acquaintance.

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Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void

is a collaborative project between Bergen Academy of Art and Design and the British Ceramics Biennial.



Preface

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

Topographies of the Obsolete is an artistic research project initiated by Neil Brownsword and Anne Helen Mydland at Bergen Academy of Art and Design (KHIB) in collaboration with partner universities/institutions in Denmark, Germany and the UK. Our main collaborative partner, the British Ceramics Biennial, invited KHIB to work at the original Spode factory site in Stoke-on-Trent, to develop a site specific artistic response as a core element of their 2013 exhibition programme. The project focus centres upon the landscape of post-industry, with a particular emphasis upon Stoke-on-Trent, a world renowned ceramic capital that bears evidence of fluctuations in global fortunes.

With the industrialisation of ceramics during the eighteenth century, systems of segregated labour brought about a phenomenal concentration of specialist skills and knowledge to specific regions of North Staffordshire. By 1800 the Six Towns of Stoke-on-Trent paralleled China as a world centre for ceramic production. Paradoxically, recent decades have seen centuries of this cultivated expertise being relocated to the Far East. Company investment in advanced production technology has further contributed to a massive reduction of an indigenous work force and the closure/demolition of once prevalent sites of historic manufacture. In 1948 around 79,000 were employed in the North Staffordshire ceramics industry; the figure now sits at just over 6000. In the current economic climate of rapid change, outsourcing, and innovation, the loss of traditional industry and skills is a matter of widespread public interest and concern.

The original Spode factory, situated in the heart of Stoke-on-Trent, was once a keystone of the city's industrial heritage which operated upon its original site for over 230 years. Amongst Spode's contributions to ceramic history include the perfection of under-glaze blue printing and fine bone china. The factory's industrial architecture dates from the 1760's to the late 1980's, with spaces associated with all aspects of design, manufacture, retail and administration in close geographical proximity. In 2008 Spode's Church Street site closed, with most of its production infrastructure and contents left intact. The site and its remnants has been the point of departure for the interdisciplinary artistic research of over 40 participating artists during three residencies. Through these intense periods investigation the core of the project has evolved. Its methodology draws upon the rhetorical method of identifying 'a landscape' and different 'topi' to ensure a multi-perspective approach¹. This method is suited to the project's diversity and to identifying the 'rhizomic' relationship between the individual and the overriding project.

Topographies is a framework, formulating topics and research strands which are treated as questions and approaches that are addressed through artistic practice. By honing in on the particular history and the singularity of this site, Topographies questions what is, and how ceramic and clay can be understood as both material and subject in contemporary art practice. How can we perceive the material (clay/ceramics) to be or constitute a site? Moreover, how do ceramics and clay form and construct our understanding of the site?

This publication is the first in a series which documents responses and reflections to the original Spode site from both artists and theorists connected to the project. Research outcomes from 'Topographies of the Obsolete' will continue to inform a programme of seminars, publications and exhibitions.

¹ Nymes, A., *Lighting from the Side*, Sensuous Knowledge, Focus on Artistic Research and Development, no.03, 2006



The original Spode factory site,
Stoke-on-Trent 2013

During the Topographies of the Obsolete residencies, artists were granted access to work in a majority of Spode's public and hidden spaces that dated from the late 1700's to 2008 when the factory closed. These included its vast production halls, design studios, show rooms, smaller workshops, backyards/courtyards, and alleyways, offices, shops, mould stores, cellars and attics. Participants encountered a mix of extreme dereliction where the forces of nature were reclaiming the building, alongside more ordered and attended areas. With the exception of finished objects, artefacts connected to specific labour divisions were left more or less intact.

The original Spode site offered multi-faceted scope for creative interpretation through its socio-economic histories, industrial architecture, and production and material remnants. Artistic strategies encompassed mapping the site through various media, from object appropriation and re-contextualisation, and lens-based work to performative gesture. Through three periods of artistic research and development on site, distinct and interconnected strands of investigation have formed the discourse in the project: The Socio-Economic Post Industrial Landscape as Site, The Globalized Landscape of Ceramics, The Human Topography of Post-Industry, The Topography of Objects/Archives and The Artist/Archaeologist, and The Topography of the Contemporary Ruin. These strands have been treated more as questions, as relevant starting-points for discussion in terms of highlighting the project(s) in established theoretical and contemporary art contexts. The project is addressing the validity and actuality of different approaches to investigate if these (familiar) strands have a potential for developing new understanding and knowledge.

One of the first and strongest impressions when entering the original Spode factory is its landscape of absence. Ceramic objects - the reason and purpose of the factory were surprisingly scarce. Gone are the workers, the many hands, heads and hearts that brought this massive beast of machinery to life. Left are 'the negatives' the voids; the rooms, the workplaces, the tools, the shelves, the firing setters, the kilns, the cardboard boxes, the soap on the sink, the tea caddy, and hundreds and thousands of moulds - potent with information, their form and purpose distorted and abstract in their unfamiliar emptiness.

The original Spode Works itself has become like one of its moulds, a vociferous void¹. The moulds 'negative' form is evocatively pointing to its 'positive' potential and leaves us in a parallel world, the world where we need to engage, either with our imagination, translating the 'negative' into our own 'positive' reality, or the tools² we create to translate our visions into being. The artistic research and processes of the artists involved in the Topographies of the Obsolete project have been using/navigating the landscape of the void³ between the negative and the positive, embracing slippage, distortion, and miscasts as to uncover the current Spode 'positive'.

The Factory⁴; the original Spode Works is very present in all the artistic responses; its physical layout and orientation as a 'heart' in the make up of Stoke; the buildings and interior features with industrial/corporate architecture spanning from its beginnings in the late 18th century, art deco buildings, and right up to 80's office partitions, and canteen furniture. A desire to open up 'the streets of Spode', and bring people back into this town 'inside a town', walking through its industrial architectural history and experiencing its immense gutted production halls, over grown courtyards, managerial offices, showrooms and art galleries, has been important to us all. It is an architecture that is also layered, literary in the sense that its insides are internally linked and joined, and how extensions and additions make up the infrastructure. The embodied and spatial (special) memory of the factory labyrinth is evident for all who visit. Therefore the whole of the site we open up to the public is a part of the exhibition, making the presence of art more a tension point whether to heighten, focus, expand or question the experience of the site. Like altitude markings in a map, making you translate the abstraction of the mapping to the physical terrain. The factory is not only walls and structures, Spode Works is a site constantly constituted in the people who know it, think about it and who tell us about it, tells the site into being, like the Aboriginal songlines⁵ of another time and place, where one sings the landscape into being, this way keeping present the continuous tale of Spode. Our voices are now joining in. What are the tales we are telling? What are the lines we are making? Is this where we find meaning/purpose in us (a group of not-local, foreign artists) working in Spode? The story of Spode is being told; politicians, economists, (art) historians, conservers, archivists, ex-workers. Art may be the only place the plurality of this site can be addressed since art does not have an agenda, focus or parameter? We experience the different songlines of this landscape/topography and combine them, challenge them even, at best we make new ones. Our stories are not more true, or more interesting, but they are different - gathered from the Vociferous Void.

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

¹ Dixon, S., *The Midst of Ruins*, Topographies of the Obsolete: Critical texts, 2013
Vociferous - marked by or given to vehement insistent outcry (Merriam Webster)

² Shales, E., *Tools Fit for the External Hard Drive*, Topographies of the Obsolete: Critical texts 2013

³ Void in casting or injection moulding, describes a defect where there are empty spaces (air pockets) in a completed part (Wikipedia)

⁴ Hauge, Ø., *Staging the Pottery*, Topographies of the Obsolete: Critical texts 2013

⁵ A knowledgeable person is able to navigate across the land by repeating the words of the song, which describe the location of landmarks, waterholes, and other natural phenomena. Traditional Aboriginal people regard all land as sacred, and the songs must be continually sung to keep the land "alive" (Wikipedia). Also see Chatwin, B., *Songlines*, Penguin Books, 1988

When I started working on 'Absence', I was for the first time using internet as a medium. Techniques used are research, action and installation. Industrially produced plates provide both the material and the subject Absence deals with, which is early transfer technology.

Stoke-on-Trent, located between Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool, is the centre of ceramic's industry, a development led by figures that included Josiah Wedgwood and Josiah Spode in the 18th century. Today, only a fraction of the original factories are still intact. These days a majority of production has been out-sourced to Asia. The industrial culture that developed in England over centuries has been dramatically reduced. People who were born and raised in this area are forced to seek out new employment prospects other than traditional industry. A starting point for my work has been to explore Stoke-on-Trent's difficult situation. I was struck by the pride in its own history; pride of the invention of a technology that took over Europe, overseas and eventually the world. A technology that helped develop a culture of peoples' everyday lives in the 20th century.

I searched the internet for creamware plates that originate from European factories, leaving out those from England. The research proved to be tough and tedious, as industrial mass-produced tableware had been mainly used in daily life and, thus, was perceived as worthless, inferior (what was passed on, was porcelain). Especially plates that had been used over a long period of time, were either used for all kinds of different purposes or disposed of completely. Considering my possibilities, I purchased one plate of each factory. The collection has grown to 63 different items between September 2012 and March 2013. Slowly, the number of plates purchased increases. The backside of each plate reads a factory stamp: from Belgium, Luxemburg, France, Germany, Silesia, Lithuania, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Switzerland, Italy, Spain... . That is the side I have chosen to display. It is possible to recognise similarities and differences in creamware and glazes at once, as well as the stamps of the producers (back stamps) and some, often handwritten, codes of decor.

Today, they show the observer, who is used to the monotony of post-industrial, globalised bulk production, the varieties of application and local developments of the original technology up to almost all individual moulding: I transferred the former dreary, ordinary, ugly into a beauty that I urgently desire these days.



Absence 2012/13 wall installation



Out of Order





Dancing in the Boardroom (Turnin' My Heartbeat Up)
HD Video 2013

A walk through S

Collective walking, and the retracing of footsteps are methods I apply in exploring threshold spaces and the passing of time, and at Spode two walks take divergent paths. The first engages with the physical, mental and historical landscape/space through the merging of extinct sounds with the contemporary sonic and human landscape. The walk can be experienced either within a group, moving together with a guide through the site, or independently.

The second, in the form of a virtual walk/video projection, wanders through the illusory pastoral idyll of decal images that, combined with material surfaces, are made strange and opaque through extreme magnification. Walter Benjamin, on the expanding field of photography states "(it) reveals in this material physiognomic aspects, image worlds, which dwell in the smallest things – meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams, but which, enlarged and capable of formulation, make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical variable".¹

A further, third artwork sees the re-illumination of the Spode Christmas lights, and the recreation of a moment in time. This resonates for me with the social/non-contractual nature of employment and relates to how workplaces constitute far more than a simple accumulation of bodies performing tasks, but form identity and sustain relationships. The unstoppable momentum of global capitalism makes times and places appear yet more temporary and impossible to return to, thrusting us into perpetual change and uncertainty. The illumination of the lights suggests a return to 6 November 2008 when the company went into administration.

¹ Benjamin, W., *Little History of Photography*, 1931



5/11/2008



The Blue Room, the original Spode factory.



The Union Room, the original Spode factory 2011.

Spode was one of the few factories that continued ceramic manufacture on its original site. Many early examples of its renowned printed blue and white earthenware's were housed in the famous 'Blue Room', situated in the heart of the factory. This priceless collection was believed to be the most comprehensive of its kind - a provenance which restricted viewing to a limited number of spectators. When production ceased at the site in 2008, this collection was preserved by the Spode Museum Trust for future prosperity. But what about the human fallout over the past two decades and the skilled endeavours that brought such objects into being? A compulsion to explore the value of commodity versus people, led to a parallel dining arena in the factory's Union Room being restaged within the Blue Room as a form of irreverent displacement. The work's title, *Vis Unita Fortior* (United Strength is Stronger) derives from the armorial bearings of Stoke-on-Trent (a city founded upon industrialisation), and is drawn upon to cite the powerlessness in recent years of trade unions in the face of global capitalism.



Vis Unita Fortior (United Strength is Stronger) 2012

Andreas Fabian

The form of vessels might change over time depending on technology, ease of use, fashion and imagination, but can the essence, the fundamental function of these vessels, also become obsolete?

Specific production methods might become obsolete at varying times in different socio-economic contexts but we still need to produce some kind of hollow form to hold our food and drink.

In the context of this project the term 'site' is to be interpreted in a very lateral way: the moulds themselves serve as a site to explore transitions of function whilst the display strategy plays with the context and associations of 'the glass cabinet' and 'the table top': from 'in use' to 'out of use'!?



Out-of-Use!?

Clay's ability to be fired gives the material permanence, or conversely it can also be temporary if used in the raw state. Clay has the power to obscure and neutralise by shrouding the memory of an object. I will achieve this by going through this process of obscuring or enveloping these spaces and objects. By covering the windows, I would like my subtle intervention to make one wonder, "what was happening behind those windows?"

As this space was once the shop for selling the company's seconds, there are many references to shops closing down or changing their displays. Once the work is installed it will obscure the dereliction within. It could be said that by going through this process I am, in fact, entombing a representative sample of company's fabric and content. I would like the observer to take away a sense that I am respecting the memory of what once was, as a revelation through concealment.



Clearance

Lunar Labour

Found workers clothes stitched together into a rectangular flag... a white flag... when the sunlight shines through it becomes transparent like bone china... Uniforms are made to make people uni-form (same-shape) but going along the outline of each piece sewing it carefully by hand, it revelled personal traces like name tags, patches and wear from use. A sense of human presence and former activities.



Drawer
found drawer and printing
standard plates, material and
glaze test plates, 3D print tests
(detail)



Flag
found workers
clothes
(right hand page,
detail left)



Gwen Heeney

*"Architecture exists because of light; palpable material light (lume materiale), something born in the materials of construction and imprisoned in the body of an edifice as the mind is imprisoned in the body"*¹

I became aware of the significance of the mould store, an important archive of information illuminated by light streaming through the windows. I had a sense of a knowledge store; of files/ records/archives. I began to view the moulds as an important archive which needed to be explored and catalogued...in some way to be made sense of.

In the store the moulds manifested themselves as objects with a great tension stored as though still precious; they presented a record to a past 'site' of invention, a record of creativity. Like the shell of the empty building, each mould represented a shell of a productive past. Light reveals shadows; the shadows reveal the architecture/landscape of the forms within.

Using different configurations, I started to formally articulate a visual language which addressed issues of collective memory, history of 'place', mapping of creative pasts, but also made connections with current information technology i.e. 'Quick Response Codes'. They became a means of communicating the past and possibly declaring/ predicting the future. A key to the skills left behind. They provoked descriptions such as profiles, building blocks (DNA) of the companies creative past; an industrial excavation/study.

The shadow and light penetrating the interior space began to deepen the language giving a glimpse of the abstract interior forms, a glimpse of past creativity. The light and shadow on another level physically and metaphorically described the past 'dark side' of the company; the physical labour which marked its worldwide success. In his book *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino compares the outside appearance of the rich prosperous city to the reality of its back streets discussing the hard physical labour behind its opulence; 'the mandrel set against the teeth of the lathe, an action repeated by thousands of hands thousands of times at the pace established for each shift'.²

¹ Ridgway, S., *The Imagination of Construction*, ARQ: Architectural Research Quarterly, 9 (3-4):188-196. Cambridge University Press, 2005. A discussion on the work of Frascari and his theory of 'Lume Materiale'

² Calvino, I., *Invisible Cities*, Vintage Classic, New Ed, 1997



Light Entombed



*The light that slips through the window, covers the room like a
silk veil. I start walking around in circles not to get stuck in the
same old routine. The smell of dried clay and perfume fills the air
and I'm thinking to myself - the two of them don't combine.
Particularly well...
My feet are aching.
The clock stops. I feel bliss.*

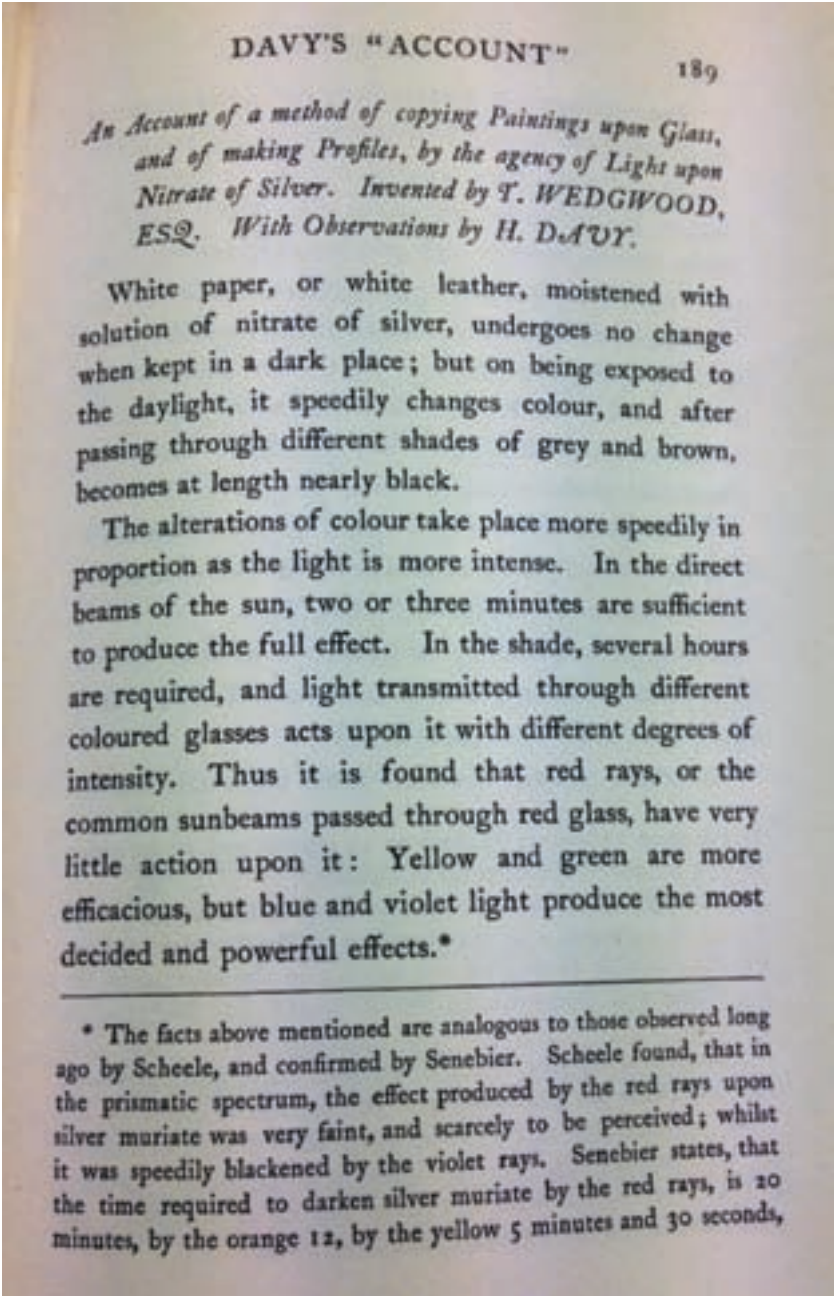


(Darkness, moulds, white leather, paper, images, glass, projections)

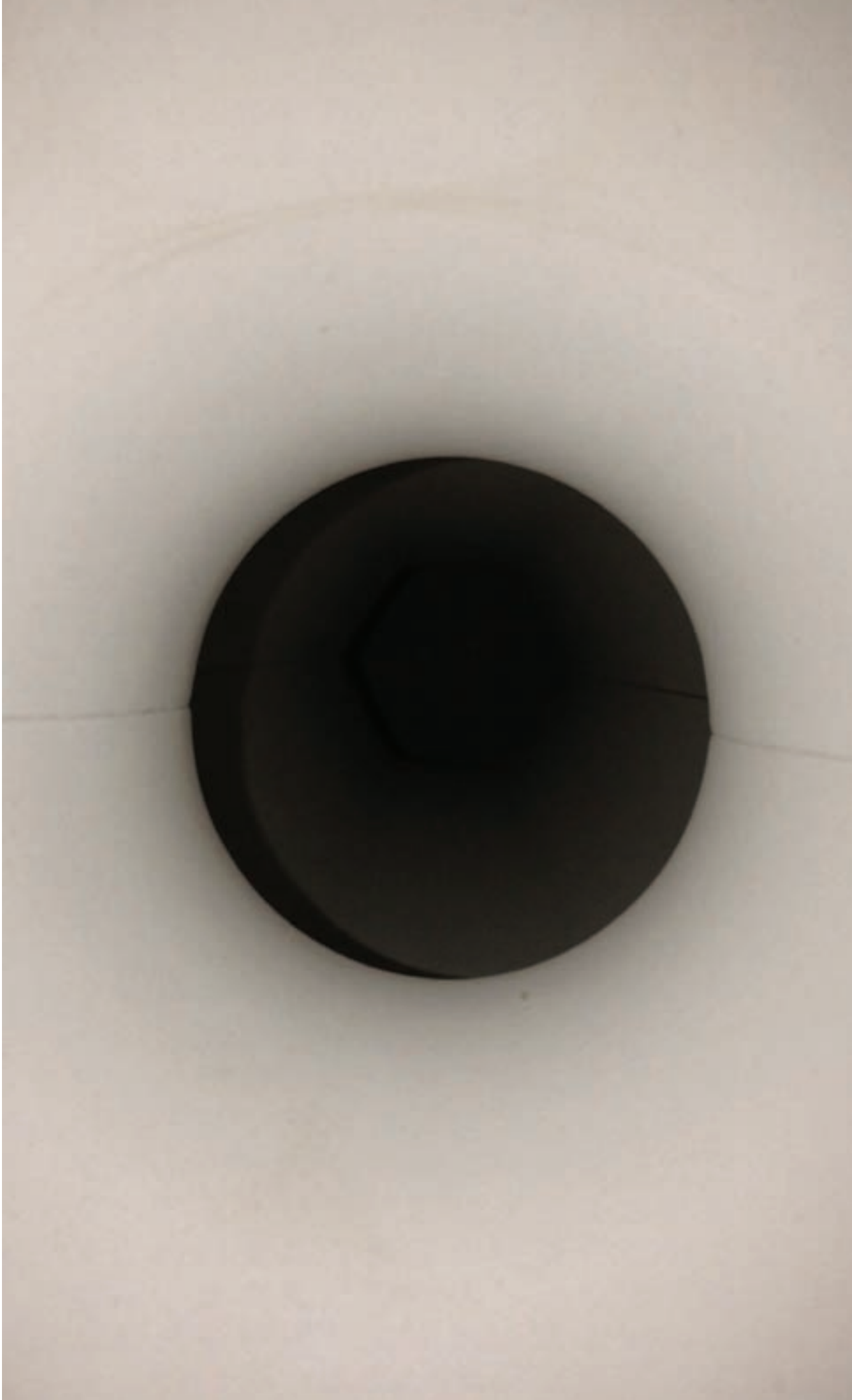
The showroom is kept in darkness; access to it has been blocked from all sides. It is a container of images not to be seen in order to exist.

The outer walls are thin opaque shells leaving me with only the memory of an interior of coloured paint, wood and glass built to present and display. Although my recollections are undergoing constant change.

The room is now for me to put on show.



Account of a Showroom



I wanted to get to know Stoke-on-Trent by collecting. I walked through the city in a circle within ten kilometres diameter and gathered different items.

What did I collect? I collected everything that is somehow related to the factory, things I am interested in, which I instinctively wanted to pick up and immediately caught my attention. When I had to think about whether I should take an item or not, I left it. In the evening, I always brought the things I had found back to the factory where I arranged them in a specific order. Each item I had found was assigned the place I found it.

The circle, my drawing ground, represents the radius where I was looking for items. The position of the factory is where all lines meet. Every circle line is one kilometre in reality. The ground is made of china clay and glue. It is the historical ground for my work and a material painting surface for my topography. This is how I want to explore and draw the location around Stoke-on-Trent in a new manner. That way, I literally performed topography, 'topography of the obsolete'. Topography is Greek (~~τόπος~~ 'place' and ~~γραφία~~ 'write') and also means to draw a place, not just to write about a place. By drawing a new topography, I am revealing what still remains.



Field Investigation

KELLY / MARHAUG

The performance works for camera in the chapters 'Holding On By Letting Go' and 'On Passing' mine the histories of Spode through silted memories and artefacts contained within crumbling walls and leaking roofs. Through a series of gestures in which fragile items are passed between them until inevitable slippage takes place, the artists create a further layer in the production of contemporary shards. In doing so they are seeking to re/generate new and living histories in spaces that resist expiring. They are unreliable archaeologists introducing empathy and contamination to the sites they inhabit.

In each gesture from the chapters, it is the inevitable release of grasp and the negotiation inherent in acts of 'passing on' and 'passing by', which opens the possibility to define new futures.

* Since the works were made, the curator's attic and the mould store have deteriorated further and are no longer accessible.



First Form from the chapter
Holding On By Letting Go
Video and stills,
the mould store*



Top and bottom:
Laying To Rest from the chapter
On Passing.
Video and live performance, the
curator's attic*

Margrethe Kolstad Brekke

In this area, where places are named Stoke, Stoke-on-Trent, Stone, and so on, people have been moving rocks since before Pleistocene.

There are manmade mountains in the horizon.

In late Holocene, possibly inspired by previous Norse initiatives, exploring was done, and the Great Empire came into existence.

More often than not, what was explored became documented in watercolour.

In this area, and also on the nearby continent, there was already a central perspective. And racing was in the blood.

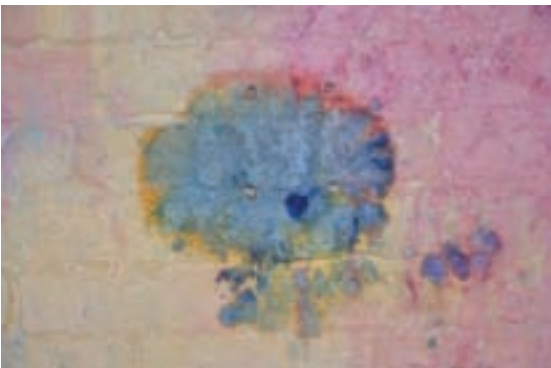
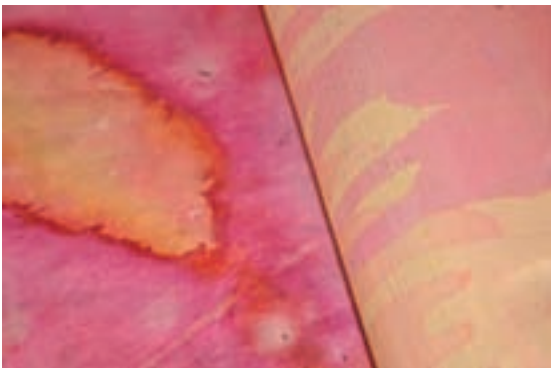
Silkworms were thriving in allocated areas, the porcelain became translucent due to broken bones and alchemistic approach and sometimes information was read through the colours of the flames.

In current days, when the Anthropocene might be unfolding around us, the fire in the kilns in this area are going elsewhere, the situation is somewhat grim as we are all travelling into the great unknown -

In this situation the first thing to do will be to fear, and try exploring the darkness in ones heart(s). But it is also possible to do things like inventing the electronic cigarette, or drop large objects, like a Volkswagen Beetle, from the skies. One can maybe say: there is potential.



Anthropocene Diorama: Topographic Watercolour in Stoke-on-Trent



The Pleistocene (approx 2,588,000-11,700 years ago) and the Holocene (11,700 years ago approx - present time) are the two most recent geological eras. The Anthropocene has yet to be declared.

'SPODE WORKS', a statement of fact, a legend writ large in wrought-iron elegance as the entrance arch to the original area of the factory.

'SPODE WORKS', now a statement of a position of liminality, since its closure a condition, as a 'space between' period is imposed upon it.

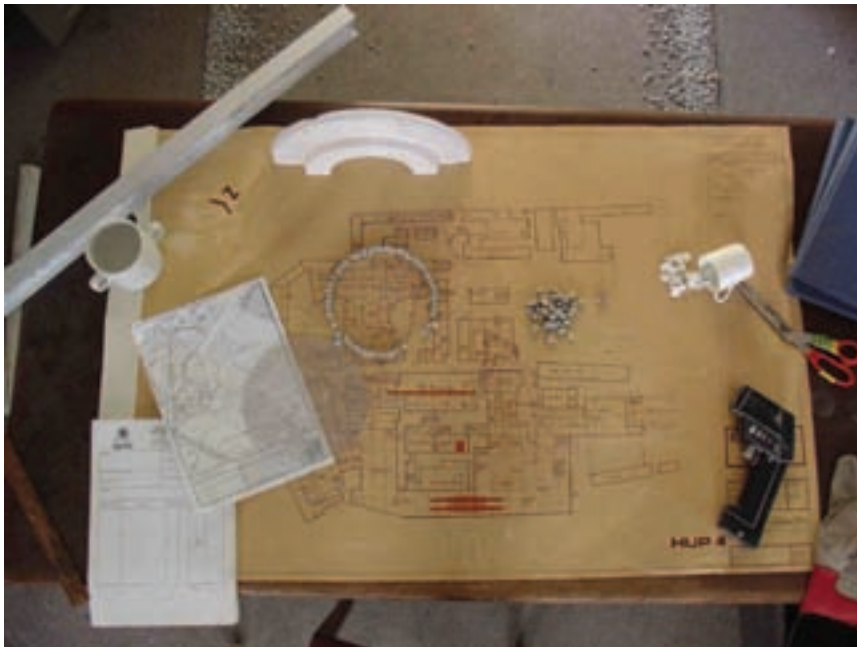
Between what?

The illustrious past is a fact, socially, historically, culturally. The 'don't hold your breath, what happens next?' liminal period is now...

The 'SPODE re-WORK'ed' is still unknowable.



Routemaster: Spode Office
(Installation & other works)
Richard Launder



Staged installation & other works (Richard Launder) and live performance (a collaboration with Julia Collura): conveying an atmosphere of highly focused competence, brewing confrontation, on the brink of dis-function/chaos. A maximalist approach to intense detail, placing layers of inferred narrative, recorded interview, potential past/future/ present actions/events and the files, plans, maps, instruments/apparatus, samples, reports, personal items...which are their alibis. At the core lies the state of health of the former employees, of the production process (of the objects produced), equipment and the very fabric of the buildings themselves. After a year + of occupancy, a new layer of dust, light markings/fading's, together with evidence/sounds of recent activities will become part of the accretion¹.

¹ “Entelechy is born in the negative spaces of the machine model of nature, in ‘gaps’ in the “chain of strictly physico-chemical or mechanical events” (Driesch) “Like the Homeric Greek notion of psuche, entelechy does not vary from person to person... but neither does it vary across organisms. It is, rather, the immanent vitality flowing across all living bodies...” (Bennett), on Vital Materialism, vibrant bodies: “...it is wrong to deny vitality to non-human bodies, forces, and forms, and that a careful course of anthropomorphization can help reveal that vitality, even though it resists full translation...encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is...” (Bennett, J., *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 2010)



Working with liminality, the condition of limbo, together with detritus and accretion: as the primary vibrant material, atmosphere and phenomena, this project articulates the aforementioned three states of existence.

routemaster@spodeoffice.co.uk

Glancing at Spode
(Performance)
Julia Collura
Richard Launder

White on White
(Still from performative installation video)
2012-13 Spode Works
Richard Launder



Over the course of the Topographies of the Obsolete research project, I have focused my attention on the abandoned decorative transfers left piled and stacked away in boxes. My interest is foremost in their domestic/decorative reference, their simultaneous 2D and 3D identities as well as an imbedded nostalgia for time and place. Similar to pattern cutting for fabric the transfers are 2D objects needing to fit onto a 3D object, therefore are cut into interesting and somewhat odd forms. As they were produced in bulk, the transfers come in large stacks of 50, 100, and 200 all cut in pragmatic yet curious shapes. Unable to be used for their original purpose, yet retaining a since value, these items fall into an interesting middle ground of being valuable and worthless simultaneously.

Recently my work has followed drawing and the domestic object with a particular interest in stitch, (text)iles, and the decorative; using subtle slippages and moments of detail to transgress propriety. These slippages can be found in moments of looking into, on top of, hidden in plan site (small details against a large scale) or in subtle text that appears as the drawn line. Using understated visual cues, image and object(s) appear as veiled details and suggestive moments. Once seen, these subtle transgressions can compel the viewer to think twice about the expected norm they see around them everyday.



Dog on Dog

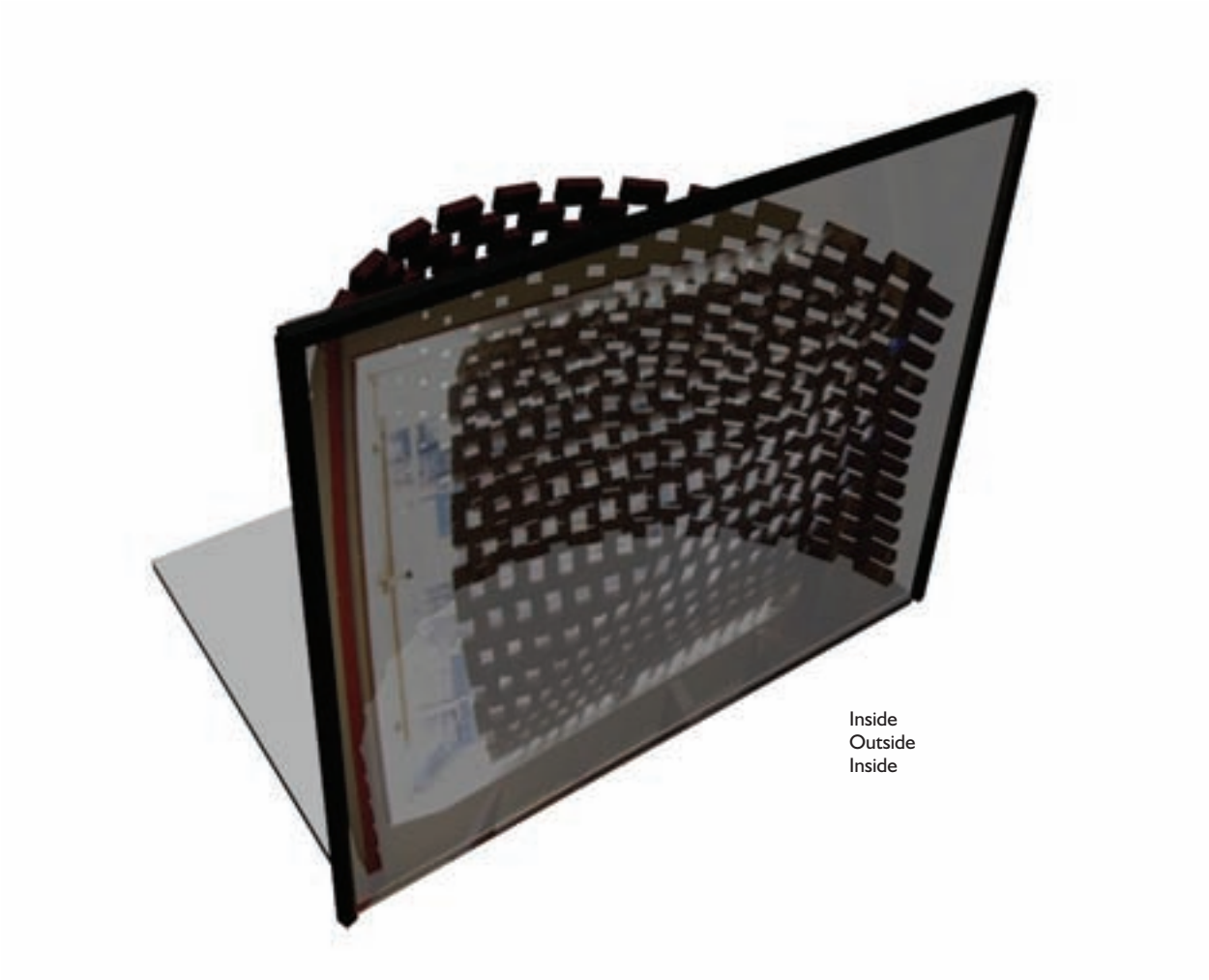
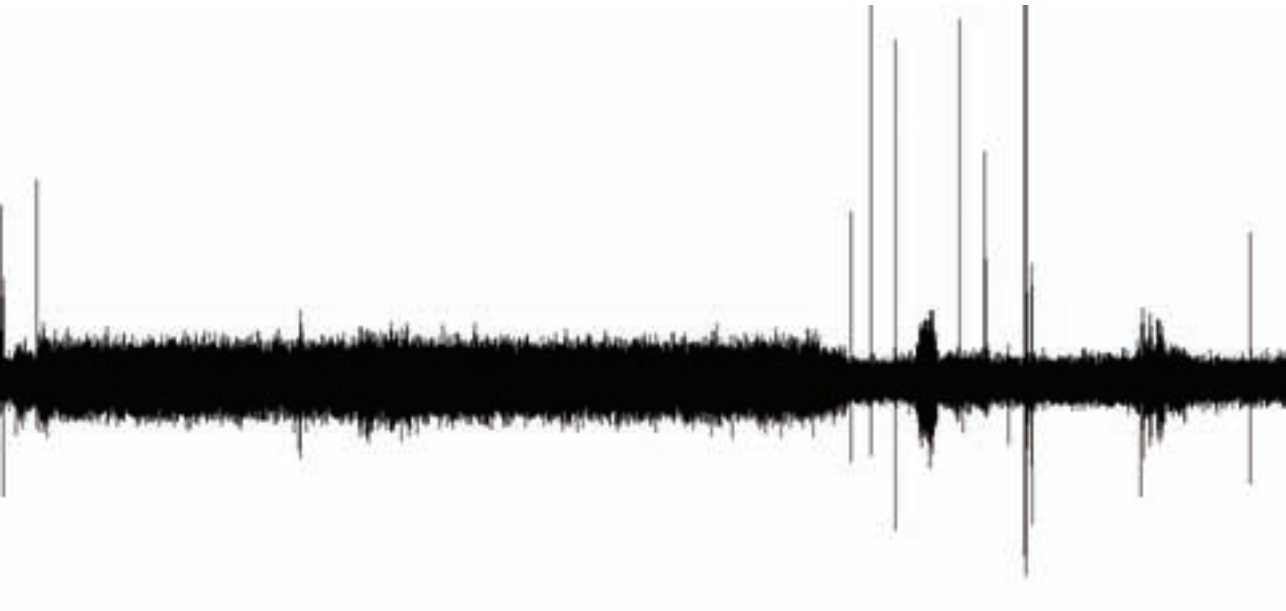


Cream Spray Duck (detail)

Morten Modin

A re-documentation of an earlier work that was built through the first workshop of The Topographies of the Obsolete. The re-documentation is an image of the memory of the image of the documentation of the original.

It is a philosophical comment on the complexity of what documentation is. Documentation and hereby also image will only bring forward a transformed understanding of how it was. Somehow it seems that the Pavilion of the Topographies of the Obsolete is suddenly fighting with the same questions as the history of Spode. Time is only one, but memory and image is more.





Contemporary Spode Landscape; White Italian

These days the original Spode Works itself decorates its objects. The room in the designer's block was used for displaying and examining new and old designs, both for the sake of printing standard but also for creativity.

By introducing the room to the remaining plates and dishes found on site, the rooms original function became ever so clear, it is a room for scrutinizing, a room for scrutinizing the landscapes and the motifs on the plates.

The subtle shades of the white bisque fired bone china - and earthenware are collected from several sites in the factory maze, and are at first glance 'unfinished'. But they are 'decorated' as well. They display the current landscapes of Spode. The dust, the rain, the pigeons, moisture and time have decorated the plates. In the tension between reconstruction and re-staging, our memory images are trying to fill in the familiar blue and white landscapes, 'the confectioned landscapes'¹. The tension between the memory image and the present trace of time and place creates an almost sacral atmosphere in the room. Icons left in a state of simulacrum².

¹ Scott, P., *Ceramics and Landscape, Remediation and Confection - A Theory of Surface*, PhD Manchester Metropolitan University 2010

² *Simulacrum* - Something having merely the form or appearance of a certain thing, without possessing its substance or proper qualities, Oxford English Dictionary



CONTEMPORARY KEEPSAKE HOMAGE TO THE SPODE WORKER

BRONZE IS ONE OF THE EARLIEST METALS
KNOWN. IT DATES BACK TO ABOUT 3500 BC.

THE DISCOVERY OF BRONZE ENABLED
PEOPLE TO CREATE METAL OBJECTS
BETTER THAN PREVIOUSLY POSSIBLE. TOOLS,
WEAPONS AND BUILDING MATERIALS
MADE OF BRONZE WERE HARDER AND
MORE DURABLE THAN THEIR STONE AND
COPPER PREDECESSORS.

BRONZE IS HARD AND BRITTLE, AN ALLOY
MADE OF COPPER AND ANOTHER METAL.
MOST MODERN BRONZE IS 88% COPPER
AND 12% TIN. IT MELTS AT 960 CENTIGRADE

BRONZE OBJECTS ARE KNOWN TO HAVE
SURVIVED NUCLEAR DISASTERS. THE
METAL RESISTS CORROSION, ESPECIALLY
SALTWATER. BRONZE IS THE MATERIAL
THAT HAS THE BEST CHANCE OF
SURVIVING TIME, AND DIFFERENT TYPES
OF NATURAL AND MAN MADE DISASTERS



The factory site consists of physical architecture which creates a small town in the core of the city, with streets and lanes, innumerable entries to and exits from former production halls, storage, offices. These rooms had been populated not such a long time ago by several hundred people at work. Bodies at work.

The worker has always been seen as body. Bodies driving the production. Keeping up the pace with demands of delivering. Machinery was welcomed in the beginning to lighten physical work, to free space for the workers' development, but soon it showed the problems of repetition, dictated by the rhythm of the

machines. Upheavals and strikes already in the early industry concerned conditions of the worker's body.

In later years the worker seemed to be asked to listen to his body. Watch it.

Among papers left in Spode's Work Study office was found the Body Part Discomfort Form. It puts questions which can be interesting to ask in any action, at any place. Positions of body parts in relation to each other and to gravity, questions of pace and repetition, breaks and flow, the body in space and in relation to objects.

Looking at the map of the factory's

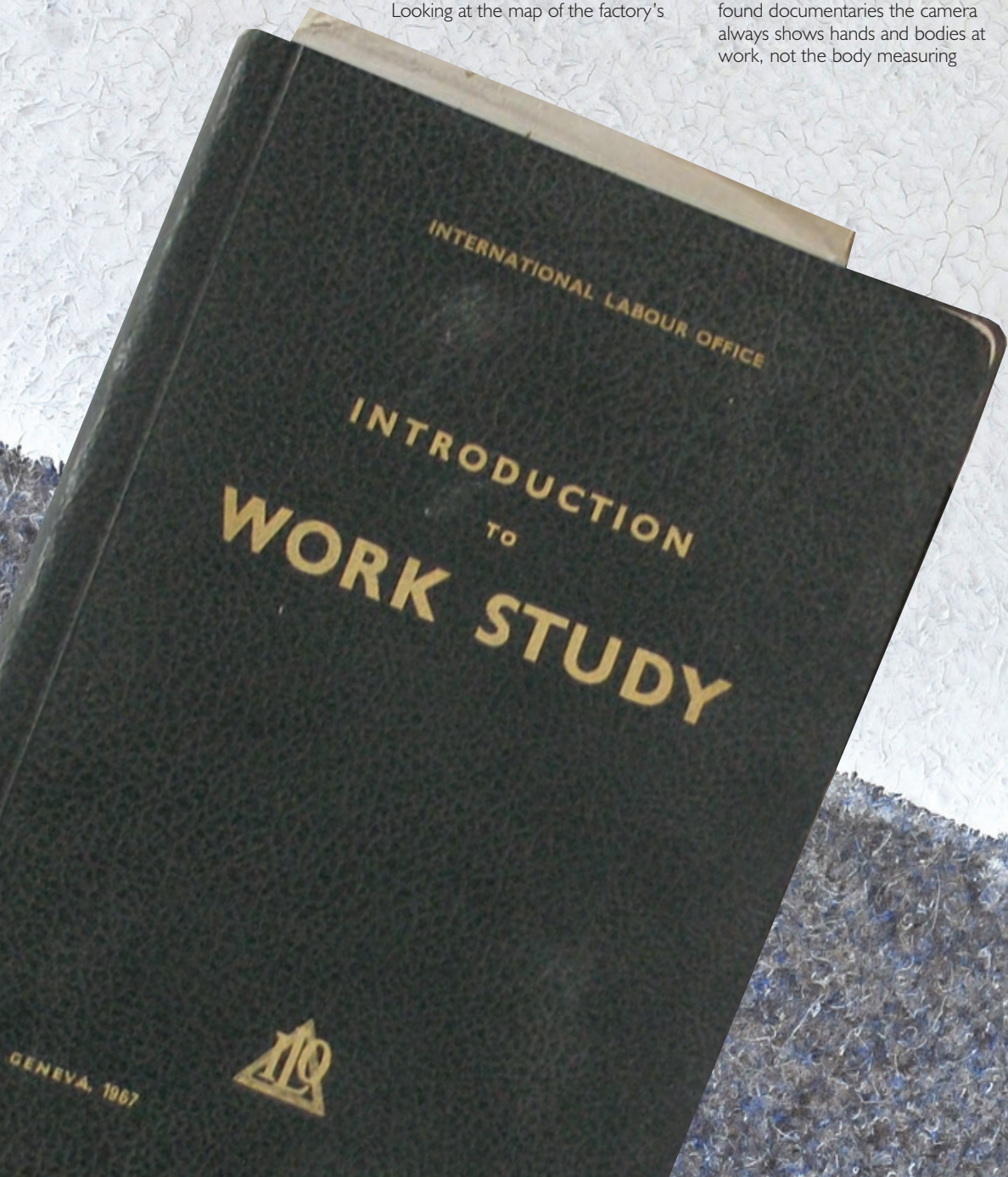
site one can (try to) imagine the lines drawn by all the workers coming and going each day. Gates spitting out and swallowing up a stream of bodies, dispersed into different directions inside the gate.

What had it looked like, when workers drew the factory, were the factory?

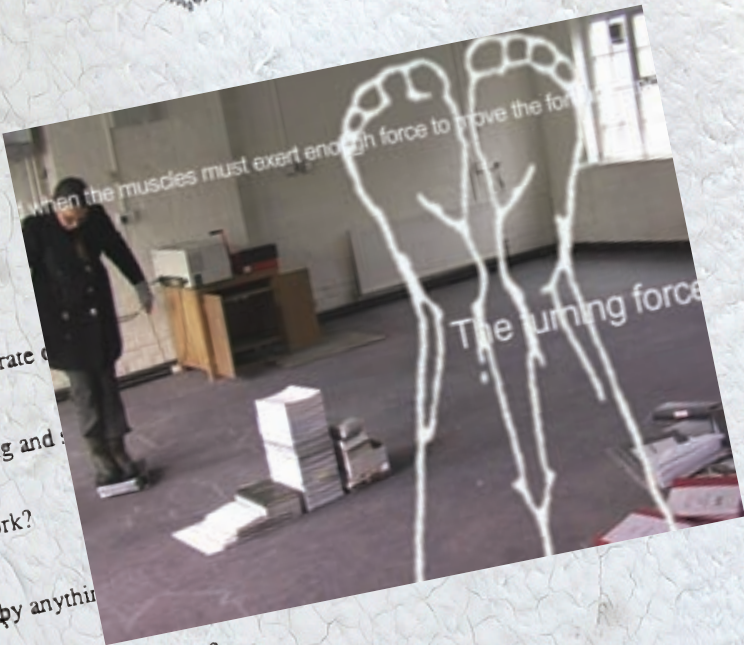
The search for images showing workers walking along factory streets, on their way to or from their shift, moving something from one to another building, didn't give any result. Why document this ordinaryness? These movements were not part of production itself. In found documentaries the camera always shows hands and bodies at work, not the body measuring

distances by steps. Sensing the closeness of walls, a breeze, humidity, slight change of light, while moving on the premises, up and down stairs, around corners, leaving one building, entering the next. Worn-out floor covering, where lines were visible, taking off to the right or to the left on the landing of the stairway, is the closest one can come the feet once moving there. The workers' bodies stay absent. The task had become others' to produce the space anew.

The human body lies prone, or it is upright. Upright it has top and bottom, front and back, right and left. How are these bodily postures, divisions, and values extrapolated onto circumambient space?



56. Are you able to keep up easily with the rate of work?
57. Do you regard your work as interesting and varied?
58. Is there enough variation in your work?
59. Is the quality of the work affected by anything?
60. Do you feel pressurised by the demands of your work?
61. Are you satisfied with the feedback you get about your performance quality and output from your supervisor or manager?
62. Do you find there is good communication among operators?
63. Is there good contact and cooperation between you and your fellow workers?
64. Can you change your workplace conditions to suit yourself?
65. Are you given too much to do?
66. Do you enjoy working here?



[Dust] is not about rubbish, nor about the discarded; it is not about surplus, left over from something else: it is not about waste... It is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone. ¹

The project Dust; Place and Skill explores how dust can help establish an understanding of today's post-industrial landscape and craft practices. My material starting point is clay. I treat it as a fundamental material, focusing on its phases of dissolution into dust. I understand dust literally, as an entropic material, but also poetically, as a transitional stage - something degenerating but with the possibility of becoming something else. In Norwegian, støv denotes tiny particles or powdery substances, but in English, dust has a wider application that includes larger refuse, as suggested by the word dustbin. This project expands the concept further to 'man-made dust', production and re-production - the dust of culture. I am interested in the material's cultural content, not as refuse, but as an active, inclusive material; dust as the basis for a place's composition, resources and identity.

Dust is a product of nature but also a by-product of refining natural materials in industry and agriculture. It necessitates specialized material-related knowledge and skill. During industrialization, it generated jobs that were performed around the clock. Charles Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) speaks of dustmen, rag-pickers and nightmen. They collected the detritus of people and industry, sorting, recycling and disposing of it according to a well-functioning system. Cinder dust was sold to brick-makers; old bricks and oyster shells were sold to builders who constructed houses and roads, and so on. I understand skill as a concept encompassing more than handiwork and tacit knowledge, so an important part of my artistic practice has been to participate in the physical work of particular places. This has not been simply in order to create my own works, but to participate in a larger community, such as a factory.

The original Spode factory in Stoke-on-Trent was once built for, and with, a material. It housed employees who, through their work processes with this material, were divided into distinct areas, buildings and floors with sections and work stations. Every work station represented specialized knowledge about the material of bone china. Spodes's own porcelain, made with bone ash, feldspathic material and kaolin powder. I initially thought that all the dust here was white. Now, inside this massive complex of abandoned industry, I find nothing that is completely white. It is no longer possible to work with bone china at the original Spode factory without at the same time coping with the dust from the walls, ceilings, floors and pigeons. And the dust from the people who used to work here.

I examine dust as an artistic and cultural-historical material through methods of collection, storage and processing, but also through the labour process. I have no permanent work station here; I circulate along with the dust and the objects throughout the rooms. I gather dust outside and inside the factory buildings. I sweep, scrape, brush, vacuum, crush, sift and sort the dust. Like Dickens's dustmen, I see dust as a raw material that has the potential to become something else. It is not just a sign of decay, inertia and death, but an active process and a valuable substance. Dust is the new bone china. The factory has become its own basic material, a mine and mill rolled into one, and it is extracting and grinding itself.

Is it possible that the crafts share some of the cyclical character of dust? After all, the crafts do not disappear; they just take on different shapes in different locations. Yet a trace remains of what the dust once signified.

Dust can be understood as the antithesis of a thing - but also the form from which all things come and eventually return. Dust; Place and Skill is about the cyclical movement between solid being and dissolution.

Translator: Arlyne Moi

¹ Steedman, C., *Dust, The Archive and the Cultural History*, Rutgers University Press, 2002, pp. 157-159



DUST; Place and Skill



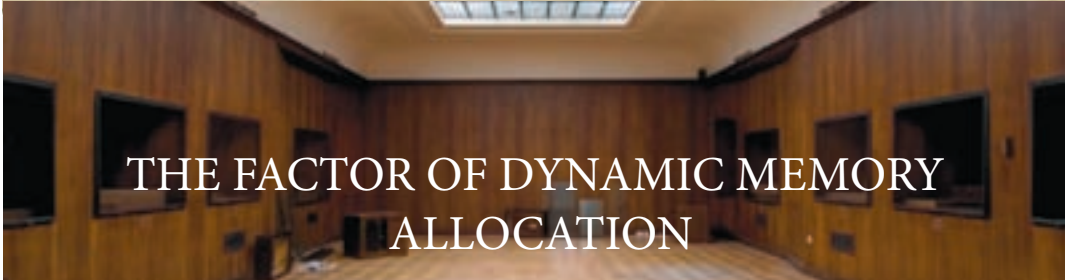


THE RONALD COPELAND ART GALLERY

Alderman W. T. Copeland, who guided the destinies of the firm of W. T. Copeland & Sons Ltd., more than one hundred years ago, looks down from his portrait on the wall on a representative collection of treasured examples of china produced by Josiah Spode since 1770. These treasures are beautifully displayed in a room perfectly equipped in every detail for the purpose of demonstrating the quality of design and craftsmanship which first brought fame to English porcelain. Today's products show the same sheer beauty of form and colour, decorative charm and surface brilliance—Spode lives on.



‘The Story of Spode’ - G. Bernard Hughes, 1950



drawings and b/w photographs - Harold Holdway

“...everything is the ruin of what came before. A table is the ruin of a tree...”¹

The Desert

Ruination is an ongoing process, ruins are not stagnant, they are continually changing or evolving. A building going from one lifetime to another, through utilization, into a desert to a jungle. The physical marks that slowly come to being in the buildings surface and structure, connect the past to the future. As the ground cracks open a timeline is made. A line that marks the surface and stands as a monument for the tension that created it.

It happens in the interaction between nature and mankind, clearly to be seen when the two are posed as opposite forces. One is delaying time as the other is making it happen. Repairing a broken building is a way of slowing down time, cleaning is removing a layer.

A piece of the earth is a strong material, loaded with meanings and references. It is, in its widest sense, our planet, our whole world and our being. It can be everything and it can also be a microcosmos, a niche, the ground of a country, a county, a city, or a house. Its ground or soil is often used as a metaphor for a homeland and can be connected to nostalgia and home sickness. It is the surface we live on but also the place we hail from, economically, and emotionally. The earth and the ground are often seen as that which is stable and solid in ones being.

A desert is in its origin an empty place, an abandoned place. It is barren, harsh, dry, and often perceived as a lifeless place. When all the water is abstracted from the soil it cracks open. The cracks stand as a monument of the tension that created them.

and the Jungle

After desertification a building is useless, lifeless, dangerous. Access denied, 'Health and Safety' issues. It slowly becomes a refuge, a home for pigeons, rats, and other outlaws. Keys get lost, things get stolen, and pathways disappear. The trash accumulates, dust covers all that is still, and sounds become muted as the layers procreate and crisscross over one another. Plants begin to grow out of walls and gardens become wild. The grass grows tall and weeds cover the flower beds as the herbal outlaws seize the chance. The world is silent but loud with silence for those who are now strangers to the place. Those who are now visitors in the jungle.

¹ Solnit, R., *Landscapes for Politics*, University of California Press, 2008



Timelines

It starts now. You are here.

The door in front of you is red, the paint cracked in a network of thin, vertical flakes. Moss is growing on the wall.

You pull the door open, shove it against the ground so that it stays open. The stairs start immediately. They are steep, the steps worn-down. Each step has its own contour, sagging, as if the soft parts of the stone had been washed away with water.

You step inside. Bird feathers, dry leaves, scraps of newspaper, pigeon droppings. The cream walls are stained with moisture and rust. On the handrail the paint is flaking, glimpses of raw wood in the cracks.

You keep your arms close to your body and start walking. A faint gust of wind blows through the staircase, upwards, makes tangles of cobweb flutter in the corners.

The stairs turn left, you reach a landing. A red fire door blocks the passage. You reach out for the door, it slides open without a sound.

Behind the door the staircase narrows, the steps are wooden, the colour on the walls is darker. The outermost layer of paint is alive, the flakes extend into space as if attempting to break loose, get free.

On your right the dust has settled on the yellowish brick wall. The dust forms a dark sediment on the upward sloping surfaces, like inverted shadows, like the reverse greyscale of a photo negative. The dust looks soft, velvety.

You can still feel the draft from the door, it breathes across the back of your neck, evenly and insistently. Your steps echo against the wood.

You reach the next landing. On your left a small triangular entry. All corners of the room are hidden by dusty cardboard boxes, crumbling plasterboard, scraps of paper. This is where you enter.

Diagonally to your right is the next doorway, you stop there. The inside of the doorframe is covered with greasy, black fingerprints.

The room in front of you is rectangular, you are standing at the short end. On both sides rows of grey metal shelves. The shelves are empty.

The floor is covered by brown tile squares. The surface undulates, as though a sea had pushed it up from underneath, leaving a wave in the floor.

You bend down and swiftly make your way along a curved line across the room. The metal rings in the entire length of the shelves as you stride past.

The next room is darker. The ceiling wooden, the walls a matte black, like soot.

The windows are low, five or six of them along the left wall, all overlooking the courtyard below. On the windowsill a dead grasshopper, dry and brittle

and completely intact, its tiny limbs bent into a foetal position.

You can no longer feel the wind, the hum is inside the walls now, like a train far away. Somewhere in the pipes a sound, of animals, birds.

A fixed wooden structure blocks the way in to the right part of the room. Behind the structure the flooring is removed, as if there were an opening, a way through.

The dust is everywhere, thin and even, like a membrane, or thick, in heaps or compressed cakes. The floor, the shelving, the objects – nothing is clear, nothing is clean, nothing is reverberating. Everything is as if sealed.

You get up, turn off into the shadows at the end of the structure. Here you are out of sight.

You reach the stairs at the back of the room, climb up. The door at the end of the stairs is wide-open. You have arrived.

The room is airy and light, like a ballroom or a chapel. You have dreamt about this room, the colours in it, turquoise, red, white. Everything dry, porous, crunchy.

The paint is peeling. Left of the entrance, the surface of the wall has come off in large, heavy chunks. Around the pillar in the middle of the room the flakes lie in piles, like pastel-coloured confetti.

A butterfly has come into the room. You hear the sound before you see it. It flutters against the windowpanes, the wings hitting the glass at a furious pace, like flat little hands against a tightened drumskin.

You walk across the room, the floor is wooden. Softly worn, thick planks where the knots protrude like islands, like heights from which the grain subsides in stages like the layers of a cardboard model.

A rickety wooden table runs along the window wall. The light falls on the table in its entire length, evenly and consistently, like a carpet. At the centre of the table there is a large green patch. Rain has come through the roof, parts of the ceiling lie in pieces on the table. Moss grows on the patch, small bouquets of tiny, green leaves like a smooth fluff on the roof chunks. In the window-frame the cobwebs lie thick like felted wool or candyfloss.

You no longer crouch, you walk over to the table, bend down. The air from your breath puts the dust in motion. Tiny white particles whirl up into the light.

The table has a warm, homey smell. The tip of your nose touches the surface, making a spherical mark in the dust. You open your mouth, press your tongue against the wood. Dust grains flicker in front of your eyes like sequins in close-up. Something melts between the tongue and the table.

A glistening, dark oval is left on the table when you leave, as though a fat snail had landed there, only to immediately take off again.

Interview with Spode Works

A.S:
Dear Spode Works, the people who worked here (in you) were craftsmen and women, all with different skills, working together to create, mass-produce. They had systems, they were dependent on each other to get things done, to get paid for their work. They functioned as the frame, the main mechanism, the probably most important piece of the puzzle. What are your views on us as artists making, let's be honest, more or less useless things? Taking photos of your wounds and scars? Rearranging and pretending to fit in. Is this disturbing? Or is it nice to be used no matter the cause?

S.W:
Well, considering my condition, that you even want to come and visit, seems to me as an extremely irrational behaviour. As to what you're doing here I guess I just appreciate being used, and if I can be of any help, that's great.

Do you consider yourself obsolete?

You're still here aren't you?





Stitched Room

During the previous workshops at Spode I have worked in the same space, resulting in an exploration of the space itself and the vast amounts of objects left around the factory.

My first work focused on the found objects, and were presented like autonomous sculpture, but all of the material had some kind of relationship to the closed down production at Spode Works thus leaving them in suspense between their present abstract, disconnected quality and their strong narrative connection to function and production.

My second response was to utilise some interesting perforations in the sealing structure of the space. These features were suggesting that the space itself was, or at least could become, a sculptural body in its own right. I wanted to stitch up the holes in the ceiling with some kind of rope or tread. I needed a material that could work visually and conceptually. It had to have some kind of unspecified aesthetic quality that could work in that setting, and finally it had to be found at the site. (Anything else felt like cheating).

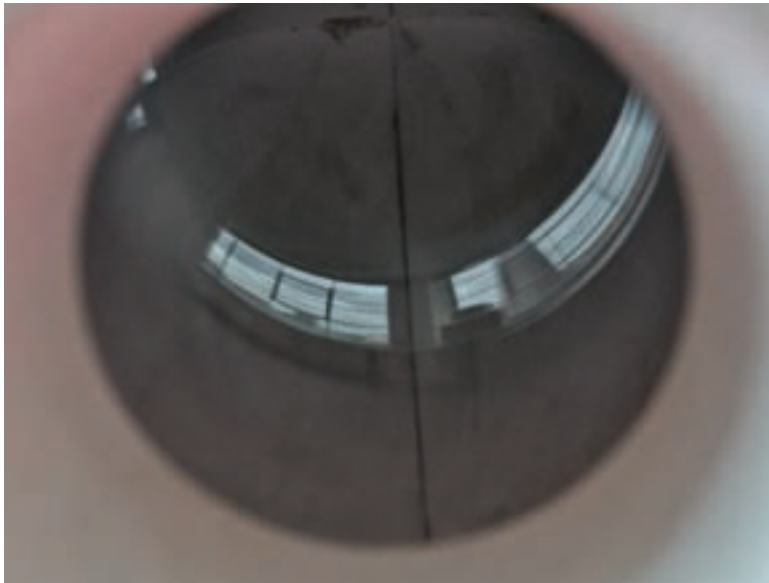
Eventually I found several rolls of so called IBM multi purpose ribbons. These are ink saturated nylon ribbons for old printer devices. These ribbons made a clear 'drawing' in the space when suspended between the structural elements. As well as a distinct smell of ink and old-fashioned typewriters creating an ambiguous sensation. As a physical action the 'stitching' of the space emphasises its sculptural properties.

Such an infiltration aims to voice the poetics hidden in the space. Highlighting the now missing veins and arteries of the architectural body, altering and negotiating the viewer's perception and experience. The now restraining ribbons, another reminiscence of the sites history, and dislocated, from its former function, could also symbolize the crumbling suspense present in a continuous decaying ruin or a derelict location.

Corrina Thornton

My space keeps time with water
My space hears what sounds like eagles
My space is overgrown with buddleia
My space contains mysteries
My space bears the memory of another space
My space hears traffic
My space is delicate and robust
My space has pipes which enter and leave of their own accord
My space is seen by other spaces
My space feels observed
My space has steps that lead to unknown spaces
My space is used
My space hears rhythm
My space hears liquid in two times
My space is made up of different generations of spaces
My space is a collage
My space lives with nature
My space is invaded by buddleia
My space hears other airborne spaces
My space provides only limited comfort
My space hears other wheelborne spaces
My space has sightless spaces
My space hisses
My space smells of food but contains none
My space contains light and shadow
My space has a small amount of productivity
My space has seen massive productivity
My space resists sleep
My space is evolving without humans
My space contains me
My space accepts my presence
My space is more mine than it was before I started this text
My space is cold on my back
My space has probably not had anyone sleep in it before
My space hears Northern Soul (again?)





Mouldscura (above) and Bulbscura (right)



Biographies

Kerstin Abraham (1956, Germany)
Based in Hamdorf, Germany. She teaches Fine Arts and Ceramics at Muthesius Kunsthochschule Kiel. She is currently leading the European Brick Summer Academy for Art Academies of Northern Europe in Egersund/Denmark. Working periods at EKWC 2010 and 1998, Archie Bray Foundation 1997, KUNSTFONDS FRG 1992.

Karin Blomgren (1987, Sweden)
Based in Bergen. She holds a BA in Ceramics at Bergen National Academy of Art and Design where she is studying for her MA in Fine Art.

Chloë Brown (1964, UK)
Lives and works in Sheffield. She is Course Leader of BA Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University. She has a BA in Fine Art from Reading University, and an MA in Sculpture from Chelsea College of Art and Design.

Andrew Brown (1959, UK)
Lives in Nottingham and is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University. He holds an undergraduate degree in Contemporary Art from Nottingham Trent University and an MA in Performance from York St. John University.

Neil Brownsword (1970, UK)
Is an artist and Professor in Clay and Ceramics, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway. He is also Senior Lecturer and Researcher at Bucks New University, UK. His PhD (2006) combined historical and archaeological research on ceramic production in North Staffordshire from the eighteenth century to the present. In 2009 Brownsword received the 'One Off' award at the inaugural British Ceramic Biennial. Co-leader of 'Topographies of the Obsolete'.

Julia Collura (1963, USA)
Based in London. She is director of Staff and Pupil Development: Arts Educational Schools, London. Holds MAs in Piano Performance and Educational Theatre, and was former PGCE Course Leader at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Collaborates with artist Richard Launder.

Andreas Fabian (1957, Germany)
Lives and works in Buckinghamshire. He is Course Leader of the BA (Hons) 3D Contemporary Crafts & Products, and Subject Leader of the MA Silversmithing & Jewellery course at Bucks New University. Educated in design and silversmithing at Hildesheim, Germany and The Royal College of Art, London, and holds a PhD from Brunel University (2011).

Tina Gibbs (1954, India)
Lives and works in High Wycombe. She studied at Buckinghamshire and Chiltern's University College, graduating in 2003 with a BA in Ceramics & Glass. She has taught in Further Education at Reading College and is studying MA Ceramics at Bucks New University.

Karen Kitani Harsbo (1963, Japan)
Lives in Denmark. She is an artist, ceramist, curator and Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art. She studied Ceramics and Glass at the Danish Design School, 1982-87.

Gwen Heeney (1952, UK)
Is based in Welshpool, Wales. She works as a public artist, author and is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Wolverhampton. She gained a BA in Ceramics from the University of the West of England in 1974 and an MA in Ceramics from the Royal College of Art, London in 1989. She was Research Fellow in Architectural Ceramics at the Centre for Ceramic Research, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Wales (1989-91). She is undertaking a PhD in the Fine Art Department of Newcastle University.

Camilla Holm Birkeland (1986, Norway)
Lives in Bergen. Currently studying BA Photography at Bergen Academy of Art and Design where she will graduate in 2014.

Sofie Holten (1983, Denmark)
Lives in Copenhagen and has an MFA from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, 2013.

Lena Kaapke (1989, Germany)
Based in Kiel, Germany. She studied Arts and Latin for teaching at the Christian Albrechts University of Kiel, and completed her BA at the Muthesius Kunsthochschule in 2012. Since October 2009 she has been studying free art and ceramics as a student of Prof. Kerstin Abraham.

Traci Kelly (1961, UK)
Based in Nottingham. Works internationally as an independent artist/scholar in various artistic and educational contexts. She has a PhD from the University of Reading (2010) and has recently worked in collaboration with Bergen based artist Rita Marhaug.

Margrethe Kolstad Brekke (1979, Norway)
Based in Bergen. She is studying MA Fine Art at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, where she holds a BA in Textiles.

Richard Launder (1953, UK)
Based in London. Associate Professor of Clay and Ceramics at Bergen Academy of Art and Design. Works internationally as an artist/scholar in various artistic and educational contexts. Studied at West Surrey College of Art and Design, Farnham UK.

Danica Maier (USA)
Based in Lincolnshire. She is currently Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University. She completed an MFA in painting before receiving an MA in Textiles from Goldsmiths in 2002.

Rita Marhaug (1965, Norway)
Lives and works in Bergen. She holds MA from Bergen Academy of Art and Design (1989), and a BA in Art History from the University of Bergen (1996). From 2007 to 2013 she was a Professor in the Department of Fine Art, Bergen Academy of Art and Design. In 2011 she was the co-founder of member organization Performance Art Bergen.

Morten Modin (1981, Denmark)
Based in Copenhagen. From 2007 to 2008 he studied at Helsinki Art Academy (KUVA) and is currently completing his studies at The Royal Danish Art Academy.

Anne Helen Mydland (1971, Norway)
Based in Bergen. Since completing her MA in Ceramics in 2000, she has worked as a visual artist, curator, lecturer and teacher, and is also part of the artist/curator group Temp. She is currently Professor in Clay and Ceramics and Artistic Research Leader in the Department of Fine Art, Bergen Academy of Art and Design. Co-leader of Topographies of the Obsolete.

Heidi Nikolaisen (1973, Norway)
Lives and works in Bergen. She is currently Assistant Professor in Photography at Bergen Academy of Art and Design. Nikolaisen studied History and Art History at the University in Oslo, before completing her BA (2000) and MA (2002) at Bergen Academy of Art and Design.

Sabine Popp (1970, Germany)
Based in Bergen. Currently works as Assistant Professor at Bergen Academy of Art and Design. She trained as potter in Germany before gained her MA degree from the Bergen Academy of Art and Design, after having studied at the University of Barcelona and the Glasgow School of Art.

Toril Redalen (1973, Norway)
Based in Todalen, Nordmøre since 2007. She holds an MA from Bergen Academy of Art and Design (2007). She has recently received two national research stipends and has been artist in residence at Porsgrunn Porcelain Factory in Norway and at Kohler Factory in the USA.

Tone Saastad (1955, Norway)
Based in Bergen and works as Assistant Professor at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, where she graduated in 1980.

Johan Sandborg (1954)
Based in Bergen. Associate Professor in Photography, and Pro-Rector of Bergen Academy of Art and Design.

Erna Elinbjörg Skúladóttir (1983, Iceland)
Based in Bergen. She studied at Reykjavík School of Art, and completed her BA at Bergen National Academy of Art and Design, where she is currently studying MA Fine Art.

Caroline Slotte (1975, Finland)
Based in Helsinki. She studied in Denmark and Finland before completing an MA in Ceramics from Bergen Academy of Art and Design. From 2007 to 2011 she was a Research Fellow in the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme. She was also a member of the interdisciplinary research project 'Creating Art Value', funded by the Research Council of Norway.

Anne Stinessen (1987, Norway)
Lives in Bergen. Currently studying BA Fine Art at Bergen Academy of Art and Design where she will graduate in 2014.

Øyvind Suul (1967, Norway)
Based in Oslo. He was Head of Ceramics in the Department of Specialised Art (2004-2007), and Associate Professor in Clay and Ceramics (2007-2013) at Bergen Academy of Art and Design.

Corrina Thornton (1978, UK)
Based in Bergen. She holds a BA in Ceramics from Bath Spa University (2008) and a MA in Fine Art from Bergen National Academy of Art and Design (2011). Currently Research Assistant to Topographies of the Obsolete.

Numi Thorvarsson (1983, Iceland)
Lives in Bergen. Currently studying BA Fine Art at Bergen Academy of Art and Design where he will graduate in 2014.

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	Corrina Thornton
	Kerstin Abraham Lena Kaapke
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Spode Museum Trust Collection
Page 11, The Blue Room

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