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Title: Pictures Not Homes

Abstract

This is a text about homes and about pictures.

An account of a concrete project. Some questions about regeneration and the arts.

We are living in the inner-city interstices of 'development': bettering, regeneration. Marooned on our doorsteps, our locality is being emptied and torn. We walk and watch and record. Our project, a floating ligan marking the wreck. We tell the story of digging in to our site: a multi-layered project with entangled narrative encompassing different voices, temporalities and spaces. We capture data with archaeological method in Southwark, in the Home Counties: both dark ages, then and now. We produce files as exhibition. The files travel, re-forming. The sites collapse. We move from archaeological dig to questions of urban organization and inauguration.

Key words:

RTI

3D Scans

Aylesbury Estate

Digital Photography

Regeneration

Gentrification

See here – you may have to imagine it – a social art project picturing housing estate residents taking poses from famous paintings.

Ameliorative images defaced and detoured in turn by residents (soon to become aliens to their homes as they are abstracted in processes of residential improvement).

Images that are weapons of pacification are reweaponised.

Through a scrawling:

Homes not stupid pictures.

It is from this we begin.

Tenement fictions: salutary social art enabling capital flow, local practices of image obstruction.

Concrete castings, narrative frameworks, social frontiers and textual barricades.

We find ourselves making pictures not homes.

This is what is left. Pictures not homes.

Fig.1 Minkin, L., Chartridge House Under Occupation, photostan, digital file, 2015

This is a project addressing the disappearance of place; the obdurateness of material; the liquidity of media and capital. An exploration of the relation of lived-in space to the zombie spatialisations of the digital. Reflectance Transformation Imaging [RTI] and 3D scans, archaeological methodology gone lumpen.

Limping field research.

To begin.

Taplow House, South East London, SE17 2UH.

A housing block within the Aylesbury Estate. Built between 1963 and 1977, the estate was one of the most imposing in Europe and one of the last to be built using a now defunct method of construction, the Large Panel System of prefabricated concrete slabs. This style with its dramatically extended and raised walkways produced monolithic blocks, huge ocean liners: Concrete Cunards (Hatherley 2009). These had been constructed to rehouse Londoners from earlier slum clearances which in turn had been built on common land, the Walworth Common. '[E]rase the traces!' demanded Bertolt Brecht in his *Handbook for City Dwellers* and here Modernism had deposited its mantra to ruthlessly rub out the old, to break from the traditions of brick (Leslie 2010). Here was a Modernism of rupture, an architectural style that sought to make a break with continuity and progress., one that was intent upon a new vernacular cleansed of nineteenth century barnacles (Hatherley 2009).

The architecture of The Aylesbury, almost immediately became synonymous with decline. The community didn't arrive as planned, failing to cohere along the elevated gangways. The phatic image of the Channel 4 ident which pans across a windswept and shabby estate reminds us not of the ambition of the project but of a statist dystopia (Hatherley 2009). It is here that Tony Blair gave his first public speech as Prime Minister, on 2nd June 1997, his 'Will to Win' speech, standing high on a balcony, saluting out towards the nation signaling the shift of New Labour from ideology to pragmatism.

'Today' he said 'the greatest challenge for any democratic government is to refashion our institutions to bring this new workless class back into society and into useful work, and to bring back the will to win.'

‘We can only see what we are looking for,’ wrote Alphonse Bertillon the godfather of forensic photography, ‘and we look for what is already in our minds’ (Dufour 2015).

Rather than a world of work as production we encounter liquid-reality flows, voltage exchange, informatic image worlds and inoperative regimes of signification, machine to machine learning.

But to think of ‘bring back...’

At the core of this mound of problems is a fantasmatic return to origins.

Taplow.

Whats in a name?

A conflation, a compression of historic time, a schizo-simultaneity.

An invocation of homeland.

A tap is an interception of communication with authority.

Taplow House was named after Taeppas Low.

SU9061 8216

A man made tumulus.

A 7th century burial mound.

Fig. 2, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Taeppas Low, photostan, digital file, 2017

It looms large over the landscape, built atop an Iron Age fortification. It would have dominated the vista, sending messages of power and sovereignty westward from the Kentish folk toward Mercia. The mound, an artificial ‘high place’ marking territorial control, requires considerable investment in communal labour. Both cult and governance require assembly and such provision in Seventh-century England included the use of ancestral mounds (Carver, 2016, 149).

In 1883 Taepas Low was excavated by the local antiquarians with ‘a zeal only outmatched by their incompetence’ (Webster 2001). The contents of the grave were rummaged, the remnants now reside at the British Museum for us to wonder at, but any knowledge to be gleaned from the context of the site are lost. The mound collapsed, resulting in irretrievable damage to the complex assemblage of grave-goods that lay within thus creating enduring interpretive problems. Does the excavation of Taepas Low act as a cautionary tale toward disturbing the past? Does it talk to us about the devastation of the present?

The demolition of the Aylesbury Estate is now underway, a project that will see Taplow House disappear completely somewhere around 2024 and see the whole landscape rebuilt, the residents will have been decanted and the area repopulated by 2032. Hans Peter Trenton’s cruise liners are now being scuttled. In maritime law to make derelict is to intentionally ensure that it will never be retrieved, but at sea there is also jetsam, flotsam and the *ligan*, the marking of any site to ensure that the abandonment can later be recovered.

How does one remember buildings whose importance lies in their own hostility to heritage? Owen Hatherly questions how to preserve, when that very act is a conspiracy with the opposition. ‘Even in their ruinous condition, they can still offer a sense of possibility which decades of being told “There is No Alternative” has almost beaten out of us’ (Hatherly 2009).

Taplow as disturbed and disturbing mound of sorts.

As before so today. We observe that in surviving epic poetry, the language of those who built the mounds, the people of the bog are killed by the people of the hall. Witness the rending fictions of Beowulf and his exorcism of the troll back to the deep.

Thin veils.

Fiction's shroud.

We learn sympathy for monsters.

A shroud of fictions. Tenement horrors fired up to increase revenue potential.

Liquidity for all.

Archaeology is perhaps an acting participant in performing the ligan, by recording and marking the retrieved in order to ensure enduring value for the lost, the forgotten and the discarded. But as we know any new data set is a new artefact, a fresh construction in its own right, producing a portrait of itself while simultaneously clouding our vision of the 'original'. What should we make of the new imaging technologies such as Photogrammetry, Laser Scanning and RTI? These are the technologies adopted and developed by The Cultural Heritage Imaging Organisation to provide digital solutions for 'people passionate about saving humanities treasures.'

The very same techniques are used to create the kind of advertising that surrounds the regeneration sites at Taplow: pixel bright panels, regeneration sunsets.

We initially spent ten days exploring Taplow House predominantly using Reflectance Transformation Imaging. RTI was initially developed by the gaming industry to create hyper-real scenes by approximating the luminance values of each pixel. An RTI image is a technological image. It might use a digital camera to collect the data set but it

is not a JPEG. The traditional logic of the visual is superseded with a new logic of data-smart image processing.

Fig. 3, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., RTI interface (cab office), 2015

The process of RTI is as follows. The camera is positioned in front of the subject and multiple photographs are taken altering the angle of light for each shot. These are then agglomerated through an open source programme into a single composite file. The RTI interface then provides 'real-time rendering and interactive visualization of changing lighting conditions and enhancements [...] revealing the most subtle details of a surface' (Guardamino and Wheatley 2013).

RTI of the assemblages of dust and dirt offered both an insight into the first layers of stratigraphy and the archaeological process with the detritus acting as a physical index for the passage of time. Each complex assemblage also acting as a projection with the shadow as trace for spatial measurement.

The RTI program works on polynomial algorithms (poly and nomial –greek for many-named). This is an algebraic function that easily smooths data. Light is converted into numbers, materiality is rendered into data which can then be subjected to abstract manipulation similar to the kind of transformations that occur in the futures markets of finance where abstraction rather than the actuality is massaged. So here we have a system in which any light, any charge, any voltage can be exchanged for any other, creating an *externality* out of the very substance of image making (Cubitt 2014).

Ray Bradbury; 'you can get people to swallow anything by intensifying the details.'
(Virilio 1994).

Fig. 4, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Taplow House (installation view) ASC Gallery, London, 2015

These RTI images are seamed together into HD films to create moving still lives of discarded bottles created through a stroboscopic activity, further revealing the performance of the capture phase, and later the enchantment of the processing phase as the shadows traced by the flash become conjoined in the program as clouds, ripples and traces.

The derelict cab office, a warren of spaces, with a typical pillar box hatch separating the entrance from the offices. Here we attempted to capture the whole space with the technique and by placing the key ball upon the apex of the hatch we created a sundial, the shadows arcing out of one space into another. Stretching the programme in this way gave rise to the term 'Dirty RTI' to describe the repurposing of the technique.

The file types thrown up by all the different technologies became a grammarology of sorts and they became the backdrops, or hoardings, for positioning back into the newly whitewashed spaces of Taplow House. Artists' Studio Group (ASC) had gutted the mezzanine levels and installed low cost partitioning in order to rent as artists' studios. ASC had negotiated with Notting Hill Housing Trust, the development company who in turn negotiated their deal for the the regeneration on the basis that they would successfully install artist organizations during the interim period of 'decanting.'

In this Taplow House exhibition the various file types are printed as pictures. These post-excavation digital files have been produced as scrambled material culture. A series of immaterial recordings, the UV files and data have been un-wrapped and made visible as barricades, barriers and sand bags.

A digital photo, metadata, paradata.

A ruin uncovered.

A work containing, enframing, unfolding, de-mattering, enlumping.

Laser-scanned wallpaper is now 3D printed, a deposition process, and then hardened by resinous glue. Lycra skins stretched by sand.

Wendover House SE17 2UD.

The display of the file types in the same space as the regeneration allowed us to continue our excavations, extending these to Wendover- an identical block on the opposite side of the road. Wendover is to be 'regenerated' between now and 2024 and due to this, the estate houses families on short term leases. We decided to scan and document The Youth Centre and work with the young people who drop in regularly to the centre. Here the intention is to create a similar record of the spaces and environment of Wendover.

Fig. 5, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Taplow 2 youth project, photoscan point cloud, digital file, 2015

The kids would arrive pick up the cameras and play, the ball was both a diamond to one group and became a football to another. The ball as a catalyst for the enactment of tackles and poses.

Fig. 6, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., RTI in the Wendover Estate 2015

Most of our reproductions were monstrous. The monster ensures the emergence of difference, interrupting consistent manufacture, introducing vital variation. A recording of a subject whose subjectivity had been abstracted.

Fig. 7, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Taplow 2 youth project, (laser scan)

Making floor and wall rubbings on the estate.

Collecting data of the marks on the floor.

Creating clay portraits to think about sculpting as data collection.

In the Wendover exhibition the objects from the workshop migrated to occupy Taplow, first coexisting and then supplanting the initial exhibition, replacing the original show in phases.

Fig. 8, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Taplow2 exhibition (installation view), ASC Gallery, London 2015

Finally the piece traveled to Athens, concurrent to Documenta 14, the travelling art circus arriving from Kassel, Germany. The piece was exhibited in a transformed building operating as creative hub, a participant in a process of both resistance and amelioration.

We think here about art and washing, processes of regeneration; the methods of inaugurating space and of banishing ghosts, those previous inhabitants of a site.

Fig.9, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Cuevas, 3dprint, plaster, 2015

Foundation Ritual

At a neolithic site we learn that, when building a home, the hearth was placed first, then the door was oriented to the sun. We read that the Romans, in contrast, ploughed a boundary first, a cordon maintaining the limit. [Rykwert, 1976, 41-50] An inauguration

or consecrated installation. This division, ploughed first by the Augur in the sky, then by the founder in the earth, is called the Templum, from:

I cut, I hew, I wound.

I divide.

Fig. 10, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Cuevas, UV texture map, digital file, 2015

Separations are enforced: Sky=nature. Ground=divination.

Underground=resemblance.

There is a compression of time, an expansion of place.

Templum pictures Temenos: the sacred grove, before the stones were circled.

Land defined by boundaries and devoted to a particular purpose. A space is set apart. An operation. A picturing. Possessed then dispossessed.

Fig. 11, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Cuevas, photoscan digital mesh file, 2015

Augur and surveyor use the same tools. The templum laid out in the sky, by ceremony, procedure. Left, right, forward, backward: our terms for location are established in relation to the templum. The temple of the sky, condensed, was projected onto a tract of land by ritual formula. Varying in shape by locality. The augural templum could be set down anywhere and did not need physical enclosure. Bounded by incantation alone. Naming draws a net around landmarks. This is the common way the Romans dealt with matters of location, of settlement.

The Roman camp was a diagrammatic evocation of Rome.

Amanesis imperium. A set of protocols for the laying out locations from the planting of the general's staff into the earth. You can't sleep there without them.

In preparing the auspicated site: A round hole is dug: the mundus. Into it deposited: the first fruit; earth from the settlers home. A pouring hole leads to a vaulted chamber, trickling oil and honey to propitiate the souls of the dead. The hole was opened three times a year and at these times it was dangerous and forbidden to do public business. The mouth of the underworld was open.

After deposition, a stone covered the hole and a fire was lit.

A name was given to the town.

The site now purified and marked out.

A mixing of earths. A foundation ritual.

The expulsion of previous ghostly inhabitants.

The surveyor's ceremony still looks arcane: PPE, high-viz and theodolites.

Divination and orientation.

After measurement lots were drawn, property law put in place. Roman law imposed terrible penalties on boundary breakers.

Terminus blood sacrifices.

So; to regenerate

To cut a ditch in the sky

An augur in the templum

An inauguration of tears

As above so below:

filling up, filling in

giving up, giving in

given out

tendered

Pyramids and blue haze;

Raptures of the present.

A town must also be unmade ritually, or disestablished. The site unploughed or undone with no further legal existence or revenue due. Rage has been the cause for which high cities were blotted out. An insolent army draws a plough over the place where the walls had stood.

We think of this ploughing when we think of this a housing estate named after an ancient mound, a set of homes earmarked for renewal, regeneration, renovation, renaissance, improvement, creative destruction.

Fig. 12, Dawson, I. and Minkin, L., Pictures Not Homes (installation view), Winchester School of Art, Gallery, UK, 2017

You find the word you find most appropriate for this process.

Ruth Glass found a word for this process that many now use: the word gentrification arriving in her 1964 book about a changing London, the term referring to what she called the invasion of one class by another (Glass, 1964). This is what might be described as the movement of the middle classes into working class residential areas as a low intensity war.

With David Harvey we might call it the submission of space to a neoliberal logic, understanding that this takes place historically with the increasing shift within city governance from a 'managerial' tendency to 'entrepreneurial' branding (Harvey, 1989). The rise of the global city with their competing art mega-plexes is far away from the

burgeoning counter-cultural milieu of the 1960s where the term gentrification first emerges.

A hardening of the promises of authentic living into high sheen gloss and the deathly knell of the effervescent pop-up shop.

Certainly the form we know as gentrification today emerges from the 1960s onwards as the economy shifts from industrial to service forms, where the social factory extends into all forms of life, where value is extracted from all things, including shifting fluctuations of housing stock linked to social and cultural capital: prices linked to frontier developments, zeitgeist uplifts and hipster invasions. Cities lose their industrial production zones but zones of housing and development become a core source for the production of value today.

Home and economy are linked, indelibly.

A truism that we live with now is that economics (the inheritor of oikos and oikonomia the ‘management of the household’) and politics (the progeny of the polis - the city and public affairs) have an unclear relationship. According to Giorgio Agamben we should approach civil war as not merely between two opposing factions within a state, it is rather a fundamental tension between the household and the state, between oikos and polis; between the inside—constituted by the familial bond—and the outside—the demands of the city—a split between the private and the public. Civil war as the name for the ‘threshold through which the unpolitical is politicised and the political is “economised”’ and the moment ‘when the polis appears in the reassuring figure of oikos’ becoming the shift of civil war into ‘the paradigm of every conflict’ (Agamben, 2015: 17-18).

A is for front line.

An alphabetical anomaly; we start with struggle, with a conflict between forms-of-life.

The social is ontologically riven: there is no complete unity, but rather a division in common.

These divisions might be experienced concretely: the wall that divides one plot from another, one people from another, us and them; made spatially distinct.

A frenzy of wall building is coming to define our time.

Wendy Brown has written convincingly on this topic, on the anxious phantasms of national sovereignty attempting to buttress themselves against the deterritorialising flows of global capital (Brown, 2010).

Fig. 13, Dawson, I., Minkin, L. and Summers, F., Pictures Not Homes (installation view), Gestures of Resistance, Centre Romantsu, Athens, 2017

Antagonism reframed as negotiation.

Racism rendered alongside the dire inoculations of patriotism.

A is for art, or art into life, not art for the few but art for the many, practised by the many.

A is for art=life.

A is for Abstraction, concretely felt

A is for

absorption &

appropriation (read, dispossession)

A is for alternative facts

mythic language of the waiting rooms of living hell

Pure abstraction.

A riot of possibility.

To continue with the front-line as metaphor we encounter urban insurrection, the movement against dispossession. We find the barricade that exists as a symbol and material practice. The barricade has a history, one described by Eric Hazan as an insurrectionary tool that utilises the very character and make up of lived urban space against those whose rule is contested (Hazan, 2015). It arrives in various forms during revolts against Henry III up to the Paris Commune, appearing in the wars of religion and the search for an alternative society. The barricade is the manifestation of conflict within a street that is worked in and lived in, and a street for which the inhabitants are ready to die.

A home as a livable space, defended.

Barricaded against opposing social forces.

The barricade is that which restricts the free movement of the oppressive forces; Swiss guards stuck at every turn, unable to progress; immobilised and attacked by words, bottles, stones, gunfire until forced to retreat. The king forced to flee the city in ignominious conditions. This much happened in 1588.

It is no surprise that the history of Parisian urban renovation is a history of removing the conditions of possibility for the barricade, the construction of the thoroughfare that foregrounds movement on a vaster scale.

Or, to recognise upgrading for what it is: urban warfare, re-named as the Hausmann effect, the removal of the ‘scandalous alleys’ for the ‘lavish self-glorification by the bourgeoisie’ (Smith, 1996: 33).

This is what Frederic Engels tells us.

A is for the logic of police and soap.

Of cleansing pathology.

Order and cleanliness.

If the function of the barricade is to withhold movement as the frontline of urban struggle over the right to homes and the right of access to the city, the other metaphor of continual movement arrives. Neil Smith describes this as a constantly moving frontier of disinvestment and reinvestment. Not so much a boundary demarcation, this frontier is instead constantly in motion, across space but also generating narratives and demarcations of space: a movement of naming and assigning. A moving line between the worthy and the worthless, a movement driven by various forces. Smith, citing Frederik Jackson Turner, notes that the frontier has the character of the ‘outer edge of the wave,’ a shifting border-line between so-called savagery and civilisation, a movement that demonstrates an urge to make ‘livable space’ from ‘wilderness’ (Smith, 1996: xv & 186).

Such a frontier serves as the mythic urge for the colonisation of space, particularly within the Western consciousness, where the West, in its movements beyond itself meets not real people but merely ‘the rest’ – those people who are soon to colonised, those who will have disposability assigned to them.

Barricades and frontiers; two models of the front line in the civil war of the oikos.

It has been long understood that artists and their choice of living space, often those that have the cheapest price for the largest size, irrespective of neighbourhood character, have been the vanguard of gentrification. Living conditions and the arts constitute a crucial part of the process of transforming New York's Lower east Side, Brooklyn or the UK's Old Street from 'wasteland' to 'civilisation'.

Or: loft living and the creative class are often the sign of a changing neighbourhood (Zukin, 1982). Rhetorics around the 'creative class' in our contemporary world designate the subsuming of counter-cultural tendencies into the entrepreneurial spirit of renewed urban character (Rosler, 2010).

Here we see art intertwined with the frontier, with the management of capital known as oikos.

- art becoming life as (sometimes non-intentional) real estate speculation
- art as the production of value: becoming social capital within a narrative of 'bettering', renewal, renaissance.

Whose right to the city?

Upgrading as continual soft conflict.

From austerity to perverted promises of communal luxury.

How might our bonds be figured?

Free flow is toilet mentality.

A politics of profits through professed care manifested in cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment.

Frontiered. Leveraged.

Transformation is a good cover word for the displacement that is involved with any reterritorialisation.

Art is no barricade here.

Art and its ability to represent social processes becomes an interesting conundrum: in one sense art can make pictures not homes. In another sense the social processes that frame art concretely affect homes, neighbourhoods and city brands.

The process of art, according to Agamben's commentary in *The Melancholy Angel*, was once the work of transmission – the continuation of tradition (Agamben, 1999). With the modern era, with the splenetic morbid detachment of Baudelaire born in part from the context of the bloody dismantling of the barricades of 1848, art takes up the labour of interruption and assumes alienation. Such an interruptive process finds the past – separated from its transmission into the present – but only in negation, where 'knowledge of the new is only possible only in the non-truth of the old' (Agamben, 1999: 110). The past as ruin becomes redeemed but only in the dead space of the museum.

Agamben's description of the promise and task of art goes thus:

By transforming the principle of man's delay before truth into a poetic process and renouncing the guarantees of truth for love of transmissibility, art succeeds once again in transforming man's inability to exit his historical status, perennially suspended in the inter-world between old and new, past and future, into the very space in which he can take the original measure of his dwelling in the present and recover each time the meaning of his action (Agamben, 1999, 114).

Fig. 14, Dawson, I., Minkin, L. and Summers, F., Pictures Not Homes (detail), Gestures of Resistance, Centre Romantsu, Athens, 2017

We take this to mean the trouble of living, of making a liveable space for living between the ruins of the past and the ruination of progress. Art's angel – which Agamben evokes from Durer's famous engraving – is lodged in an atemporal non-time, staring at scattered tools that have become inoperative, de-utilitarianised. Art as the inoperative, as the putting down of work tools. We wonder aloud about the de-linking of art from production in order to make a liveable time, yet the distinction between art and production of value is ever decreasing as seen in the social processes described.

Agamben's concluding words to his essay demonstrate an interesting paradox for our time:

‘According to the principle by which it is only in the burning house that the fundamental architectural problem becomes visible for the first time, art, at the furthest point of its destiny, makes visible its original project’ (Agamben, 1999: 115).

Fig. 15, Dawson, I., Minkin, L. and Summers, F., Pictures Not Homes (detail), Gestures of Resistance, Centre Romantsu, Athens, 2017

We find ourselves asking:

Is art the process of burning houses or transforming homes?

Is art's relation to the home most fundamentally as *oikos*, linked to the management or governance that economy demands, a demand that renders us perpetually homeless.

How can we address the historical processes that we witness without turning them into gnomonic objects forever separated from us?

Certainly one of art's problems is of addressing 'real life' events without them becoming ossified commodities within the museum.

How can such processes be documented or described?

How might art encompass or render inoperative such social relations?

This is a question worth asking.

Or, is art the imperative to make dwelling in the present possible?

How can we picture a home in these terms?

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