

# Found and Lost: A Genealogy of Waste?

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## Two Notes of Warning

- 1 Some of the images that follow are really rubbish. Rubbish slides – images of rubbish, trash and rubbish or ‘poor images’ (Steyerl 2009). Bad in quality, low in resolution, diminished and deteriorated – closing in on the reproduced remains of the artwork accelerated towards dissolution – how does the work of art appear, or disappear?
- 2 The Van Abbemuseum was founded in 1936 by the tobacco industrialist Henri van Abbe. Joseph Amato writes, ‘An average puff of a cigarette is estimated to contain 4 billion particles of dust’ (2000, p. 3). Where there’s tobacco, there’s smoke; where there’s smoke, there’s usually fire and ash; and where there’s art, I would say, there’s also waste and dust.

## INTRODUCING THREE OR FIVE SCENES

In 1989, Kumiko Shimizu adorned the exterior of the Hayward Gallery with *Painted Objects* – a wheel, wheelbarrow, typewriter, toilet and pram – curious jewels of salvaged goods, strung and hung from the rooftop, the concrete façade popping with colourful urban barnacles.

From the late 1990s, over a 10-year period, Tomoko Takahashi filled various London galleries and museums (as well as a tennis court and an abandoned office space), with their own discarded and neighbouring junk – from defunct computers to broken furniture, circuitries of desks, chairs and cables.

Between 1997 and 2005, Vong Phaophanit and Claire Oboussier create *Atopia*, a divided and double installation between Berlin’s DAAD offices and galleries. Outside, anti-pigeon devices cover a rooftop, an





Kumiko Shimizu, *Painted Objects*, 1989, found objects installed on exterior of the Hayward Gallery, London. Images courtesy the artist.

orderly and insistent deterrent. Inside, rubber oozes through galvanised steel shelving, slowly giving up its solidity. Across external and internal sites, imaginary bodies – avian and synthetic – are repelled and divided, expelled and dissolved. Later, an eponymous artists' book inscribes their transitional encounters in/between Berlin during a year away, abroad and adrift.<sup>1</sup> From the scant traces of Shimizu's and Takahashi's works, to the tactical 'absencing' of Phaophanit/Oboussier's practice, I take a cue from the tangles of rope, cable and string, to cast my own lines out: words and sentences to gnarl up the linear, to tamper with narratives, to reimagine and connect forgotten or unseen scenes, and venture a tentative constellation of waste and dust.<sup>2</sup>

### SCENE ONE: LONDON, SOUTH

Shimizu's *Painted Objects* were created for the landmark 1989 exhibition, 'The Other Story', curated by Rasheed Araeen. Subtitled 'Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain' (the 'Afro-Asian' a contraction of African, Asian and Caribbean), the show was met with widely scathing, dismissive and at times vitriolic critical response, with little attention paid to the actual works, except to illustrate an assertion of inferiority or mimicry. A rare mention of Shimizu can be found in the Hayward exhibition archive, in one of the few defences mounted of 'The Other Story'. In a letter to the editor of the *Sunday Times*, Martin Russell writes to correct both Araeen and his most vehement critic, Brian Sewell, pointing astutely to the market interests in which criticism and art history are imbricated, and the economic as well as aesthetic stakes in play:

The reason why the Afro-Asian artists have failed to achieve critical notice and establish a London market for their work is not what Rasheed Araeen or Brian Sewell assert. Araeen thinks the explanation lies in the prejudice of Europeans against other civilisations, the remnants of colonial and racial feelings, and the rise



of United States influence. Sewell states ‘they are not good enough. They borrow all and contribute nothing’. The real reason is that English and American painting is mediocre... [and] Western art dealers have filled their store rooms with work produced by their chums and the chums of chums. They would be ruined if it were now recognized that they have missed the really inspired artists whose work is now on view at the Hayward.<sup>3</sup>

#### A second document responds to Sewell’s specific attack on Shimizu:

Mr Sewell is of course right that the Hayward is an ugly building externally... [but] probably mentions [it] only to give himself an opportunity of disparaging the Japanese artist Kumiko Shimizu [*sic*], who with humorous intent has hung sundry objects on it, ‘all crudely painted in bright colours’ as Mr Sewell puts it, though he admits all this ‘may seem a witty criticism of the architecture’.<sup>4</sup>

I want to note the prospect of ‘ruin’ (the loss of wealth and reputation) and the hint at institutional critique, in order to move towards ruins or remains.

Meanwhile, Araeen (1989a, p. 95). introduces Shimizu as ‘an artist who turns rubbish into art’. Describing her ‘early environmental works’ as influenced by Richard Long and Christo, and later projects in often derelict sites as ‘critique[s] of the urban environment’, he situates her in relation to two traditions: ‘the use of found material, which goes back to Duchamp; and the relationship between art and building or architecture.’

Twenty years later, Jean Fisher touches briefly on Shimizu in her essay, ‘The Other Story and the Past Imperfect’, referring to her as ‘an indirect heir to [an] historical strand’ of practice represented by David Medalla and Li Yuan-chia. If Medalla was ‘instrumental in introducing to London audiences avant-garde Fluxus-

like events, environments and installations from both Europe and Latin America’, and Li is ‘now credited as the “father” of Chinese abstraction’, then Fisher’s assertion may be read as a statement of Shimizu’s affinity with everyday practices, participation and play as process, as well as art’s relation to and as environment. One might then find connections between Li’s *Hanging Disc Toys* (c.1980) or Medalla’s ongoing *A Stitch in Time* (since 1967), in terms of the medium of suspension and the use of rudimentary weaving processes – one could see the building as the fabric on which Shimizu sews the detritus of the street; one could also then read Takahashi’s arrangements as tapestries threaded through with leads and cables; or consider the literal tensions between string, rubber and steel in the work of Phaophanit/Oboussier.

However, I find the idea of ‘inheritance’ itself a little troubling, for the intimation of patrilinear descent or bequest. It is worth noting that in terms of age, there is at most a half-generation between Li and Shimizu, and only six years between Shimizu and Medalla. Moreover, as artists moving in the same circles, Medalla and Li might be understood less as Shimizu’s ‘elders’ or benefactors, than as her contemporaries and peers.

The scant documentation available of Shimizu’s work, her occlusion from art historical narratives and absence from public collections, and her later moves towards collaborative urban design projects, are all likely contributory factors to her being overlooked as an artist. But it is not my aim to piece together the few traces of her practice, nor argue for what Araeen describes as the ‘true significance’ of her work, which ‘has not yet been understood’. If Shimizu is an ‘indirect heir’, I want to dwell less on narratives of influence, lineage and legacy, and more on indirect relations. The indirect is suggestive of tangents, mediations, separations and removes; thus, I turn from separating to sorting, from removes to removals, and so, to the managing of waste.







Kumiko Shimizu, *Painted Objects*, 1989, found objects installed on exterior of the Hayward Gallery, London. Images courtesy the artist.



Kumiko Shimizu, *Painted Objects*, 1989, found objects installed on exterior of the Hayward Gallery, London. Images courtesy the artist.

A wheel, liberated from some unknown vehicle, possibly a bicycle, going nowhere; a wheelbarrow, lifted far above the displaced earth it might once have transported; a typewriter, old tech replaced by new; a pram, outgrown; and, speaking of waste management, a loo. As Araeen (1989a, p. 97) suggests, the ‘transformations’ effected by the painted objects are ‘chaotic’, for they ‘also point to their demise’. ‘Chaotic’ is a word frequently used to describe Takahashi’s work too, and is worth stressing here, less in terms of the formal sense of ‘designed disorder’, and more in terms of its unsettling affect.

Debunking the bunker-like building with a touch of toilet humour, the painted objects may invoke other artists’ responses to the call of nature, through acts of recontextualisation. Martha Buskirk (2005, p. 63) notes that Duchamp’s ‘thorough assimilation into museum collections and art historical discourse has insured that any use of such objects as a bicycle wheel, snow shovel, and especially a urinal will be read as a reference to Duchamp, and not just a use of the object itself’. She goes on to discuss Robert Gober’s handmade *Three Urinals* (1988), David Hammons’s *Public Toilets* (1990), in which he ‘affixed a series of urinals to trees’, and Sherrie Levine’s cast bronze *Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp)* (1991), in terms of discourses of authorship and originality. Interestingly, there is no mention of the argument that ‘has been swooshing around the cistern of contemporary art criticism since the 1980s...’ (as one writer puts it), namely ‘that Duchamp’s famous... pissoir laid on its side – was actually the creation of the poet, artist and wearer of tin cans, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven’ (Frizzell 2014). As John Higgs (2015) has written:

On 11 April 1917 Duchamp wrote to his sister Suzanne and said that, ‘One of my female friends who had adopted the pseudonym Richard Mutt sent me a porcelain urinal as a sculpture; since there was nothing indecent about it, there was no reason to

reject it.’ As he was already submitting the urinal under an assumed name, there does not seem to be a reason why he would lie to his sister about a ‘female friend’. The strongest candidate to be this friend was Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. She was in Philadelphia at the time, and contemporary newspaper reports claimed that ‘Richard Mutt’ was from Philadelphia.

This ‘long-forgotten pioneering feminist’ may be the ‘strongest candidate’ for the ‘female friend’ that Duchamp mentioned in his letter to his sister Suzanne. Freytag-Loringhoven was in Philadelphia at the same time as contemporary newspaper reports claimed that ‘Richard Mutt’ was from Philadelphia.

The temptation and allure of lineage, again...

Of course, Shimizu’s loo is not a pristine, manufactured object. It could be considered a ‘ready-made’ in that it ‘derives from a multiple gesture involving the act of selection... designation... and recontextualisation’ (Buskirk 2005, p. 10). However, as a despoiled and discarded object, its function is cancelled long before its conceptual re-designation. As repurposed scrap, it may be better thought of as ready-used – the work an impermanent assemblage of modified found objects, temporarily rehabilitated before returning to junk status – predisposed to disposal, if you will.

Moreover, Shimizu’s loo is a lavatory, not a urinal. As an everyday object, ‘a lavatory is not simply a technological response to a physical need but’ as architectural historian Barbara Penner (2009, p. 372) argues, ‘a cultural product shaped by complex and often competing discourses on the body, sexuality, morality and hygiene’ – discourses, we might add, that are also already gendered, classed and raced.

A loo on the side of a London building may read as absurd or facetious (etymologically unrelated to





faeces), given that 120 years ago, public lavatories in the capital – for women, that is – were a scarcity. The LSA or Ladies' Sanitary Association had actively campaigned since 1870s for provision of women's conveniences. In 1879:

While... women's conveniences were already established in Glasgow, Nottingham, Paris and other continental cities, the first permanent women's conveniences in London were reportedly built only in 1893 in the Strand opposite the Royal Courts of Justice... there existed a fair degree of public awareness, and sympathy for, the need for female conveniences by 1900. However... not everyone was so eager for women's lavatories to adorn London's streets and the expression of disapproval took many forms (Penner 2009, p. 375).

Euphemistically referred to as 'women's conveniences', their lack was no laughing matter for those caught short in the street, only to be met with such unsympathetic signs as, 'Commit No Nuisance' or 'Decency Forbids'. Loos are objects and spaces that hint at defecation, urination and menstruation – bodily hence also sexual functions. As such, wide opposition to the construction of visible public conveniences for women reflected prevailing Victorian values and 'increasingly strict prohibitions on bodily display and the emergence of a rigid ideology of gender' (Penner 2009, p. 373 and p. 370).

Effectively delimiting women's mobility and policing their morality and sexuality, the gendered demarcation of private and public spheres, also sought to demarcate class. Penner writes, 'It is misleading... to speak of "women's needs" as a unified entity, as it is evident that the needs of working-class women and "ladies who shop" were not considered to be the same' (2009, p. 377). 'The fear of a potential "promiscuous" mixing of working- and middle-class female bodies... indicates that decency and femininity were defined primarily as



susan pui san lok, *Commit No Nuisance*, 2019, digital photograph.



middle-class attributes... [and] threatened the moral contagion of the “ladies” by the factory and flower girls’ (2009, p. 382).

With Shimizu’s *Painted Objects*, the revered or reviled monumental is mocked, marred or improved (depending on your view), by processed plastic, metal and porcelain junk, as if hosting an up-turned, gravity-defying backyard sale. Araeen likened Shimizu’s earlier 1985 *Roadworks* piece to ‘knick-knacks hanging from the wall as if she was selling them’ (1989a, p. 95). The work relies on skips and fly-tippers to perform a kind of reverse fly-tipping – legitimately depositing waste on a designated site, at least for a limited time. The bright Warholian colours and patterns of the salvaged objects mask a contagion of the raw with the cooked, to invert the anthropological metaphor.<sup>5</sup> Here the raw concrete infers rarefied high culture and institutional power, while the cooked implies mass-manufactured products turned commodities, popularly consumed, discarded and salvaged, as well as the social relations within which all such objects are bound – the loo being just one example.

One does not have to look too closely to surmise that the aesthetic has been ‘contaminated’, as Félix González-Torres (1993, p. 21) might say, ‘with something social’. As such, the metaphorical and physical elevation of waste objects, on the elevation of a space of cultural elevation, may be taken as less – or more – than ‘a witty criticism of the architecture’ per se. Rather, their incongruity serves as a decorative indictment of London’s disparities of wealth and power, adorning the building’s façade with pretty, or pretty ugly (*jolie-laide*) banners of ruin.

## SCENES TWO, THREE AND FOUR: LONDON (SOUTH, EAST AND CENTRAL)

With Shimizu’s typewriter hanging off the Hayward, I want to segue into Takahashi’s tangled installations, before ending with Phaophanit/Oboussier’s *Atopia*. In 1997, at the artist-run Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall, south London, Takahashi created an installation with materials from her own ‘vast personal collection, objects borrowed from [the gallery, and] contributions gleaned from her friends’ storage areas... a wide variety of electrical products... extension wires, a slide machine, TVs, computers, an amplifier, and an open reel tape deck – ... taken apart and plugged in. Amidst other “junk”, a slide machine on a timer clicked blindly away and a blank videotape played on a TV screen’ (Preece, 1997). Her later collaboration, *Word Perfect* (2000),<sup>6</sup> offered a sparse counterpart to the cluttered dystopian landscape of defunct and dying technology. In *Word Perfect*, automated functions are decidedly dysfunctional, continually interrupted by virtual junk; the promise of time-saving technological innovation, undone by time-wasting human behaviour. While Takahashi invites questions of value, use, functionality, technology, productivity and waste, the very presence of trash in the utopic virtual domain is arguably what makes it real. Julian Stallabrass opens his 1996 essay, ‘Trash’ by citing William Gibson’s *Count Zero* (1986, p. 26), where a character observes the ‘amazing detailed rendering of the ‘useless and neglected’; it is the meticulous representation of rubbish that distinguishes the most exclusive terrain of conspicuous consumption (1996, pp. 171–88).

Claudine Isé (2002) fleetingly aligns Takahashi’s installations with Robert Rauschenberg’s early ‘combines’ as both attract, ‘One of the clichés often used to describe modern and contemporary art [namely] that it “looks like a pile of junk”.’ Takahashi declares, ‘I don’t really read articles because they don’t







Kumiko Shimizu, *Painted Objects*, 1989, found objects installed on exterior of the Hayward Gallery, London. Images courtesy the artist.

really say anything. It's always, "Pile of rubbish! Pile of rubbish!" (cited in Fortnum, 2006, p. 149).

Usually working with the architecture and objects of a given place, be that a gallery, office space, school, tennis court or unfinished auditorium, Takahashi transforms the waste produced by people's work into 'frenetic three-dimensional collages' (Stallabrass 1999, p. 76). The comparison to 'junk' may be both a red flag and a red herring – a dismissal designed to rile; or relation designed to revalidate by association with Dada or Arte Povera traditions, for example.

While Rauschenberg's free-standing or wall-hung combines of painting and sculpture and everyday objects achieve a fixity and retain a pictorial quality, Takahashi's installations are durational, site-specific assemblages and participatory environments, of comparatively significant scale, immersive spectacles to be navigated. And yet... let me note here Helen Molesworth's discussion of 'the polarized discourse of essentialism versus theory' in feminism, and the 'tenacity of [Heinrich] Wölfflin's model' within art historical discourse, which initiated 'the structural logic of compare and contrast' – a progressive stylistic model whose 'methodological, discursive and technological' binarism continues to underpin both dominant narratives and critical counter-narratives of art practice (in this very sentence, for example), and indeed, drive its generational and geographical divisions. Molesworth (1999) goes on to triangulate such divides through the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, to which I shall return at the end of this paper. At this point, suffice to say that compare and contrast remains a hard habit to kick. Might an alternative model or connection be made in 'indirect' relation to the Gutai group, whose 1956 manifesto refuses the West's derivative designation as 'neo-Dada'? 'But we think differently, in contrast to Dadaism, our work is the result of investigating the possibilities of calling the material to life' (Yoshihara





1956). Is it helpful to think about Takahashi's installations as somehow 'calling the material to life'? Her more positive critics tend precisely towards such metaphors of reanimation: Takahashi 'imbue[s] ordinary objects with renewed life' (Isé 2002); Takahashi '[brings] discarded objects back to life' (Fortnum 2006, p. 146). Perhaps instead of merely reversing or halting the processes of decay and death, the objects here might be thought of more as matter twice displaced: first as waste, then as art. This is Julian Stallabrass, talking trash:

Objects gain and lose something when they are abandoned as rubbish. What they lose is...: newness, utility, wholeness, a distinction from other objects... In becoming rubbish the object, stripped of this mystification, gains a doleful truthfulness, as though confessing: it becomes a reminder that commodities, despite all their tricks, are just stuff; little combinations of plastics or metal or paper.

(...)

[Trash] is of course a powerful reminder of the West's profligacy in consumption, of the extraordinary engines of waste that are our economies, sacrificing vast quantities of matter and human labour on rubbish dumps...

When the commodity form is stripped away, something may be revealed of the social relations which are immanent in the objects and which bind people and their fates. (1996 cited in Candlin & Guins 2009, pp. 416–19)

Or as Isé (2002) puts it:

... why [do] we give such tremendous value to certain kinds of objects while discarding others without a second thought, how [do] we make distinctions between what is useful and what isn't, and what [are] the consequences of those decisions?

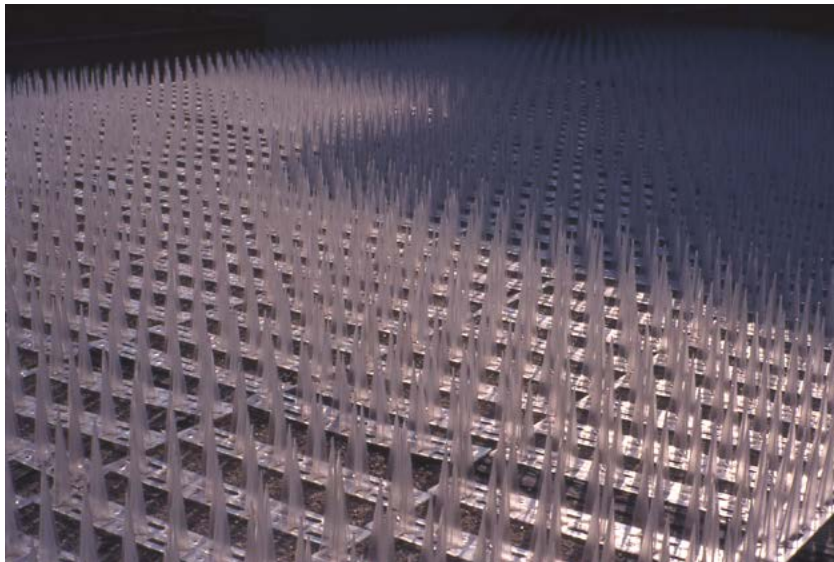
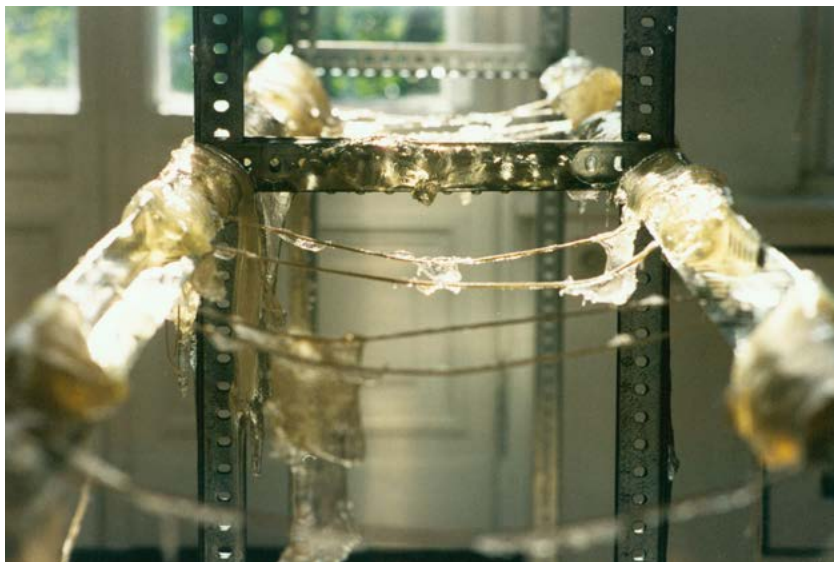
Some of Takahashi's installations have suggested the melancholic vistas of buildings in ruins to be contemplated,<sup>7</sup> while others have demanded the awkward navigation of narrowed spaces, as dangerous looking towers of stuff appear to be on the verge of toppling, or water threatens to boil over, and objects literally crash down. On several occasions, her installations have been disassembled by audiences, and salvaged objects returned not to the scrapheap, but granted other futures – as mementoes, souvenirs or art relics. 'Sold off' for nothing in a car-boot sale, or given away via a free raffle,<sup>8</sup> the raffle is a particularly unsettling strategy – randomising and levelling the value of things, while the element of chance heightens the recurring dimensions of play and precarity.

Takahashi's description of her art school experience might also serve for her work: 'Here you can delve around, breaking everything down' (Fortnum 2006, p. 145). Her words also remind me of the 2001 work, *Break Down*, by Takahashi's contemporary, Michael Landy, in which he systematically destroyed the entirety of his 7,227 possessions, over a 2-week period, in a former C&A department store. Landy's heroic or anti-heroic act of destruction, or self-destruction (if the self is defined by stuff and we are what we own) drastically accelerated – or short-circuited – the cycle of consumption to waste, leaving him with nothing. One might argue that Takahashi, however, decelerates the breakdown – diverting the cycle, stalling the progression towards destruction and opening up other circuits of exchange.

## SCENE FIVE: BERLIN (EAST, WEST AND NOWHERE)

With precarity, circulation and movement in mind, I want to end with the divided and double image of Phaophanit/Oboussier's *Atopia*, an installation first created in 1997, occupying twin sites 'separated by





several miles' (Oboussier 1998). On the roof of an old government administration building in the former Eastern bloc, now housing the DAAD offices, anti-pigeon devices line up in rows, forming an orderly and insistent deterrent, an uninhabitable field within a 360 degree view of the city. Across town in the old West, inside the DAAD gallery, bales of synthetic rubber ooze through galvanised steel frames, the shelving replaced by hand-tied lengths of domestic string – 'feeble filaments' (in the artist's words) that nevertheless cut through the collapsing mass.

According to Buskirk's terms, the work has 'qualities identified with minimalism: industrial materials, simple, geometric forms, the repetition of identical units, and the activation of the surrounding or contained space' (2005, p. 3). Yet it also brings these values into tension through its own division, doubling and collapse. Straddling former geographical, social and political divides, the work splits and spills – the exterior work demands distance, warding off any movement across its terrain; while the interior demands intimacy and caution, careful manoeuvres around the steel and rubber obstructing the galleries and doorways.

Static geometries are countered by the discordant 'arrhythmia' (Glueck 2006) of sinewy strings looping, clinging and slicing through mounds of melting rubber – that may recall Eva Hesse's works with latex and rope, in terms of the anxiety provoked by materials prone to change and alteration over time. With Hesse, the 'brittle discoloration or complete decay' of latex are 'subjected to the forces of gravity' over decades (Buskirk 2005, p. 25 and p. 134). With Phaophanit/Oboussier, the physical instability of the material

Vong Phaophanit, *Atopia*, 1997, installation in two parts: polybutadiene rubber, galvanised steel shelving, string; anti-pigeon devices on a roof-top. Commissioned by DAAD, Berlin. Images courtesy the artist and Oboussier Studio.



To look – from the middle high German *lucgen* – to mark, behold – originally ‘to look through a hole’ – *loch* – a hole or dungeon, *lochem* – to pierce, to lock.

To see – from the base of Latin *sequi* – to follow, to follow with the eye.



Lift (with selftape), Helmsiederstrasse

Berlin is the most unlikely *Atopia*, weighed down as it is by the poisonous lead of its history, inexorably determined in so many hearts. But perhaps it is precisely this surfeit of meaning, the festering wound of its real events that, paradoxically, makes Berlin open to *Atopia*. Its chaos of unresolved narratives, its sites of unspeakable truths – perhaps *Atopia* requires a backdrop such as this.



Tierpark

*Atopia* – displaced, without anchor, adrift.

underlines the site-specific conditions and limited duration of the work, as heat combines with gravity to disintegrate the rubber in a matter of hours.

Anti-pigeon devices – a ubiquitous mechanism designed to deter creatures sometimes referred to as ‘winged rats’ – connote pestilence and dirt withheld. These devices are deployed to mark boundaries, extend territories, maintain the cleanliness of a given building and its peripheral spaces, to deny occupation, resist contagion and delimit pollution, waste. Reading across the divided and doubled *Atopia*, the familiar, seemingly innocuous attempts to inoculate or keep the environment clean, suddenly converge acts of cleaning and cleansing. If Hesse’s latex suggests skin sagging and peeling, then Phaophanit/Oboussier’s rubber may suggest bodies collapsing – submitting to or evading – the systematic removal elsewhere, of unwanted, objectified ‘others’.

## SCENES UNSEEN

By reading Shimizu, Takahashi and Phaophanit/Oboussier in tandem, I mean to sidestep the restorative counter-narrative of the forgotten or marginalised artist, lost or found by this or that neglectful or remorseful institution, seeking to expand but essentially leave intact an unchanged, unchallenged canon.

Across these three dissipated moments and disparate practices, salvaged ready-used objects and industrial materials are appropriated, not to evacuate their function and examine their objecthood, but to question their presumed redundancy and reassert their immanent socioeconomic, technological and political relations.

Vong Phaophanit and Claire Oboussier, *Atopia*, 2000, limited edition artist book, selected pages. Images courtesy Phaophanit and Oboussier Studio.



In the process, rubbish, junk, waste and its management, are momentarily raised to the status of that most rarefied of commodities (and for some, the most useless of objects) – art. Between them, the realms of the aesthetic, economic and political are more intimately linked than some might prefer to admit.

Phaophanit/Oboussier's *Atopia* works to foreground the practice and politics of occupation, and re-territorialisation, enacting the policing – and perforation – of institutional spaces and borders, haunted by divisions. Shimizu's transformation of the Hayward, from cultural haven to trash magnet, draws attention to immediate local economic and social schisms. At the same time, her adornments anticipate the 'becoming generic' of the museum, as a vernacular, spectacular site of distraction. While Michael Newman discusses the impulse towards 'the generic object' and 'becoming generic' as a 'problem of modernity', with post-conceptualist practices distinguished both by the 'desire to disappear' and its impossibility (Newman 1999, pp. 206–21), such contradictory desire arguably remains the privileged domain of those who already inhabit the visible. Who or what disappears with the spectacular turn? This development in museum culture is amplified in Takahashi's galleries-turned-gaming-spaces, with circuitries of junk and precipitous ruins: art as increasingly reckless and hazardous entertainment. Moreover, the intimate and precarious relation between aesthetic and economic labour as structural to the gallery or museum and its maintenance, is embodied in Takahashi's hazardous occupational history (McCorquodale, Siderfin & Stallabrass 1998), and with the particular space of Beaconsfield: 'I used to work here, as a cleaner, a long time ago. I was cleaner, invigilator and painter and decorator, putting things in envelopes and everything... I really wanted to do something about me working here' (Fortnum 2006, p. 146).

Here, we might remember Mierle Laderman Ukeles's 1969 *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, in which she divides labour into two categories, 'development' and 'maintenance'. As Molesworth explains:

Development corresponds largely with Modernist notions of progress and individuality, while maintenance, on the other hand, is the realm of human activities that keep things going – cooking, cleaning, shopping, child-rearing and so forth (...) when Ukeles renames domestic labour 'maintenance' she underscores the public sphere's structural reliance on private/domestic labour (1999, pp. 114–15 and p. 117).

If it is 'absolutely structural... to patriarchy and capitalism that the labour of maintenance should remain *invisible*', then the making visible of waste and its management is potentially chaotic in affect. To expose 'the hidden and devalued labor of daily maintenance and upkeep' (Kwon 2004, p. 19), is to '[stymie] the very labour it is designed to maintain' (Molesworth 1999, p. 120).

'Waste' invokes both material and dematerialising substances, both devastating and dissipating action, and a sense of the careless, extravagant and purposeless, the unwanted, unoccupied and uncultivated, the weakening, passing and eliminated. Carolyn Steedman argues that 'Dust – speaks of the opposite of waste and dispersal; of a grand circularity, of nothing ever, ever going away' (2001, p. 166). The works of Shimizu, Takahashi and Phaophanit/Oboussier, however (not to mention the growing evidence of plastics in our oceans), suggest that waste is not opposed but intrinsic to that circularity, 'of nothing ever, ever going away' – a mere stage in what Amato describes as 'the ceaseless tides of the becoming and dissolution of things'. He writes,

Dust is a result of the divisibility of matter...

Unnoticed, it is associated with the lowliest of things, with what is broken, discarded, formless...

Out of [dust] things are made; into it they dissolve.





So constant, so pervasive, dust, aggregating and disintegrating, gauges matter on its way to and from being. (Amato 2000, pp. 3–5)

A ‘genealogy of waste’ may draw attention to ‘what we tend to feel is without history’ (Foucault 1977, pp. 139–40) – and without place – yet also infer the ‘entangled and confused’, the plural and contradictory pasts and displacements that may reveal relations of power in the present. Waste implicates the museum, not only in terms of its refuse and refusals, but also in terms of its imperative – to collect and conserve. An enduring question for the modern and contemporary museum is: who, what, how and why collect? Most art will not be collected, and so, like most things, is destined to become matter displaced, as waste, and eventually dust.

A genealogy of waste may point us to untold and unexpected histories of the present, to the museum’s reinvention, or indeed to its own ruin.

A constellation of dust may take us back to the archive and the studio, and all that hovers between visibility and obscurity and possibility – unsettled and unseen, until we look between things.

Last words to Takahashi (Fortnum 2006, p. 150): ‘Yes. It’s all gone, great! The end is great’.

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## NOTES

- 1 Vong Phaophanit and Claire Oboussier's collaborative relationship (hereafter, Phaophanit/Oboussier) has evolved over thirty-two years. In an e-mail to me on 24 April 2018, they wrote that at the time of their year-long DAAD residency, their collaboration 'was unspoken... still in many ways an "undeclared", tacit one and certainly subterranean in terms of the art world's narratives'.
- 2 This paper incorporates some revisions made for a keynote presented at 'Tampered Emotions – Lust for Dust', a public programme curated by Lotte Arndt for Triangle France – Astérides, Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseilles to coincide with the opening of the exhibition at the same venue, 'Vos Desirs Sont Les Nôtres', curated by Marie de Gaulejac and Celine Kopp, 29 June–21 October 2018.
- 3 Hayward Gallery Library and Archive collections, London, 'The Other Story' exhibition archive, uncatalogued letters, viewed 14 December 2015, <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/about/what-we-do/archives-collections/hayward-gallery-archive>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 And invoke, perhaps, the Fine Young Cannibals' album of 1989.
- 6 See <http://www.e-2.org/commissions/wordperfect.html>, viewed 1 November 2018.
- 7 'At Beaconsfield, the work stretched across the floor had a melancholy air: if seen as buildings, the junk became ruins; if as circuitry, it was obsolete' Stallabrass 1999, p. 77.
- 8 The raffle was part of the close of Takahashi's show, 'The Rules of the Game', Serpentine Gallery, London, 2005 while the car-boot sale took place at the close of her residency, 'Crash Course @The University of Warwick', University of Warwick, Coventry, 2006.





## COLOPHON

This e-book offers the findings of the conference 'Conceptualism – Intersectional Readings, International Framings: Situating "Black Artists & Modernism" in Europe After 1968' at the Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, 7–9 December 2017, presented by Black Artists & Modernism in collaboration with the Van Abbemuseum.

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