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# **Exploring Human/Environment Interdependencies Through Critical Spatial Practice**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy by Published Work**

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## Abstract

The thesis consists of a collection of material emanating from two, related, practice-as-research projects that I undertook between 2007 and 2012 in Glasgow, Scotland: *Glimmers in Limbo* (2007-08) and *The River Clyde Project* (2009-12). Included in the thesis is documentation of both projects in the form of photographs, video and sound recordings; three journal articles and a book chapter reflecting on the projects; a book/catalogue documenting and reflecting on *Glimmers in Limbo* and (as appendices) material relating to the public exhibition/performance of the works: invitations, programme notes, press and publicity matter and other research material.

The body of work constitutes an exploration of human/environment inter-relations, through critical spatial or site-orientated practice. The earlier project, *Glimmers in Limbo*, focuses on the built environment and, specifically, on two contrasting but complementary sites that have played multiple roles in the social and cultural life of Glasgow, sites which can be understood as rich repositories of cultural memory and which are subject to competing interests and investments. The project investigates the potential of critical spatial practice, using ephemeral media such as projected imagery, sound and performance, to invite interpretations of these 'heritage sites' that are multiple and unresolved and to activate them as stimuli for diverse, overlapping memories. It considers the efficacy of transient artworks in resisting the fixing or monumentalisation of heritage sites and, thus, in offering resistance to single, authoritative renderings of the past, which might serve to perpetuate dominant and exclusive ideologies. In the course of the investigation-through-practice, perceived distinctions between so-called tangible and intangible heritage are troubled.

The later body of work, *The River Clyde Project*, focuses on Glasgow's major river as it flows through the city, extending *Glimmers in Limbo's* human-centric focus on the built environment, cultural memory and heritage. In *The River Clyde Project*, two contrasting but iterative pieces of critical spatial practice – *Bridging Part 1* (2010) and *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* (2012) – explore ideas of the urban, post-industrial river as a paradigm for natural-cultural or ecological-social exchange, using the lens of vital materialism to consider the ways in which the artworks reveal the waywardness of 'natural' phenomena and unsettle anthropocentric understandings of human/environment inter-relations. *The River Clyde Project*, in its engagement with expanded or extroverted ideas of site, also productively challenges seeming contradictions between notions of site-specificity and mobility.

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1. Framing Essay:  
Exploring Human/Environment Interdependencies Through  
Critical Spatial Practice

An essay contextualising the written publications and practice. The essay includes recommendations regarding how and when to access the written publications and documentation of the practice.

2. ***Glimmers in Limbo***

Minty Donald, 'Tracing Tramlines: Site-responsive Interventions at Glasgow's Tramway', *Performance Research*, 12.2 (2007), 5-9.

Artist's pages reflecting on *Glimmers in Limbo: Tramway* as work-in-progress.

Minty Donald, 'Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions: Resisting the Homogenisation of Cultural Memory Attached to Material Sites' in Colin Counsell and Roberta Mock (Eds.), *Performance, Embodiment and Cultural Memory* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars' Press, 2009), pp. 183-202.

A book chapter considering *Glimmers in Limbo: Britannia Panopticon* in relation to ideas regarding performance, embodiment and cultural memory.

Minty Donald (Ed.), *Glimmers in Limbo* (Glasgow: Tramway Publications, 2009).

An illustrated book including a commissioned essay, writing by Minty Donald and a transcribed interview reflecting on *Glimmers in Limbo*. The book also includes a DVD with images, sound and video documentation of the project. The DVD is available as a media file with the electronic version of the thesis.

3. ***The River Clyde Project:  
Bridging Part 1 and High-Slack-Low-Slack-High***

'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.2. (2012), 213-223.

An essay reflecting on *Bridging*.

'On Planning and Improvisation, Success and Failure, Control and Unruliness', *Public Art and Research Scotland* (2011), <http://www.publicartscotland.com/reflections/78>

A short essay on *Bridging* commissioned for the Public Art Scotland website.

'Bridging Part 1', *Performance Research*, 17.4, On Ecology (2012), 49-51.

Artist's pages documenting and reflecting on *Bridging*.

*Bridging Part 1* – Video, DVD.

A DVD of video documentation of *Bridging*. (Duration 11mins 13secs.) The split-screen video was edited from over thirty hours of footage shot from multiple angles on five cameras.

*Bridging Part 1* – photographic documentation, DVD.

A DVD of photographs of the performance, *Bridging*. A metadata file with information on each photograph is included. Clicking the hyperlink in the metadata file will link images with contextual information.

*High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* – slideshows with sound, sound recordings, photographic documentation, DVD.

A DVD of images of the six *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* performances (site-specific and concert), sound recordings of concert versions of five performances, slideshows with recordings of works by Minty Donald, Nichola Scrutton and Hanna Tuulikki and an electronic version of the programme/leaflet accompanying *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*. A metadata file with information on each item is included. Clicking the hyperlink in the metadata file will link images/sound/video with contextual information.

Material in the appendices is considered as supplementary to the thesis. It comprises background material such as research images, interviews and recorded discussions, press and publicity material.

## Appendix 1.

All material in Appendix 1 is available as media files.

### *Glimmers in Limbo: Britannia Panopticon – Archive DVD 1.*

A metadata file with information on each item is included. To navigate the material on the DVD, click the hyperlink in the metadata file, which will link images/sound/video with contextual information.

The DVD includes research images (photographs of the building); an introduction to the project; visitor questionnaires, recorded discussions about the project with audience and participants; research images (historical photographs of the building's exterior), documentary images and video relating to the work *Façade Fruitmachine*; images and video of the work *Shoebox Archive*; images of the work *Real Estate*; press, publicity and marketing material.

### *Glimmers in Limbo: Britannia Panopticon – Archive DVD 2.*

A metadata file with information on each item is included. To navigate the material on the DVD, click the hyperlink in the metadata file, which will link images/sound/video with contextual information.

The DVD includes images and sound recordings of the work *Pianola Karaoke* and transcripts of interviews with singers in *Pianola Karaoke*.

### *Glimmers in Limbo: Tramway – Archive DVD 1.*

A metadata file with information on each item is included. To navigate the material on the DVD, click the hyperlink in the metadata file, which will link images/sound/video with contextual information.

The DVD includes research images; an introduction to the project; images, sound and video recordings of the four Tramway works; recordings of interviews with and comments from visitors to *Glimmers in Limbo: Tramway*; images, sound recordings and publicity material relating to the post-project Site-Art-Audience symposium at Tramway, Glasgow, September 2008; press, publicity and marketing material.

## **Appendix 2.**

The programme for *Bridging* is not available in the electronic version of the thesis.

Press and publicity material and programmes (paper copies) for *Bridging and High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*.

### **2a. *Bridging***

Programme/leaflet, IETM programme, article in *The Sunday Herald*.

### **2b. *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*:**

Programme/leaflet.

## Acknowledgements

The *Glimmers in Limbo* project was supported by an AHRC Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts and hosted by Glasgow School of Art (GSA). I would like to thank staff and colleagues at GSA for their advice and encouragement throughout the project, in particular, my mentor, Tim Sharpe, Sue Brind, Justin Carter, Brian Kelly, Robert Mantho, Peter McCaughey, Ray McKenzie, Shauna McMullan and Johnny Rodger. I would also like to thank the Britannia Panopticon Trust for embracing the project and for granting me almost unrestricted access to the building and its archives. In particular, I would like to thank Judith Bowers for her unstinting support and energy, Graham Hunter and the Mitchell Family. Thanks are also due to Liz Davidson of the Merchant City Townscape Heritage Initiative. And, of course, to the singer-song-choosers in *Pianola Karaoke*: Judith Bowers, Aileen Campbell, John Cavanagh, Callum Cuthbertson, Ella Finer, David Harding, Stevie Jackson, Janis F. Murray/The Parsonage Choir, Donna Rutherford and Ross Sinclair,. For *Glimmers in Limbo* at Tramway, I am indebted to Tramway/Glasgow Life for financial support. I would also like to thank all Tramway staff for facilitating the project and, especially, Lorraine Wilson and Steve Slater, for their backing and organisational input. *Bridging Part 1* was programmed by the International Network of Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM), whose financial and organisational contribution enabled the performance to take place. Particular thanks are due to Lorna Duguid and Steve Slater. I also wish to thank Clydeport for its essential support and, in particular, Deputy Harbour Master, Guy Henderson, for his whole-hearted endorsement of the project. Warm thanks are due to my collaborators, Offshore Workboats Ltd., whose expertise and enthusiasm were crucial and formative components of the project, with specific thanks extended to Keith Russell. For *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*, I would like to thank the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art, 2010 for programming the event and, in particular, Jean Cameron. Thanks are also due to Creative Scotland, Glasgow Life and the University of Glasgow's Chancellor's Fund for financial support, and to Clydeport for allowing access to their premises. Again, the warmest thanks are due to my generous, rigorous and stimulating collaborators: John Cavanagh, Douglas Morland, Nichola Scrutton and Hanna Tuulikki. For support throughout all the projects and, especially, in preparing the work for submission as a doctoral thesis, I would like to thank all my colleagues and friends in Theatre, Film and Television Studies at the University of Glasgow. Particular thanks are due to Karen Lury, who has acted as sounding board and critical interlocutor throughout the entire programme of work, and to Katie Gough, Dee Heddon, and Adrienne Scullion for their generous support, insightful advice and feedback. Finally, special thanks to my partner, Nick Millar, for his invaluable collaboration, expertise and enthusiasm.

### **Author's declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this material presented is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degrees at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Minty Donald

## Exploring Human/Environment Interdependencies Through Critical Spatial Practice

The material I present for examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work comprises documentation of practice-as-research in the form of photographs, video and sound recordings, together with several published essays and articles, which stand as exegesis of the practice-based research, and an appendix of supplementary items associated with the public exhibition/performance elements of the research projects (programme notes, exhibition invitations, press and marketing material, etc.) and other matter generated during the research. The material emanates from two, incremental, practice-based research projects that I undertook: *Glimmers in Limbo* (2005-2008) and the *River Clyde Project* (2008-on-going). Recommendations regarding the order in which this material should be accessed are included throughout the introductory essay to guide the reader through the thesis. Material in the appendices is considered as supplementary, rather than essential, viewing/listening/reading. It is included should readers wish further information on the processes and contexts of each work.

I locate the body of work within the field described by Miwon Kwon as ‘site-orientated practice’<sup>1</sup> and by Jane Rendell as ‘critical spatial practice’,<sup>2</sup> Rendell’s term, which foregrounds the reflective, transformative and analytical intent of the practice, being my preferred designation. The work draws on a range of disciplines including anthropology, architectural studies, contemporary art theory and practice, cultural and physical geographies, heritage studies,

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<sup>1</sup> Kwon uses the term ‘site-orientated’ (as distinct from site-specific, site-responsive, site-based etc.) to describe practice that engages with ideas of site that extend beyond physical location to include, for example, institutional, cultural or economic contexts. Miwon Kwon, *One Place Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge MA, London: MIT Press, 2004) pp. 19-30.

<sup>2</sup> Rendell’s term is intended to signal a similarly expansive rendering of site/place/space and accommodates, like Kwon, work in galleries and institutions when that work operates as critical interlocutor of those sites. Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 1-20.

performance studies and urbanism. Broadly framed, the two related projects constitute an enquiry into aspects of our relationships with the environments we inhabit, construct and shape. Environments which, in turn, shape and construct us and which might also, as I propose in my concluding remarks, be considered to *inhabit* us. Both projects use critical spatial practice – manifested as performance, sonic intervention, projected imagery and other transient media – to explore instances of human interdependency with the built/natural environment. The environments I focus on are: first, two locations that might be understood as heritage sites (*Glimmers in Limbo*) and second, a site that can be read as a complex model of natural-cultural or ecological-social exchange (*The River Clyde Project: Bridging and High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*). The two heritage sites that I consider in *Glimmers in Limbo* are contrasting yet complementary spaces/places which have played multiple roles in the social and cultural life of Glasgow: Tramway, a contemporary arts venue housed in a former tram manufacturing works on the city’s residential Southside, and the Britannia Panopticon building, where a semi-derelict nineteenth century music hall sits above an amusement arcade on a busy city centre street. Both buildings wear the evidence of their changing functions and fortunes in their physical appearance. Both are sites subject to diverse, competing readings, whose uses remain contested. In *The River Clyde Project: Bridging* (2010) and *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* (2012), I focus on Glasgow’s major river as it flows through the city centre, where the Clyde’s material form owes much to human intervention. Here, the waterway’s sheer, inaccessible quayside walls and the river bed’s propensity to silt build-up are the result of engineering work undertaken during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the ‘natural’ river was deepened and embanked to serve the city’s industrial needs. With its manufactured physical features now redundant following the decline of heavy industry in Glasgow (most notably ship-building), the Clyde is a site where complex, shifting formations of natural-cultural or ecological-social exchange have been, and continue to be, played out.<sup>3</sup> The research programme reflects on the efficacy of critical spatial

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<sup>3</sup> The fragile balance between human intervention and ‘natural’ processes was demonstrated on 1

practice as a method of exploring our relationships with such polyvalent, contested sites – of stimulating debate, testing, troubling and altering perceptions of human/environment interdependency.

The two projects share methodologies and over-arching conceptual frames. They also both emerge from my past practice as a scenographer and share reference points in the work of a diverse range of practitioners. Before considering the specific context of each project and signalling their insights and intellectual significance, I will first outline their shared concerns and theoretical perspectives and the approaches I took that were common to both. I will also discuss their contexts in relation to my own previous practice and to the work of other artists.

## Conceptual Frames

### i. Origins

The research programme is under-pinned by conceptions of space, place and site as fluid, expansive, relational and always in-process. In this rendering, site/space/place is understood as a continually evolving weave of interconnected relationships, with physical perceptions or material readings of site/space/place inseparable from social and cultural constructions of location. In this conceptualisation, I draw on scholarship from the field of cultural geography that emerged throughout the 1980s and 1990s and which in turn drew on influential work by, predominantly, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre.<sup>4</sup>

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March 2013 when a section of quayside wall in central Glasgow collapsed into the river. See <http://www.scotsman.com/the-scotsman/scotland/section-of-walkway-collapses-into-river-clyde-1-2815439> [Accessed 18 March 2013].

<sup>4</sup> I use Foucault's notion of 'heterotopias', for example, to consider the ways that unresolved, liminal locations, such as the Britannia Panopticon building, might be activated through critical spatial practice to invite reflection on conceptions of urban space. See Minty Donald (Ed.), *Glimmers in Limbo* (Glasgow: Tramway Publications, 2009), pp. 12-16.

My approach is informed by their figurings of site/space/place – variously adopted, critiqued and advanced by cultural geographers including Mike Crang, Tim Cresswell, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Steve Pile, Edward Soja and Nigel Thrift – that were intended to redress dominant ideological tendencies in contemporary (capitalist) society, where spatiality was uncoupled from temporality and from its socio-cultural context, with human existence consequently reduced to a succession of de-contextualised events that ignored issues of power – of access, control and ownership – played out in space/place. These figurings promoted attentiveness to locations such as the street, the city and the institutional building as arenas where hidden and embedded power structures could be discerned and potentially disrupted. The challenge to ideas of space/place as abstract, fixed or a-temporal represented by this body of work provides an over-arching critical frame for my research. Both my projects seek to activate a sense of space/place as fluid and relational.<sup>5</sup> In this, they contribute to and build on current discourse in theatre, performance and visual art that troubles seeming oppositions between site-specificity and mobility.<sup>6</sup>

## ii. Space/Place/Site

In my writing and thinking, I make no strong distinction between the terms ‘space’, ‘place’ and ‘site’ and use the three more-or-less interchangeably to suggest my figuring of all spatial formations as constantly morphing webs of interconnected relationships. In this I follow scholars, including Rendell and Massey, who argue that making distinctions between, for instance, space as abstract and geometrical and place as culturally-rich and meaningful, does not promote understandings of location as always fluid and networked. As Rendell

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, pp. 28-31; Minty Donald, ‘Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions: Resisting the Homogenisation of Cultural Memory Attached to Material Sites’, in Colin Counsell and Roberta Mick (Eds.), *Performance, Embodiment and Cultural Memory* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars’ Press, 2009), pp. 187-189, 194; Minty Donald, ‘Tracing Tramlines: Site-responsive Interventions at Glasgow’s Tramway’, *Performance Research* 12.2 (2007), 5-9 (pp. 6-9).

<sup>6</sup> See Minty Donald, ‘The Urban River and Site-Specific Performance’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.2 (2012), 213-223 (pp. 213-215, 222-223).

notes, theorists' attempts to "unfix" one term [tend to...] involve the "fixing" of another term'.<sup>7</sup> Using all three terms to stand for mobile, relational renderings of location avoids the valorisation or denigration of one or another. Within this conception, however, I recognise that each word carries nuanced definitions that have been employed productively in considering our interactions with site/space/place.<sup>8</sup> For example, the notion of a 'sense of place'<sup>9</sup> can be used to suggest the affects, memories, sensual or emotional responses aroused by physical locations and the role these can play in shaping individual and collective identities through, for instance, engendering feelings of belonging or estrangement. Whereas, a focus on particular materialities and individual somatosensory responses to a site – its smells, sounds and textures – is often implied in applications of the term 'site-specific'.<sup>10</sup> My work draws on both conceptions. While promoting an expanded understanding of site, both projects are attentive to the specific material properties of the locations and both recognise and embrace the sites as repositories for multiple memories and personal associations. In this, they echo Massey's descriptions of space as 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far' and place as 'a collection of those stories',<sup>11</sup> suggesting that, while site/space/place is always unresolved, unstable and polyvalent, spatial formations can and do coalesce to generate meanings before dissolving and evolving into further shifting articulations. The figuring of site/space/place that my work aims to explore and promote is, therefore, one which invites engagement with location as specific, individual and local while

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<sup>7</sup> Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Michel de Certeau, for instance, associates 'place' with stability and with an understanding of locational identity as fixed. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Trans. Steve Rendell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 117-118. For Yi-Fu Tuan, 'place' refers to location when we 'endow it with value'. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1977), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place' in *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 146-156.

<sup>10</sup> In theatre and performance practices, the term 'site-specific' is regularly associated with a particular attentiveness to material properties and sensorial experiences of a physical location. See, for example, Mike Pearson's account of a phenomenological model for site-specific performance. Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Basingstoke, England and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2005), p. 130.

simultaneously retaining an awareness of its interconnectivity with an extended, constantly morphing web.<sup>12</sup>

### iii. Heritage and Performance

A further frame, clearly applicable to the earlier project, *Glimmers in Limbo*, and also, albeit less centrally, to *The River Clyde Project*, is provided by scholarship in heritage and performance studies. The notion of considering heritage, not in terms of material objects, sites or artefacts, but as an on-going process, is core to my research. This is proposed by heritage and performance scholars and practitioners including Mike Pearson, Rebecca Schneider, Laurajane Smith and Diana Taylor, whose entreaties to understand heritage in terms of performance I take as a steer in my practical experimentation and critical reflections. Both *Glimmers in Limbo* and *The River Clyde Project* employ and reflect on the efficacy of performance<sup>13</sup> and other transient practices, as means of resisting or unsettling single, fixed, authoritative renderings of heritage sites. They explore the potential of performance practices to allow diverse, competing readings and experiences of sites deemed to be of cultural and/or historical significance. Performance-based strategies are used to mobilise ideas of heritage as a continuing process, engaging with the past as open and available to multiple, on-going interpretations.<sup>14</sup> Following Pearson, Schneider and others, performance-based approaches are used to stimulate creative re-imaginings or imaginative remembering,<sup>15</sup> allowing us to continually re-think trajectories from past to present to future. I reflect on the potential of performance practices to

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<sup>12</sup> See Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-Specific Performance', (p. 223); Karen Lury, 'Glimmers in Limbo: Following the "Path of Reverie" and Locating the Ghosts of the Everyday', in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, pp. 32-35; Donald, 'Tracing Tramlines', 5-9.

<sup>13</sup> For my working definition of the terms 'performance' and 'performance-based practices' see Donald, 'Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions', p. 201.

<sup>14</sup> See Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-Specific Performance', (pp. 217, 218-223); Donald, 'Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions', pp. 184, 186-194; Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, pp. 12-16.

<sup>15</sup> This concept also has affinities with Gaston Bachelard's 'memory-imagination mixture'. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language and the Cosmos* (Boston, MA: Boston Press, 1969), p. 119.

negotiate notions of embodiment<sup>16</sup> and memory in relation to heritage sites, and how this productively de-stabilises perceived distinctions between material and immaterial, tangible and intangible heritage.<sup>17</sup> The capacity of creative practice, particularly using transient media, to recuperate nostalgia from conservative impetuses to fix or monumentalise renderings of the past is also explored. Here, cultural commentator Svetlana Boym's notion of 'reflective', as opposed to 'restorative', nostalgia provides a useful frame. In Boym's 'reflective nostalgia',<sup>18</sup> loss and longing for the past does not attempt to resolve itself through the recreation of historical moments or fixed monuments but allows the absent object to remain elusive, fragmented and incomplete. Boym's term proposes a productive relationship with history where multiple, competing interpretations and memories of the past are encouraged to mingle with emerging perceptions of present and future, inviting a continual re-imagining of our histories, offering resistance to the reification of heritage and to its possible implication in perpetuating dominant beliefs. Ideas of the fragmented and the incomplete figure prominently in both *Glimmers in Limbo* and *Bridging Part 1*, employed in attempts to initiate open and on-going interactions with the heritage sites on which I focus.<sup>19</sup>

#### iv. New Materialism

Particularly in the later of the two projects (*The River Clyde Project*) and in my current, on-going research into urban rivers and human/water interdependencies more generally (a development of the work presented here) I also draw on more recent discourses in cultural geography and anthropology regarding a revived and reframed interest in materiality and ideas of material

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<sup>16</sup> For my working definition of 'embodiment' see Donald, 'Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions', p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> See Donald, 'Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions', pp. 184, 188-197, 199.

<sup>18</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. 41, 49.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-Specific Performance', (pp. 220-221); Minty Donald, 'On Planning and Improvisation, Success and Failure, Control and Unruliness', *Public Art Scotland* (2011), <http://www.publicartscotland.com/reflections/78>, (pp. 7-8); Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, pp. 13-14.

agency and liveliness. This ‘new materialism’ re-valorises the significance of matter – of things, objects and environments – arguing for their ability to ‘act back’,<sup>20</sup> to have a direct, unmediated affect on us and to resist human attempts to control or rationalise their meanings or behaviour. New materialism represents a politically motivated effort to counter anthropocentrism by entertaining seriously the idea that non-human and non-animal entities and phenomena have agentic powers. It reflects on the nature of those powers and on the implications of material agency in the consideration of human/environment inter-relations. Arguments for countenancing vitality and agency in matter made by scholars including Jane Bennett, Tim Ingold, Owain Jones and Nigel Thrift, provide a valuable frame for my practice and thinking, particularly regarding the performance of ‘natural’ phenomena like rivers, tides and weather in *Bridging and High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*. These works, viewed through a lens of new materialism, trouble binaries of animate/inanimate and natural/cultural and hint at fresh paradigms for the interdependency of ecological and social systems.<sup>21</sup>

### Context: artists and practices

The practice presented here emerged from and was shaped by my fifteen-plus years’ experience as a professional scenographer. The influence of my scenographic background is, perhaps, most evident in the earlier project, *Glimmers in Limbo*. While my scenographic work was undertaken in diverse genres including opera, contemporary dance, community arts, devised and script-based theatre, a constant throughout was a particular quality of attentiveness towards the site of the performance. This attentiveness went beyond a necessary engagement with spatial properties, such as dimensions and sight-lines, to engage with the material and formal characteristics, socio-cultural context, histories and current usages of the locus of performance. In other words,

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<sup>20</sup> Nigel Thrift, ‘Performance and...’, *Environment and Planning A*, 35 (2003), 2019-24 (pp. 2022-23).

<sup>21</sup> See Minty Donald, ‘Bridging Part 1’, *Performance Research*, 17. 4 (2012), 49-51.

while many of the projects on which I collaborated as a scenographer were not described as site-specific, my approach towards scenography had close affinities with site-orientated practice. In this, my scenographic work was affiliated to and informed by the practice of Cliff McLucas and Brith Gof. My approach towards site broadly corresponded to McLucas' notion of the 'host' and the 'ghost': a reciprocal relationship between the existing, unstable architectures and narratives of a space/place ('the host') and the temporary occupation of that space/place through scenographic intervention and performance ('the ghost').<sup>22</sup> Like McLucas, my intention was to introduce scenographic elements that did not negate or occlude the histories, current functions or material and formal properties of a site. Like McLucas, these at times borrowed from the architectural motifs and present functions of the location to create a scenography that reinforced the site's prevalent characteristics. For example, in Anatomy Performance Company's *Love Songs in a Lonely Desert Filled with Crying Men and Howling Women*, 2000, at Barrowlands, a rock venue and former dancehall in Glasgow, I arranged a row of microphone stands to resemble telegraph poles along an American desert highway, which receded across the sandy-coloured wooden dance floor towards an arrow-shaped neon sign mounted on the stage.<sup>23</sup> In other instances, the scenography introduced discordant elements that were intended to produce moments of rupture. In all cases, I sought to ensure that significant aspects of the 'formal architecture [...] or character of the building'<sup>24</sup> remained visible and present for the audience. For instance, in my scenography for touring productions by TAG Theatre Company and *7:84 (Scotland)*<sup>25</sup> my choices were always to avoid using masking and to allow

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<sup>22</sup> Cliff McLucas quoted in Nick Kaye, *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) p.55.

<sup>23</sup> The performance was commissioned by Tramway as part of the Tramway@ season, which took place at various venues in Glasgow while Tramway was closed for major refurbishment. The production was devised and directed by Marisa Zanotti. See <http://www.heraldsotland.com/sport/spl/aberdeen/dance-love-songs-tramway-at-barrowland-glasgow-1.243858> [accessed 17/12/13].

<sup>24</sup> McLucas quoted in Kaye, *Site-specific Art*, p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> For example, TAG Theatre Company, David Ian Neville, 1986, *The Twelfth of July*, dir. Ian Brown, toured to primary schools in Glasgow. *7:84 (Scotland)*, Peter Arnott, 2000, *A Little Rain*,

the physical features and social functions of the village hall, community centre or school gymnasium where the performance was taking place to sit alongside the scenic elements I introduced.<sup>26</sup> This approach towards site is evident in *Glimmers in Limbo*. Here, the objects and materials installed in the two venues were selected to set up sympathetic and/or gently disruptive relations with the concrete fabric of the buildings, their habitual functions and their multiple histories. For instance, my interventions at the Britannia Panopticon were carefully considered to negotiate the chaotic, crowded environment and polyvalent narratives of the dilapidated music hall. (Image 1.) An installation of six hundred stacked, white, cardboard shoeboxes, for example, appeared out-of-place, a striking imposition into the crumbling nineteenth century auditorium and a contrast to the handcrafted displays of music-hall memorabilia located there. But it also referenced the site's former role as a shoe warehouse and invoked associations with collecting as a personal, private pursuit.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the coloured lines that I introduced throughout the ground floor of Tramway were reminiscent of transport maps or of way-finding markers in a museum – referring to Tramway's histories as a tram manufacturing works and museum of transport. One visitor, however, described the lines as making 'a colourful intervention into this quite self-consciously cool space [...] playful and renegade, like they didn't care what the rules of Tramway were'.<sup>28</sup> (Image 2.) As in McLucas' aspirations for 'real site-specific works', the *Glimmers in Limbo* projects were intended to activate multiple interpretations of and interactions with site, to create 'a hybrid of the place, the public and the performance'.<sup>29</sup>

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dir. Gordon Laird, toured to venues that included village halls and community centres throughout Scotland.

<sup>26</sup> In this, my approach was influenced by John McGrath's entreaty to acknowledge the location of each performance and to recognise issues of local ownership relating to performance venues when devising and designing touring theatre. McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class, and Form* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981).

<sup>27</sup> Karen Lury refers to the collections of wool scraps and tube-tops stored in shoeboxes by her 'Scottish Great Aunt Belle', Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> McLucas quoted in Kaye, *Site-specific Art*, p.55.



Image 1. *Glimmers in Limbo: Britannia Panopticon.*  
Shoebox Archive in the music hall auditorium.



Image 2. *Glimmers in Limbo: Tramway.*  
Coloured lines in Tramway's foyer.

A further characteristic of my scenographic practice, which fed into the work presented here, was a commitment to using everyday materials and objects in their existing and unadulterated forms, and an accompanying interest in the affective potential of the inherent qualities of these objects and materials. For example, in the scenography for *Under Construction*, 7:84 (Scotland) commissioned for Glasgow City of Architecture, 1999,<sup>30</sup> I used materials such as wire mesh, graffiti-etched acrylic sheeting, untreated plywood and rough asphalt roofing fabric. I chose these materials as much for their textural and haptic properties – their potential to evoke sensory perceptions and emotions in the audience – as for their thematic appropriateness to a performance about Glaswegians’ relationship with their built environment. In this, my scenographic practice relates to and was informed by the work of Simon Banham, particularly in respect of his collaborative practice with Quarantine. Banham’s employment of quotidian materials and objects in a ‘theatricalised anti theatrical aesthetic’<sup>31</sup> both mirrors and influences my approach in the work presented here. An aesthetic similar to Banham’s was evident, for instance, in the minimalist, semi-industrial design of the trolleys I created for *Glimmers in Limbo* at Tramway, which were constructed from untreated plywood, box-section steel and prefabricated wheels. (Image 3.) In *Bridging*, the workboat and mile-long stretch of black, polypropylene, mooring line that were core ‘anti theatrical’ components of the performance became ‘theatricalised’ in the context of the event in ways that find echoes in Banham’s practice. (Image 4.)

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<sup>30</sup> 7:84 (Scotland), *Under Construction*, dir. John Heraghty, 1999, community venues in Greater Glasgow.

<sup>31</sup> From a description of Simon Banham’s practice <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/tfts/staff/shb/> [accessed 14/12/13].



Image 3. *Glimmers in Limbo: Tramway*. Projector-trolleys.



Image 4. *Bridging*. Workboat with rope and boat crew.

The interest in the intrinsic properties of materials and objects that characterised my scenographic practice might also be linked to the work of Manchester-based performance company, Doo Cot.<sup>32</sup> Doo Cot, who acknowledged a debt to Tadeusz Kantor, used ‘found’ items and evocative, everyday materials to create a hybrid of puppetry, object-manipulation and two-dimensional animation. Doo Cot’s work, at times, demonstrated the affective potential of

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<sup>32</sup>Rachael Field and Nenagh Watson worked collaboratively as Doo Cot between 1990 and 2007. See <http://animations.puppetcentre.org.uk/aoeighteen/profile-doo-cot.html> [accessed 17/12/13].

materials and objects – their ability to impact directly on human perception and emotions, before and beyond interpretations based on cultural or personal associations. In this, Doo Cot’s practice resonates strongly with ideas proposed by Jane Bennett and others in writing on new or vital materialism.<sup>33</sup> It also relates to the role played by the non-human elements involved in my work, *Bridging*. In *Bridging*, the potency of the materials used in the performance, such as a sodden, black mooring line festooned with river detritus or the straining fibres of the rope as it ground against the steel of a mechanised capstan, was evident in bodily responses and comments made by witnesses in response to this ‘vibrant matter’.<sup>34</sup> (Image 5.)



Image 5. *Bridging*. Rope with detritus.

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<sup>33</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> The evidence is based on observation of spectators’ behaviour, overheard comments and informal conversation with witnesses to *Bridging*.

The understanding of heritage which underpins the two projects presented here: heritage as an on-going process that generates multiple interpretations and experiences, rather than an idea of heritage as preserving fixed identities through authorised narratives or monuments, finds expression in the practice of Phil Smith. Both *Glimmers in Limbo* and *The River Clyde Project* share aspects of Smith's playful performance practice, which he employs to undermine and mobilise the static, authoritative readings that many heritage sites promote and the ideologies that they, subsequently, perpetuate.<sup>35</sup> For instance, in *Pianola Karaoke*, one of four works that comprised *Glimmers in Limbo* at the Britannia Panopticon building, I initiated an event that invited multiple, competing responses to and interpretations of the nineteenth century music hall. The event juxtaposed digital technologies with the mechanics of an early twentieth century player piano; classic and contemporary pop songs with folk ballads and musical theatre numbers, providing an alternative to the Britannia Panopticon programmers' regular 'Music Hall Memories'<sup>36</sup> shows, which aspire towards historically 'authentic' recreations of nineteenth century music hall.

Further influences in my work, in relation to strategies for resisting monumentalisation and fixity at heritage sites and for unsettling associated ideologies, can be identified in the practice of artist Krzysztof Wodiczko. Wodiczko's projections frequently superimpose images and footage of the human body onto the facades of buildings and public monuments in order to expose and critique the agendas and regimes that those edifices can be seen to represent.<sup>37</sup> While my practice does not use projected imagery on the scale or with such overtly political focus as Wodiczko, my work has harnessed the potential of overwriting the solidity of built edifices with the mobile, ephemeral architecture of projected imagery. For example, in *Façade Fruitmachine*, part of the *Glimmers in Limbo* project at the Britannia Panopticon, I projected an animated sequence onto the windows in the façade that referenced the building's past and present

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Phil Smith, *Counter-Tourism: A Pocketbook* (Axminster: Triarchy Press, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.britanniapanopticon.org/musichallmemories.html> [accessed 17/12/13].

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Krzysztof Wodiczko, 1998, *Bunker Hill Monument* [video projection], Boston.

roles as a site of entertainment and commercial activities for Glasgow's less affluent population. At Tramway, I used mobile projectors showing video footage of journeys across Glasgow to re-inscribe the building's histories as a transport depot and manufacturing centre within the whitewashed gallery space.

In the more recent projects, *Bridging* and *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*, my practice-based reference points have been a clutch of artists whose work often takes the form of poetic, performative gestures that engage with the politics of place and with human/environment interdependency. Francis Alys' practice, in particular, resonates strongly with some of my more recent work. For example, Alys' *Bridge/Puente*,<sup>38</sup> while on a grander scale than my own *Bridging*, shared not just a theme (of bridging a stretch of water) but also an aspiration to orchestrate a grand symbolic action, while entertaining and embracing its failure. Simon Starling's work, and in particular *autoxylopyrocycloborus*, also has thematic and formal affinities to *Bridging*. In *autoxylopyrocycloborus* Starling installed a single cylinder, marine steam engine in a twenty-foot wooden boat. As the boat sailed in circles in the Clyde Estuary, its hull was dismantled and fed as fuel to the steam engine that powered it, until the boat sank. Read as a comment on the Clyde's industrial heritage – the unsustainability of the manufacturing industries on which Glasgow's prosperity was founded – and as an ambitious, futile, poetic action, it finds resonances with my work, *Bridging*. Finally, Lone Twin's actions around rivers and water in England, Norway, Denmark, Spain and Montreal, and their 'raindance' performances, also continue to inform my recent and current practice.<sup>39</sup> Themes explored by the playful, durational performances and actions of Lone Twin, such as our (human) interdependence with the water cycle, rivers' symbolic role in diverse cultures and water as an ungovernable force also figure strongly in *Bridging*, *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* and in my most recent practice.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Francis Alys, 2006, *Bridge/Puente* [performance/video], Havana, Cuba, Key West, Florida.

<sup>39</sup> Lone Twin's actions are described and discussed in *Good Luck Everybody: Journeys Performances and Conversations* (Eds.), Carl Lavery and David Williams (Aberystwyth: Performance Research Books, 2011), pp.139-185.

<sup>40</sup> Minty Donald and Nick Millar, 2013, *Guddling About: Experiments in Vital Materialism with Particular Regard to Water* [performance/installation], Calgary and Southern Alberta. See

## Methodology

Both projects take critical (art) practice as a primary research method. In my employment of this methodology, I draw on Jane Rendell's rendering of 'critical spatial practice' as an approach that attempts to negotiate 'a place between'<sup>41</sup> theory and practice, troubling perceptions of the two terms as binaries and proposing that they operate through a process of exchange, continually informing, inflecting and critiquing each other. However, while Rendell, as commentator rather than first-person practitioner,<sup>42</sup> chooses a spectrum of examples of artists' and architects' work on which to reflect, my research centres on my own art practice. In this, my methodology is in line with models of practice-as-research, such as those proposed by Estelle Barrett, Barbara Bolt and Robin Nelson,<sup>43</sup> which avow the value of types of knowledge generated through praxis: subjective, experiential and haptic intelligences. In light of my work's concerns with the agentic properties of things, objects and sites, a methodology that allows the attributes of materials and environments to influence or even lead the research – what Paul Carter calls 'material thinking',<sup>44</sup> – seems necessary and appropriate. Given my area of enquiry – an investigation into the cultural, social and material interdependency of humans and environment – practice-based modes of research that foreground the somatic, the spatial and the sensory, seem entirely fitting. Indeed, Nelson proposes that

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[www.guddlingabout.tumblr.com](http://www.guddlingabout.tumblr.com) and [www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.com](http://www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.com) [accessed 17/12/13]. This work took place after the initial submission of my thesis.

<sup>41</sup> Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, pp. 1-12.

<sup>42</sup> Rendell, who is both trained architect and art/architecture theorist and historian, complicates neat distinctions between 'practitioner' and 'commentator', particularly in *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), where she considers writing as a critical spatial practice. In *Art and Architecture*, however, her role is as commentator.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Ludovine Alleque, Simon Jones, Baz Kershaw and Angela Piccini (Eds.), *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen* (Basingstoke, England and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (Eds.), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London and New York: I.B Taurus, 2007); Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts* (Basingstoke, England and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Paul Carter, *The Theory and Practice of Creative Research* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004).

concepts of space and time, particularly when they involve human experience of space and time, might best be explored through that experience, through praxis [...], rather than through writing or rhetorical debate.<sup>45</sup>

Nelson's comment, however, points to a persistent concern for those engaged in practice-as-research: the relationship between praxis and discursive reflection on, or exegesis of, that praxis.<sup>46</sup> While concurring with arguments that practice-as-research can generate and disseminate knowledge in and of itself without further articulation in more conventionally discursive modes,<sup>47</sup> and that exegesis runs the risk of duplicating, reducing or distorting the specific qualities of knowledge gained and shared through 'doing', my approach embraces both praxis (performance, sonic and visual art) and critical reflection or exegesis (in forms such as written commentaries or discussions). I share Rendell, Bolt and others' understanding of praxis and exegesis, of thinking and doing, of theory and practice, as inflected through one another, intertwined and in dialogue. As Bolt suggests:

In the exegesis, particular situated and emergent knowledge has the potential to be generalised so far that it enters into dialogue with existing practical and theoretical paradigms [producing] movement in thought itself [...] Such movement cannot be gained through contemplative knowledge alone, but takes the form of concrete understandings which arise in our dealings with ideas, tools and materials of practice.<sup>48</sup>

My approach, in the work presented here, began with the identification of a location or site that appeared to me to offer possibilities for exploring a set of

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<sup>45</sup> Robin Nelson, 'Modes of Practice-as-Research Knowledge and Their Place in the Academy' in Alleque, Jones, Kershaw and Piccini, *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, p. 119.

<sup>46</sup> I recognise, as do others concerned with debates around practice-based research, that writing is also a 'practice'. See, for example, Rendell, *Site-Writing*.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Bolt, 'The Magic is in Handling' in *Practice as Research*, p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> Bolt, 'The Magic is in Handling' in *Practice as Research*, p. 33.

conceptual concerns or questions regarding site/space/place. The Britannia Panopticon and Tramway are sites whose cultural and material identities exemplify ideas of spatial fluidity and polyvalency, while the River Clyde in Glasgow can be understood as epitomising ecological-social exchange. In other words, the genesis of the research programme was both material and theoretical. The theoretical frame and the physical sites functioned as starting points for experimental practice, whose form and outcomes were undetermined at the outset of the research programme. My methodology involved spending considerable periods of time at each of the sites: observing, conversing, exploring, wandering, touching, listening, sketching, photographing, filming, recording... alongside archival and desk-based research into the histories of the sites and related critical literatures. From these initial periods of fieldwork, deskwork and archival research, experimental artworks evolved, which were in turn generative of further practice. In this, I experienced and embraced what has been identified as one of the significant strengths of practice-as-research in the creative arts – its generative capacity.<sup>49</sup> Throughout my research programme, the work evolved in unanticipated ways, producing unexpected insights, revealing or opening up new areas of enquiry and ways of working – through praxis and exegesis. For instance, through the physical and emotional experience of undertaking the performance, *Bridging Part 1*, and in subsequent critical reflection on the event, I witnessed a complex interplay of shifting agency – human and non-human – subsequently gaining insights into urban rivers as models of ecological-social exchange and potentially productive paradigms of human-environment interdependency.<sup>50</sup> Through undertaking the performance, I gained somatic, sensory and affective understanding of human inter-relationships with water, weather and tide – a corporeal conceptualisation of site as mobile, relational and expansive. These insights directly influenced my approach in developing *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*.

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Barrett, *Practice as Research*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Donald, 'Bridging Part 1', 49-51; Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-Specific Performance', (pp. 221-223).

While my practice-as-research methodology embraces subjectivity – recognising my creative decisions and actions as an artist as significant components of my research method – I am not a performer or first-person practitioner who always engages in hands-on, studio-based work. Several pieces of practice-as-research presented here were made with the collaboration of others,<sup>51</sup> with my adopting a directorial or curatorial role. In several of the works, too, the audience were cast as participants – as performers and/or co-creators.<sup>52</sup> As such, my research methodology included reflecting on my role as participant-observer, developing strategies for soliciting feedback from other participants and for gauging audience responses. I used a range of methods to do this including informal conversations, interviews, discussion groups, questionnaires, observation of audience/participant behaviour and creative practice.<sup>53</sup> I also invited a range of commentators and other practitioners to witness, consider and discuss my work throughout my process, incorporating and responding to their feedback in incremental iterations of the practical experiments.<sup>54</sup> This approach mirrors the project’s conceptual under-pinning in that it endorses the co-existence of and productive interplay between individual, subjective interpretations and multiple, overlapping and/or competing perspectives on a site/space/place.

### **Glimmers in Limbo**

The body of work titled *Glimmers in Limbo* was undertaken during my three years as an AHRC Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at Glasgow

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<sup>51</sup> For example, the singers/song-choosers in *Pianola Karaoke* (2007) or marine services company, Offshore Workboats Ltd., in *Bridging Part 1* (2010).

<sup>52</sup> For example, the audience-participants pushing projector-trolleys in *Glimmers in Limbo*, Tramway (2008) or donating items to the *Shoebox Archive* (2007).

<sup>53</sup> For examples of comments gathered using these methods see Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, pp. 13, 15, 29, 30, 36-42 or Donald, ‘The Urban River and Site-specific Performance’, (pp. 221, 222). An example of creative practice used to elicit responses can be seen in the invitation to visitors to the Britannia Panopticon to note their own song choices on specially designed postcards.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Donald, ‘Tracing Tramlines’, 5-9; Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 14.

School of Art, from 2005 to 2008. The research project sought to explore the potential of critical spatial practice, using ephemeral media such as projected imagery, sound and performance, as a means of debating, critiquing and shaping conceptions of the built environment. In *Glimmers in Limbo* the focus was on specific examples of heritage site: spaces/places whose concrete fabric is marked by their varied and shifting roles, sites that act as triggers to multiple, competing memories and where investments and interests remain contested and unresolved. The research was undertaken through the development and public exhibition of two suites of site-orientated work, each consisting of four artworks or interventions, in two architectural sites in Glasgow: the Britannia Panopticon and Tramway, both buildings whose changing status and functions are woven through the social and cultural fabric of Glasgow.

The two buildings exemplify fluidity and polyvalency in their shifting and multiple uses. Tramway has been a site of industry (tram manufacturing works), of heritage and recreation (museum of transport) and a multi-disciplinary contemporary arts venue, while the Britannia Panopticon was built originally as a warehouse before its conversion to music hall and public house. It has also hosted a cinema, a menagerie, a tailor's business, several shoe shops and a leather-wear store before its current occupation by an amusement arcade and the semi-derelect music hall. At both locations, however, tensions exist between the sites' competing identities and between those people involved in shaping the buildings' futures. Issues of access and ownership (financial and social) are played out as various interested parties seek to determine and fix the sites' meanings and uses. For example, at the Britannia Panopticon, Judith Bowers, the founder of the Britannia Panopticon Trust who manage the music hall and strive to raise funds for its restoration, is increasingly committed to the idea of recreating an 'authentic' nineteenth century music hall.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, the owners of the building, who operate the amusement arcade that sits at street level

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<sup>55</sup> Judged by recent activities at the Britannia Panopticon and recent conversation with Judith Bowers, it appears that she will no longer programme contemporary music, performance or visual arts events.

below the music hall, are driven by commercial imperatives. Glasgow City Council (GCC)'s interest in the building lies in its role in the gentrification of the surrounding area (as recent investment in restoration of its façade testifies).<sup>56</sup> In respect of Tramway, as a contemporary arts venue it has struggled to attract audiences and to negotiate its relationship with its local neighbourhood. Since opening (with Peter Brook's production of *The Mahabharata* in 1988), Tramway has been engaged in regular attempts to attract audiences from the predominantly Pakistani and Indian communities that live adjacent to it.<sup>57</sup> As a multi-disciplinary arts venue, Tramway experiences little overlap between distinct audience groups (for visual art and theatre/performance). Despite on-going initiatives, the venue's five, supposedly-flexible, gallery/performance spaces remain predominantly used by and associated with specific art forms. Internally, the building experiences institutional territorialism as technicians, managers, programmers and (since 2009) Scottish Ballet, lay claim to different portions of the space. The *Glimmers in Limbo* project sought to make critical interventions in these two complex, conflicted locations, attempting to open up them up as sites of on-going negotiation and to resist impetuses to fix or limit their readings and uses.

The material presented here consists of documentation of the two suites of site-orientated work, an article reflecting on work-in-progress at Tramway,<sup>58</sup> a book chapter considering the Britannia Panopticon performance and

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<sup>56</sup> The façade of the Britannia Panopticon was renovated in 2009, 'improving' the building's appearance on the street, while the interior remains in a dilapidated state. GCC supports the Townscape Heritage Initiative regeneration scheme in this area of Glasgow. See <http://glasgowmerchantcity.net> [accessed 18/12/13].

<sup>57</sup> Tramway hosted the Glasgow Mela, a multicultural family festival based on the traditions of the Indian Sub-continent in 1990. The event subsequently moved to Kelvingrove Park in Glasgow's West End. Tramway's Hidden Gardens, a green space adjacent to the building, designed by NVA and opened in 2005, are intended to promote 'inter-cultural dialogue on a local, national and international level'. See [thehiddengardens.org.uk/](http://thehiddengardens.org.uk/) [accessed 19/12/13]. In 2013 Tramway hosted the Albert Drive Project, 'a large-scale creative project exploring the idea of neighbour and what it means to live alongside each other from the perspective of one street in Glasgow'. See <http://www.tramway.org/events/Pages/Albert-Drive.aspx> [accessed 19/12/13].

<sup>58</sup> Donald, 'Tracing Tramlines', 5-9.

installations<sup>59</sup> and a publication which includes an interview transcription and essays (my own and commissioned writing) contextualising and commenting on *Glimmers in Limbo*.<sup>60</sup> Readers are recommended to read the publication Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, including watching the material on the insert DVD available as a media file with the electronic version of the thesis, and to read the articles Donald, 'Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions' and Donald, 'Tracing Tramlines', before reading the next section of this essay.

The project produced some significant insights about the kinds of engagement with heritage sites that can be generated through critical spatial practice and the efficacy of these types of interaction in resisting fixed, circumscribed renderings of space/place – renderings that might be employed to promote specific ideologies and to shut down questioning, inventive, on-going 'heritage work'.<sup>61</sup>

In several instances, the artworks or interventions encouraged audience-participants to re-imagine trajectories between past and present by simultaneously accessing diverse spatio-temporal frames. This occurred, for example, in the intervention taking place throughout Tramway's ground level, where a nineteenth century map of Glasgow was marked across the entire floor of the building, the historical city shrunk to fit within its walls. Here, judged by their comments and observation of their behaviour, audience-participants seemed acutely aware of their presence in a contemporary arts venue while, concurrently, appearing to project themselves imaginatively beyond the spatial and temporal bounds of the building to contemplate Tramway's position within the social, cultural and physical context of nineteenth century Glasgow. Evidence of this occurred when audience-participants following the map's lines into areas from which they were normally excluded, such as private backstage zones, remarked on the shabby surroundings and their sense of intruding while

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<sup>59</sup> Donald, 'Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions', pp. 184-202.

<sup>60</sup> Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*.

<sup>61</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 1.

continuing to reflect on the changing urban fabric of Glasgow, prompted by historical landmarks on the map.<sup>62</sup> (Image 6.)



Image 6. *Glimmers in Limbo*: Map Lines in Backstage Area

Similar spatio-temporal layering or dislocation seemed to occur in the intervention in *Tramway 2*, where audience-participants playfully engaged with the work in the material here-and-now: running with the hefty trolleys, dancing in the projector beams; while simultaneously accessing alternative spatial and temporal frames through their imaginations and memories: reminiscing about locations depicted in the video, commenting on Glasgow's continually changing cityscape.<sup>63</sup> These and other works<sup>64</sup> appeared to allow audience-participants to

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<sup>62</sup> See Donald, 'Tracing Tramlines', (pp. 7-9.); Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>63</sup> See Donald, 'Tracing Tramlines', (pp. 6-7); Lury in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 32.

<sup>64</sup> Spatio-temporal layering appeared to occur in other works, for instance, during the live performances of *Pianola Karaoke* (2007). See, for example, Lury in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 34.

experience the chosen heritage sites as ‘extroverted.’<sup>65</sup> That is, spaces/places where the here-and-now of local specificity is perceived as connected to an expanded network of theres-and-thens. In these instances, *Glimmers in Limbo* demonstrated the potential of critical spatial practice to engage audience-participants physically, creatively, thoughtfully and playfully in enacting conceptions of the built environment and material heritage as unfixed, porous and polyvalent.

Several of the *Glimmers in Limbo* works also appeared to bring about a troubling of conventionally perceived distinctions between material and immaterial culture, tangible and intangible heritage. For instance, in the work in Tramway 2 the engagement of audience-participants with material culture, with the steel tram tracks that remain as relics of Tramway’s industrial heritage, was both somatosensory and imaginative: audience-participants reacted to the sonorous rumbling of the trolleys wheels on the tracks while speculating about the destinations of the tramlines that vanished into the building’s walls.<sup>66</sup> In a further example, in *Shoebox Archive* at the Britannia Panopticon building, visitors’ interaction with material heritage (the historical and contemporary artefacts in the shoeboxes) was at once haptic and contemplative.<sup>67</sup> (Image 7.) While, in *Pianola Karaoke*, singers’ song choices appeared to be triggered by the material qualities of the building melded with the personal and cultural connotations it held for them.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Doreen Massey, ‘A Global Sense of Place’, p. 152.

<sup>66</sup> These reflections are based on visitor observation and remarks made in interviews conducted with visitors at *Glimmers in Limbo*, Tramway. See *Glimmers in Limbo* archive DVD. See also Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, pp. 27-28, 41.

<sup>67</sup> See Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 14; Lury in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> See Donald, ‘*Pianola Karaoke* and Other Attractions’, pp. 186-189.



Image 7. *Glimmers in Limbo*: Item in *Shoebbox Archive*

In these examples, the potential of critical spatial practice to bring about what Nigel Thrift describes as an extension of ‘the imagination into matter’<sup>69</sup> was enacted. During the performance of *Pianola Karaoke*, in particular, memories and associations appeared to erupt in visceral, emphatically embodied forms in response to the event and physical environment.<sup>70</sup> Correspondences between material heritage, memory and imagination were mobilised, enabling material heritage to remain open to multiple, creative interpretations and interactions and to resist tendencies to fix or limit its readings and uses. *Glimmers in Limbo* at the Britannia Panopticon building appeared to demonstrate the impossibility of upholding divisions between tangible and intangible heritage, suggesting the consequences of attempting to detach material culture from the memories and associations it inspires. This was recognised by Liz Davidson, Director of the

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<sup>69</sup> Nigel Thrift, ‘Performance and Performativity: A Geography of Unknown Lands’ in *A Companion to Cultural Geography* (Malden MA and Carlton Victoria: Blackwell, 2004), p. 123-135.

<sup>70</sup> See Donald, ‘*Pianola Karaoke* and Other Attractions’, pp. 189-191.

Merchant City Townscape Heritage Initiative, an urban regeneration agency responsible for the Britannia Panopticon.<sup>71</sup> Davidson attributed *Glimmers in Limbo* with altering policy regarding the conservation of the building. Rather than focusing on a whole-scale restoration of its fabric, which would involve closing the building for several years while its interior was ‘restored’ with mostly new materials, Davidson proposed that the favoured approach of the Townscape Initiative and the Britannia Panopticon Trust now entailed ‘getting the building used [...] trying to keep that quintessential thing that you can’t put a finger on’. Davidson stated, ‘we’re coming around to thinking now [...] that the Britannia Panopticon *is* its atmosphere.’<sup>72</sup>

Davidson and others’ responses to *Glimmers in Limbo*’s exploration of the two sites hint at their sensing of an attribute or quality of the built environment that I had not considered when I initiated the project. A recurring trope in commentaries on the work was a figuring of the sites as ‘haunted’, as redolent with ‘ghosts’ or as generating something – an ineffable association, an indefinable feeling, a surprise reaction – that exceeded cultural or historical readings of the buildings. Karen Lury, for instance, reflected on how the work offered the ‘potential to listen and speak to the dead, to acknowledge the ghosts of our everyday’.<sup>73</sup> In this respect, she suggested, *Glimmers in Limbo* might be understood as affording opportunities to engage with the built environment/heritage sites through the contingent, the unexpected, or the overlooked. It might be taken as an example of critical spatial practice where ephemeral media such as performance, projected imagery and sound acted as prompts to bear witness to the forgotten, discarded, incomplete and unremarkable.

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.glasgowmerchantcity.net/> [Accessed 18 May 2013].

<sup>72</sup> From an interview with Liz Davidson, 17 April 2009, quoted in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 39. Original emphasis.

<sup>73</sup> Lury in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 35.

Perhaps the most significant, and largely unanticipated, insights into human/environment interdependency occurred, however, in my emerging awareness and conceptualisation of material culture as possessing a kind of agency or vitality. In several instances, as Lury and others suggest, the work appeared to allow the concrete matter of the sites to exercise what Jane Bennett describes as ‘*thing-power*: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle’.<sup>74</sup> Bennett argues that objects and matter appear to possess a vitality or agentic property beyond the subjective and cultural connotations that are generally understood to lend them their potency. Writing about *Shoebox Archive*, for example, Lury and Venda Pollok made reference to the affective power of the jumble of de-contextualised fragments (historical and contemporary artefacts) installed in the shoeboxes.<sup>75</sup> While audience members and participants during *Pianola Karaoke* spoke of feeling impelled to behave in a particular way, to a sense of being ‘performed’ by the dilapidated music hall.<sup>76</sup>

My growing consciousness of a material vitality, a power or quality of non-animate matter that exceeds the values ascribed to it through cultural or personal associations, emerged in the praxis of *Glimmers in Limbo*. It found support in scholarship on new materiality, which posits the agentic attributes of materials and spaces/places and, in doing so, offers a challenge to anthropocentric conceptions of our relationships with the built/natural environment. As Nigel Thrift puts it:

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<sup>74</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant*, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Lury in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 35. Comments by Venda Pollock, quoted in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> Stevie Jackson, an experienced musician and one of the *Pianola Karaoke* singers, remarked on a palpable and unexpected awareness of the presence of the building during his performance. While Judith Bowers, another *Pianola Karaoke* performer and founding member of the Britannia Panopticon Trust, referred to the building as a living participant in the event. Comments are from post-performance interviews.

Space is [...] constitutive in the strongest possible sense and it is not a misuse of the term to call it *performative*, as its many components continually act back, drawing on a range of different aesthetics as they do so.<sup>77</sup>

The implications of entertaining seriously ideas of material agency and of site/space/place as inherently constitutive significantly informed the second part of the research programme, *The River Clyde Project*. Whereas, in *Glimmers in Limbo*, human/environment inter-relations were explored from a fundamentally anthropocentric perspective – the project’s major concerns were with human/social/cultural constructions such as heritage – in *The River Clyde Project* the non-human, or more-than-human,<sup>78</sup> figured as a forceful, if not necessarily equal, player.

### ***The River Clyde Project: Bridging Part 1 and High-Slack-Low-Slack High***

The work presented here under the title *The River Clyde Project* comprises documentation of two pieces of practice: *Bridging Part 1* (2010) and *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* (2012), together with three publications reflecting on aspects of *Bridging*, written in different registers and for different contexts.<sup>79</sup> The work develops from my sustained interest in the River Clyde in Glasgow, which was explored in an earlier site-orientated intervention, *Riverstop* (2008)<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Nigel Thrift, ‘Performance and...’ (pp. 2022-23).

<sup>78</sup> Notions of the ‘more-than-human’ have been harnessed by commentators from a range of disciplines including Bennett, Donna Haraway, Ingold, Bruno Latour, Thrift and Sarah Whatmore, in attempts to counter anthropocentrism and re-imagine human/environment inter-relations.

<sup>79</sup> Donald, ‘The Urban River and Site-specific Performance’, in *Contemporary Theatre Review*; Donald, ‘On Planning and Improvisation, Success and Failure, Control and Unruliness’ commissioned for the *Public Art Scotland* website; Donald, ‘Bridging Part 1’, in *Performance Research*.

<sup>80</sup> *Riverstop* (2008) was a series of interventions located at a riverside kiosk during Glasgow River Festival. This included a display of postcards depicting boats on urban rivers solicited from across the world, a video of a journey to the source of the Clyde and the distribution of bottles of water from the source labeled with Michel Foucault’s words: ‘In a civilization without boats, dreams dry

and through an ambitious, longer-term undertaking: designing, building and living on board a twenty-metre replica Dutch barge (2005-2012) with my partner and regular collaborator, Nick Millar, at the River Clyde Boatyard, Rothesay Dock, on the outskirts of Glasgow. Readers are recommended to read the articles Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-Specific Performance'; Donald, 'On Planning and Improvisation' and Donald, '*Bridging Part 1*' and to watch the DVD *Bridging Part 1* Video, before reading the next section of this essay.

### *Bridging Part 1*

The performance, *Bridging Part 1*,<sup>81</sup> and subsequent contextualising and reflective article published in a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review*, made a significant contribution to current debates around ideas of site-specificity and mobility. In recent commentaries on site-based practices scholars, including Mike Pearson and Fiona Wilkie, identify a 'mobility turn', which navigates the apparent contradictions between the terms site-specificity and mobility.<sup>82</sup> An expanded definition of site-specificity is proposed, which moves beyond implications of rootedness in a physical location and promotes ideas of space/place as networked and always in-process. Fixed, circumscribed notions of site and site-specificity have been challenged in scholarship on walking practices,<sup>83</sup> while performance work involving other forms of transport has also problematised static conceptions of site-orientated practice.<sup>84</sup> My work on *Bridging* is innovative in its focus on a site that is essentially mobile, fluid and expansive – a river – but one that also plays a role in maintaining Glasgow's

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up, espionage takes the place of adventure and the police take the place of pirates'. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' in *Diacritics*, (Spring 1986), 22-27 (p. 27).

<sup>81</sup> For a description of the performance see Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance', (pp. 218-220).

<sup>82</sup> Fiona Wilkie, 'Site-Specific Performance and the Mobility Turn', in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22:2 (2012), 203-212. Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, p. 7-16.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, work by Dee Heddon, Carl Lavery, Phil Smith and Cathy Turner.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007 - ongoing), Fish and Game's *Cycling Gymkhana* (2011) or Lone Twin's *The Boat Project* (2011- ongoing).

stubbornly-enduring identification with ship-building and heavy manufacturing.<sup>85</sup> *Bridging* explored the River Clyde as a site that exemplifies seemingly antithetical concepts of mobility/fluidity and continuity/endurance, proposing a paradigm for site-specific practice and a conception of space/place where the local, particular and subjective are in productive tension with the mutable, relational and expansive.<sup>86</sup>

The performance of *Bridging*, and my written exegesis of it, generated insights into the potential of this paradigm and, in particular, of harnessing the notion of the intrinsic waywardness of the river to unsettle fixed, reified perceptions of the Clyde. *Bridging* suggested the possibility of engaging with the River Clyde in ways that opened it up to new uses and readings, while acknowledging its role in shaping Glasgow's identity and in founding the city's industrial supremacy. In this, *Bridging* offered a model of 'reflective nostalgia'.<sup>87</sup> The potential of critical spatial practice to promote 'reflective', rather than 'restorative', nostalgia is discussed in the essay 'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance'.<sup>88</sup>

*Bridging* also made a contribution to debates regarding the potential of critical spatial practice to engage with the policies and processes of urban planning. In particular, the article commissioned by Public Art Scotland considered the performance in relation to ideas about the role of improvisation in planning, about the significance of scale (the over-arching master plan and individual, in-the-moment tactics) and about concepts of 'success' and 'failure' in terms of planning.<sup>89</sup> The performance and subsequent article was identified by Ben Spencer, Director of Velocity (a body charged with delivering a cultural

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<sup>85</sup> Interviews with visitors to Glasgow River Festival, conducted during *Riverstop* (2009), indicated that the Clyde's associations with ship-building and heavy industries are predominant, outweighing any other connotations. This, despite the absence of any significant manufacturing activity on the Clyde for over thirty years.

<sup>86</sup> See Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance', (pp. 213-214, 222-223).

<sup>87</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 41, 49.

<sup>88</sup> Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance', (pp. 214, 216, 222-223).

<sup>89</sup> Donald, 'On Planning and Improvisation, Success and Failure, Control and Unruliness'.

response to the impact of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games on the city and its communities),<sup>90</sup> as making a significant contribution to efforts to regenerate and re-imagine the River Clyde through creative practice.<sup>91</sup>

The insights gained through *Bridging* that were most fruitfully generative in terms of the future direction of my practice/research, however, were those concerning the interplay of human and non-human agencies articulated in the work. In the planning, development and realisation of the performance a complex and shifting weave of agencies unfolded, offering possibilities for the development of progressive ecological-social paradigms – constructive models of human/environment interdependency.

During preparations for the performance, in our interaction with the thick, heavy rope that was a major component of *Bridging*, the dynamic entwinement of agencies emerged in a form that might be usefully recognised as what anthropologist Tim Ingold terms a ‘meshwork’.<sup>92</sup> Ingold proposes the meshwork as a model of agency-in-flux, where agentic properties are imagined as emerging along entangled and shifting pathways. In the meshwork paradigm agency is explicitly fluid and unfixed, generated through changing confluences of forces or in movements along trajectories, rather than envisaged as residing with individual entities or dispersed across a network of interconnected nodes.<sup>93</sup> Ingold’s model, thus, accommodates an uneven and fluctuating distribution of agency, allowing that components of the meshwork can acquire, for a time at least, a degree of directedness that compels them to follow specific courses of

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<sup>90</sup> <http://www.velocityglasgow.org.uk/> [Accessed 18 May 2013.]

<sup>91</sup> *Bridging Part 1* is part of a legacy of artworks located on and commenting on the status of the Clyde, including George Wylie’s *Paper Boat* (1988), Ian Hamilton Finlay’s *All Greatness Stands Firm in the Storm* (1990), NVA’s *Stormy Waters* (1997) and Matt Baker and ts Beall’s *Nothing About Us Without Us is For Us* (2012), which are seen to have contributed to a reinvigorated focus on the Clyde waterfront. Rebranded as Commonwealth Promenade, the Clyde waterfront will be a key site for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Tim Ingold, ‘When ANT met SPIDER: Social Theory for Anthropods’ in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011) p. 92.

<sup>93</sup> Ingold’s conception of the meshwork is presented as a critique of some models of Actor-Network Theory which, Ingold argues, can serve to perpetuate ideas of agency as static and as evenly distributed across a network of actants. Tim Ingold, ‘When ANT met SPIDER’, pp. 89-94.

action. These ‘action[s]’, however, as part of the complex, morphing meshwork, are subject to mutation and dissipation, perhaps becoming ‘trailing loose ends [...] which tangle with other strands’.<sup>94</sup> Ingold attests that the components of the meshwork that can perform ‘action[s]’ and which, therefore, can be seen as agents (these being, it appears, exclusively animate components) develop their agency through accumulating somatosensory experience or learning ‘varying degrees’ of skill.<sup>95</sup> Ingold’s model of agentic flux usefully maps onto the push and pull of human and non-human intentions, skills and proclivities played out in manoeuvring the rope during preparations for *Bridging*. Here, at times, the human players appeared to be working against the rope’s propensities while, in other instances, the mooring line’s material characteristics seemed to be harnessed to their specific expertise. For example, in the process of splicing, the technique used to join twelve shorter rope lengths into a continuous mile-long stretch, strands of multi-ply line were interwoven and pulled taut, the rough texture of the rope filaments inter-locking under tension to create a strong bond. The procedure yoked the rope’s physical properties or proclivities – the tendency of its strands to become entwined and the friction created as they did so – with the human skill involved in splicing. Meanwhile, the technique used to facilitate the transportation and handling of the unwieldy mooring line, known as flaking and recommended to us by our collaborators, Offshore Workboats Ltd., worked to impede the rope’s seeming predilection to revert to a state of unruly entanglement. (Image 8.) In flaking, rope is laid out on a horizontal plane in a tight zigzag formation (like the chocolate in a bar of Cadbury’s Flake), allowing the rope to run freely, with less risk of becoming snarled than is likely in coiling. (Image 9.) Throughout the preparatory interaction with the mooring line in *Bridging*, human expertise and focused labour impelled the rope to act as we intended, sometimes, apparently, against and sometimes, seemingly, in tandem with its characteristic propensities. The intentions and embodied knowhow of the project’s human agents enabled them to complete a number of specified tasks

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<sup>94</sup> Ingold, ‘When ANT met SPIDER’, pp. 91-94.

<sup>95</sup> Ingold, ‘When ANT met SPIDER’, p. 94.

with the rope (also involving other non-human players such as the wooden splicing spike, the cobbled surface of the quayside and the flatbed truck on which the rope was loaded). However, the materiality of the rope exerted a significant influence on the kinaesthetic and spatial aspects of both the preparations and, ultimately, the performance itself, ‘act[ing] back’,<sup>96</sup> to give shape to the peculiar choreographies of hands and splicing tool, of river workers, cobblestones, truck, bollards and boat.



Image 8. *Bridging Part 1*: Pile of Rope

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<sup>96</sup> Thrift, ‘Performance and...’ (pp. 2022-23).



Image 9. *Bridging Part 1*: Flaked Rope

The model of fluid agency based on reciprocal, yet not symmetrical, exchange between people and artefacts was unsettled and further extended as events unfolded during the performance of *Bridging*. It became apparent that a yet more nuanced paradigm of fluid and intertwined agencies was emerging — one that recognised the significance of the roles played by the immersive phenomena of tide, weather and daylight, including the emotional, sensosomatic and affective influence they exerted.<sup>97</sup>

Ingold notes that many models of agency,<sup>98</sup> while intended to evade anthropocentric perspectives and to promote notions of agency as dispersed among human and non-human components, still have a tendency to perpetuate a

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<sup>97</sup> See Donald, 'On Planning and Improvisation, Success and failure, Control and Unruliness', (pp. 7-8); Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance', (pp. 220-222); Donald, 'Bridging Part 1', (p. 49).

<sup>98</sup> Ingold critiques, in particular, some renderings of Actor-Network Theory which, he claims, can encourage this propensity. Ingold, 'When ANT met SPIDER', pp. 89-94.

view that ‘people and material objects [are] *all there is*’.<sup>99</sup> Ingold, in reference to our relationships with wind, light and weather, argues for a way of understanding and of *being* in the world that is characterised by openness, interconnectedness and a perception of the environment as in perpetual flux. By centring on the engulfment of objects, human and non-human animals in these all-encompassing entities – what he describes as our ‘common immersion in the currents of the medium’<sup>100</sup> – Ingold proposes a model for human/non-human interdependency and agency where people, animals, materials, artefacts and phenomena such as wind and weather are coterminous. We are, for example, ‘enwinded’<sup>101</sup> and also, in the case of the performance *Bridging*, entided.

This figuring of site and agency, which foregrounds the significance of encompassing entities such as wind and tide, promotes an ecological perspective that profoundly challenges anthropocentricity, while also critiquing models of agency as dispersed equally among networks of discrete objects and things. Instead, it proposes a model of engulfment where humans and other non-human players are coterminous with atmospheric phenomena like weather and gravitational forces. In this model, unruliness and unpredictability are not ascribed solely to non-human entities.<sup>102</sup> The messy and unplanned emotions, actions and responses of the boat crew, ourselves and the spectators in *Bridging*, for instance – of ‘human nature’ – are recognised as potentially disruptive and uncontrollable forces, alongside and intermingled with those of tide and weather. Within this frame, the ‘failure’ of *Bridging* – our inability to complete our

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<sup>99</sup> Tim Ingold, ‘Earth, Sky, Wind and Weather’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13, (2007), S19-S38 (p. S30). Original emphasis.

<sup>100</sup> Ingold, ‘Earth, Sky, Wind and Weather’ (p. S30-31).

<sup>101</sup> Ingold, ‘Earth, Sky, Wind and Weather’ (p. S32).

<sup>102</sup> Ingold’s notion of ‘meshworks’ is one iteration of dispersed and fluctuating agency that might be grouped under the banner of ‘new materialism’ developed as a challenge to anthropocentric analyses. Jane Bennett’s rendering of vital materialism, which draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of ‘assemblages’ (Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) provides a similar model. ‘The vitality of matter is [...] as much wind as thing, impetus as entity, a movement always on the way to becoming otherwise, an effluence that is vital and engaged in trajectories but not necessarily intentions’, Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 119.

intended task – can be reviewed and revealed as a product of a human-centred value system.<sup>103</sup>

An understanding of agency and space/place derived through focusing on immersive entities such as wind and tide also infers a conception of site as at once local and universal. Phenomena such as tides are location-specific, in that they manifest in unique spatial and temporal forms in each particular material context, but they are also unbounded – globally interconnected in their shared dependency on the phases of the moon. It is, therefore, a rendering of site that invites us to invest in our immediate surroundings while remaining alert to a much wider inter-connectivity.<sup>104</sup>

The insights into notions of agency and of local specificity/global interconnectivity that emerged through *Bridging*, particularly those regarding immersive and uncontainable phenomena such as tides and weather, directly informed the final piece of practice-as-research presented here, *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*. Unlike the previous works discussed, at the time of submitting this thesis there is no published writing on *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*. The project has also not yet proceeded beyond pilot stage. As such, the commentary on this work is both more extensive and, necessarily, less conclusive. Plans for future development of the project and for published writing on the project are outlined at the end of this section. Before reading the next section, readers are recommended to access the material on the *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* Archive DVD, including reading the programme/leaflet for the project. The DVD contains slide shows and sound recordings of the five audio works that constituted *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*, as well as images of the project.

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<sup>103</sup> See Donald, 'Bridging Part 1', (p. 49); 'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance', (pp. 221-222).

<sup>104</sup> Other instances of tidal waters as signifiers of local-global interconnectivity are considered in relation to ts Beall's work *The Govan Armada* (2010). See Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-specific Performance', (pp. 216-217).

### High-Slack-Low-Slack-High

The impact, both pragmatic and affective, of the Clyde's significant tidal fluctuations during *Bridging* struck me, the boat crew and other audience members forcefully during the performance. The dramatic fall of the water level to reveal a looming quayside wall was a more potent and emotive experience than I had imagined, while the growing height differential made the boat crew's task increasingly arduous. Several witnesses to the event expressed surprise at the extreme tidal range of the Clyde in Glasgow city centre<sup>105</sup> suggesting that, unlike in previous eras,<sup>106</sup> the tidal rhythms of repetition-with-variation make little impression on contemporary Glasgow life. Given its attributes as an encompassing phenomenon, tidal characteristics of local specificity coupled with global interconnectivity and changing perceptions of tidal cycles in diverse social, cultural and historical contexts, the tide appeared likely to provide a rich focus for further investigation into notions of agency through critical spatial practice. My instinct in this was supported by the scholarship of geographer, Owain Jones. Jones states that tides afford an opportunity to consider 'the agencies of processes and flows'.<sup>107</sup> That is, they are models of agencies-in-flux, offering an example of 'temporal-material performance',<sup>108</sup> which challenges notions of agentic powers as attributed to discrete organisms and artefacts. Further, tides invite consideration of the melding of natural and cultural agencies in what Jones describes as 'ecosocial formations'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Impressions gathered through overheard remarks and informal conversations during the performance of *Bridging Part 1*.

<sup>106</sup> John Riddell's account of the development of the Clyde as a navigable waterway cites several instances of the impact of the tidal river on city life. John Riddell, *Clyde Navigation: A History of the Development and Deepening of the Clyde* (John Donald Publishers: Edinburgh, 1979).

<sup>107</sup> Jones, 'Lunar-solar Rhythm-patterns: Towards the Material Cultures of Tides', *Environment and Planning A*, 43 (2011), 2285-2303, (p. 2286).

<sup>108</sup> Jones, 'Lunar-solar Rhythm-patterns', (p. 2285).

<sup>109</sup> Jones uses the term to describe a melding of ecological and social or natural and cultural, with the ecological seen as having agency that predates and 'frames' the limited powers of the social. I prefer a more symmetrical pairing of ecological-social, in recognition of the impact of unruly 'human nature' within the social. Jones, 'Lunar-solar Rhythm-patterns', (p. 2285).

Tides [...] are both predictable and unpredictable, temporally open and changing, but also repeating rhythmically in ways which culture builds material arrangements around.<sup>110</sup>

*High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* was envisaged as a pilot project intended to test the potential for extended research into the nature of agency in pervasive and enveloping phenomena such as wind and tide. For the pilot, I invited four artists – John Cavanagh, Douglas Morland, Nichola Scrutton and Hanna Tuulikki – to join me<sup>111</sup> in creating a series of performance works that responded to the tidal cycle of the Clyde in Glasgow. Each artist was asked to make a sound work to be performed at a publically accessible location, chosen by them, on or near to the river. The works were performed to coincide with high tide over five consecutive days and programmed as part of Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art in April 2012.<sup>112</sup>

The decision to focus on sonic performances stemmed from my sense of the correlation between sound, particularly composed sound or music, and the fluctuations and cycles of the tide. The tide operates through rhythm and repetition. It rises and falls at regular intervals in repeating but varied patterns inviting ready comparisons with the tempo, pitch and cadences of music. Sound is also pervasive, encompassing and uncontainable. It reaches through and beyond matter engulfing or ‘ensounding’<sup>113</sup> us, as Ingold puts it, just as the wind ‘enwinds’<sup>114</sup> us or the moon’s gravitational pull entides both us and the earth’s

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<sup>110</sup> Jones, ‘Lunar-solar Rhythm-patterns’, (p. 2290).

<sup>111</sup> My work was made in collaboration with my regular partner, Nick Millar. In this instance, Nick’s conceptual and aesthetic input was less prominent than in other collaborations, such as *Bridging*.

<sup>112</sup> My work was also performed at low tide throughout the week. Versions of all five works were given an additional ‘concert’ performance on 28 April 2012 in the circular Trust Hall in Clydeport’s headquarters, an opulent late nineteenth/early twentieth century building overlooking the Clyde.

<sup>113</sup> Ingold, ‘Four Objections to the Concept of Soundscape’ in *Being Alive*, p. 139.

<sup>114</sup> Ingold, ‘Earth, Sky, Wind and Weather’ (p. S32).

waters. Like the tide, sound comes into being through ‘temporal-material performance’<sup>115</sup> – through the oscillation of physical substances.

*High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* aimed to explore the potential of critical spatial practice to reflect on human/environment inter-relations through focusing on the immersive entities of tide and sound. What kinds of agency might be articulated by re-framing the tempos and cadences of the tide as sound and inserting them into the contemporary urban fabric? What expanded and expansive definitions of site might be generated through site-specific performances that use the pervasive medium of sound? How might sonic interpretations of tidal patterns make audible a phenomenon now largely unnoticed in central Glasgow? How might the performances engage with nature-culture or ecological-social interfaces? And what progressive paradigms for human/environment interdependency might emerge? Here, I consider the insights gained through three of the sound works – those made by me, Nichola Scrutton and Hanna Tuulikki. And I reflect on potential developments of this project in future research/practice.

Hanna and I took a similar approach to the translation of tidal movement into sound. We both chose to transpose graphic representations of the waveforms generated by predicted tidal fluctuations in the Clyde in Glasgow onto the standard Western musical stave. (Image 5 and Image 6.) The repeated cycles of rising and falling water level were used to determine the pitching and duration of a musical phrase. In Hanna’s work the musical score was performed by two pairs of singers positioned opposite one another on the banks of the Clyde and sung, through hand-held megaphones, as a call and response across the water. In my piece the musical phrase was played by ships’ horns, recorded at the upper Clyde’s only remaining working boat yard. The captured horn sounds were electronically re-pitched to correspond to the predicted tide cycles of the city centre river between 23 and 27 April 2012, as transposed onto a musical stave.

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<sup>115</sup> Jones, ‘Lunar-solar Rhythm-patterns’ (p. 2285).

The resulting ships' horn refrains were broadcast at bus stops and in Glasgow Central Station from portable speaker-systems housed in items of luggage, greeting passengers as they embarked and disembarked. Nichola Scrutton used numerical information from shipping and tidal charts and material from broadcasts on maritime radio channels to compose a sound work for relay through a speaker horn system, with six female voices adding a live, acoustic layer. It was performed on a city centre thoroughfare that links the Clyde to Glasgow's main shopping area.

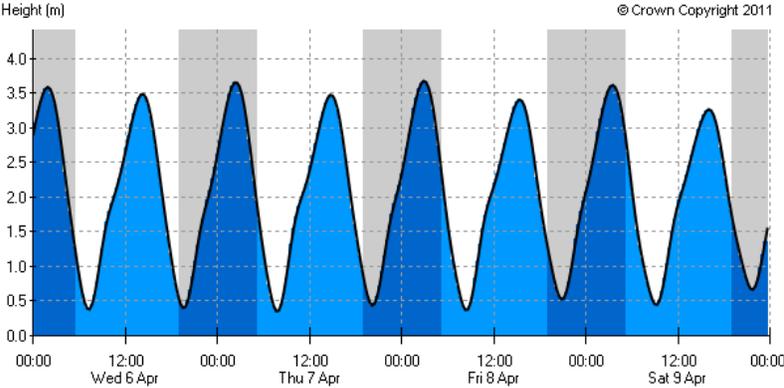


Image 10. *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*: Sample Tide Chart

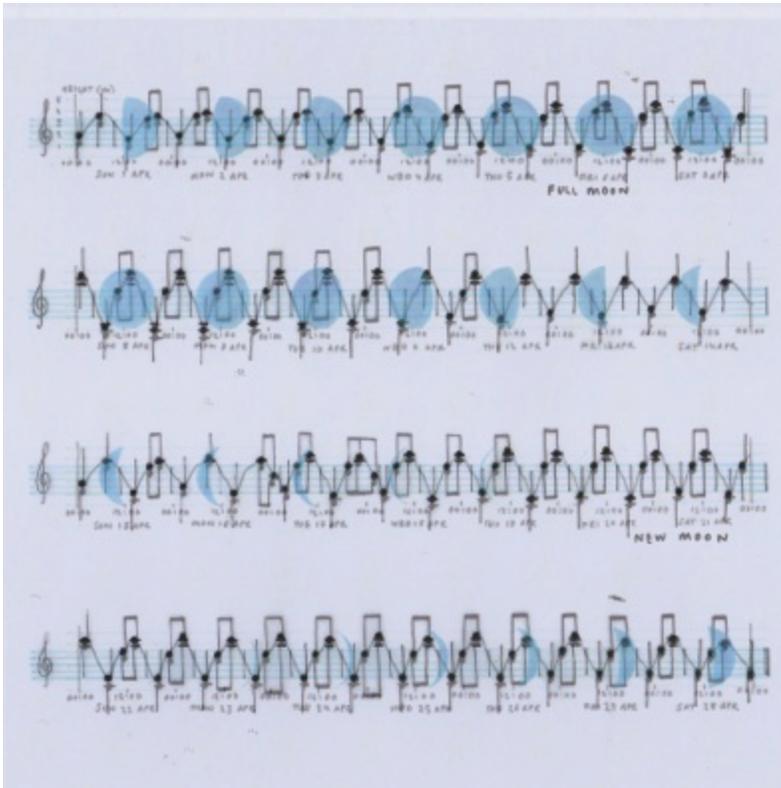


Image 11. *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*: Hanna Tuulikki’s Visual Score

Shifting meshworks of agency and of natural-cultural exchange were played out in the devising and composition of the works. In my work, the tidal data (itself, a calibration and systematisation of natural phenomena)<sup>116</sup> was transposed into a further rationalised system – Western musical notation. The transposition, however, entailed a series of subjective decisions – my arbitrary choices about pitch and tempo. The notated musical phrase was then mediated through digital, electronic and mechanical devices and processes, involving further interplay between the imprecision of human performance and logic-based systems: my limited keyboard skills and aesthetic choices filtered through digital editing software. Hanna’s strategy initially followed a similar trajectory, but circumvented electronic mediation. Her score was inscribed by hand and composed for/with human voice. Despite identical source material (the same

<sup>116</sup> Printed tide tables became generally available to Western mariners during the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, the first edition of *Brown’s Nautical Almanac & Tide Tables* was published in 1877.

graphic representations of the same tidal data) the resulting sonic compositions diverge markedly. While this might be read as evidence of the primacy of human agency – human intentionality and skill apparently determining the form of the sonic works – a more nuanced and expansive analysis yields less anthropocentric and deterministic models of human/environment or human/non-human relations. The meshwork of agency might be extended to consider the sets of social, cultural and biological conditions that led Hanna to become a significantly more skilled and sensitive musician than me. Or to include the ‘acting back’<sup>117</sup> of individual components, such as the motion of the keys on my electronic piano or Hanna’s pen and ink. Or to contemplate the influence of prescribed parameters within the rationalised systems used in composing – the evenly spaced lines of the musical staff or the predetermined functions of the proprietary sound editing software. In performance, the meshworks grew yet more complex and extensive as the sonic interventions both shaped and were shaped by the material, social and atmospheric conditions into which they emerged. In my work, the unexpected noise of the ships’ horn refrain elicited unpredictable responses, comment and conversation from passengers waiting at bus stops. The broadcast sound was affected and inflected, muffled, amplified and interrupted by weather conditions, other elements of the urban sound world, and the varied architectural environments of the city. In Hanna’s work, megaphones mediated the four human voices, the distorted vocals resonating uncannily across the water. While the performance of Nichola’s composition found her fluvial sound world merging with noises of traffic, wind and rain.

The use of the pervasive medium of sound appeared to promote expansive and extended understandings of site in ways that echoed the experience of some audiences/participants during *Glimmers in Limbo*.<sup>118</sup> Audience comments about Nichola’s work, for instance, suggested that the sonic interventions encouraged

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<sup>117</sup> Thrift, ‘Performance and...’ (pp. 2022-23).

<sup>118</sup> A layering of multiple spatio-temporal, actual and imaginary, frames was also witnessed during the performance of *Pianola Karaoke*. See, for example, Lury in Donald, *Glimmers in Limbo*, p. 34 or Donald, ‘*Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions*’ pp. 189-191.

audiences to access multiple spatio-temporal frames. The persistent rain, gusting wind and traffic noise during Nichola's performance made the material here-and-now hard to ignore, while the relayed sound of her composition prompted reminiscences and imaginings about journeys down river to the Clyde Estuary and beyond. The uncontainability and mobility of sound, particularly evident in Hanna's work, also challenged ideas of site as circumscribed and a-temporal. Here, the singers' voices, amplified through megaphones, carried far across the water to reach 'accidental' audience members some distance from the performers, for whom the sound source was not visible.<sup>119</sup> The diffused sound, like the incessant flow of the river water, suggested a figuring of site as fluid and unbounded.

Judged by audience response, all three works heightened awareness of the presence of the tidal river in central Glasgow, on occasion providing glimpses of its potential to promote progressive understandings of ecological-social exchange. During Hanna's performance, for example, audience members commented on the meditative quality of the sound and its introduction of an alternative, unhurried tempo into the urban sound world.

The works appeared to encourage audiences to engage with ecological-social or natural-cultural interfaces in further ways. For instance, the interjection of the ships' horn refrains in my work prompted comments about the decline of river traffic on the Clyde and recollections about the numerous ferry services that once crossed the city centre river, inviting comparisons with today's solely land-based transport networks. A set of ecological-social conditions no longer in existence was recalled, where human and non-human agency was more evidently entwined and co-dependent – the river playing an important role in Glasgow's transport system. Or, perhaps, the model of natural-cultural exchange inferred was one where human agents sought to subjugate the river – the city centre Clyde required continual dredging to ensure it was

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<sup>119</sup> Audience responses were gathered through overheard remarks and informal conversations with people witnessing the site-specific performances.

sufficiently deep for river traffic, such as ferries.<sup>120</sup> In Nichola's work the juxtaposition of sounds suggestive of the Clyde's history as a goods' transportation route (her composition used material gleaned from maritime broadcasts and shipping announcements to evoke the up-river passage of commercial vessels) with the contemporary noises of the busy shopping district where it was performed invited further consideration of the ecological-social formations coalescing around the city and the tidal river, tracing fluctuating meshworks of agency through Glasgow's past and present.

As a pilot project, *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* indicated the potential of focusing on the immersive entities of tide and sound in future enquiries into human/environment inter-relations using critical spatial practice. My intention is to develop this area of research in an extended and more geographically dispersed study. For example, it was evident from the time-limited pilot scheme that the duration of the sonic interventions was significant. In future practice-as-research I intend to conduct sonic interventions over a longer period of time – several months, rather than one week – and to experiment with different tempos within the sound works themselves. This would also facilitate reflection on the significance of repetition and a deeper consideration of shifting natural-cultural, ecological-social cycles and patterns. I also aim to achieve greater coverage across the city than in the pilot, which targeted a limited number of locations: stops along four bus routes and one train station. An extended programme of practice-as-research would find sonic interventions throughout the city's networks – at a wide range of bus stops, on the underground system, at train stations – interjecting the rhythms, patterns and cycles of the tide into some of the systems and schedules which measure out contemporary Glasgow life.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> For a history of dredging on the Clyde see Riddell, *Clyde Navigation*, pp. 273-321.

<sup>121</sup> The focus of the project currently remains on transport networks and schedules, chosen as examples of spatial-temporal systems which reflect changing social, cultural and ecological inter-relations.

With the extended research project my aim is to investigate human/environment interdependencies and social-ecological interfaces in an urban context through focusing on temporal and sonic systems – particularly rhythm and tempo. In this I respond to Henri Lefebvre’s proposition, where he posits the potential of a study of rhythm, both ‘in nature’ and ‘social’,<sup>122</sup> as a means of understanding and critiquing everyday, generally urban, life. I also draw on Brandon LaBelle’s work on the role of auditory experiences and practices in understanding and shaping the contemporary spatio-social milieu.<sup>123</sup> My hope is that a critical spatial practice working through the cycles, rhythms and pulses of natural-cultural exchange might generate further insights into the ways we live in cities today and propose progressive, non-anthropocentric paradigms for ecological-social interfaces of the future.<sup>124</sup> In the extended practice-as-research project I intend to address the questions: how might insinuating alternative cycles and tempos into the schedules and patterns of urban life, through sonic intervention, reveal and unsettle existing and unnoticed instances of ecological-social exchange? How might this strategy function to shift perceptions towards a less human-centred perspective, allowing us to ‘listen’ to the more-than-human?

### Concluding Thoughts

The work presented here traces my evolving, embodied conceptualisation of human/environment interdependencies, explored through critical spatial practice and written exegesis. Over the course of the research programme my conceptions have been continually troubled in unanticipated and, at times,

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<sup>122</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Trans. Stuart Eldon and Gerald Moore (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>123</sup> Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>124</sup> Future projects include *Guddle-ing: Experiments in Vital Materialism with Particular Regard to Water*, a series of public experiments/actions/performances developed as part of the Watershed+ residency programme, Calgary, Alberta (April - October 2013) and *Riparian Rites* (October 2013 - April 2014) research and development for public art work engaging with the cycles, rhythms and pulses of the River Clyde as an ecological-social organism, funded by Creative Scotland.

profound ways, as a result of practical experimentation. Through practice-based exploration, alternate understandings of agency and materiality, and relationships between them, have emerged: a model of shifting and dispersed agency, continually dissipating and coalescing – a folding together of humans, objects, things and phenomena. In the course of the research programme, the initial terms of my ‘enquiry into [...] our relationships with the environments we inhabit, construct and shape’, have been unsettled in a questioning of the position that humanity adopts in framing those terms. In conclusion, I propose instead an alternative paradigm where we can conceive of the environment shaping, constructing and *inhabiting* us as readily as of our shaping, constructing and inhabiting it. While recognising the inherent paradox in my proposition, as a human, of a non-human-centred agentic and ecological model, my intention is to develop, through critical spatial practice, ‘everyday tactics for cultivating an ability to discern the vitality of matter.’<sup>125</sup>

My current and proposed future work supports this intention. An essay, ‘Entided, Enwatered Enwinded: Human/More-than-Human Agencies in Site-specific Performance’, which expands on the writing on *Bridging* and *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* included here, is due for publication by Palgrave in 2014 in a collection titled *Objects and Things in Performance*, edited by Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy. A recent project undertaken in Calgary, Alberta, as part of the Watershed+ and City of Calgary artists’ residency programme, was a preliminary attempt to devise ‘tactics [...] to discern the vitality of matter’<sup>126</sup> and to position the more-than-human as co-creator or co-performer in my work. The project, *Guddling About: Experiments in Vital Materialism with Particular Regard to Water*, was a series of actions or experiments devised with Nick Millar and designed to explore human/water inter-relations around the Bow River, the

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<sup>125</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.119.

<sup>126</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.119.

main watercourse flowing through Calgary.<sup>127</sup> Our aim is to repeat the actions in the context of the River Clyde and Glasgow in spring 2014. Critical writing reflecting on *Guddling About*, Calgary will be published in *The Goose*, the online journal for the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada in 2014, while further writing on both the Calgary and Glasgow legs of the project is anticipated for 2014/2015, with publication likely in *Cultural Geographies* journal. More long-term plans include a co-authored book, with Stephen Bottoms, *Performing Landscapes: Water*, as part of a series titles *Performing Landscapes*, edited by Dee Heddon and Sally Mackey. In this current and future work, I propose a radical stance – a re-imagining of human/non-human inter-relations which moves beyond environmentalist notions of (human) stewardship and offers possibilities, through creative and critical practice, for speculative and inspirational alternatives to the unproductive perceptions of (human) blame or (human) responsibility that haunt much thinking about sustainability and ecology.

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<sup>127</sup> *Guddling About*, Calgary concluded with an open studio event at Glenmore Dam, Calgary, Alberta on 28 September 2013, attended by around 200 visitors. See [www.guddling.tumblr.com](http://www.guddling.tumblr.com) and [www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.com](http://www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.com) [accessed 19/12/13].

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*Glimmers in Limbo*

## Tracing Tramlines Site-responsive interventions at Glasgow's tramway

MINTY DONALD

Tramway, one of Glasgow's leading contemporary arts venues, can be located at the intersection of ideas relating to travel, touring and mobility. Originally built as the city's tram manufacturing works in 1893, it reflects the industrial expansion and growth of Glasgow - so-called 'Second City of the Empire' - in the late-Victorian period. As a tram depot it continued to service the expansion of the city in its first, twentieth-century, phase of suburban development. After 1945, Glasgow's heavy industries - like those of other major industrialized cities - underwent a decline. Resultant changes in demographics and subsequent planning decisions contributed to the decimation of many previously populated areas. Unable to keep pace with the onward drive of 'modernization', the tram network closed in 1962.

In 1964, the defunct tram shed, still under the ownership of Glasgow Corporation, was converted into the city's Museum of Transport, show-casing a variety of forms of transport from horse-drawn trams to models of luxury ocean liners. In this guise, it functioned as a popular family destination - despite its location some distance from the city centre - until the late 1980s, when plans to move the collection to larger, more accessible premises near Kelvingrove Museum left the building under threat of demolition.

An unlikely rescuer emerged in the form of theatre director Peter Brook who, in 1988, chose Tramway as the venue for the only UK staging of

his production *The Mahabharata*, re-casting the building as one of his family of world-wide 'found' spaces.<sup>1</sup> Its status as an international arts venue, a position it continues to hold today, was established in 1990 when it played a key role in Glasgow's year as European City of Culture.

Read against this history, the building exemplifies diverse versions of travelling. Notions of the routine tram ride to work, travel as a nostalgic or exotic commodity and the exclusivity of the international arts trade are woven into its histories and fabric. It is a site where cultural memories reside in overlapping and sometimes conflicting images, in stories and material reminders of the past and present.

Through a three-year research project - to culminate in a final public showing in January and February 2008 - I am developing a series of interventions in Tramway that explore these themes. The interventions encourage spectator-participants to navigate Tramway's entangled narratives by engaging with the physical features of the building, its location and its historical and cultural contexts. The interventions invite spectator-participants to pick their way through the issues of access, class and social mobility signalled by the forms of travel cited above and embedded in the site. These issues continue to echo around debates on Tramway's current role and its local and international status.

The following images and commentary refer to work-in-progress showings of two of the

<sup>1</sup> Peter Brook used the term 'found' space to describe the buildings that he 'discovered' and converted for his use as performance spaces between 1974 and 1990. 'Found' spaces were characterized by the, carefully preserved, 'lived-in' quality of their fabric, pointing to their previous functions and histories. These buildings include: the Mercat de les Flors, a former flower market in Barcelona; the Bockenheimer Depot, a converted tram depot in Frankfurt and Brook's home theatre, the Bouffes du Nord, an abandoned nineteenth-century theatre in Paris.

planned interventions, which took place in August and September 2006. Spectator-participants who attended these showings were observed and photographed while participating in the interventions, and their comments and responses were gathered through different types of informal feedback.

TRAMWAY 2

Steel tramlines, set in the concrete floor of Tramway's main exhibition space **1**, remain as relics of the building's steel tramlines past, at the heart of Glasgow's transport network. In the intervention, spectator-participants are invited to push wheeled trolleys along these tramlines.

Each trolley houses a video projector **2**. When pushed, the movement of the wheels triggers the projection of a tracking shot of a journey across Glasgow onto the whitewashed brick wall of the gallery space. When the trolley stops, the video pauses, freeze-framing the moment.

Each tracking shot follows the route of one of the city's former tramways, dating from the 1890s, when Tramway was built, and filmed in Summer 2006 from the sunroof of a white van.

The trolleys look a little like museum cases - steel-framed glass boxes on wooden plinths. Each displays a fragment of a late-nineteenth-century map of Glasgow **3**, tracing the route along which the video was filmed.

Routes span the city. Moving from peripheral estates through vacant brownfield sites surrounding the city centre (once filled with main streets, shops and small businesses), the routes cross the River Clyde, past shipyards and the regenerated riverbank, with its space-age Science Centre and 'exclusive luxury developments' of upmarket housing. In the city centre, smokers - banished by recent legislation from Glasgow's pubs - stand outside and point at the camera **4**.

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Spectator-participants can stop and start their own journeys along the tram tracks at will, pausing for a closer look at the images framed on Tramway's wall, editing their own cut of the multitude of incomplete, competing narratives that constitute Glasgow's movie.

'That's Springburn isn't it **5**? There's the supermarket where we do our weekly shop'.

'That's Springburn - the St Rollox Works, where they built the locomotives. Is it still there? I thought it was knocked down ages ago.'

'Glasgow looks beautiful. I really miss it.'

'What's that guy doing? Is he waving, or . . .?'

Moving up and down the tramlines, spectator-participants trundling trolleys overlap and intersect with the images projected into the concrete fabric of the site. The 'here and now' of their presence in Tramway resonates with the 'there and then' of the multiple, and competing, narratives evoked by the images.

TOUR

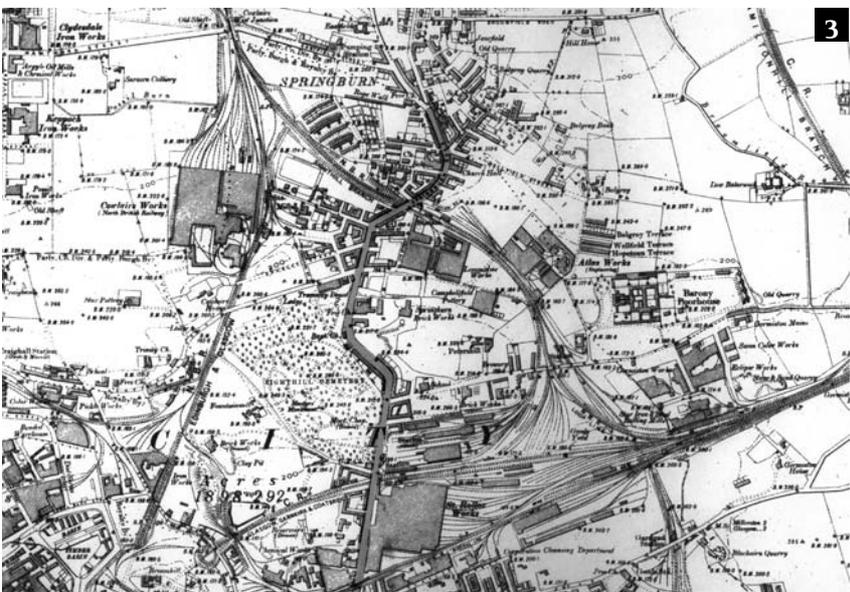
Using maps of Glasgow's former tram networks, spectator-participants - let's call them tourists - are encouraged to navigate the ground floor of Tramway.

As though visiting a museum, art gallery or nature trail, tourists are invited to choose how they wish to explore the building **6**, how much information they want, how they will move around the site.

Some opt simply to follow the coloured lines marked on the building's floor, each representing one of the tram routes that existed in the late 1890s.

As the lines they are following disappear into a wall, behind a pillar or beneath a seating bank - or as routes split, only to lead back on themselves - tourists who make this choice appear to drift from one route to another.

The lines offer unconventional pathways through the building, a framework for the



systematic wandering characteristic of Situationist *dérives*.

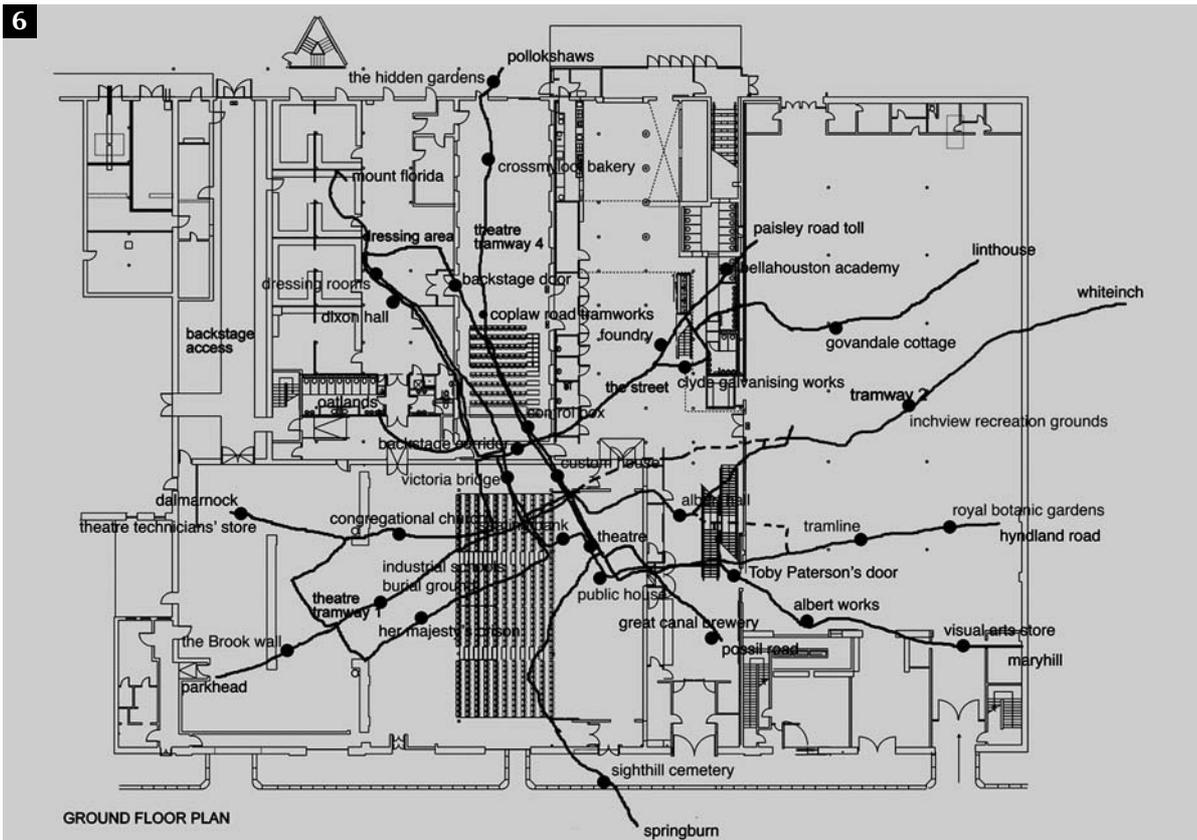
Intent on following the markings on the floor, some tourists are observed marching through the café, stumbling into the wrong toilet and venturing carelessly into ‘private’ backstage areas, their licence to disrupt cultural codes and ignore conventional modes of behaviour seemingly granted by the alternative mapping system.

Others choose to supplement their tour with an audio guide. These guides - pre-recorded on MP3 players - allow them to access information about the building and the tour. They also invite tourists to record their own observations and impressions, adding their personal commentaries to the building’s ongoing narratives.

Still others study an animated map of Tramway, showing a ground plan of the present structure overlaid with lines of the former tram routes, before setting out. They seem to wish to gain an overview of their journey before embarking, a sense of the shape and context of their tour.

Each of the routes is punctuated by a number of ‘landmarks’: selected spots signposted by fragments of maps and plans inset into the concrete floor.

Some landmarks are transposed from late-nineteenth-century Glasgow, the Victorian cityscape shrunk to fit Tramway’s walls **7**. Standing in Tramway’s café, tourists can learn that they are at the site of Crossmyloof Bakery, founded to supply cheap, good-quality bread to local workers. Or that upstage of the seating



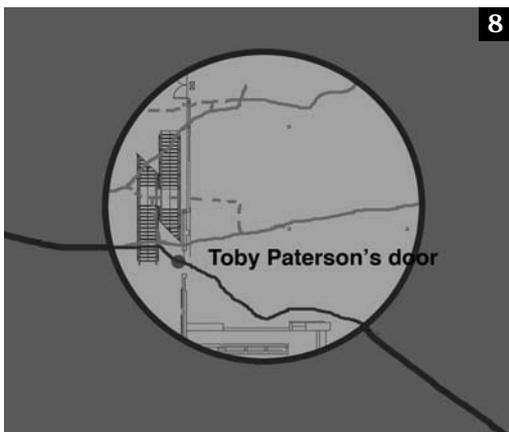
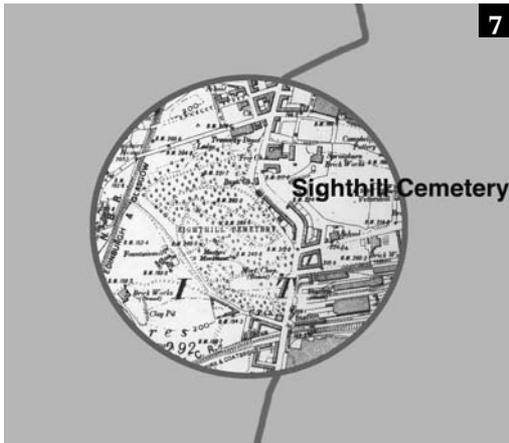
mins ride to airport + 2 hrs checking-in + 6 hrs in air + 40 mins ride to hotel = Total 9 hrs 5

bank in the main auditorium lies the Industrial School's Burial Ground, where some of Glasgow's most deprived children were buried.

Others root the spectator-participant in the here-and-now, pointing to features of the current building: the 'Brook' wall, built for Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, which remains as a permanent fixture in the main performance space **8**, or a glass door leading to the large gallery, designed in 2006 by Glasgow artist Toby Paterson and NORD Architects.

Travelling along the tram routes, tourists can experience the sights, sounds, smells and textures of Tramway today, while journeying imaginatively beyond its walls to intersect with its histories, its location and evolving cultural context - filtering Tramway's identity through the changing character of Glasgow.

The observation and documentation of the work-in-progress showings, together with audience feedback, inform and shape the interventions as they continue to evolve - reflecting ongoing changes in Tramway and its wider social, cultural and geographical context - until the final public showing in 2008. During further development and showings of this project, a wide range of spectator-participants - including Tramway employees, Tramway user-groups (such as the visual arts studio and Sounds of Progress, a music training workshop for people with disabilities), casual visitors to the café, and invited 'specialists': architects, planners, curators and conservationists will be encouraged to experience the interventions. Their responses will be collected through workshops and discussions. It is my hope that new, unpredictable reactions to the interventions, and to Tramway itself, will emerge, offering fresh insight into our relationships with the places and spaces that hold our cultural memories - the sites that allow us to juxtapose alternative interpretations and images of our pasts and presents, and to imagine our futures.



*PIANOLA KARAOKE* AND OTHER ATTRACTIONS:  
RESISTING THE HOMOGENISATION  
OF CULTURAL MEMORY ATTACHED  
TO MATERIAL SITES

MINTY DONALD

Concealed behind a crumbling façade, above a functioning, contemporary amusement arcade, in a building that sits on a busy shopping street on the cusp of Glasgow's regenerating Merchant City district and its deprived East End, lie the decaying remains of one of the UK's oldest surviving music halls. Now known as the Britannia Panopticon, combining two titles from its previous manifestations as an entertainment venue, the building has been subject to changing functions and fortunes since its earliest-recorded existence, as a warehouse, in the mid-1850s. Following its demise as a popular venue for live performance, its roles included indoor carnival and cinema, before the premises were occupied by a succession of retail businesses, leaving the vestiges of the music hall abandoned, hidden above a false roof in the building's upper floors.

Since 1997, a group of volunteers, operating as the Board and Friends of the Britannia Panopticon Music Hall Trust and sanctioned by the building's current owners (the Mitchell family, who run the amusement arcade on street level), have worked to uncover the fabric of the old music hall, raise funds for its preservation and, above all, publicise its existence.<sup>1</sup> In the limited space that remains publicly accessible, they continue to mount a programme of performances, tours and exhibitions, which regularly features their own amateur music hall re-enactments alongside a more erratic and eccentric schedule of poetry readings, experimental music and film, and screenings of "Laurel and Hardy" movies<sup>2</sup> – all situated within a semi-permanent display of memorabilia, artefacts found in the building and assorted bric-a-brac. Meanwhile, below the decrepit auditorium, the amusement arcade attracts a stream of regular punters.

Read in this context, the site is one of multiple, competing narratives, bound up in the social and cultural fabric of Glasgow. It is a site in which the varied interests and investments of those who use and remember it are interwoven, and whose histories and potential futures are open to debate. Given its location in an area designated for gentrification as the city's "cultural quarter," it is, however, highly susceptible to drives to formalise, contain or close down its varied functions and meanings, stemming from the proliferation of anecdotes and imagined histories it propagates.<sup>3</sup>

Focussing, as a case study, on a suite of site-responsive artworks – events or interventions – which I developed in the Britannia Panopticon building in October 2007, this essay considers the efficacy of artworks which employ performance<sup>4</sup> and other embodied<sup>5</sup> practices to critique impetuses to circumscribe, unify and regulate the uses and readings of such rich, productively unresolved "heritage" sites. It reflects, in particular, on their potential to resist the restriction and homogenisation of the individual and collective memories generated by such sites. The Britannia Panopticon artworks were collectively titled *Glimmers in Limbo*, (mis)appropriated from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Reverie* which discusses the way we experience memories, especially those linked to space and place, as unresolved memory-images that interleave past and present.<sup>6</sup>

## **Performance, Embodiment, Memory and Heritage**

This essay proposes that engaging with ideas of heritage through performance and embodied practices dissolves perceived boundaries between material and intangible culture. It suggests that by focusing on heritage as a "multi-layered performance" and on-going "cultural process,"<sup>7</sup> we can challenge tendencies among those charged with its stewardship (often characterised as "the heritage industry") to promote heritage as static, as separate from and unavailable to contemporary culture. By doing so, it proposes, we can offer a critique of situations where heritage serves to perpetuate the ideologies it can be seen as representing. I will argue that performance and embodied practices can destabilise the fixed meanings and functions that consolidate around material sites and objects, opening them up to operate as stimuli for creative acts of individual and collective memory – imaginative rememberings – which allow us to continually re-visit, re-think and re-imagine relationships between past and present, evading the potential of heritage to be used to maintain and endorse dominant beliefs and power structures.



Figure 1: *Façade Fruitmachine*. Photo: Alan Dimmick.

*Pianola Karaoke*, *Façade Fruitmachine*, *Shoebox Archive* and *Real Estate?* – the four events or interventions I staged at the Britannia Panopticon – took place simultaneously and varied significantly in form and the media they employed. My intention was to mirror and emphasise the multivalency of the site by delivering what one commentator described as “a hotch potch of entertainments to diverse audiences.”<sup>8</sup> In this essay, I will focus primarily on *Pianola Karaoke*, one of the two artworks which took place inside the building, referring more briefly to the other interior work, *Shoebox Archive*, and to one of the external works, *Façade Fruitmachine* (See Figure 1.)

### ***Pianola Karaoke***

For *Pianola Karaoke*, the work in which performance figured most overtly and in the most commonplace understanding of the term, I invited eleven people to choose the song that they would like to sing in the old music hall, requesting that their choices were inspired by their personal responses to the building but making no other restrictions, other than to suggest that I was not trying to re-create “old time music hall.” Specially-commissioned accompaniments to the songs were then converted into paper rolls for a 1920s pianola – a mechanised piano which, using pedal-operated bellows,

draws air through a perforated paper scroll, causing the keys to function. The domestic-style pianola is one of many items that have been accumulated by the Friends of the Britannia Panopticon Trust during their stewardship of the music hall. Though historically inauthentic and slightly incongruous, it is one of the building's most popular attractions, visitors regularly commenting on its ability to evoke for them what they describe as the sound and atmosphere of the music hall. The songs were performed live, by the song-choosers (or, in the case of choir mistress Janis F. Murray, by The Parsonage Choir), for one night only, on the evening of 18 October 2007.

I made a considered decision not to record the live event. It was documented only through still photographs (and in a bootleg video of Hanna Tuulikki's performance of *Wuthering Heights*, captured by an audience member on their mobile phone). The documentation was intended to function primarily as "a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present."<sup>9</sup> My wish was for the event to have an after-life, following the live performance, only through the incomplete, "unreliable" and contradictory memories of those who had attended, and in the imaginations of those who had heard partial accounts, seen fragmentary images, or listened on-line to the versions of the songs recorded by the singers on a separate occasion.<sup>10</sup> I did not want the event to persist, through its documentation, as another site-related artefact preserved as though for posterity and subject to (ab)use in promoting a particular perspective. In particular, I did not want it to "participate in the circulation of representations of representations."<sup>11</sup> Instead, I wanted to orchestrate an occasion that would be in itself memorable, that would generate multiple new stories and reminiscences. In doing so, my intention was to allow the site, through the proliferating memories and accounts of the event witnessed there, to continue to participate in the continual "cultural process" of heritage, extending the significance of the site beyond its physical and temporal boundaries. beyond its value as a relic of former times and thus evading its potential to function in perpetuating specific values and ideologies.

My main intention in *Pianola Karaoke* was to discover if, and how, people might relate to material culture through music and song and this was in line with the overall *Glimmers in Limbo* project led by research objectives. However, as the artist responsible for its inception and orchestration, I had a (perhaps unavoidable) investment in the "success" of the live event. My hope was that both audience members and singers *would* feel a personal

connection with the site, that the live performances would encourage them to participate in imaginative rememberings or re-imaginings, that the event would re-invigorate and re-articulate the productive disjunctures between interpretations, images and experiences of past and present which the site has the potential to engender. I also, undoubtedly, wanted everyone to have a good time. As such, my commentary on the event, while countered, corroborated and enriched by the observations of other participants and audience members, is clearly subjective and deeply invested.

My reflection also comes from the perspective of a key participant, or performer, as I took on the role of pianola “player” throughout the performances, inserting a perforated paper roll of music for each new song and pumping, with demonstrable physical effort, the creaking pedals that operate the pianola’s bellows. My experience of *Pianola Karaoke* was, therefore, a strongly embodied one, located at the heart of the event.

The invitation to select a song in response to the site inspired a wide range of choices, from Kate Bush’s *Wuthering Heights* to traditional ballad *Unfortunate Rake*. Many of the songs selected alluded to the singers’ own memories, relating to different times and places in their lives, triggered as a response to the context of the crumbling music hall, with its eccentric assortment of artefacts and occupants. The singers’ reasons for making their choices suggested that the site had a rich capacity to generate diverse associations and creative reminiscences.

For instance, Ross Sinclair, who picked the song *Wan Light*, written by Glasgow post-punk band, Orange Juice, said of his choice:

The words seemed to suggest this idea of the music hall being this other place. The first line [of the song] is, ‘there is a place which no-one has seen where it’s still possible to dream.’

He spoke of a cluster of associations around his selection: memories of the abandoned theatres and cinemas he had explored when a student, thoughts about his own practice as an artist, memories of listening to the song at various times over a twenty-year period and of a recent television documentary following the lead singer of Orange Juice, Edwyn Collins, as he recovered from a brain hemorrhage.



*Figure 2:* Ella Finer sings *After Hours* after The Velvet Underground. Photo: Stephen Robinson.

Ella Finer, who chose The Velvet Underground song, *After Hours*, did so because she said, “it *celebrates* the enclosed and dark nature of the space rather than highlighting it as a ghostly or sad place” and that this reminded her of times when she had wanted “a place where you can shut out the light and have your own private time to contemplate whatever in your life, or love and everything” (See *Figure 2.*)

These reflections, along with other singers’ comments on the ideas connected with their choices, suggested that the invitation to respond to the site through song induced a kind of poetic, associative contemplation, or daydreaming, in relation to the physical space, akin to that characterised by Gaston Bachelard as “reverie.” This quality of interaction with material sites that “imagines while remembering” problematises “the historian’s memory”<sup>12</sup> – the official, factual record – by allowing the site to function

as a stimulus for personal, heterogeneous reminiscences and associations. Thus, the Britannia Panopticon building could conjure, for one singer, places of private sanctuary and comforting seclusion while, for others, it suggested occasions of communal celebration or images of neglect, decay and disenfranchisement. It appears that engagement with material sites through a state of “poetic reverie” encourages interactions which are expansive and inclusive, allowing individuals to make their own imaginative connections that range across time and space, and which resist drives to circumscribe or determine the uses and readings of tangible heritage.

For the live performance, the stalls level of the auditorium – the only part of the music hall accessible, on health and safety grounds, to the public – was left open, with no seating and no raised stage or clearly demarcated area for the singers. It remained in virtual darkness, with the exception of a spotlight focussed on the pianola, while the textures of the atmospherically peeling paintwork, charred wooden beams and aged, encrusted theatrical fittings of the unreachable upper levels were picked out and made palpable through sensitive lighting. The pianola occupied a central position, facing what had been the music hall’s stage. During the performances, audience members gathered around the pianola in an irregular arc, those at the front sitting on the floor, while the performers simply emerged from the crowd to take up their chosen positions by the pianola.

In doing so, we (audience, singers and pianola player) “performed” and were “performed by” the space, our spatial configurations echoing the architecture of the music hall (mimicking the stage and seating arrangement which once occupied the auditorium) while evoking, for myself and other audience members, memories of the informal settings of domestic living rooms, where friends and family gathered to perform and listen to one another’s “party pieces.” Through our embodied performance of the space (and its “performance” of us) we were induced to access collective, cultural memories – of the layout of the many theatres and performance venues that we knew or had visited, and of our actual, inherited or imagined, experiences of family sing-songs and similar events.

In *Pianola Karaoke*, the interweaving of individual and collective memories – the singers’ personal and idiosyncratic memories evoked by the material site, and the shared cultural memories prompted by audience members’ spatial “performance” – suggested that embodied practices may

offer us the potential to move fluidly between personal and communal responses to material culture, allowing neither to dominate, thus providing a strategy for resisting homogenisation.

Fittingly, given the event's evocation of family get-togethers, the song choice of Aileen Campbell, who opened the evening's entertainment, chimed with the notion of the music hall as an intimate, informal venue. It also resonated with ideas concerning the potential of performance, and specifically music, to stimulate involuntary memories and creative rememberings. Her chosen song, *Mama's Opry*, written by country singer Iris Dement, recalls the musician's mother singing at home and her sense of how this imaginatively transformed the domestic space of their house into the famous country music venue, *The Grand Old Opry*.

The fact that the performances were musical ones – experienced more through the aural, than visual, sense – was highly significant in terms of the quality of the embodied experiences which the event produced for both performers and audience.

In human sensing, whereas sight distances, hearing envelops... Sound, by its enveloping character, brings us closer to everything alive. Hearing musical sounds ... makes us especially aware of proximity and thus connectedness.<sup>13</sup>

As Leppert here proposes, the peculiarly physical, visceral and emotional impact of sound, and musical performance in particular, is resistant to the kind of measured analyses, and subsequent closing down of interpretation, that the visual image allows. Operating through irrational and bodily affects, live music refuses such regulation and encourages engagement and a kind of “knowing” that is individual and experiential – that is, it is beyond-representational.

The embodied, affective practice of listening to and performing live music is often attributed with inducing involuntary memories – the type of unregulated, unbidden reminiscences triggered by sensory encounters that is identified famously in the work of Proust, and taken up by Benjamin. This effect, commented on by several audience members, was described by Karen Lury in her reflections on the event:

I am allowed access to, or possessed by, a host of different temporalities – the regular pulse of the pianola which Donald pedals industriously; the performer's voice pulling and tugging at the orchestration of the music; the

recollection (a sonic echo) of earlier versions of the song, my knowledge of why the performer chose the song, my own feeling about the song – a coalescence of their memories and mine.<sup>14</sup>

In her comments, Lury points to the event's ability to evoke multiple, over-lapping timeframes, to invite audience members to entertain the co-existence of numerous individual and collective memories, but to judge none of them as having authority over others. This occurrence – the capacity of the event to encourage participants to access multiple unresolved memories – may be attributable to the embodied nature of our engagement with, particularly live, music.

The complex relationship between live, embodied performance and its recording as static, inanimate artefact is embedded in the concept of *Pianola Karaoke*. The pianola is a device that allows music to be stored in a permanent material form – as a perforated paper roll – and then endlessly and unchangingly reproduced. The phenomenon of karaoke is based on its participants' wish to perform their own cover versions of favourite songs, to produce countless sonic echoes and an accumulation of layered memories. As such, *Pianola Karaoke* exemplified approaches towards the recording and re-enactment of live performances which have been characterised by Diana Taylor as “archive” and “repertoire.” Taylor suggests that although there is a tension between the two – the archive frequently being taken to represent fixed, authoritative and enduring versions of the past, while the repertoire is viewed as personifying transient, mutable knowledge passed on through embodied practice – they, in actuality, “exist in a constant state of interaction.”<sup>15</sup> *Pianola Karaoke* played with this tension.

While referencing material culture's susceptibility to being perceived as permanent, official archive, it allowed it to function as a stimulus for an on-going cultural process that folded together reminiscence, imagination and lived experience, where both individual and shared pasts were continually performed and renegotiated in the context of the present, and where the here-and-now was played out amid physical reminders of the there-and-then.

Sound, as Susan Smith argues, “is highly participatory, for performers and for those in earshot.”<sup>16</sup> In *Pianola Karaoke*, the requirement for participation by the listener was increased by the informal spatial arrangement of the venue – the audience were obliged to play an active role in positioning themselves in order to both hear and see – their need to

concentrate, to listen intently, made even more acute by the singers performing without amplification. Rather than finding this disconcerting or frustrating, both audience and performers responded positively. Audience comments suggested that it made them feel that they were involved in a shared enterprise, that they were “part of something... special.” Stevie Jackson, an experienced professional musician, and one of the singer-song-choosers, remarked:

I think I learned something about projection and presenting material in a certain way... To present music without amplification... well people reached out to it and were entertained and fulfilled by it, you could totally feel it.

Though unquantifiable and wholly partial, my own overwhelming impression, while I sat pedalling the pianola with the audience behind me and the singers to one side or in front of me, was of a collective will for the performances to succeed, for the evening to “work.”

One factor on which several visitors commented, and that may have contributed to this sense of communality, was a shared awareness of an element of risk and uncertainty running through the event – a feeling that we were all in it together, but that we did not know exactly what “it” might turn out to be. In their exposure to both the relentless, unyielding mechanics of the pianola and to the judgement of an audience – demonstrated in the initial nervousness some singers displayed – the singers’ risk-taking was evident. But the audience too had opened themselves up to chance, attending an occasion with no prior knowledge of what to expect and whose loose structure gave them little guidance on how to behave. They had taken a risk in placing themselves in a physical setting which was disconcerting and unsettling in its collisions of contemporary gaming room and nineteenth century music hall, authentic Victorian jewellery and “fancy dress” costume, ’sixties pasteboard partitions and ornate plaster cornices.

Risk-taking extended also into my shaping and organisation of the event: not simply in the deliberately open-ended approach and light touch I had taken in directing the evening’s proceedings, but also in the real physical hazards presented by the dilapidated fabric of the building and in the fact that, through the popularity of the event and the generosity and enthusiasm of the volunteer door-keepers, audience capacity limits agreed with the licensing authorities had been exceeded. While hardly extreme or endangering, the element of risk-taking inherent in the event, and the

relaxed, irreverent attitude towards the music hall as a heritage site that it implied and promoted, ran counter to more typical approaches towards material culture where heritage sites are strictly regulated, with visitors' experiences rendered risk-free and the potential for unplanned occurrences strictly limited.

Through exposure to risk, to the physicality of the site and the performances, the event encouraged encounters where both audience and performers' sensory experiences were foregrounded. Memories of the event were, as later discussions with participants revealed, closely associated with specific corporeal sensations – the smell, temperature and quality of sound were all notably commented upon. The event was, in this sense, “remembered” through the body, invoking a form of memory which, in its lived, experiential nature, was unique to each individual. As such, it was resistant to archiving strategies (recording through written or other means) which Taylor and others argue render cultural memory susceptible to regulation.<sup>17</sup>

Whether attributable to a feeling of shared risk or not, the impression of a supportive rapport between singers and audience members that characterised *Pianola Karaoke* was undoubtedly pleasurable. And the perception of the event as a positive, communal experience, described by those attending as “life-affirming” and “up-lifting,” was certainly gratifying to my desire for the occasion to be “a success.” Once the moment of the live event had passed, however, I was left with a faint unease that this perceived sense of unity, of shared celebration and sentiment – among what was, predominantly, a white, middle-class and “arty” contingent – was an illusion, perhaps functioning to erase difference, ignoring exclusions and opposing voices, rather than to promote the productively dissonant multivalency of the site.

It could equally be argued, though, that what occurred in the fleeting semblance of unity was a *performance* of communality – a utopian moment, as characterised by Jill Dolan:

Live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences... that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world.<sup>18</sup>

It was also a moment which (as typifies the unsustainability, or unattainability, of utopias) began to dissipate as soon as the last note was

struck and sung, exposing the messy and complex realities of our relationships with the site and with one another.

Departing audience members may have been heard to comment on the “fabulous” and “moving” night that they had just experienced, but they did so as they left the building past the punters in the amusement arcade, past drug-users’ discarded syringes at the side-lane exit and past the East End of Glasgow’s own crowded karaoke bars. And while the overheard remark of one visitor, “I think we’ll all remember this as a great Glasgow night,” hinted that the event had allowed the crowd to form, in the moment of the live performance, a sense of collective identity, its transience (reinforced by the lack of documentation of the performances) ensured that their memories would not be unified or homogenised. This feeling, Simon Frith has suggested, is characteristic of live music’s ability to allow us to experience identity not as fixed, but as continually in process – as “a becoming not a being.”<sup>19</sup> Sensing identity through performance in this way – as always in flux, forming and re-forming, moving between the personal and the communal – offers an alternative to circumscribed and static models which can serve to maintain existing power structures and perpetuate dominant ideologies.

*Pianola Karaoke* appeared to create a situation where audience and performers were able to slip in and out of, or simultaneously entertain, a cluster of experiences: a sharp awareness of existing as a distinct individual, while feeling a sense of collective identity or communality (as one audience member described it: “the experience was very personal. It feels like you are alone in the space yet the music creates a very communal atmosphere”). A strong sense of being “present” in the unique here-and-now of the physical environment, while travelling, through memory and imagination, to the multiple temporalities evoked by the songs, the space and the occasion. A brief utopian moment, punctured by the contingencies of the specific location.

Following the night of the live performance, recorded versions of the singers’ renditions – accompanied by other traces of the event, such as projections of fragmented scrolling lyrics and paper pianola rolls printed with singers’ comments on their reasons for their song choices – acted as a soundtrack, a ghosting of *Pianola Karaoke*, for the second artwork I wish to consider.

### *Shoebox Archive*



*Figure 3: Shoebox Archive.* Photo: Stephen Robinson.

For *Shoebox Archive*, I installed six hundred shoeboxes in the auditorium of the music hall (See *Figure 3*). The boxes referred to one of the building's previous roles as a shoe warehouse, and were inspired by the recollection – quite possibly a false memory – of my first visit to the space and the piles of boxes I “remember” filling the stalls area. In one hundred and fifty of the shoeboxes I placed one of the many artefacts that have been excavated from under the floorboards of the Britannia Panopticon: everyday detritus from the 1860s to the 1930s – ticket stubs and spent matches, a whelk shell and a baby's dummy – which had lain discarded for decades.

Although the mass of white, stacked boxes created an imposing image in the space – some visitors likened them to a memorial, or drew comparisons with the work of Christian Boltanski – they were not intended to be interpreted as solely representational. Visitors were encouraged to interact with them<sup>20</sup> – to rummage through the boxes, discovering what they contained and connecting with the objects in an intimate, personal, tactile and imaginative way – as a counterpoint to the labelled artefacts on display under glass in the Britannia Panopticon's permanent exhibition. As one visitor observed, highlighting the sense of

present-ness and ownership they felt through the experience, “it’s like finding the lost items yourself.” In the remaining four hundred and fifty empty boxes, labels fixed in their bases invited visitors to “please leave something in the box.” Over the duration of the intervention more than three hundred items were left in the empty boxes by visitor-participants.

The accumulated items – historical and contemporary artefacts – formed an unruly jumble, a collection that resisted categorisation and ordering. While it was possible to speculate that some items had been consciously selected to set up correspondences – for example, a set of headphones for an MP3 player was left beside a programme for the music hall – the choice was limited to what the donor happened to have about their person and so was arbitrary, not pre-meditated: a ticket from the national museum in Istanbul, a tiny architectural scale model of a human figure or, more often, the mundane junk that we carry around in our pockets – loose change, till receipts, paper clips.

This shambolic assortment of everyday objects – a collection but one which encouraged interaction and random additions, and which was presented in the homely, domestic containers of the shoeboxes – functioned as critique of the controlled meanings promoted through the heritage industry’s common curatorial practices, and a stimulus for the kind of involuntary associations and fragmentary, elusive memories that Joe Moran describes (referring to rubbish) as a “memory surplus which is neither purposive nor easily recuperable by dominant ideologies.”<sup>21</sup> As one visitor remarked: “it reminded me that every person who visits leaves something behind, takes away or experiences something different.” Another wrote of the piece:

Given that the layered history of the building is still present in the wooden beams and projection room, the installation, for me, disturbed the way in which we try to ‘read,’ understand and pigeon-hole chronologically... It raised questions about such sites and whether we do not actually do them a disservice through period restoration, through display boxes, through meta-narratives that tell some stories and silence others. For me, it highlighted the value of disruption, of discovery, of lessening narration in favour of imagination, of constructing our own stories about the place, of fiction but a very living fiction. I liked the not-knowingness of it all, but that not-knowingness coming from something that was very real. I don’t think that the power of the fragment should be underestimated.

When the installation was dismantled, the historical objects were returned to the care of the Britannia Panopticon Trust, while the donated items were secreted around the building, creating a new layer of rubbish: rubbish with the potential to prompt the type of everyday, dispersed memories that, Joe Moran argues, escape “formal mechanisms of remembrance”<sup>22</sup> or evade the official memorialising of the heritage industry.

## Inside Out

The remaining two interventions, *Façade Fruitmachine* and *Real Estate?*, interacted with the exterior of the building. They sought to consider its identity within the context of its ever-changing urban environment, and to engage with audiences additional to those who chose to enter the building. In *Real Estate?* photographs of details of the building’s interior were mounted in the shop front window of the amusement arcade, mimicking the displays in estate agent windows. They were installed to form a permeable layer through which the two existing window displays – the Britannia Panopticon Trust’s music hall memorabilia and Mitchell’s Amusement Arcade’s neon advertising signage – could be glimpsed.

In *Façade Fruitmachine* an animated sequence was projected in the windows of the inaccessible second floor of the building, making reference to signage on the façade from the past one hundred and fifty years of its existence (using the range of fonts recorded in photographs of its exterior over this period) and to its current function as an amusement arcade. In the animation, letters spun like the drums of a coin-operated fruit machine, sometimes, momentarily, resolving into words that pointed to the building’s former roles as music hall, tailors’ warehouse, waxworks and cinema.

As I had anticipated, the constituent audience for this intervention had little overlap with the audience who experienced the interior works. Many of the people who came to the opening event, or who visited the exhibition during the following week, did not notice the exterior projection, as it was visible only after dusk and from the opposite side of the street. Those who did witness both the internal artworks and *Façade Fruitmachine* spoke of how the animated projection had shifted and extended their perceptions of the building. They remarked on the transition from the “private” secluded interior of the music hall into the “public” arena of the lively city street, and how this movement altered both their physical and conceptual relationships with the site. As one observer put it:

The light work on the exterior of the building... made me look up... It forced me to see the building as a built object that had a role in the cityscape beyond – or maybe before – its commercial, entertainment and ‘heritage’ one.

The effectiveness of the work in dislocating the building from its heritage as well as other identities – in encouraging spectators to form their own imaginative relationships with it in the context of the contemporary urban environment – was borne out by additional responses.

The most concentrated audience for the intervention – and one on whose conversations it was easy for me to eavesdrop inconspicuously – consisted of waiting passengers at the bus stop facing the Britannia Panopticon building. Remarks overheard from this loose community of incidental spectators revealed that a relatively small number had linked the animation’s rotating letters with the building’s function as an amusement arcade, while an even smaller group – who clearly had prior knowledge of the site – recognised some of the building’s former titles in the animation. (The words Britannia, Panopticon and the local nickname for the music hall, “pots and pans,” were all spelt out.) The majority of viewers appeared to remain unaware of the animation’s relationship to the site’s commercial, heritage and entertainment identities.

This general failure to recognise the connection between the projected words and the building’s histories opened up the site’s multiple possibilities – spawning conjectures and imaginative propositions about the building’s past, present and future roles – rather than functioning as the exercise in naming, or labelling, it might have become had the link been more clearly identified. Instead, spectators entered, through the work, into a playful interaction, or performance, with the site – participating in a (word) game with no discernable rules, played out in the context of their routine activities on the city street.

Through the intervention, the spectators’ relationship with the Britannia Panopticon building diverged from more customary engagements with heritage sites – generally marked off from their surroundings as special and valuable. It became an everyday – albeit extraordinary – encounter; the cold, the rain, the passing buses and bustle of the busy shopping street formed a web of competing experiences, of which the flickering animation in the darkened windows of the music hall was just one component. As in the unregulated, hands-on interaction with the uncategorised artefacts in *Shoobox Archive*, the connection to heritage made by the spectators of

*Façade Fruitmachine* was left open and unexplained, located firmly within the context of their day-to-day existence. The work invited spectators to engage in an enactment of the proposition that heritage sites should not, and cannot, be separated from contemporary life, that material culture cannot be contained, controlled and preserved for posterity, that the past remains very much alive in the present.

### Concluding Remarks

Reflecting on the project in light of my own observations, and those of audience members, other visitors and participants, it appears that *Glimmers in Limbo* at the Britannia Panopticon demonstrated the potential of performance and associated embodied practices to activate relationships between material culture and cultural memory, dissolving perceived distinctions between tangible and intangible heritage and mobilising heritage as a living, ongoing, creative process. The embodied nature of the *Glimmers in Limbo* artworks – their emphasis on sensory engagements with the site, the uncertainty, or risk, inherent in the live performances, and their transience – worked against the impetus to control and regulate interactions with material culture, opening it up as a site of multiple possibilities. Their integration of space, place and performance activated and generated both shared and personal memories – inviting participants to play out individual and collective identities that coalesced and dispersed, complemented and contradicted, but which refused resolution or homogenisation.

Allowing the material culture of the building to “perform” and to be performed unlocked its potential to play unlimited roles, to inspire numerous competing, yet overlapping, reminiscences and re-imaginings, to foster a dynamic relationship between past and present where the world might be considered as, in Nigel Thrift’s words, “a heap of highly significant fragments... contingent and complex, a space for opportunities and events.”<sup>23</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Despite the efforts of the Trust, its official status "of special historic interest" (as designated by Historic Scotland in 2008) and its presence on Scotland's Buildings at Risk Register, no secured funding for the building's conservation and maintenance, or coherent plans for its future currently exist.

<sup>2</sup> Stan Laurel allegedly made his debut, as a boy, at the Britannia Music Hall.

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<sup>3</sup> Two recent works demonstrate the richness and diversity of the testimonies, stories and myths that the Britannia Panopticon has generated. Paul Maloney's PhD thesis *The Britannia Music Hall and the Development of Urban Popular Entertainments in Glasgow* (2007) contains a substantial collection of first and second-hand testimonies of the latter years of the Britannia Panopticon's existence as a public entertainment venue, while *Stan Laurel and Other Stars of the Panopticon* (2007) by Judith Bowers, founder of the Britannia Panopticon Trust, provides her own personal, highly anecdotal, account of the music hall's history.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term "performance" within the essay to refer to a spectrum of activities that can be read as marked off from everyday, unconsidered behaviour through a degree of intentionality – either on the part of the "performer," who is consciously performing a task, action or role, or on the part of the commentator, who designates the behaviour as "performance." This ranges from commonplace understandings in which the term refers to situations where audience and performers play clearly designated roles within conventional theatrical or entertainment settings, to less specific usages, such as Nigel Thrift's where "performance" is taken to mean a physical "doing". See Thrift (2003) "Performance and..." *Environment and Planning A*, 35, pp.2019-2024; and Thrift (2004) "Performance and Performativity: A Geography of Unknown Lands," in Duncan, J., N. C. Johnson and R. Schein (Eds.) *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing.

<sup>5</sup> Within the context of the essay I define "embodied" as that which is understood or enacted primarily through somatic, expressive and non-discursive means, where sensory and corporeal experience takes precedence over cognitive comprehension. While acknowledging that embodied experience cannot be separated from intellectual engagement, the essay takes the position that the body can "know" in ways distinct from rational thought and that this type of knowing is more resistant to control and regulation than discursive epistemologies. Significantly, in terms of this essay, embodied practice is also, as Diana Taylor argues, key to shaping, transmitting and re-negotiating cultural memories and identities. Taylor (2003) *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memories in the Americas*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Gaston Bachelard (1969) *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, Boston: Beacon Press, p.112.

<sup>7</sup> Laurajane Smith (2006) *Uses of Heritage*, London and New York: Routledge, pp.3,44-84.

<sup>8</sup> Responses to the artworks/interventions were gauged and recorded using a variety of methods: participant observation, informal conversations, structured group discussions, interviews, questionnaires and invited written responses, from which all quotations and paraphrased comments used in the essay are derived.

<sup>9</sup> Peggy Phelan (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, New York and London: Routledge, p.147.

<sup>10</sup> The songs were recorded on-site at the Britannia Panopticon in the week preceding the live performance. Singers had, therefore, one very brief rehearsal, or run-through, of their song with the pianola before facing an audience.

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<sup>11</sup> Phelan (1993), p.147.

<sup>12</sup> Bachelard (1969), p.119.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Leppert (1993) *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation and the History of the Body*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, p.29.

<sup>14</sup> Karen Lury (2008) "Glimmers and Limbo: Following the 'Path of Reverie' and Locating the Ghosts of the Everyday." Paper presented at the *Art – Site – Audience* symposium, October 26, in Glasgow, UK.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor (2003), p.21.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Smith (2000) "Performing the (Sound)world," *Environment and Planning D*, 18, p.624.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Taylor (2003), p.17.

<sup>18</sup> Jill Dolan (2005) *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theatre*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Frith (1996) "Music and Identity," in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, p.109.

<sup>20</sup> The outside of the boxes were marked with labels informing visitors that the box might contain an artefact, while invigilators in the music hall gently suggested that the boxes could be opened and searched through.

<sup>21</sup> Joe Moran (2004) "History, Memory and the Everyday," *Rethinking History*, 8, p.58.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66

<sup>23</sup> Nigel Thrift (2008) *Non-Representational Theory: Space/Politics/Affect*, London and New York: Routledge, p.125.



for Maggie

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## Introduction

Urban regeneration is one of the prevalent aspirations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with schemes proliferating across the UK and Europe.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the question of what we *do* with our material heritage – the built environment that we have inherited from previous generations – is pressing and pertinent. Planners, architects and conservationists charged with making today's cities 'fit for purpose' now generally recognise that this should not be at the cost of erasing the histories or cultural identities of existing areas – their 'character'. However, while the value of conserving elements of a neighbourhood or building's past may be commonly acknowledged, the specific decisions made about *what* is conserved, and how, raise further issues regarding the function and uses of our material heritage – and in particular, concerns about access and ownership. As Laurajane Smith argues in *Uses of Heritage*,<sup>2</sup> the manner in which our material heritage is conserved and maintained determines the ways in which we can interact with it, both physically and imaginatively. For instance, a 'heritage' site such as an English country house that is presented as a seamless, authoritative version of the past can serve to perpetuate the ideologies it might be seen to represent. It can be seen as exclusive, denying access to those whose histories – frequently those of non-dominant classes, races or gender – are invisible at the site. Viewing the material past in this way, as fixed and inert – a collection of old, dead stuff – also leads to its becoming separated from and unavailable to contemporary culture. It prevents us from re-visiting, re-imagining and re-negotiating our relationships with our histories – and, as a consequence, from questioning the seeming inevitability of the trajectory from past to present to future.

With the *Glimmers in Limbo*<sup>3</sup> project, I set out to explore, through my own practice as an artist, the potential of art – and specifically work which might be described as site-orientated<sup>4</sup> or critical spatial practice<sup>5</sup> – to encourage an engagement with our built heritage that is dynamic, individual, idiosyncratic and imaginative. I wanted to reflect on the possible role of this type of art in mobilising our relationships with heritage and inviting us to understand it not as something that is static, removed or moribund, but as an ongoing 'cultural process'.<sup>6</sup> In particular, I was interested in investigating the extent to which the ephemeral, interactive and performative qualities of my work might function to facilitate creative, open-ended exchanges with the material past. I wished to consider whether these qualities might contribute to the dissolving of distinctions between 'tangible' and 'intangible' heritage – between physical artefacts and the memories or practices that they invoke – and so shift our understanding of heritage from things to processes.

*Glimmers in Limbo* consisted primarily of a series of site-responsive artworks – or interventions – made in two contrasting, but complementary, sites in Glasgow: the Britannia Panopticon building in the city centre, where the dilapidated remains of a nineteenth-century music hall sit above a functioning amusement arcade, and Tramway, a contemporary arts venue on Glasgow's Southside, housed in the city's former tram works.

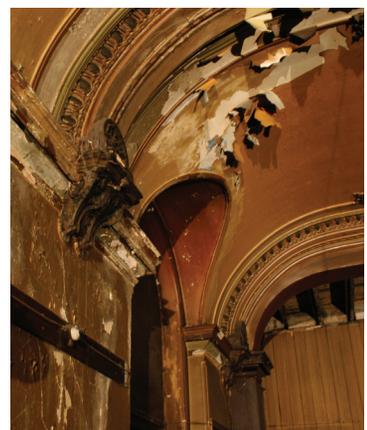
The sites were chosen as examples of buildings in flux, whose changing fortunes, functions and appearances demonstrate notions of space and place as fluid and mutable. Tramway, built in the 1890s, has been an industrial site (as the city's tram manufacturing works), a popular family destination (as Glasgow's Museum of Transport) and a home for 'high' culture (in its guise as a contemporary arts venue).



The Britannia Panopticon



Tramway



The Britannia Panopticon Interior



The semi-derelict Britannia Panopticon music hall lay buried for decades in a city-centre warehouse but was once at the heart of Glasgow's working-class entertainment district. Both buildings wear the evidence of their histories in their fabric: the layers of the Britannia Panopticon's flaking paintwork, the steel tramlines in Tramway's floor. Both are sites of multiple, competing narratives, bound up in the social and cultural fabric of Glasgow. They are sites in which the varied interests and investments of those who use and remember them are interwoven, sites whose histories and potential futures remain open to debate.

Over the three years of the project, I spent time on each site developing the interventions – artworks which invited visitors to participate actively in their creation and reception – and holding work-in-progress 'showings'. Observation and documentation of the showings, together with audience feedback, informed and shaped the interventions as they evolved, reflecting ongoing changes both at the sites and in their wider social, cultural and geographical contexts. Final public showings of the interventions took place from 18–27 October 2007 at the Britannia Panopticon and from 15 February–2 March 2008 at Tramway.

This publication documents the creation and reception of the artworks. It records responses to them from a wide range of visitors and includes reflective writing on the research project – both my own and that of the critics I invited to comment on the work. My hope is that it captures something of the new and unpredicted reactions to the sites that the interventions inspired. These reactions, I believe, offer fresh insight into not just the specific sites that I focused on, but more generally into the places and spaces that hold our cultural memories – the sites that allow us to juxtapose alternative interpretations of our pasts and presents, and to imagine our futures. My hope is that this publication offers a useful, and engaging, commentary on a model for an arts practice that encourages creative, active, critical and empowered interactions with the heritage of our built environment.

#### Notes:

1. Glasgow is currently undertaking a major regeneration project around its central river, the Clyde, alongside several other on-going schemes such as the Merchant City Initiative (<http://www.glasgowmerchantcity.net/> [September 2009]). Across the UK, cities including Manchester and Newcastle have undergone significant urban transformations, while the rejuvenation of European centres such as Bilbao can also be seen as part of this trend.
2. Laurajane Smith (2006) *Uses of Heritage*, London and New York: Routledge.
3. *Glimmers in Limbo* was a three-year programme of practice-led research that I carried out between September 2005 and September 2008, as an Arts and Humanities Research Council Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at Glasgow School of Art. The title of the project, is (mis)appropriated from Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Reverie* and refers to the way that we experience memories, especially those related to space and place, as unresolved memory-images interleaving past and present. Gaston Bachelard (1969) *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, p. 112.
4. The term is used by Miwon Kwon to encompass a spectrum of practices that engage with 'site' in an expanded sense of the word, which includes dimensions such as the institutional and cultural context of a site, in addition to its physical fabric. Miwon Kwon (2004) *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 1-9.
5. Jane Rendell uses the phrase to describe practices which cross over a range of disciplines including art, architecture, performance, geography and anthropology, and which aim to make an intervention into our relationships with the spaces and places we build and inhabit. Jane Rendell (2006) *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, London and New York: IB Taurus, pp. 1-12.
6. Smith (2006), pp. 3, 44-84.



Tramway Interior



***Glimmers in Limbo:  
Britannia Panopticon***

18 – 27 October 2007

113 – 117 Trongate, Glasgow  
G1 5HD

Four interventions – ***Pianola Karaoke, Façade Fruitmachine, Shoebox Archive*** and ***Real Estate?*** – interleaved layers of the Britannia Panopticon building's histories with its present fragile existence, and uncertain future, in Glasgow's regenerating Merchant City district.

***Pianola Karaoke***

Eleven participants each chose the song they would like to sing in the dilapidated music hall, inspired by their personal responses to the building – its location, its histories and its present condition. Specially commissioned piano scores, converted into perforated paper rolls for the Britannia Panopticon's pianola, accompanied the participants' live performance of the songs on the evening of 18 October 2007. Throughout the following week, recorded versions with scrolling projections of their lyrics played in the building, which was open to the general public.

***Façade Fruitmachine***

A looped video sequence was projected onto the windows of the building's second floor. Merging past and present, its animated images made reference to signage that had appeared on the façade from the past 150 years of the building's existence and its current role as an amusement

arcade. Letters revolved like symbols on a coin-operated fruitmachine, sometimes spelling out words that hinted at the building's previous functions as music hall, tailors' workshop, waxworks and cinema.

***Shoebox Archive***

The intervention focused on 600 shoeboxes installed in the auditorium, some holding artefacts found in the building. Visitors were invited to leave something of their own in the remaining empty boxes. *Shoebox Archive* was intended as an interactive alternative to the existing permanent exhibit of artefacts, which are mounted behind glass or arranged in display cases.

***Real Estate?***

Photographic transparencies of details of the building's inaccessible interior, mounted on translucent acrylic, were hung in the shopfront window of the amusement arcade. Echoing the displays in estate agents' windows, the intervention was intended to invite spectators to consider the role of the Britannia Panopticon building in the regenerating Merchant City area.



Shoebbox Archive  
Britannia Panopticon  
October 2007

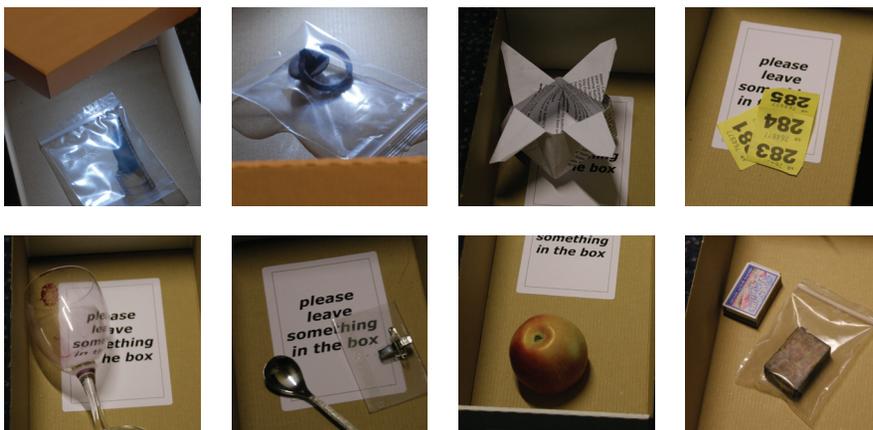


Pianola Karaoke  
October 2007  
Singers: (clockwise  
from top-left)  
John Cavanagh  
Hanna Tuulikki  
Ross Sinclair  
Ella Finer  
Judith Bowers



Façade Fruitmachine  
October 2007





Shoebbox Archive  
October 2007



Real Estate?  
October 2007





Pianola Karaoke  
October 2007

**Pianola Karaoke and Other Attractions: Performing Heterotopias in a Ruined Music Hall<sup>1</sup>**

Minty Donald

Concealed behind a crumbling façade, above a contemporary amusement arcade, in a building that sits on the cusp between Glasgow’s regenerating Merchant City district and its deprived East End, lie the decaying remains of one of the UK’s oldest surviving music halls. Established in 1859 as the Britannia Music Hall, the building now combines two of its previous titles to be known as the Britannia Panopticon.<sup>2</sup> Amid the ruins of this place of popular entertainment, a group of volunteers operating as the Board and Friends of the Britannia Panopticon Trust continue to mount an erratic and idiosyncratic programme of performances, tours and exhibitions in the limited space which remains publicly accessible. This programme includes their own regular amateur music hall re-enactments, alongside a semi-permanent display of memorabilia, artefacts found in the building and assorted bric-a-brac. The Trust’s presence is sanctioned by the building’s owners, the Mitchell family, who operate an amusement arcade on its ground floor. Despite the building’s official status as ‘of special historic interest’ (as designated by Historic Scotland, 2008)<sup>3</sup> and its presence on Scotland’s Buildings at Risk Register,<sup>4</sup> no secured funding for its conservation and maintenance, or coherent plans for its future, currently exist.

Read in this context, the Britannia Panopticon building exemplifies ‘in-between-ness’: between regeneration and decline, between past, present and future, between conservation and decay, between ‘living’ building and static monument, between material culture and cultural memory, between public and private.

It might also be considered as what Michel Foucault – in his much debated but highly influential text, ‘Of Other Spaces’,<sup>5</sup> termed a ‘heterotopia’. A site which ‘is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’<sup>6</sup> and which brings about ‘a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of

the spaces in which we live’.<sup>7</sup> In a heterotopic site, conflicting ideologies and utopian visions coexist – never to be resolved nor to offer actual liberation from predominant power relations – but as an incitement to question and reflect on the complex interplays of agency and ownership enacted in the environments we inhabit. As in the Britannia Panopticon building, where the Trust volunteers present their idealised version of music hall nostalgia above a gambling hall frequented by some of Glasgow’s most underprivileged residents, and curate a programme featuring experimental music and art inspired by the building’s decaying interior alongside screenings of Laurel and Hardy movies.<sup>8</sup>

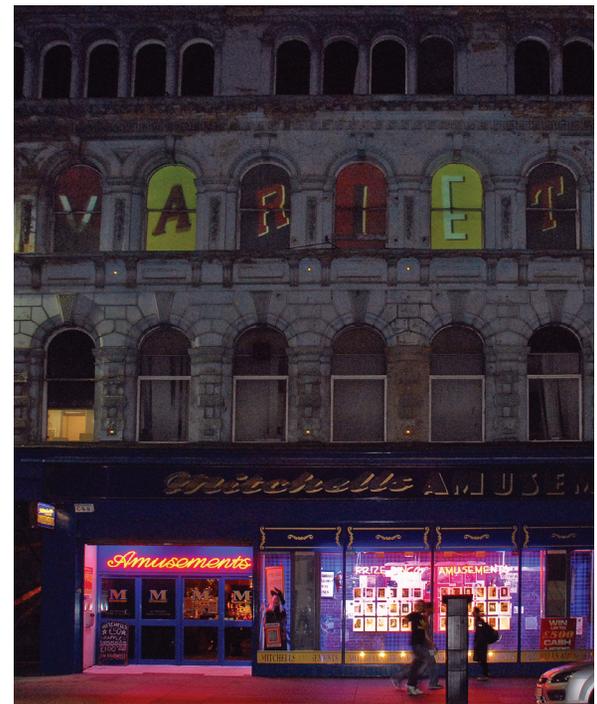
In this short essay, I will describe and comment on the context, realisation and reception of a suite of site-responsive artworks – or interventions – which I made at the Britannia Panopticon building between 18 and 27 October 2007. Using sound, projected imagery and performance, the interventions were intended to explore the *productive* in-between-ness of the site – its potential to resist drives to fix or determine readings and uses of the built environment. They were intended to invigorate the site, reinforcing and promoting its heterotopic qualities – its potential to allow us to entertain multiple, unresolved experiences and interpretations of our pasts and presents, and, perhaps, to imagine possible futures.

**The Artworks**

I made four pieces of work in the building: *Pianola Karaoke*, *Shoebbox Archive*, *Façade Fruitmachine* and *Real Estate?* The four artworks, which took place simultaneously, varied significantly both in form and in the media employed. My intention was to mirror and emphasise the multivalency of the site by delivering what one visitor favourably described as ‘a hotch potch of entertainments to diverse audiences’.<sup>9</sup>

**Pianola Karaoke**

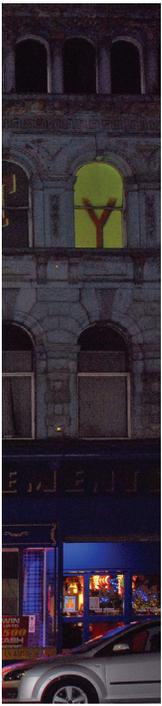
For *Pianola Karaoke* I invited eleven people to choose the songs which, inspired by their personal responses to the building, they would most like



Façade Fruitmachine  
October 2007

Pianola Karaoke  
October 2007





to sing in the old music hall. Specially commissioned accompaniments were converted into paper rolls for the Britannia Panopticon's pianola, and the songs were performed live, by the song-choosers, on the evening of 18 October. Recorded versions, accompanied by projections of scrolling lyrics, played on-site throughout the following week. Song choices ranged from Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights* to the traditional ballad *Unfortunate Rake*. The reasons the singers gave for their choices – their responses to the context of the crumbling music hall, with its eccentric assortment of artefacts and occupants – were equally varied. They reinforced the site's definition as a space which connects with and reflects on other spaces, which both contains and points to a multiplicity of other sites, and which is open to numerous, competing interpretations. For instance, Janis F. Murray, choir mistress of The Parsonage Choir (who sang the song), was surprised by the overwhelming sense of sadness she felt on entering the Britannia Panopticon. She chose the Marianne Faithfull/Rolling Stones' song *As Tears Go By*, which made her think about 'being old and disenfranchised [...] being displaced because of age'. In contrast, Ella Finer chose The Velvet Underground song *After Hours* because, she said, 'it celebrates the enclosed and dark nature of the space rather than highlighting it as a ghostly or sad place'. Aileen Campbell's choice, *Mama's Opry*, written by country singer Iris Dement, suggested the site's ability to evoke multiple overlapping spatial and temporal frames. The song recalls its writer's memory of her mother singing at home and her sense of how this imaginatively transformed the domestic space of their house into that of a public performance arena – The Grand Old Opry. Ross Sinclair chose *Wan Light*, written by Glasgow post-punk band Orange Juice. He said, of his choice:

The words seemed to suggest the idea of the music hall being this other place. The first line [of the song] is 'There is a place which no-one has seen where it's still possible to dream' [...] It's about how to make this space that could be another kind of space – even for a moment.

While the variety of the singers' responses to the building and the range

of songs chosen supported the site's heterotopic characteristics, the evening of live performance was, perhaps, less effective in promoting its multivalency. On one level, the performance was an overwhelming success. There was a capacity audience<sup>10</sup> whose responses were almost exclusively complimentary. Invited to comment on the event, audience members used words such as: 'life-affirming', 'sociable', 'memorable', 'fabulous', 'informal' and 'intimate'. Singers, too, were unconditionally positive. Stevie Jackson made a representative observation: 'People reached out to it and were entertained and fulfilled by it, you could totally feel it'. The event appeared to induce a sense of shared experience amongst audience and performers – a warm, supportive atmosphere that was described as 'uplifting' and 'moving'.

Did, however, this perceived moment of unity, of shared celebration and sentiment among what was, predominantly, a white, middle-class and 'arty' contingent function to erase difference, ignoring exclusions and opposing voices, rather than promoting the juxtaposition of alternative readings and experiences of the site? Taken in isolation, the live event could be read as failing to engender the productive disjunctures characterised by Foucault's notion of heterotopia: a site 'in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted'.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, considered as one element in a suite of interventions – and an element that was transitory, fleeting – it could be argued that the momentary semblance of unity it induced reflected back on the site, revealing itself as a utopian illusion and highlighting the messy realities of the building. Departing visitors may have been heard to comment 'I think we'll always remember this as a great Glasgow night', but they did so as they walked past the punters in the amusement arcade, past discarded syringes at the side-lane exit and past the East End's own crowded karaoke bars.

### *Shoebox Archive*

In a second intervention, I installed 600 shoeboxes in the auditorium of the music hall. The boxes referred to one of



the building's previous roles as a shoe warehouse, and were inspired by the recollection – quite possibly a 'false' memory – of my first visit to the space, and the piles of boxes I 'remember' filling the stalls area. In 150 of the shoeboxes I placed one of the many artefacts that have been excavated from under the floorboards of the Britannia Panopticon by Trust volunteers. This everyday detritus from the 1860s–1930s – ticket stubs and spent matches, a whelk shell and a baby's dummy – lay discarded for decades. Now reclaimed, the status of the detritus oscillates between value and worthlessness, between repository for cultural memory and load of old rubbish. Visitors were encouraged to interact with the boxes – to rummage through them, discovering what they contained and connecting with the objects in an intimate, personal, tactile and imaginative way – as a counterpoint to the labelled artefacts on display under glass in the Britannia Panopticon's permanent exhibition. As one visitor observed of the experience: 'It's like finding the lost items yourself'.

In the remaining 450 empty boxes, labels fixed to their bases invited visitors to 'please leave something in the box'. Over the duration of the intervention, more than 300 items were left in these boxes by visitors. Some could be read as setting up a correspondence with the 'historical' objects – for example, a set of headphones for an MP3 player was left beside a programme for the music hall. Others hinted at more freely associative responses from their donors – a ticket from the national museum in Istanbul and a tiny architectural scale model of a human figure were among the items left. Others still seemed simply to be examples of the mundane junk that we carry around in our pockets – loose change, till receipts, paper clips.

Overall, the accumulated artefacts, together with visitors' comments on the installation, suggested that it had brought about what Nigel Thrift describes as an extension of 'the imagination into matter' in his writing on 'the new materiality'.<sup>12</sup> The intervention appears to have encouraged visitors to engage with the objects as carriers of interwoven, yet irreconcilable cultural memories, to make imaginative associations and

connections. And, perhaps, to begin to comprehend the world as, in Thrift's words: 'a heap of highly significant fragments [...] contingent and complex, a space for opportunities and events'.<sup>13</sup> One visitor remarked: 'It reminded me that every person who visits leaves something behind, takes away or experiences something different', while art historian Vanda Louise Pollock wrote of the piece:

Given that the layered history of the building is still present in the wooden beams and projection room, the installation, for me, disturbed the way in which we try to 'read', understand and pigeon-hole chronologically. [...] It raised questions about such sites and whether we do not actually do them a disservice through period restoration, through display boxes, through metanarratives that tell some stories and silence others. For me, it highlighted the value of disruption, of discovery, of lessening narration in favour of imagination, of constructing our own stories about the place, of fiction but a very living fiction. I liked the not-knowingness of it all, but that not-knowingness coming from something that was very real. I don't think that the power of the fragment should be underestimated.

When the installation was dismantled, the historical objects were returned to the care of the Britannia Panopticon Trust, while the donated items were secreted around the building, creating a new layer of 'rubbish'.

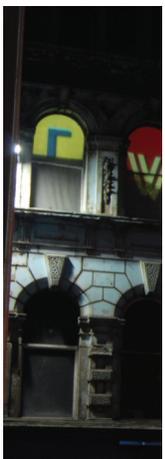
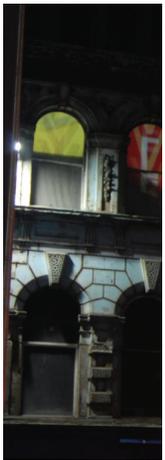
While *Shoobox Archive* and *Pianola Karaoke* focused on the interior fabric and relations within the building, the remaining two interventions interacted with the exterior. They sought to engage with audiences beyond those who chose to enter the space, and to relate the building to its ever-changing urban context.

#### *Façade Fruitmachine*

In *Façade Fruitmachine* an animated sequence was projected in the windows of the inaccessible second floor of the building, making reference to signage that had appeared on the façade during the past 150 years of its existence, and to its current identity as an amusement arcade. Letters spun like the drums of a



Shoobox Archive  
October 2007



coin-operated fruitmachine, sometimes, momentarily, resolving into words that pointed to the building's former roles as music hall, tailors' warehouse and cinema. (Among others, the words Britannia, Panopticon and the local nickname for the music hall, 'Pots and Pans', were all spelt out.) The work was intended to offer fleeting traces of the building's multiple, fluid identities – past and present – the restless cyclical movement of the letters suggesting its perpetual in-between-ness. By animating the normally dark and empty upper floors of the building, I hoped to encourage spectators to speculate on its uses and the events it might have witnessed, to teasingly invite them to imagine a space from which they were excluded.

To a considerable extent, the audience for this intervention did not overlap with that which experienced *Pianola Karaoke* and *Shoebox Archive*. Many of the people who came to the opening event, or who visited the exhibition during the following week, did not notice the exterior projection. It was, of course, visible only after dusk and was also only legible from the other side of the street. Those who did see it commented on how the work had altered their readings of the building. As one observer put it:

The light work on the exterior of the building [...] made me look up and therefore look at more than the street level. It forced me to have a look at the building as a built object that had a role in the cityscape beyond – or maybe before – its commercial, entertainment and 'heritage' one. Another viewer focused on the work's location on the façade, or surface, of the building, seeing this as a site of both limitation and possibility – qualities inherent in fruitmachines and the practice of gambling. For this commentator, the play of colourful letters skimming the building's exterior presented an uncomfortable tension with the reality of the habitual arcade-users – heterotopia, in this case, encompassing both dystopia and utopia. The most concentrated audience for the intervention, however, and one on whose conversations it was easy for me to eavesdrop inconspicuously, was provided by the waiting queues at the bus stop opposite the Britannia Panopticon building. Remarks overheard at the bus stop revealed that a relatively

small number of spectators linked the animation's rotating letters with the building's function as an amusement arcade, and that an even smaller group – who clearly had prior knowledge of the site – recognised some of the building's former titles in the animation. The majority of viewers appeared unaware of the animation's relationship to the site's commercial, heritage and entertainment identities. Many of the comments and much speculation about the work was concerned with its purpose – leading some spectators to discuss, as I had hoped, what was housed within the ostensibly empty upper floors of the building. Initial responses tended to assume that the animation was some kind of advertisement; but then, when the spinning letters settled into a seemingly meaningless string of words – or random letters – this assumption appeared to be forgotten, with several spectators entering into a game of 'find the hidden word', and some even reluctant to leave it behind when their buses arrived. This willingness to enter into a playful engagement with the piece – to seemingly abandon assumptions that it must have a purpose, probably a commercial one – suggest that it had succeeded in disrupting, albeit momentarily, the dominant function of the city centre shopping street. In many ways, the general failure of spectators to recognise the relationship between the projected words and the building's histories functioned to open up the site's multiple possibilities more effectively than an exercise in naming, labelling and categorising might have done. Instead, spectators entered into a performance with the site, participating in a word game with no discernible rules, played out on the city street.

### *Real Estate?*

In the final piece, *Real Estate?*, photographs of details of the building's interior – many of inaccessible, decaying corners – were mounted in the shop front window of the amusement arcade, in a mimicry of estate agents' window displays. The photographs themselves were fragmentary images, captured at disorienting angles and captioned with text lifted from house vendors' schedules. They were installed to form a permeable layer through which the two existing window displays – the

Façade Fruitmachine  
October 2007



Britannia Panopticon Trust's music hall memorabilia and Mitchell's Amusement Arcade's neon advertising signage – could be glimpsed. The intervention was intended to suggest the tangle of overlapping interests and investments bound up in the site as it sits between restoration and ruin, at a point where the slick new patina of regenerating Glasgow rubs against the impoverishment of the post-industrial city.

### Concluding Thoughts

Based on observation of visitors and participants, and comments collected through questionnaires and structured discussions, the work appears to have been successful in encouraging visitors from diverse backgrounds to engage with, and appreciate, the building as a site of overlapping, yet incompatible, narratives. While a small minority of visitors expressed a wish to see the site, as they put it, 'returned to its former glory', the majority of comments celebrated its lack of resolution and regulation – precisely its in-between-ness. Typical responses included:

[the artworks] made me think whether we should restore buildings – I feel so much power and feeling would be lost by restoring this wonderful space,

and

the interventions set up a lens through which we can see that this is an impossible space to capture and restore. Its quintessence is irregularity.

The project appeared to identify a desire, even a need, to experience sites which encompass what Daniel Defert, writing about Foucault's heterotopias, describes as 'ruptures in ordinary life, imaginary realms, polyphonic representations'.<sup>14</sup>

Heterotopias do not promise solutions. They can incorporate, even enact, utopian visions – as unattainable aspirations that reflect back on untidy, uncomfortable, realities – but as Peter Johnson states in his reflections on Foucault's heterotopias, their role is in, 'illuminating a passage for our imagination'.<sup>15</sup> Town planners, conservationists and city officials may be obliged to find an answer to the question: 'what will we do with this crumbling, unregulated, unsustainable

building?' But performative practices, fluid and ephemeral, have the potential to invite the continual, restless, rewriting of a site's possibilities – to provide, in the words of Orange Juice, 'a place [...] where it's still possible to dream'.

#### Notes:

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented as part of a paper at the Space/Performativity symposium at the University for the Creative Arts, Canterbury, 30 October 2008.
2. The Panopticon was the name given to the building by A. E. Pickard who, on acquiring it in 1906, extended its function from music hall into an entertainment complex that featured a wider range of attractions, such as fairground gaming machines, 'freak' shows and a menagerie. Pickard also owned the adjoining building which housed a waxworks.
3. <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/> [October 2008].
4. <http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/BAR/> [October 2008].
5. Michel Foucault (1986) 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16.1.
6. Foucault (1986), p. 25.
7. Foucault (1986), p. 24.
8. Stan Laurel allegedly made his debut at the Britannia Music Hall and the venue is regularly used for film showings by the local branch of the Laurel and Hardy Appreciation Society.
9. All previously unpublished citations are taken from questionnaires, comments recorded during structured discussions held on-site or written responses from visitors to *Glimmers in Limbo: Britannia Panopticon*.
10. The venue is licensed for up to 140 audience members at a non-seated event. An unofficial head count suggested that this may have had been exceeded on the opening night.
11. Foucault (1986), p. 24.
12. Nigel Thrift (2004) *Performance and Performativity: A Geography of Unknown Lands, A Companion to Cultural Geography*, Malden MA, Oxford and Carlton Victoria: Blackwell, pp. 123-125.
13. Nigel Thrift (2008) *Non-Representational Theory: Space/Politics/Affect*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 125.
14. Daniel Defert (1997) 'Foucault, Space, and the Architects', *Politics/Poetics. Documenta X – The Book*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz Verlag, p. 275.
15. Peter Johnson (2006) 'Unravelling Foucault's "Different Spaces"', *History of the Human Sciences*, 19.4, p. 87.

Real Estate?  
October 2007





**113 -117 Trongate, Glasgow**  
*Property requiring modernisation.*

***glimmers in limbo***



**113 -117 Trongate, Glasgow**  
*Many original features. Fabulous potential.*

***glimmers in limbo***

Real Estate?  
 October 2007

***Glimmers in Limbo:  
Tramway***

15 February – 2 March 2008

25 Albert Drive, Glasgow,  
G41 2PE

Four site-responsive interventions throughout the ground floor of contemporary arts venue, Tramway, invited visitors to interact with the fabric, histories and everyday life of the building. As at the Britannia Panopticon, they were intended to encourage visitors to engage with the building's past, present – and future.

***Tramway 1***

An installation comprising of a full-scale photographic image of the reverse side of the large brick wall in Tramway's main performance space – built in 1988 for Peter Brook's inaugural production of the *Mahabharata* – projected onto its on-stage face. The accompanying sound mix, played through intercom headsets suspended in front of the wall, layered recordings of the whispered commands and conversations of theatre technicians working behind the scenes. The intervention was intended to prompt visitors to consider the 'private' and 'public' worlds of the theatre.



## ***Tramway 2***

Three steel trolleys, holding video projectors, were installed to run up and down the tramlines which remain in the floor of Tramway's large exhibition space as relics of its industrial past. Visitors were invited to push the trolleys. Their movement activated the projectors, showing footage of journeys across Glasgow filmed in summer 2006 and 2007 while driving along the routes of the city's nineteenth-century tram network. The video, projected onto the whitewashed brick wall of the gallery, played as the trolleys moved and froze when they stopped – allowing visitors to edit their own cut of the movies, soundtracked by the sonorous rumble of the trolleys' wheels.

## ***Entrance/Reception Area***

A miniature projection, showing time-lapse footage of performances in Tramway's main theatre space throughout 2006 and 2007, was superimposed onto a scale ground plan of the building inscribed on the concrete floor in the entrance/reception area of Tramway.

## ***Throughout the Ground Floor***

A network of coloured lines, based on a map of Glasgow's tramways between 1893 and 1896, was marked throughout the ground floor of the building. Each line was punctuated by landmarks lifted from the nineteenth-century map or nodes that pointed to contemporary features of the building. Visitors were encouraged to navigate Tramway following these routes.

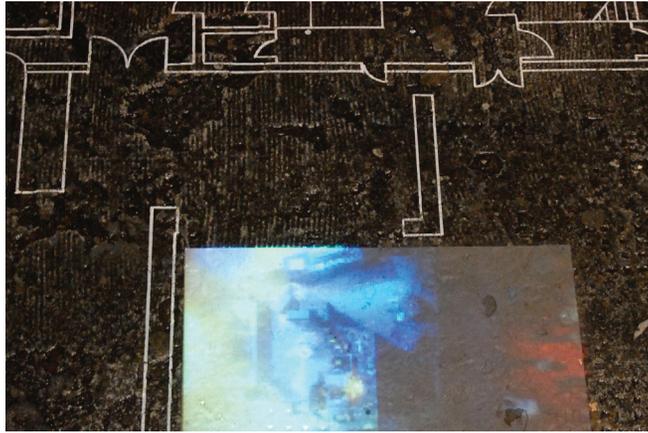
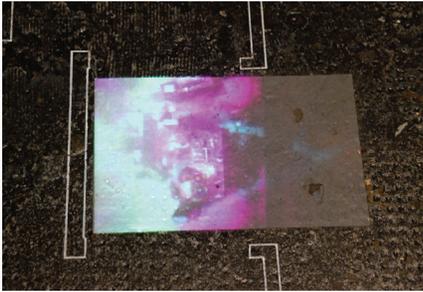




Tramway 1  
February 2008



Tramway 1  
February 2008

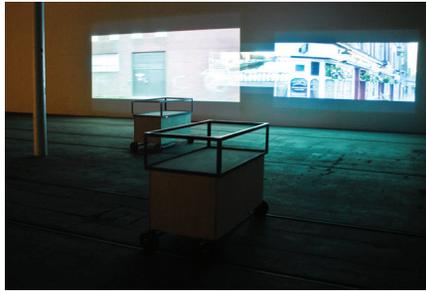


Entrance/Reception Area  
February—March 2008

Tramway 2  
February—March 2008



Tramway 2  
February—March 2008







Tramway 1  
February 2008

**(Tram) Lines: Across, Along, Between and Beyond**

Minty Donald

The tramlines that slice through Tramway’s cavernous exhibition space – persistent reminders of the building’s origins as a tram manufacturing and repair works – are among its most recognisable, and defining, features. These six pairs of straight, parallel lines, which run the length of the former tram shed, can be read as representative of a drive for efficiency in transport, motifs of nineteenth-century industrialisation. They stand for the rationalisation of travel – its evolution from an emphasis on the *process* of journeying to a focus on the well-organised and rapid movement of people and goods from A to B, by means of fixed routes and timetables.<sup>1</sup>

But the tramlines are also physical objects, not just icons of modern systematised transport. They are cast, solid-steel grooves set into a concrete surface, with bumps and indentations caused through heavy use over many years. They no longer run straight and true, but have warped through wear and tear. As such, they provide evidence of the graft and grind behind the nineteenth-century project of industrialisation and modernisation – its material reality. They remain as traces of the actions and gestures of the people who constructed and travelled along them. Today, the tramlines retain their performative quality, continuing to invoke physical movement, to invite the placement of a wheel in the metal ruts and suggest its trundling progress up and down the echoey hall.

They are lines that run through time. As the only remaining tram tracks in Glasgow (following the closure of the tram system in 1962) they act as triggers for memories of past journeys through the innumerable versions of Glasgow that have been erased or over-written in the city’s continual process of transformation. They inspire countless narratives: about changing landmarks on the former tram routes, roads and streets that no longer exist, and communities disrupted and dispersed by the city’s onward drive towards modernisation. They induce us to travel spatially and temporally,

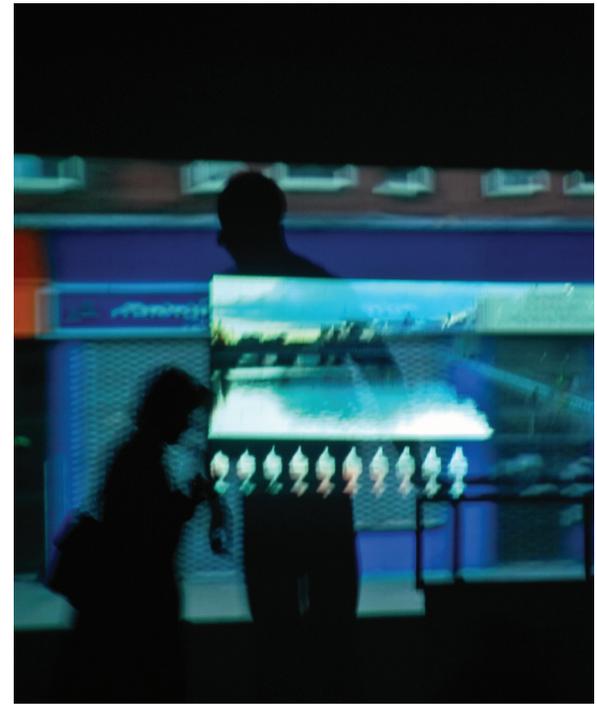
through our imaginations, beyond the confines of Tramway’s walls – inviting us to juxtapose the here-and-now of the contemporary building with the there-and-thens of its histories, and its wider cultural context.

The tramlines’ ability to span and dissolve boundaries is literal, as well as metaphorical. Designed to allow trams to enter the former work shed, the steel tramlines cross the threshold from Tramway’s internal space onto the street, blurring the line between interior and exterior. In doing so, they urge us to question our commonplace perceptions of the limits and parameters of the spaces and places we build and inhabit: as circumscribed by perimeter walls or delineated on plans and maps.

Musing, in this way, on the multiple possible interpretations of the tram tracks led me to a realisation that not just *tram*lines but a more comprehensive understanding of lines figured prominently in all four artworks which I made at Tramway, and that this might provide a fruitful linking theme for their discussion. Drawing on Tim Ingold’s book, *Lines: A Brief History*, a wide-ranging study which considers the line as permeating all aspects of the human condition, this essay will describe and reflect on the artworks. It will contemplate the significance of lines – as straight or meandering, as the shortest path between two points, as boundaries, as narratives, as temporal, as inscriptions, as ‘threads’ and ‘traces’<sup>2</sup> – in relation to the four works. Read as representative of a range of approaches towards space and place, the varied notions of linearity employed might, I hope, elucidate the role of the artworks in shaping and critiquing perceptions and conceptions of the built environment, urging us to view it as extensive and fluid, rather than circumscribed and fixed.

**Tramway 2**

Inspired by the tramlines that run up and down the concrete floor of Tramway’s large exhibition space, linearity was a prominent characteristic of the work that I made in the gallery now known as Tramway 2. In particular, the performative quality of the tram tracks, their potential to both invoke and



Tramway 2  
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facilitate movement or travel, acted as a stimulus for this piece.<sup>3</sup>

I designed three identical steel-framed trolleys, built to resemble (empty) museum cases, in reference to the building's previous role as Glasgow's Museum of Transport. The trolleys were intended to be pushed up and down the tram tracks by visitors to the gallery. Each trolley housed a video projector showing footage of a journey across Glasgow, filmed while driving along the routes of the former tram network, and projected onto the long whitewashed brick wall of the gallery space. The video was activated by the movement of the trolleys' wheels: playing when they were in motion and pausing when stationary.

Multiple meanings of the line were at play in both the making and reception of this work. The routes along which filming took place were derived from the lines marked on an 1893–96 map of Glasgow denoting the recently established tram network. I then transposed these lines onto a contemporary road map of the city, which was used to navigate a series of journeys driven along the remnants of the tram routes. As such, the continuous lines of the nineteenth-century map – abstracted representations of the physical tramways – evolved into a number of broken, disjointed excursions, disrupted where roads no longer existed or had been pedestrianised, or where one-way traffic systems prevented access. The master-narrative of history as a voyage of uninterrupted progress, prevalent in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought, was replaced by the fragmented, incomplete and overlapping narratives of late modernism.<sup>4</sup> An idealised vision of purposeful travel linking centres of population to places of work and recreation gave way to the messy reality of a journey of stops and starts, back-tracking and re-tracing, a journey where the destinations that had previously provided its *raison d'être* – the high streets, tenement housing and factories – were seldom still present, now replaced by brown-field sites, 'exclusive' apartments, motorway access roads and retail parks. Overlaying the contemporary city with the tracery of the nineteenth-century map brought fresh perspectives to my understanding of the way in which the contemporary

city of Glasgow has developed: through grand schemes and strategies – some abandoned or left incomplete – and through the small acts and tactics of pragmatism that intercut them.<sup>5</sup>

Judging by my observations and responses gathered, visitors' experience of the work in Tramway appeared to explore similar tensions: between prescribed master-narratives and their subversion or reclamation through individuals' engagement with them. Mirroring, perhaps, the experience of using public transport, where a journey follows a fixed route but is perceived differently depending on circumstances and personal predilections, visitors' interaction with the work was circumscribed, but also open to accidental occurrences and individual interpretation. Physically, visitors were limited to travelling up and down the parallel tram tracks. The filmed journeys were also predetermined, as recorded footage played in a loop. Within those limits, however, visitors were afforded certain freedoms. They could, and did, choose the speed at which they wished to push the trolleys – some walking at a measured pace while studying the moving images, others hurtling up and down the tracks as fast as possible. Visitors could also start and stop the movement of the trolleys at will, in turn causing the video image to move or freeze. But the footage was restricted to forward motion. It did not rewind if the trolleys were pulled backwards, continuing, instead, to show the onward journey. Choice, and accident, played a part too in the framing of the projected images, which overlapped and were disrupted by the shadows of bodies and trolleys passing one another on the parallel tracks. Perhaps most significant, however, given the work's aspiration to challenge ideas of the fixity of space and place, was the potential of the projected imagery to provoke reminiscences and induce visitors to recount stories relating to the locations depicted. The multiple, overlapping narratives generated by the images functioned as diversions from the linearity of the routes, allowing visitors to deviate, in their imaginations, from the spatial and temporal constraints of the pre-recorded journey and the fixed path of the steel tram tracks.



Tramway 2  
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The piece appeared to allow visitors to negotiate between notions of travel as a regulated means of moving efficiently from one point to another – epitomised by the straight, connecting line and described by Tim Ingold as 'destination-orientated transport'<sup>6</sup> – and the more open and meandering linearity of a journey undertaken as a worthwhile and life-affirming activity in its own right. While acknowledging their functional, rational origins, the tramlines now acted as guidelines for wandering, imaginative excursions through innumerable, unresolved images, stories and experiences of Glasgow – past, present and future.

The work in Tramway 2 also played with what Tim Ingold terms 'ghostly'<sup>7</sup> lines. Lines, that is, which do not exist physically but which operate in our consciousness and conventions, often as borders separating one designated area or type of behaviour from another. As one visitor remarked, in response to the work in Tramway 2:

There definitely seemed to be some fascinating play or give in the usual boundaries of control – the demarcation of access and ownership of space – in the sense that the works were granting participants new freedoms, which were not always recognised or acted upon instantly. For example, as people cautiously experimented with moving the trolleys before, often, eventually relaxing and literally running with the experience.<sup>8</sup>

### *Tramway 1*

The notion of imaginary lines – boundary lines in particular – and the implications of crossing them, was a significant feature of the work I made in Tramway 1, the space generally used as Tramway's main venue for live performance. The linearity at play here related to the demarcation of perceived territories, often seen as under the ownership or jurisdiction of identifiable groups, and of areas associated with specific conventions.

The installation in Tramway 1 comprised of a full-scale photographic image of the backstage side of the brick wall that sits at the rear of the performance space, projected onto its onstage face.

This wall was built in 1988 for Tramway's inaugural theatre performance of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* and, now known as the 'Brook wall', has remained as a permanent feature of the space. The startlingly life-like photographic projection revealed the electrical cables, power sockets and other backstage paraphernalia normally hidden from view. On stage, in front of the wall and projected image, hung four intercom headsets, of the kind used backstage for communication between technicians operating a show. Each headset played a sound track, created by overlaying the whispered conversations and commands of theatre technicians working behind the scenes, recorded during performances at Tramway over the previous year. The theatre's retractable seating bank, fully extended, faced onto the 'empty' stage.

The piece was intended to encourage visitors to explore and experience the conceptual, and institutional, boundary lines that lie at the heart of theatre and formalised performance – the lines between the 'theatrical' onstage world of the performer and the 'everyday' world of the audience, between onstage and offstage. As a venue for contemporary, experimental work, performances programmed in Tramway regularly confront this crucial characteristic of staged performance, blurring the boundary between everyday and theatrical, or questioning the established roles of spectator, actor-performer and theatre technician.<sup>9</sup> Unlike more traditional theatres, where clear distinctions between audience and performer; 'real' and 'make-believe'; front-of-house, onstage and backstage are maintained, Tramway has a reputation for challenging normative theatrical forms and practices. However, in Tramway, the line between onstage and offstage is solidly manifested in the architecture, concretised in the form of the Brook wall that frequently serves to frame performers and hide the 'backstage' area from audience view, investing Tramway 1 with the spatial conventions commonly associated with traditional nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western theatre.

Through the installation, visitors were invited to experience the tensions created by these conceptual, physical



Tramway 1  
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and institutional boundaries. Entering onto the 'stage' area, several visitors commented on their sense of crossing a line and their hesitation about trespassing into an area typically designated off-limits. As one visitor, describing their experience of entering the dimly lit theatre, put it:

You're kind of standing back going, right, should we actually walk in here or not? Is somebody going to come in and tell us off? [...] There are people sitting watching as if something's going to happen.

The interplay between spectating and performing that the work produced was noted by another visitor, who commented:

[It] made visitors participants, interacting with the work, but "on-stage" too.

Many visitors were initially deceived by the *trompe l'oeil* effect of the projected image. As such, they were encouraged to cross the line that separates theatrical from everyday, pretend from authentic. Approaching the wall, several were drawn to touch its rough surface, their tactile encounter breaking the illusion. Visitors were then moved to look behind the wall – realising, as they did so, that the image mirrored the concealed backstage workings of the theatre. In this, their curiosity appeared to lead them to cross another, institutional, boundary and to tentatively trespass into the space generally viewed as the territory of theatre technicians and stage managers – the private world behind the scenes. As one visitor commented:

[It's] astonishing – so life-like – the projection truly subverted the building fabric and made me look afresh at the space, requiring me to go backstage.

Through its invitation to navigate boundaries, the artwork appeared to instil in visitors an awareness of the spatial subdivisions that exist within most buildings, perhaps particularly evident in theatres and other institutions, and afford them an insight into some of the issues of access and ownership, power and control, embedded in such spaces.

#### *Throughout the Ground Floor*

The conception of linearity as divisive, as concerned with defining borders, was further explored in a third artwork,

which extended throughout the ground floor of Tramway. Like the work in the gallery space, Tramway 2, it drew on information relating to Glasgow's former tram network.

For this piece, I marked coloured lines, with the electrical tape customarily used by theatre workers to mark out rehearsal rooms, throughout the ground floor of the building. Each line was scaled up from a 1893–96 edition of the Glasgow City map and represented one of the tram routes that existed when Tramway was built. Visitors were encouraged to use these maps to navigate their way through the building.

There was, of course, no logical or formal fit between the map of the citywide nineteenth-century tram route and the ground plan of Tramway today. The coloured lines disappeared into walls, behind pillars or beneath stairways. They stopped abruptly, with no discernable destinations, or split, only to lead back on themselves. The superimposition of this alternative mapping system onto the rectilinear floor plan of Tramway – flowing lines seemingly extending beyond the walls of Tramway, aimless and incomprehensible when displaced from their original context – was intended to unsettle perceptions of the architecture as rational and functional, and to critique the conventions of maps and plans commonly used in architectural representation. I hoped it would encourage visitors to question assumptions about the physical parameters of the built environment – the lines we draw to enclose and define the spaces and places we create and inhabit.

I was also hopeful that the alternative mapping system would grant visitors the licence to move through the building, disrupting the cultural codes and ignoring the conventional modes of behaviour that the site prompts – that it would allow them the freedom to access designated non-public areas and to act in unpredictable ways. While the system of coloured lines did not lead visitors to break strongly-embedded cultural codes (for instance, no one became so intent on following the floor markings that they stumbled into the 'wrong' toilet) it did seem to encourage them to venture

Tramway 1  
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beyond their routine interactions with the building. As one visitor commented:

I loved exploring the building [...] the way the lines led you places you might not normally go.

While another remarked:

What I liked about [the lines] was [...] the way they made a colourful intervention in this quite self-consciously cool space. They seemed playful and renegade and like they didn't care what the rules of the Tramway were.

Reactions from one sector of Tramway's staff to the installation of the lines in private areas were less favourable. Despite the work's sanctioning by management and by representatives from all of Tramway's departments, the building's theatre technicians conducted an ongoing, unofficial campaign to stop the coloured lines passing through 'their' area. Ultimately, this resulted in their barricading themselves into a corner of the backstage space, removing the coloured line that crossed the barricade and fixing to it a sign that read, 'no trams here'. While this encounter was humorous, it did expose – or rather confirm – the extent to which institutional power relations can be played out through claims on physical territory, how issues of access and ownership are enacted in terms of material space.

Each of the routes, or coloured lines, was punctuated by a number of 'landmarks': selected spots signposted by fragments of maps and plans placed on the floor. Some landmarks were historical, transposed from the late nineteenth-century map of Glasgow – the Victorian cityscape telescoped to fit within Tramway's walls. So, standing in Tramway's café, visitors could learn that they were at the site of Crossmyloof Bakery, or that upstage of the seating bank in the main auditorium lay the Industrial School's Burial Ground. Other landmarks rooted the visitor in the here-and-now, pointing to features of the current building. The landmarks invoked multiple temporalities: unanchored, imaginative destinations that invited visitors to wander in their minds beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the building, overlaying their lived experience of Tramway today with their own interpretations of the changing character of Glasgow.

### Entrance/Reception Area

The conventions of plan-drawing and mapping, and, in particular, their linear abstraction of actual, lived space, figured in the fourth artwork that I made at Tramway. Located at the entrance to the building, it consisted of a scale plan of Tramway's ground level, inscribed in white paint directly onto the concrete surface of the floor. A miniature video loop, showing time-lapse footage of performances recorded in Tramway 1 throughout the previous two seasons and filmed from a bird's-eye perspective, was projected onto the plan.

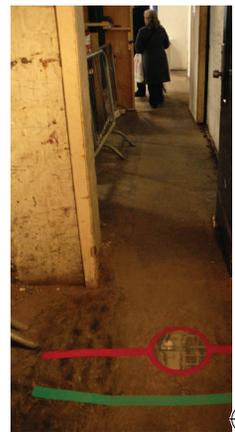
Hand-drawn onto the uneven surface of the concrete floor, the replica plan of Tramway's ground level was intended as a critique of the abstract, de-materialised representations of the built environment commonly found in architectural drawings – particularly evident since computer programmes replaced traditional draughtsmanship. This condition is described by Ingold as 'linearisation':

Fully linearised, the line is no longer the trace of a gesture but a chain of point-to-point connections. In these connections there is neither life nor movement.<sup>10</sup>

Although following the conventions of plan-drawing – representing the building from a bird's-eye, or rather architect's-eye, point of view, as two-dimensional and formalised – the white lines were slightly irregular, drawing attention both to their hand-crafted qualities and to the texture of the surface on which they were marked.

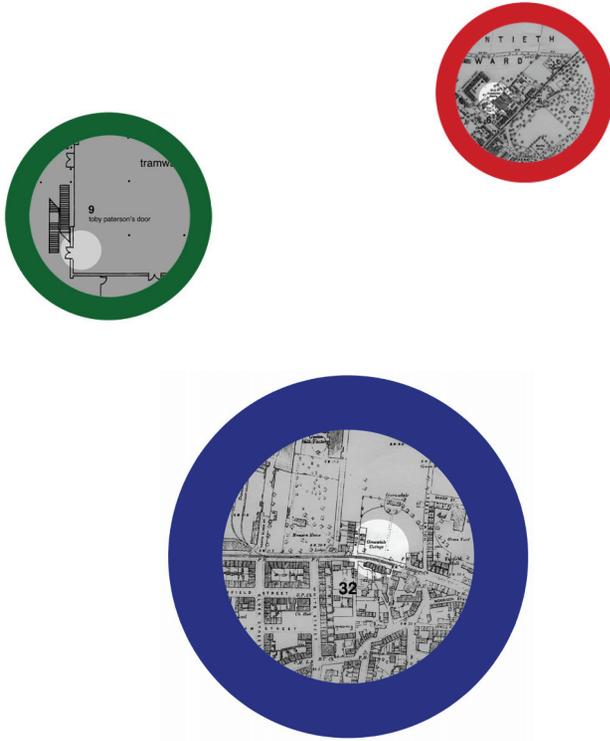
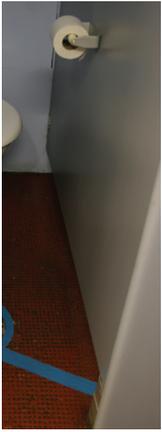
As one observer's remarks suggest, the installation appeared to encourage visitors to engage actively with relationships between abstracted, conventional depictions of the built environment, and its material reality:

Entering the building, I immediately loved the tidy fastidiousness of the [...] architectural drawing of the Tramway's layout and I loved that this was almost miss-able if you weren't looking, like a doormat. [...] Immediately we were invited into several different spatial relations with the building. It was miniaturised by its drawing, but we were miniaturised too, invited to stoop down to feel the floor and to examine the morphing images at close range.

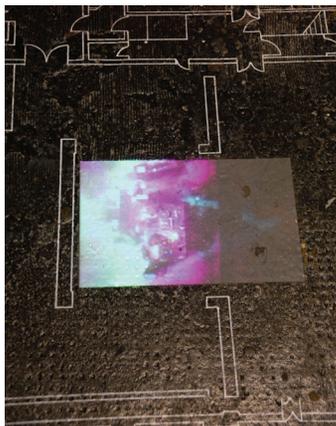


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February 2008





Throughout the Ground Floor  
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Entrance/Reception Area  
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## Concluding Thoughts

The notions of linearity explored in the artworks, and in this essay, suggest competing, yet intertwined, approaches towards the built environment, space and place. Conceptions of the line as a border or boundary imply an understanding of space and place as circumscribed and fixed. The line as a connector of pre-determined points proposes an interpretation of the built environment as rational, formalised and controlled. Yet, linearity also invokes ideas of movement and extension – of trajectories beyond, across and between delineated territories. It may be defined, in abstract geometry, as a de-materialised set of co-ordinates, but it can also be the physical trace of a human action. The line can be open-ended, rather than enclosed: entangled and circuitous, rather than precise and directional. It can be, as Ingold concludes, a 'loose end'.<sup>11</sup> As such, it offers multiple possibilities, inviting us to speculate about where it might take us.

### Notes:

1. Tim Ingold (2007) *Lines: A Brief History*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 72-103.
2. Ingold (2007), pp. 39-52.
3. Perhaps surprisingly, given the dominance of the tramlines in the space, they have only been used twice in performances or exhibitions as tracks for wheeled vehicles: in Brith Gof's *Goddodin*, 1988 and Welfare State International's *Lantern Arcade*, 1993.
4. Ingold claims: 'if the straight line was an icon of modernity, then the fragmented line seems to be emerging as an equally powerful icon of postmodernity'. Ingold (2007), p. 167.
5. For example, 1960s plans for a major motorway access network, which included the demolition of Victorian mansions at Glasgow's Charing Cross, were never completed, leaving half of the nineteenth-century cross intact and a redundant, disconnected section of elevated road – a fly-over to nowhere – on which was built, many years later, an elevated office block.
6. Ingold (2007), p. 101.
7. Ingold (2007), p. 49.
8. All previously unpublished citations are taken from recorded interviews with, or written responses from, visitors to *Glimmers in Limbo: Tramway*.
9. For example, Tramway-commissioned shows by Quarantine (*Butterfly*, 2004 and *Old People, Children and Animals*, 2008) both played with the conventions of audience/performer relationships, as did Simon Vincenzi's *The Infinite Pleasures of the Great Unknown*, 2008.
10. Ingold (2007), p. 151.
11. Ingold (2007), p.170.

## Glimmers and Limbo: Following the 'Path of Reverie'<sup>2</sup> and Locating the Ghosts of the Everyday

Karen Lury

This essay<sup>2</sup> is about the qualities of art orchestrated, remembered and performed in different spaces and places, and about the way in which audiences respond or participate enthusiastically, ethically and imaginatively with this kind of site-orientated art. Specifically, however, it is a consideration of Minty Donald's work, a series of site-responsive interventions – grouped together as *Glimmers in Limbo* – undertaken during Donald's AHRC-funded fellowship at the Glasgow School of Art.

I will be upfront in saying that Minty is one of my closest friends, and that I had the privilege to discuss with her the origins and development of her project. Strangely then, for someone who is not Glaswegian, this makes me an 'insider' on a strongly Glasgow-oriented project. I should also acknowledge that, as a film and television studies teacher, I am not really that familiar (as an academic or as an 'ordinary punter') with the kind of site-related artwork that Donald and others produce. It also means that I had – as a participant-spectator – a rather odd position in relation to the work. Unlike the majority of film and television texts which I study and then teach and write about, I didn't expect or initially intend to write or speak formally about Donald's work. This meant, ironically, that at the events themselves I didn't really pay what I would call 'proper critical attention'; first and foremost, I wanted the events to go well for Minty; I was also distracted by personal matters (my kids running riot in Tramway, my husband turning up too late for *Pianola Karaoke*), and I was otherwise selfconscious about meeting people I hadn't seen for years. In other words, I was distracted by everyday, trivial concerns. Necessarily – and strategically – I have tried to employ this 'distracted attention' as a way in to the different artworks and to explore how effectively they articulate a relation between the contingent (the coincidence, the accident, the almost missed moment), personal memory and the everyday, and how the play between these different relations orchestrates a subversive refusal of History with a capital 'H' and the industry of heritage. I will focus my discussion on the two larger installations/events in *Glimmers in Limbo* and comment on others in passing.

I shall begin by thinking about the 'trolley-projectors' in Tramway 2. This huge hall was left mostly unlit and on each set of the remaining tramlines Donald had positioned a (quite heavy) trolley which when pushed manually along projected a series of images (a piece of looped video) onto the bare walls. Each of the films had been made by retracing the now extinct tram routes

that once covered the city; the video footage was therefore of contemporary Glasgow, presented in vivid, almost super-saturated colour. As a participant-observer I came into a hall that was dark, warm and filled with the rumbling sound of the trolleys as they were pushed (often with great enthusiasm) up and down. It was beautiful, and it was fun, as if we were engaging with a slow fairground 'ghost train' as the video projections overlapped and people's shadows deliberately or inadvertently blocked out the light from the projectors.

Responses I heard that opening night were simple, pleased: 'That's!', or 'Isn't it?' or 'I've been' or 'Where?' or 'Is he waving?' People pulled the trolleys back and forth, sometimes trying to recapture a missed contingency – this turned out to be an impossibility, since like the ongoing tram it ghosted, the video images simply moved on, whichever direction the trolley was pushed or pulled.

A polychronic experience is performed here: there are three journeys which overlap: the original, now extinct, tram route; Donald's contemporary retracing of those routes; and the push-me-pull-you tension between the 'up and down' of the trolleys animating the video loop projected onto the wall. In some senses the projection might be interpreted as a simple and engaging record of a journey through Glasgow, an everyday encounter replayed attractively, interactively in a gallery context. However, despite the fact that it recalls the everyday, there is something not quite right about it – this 'wrongness' is because it conjures up a journey that takes us on a different (a new or forgotten) route through a familiar place. It is therefore both familiar and strange, or uncanny; I kept thinking about a wonderful scene from the British horror film *Dead of Night* (1945). In one sequence from the film a man dreams that his familiar bus conductor has become the driver of a glass-plated hearse (in retrospect I realise this odd connection between trolley and hearse was prompted by the fact that whilst the trolleys were designed to look like museum cases they also recall the particular kind of horse-drawn hearse featured in that film). A particularly chilling moment in the film is when the conductor/undertaker calls out to the man, something that he says every day, but which, in this new context becomes something else entirely: 'Room for one more inside, sir'.

Despite the lurking sense of unease I felt, most people were happy to immerse themselves in these virtual journeys, relieved perhaps of the real tinge of anxiety of missing their 'stop'. It wasn't hard, it wasn't intimidating, it seemed robust, and in the end it didn't matter where you looked or how you looked. It was accessible; and could, and probably was, used (ironically perhaps) as if it were a kind of

heritage exhibit taking us through 'a journey into Glasgow's past'. However, precisely because on one level it was so open, the installation also allowed for the way in which such journeys – because they are not usually threatening but rather ordinary and routine – allow for an indulgence in 'bored daydreaming' or reverie in which loose connections, memories and concerns flicker and arrest you.

For instance, unsurprisingly, given my occupation, the experience of the projections recalled for me the sensation of watching early film, or of later amateur travelogues, cityscapes in which the 'contingent' – the accidental record of the trivial now made history – is captured by the camera. More particularly, the intense colour of the images and their presence on a wall rather than a screen recalled the home movies that my family had made and replayed during my childhood, reminding me of the luminous intensity of Super-8 film and the noise of the projector substituting for the muteness of the images.

One Sunday I took my youngest daughter to a party in the Hidden Gardens at Tramway, and whilst dropping her off I discovered that the projections were still playing. This time when I entered the shed it was spookier, quieter and colder. There was a young family pushing the trolleys and dancing in front of the projection beams. I was a little preoccupied by some writing I was doing at the time, and I realised (with a small shudder) that the colour of the images and their projection in that shadowy environment now recalled another British film I had just seen again – *Peeping Tom* – Michael Powell's infamous 1960 film about a young man obsessed with capturing the moment of death on camera. In the film he murders a series of women via a sharpened leg on his tripod camera; this means that as he murders he is also able to film the women as they die. In two key sequences in the film, characters are trapped in the projector's beam as these films of death are replayed; these films, like Donald's images, are mute, and we hear only the sound of the projector.

This coincidence of images is (of course) a reflection of my own preoccupations, but it is also dependent on the experience of intense colour which characterises many of Powell's films (his better-known films include *Black Narcissus* [1947] and *The Red Shoes* [1948], made with Emeric Pressburger). However it also surfaced because *Peeping Tom* is about the effects of experimental practice, not only in relation to the young man's own cinematic experiments, but it also emerges that he was subject to his father's psychological 'experiments' as a child. Another connection is that *Peeping Tom*'s murderous experiments are, like Donald's work here, about the coincidence, or (in the film, fatal) conjuncture, of the organic

(the human body) with one of the pre-eminent 'machines' of modernity – the film camera. Site-responsive art like *Glimmers in Limbo* is also in itself an experiment (the research questions being of the order: what will the audience do, how will they change the nature of what is being done, how will it make them feel?)

Another similarity is that *Peeping Tom*, like Donald's work and other kinds of site-responsive art, involves or comments upon the power and nature of surveillance. In Donald's work this is expressed in questions such as: who or what can we see in the films, what can we hear, what are the audience doing?; and in the sense that the audience members individually or in groups become part of the performance and thus their positions as spectators or participants are interchangeable – they both watch and are watched. In that sense, if I have understood performance theorists such as Alan Read correctly, the work is necessarily ethical and political. The nature of responsive artworks is a 'responsibility' to the chosen site as well as to the 'others' who legitimately or illegitimately occupy that space. Donald acknowledges this by making surveillance overtly part of the other events she created for Tramway at the same time, such as a miniature animation in the foyer of productions that had taken place in the recent past (seen from the 'bird's-eye' perspective of the technicians' gallery), and in Tramway 1 the recorded sounds of the 'backstage directions' made audible via headphones hanging down suggestively in front of her *trompe l'oeil* projection of the 'other side' of the famous Peter Brook wall. Donald's intervention was therefore not just 'outside in' (let's get people in here and see what they do) but 'inside out' (what do the people who work here actually do, say and see?) Thus both the proper and improper business of these 'others', insiders made outsiders and outsiders taken in, is made meaningful by their co-occupation of the space: their fidgets, running feet, squeals, whispers, shouts, directions and giggles are co-opted, allowed and revealed. The playful but sometimes antagonistic relations Donald negotiated with the technicians and staff at the Tramway were, in the end, necessarily and appropriately, part of the artwork as performance.

It is here, then, that Donald's work demonstrates the possibilities of a different kind of theatrical or artistic event. As Read suggests, following Michel de Certeau, the sounds, shuffles and expiration of the 'reading' body or, in this instance, the audience must first be exposed or revealed to be made political.

This may not seem a very auspicious beginning to an ethical and political theatre but it is as useful a place to start as an untheorised and utopian 'participation' which conceals the real 'structures of belonging' that a suppressed

sneeze, a nervous cough, a premature departure are likely to expose. For all the audience's adherence to a convention of theatre, the cacophony that occurs within it is a poignant reminder that there is often little direct attention being paid to the very procedures the analysis of theatre has given so much thought to understanding.<sup>3</sup>

What Read is suggesting here has a particular relevance in terms of Donald's intervention in the discourse of 'public memory' or history as heritage. Tramway is not just 'any' space, and it is never, could never, be Brook's 'empty space'.<sup>4</sup> The 'cacophony' that Read alludes to is, in Donald's work, not just the voices and exhalations of the living but the sounds, smell and touch of the dead and gone. Have you noticed how Tramway smells? It doesn't smell like other places, there is too much concrete, too much damp and gritty dust and oil. The heat of the projections both from the trolleys and from the lights in Tramway 1 made this gritty smell quite tangible, despite the competing smells of booze, coffee and chips. It has become quite the thing in recent museum revamps or builds to make rooms smell a particular way, or to make the ambient temperature colder or warmer, yet here the smells were unruly, leaking out, combining with and overpowering one another. Of course, unlike many museums or permanent exhibition spaces, Tramway isn't a 'purpose-built' space; it has had so many purposes that it is literally redolent of its different uses and histories. Significantly, Donald's work amplifies the polyvocality of the building: she allows the building to speak and to 'surprise' us.

I now want to discuss the second major installation that Donald produced, which would seem perhaps to be very different from her approach at Tramway. At the Britannia Panopticon – once a waxwork museum, a music hall, a shoe warehouse and now, in part, an amusement arcade – Donald staged *Pianola Karaoke*, for which she asked ten different individuals and one choir (some professional musicians, some not) to choose a song to sing accompanied by a pianola (a keyboard manipulated by pedals which uses a rotating paper roll to mark out the musical arrangement; a bellows sucks air through the holes in the paper and triggers the desired keys). The singers performed for one night only before a small audience. The room was shadowy and people initially milled about, uncertain whether or not they should take off their coats. Yet once the performance began it seemed easy to participate, to have 'a good time' – the audience joined in several times, becoming increasingly enthusiastic. From my comfortable position in the crowd I acted dimly like an *X-Factor* judge – the stand-out performance for me was Hanna Tuulikki with her cover of *Wuthering Heights*.

But now, of course, I can't really remember it; I can't hear it again. I can remember Hanna's gestures, the momentary intensity of her voice, a note hit, a sigh, and I recall the glimmer of Donald's glittery gold dress and the pulse of the pianola. This makes me sad, this loss; a loss that music, sound, always carries with it (or should I say, leaves behind). One of the strange aspects of music and song as orchestrated, organised sound is that it promises us something which it can't deliver. It promises meaning, permanence. When we listen to or perform music, it gives us an incredibly strong sense of presence – but as soon as the music has gone so has that animation and that certainty, that promise of a coherent subjectivity, the illusion of communality. All that is left is the swallow and gulp of saliva from the tired performer, the dying sounds of applause and the mute score previously sucked and struck by the mechanism of the pianola. Sound and music are unique, once and once only, experiences – the recorded sound is not the same as the live performance, and I don't mean this as a qualitative judgement (it is neither better nor worse), they are just different. Donald, in fact, did not record the live performance. Yet even if the recording had been done at the performance itself – and it was significant and fitting that it wasn't – it would not be the same: for example, in relation to such a recording I might stand nearer or further away than I did the first time; my listening context might be noisier or quieter, and the sound or music would not pass through that particular combination of bodies (of friends and strangers) in their overcoats, clinking glasses and shuffling their feet.

Yet for the time that the music played and the singers sang that first time, and when I hear their voices and the sound of the pianola again but differently, I am allowed access to, or possessed by, a host of different temporalities – the regular pulse of the pianola which Donald pedals industriously; the performer's voice pulling and tugging at the orchestration of the music; the recollection (a sonic echo) of earlier versions of the song; my knowledge of why the performer chose the song; my own feelings about the song – a coalescence of their memories and mine. There is simply but perfectly articulated the recurring intense presentness of the music but simultaneously its pastness – just past and long ago.

It is deliberate that in both these related artworks – in Tramway and the Britannia Panopticon – there was a 'modern recording machine' that insisted upon its own regular temporality: a machine which insisted upon a movement or temporal inclination which takes us forward in time and which restricts the viewer/listener/performer's ability to go back. The pianola could and did, unlike the film projected

in a loop, allow one performer (John Cavanagh) to begin again when he came in at the 'wrong time' – but the machine had to be stopped and rewound by its human operator. This wonderful awkward moment could not have been foreseen but exposed the nature of the one-sided contract between man and machine. In both instances the organic – the human – struggles and is co-opted by the machine; a tension entirely appropriate to the project's implicit commentary on the greater 'site' of Glasgow itself, which was so much a part of the industry-led changes that became known as modernity; specifically, the recalibrating of human time to fit the time of tram schedules, of shift-work, and of the invention of leisure time as a time dictated by consumption and speculation (in music halls, and paid-for exhibitions, in gambling and retail).

After the performance Donald used her recording of the songs<sup>5</sup> to act as a soundtrack for visitors to the Britannia Panopticon who would then encounter another installation located at the back of the hall. A wall of shoeboxes: a reminder of Donald's (perhaps misremembered) impression of the building acting as a warehouse for shoes when she visited the site some years earlier. In some of the shoeboxes detritus from the building itself could be discovered – a fragment of celluloid, a baby's dummy. In others, there was a request that the visitor deposit something small of their own inside the box for someone else to discover. The shoeboxes thus deliberately usurped the familiar museum narrative or organisation of objects labelled and on display (and which should not be touched or substituted): for me it recalled my Scottish Great Aunt Belle, who, when she died, was discovered to have shoeboxes full of toothpaste-tube caps, scraps of ribbon and ends of wool. Here, poignantly, uncannily, Donald's work boxed in the everyday, producing pockets of 'limbo' into which objects (headphones, travel tickets) became disconnected from their original stories. In terms of temporality, 'limbo' here is precisely not the same as the objects being recast as 'timeless'. These artefacts do not acquire the authority of history; instead they linger, they are absurd, strange, out of place – in this sense they are like the recorded voices being replayed all around; they are ghostly, an absent-presence. For, as Kevin Hetherington suggests, in his commentary on the detritus of consumption and its uncanny afterlife:

We encounter the unexpected presence of absence as a ghost. In consumption practices there are many ghosts. Things we threw out before we should, things we held onto long after they should have been disposed of [...] Ghosts do not only moan and rattle their chains, they also speak the language of credit, debt and value. Commonly we understand haunting as an unacknowledged debt and feel a sense of guilt

in its presence. It is a debt that we, heirs to past consumption, owe for the failure to dispose of it in the proper manner.<sup>6</sup>

In browsing the shoebox archive finding the objects may be a surprise but the objects themselves are not surprising, or interesting in themselves; they do not represent anything other than the narratives they used to inhabit, or might have inhabited. In this sense they represent an absence – they are no longer and perhaps never were important in themselves, and instead what they represent is our unacknowledged debt to the past; to the forgotten (kicked under the carpet, fallen through the cracks in the floorboards) of the 'everyday' – irritating, plaintive reminders of empty consumption and forgotten habits.

*Glimmers in Limbo* is remarkable for the way in which it asks us to listen to the dead, and the kind of listening that is being prompted is not just hearing, but looking, finding, touching and performing. Often playful, frequently intimate, Donald's response to her chosen sites was generous, open-ended. It was accessible in the best possible sense: it offered many points of entry; it was not intimidating but, equally, it was not superficial. She generated a particular kind of potential; perhaps an eerily appropriate potential in the context of a city still haunted by its Victorian past where spiritualism and seances were so much in vogue. The potential to listen and speak to the dead, to acknowledge the ghosts of our everyday, is, as Hetherington suggests, an ethical and political intervention. The achievement of *Glimmers in Limbo* becomes clear, if we recognise, as Colin Davis suggests, that:

Listening to the dead [...] entails listening to signs which irrupt as a surprise, and which signify without any ascertainable signifying intention. They cannot be anticipated or foreseen, and they cannot be attributed to a conscious subject. They may be anywhere we do not expect them. Perhaps they are all around us.<sup>7</sup>

Notes:

1. Gaston Bachelard (1969) *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, p. 112.
2. An earlier version of this essay was presented as a paper at the symposium, 'Art – Site – Audience', held at Tramway on 26 September 2008.
3. Alan Read (1993) *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*: London and New York: Routledge, p.140.
4. Peter Brook (1968) *The Empty Space*, London: Penguin.
5. The recordings were made with singers during a short rehearsal, or run-through, of the songs at the Britannia Panopticon in the week preceding the live performances.
6. Kevin Hetherington, 'Second-handedness: Consumption, Disposal and Absent Presence' published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/soc097kh.html> [October 2009] cited in Joe Moran (2004) 'History, Memory and the Everyday', *Rethinking History*, 8.1, pp. 51-68.
7. Colin Davis (2004) "Can the Dead Speak to Us?" De Man, Levinas and Agamben', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 45.1, pp. 77-89.

## A Conversation About Heritage and Contemporary Art

It seemed fitting to include in this publication a reflection on the project's contribution to debates around heritage and contemporary art practices in a wider, more outward-facing context, but one that recognised and valued its local specificity. To this end, I invited three Glasgow-based experts – art and architecture historian **Ray McKenzie** (RM), conservationist **Liz Davidson** (LD) and performance studies academic **Katie Gough** (KG) – to join me (MD) in a discussion of the work and its more far-reaching implications.<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to them for the insights, perspectives and expertise they brought to our reflection on the project and their informed, articulate and entertaining contributions.

The transcription edited from our conversation mirrors the form and themes of the project itself: embracing multiple narratives, fragmentation and what I believe was a *productive* lack of resolution.

KG Looking in the boxes [in *Shoobox Archive* at the Britannia Panopticon] made me think about methods of monumentalising history. It brought up what we do with the fragment that could be radically decontextualised in trying to make stories around it.

RM Something about the fragment, I think, is really, really interesting. I applied it to a work by Marcel Broodthaers (*Décor*, 1975), which used an incomplete jigsaw of the Battle of Waterloo. (Although a jigsaw piece is not really a fragment, it's a component.) I took it to be his comment on history. You make a picture from the fragments but it's never going to be complete. But the point is that if you do a jigsaw you aim to get it finished and when you put the last piece in it's a real sense of anticlimax that there's no more work to do. And to me, history has to be an ongoing process. The idea you can complete that narrative is a futile and self-defeating idea. So, in fact, the fragment is fundamental to the whole thing.

[...]

LD I met with a student from Athens yesterday. She's looking at how Glasgow has kept its buildings in relation to Edinburgh and then taking it back to the situation in Greece. And she feels, of the three cities, Glasgow is the most exciting one because we have been able to let go of the past. In such a dreadful way in some places. She says, yeah, back home, we keep the Acropolis, but it's just a museum piece. And then she just doesn't feel a sense of excitement in Edinburgh. But she thinks Glasgow has the best of all these worlds – the fact that it's managed to rip its heart out in places, and drive the roads through and be so abusing to itself. Trongate, which has no uniform style, is a good street to exemplify it. Glasgow's always been terribly 'let's go with the current mode of thought and just do it'. The Victorians happily ripped down anything that was medieval. Glasgow Cathedral, just by a whisker, God knows how it survived! The Edwardians would quite happily have done the same. Then you go to the 1960s ... When you're getting to the 1960s and 1970s, it wasn't the artist, I think, that was taking those decisions, the architects and the artists. It was planners.

RM Planners!

LD And it was this utopia that maybe really did work in fantastic, beautiful, sunny climates where everybody had the same level of income and the same opportunity. But when you put it [in Glasgow] and you took people out to the peripheries of the city, where they couldn't afford the bus-fare to get back in to the centre, and put them in high-rises ... But for all that, you have to be quite proud of Glasgow. It has been radically unsentimental in how it's forged ahead. Unfortunately, the folk who are deemed to be the less privileged are still living in the mistakes of that past.

MD Let's build the city of the future and wipe out everything and rethink it all.

Authenticity

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ephemerality

I'm just wondering about both the spaces I chose to work in, which are places that are really the opposite of that unified vision.

KG It's this interesting combination of thinking about how it's not sentimentalised. So that there's two kinds of authenticity that could operate in terms of trying to preserve this historic building and putting the velvet rope around it; or, like the Britannia Panopticon, letting it be dilapidated and thinking that's more authentic. Then that has its own sentimental attachments too. And somewhere in between it seems, unlike maybe the Athens case or Edinburgh, there aren't those extremes in Glasgow. That allows for an interaction and means that contemporary art practice as a medium, instead of just as an object, can intervene. As heritage is taking place, you can also do these other things that aren't in such a binary relationship. You don't have to undo a master narrative because there don't seem to be a lot of master narratives.

MD One of the questions that did occur to me when I was in the middle of the process of making the work was, why did I choose those two sites which were already doing the sort of things that my practice is interested in? I didn't choose to go to, say, an English country house that presents a pristine, monolithic image, and to do something which disrupted that. I went to places that were already in flux and are very much fragmented and messy.

LD For me, what's interesting about the choice of both the buildings is that they're real fighters. They've struggled and changed, so both of them survived with maybe two or three or four different changes of purpose. Tramway has had changing fortunes, and it's adapted and been quite happy to knock itself about in the process, to completely turn itself inside-out and come back fighting. And the same with the Britannia Panopticon in a much less organised way, because it's not municipally owned.

RM But it's got one big advantage that, I think, Tramway hasn't in that it's actually a very beautiful building, in terms of its architectural design. Whereas the Tramway, architecturally, it's not...

LD It's a utilitarian shape.

RM So really, simply as part of the street it's on, it would be a sad loss, I think, if the Britannia Panopticon had to go, but I don't think anybody, any architectural historian, would lament the loss of Tramway. It's really more about the social history and what it tells us about our past in that sense.

MD Although it wasn't a conscious decision, that perhaps explains why I didn't do anything with the exterior of Tramway, unlike at the Britannia Panopticon where I made the projection piece, *Façade Fruitmachine*. It was also partly to do with context, I think. The Britannia Panopticon is on a busy street where there are different types of audience. Passers-by who barely notice the work, and then this captive audience, who were static at the bus stop opposite. Whereas Tramway, it doesn't have that kind of passing trade, as well as not having a fascia that has an impact on the street.

RM It reminds me of a piece of work by Peter McCaughey. He projected onto the top floor windows of a tower block that was due for demolition and turned it into a pocket calculator – a kind a countdown to demolition (*Wave*, 1993). So it was almost as though the moment of memory was encapsulated by the act, and then that was let go.

MD I think that is really part of what my work tries to do.

KG I'm always fascinated by [ephemerality] because, of course, that is so much a part of trying to figure out the efficacy of performance. Because, you know, what is ephemerality, as a mode of intervention? Because you're not going to be able to nail it down. It's sort of like the fragment. So was that an anxiety for you?

MD Maybe that is what the efficacy of the performance is. It's something that people have memories about, and the memories will be different. But then what

does it do? Does it change policy? Does it change planning strategies?

KG I think that the thing that all of us in our various ways probably come up against is that sort of hardcore pragmatism. Does it change policies? And you need to always keep in mind that the kind of work of, perhaps, the heritage industry and the policymakers and the work that you do, is that they circulate in different economies: one is commercial and one is representational. And they both can work together in really interesting ways. But talking about the human condition is not necessarily going to change policies. It actually works in that sort of ephemeral space.

LD There's very few things in this world that change policy. And it is quite small changes, usually, that have to be made. But there are odd occasions when you come out of something and there is a feeling that wells up inside you, and it is quite an emotional feeling, where you think you've really gone beyond that level of the superficiality of everyday existence and you've touched something much deeper. And it may be a very fleeting moment, for you, and for everybody else in that room, but that is important, that those occurrences happen, just now and again.

MD I think there was something about *Pianola Karaoke* – a sense of fear or anxiety about whether the performance was going to be uncomfortable, embarrassing. I think that was part of its strength, that everybody felt there was a sense of risk involved. And there was also something about trying to make the event quite undirected. I was interested in trying to leave things open.

KG Did you feel this in terms of the audience interaction in the work that you did in *Tramway*, with the trolleys? Did you expect people to interact with that piece in that way?

MD It wouldn't have worked if people hadn't interacted at all, if the trolleys had just sat there stationary. So it was absolutely imperative that the audience did participate by pushing them. I think the work also did quite an interesting thing, which I hadn't anticipated, with the rules of *Tramway* – the rules or conventions of museum and art gallery visiting – where generally there's a sort of, don't touch, don't do this ethos. So sometimes with people there was a little bit of ...

RM Hesitation?

MD Hesitation, yes. And then they got into it. Most folk just walked slowly and looked, but some went haring up and down!

KG There was a great quote in the visitors' book. Somebody wrote, 'finally, art we can touch'.

RM I'm interested in the role of research, the research you have to do in order to come up with that manifestation of history [in your artworks]. You spoke about trying to question or challenge the conventional museum ways of presenting material, in particular in relation to heritage. Now, a very bald question would be: would you be pleased if the Transport Museum came to you and said, we'd like to buy this off you and incorporate it into the Transport Museum as an example of contemporary museum practice, offering not objects but experiences?

MD Well, the best museum practices, I hope, are not a million miles away from my work. And in a way I would hope that what I do might have a slight rub-off effect on some museum practices. But there was a thing in my work about not giving very much information that maybe diverges from most museum practice. A couple of people, who perhaps approached the work more as a museum piece, said that they wanted more information about where they were on the tram routes and about dates and the locations of the photographs of street names. But, well, it's not a geography project, it's not a history project ...

RM But it raised questions in my mind about the status of research in the output, and what intrigued me was the fact that for you to be able to produce the work you must have done a lot of the things that I do as an academic researcher but

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used them differently to come up with a different thing. I'm interested in that area of overlap and how the insights you get from doing archive research can drive a project like that or go in a different direction and come out as a book on the history of the tram.

MD There were different ways I could have researched it, but I decided what I was going to do was look at maps produced round about the time when Tramway was built and trace the tram routes that were actually marked on them. So you could physically have driven a tram non-stop along the routes that I devised – although I don't know whether they actually ran trams continually along those routes. So that was the logic. There's a limit to how far I went, as a 'proper' researcher. And I guess that was the artistic decision. I'll use this map as a visual reference point.

LD What fascinates me about trams is how much they say about a city and its status. People feel it is a good, well-organised, European city when trams are running. There's something about a tram, a fixed public transport route, as opposed to buses ...

MD One thing that strikes you when you mention trams in Glasgow is this wave of nostalgia and regret. I've never really been able to understand it. I think you've maybe pinpointed it. It's a symbol of the city's status, of its greatness, of its position in the world.

RM So that's one thing we boldly swept aside and do regret...

LD There's an emptiness there, I think. We should be putting in trams. We should be getting trams back as a genuinely egalitarian mode of transport for people.

MD I think it's interesting how, in talking about this piece of work – which is something I was hoping would happen – we've gone so far beyond the specific material site of Tramway. There's a sense of the work leading you to think about the city, its status within the world, now and then. Maybe it's the idea of travel, which is so central to it, which kind of extrapolates you from the physical location of Tramway [...]

LD To go back to the Britannia Panopticon. [There's] something that's been a legacy of your project that's now feeding through to the reality of the Britannia Panopticon. We're about to unveil the renovated façade, and it will be going back, hopefully, to something a bit more original, whatever that is, as it's being interpreted quite liberally to meet with disability legislation, etcetera. All the complications that it won't be the 'authentic' shop front. But one of the really interesting things is that the interior is being untouched as part of this project. It's really a face job, just the frontage. But if we had done this project in totality four or five years ago, with the Britannia Panopticon Trust, Glasgow City Council and Historic Scotland and everyone, we'd be looking at something that was a three or four or five million-pound project that shut the building down for a year and a half, put all the wiring in, took all the plaster off, relined it in lime plaster and new woodwork, put in new, non-intrusive lighting, and all the rest. Very little, content-wise, of the old building would have remained. It would have been replicated and put back. What we're coming round to thinking now, and it's not just because there's less money around, is the fact that the Britannia Panopticon is the atmosphere; and how do you capture atmosphere? You can't do a project that costs four million pounds in a building like that without destroying its atmosphere. So we're coming towards getting the building used, but not having a multi-million pound project, and somehow trying to keep that quintessential thing that you can't put a finger on. It just has that atmosphere, which Judith Bowers [founder of the Britannia Panopticon Trust] would attribute to the ghosts of the Britannia Panopticon.

KG If you redid the building, you might get rid of the ghosts.

RM I think this was the conclusion we came to in the discussions during your show at the Britannia Panopticon. Everybody agreed that crumbling plasterwork is beautiful.

MD Although, that may just be an aesthetic that we particularly like at this moment in time, this distressed crumbliness ...

KG It has its own romantic attachments.

MD Yes, the romance of the ruin. I'm terribly attracted to it as well. But what I find particularly exciting about the building at the moment is that it's not just about that aesthetic of romantic decay. There's a lot more going on. Judith's displays of music hall memorabilia, the music hall shows and all the other stuff like bands playing and films and exhibitions ... So, I think what you're talking about, about keeping the atmosphere alive, is also very much about having things happening there. Not just historical re-enactments, but contemporary things. This space still has to be available to us as part of our culture, for us to create new memories in, for its atmosphere to stay. It relates to one of my questions about the relationship between so-called tangible and intangible heritage. Atmosphere is completely intangible ...

RM By definition.

MD ... but the materiality of the site is so key to that atmosphere.

LD There's another thing, though, from a conservation point of view. You, quite rightly I think, questioned the heritage industry's quest for preserving buildings at a given moment in time. The heritage industry, I think, is a different thing to a pure conservation project, which is really to protect as found, as opposed to conserve, which usually means, paradoxically nowadays, changing it. As soon as you get involved with a building you're hit with such a raft of regulations you have to make radical changes.

RM So we're back to the whole thing about policy ...

LD This is why I say you can't really change the course of history. But there are small buildings and small occasions, and I think the [*Glimmers in Limbo*] project that happened at the Britannia Panopticon for me was a really interesting one, because it gave us that notion where suddenly we thought, why are we trying to raise four million to get this building back into full capacity public usage? Maybe we don't try and do that, maybe we just try and find enough money to keep this very unique space going, because it would be truly unique.

RM You both [KG and LD] at one point or another, used the word authentic, and that has got to come into it. Now I think we all know it's one of the hardest things to pin down, and yet, I think, intuitively, we have a sense of what it does actually mean. There is a notion of authenticity that, I think, we can recognise. But, if you've got a site like that, that's got so many layers of history you have to think very hard about which is the bit that corresponds to your notion of historical authenticity. But I think what you're saying, Liz, I really so much agree with that: a light touch, keep it free from the big money, and that just enough to keep it going is probably the secret here. It's not important enough to draw attention to itself, but it's sufficiently interesting for people to want to put resources into it to keep it going. That seems the kind of paradigm for the whole thing. It's like what we were discussing earlier about boldly getting rid of stuff and building things that correspond to a contemporary sense of what architecture should look like, and how it should work, and yet what we've got are buildings that are much less durable, and they go out of fashion too.

KG It seems like it's in a difficult relationship to the kind of ephemerality that Minty's trying to produce in her work because in some ways that's an ephemerality we want to resist, whereas Minty's is the kind that we want to engage with – the sense of this wholesale demolition, as opposed to the fleeting event.

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RM I think there's a very relevant issue coming through, specifically to your practice. This business about history speeding up, it's not new. What I think is different about the times that we live in – and again, it has a history that goes back to the early nineteenth century – is the technology for documentation that we have. Now everything can be recorded in incredible detail and in enormous abundance as well. We're actually swimming in a culture of representations of ourselves. That means that our relationship with history has now got this as a mediation, that we've got pictorial representations of it. And the relevance I think it has for your practice is that this is now so much a part of contemporary art practice that the documentation which comes along with it has got a much, much bigger role than it had before. And it's forcing us to rethink, to readjust, not only to History with a capital 'H', but to our own private history as well. And all these things somehow converge on the material objects that create the context in which we live our lives.

KG It seems that's almost like the anxiety around the fragment. So we've got all of these things, we need some sort of critical framework to understand how to make an argument out of all of the detritus and fragments that we're getting from Google or from anywhere. It seems to be in relationship to all these multiple historical narratives.

MD Yes. Because I've been talking about resisting this master-narrative, this History with a capital 'H', and it all being multiple and numerous and competing and everything.

RM We have to be careful.

MD Well, exactly. Where does that get you, if everything is thrown into the mix, if what you're doing is creating experiences where everything's up for grabs? But I'm not sure that's really what did happen, or does happen, in my work. And I'm wondering if it has something to do with site-specificity, which has now become a little bit of a dirty word? There has been a bit of a move away from the use of the word site, with its associations of bounded-ness and contained-ness. And, although that is not my understanding or use of the word 'site', I think I do really want to cling onto the idea of its materiality. It comes back to Ray's point about whether I would take the work from Tramway to the Museum of Transport. If I did, it's not the same work: you have to have those steel wheels on those particular tramlines ...

RM With the noise they make, and the vibrations and all that.

MD The noise, yes. It's something about that live encounter, that physical, embodied encounter which maybe is the kind of deep anchor that then allows all these different, competing, multiple narratives and associations and imaginations and memories to spin off from it.

RM Yes. In a way it's almost like a cultural object, as opposed to a natural object. It's got some equivalent of radioactivity. It's a thing, but it's giving off and you've got to get a Geiger counter to be able to read those messages that it's pumping out all the time. I think this ties in with what I was saying about representation. Because it seems to me that the way, especially the way young people understand history, is as digitised information. And the acronym that we use so freely in relation to computers, Random Access Memory, seems to me the model. Everything is available to you and you can grab anything at any time. And the element of randomness is part of this kind of scrambled way of thinking. The historical evidence that they're getting has been digitised and it's coming as a disembodied thing on a screen, so the object now takes on even more importance than it had before. It's almost like there's a need to get closer to the real world itself, as opposed to a simulated version of it on a screen.

MD Yes. That links with a lot of the arguments that circulate around performance and the efficacy of performance as an embodied experience.

KG I think, on so many different scales, it's a really difficult push and pull between the random access and a kind of political or ethical imperative to make meaning with your audiences, because actually, at the end of the day, they do need to know how to read the cues of the world that they're living in, that it's not all random. That actually there are different ways in which these things could be read, which are quite powerful and could have a lot of different kinds of impact.

RM So the demand for a narrative doesn't necessarily commit you to a master narrative of the old-fashioned kind. But you do need storytelling skills, and maybe that's what's lacking.

KG Deep rhetorical skills, whether it's with objects, or ...

RM What it means for us, whether as artists or non-artists, is some form of meaningful active citizenship. That we have to take responsibility for those little bits of things that we can actually affect, even if it means just making a noise at a public meeting. If it changes nothing at least you know you were part of that discourse and you can sleep easy at night.

MD I suppose that's where we started off, isn't it? The discourse is not going to change policy, but ...

LD But like at the Britannia Panopticon – I mean the music hall audience would have made their views known straight away. In a very small way changing policy – they don't want to see that act back on the stage ever again. But it would have been a no-holds-barred, absolutely rowdy vote.

KG In some ways, I wouldn't underestimate that carnivalesque thing. There could be mutinies. Maybe policy can change with this.

RM Well, okay, I think if we'd had this debate several years ago, and you put the question to us, how can an artist intervene in this process and do something meaningful? I would have said, do something like that [*Glimmers in Limbo*], and we're on the way towards solving it ...

### Contributors

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**Katie Gough** is a lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow. She teaches classes on intercultural and postcolonial performance. Her research areas cross several artistic mediums in order to explore questions of memory, performance and historiography in the circum-Atlantic world.

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#### Notes:

1. The conversation took place on 17 April 2009.

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## Concluding Thoughts

Given *Glimmers in Limbo's* advocacy of an open-ended approach, there is a compelling argument for closing this publication with the multiple voices and insightful-yet-inconclusive reflections recorded in the previous section,

**A Conversation About Heritage and Contemporary Art.** However, the project's promotion of irresolution was not an end in itself, but as a means of resisting conceptions of our built heritage as fixed and circumscribed. I would, therefore, like to offer a few concluding remarks which highlight and draw together some of the insights gained through the project. These, I hope, will be of use and interest to those who share my preoccupations with the potential of contemporary art practice to shape our understanding of material heritage.

The importance of interactivity – of making work that invited visitors to participate actively in its creation and reception – was substantiated through the project. Judging by the evidence gathered, this key attribute of the interventions allowed visitors to enter into individual, imaginative engagements with material heritage that, in some instances, appeared to alter their perceptions and preconceptions. As one visitor, speaking of the work in Tramway 2, put it:

When I was pushing the trolleys along the tracks and looking at pictures of the East End and Springburn, it really made me think about how Glasgow's developed and about all that regeneration and stuff – how political that is.<sup>1</sup>

Even more significant, perhaps, was the *quality* of the interactions experienced through the *Glimmers in Limbo* artworks. While my intention was to facilitate open-ended and creative interactions, these took place within the parameters set by the artworks, and were, to a considerable extent, directed. The sites themselves – the codes of behaviour with which they are associated, their institutional power structures – also influenced the nature of visitors' interactivity. In this way, interventions such as the projector-trolleys in Tramway 2, and *Shoebox Archive* at the Britannia Panopticon, played out the tensions between freedom and control, fixity and fluidity that characterise our relationships with heritage sites, institutional spaces and the built environment in general. As a consequence, the artworks raised awareness of, and in some cases gently shifted (in the Tramway works where visitors were invited to 'trespass' into private areas), the power structures operating within the sites.

The significance of various forms of performance and performativity in promoting fluid and dynamic relationships with material heritage also became evident in aspects of the project. In the case of *Pianola Karaoke* at the Britannia Panopticon, musical performances inspired by the building functioned as stimuli for individual and shared memories, or imaginative remembering. In offering a means of engaging emotionally and creatively with the material past, the performances resisted ideas of heritage as static, monolithic, separate from and unavailable to contemporary culture. Instead, a notion of heritage as a 'multi-layered performance'<sup>2</sup> was enacted, dissolving perceived boundaries between material and intangible heritage. In its conjuring – through memory and imagination – of multiple spatio-temporal frames, performance also functioned to emphasise the site's heterotopic qualities.

It became apparent that the ephemerality of the performances – and indeed of all the *Glimmers in Limbo* artworks – operated as a strategy to evade the monumentalisation of material heritage and its resulting potential to perpetuate

dominant ideologies. As one visitor remarked about the live *Pianola Karaoke* event, 'it felt like we were making new memories'. Since the live performances were not recorded, the fragmented, unreliable recollections of those who witnessed them, and a few photographic images, are the work's legacy. It cannot, therefore, be stabilised or become fixed, but continues to participate in the 'cultural process'<sup>13</sup> of heritage through proliferating reminiscences and accounts.

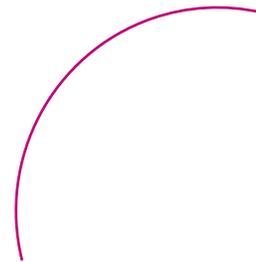
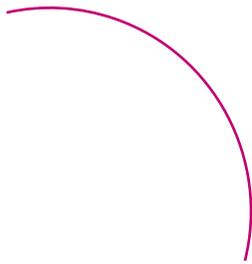
The experiential nature of the interventions – the embodied, sensory encounters with the sites that they encouraged – also emerged as a significant feature of the project. For instance, while visitors were inspired by the projected videos in Tramway 2 to engage imaginatively with the site, visualising what lay beyond the building's walls or scenes from Glasgow's past, this was countered by a heightened awareness of their bodily presence in the material here-and-now of the site: their pleasure in the physical act of pushing the trolleys was obvious, while the atmospheric rumbling of the wheels was noted by several visitors. Likewise, in Tramway 1, the juxtaposition of the illusory projected image and the tactility of the wall's rough surface interleaved material and conceptual understandings of the built environment.

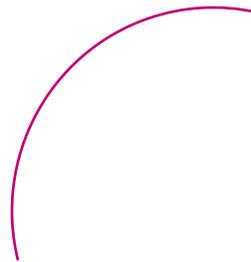
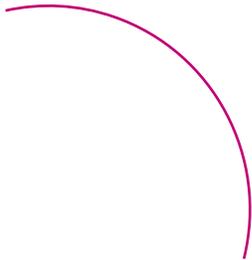
For some visitors, the incidental, everyday and generally over-looked figured prominently in *Glimmers in Limbo*. This focus on the mundane, particularly evident in *Shoebox Archive*, appeared to provide an alternative to official, monumental versions of heritage. Heritage, in this rendering, was dispersed and fragmented, residing in the inconsequential and the contingent. As a result, it was inclusive and resistant to use in the promotion of specific belief systems.

In light of these reflections, based on my observation of visitors' behaviour and on comments made by those who experienced the *Glimmers in Limbo* project, I would conclude that site-orientated or critical spatial arts practices can shape conceptions and perceptions of our built heritage in productive and meaningful ways. While the potential of contemporary art to influence policy concerning material heritage remains unproven<sup>4</sup> (and it was not the project's intention to test this) spatial or site-orientated practices can, it appears, instigate a questioning of the seeming inevitability of the trajectory from past, to present, to future, and perhaps recuperate nostalgia from its monopolisation by conservative ideologies.

Notes:

1. All previously unpublished citations are from visitors to *Glimmers in Limbo* at Tramway or the Britannia Panopticon, captured in recorded interviews and group discussions or through written comments.
2. Laurajane Smith (2006) *Uses of Heritage*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 3.
3. Smith (2006), pp. 44-84.
4. Liz Davidson's remarks in **A Conversation About Heritage and Contemporary Art** did, however, suggest that, in the case of the Britannia Panopticon, the artworks had affected a shift in strategies concerning the building's future.





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***The River Clyde Project: Bridging Part 1***  
**and**  
***High-Slack-Low-Slack-High***

# The Urban River and Site-specific Performance

Minty Donald

1. This is a corruption of the well-known saying that is attributed to the Ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus: 'One cannot step twice in the same river.' *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, trans. by Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 53.

Rising and falling in response to weather conditions or tidal flow, prone to breaching the boundaries imposed by humans, and in constant flux ('never the same twice'<sup>1</sup> in their course from source to sea), rivers epitomise ideas of spatial fluidity and impermanence. Yet, paradoxically, rivers also commonly play a role in engendering a strong, continuous sense of local identity. The well-worn Glaswegian saying, 'the Clyde made Glasgow and Glasgow made the Clyde' or the epithet 'Old Father Thames', to choose just two examples, suggest that urban rivers have an enduring potency in shaping a city's self-image and wider reputation. In doing so, they can function to promote a dominant, apparently unified and unchanging sense of place, despite signifying transience. By simultaneously evoking seemingly contradictory ideas of spatial fluidity and of continuity of place, the conception of space/place suggested by the urban river therefore problematises the apparent opposition of mobility and site-specificity. As a spatial paradigm, the urban river calls into question assumptions that mobility equates with a superficiality of engagement or lack of investment in place, and that site-specificity implies a static or circumscribed understanding of locatedness.

I wish to consider the contradictory nature of urban rivers – the way in which they emblemise seemingly opposing conceptions of place or site as rooted and constant, and as mutable and unbounded – through describing and reflecting on a number of performances and performance-related artworks which have recently taken place in response to the River Clyde in Glasgow on and around the city-centre watercourse. I focus in particular on two works, ts Beall's *The Govan Armada*, part of a larger suite of works collectively titled *A Stone's Throw Away* (May 2010), and *Bridging Part 1* (November 2010), which I devised with my regular collaborator, Nick Millar, and marine services company, Offshore

Workboats Ltd. I propose that urban rivers facilitate an understanding of important aspects of how contemporary cities, and especially post-industrial cities, function, while offering a paradigm for a concept of space/place which productively negotiates tensions between site-specificity and mobility.

My argument is driven by the notion of the river's role as a rich repository for urban imaginaries: the emotional, affective, sometimes subconscious and often intangible aspects of the way we experience cities. Urban imaginaries find expression in the myths and images which cities generate, such as the fog-bound London of Dickens' novels or the brand of off-beat Parisian bohemianism present in films like Jean Pierre Jeunet's *Amelie* (2001). Urban imaginaries, as commentators such as James Donald and Steven Pile<sup>2</sup> have argued, coalesce and circulate, contributing towards defining the character or 'personality' of a city. In the case of the River Clyde and Glasgow, the predominant category of imaginaries continues to coalesce around a version of the river's industrial past: that is, the Clyde's worldwide reputation for shipbuilding and its role in establishing Glasgow's status as a global manufacturing centre throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Narratives associated with this strand of the river's history – the macho heroism of the shipyards and the solidarity of the communities attached to them – persist despite the absence of any significant industrial activity on the upper Clyde for over thirty years.<sup>3</sup> I believe that it is precisely these well-trodden, reified and reductively backward-looking narratives that might be countered by focusing on the unstable and irrepressible qualities of the waterway, features which played a significant role in both the performances I discuss here. By endorsing the restless and unbounded nature of the river as a site-in-process, we might understand how it refuses to be subjected to what Svetlana Boym characterises as 'restorative nostalgia', a conservative attitude towards history which 'manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past'. Instead, at least in these performances, the river functions as a site of 'reflective nostalgia',<sup>4</sup> in which a sense of loss and longing for the past does not attempt to resolve itself through the recreation of historical moments or fixed monuments, but where the object of loss remains elusive, fragmented and incomplete. This non-authoritative approach allows the past to remain open to ongoing and multiple interpretations. Using the lens of reflective nostalgia, the Clyde's enduring associations with Glasgow's industrial heritage might be productively juxtaposed with alternative, overlapping and competing narratives of the river and the city. This important chapter in the river's history might be opened up, available to be revisited and re-imagined, rather than become a closed, fixed episode whose mythology functions to perpetuate prevalent conservative ideologies.

The works I have chosen to discuss build and comment on a legacy of performances and performance-related works responding to the Clyde. John Grierson and Hilary Harris's Oscar-winning documentary, *Seawards the Great Ships* (1961), for instance, made as the shipbuilding industry in Glasgow was entering the period of its decline, captures and mythologises the peak of shipbuilding on the Clyde and is amongst the

2. James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 69. Steve Pile, *Real Cities: Modernity, Space and the Phantasmagorias of City Life* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 2005), p. 2.

3. BAE Systems, a global defence, security and aerospace company, is currently the only large-scale manufacturing organisation operating on the upper Clyde.

4. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 41, 49.

5. Wyllie's work was part of the lead-up programme for Glasgow's year as European City of Culture in 1990. *Paper Boat* subsequently toured to other locations including the River Thames, London (1989), the River Scheldt, Antwerp (1990) and the Hudson River, New York (1990). For further information on Wyllie's practice see <<http://www.whysman.co.uk/index.html>> [accessed 3 February 2012] and Jan Patience, 'George Wyllie: 90 Years Old and as Influential as Ever', *The Herald* (31 December 2011) <<http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts-ents/visual/george-wyllie-90-years-old-and-as-influential-as-ever.1325300591>> [accessed 3 February 2012].

6. Susan Philipsz's Turner Prize-winning sound work, *Lowlands* (May 2010) was originally conceived for the Landwehr Canal in Berlin before being re-located to a site underneath a cluster of bridges spanning the River Clyde in Glasgow city centre. It was re-sited once more to Tate Britain, London, for the Turner Prize exhibition (October 2010–January 2011).

7. Nigel Thrift, 'Performance and . . .', *Environment and Planning A*, 35 (2003), 2019–24 (pp. 2022–23).

8. <<http://www.astonesthrowaway.co.uk/indexhibit/index.php?/docks/project-description/>> [accessed 13 June 2011].

most celebratory and uncritical of the river's history as a symbol of industrial prowess. Later examples include artist George Wyllie's sculpture-performance, *Paper Boat* (1989). This work, comprising an eighty-foot ship made in the form of a folded paper boat and launched on the Clyde, commented wryly, yet humorously, on the demise of ship manufacturing on the river in the context of post-industrial Glasgow's reinvention as a festival city and tourist destination.<sup>5</sup> Other performance works include NVA's *Stormy Waters* (1995) and Stephen Hurrell's *Zones: An Audiology of the Clyde* (1999), both of which juxtapose the river's industrial past with its potential future as a media and telecommunications district.<sup>6</sup>

The two more recent works I focus on in this essay seem prepared to engage with the river on further multiple levels, while acknowledging and responding to the Clyde as a former site of industry. First, in both *The Govan Armada* and *Bridging Part 1* the river plays an active role as an unpredictable, uncontrollable component of the work. In doing so, I would suggest, the agency of the river functions to unsettle fixed meanings ascribed to it. This proposition draws on Nigel Thrift's argument that space is performative in the sense that it always has the potential to resist, or 'act back', when faced with ideological drives to stabilise its readings and uses.<sup>7</sup> As I will discuss later in the essay, in *Bridging Part 1*, the river's evasion of attempts to impose specific meanings on it became a critical element of the work. The unruliness of the river contributed to our failure to achieve the original aims of the performance, resulting in what I believe was a more complex and insightful work than that initially envisaged, one which enacted tensions between fixed and fluid concepts of space, place and site. Second, both performances consider the river as a manifestation of nature in culture. In different ways, they refer to the regulation and control of the Clyde – through, for instance, embankment and canalisation – in the pursuit of a rational, functional urban environment. Such attempts to tame the river necessarily evoke its essential waywardness: fears of its unruly force or of what its depths might conceal. Finally, I invoke the idea of the river as a conduit to other locations – both actual and imaginary. The river, while literally connecting urban to rural and city to sea, invites imaginative journeys through time and space to, for example, the imperial reaches of Glasgow's maritime heritage or to less far-flung holiday destinations on the Clyde estuary.

### *The Govan Armada*

Part of a public art project titled *A Stone's Throw Away*, *The Govan Armada* was intended to 'examine the relationship between two opposing locations, each uniquely representative of the City of Glasgow: the historic Govan Graving Docks (or Dry Docks) and the nearby redevelopment of the Pacific Quay'.<sup>8</sup> While physically adjacent to one another on the Clyde's south bank, these two sites, one inextricably linked to Glasgow's shipbuilding heritage and the other part of the riverside's regeneration as a media and digital communications

9. The lack of integration between Clydeside districts has been widely acknowledged. See, for example, Rowan Moore's review of the Riverside Museum on the Clyde: 'If the passion for building singular things on the Clyde had been matched by some energy and thought in the way they went together, it would be a much finer place than it is now'. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/jun/12/zaha-hadid-glasgow-architecture-review>> [accessed 13 June 2011]. See also initiatives such as Glasgow City Council's recent establishment of a ferry service from Govan, <<http://www.clydewaterfront.com/projects/greater-govan-glasgow-harbour/infrastructure/i69-govan-ferry>> [accessed 23 October 2011] and artist Matt Baker's public art project working with the people of Govan, <<http://sacrificialmaterials.blogspot.com/>> [accessed 23 October 2011].
10. <<http://www.astonesthrowaway.co.uk/indexhibit/index.php?/the-govan-armada/>> [accessed 13 June 2011].
11. The St Kildan way of life, with its unpredictable technology, proved unsustainable in the face of twentieth-century modernisation, and the last islanders were evacuated in 1930.
12. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 49.

zone, present two very different narratives of the city and the river. Govan, the location of the now-derelict Graving Docks, had the highest concentration of shipyards in the City of Glasgow and remains the district most directly affected by the collapse of the industry, while the Pacific Quay redevelopment, comprising Glasgow Science Centre, BBC Scotland's headquarters, and The Hub Digital Media Centre, is at the heart of the riverside's current reinvention. There is little interaction, in terms of reciprocal visits or shared communities, between the two locations.<sup>9</sup>

For *The Govan Armada*, ts Beall worked with community groups, local businesses, children and other individuals from Govan to build a flotilla of small, toy-like boats using flotsam – 'redeveloped rubbish',<sup>10</sup> – recovered from the Clyde. The vessels were inspired by the St Kilda mailboats, simple constructions consisting of a container for messages and a flotation device, which were launched from the remote island of St Kilda in the Outer Hebrides in the hope that they would be carried on the Gulf Stream to mainland Scotland.<sup>11</sup> The *Govan Armada* boats were set adrift from the Govan Graving Docks, their destinations to be determined by the tides, current, and weather of the Clyde. Each contained a message written by their maker, together with details inviting their potential finder to report the whereabouts of their discovery. The *Armada* was given a ceremonial launch, which included a speech from a local councillor, a blessing by the local bishop and the distribution of free hamburgers, on 2 May 2010. Since then, boats have been found at locations down river, throughout the Clyde estuary and on the Ayrshire coast in south-west Scotland.

While the Clyde's shipbuilding heritage evidently provided a context for *The Govan Armada*, the project's relationship to this aspect of the river's history was not, I would argue, one of backward-looking, conservative nostalgia. Although several elements of the project referred directly to shipbuilding on the Clyde – its location at the historic Graving Docks, the party and ceremony accompanying the boats' launch – they were, in Svetlana Boym's terms, the 'ironic and humorous'<sup>12</sup> references of reflective, not restorative nostalgia. Naming the flotilla of miniature, handcrafted boats as an 'armada', for instance, suggested an irreverent and light-hearted attitude towards the past frequently absent from more authoritarian approaches towards heritage. The work's playful and poignant tribute to the lost skills and technologies of Glasgow's maritime heritage was interwoven with alternative, competing narratives of the river and the city which the little boats invoked, such as the Clyde's role as a site of recreation or as a depository for the city's waste.

Made from materials resembling the spoils of a beachcomber, the colourful, toy-like qualities of the little vessels referred not to heavy industry but instead triggered memories for me of seaside holidays on the Clyde estuary, suggesting the urban river as an escape route, providing access to sites of play and leisure. Indeed, one boat from the *Armada* was found beached on Arran, an island lying off the west coast of Scotland where I spent the majority of my childhood summers. The boats' obvious resemblance to 'messages-in-a-bottle'

equally reinforced associations with escape, evoking the mythology and romance of waterways as conduits to far-off locations, both real and imagined. In activating the river as a communication network, using the unreliable, unsophisticated technology of the message-boats, the work also critiqued the way in which the global connectivity offered by the riverfront investment in new media and telecommunications threatens to leave the underprivileged communities of Govan facing continued isolation: effectively stranded, left behind by advancing technology, like the residents of St Kilda.

The boats' construction from a random assortment of matter deposited in the river – bleached timber, coloured nylon twine, black tyre-rubber, punctured footballs, bottles, cans – also brought to mind the chance juxtapositions of discarded, obsolete objects in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades* where, Benjamin maintained, the dreams, failures and hopes of the modern city could be deduced.<sup>13</sup> Like Benjamin's bric-a-brac, the unwanted detritus from which the boats were made – dredged from the hidden depths of the river – acted as a reminder of the consequences of consumerism and industrialisation, a point further reinforced by the location of their launch and assembly at the Graving Docks, the site where decommissioned ships were dismantled or 'graved'.

The alternative narratives of the river and the city that the work evoked – narratives of escape, of communication and of the costs and dreams of industrialisation – demonstrate a reflective nostalgia, where a sense of loss and yearning does not preclude criticism, and where the past remains open to present and future re-interpretations. By embracing the Clyde's uncontrollability and volatility as an essential component of the performance (the destinations and survival of the *Govan Armada* boats were entirely subject to the forces of the river) the project powerfully promoted a version of the urban river that evades fixed, unified readings. In *The Govan Armada*, the river was a dynamic, unpredictable agent. It 'act[ed] back'<sup>14</sup> against the potential for meanings to become stabilised, and thus serve to perpetuate dominant imaginaries and their associated ideologies. Furthermore, it did not, as in the prevailing narratives of shipbuilding on the Clyde, operate in service to human industry. The scale and fragility of the handmade *Govan Armada* boats, gently cast adrift on the river to travel where its forces determined, made a powerful contrast with the heroic images commonly associated with ships on the Clyde. Grierson and Harris's film, *Seawards the Great Ships* (1960), for instance, opens with a montage of launching vessels: towering, seemingly unyielding steel structures breaching the water. While works like Grierson and Harris's documentary depict the urban river as harnessed to the needs of the shipbuilding trade (nature subservient to culture), Beall's project willingly accepted the futility of attempting to subjugate nature, acknowledging it as a powerful and unruly force to be respected, not mastered. *The Govan Armada* pointed to the vulnerability and fallibility of synthetic technology, particularly in the face of natural forces, hinting at the folly of grand, over-reaching industrial projects and suggesting the possibility of alternative, more reciprocal relationships between nature and technology.

13. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

14. Thrift, 'Performance and ...', pp. 2022–23.

## *Bridging Part 1*

*Bridging Part 1*, which I made in collaboration with Nick Millar and Offshore Workboats Ltd, was also informed and influenced by the Clyde's industrial past and by the current status of the waterway in Glasgow's riverside regeneration plans. As with *The Govan Armada*, it too engaged with the relationship between natural forces and technology. However, it did so largely in the realisation rather than the conceptualisation of the work, differing significantly from *The Govan Armada* in its acknowledgement of the Clyde's active role in the performance. While, in Beall's project, the river was explicitly afforded the agency which industrialisation attempted to suppress and its unpredictability embraced as an essential component of the work, in *Bridging* the overarching metaphor (as the title implies) was of an attempt to override the river: to bridge it and to negate its presence in the city as an obstacle or uncontrollable entity. This metaphor seemed, to us, representative of attitudes towards the post-industrial Clyde where the current regeneration programme focuses on the riverbanks, leaving the watercourse itself largely neglected.

*Bridging Part 1* (see Image 1) was situated on a stretch of water in the city centre overlooked by a well-known Glasgow landmark, a fifty-metre-high decommissioned crane, previously used by artist George Wyllie in his sculpture-performance, *The Straw Locomotive* (1987) and *The Paper Boat* (1989).<sup>15</sup> *Bridging*, a site-specific performance, took the form of an attempt to lace together the banks of the River Clyde with a zigzag lattice of thick, heavy, black mooring rope, measuring over 1.6 kilometres in length. The hefty rope was tensioned round bollards on the opposing quaysides that survive as relics of the river's maritime heritage. The project was initially envisaged as a poetic gesture: stitching together the banks of the river as a metaphor for the reluctance of Glasgow's municipal and waterways authorities to engage with the watercourse itself. In addition to the current regeneration programme's focus on the riverbanks, the recent proliferation of new bridges and the decision to reduce dredging in the city centre are rendering the Clyde increasingly inaccessible to river traffic. It was imagined as symbolic of the attempt to fix and stabilise the essential mobility of the river, or as emblematic of the industrial city's efforts to regulate the river's natural forces.

15. George Wyllie's two sculptures, one a full-scale replica of a locomotive made from straw, and the second, a vessel designed to resemble an oversized paper boat, were suspended from the Stobcross Crane before being, respectively, set on fire and launched on the Clyde.



Image 1 *Bridging Part 1*. The Workboat and Stobcross Crane: photo by Stephen Robinson.

*Bridging* was intended to climax with the completion of eleven cross-river lacings – echoing the eleven bridges in the city centre – stretched above water level from one bank to the other and straining to pull together the artificially embanked quaysides. Resembling a giant cats' cradle, they would rope off the watercourse like an out-of-bounds exhibit at a heritage site. Once completed, the ropes would be released, the river becoming navigable once more.

In order to achieve this spectacular image, however, we needed to engage with the waterway itself and with our collaborators, marine services company Offshore Workboats Ltd, on whose expert knowledge we were heavily reliant. During discussions with Offshore Workboats we considered various potential methods for installing the rope. Although we estimated that the most efficient and controllable method of carrying out the installation would be to tighten the mooring lines by means of mechanised winches mounted on the quayside, using a boat simply to ferry the rope back and forth across the river, it became apparent that stitching up the Clyde should be undertaken from the river itself, from a working boat operating on the water. There were several interconnected ideas leading to our decision that the ropes should be rigged and tensioned from the river itself.

First, we wanted the performance to function, at one level, as a reinstatement of the working life of the river. Without any recourse to historical re-enactment, we wanted to make apparent the effort, skill and ingenuity required to carry out work on the watercourse, work which was once an everyday occurrence on the city centre river but which is now rare. Offshore Workboats Ltd are one of a handful of marine services companies still operating on the upper Clyde. Second, by choosing a less mechanised, and less reliable, solution to installing the ropes, we believed that the difficulty of the task would become more evident, that its execution would become more dependent on the resourcefulness of the boat crew and that there would be a greater degree of uncertainty about the successful completion of the eleven crossings. Echoing Beall's adoption of the unreliable technology of the St Kilda mailboats, we hoped that the decision to use less sophisticated machinery would foreground the interaction, and even potential conflict, between the technology, the river's natural forces and the human endeavour entailed in realising *Bridging*. While not wholly evident to us in the initial conceptualisation of the work, the tension between the spectacular image of the stitched-up waterway and the messy, difficult reality of attempting to achieve it through relatively low-tech and fallible means transpired to be a powerful element of the live performance. Third, using the workboat itself as the instrument which brought about the closure of the waterway – both literally, through the actual obstruction to river traffic caused by the rope lattice, and metaphorically, through the symbolic gesture of stitching together the riverbanks – seemed like a fittingly ironic gesture. It pointed to the predicament of the post-industrial river, where over-identification with its shipbuilding heritage has, arguably, deterred the evolution of new uses and meanings for the Clyde as a living waterway. Finally, and of considerable significance, by opting to carry out the installation from the watercourse itself, the river would become a

much more active element in the performance, obliging the workboat crew to operate in a dynamic way with and against its insistent, irrepressible forces (see Images 1 and 2).

On the day of the performance, under the unleavened grey sky and relentless rain characteristic of Glasgow in November, the challenges of working with the river's volatility became apparent, as the operation proved much more difficult than during the trial run that we had conducted in July. Several factors made the work slow and laborious: the angle at which the boat needed to butt against the quayside in order to tense the ropes around the designated bollards, the tide level and currents and the unexpected occurrence of the rope sinking in the water when it had previously floated. At one stage, after only two crossings had been completed, the submerged rope became snagged round the workboat's propeller, requiring it to be freed by a diver. Our vision of eleven strands of rope tensioned across the water, and covering over 200 metres of quayside, was rapidly appearing unachievable as the daylight faded. The boat crew, though, carried on doggedly and good-humouredly with their task. The focus of the piece seemed to shift from the imagined end point – the spectacle of the rope-work lattice – to the labour involved in attempting to achieve it: the efforts of the boat crew, drawing on their ingrained nautical knowledge as they worked both with and



Image 2 *Bridging Part 1*. Two ropes stretched across the River Clyde: photo by Stephen Robinson.



Image 3 *Bridging Part 1*. Ropes swagged across the River Clyde at dusk: photo by Stephen Robinson.

against the river, reading the force of its currents, hampered in their manoeuvring of the workboat by the strength of its flow. As one spectator described their experience:

When I first arrived my instant reaction was feeling somewhat underwhelmed – somehow I was anticipating something perhaps more glitzy spectacular, a big wham-bam visual explosion. Don't know why. Then I stayed and immersed myself into it, getting caught up in the crepuscular drizzle, watching that beautifully ugly working boat struggle with its task, finding real satisfaction and challenge in the inevitable 'failure'. And asking myself why it was failure – because it hadn't achieved the pre-determined number of crossings/lacings? A stunning theatrical event that managed to simultaneously propose and undermine its own potential for spectacle.<sup>16</sup>

16. Comments emailed to me by spectator, Richard Gregory, 7 November 2010.

It seems that, for this commentator at least, the 'failure' of *Bridging* was much more affective and thought-provoking than a slicker execution of the installation might have been. It reinstated real work – the performance of mundane, but highly demanding tasks – on and with the river, not as a historical re-enactment of the Clyde's industrial past but as a demonstration of its continued life. Clad in their high-visibility workwear, manipulating the mechanical winches and crane on their sturdy, functional boat, the crew's actions appeared to form part of a lineage of work carried out on the river, a performance of everyday labour taking place on a contemporary, operational, urban waterway. The effort involved in attempting to negotiate the river's irrepressible forces was obvious and ongoing, the crew and boat's activity never resolving into the static image of the roped off Clyde which we had originally envisaged. Our relatively low-tech approach towards installing the rope, which made evident the obstacles and challenges involved, also made apparent the river's ability to 'act back'<sup>17</sup> and to participate in a co-performance with the crew, Nick Millar and I (as directors and instigators of the event).

17. Thrift, 'Performance and ...', pp. 2022–23.

The urban river as a manifestation of nature in culture unfolded in further unanticipated ways in the performance of *Bridging*. In our initial vision, the rope strung tightly from quay to quay and tensioned above the water line was intended as a response to the artificiality of the built-up embankments, where the clearly demarcated boundary between water and land holds the river at arm's length from the city. As Maria Kaika has observed, city rivers – embanked, canalised and culverted – represent an acceptance of the regulation and subjugation of the river's natural features in the pursuit of an efficient urban environment. Kaika goes further, attesting that urban rivers function to 'change [...] perceptions of what the socio-natural urban landscape should look like'.<sup>18</sup> Rather than highlighting this view of the regulated urban waterway, however, as was our initial intention with *Bridging*, the breakdown of our planned system for installing the rope resulted in some challenges to the image of the controlled urban landscape, revealing something of the lurking anxiety behind the ordered forms of the city that the river continues to embody. When the rope sank to the river bed and emerged festooned with detritus from the city's sewers and when the diver descended into

18. Maria Kaika, *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature and the City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) p. 71.

the murky, freezing, less-than-sanitary water to free the boat's propeller, widely and profoundly held fears of deep, open water were triggered: of drowning, of disease and intangible, irrational fears of its unknowable depths.

As evening fell, we finally abandoned our attempt to install the eleven crossings. The closing image of the performance was not, as in our initial vision, of a network of tautly strung lines straining to lace together the banks of the Clyde. Instead, five swags of black rope looped across the dark water, reminding one spectator of 'the mooring ropes of ghost ships',<sup>19</sup> while, adjacent to the unfinished installation, the boat crew gathered on the quayside by their workboat, drawing breath and reflecting on the day's events, their fluorescent rain gear illuminated against the night sky.

On reflection, this incomplete, unintended conclusion for the performance – its failure – seemed a more fitting and productively open-ended gesture than our planned outcome would have been. The river had evaded our attempts to stitch it up – to ascribe to it, albeit momentarily, a specific meaning. The focus of the work had shifted from the spectacular, static image of the zigzag lacings to the boat crew's ongoing labour on and with the river, playing out both the possibility of co-operating with natural forces, in the boatmen's responsiveness to the river and weather, and the potential folly behind the pursuit of grand, overarching visions that disregard or seek to dominate nature. Rather than a symbolic enactment of the authorities' reluctance to engage with the watercourse, the failure of *Bridging*, and in particular the ropes' dredging of the river's hidden depths, afforded a glimpse of what lurks beneath and behind the ordered urban landscape, reminding us of the real and imagined threats which unruly natural features represent to the civilised contemporary city. Our failure to complete the intended final image, to render the river as the inert water feature that the municipal and waterways authorities apparently envision, instead evoked the river's essential mobility, and, by extension acted as a reminder of the mutability of any site. It called into question the impetus to determine or pin down specific readings of any location, however fleetingly or critically, through site-specific practice.

The Clyde, like many urban, post-industrial rivers, no longer has an obvious functional and economic value for its city. While its physical form bears the impact and retains the vestiges of its industrial life – from the silting up of the river banks exacerbated by the Clyde's artificial narrowing, to the redundant bollards and rusting winches that remain on the quaysides – its service to the industrial cause is now relegated to history. In light of this demise, and in the absence of an alternative practical and commercial use, the authorities responsible for managing the river demonstrate ambivalence, and perhaps even aversion, to engaging with the waterway. The current major regeneration project taking place along the city centre river, the Clyde waterfront redevelopment,<sup>20</sup> is concentrated almost entirely on the banks, with the water itself largely disregarded and treated as an inert landscape feature or as an obstruction dividing the city and requiring to be bridged.

The river, however, persists in functioning as a repository for urban imaginaries. While the prevalent category of imaginaries may still

19. Comments made by spectator, Steve Slater, 6 November 2010.

20. <<http://www.clydewaterfront.com>> [accessed 23 October 2011].

circulate around the Clyde's industrial past, the performances discussed here suggest that creative practice can lead us beyond this dominant definition. Site-specific practice which acknowledges the essential fluidity, mobility and waywardness of the urban river can help it resist containment as a heritage site, thus evading reductive, authoritative readings which may serve to promote exclusive and prevailing ideologies and to close down ongoing interactions, interpretations and imaginings. Filtered through the artworks it has engendered and continues to engender, the river can encourage us to move beyond a static rendering of history to try to understand and acknowledge what lies behind the city's haunting by its industrial past; such as our attempts and failures to subordinate natural forces, the fragility of our dreams of a safe, sanitary and ordered urban environment and our desires for global connectivity.

The urban river can serve as a spatial paradigm which allows us to productively negotiate perceived dichotomies between site-specificity and mobility. This paradigm enables us to value our surroundings as meaningful, for instance in the way that they shape our cultural identities, while concurrently offering resistance to static, circumscribed conceptions of place and to the exclusive or conservatively nostalgic renderings of rootedness they can promote. The urban river holds the potential to promote a spatial model, and to foster related approaches towards spatial or site-specific practice, where we can invest in a 'sense of place'<sup>21</sup> while recognising the temporality, porosity and interconnectedness of that place.

21. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 146–56.

# On planning and improvisation, success and failure, control and unruliness.

Minty Donald, 26 Jul 2011

## Editor's introduction

Minty Donald is an artist and lecturer based in Glasgow. Minty's practice and research interrogates the multiple relationships between 'art', 'space/place' and 'audience', and her previous projects include the 3 year long Glimmers in Limbo in which a series of site specific works were produced for the Britannia Panopticon, and Tramway, both sites in Glasgow.

In late 2010, Minty developed *Bridging Part 1* an ambitious site-specific work that crossed and re-crossed Glasgow's Clyde. The work was commissioned by the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts, and was produced as a collaboration with artist Nick Millar and Offshore Workboats Ltd.

Here Minty explores the planning processes that preceded and accompanied the work, and considers the place of both emotion and 'failure' in understanding *Bridging Part 1's* impact.

## In Genesis

I want to reflect on the nature of plans and planning by describing and considering the process of realising a large-scale performance/temporary installation, *Bridging Part 1*, which I made with my partner and regular collaborator Nick Millar and Offshore Workboats Ltd. on the River Clyde in Glasgow city centre. The performance/installation was commissioned by the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts and took place in November 2010.

*Bridging Part 1* took the form of an attempt to lace together the banks of the river by dragging, with the aid of a work boat, over one mile's length of heavy, black mooring rope back and forth across the watercourse, tensioning it around bollards on the opposing quaysides to create a zigzag lattice. The aim was to span the water eleven times, echoing the eleven existing city centre bridges.



Visualisation of *Bridging Part 1*, courtesy of Minty Donald.

At conceptual and practical levels, the work engaged with a range of ideas relating to plans and planning. Conceptually, it was imagined as a response to the Clyde's role in shaping Glasgow's identity and status. For instance, the river's function in the master plan of industrialisation, where the Clyde was narrowed and deepened to service ship-building and other heavy industry. Or the river's ambiguous position in contemporary plans for the post-industrial city, where the major regeneration project currently underway along its banks leaves the watercourse itself largely neglected. In practical terms, the performance/installation required negotiating the complex issues of ownership surrounding the river today in order to gain permission for its execution. It involved detailed discussions with our collaborators, Offshore Workboats, trials and tests, in order to determine our methods for the installation. It is this tension between *Bridging Part 1* as 'grand plan', its existence as a concept or poetic, speculative gesture, and the reality of the mundane preparation and labour involved in its execution – the macro and the micro of planning – on which that I'd like to reflect. I want to consider the balance between forward planning and improvisation, between control and lack of regulation, as it played out in the realisation and reception of *Bridging Part 1*, and as it relates to wider issues of urban planning, particularly in Glasgow today.



NOTICE TO MARINERS

37/10

**River Clyde – Lancefield Quay Art Installation**

Mariners are advised that a “test run” of a proposed temporary art installation will be carried out between Lancefield Quay on the north bank of the Clyde and General Terminus Quay on the south bank at 1600hrs local time on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2010.

This art installation will take the form of a ship’s mooring line which will be secured to one bank of the river and then run north and south by boat between several extant bollards on the quayside.

The actual installation will take place on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2010 and will be in place for approximately 6 hours.

It is anticipated that the test on 31<sup>st</sup> July will take no more than 2 hours from beginning to end.

Offshore Workboats of Rothesay Dock will be providing the maritime expertise and their boat “Trio” for this project. On the day, she can initially be contacted on VHF Channel 12 and she will then designate a working channel.

**Mariners are advised that whilst this operation is being carried out, this section of the River is closed to through traffic.**

**Captain Ron Bailey  
Harbour Master**

**23rd July 2010**

Notice to Mariners, courtesy of Minty Donald.

In genesis, the work was conceptual, originating as a proposition for a spectacular gesture which lent itself to multiple, metaphorical interpretations. (The mooring line might be read as pulling together a city divided by its river, or as roping-off a defunct waterway which now has the status of an out-of-bounds exhibit at a heritage site.) The visual representations of the imagined rope lattice, which we made to promote the work to funding bodies and for pre-publicity, reinforced its status as a proposition, or grand plan. In these speculative visualisations, it was depicted from a birds’ eye perspective with the rope denoted by a line on a map or Google Earth photograph: complete and flawless. These images, depicting an elegant, seemingly effortless gesture, together with our lyrical descriptions of the piece and the metaphorical interpretations it invited, belied the labour involved in its realisation.

## In Possibility

At the earliest stage of planning our most crucial negotiation was with Clydeport, the organisation responsible for managing activity on the river itself, and whose support was required to authorise the closure of the watercourse for the duration of the installation. Our initial proposal, to install the ropework and to leave it in place for twenty-four hours, was met with a flat refusal from Clydeport's then Deputy Harbour Master. However, he was willing to enter into a dialogue. Our subsequent discussion became one of creative exchange where he engaged fully with our proposed work and its potential to stimulate debate about the changing role of the Clyde, while we learned a great deal about managing and maintaining the waterway as a navigable channel. As a result, we re-framed the proposal, with the rope lattice now remaining in place only momentarily after its completion. This both satisfied Clydeport's concerns about closing the river for an extended period and led us to re-consider our intentions. We came to recognise that focusing on the act of installing the rope, rather than the completed installation, was a more appropriate response to the river. It reflected the idea of the Clyde as a dynamic and fluid environment, open to multiple possibilities.

Our conversations with the Deputy Harbour Master also gave us fresh insight into the complex, competing attitudes towards Glasgow's major river held by the several public and private bodies responsible for the management of the watercourse and its banks. We gained a new perspective on the unresolved nature of plans for the future of the Clyde.

At this point, I should perhaps declare a further, personal investment in the current and future status of the Clyde. The ideological dimension of my interest in the role of the river in Glasgow is inseparable from on-going, and as yet unsuccessful, efforts to obtain a mooring on the city centre reach of the Clyde. The mooring is for a new twenty-metre barge which my partner and I have built, and on which we hope(d) to live. The encouragement and support we received over five years of negotiation with the various authorities responsible for the Clyde in Glasgow, and which led us to believe that installing moorings for residential and pleasure craft was part of the city's plan, have not resulted in any such provision. Small-scale initiatives, like providing berths for a handful of boats, appear to have stalled in favour of banking on the fruition of long-term, speculative ventures, such as the grand plan for a 'floating village'<sup>1</sup> in the Canting Basin on the Clyde adjacent to Glasgow Science Centre.

Our boat-building activity, though, played a major role in another aspect of planning the performance/installation: finding collaborators who could provide the marine expertise and equipment necessary to install the rope, and who would buy into the concept of the work. Offshore Workboats Ltd., the company located in the yard where the fit-out of our boat has taken place, were the obvious choice. It became evident that they were excited by the challenge, shared our sentiments about the lack of activity on the Clyde, and clearly 'got' the work, which we deliberately resisted explaining. Another significant factor in choosing to collaborate with Offshore Workboats, rather

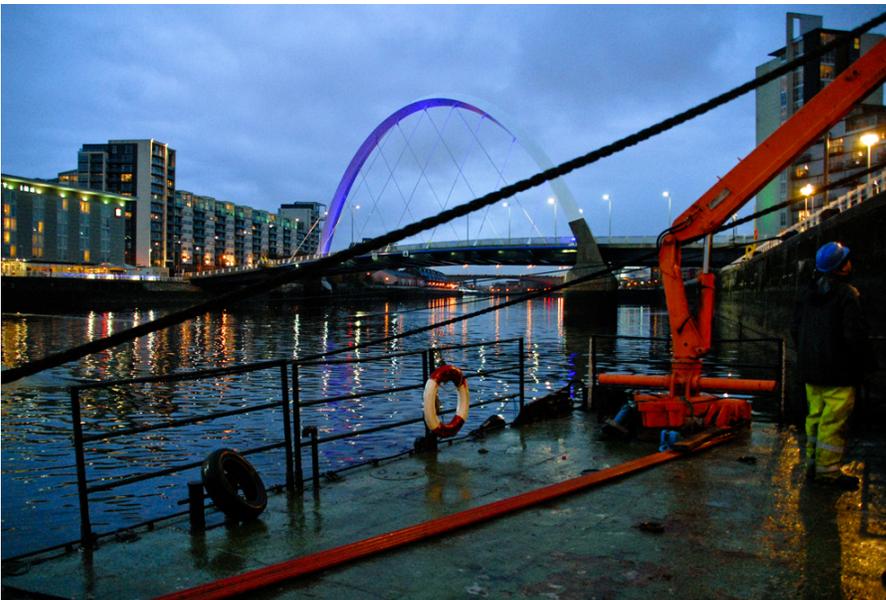
than with one of the few other marine services operating on the Clyde, was our expectation that they would adopt a relatively improvisatory approach towards the task. They, and we, did not have the resources or inclination to carry out a slick, highly mechanised operation or to conduct meticulous trials and tests. Together, we devised a broad method, which would be undertaken in a comparatively hands-on, low-tech manner and adapted as circumstances demanded. We carried out a trial run of two crossings in the summer preceding the performance and accepted that this limited rehearsal did not guarantee completion of the task. Our instinct was that the labour and thought entailed in the performance/installation should be evident, tempering our grand vision for the final image. We also recognised, and attempted to embrace, the real possibility of failure.

### In Reflection

On the day of the event, under a grey sky and relentless rain, the operation proved much more difficult than during our trial run in July. The angle at which the boat was required to cross the river to connect with the regularly spaced bollards, the tide and currents, together with the rope unexpectedly sinking in the water, made the work slow and laborious. At one stage, after only two crossings had been completed, the submerged rope became snagged round the work boat's propeller, and required freeing by a diver. This breakdown of our system, and in particular the diver's immersion in the cold, murky water, acted as a reminder of the river's untameable and unknowable power – its resistance to planning and regulation. The emergence of the rope from the river's depth, draped with detritus from Glasgow's sewers, was an unsettling revelation of what lies hidden behind the rational, ordered forms of the city.



Two Rope Crossings, Aerial View  
Photograph by Stephen Robinson, courtesy of Minty Donald.



Rope Swags Across the Clyde  
Photograph by Stephen Robinson, courtesy of Minty Donald.

As the daylight faded, our vision of eleven strands of rope tensioned across the water, and covering over 200 metres of quayside, was rapidly appearing unachievable. The boat crew, though, carried on doggedly and good-humouredly with their task. The focus of the performance seemed to shift from the imagined end point – the spectacle of the rope-work lattice – to the boatmen’s unspectacular, everyday labour. As spectator, Richard Gregory, described his experience:

*'When I first arrived my instant reaction was feeling somewhat underwhelmed – somehow I was anticipating something perhaps more glitzyly spectacular, a big wham-bam visual explosion. Don't know why. Then I stayed and immersed myself into it, getting caught up in the crepuscular drizzle, watching that beautifully ugly working boat struggle with its task, finding real satisfaction and challenge in the inevitable 'failure'. And asking myself why it was failure – because it hadn't achieved the pre-determined number of crossings/lacings? A stunning theatrical event that managed to simultaneously propose and undermine its own potential for spectacle.'*<sup>2</sup>

Richard’s remarks point to the push and pull between the macro and micro of planning as it played out in the event: the minute-by-minute decision-making and improvisation of the boat crew as they drew on their ingrained nautical knowledge, working both with and against the river in a determined attempt to achieve our grand vision. For me, the event was intensely emotional, as I moved between deep admiration and appreciation of the boat crew’s labour, skill and commitment, immersion in the intricacies of the activities I was witnessing, and a sense of disappointment that I wouldn’t see our spectacular image completed.

On reflection, though, I believe that the ‘failure’ of *Bridging Part 1* was, as our instinct in planning the event had suggested, much more affective and thought-provoking than a slicker execution of the installation might have been. It made visible the effort expended in the realisation of grand plans, valorising the skill, labour and determination of those who implement them. It raised questions about the value of improvisation, compromise and on-the-ground decision-making, in relation to the creation of master plans or overarching schemes. And it made evident the resistance to planning, regulation and control which natural forces, such as the river, represent.



Boat Crewman at End of *Bridging Part 1*  
Photograph by Stephen Robinson, courtesy of Minty Donald.

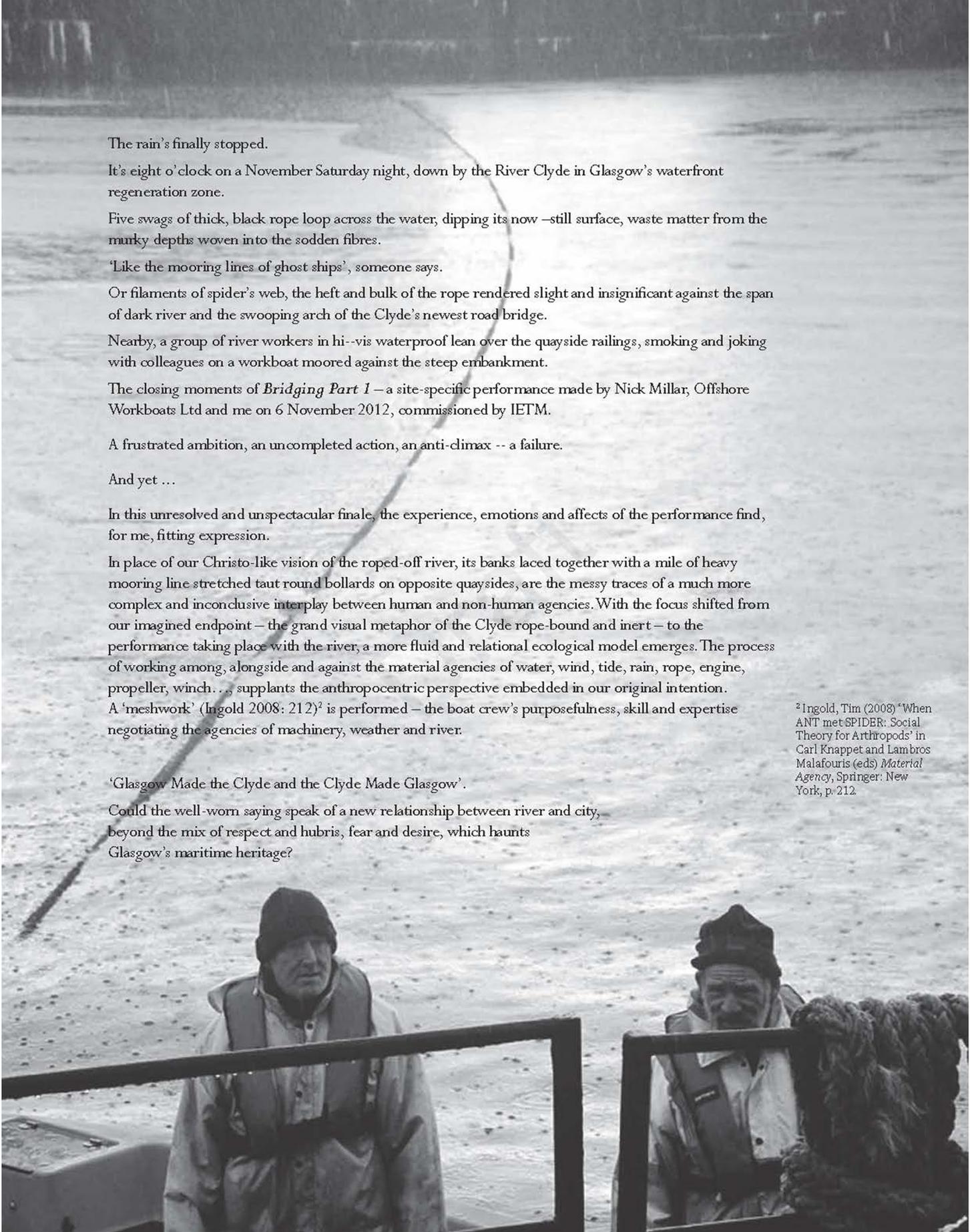
As darkness fell and we finally abandoned our attempt, having managed only five crossings, spectators remarked on the sadness and sense of loss they felt witnessing the network of black ropes swagged across the dark water, like the mooring ropes of ghost ships – an elegiac evocation of the Clyde’s past and, perhaps, of the failure of the grand plan of the modernist-industrialist project.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scottish-enterprise.com/News/2011/01/floating-village.aspx>  
[Accessed 8 May 2011]

<sup>2</sup> Comments emailed to Minty Donald by Richard Gregory, 8 November 2010.

[http://archive.publicartscotland.com/reflections/78#in\\_reflection](http://archive.publicartscotland.com/reflections/78#in_reflection) [Accessed 10 March 2013]



The rain's finally stopped.

It's eight o'clock on a November Saturday night, down by the River Clyde in Glasgow's waterfront regeneration zone.

Five swags of thick, black rope loop across the water, dipping its now –still surface, waste matter from the murky depths woven into the sodden fibres.

'Like the mooring lines of ghost ships', someone says.

Or filaments of spider's web, the heft and bulk of the rope rendered slight and insignificant against the span of dark river and the swooping arch of the Clyde's newest road bridge.

Nearby, a group of river workers in hi-vis waterproof lean over the quayside railings, smoking and joking with colleagues on a workboat moored against the steep embankment.

The closing moments of *Bridging Part 1* – a site-specific performance made by Nick Millar, Offshore Workboats Ltd and me on 6 November 2012, commissioned by IETM.

A frustrated ambition, an uncompleted action, an anti-climax -- a failure.

And yet ...

In this unresolved and unspectacular finale, the experience, emotions and affects of the performance find, for me, fitting expression.

In place of our Christo-like vision of the roped-off river, its banks laced together with a mile of heavy mooring line stretched taut round bollards on opposite quaysides, are the messy traces of a much more complex and inconclusive interplay between human and non-human agencies. With the focus shifted from our imagined endpoint – the grand visual metaphor of the Clyde rope-bound and inert – to the performance taking place with the river, a more fluid and relational ecological model emerges. The process of working among, alongside and against the material agencies of water, wind, tide, rain, rope, engine, propeller, winch... supplants the anthropocentric perspective embedded in our original intention.

A 'meshwork' (Ingold 2008: 212)<sup>2</sup> is performed – the boat crew's purposefulness, skill and expertise negotiating the agencies of machinery, weather and river.

'Glasgow Made the Clyde and the Clyde Made Glasgow'.

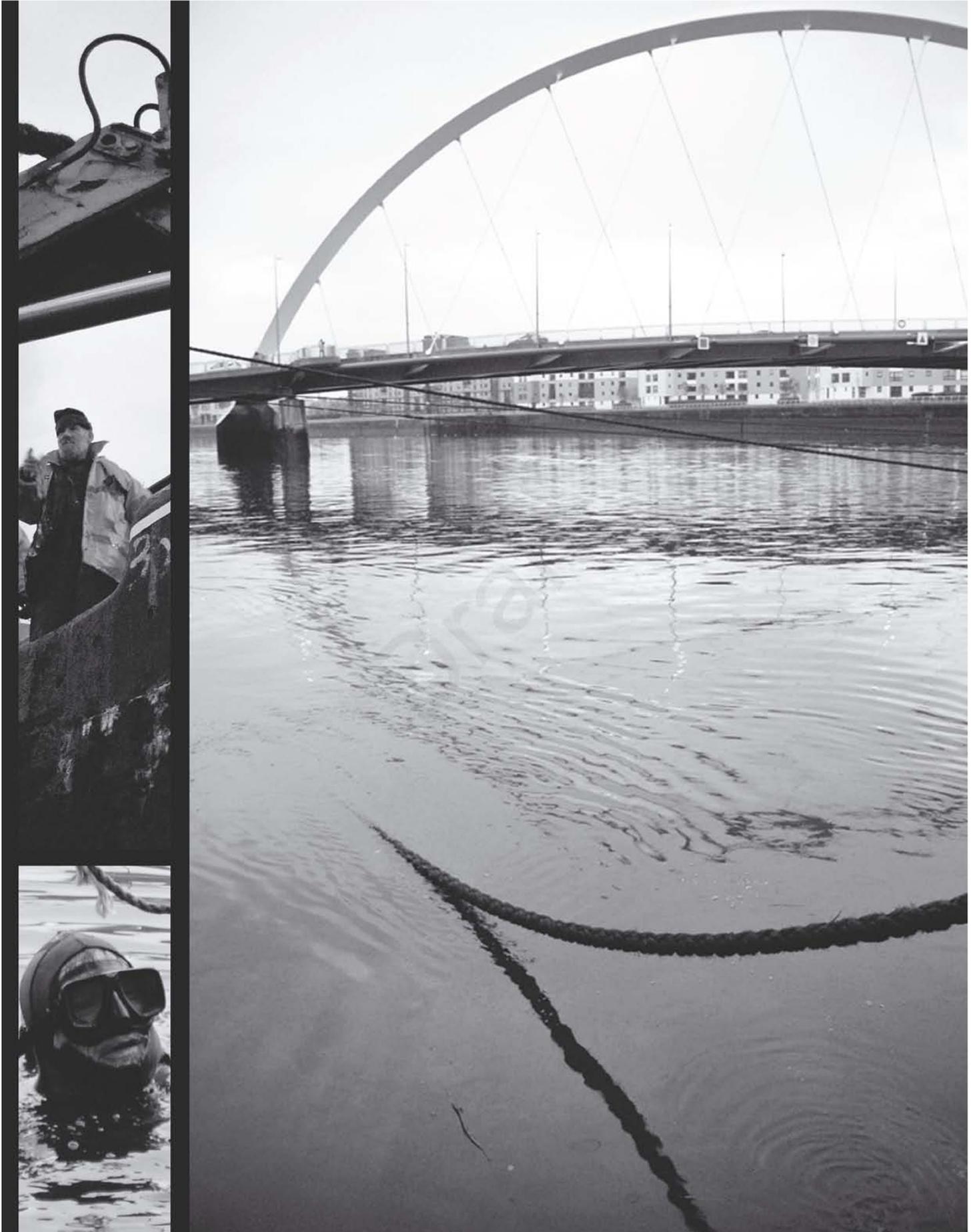
Could the well-worn saying speak of a new relationship between river and city, beyond the mix of respect and hubris, fear and desire, which haunts Glasgow's maritime heritage?

<sup>2</sup> Ingold, Tim (2008) 'When ANT met SPIDER: Social Theory for Arthropods' in Carl Knappet and Lambros Malafouris (eds) *Material Agency*, Springer: New York, p. 212.



*Bridging Part 1*  
visualisation (top left)  
and  
documentation





## **Appendix 1.**

All material in Appendix 1 is available as media files.

## **Appendix 2.**

The programme for *Bridging* is not available in the electronic version of the thesis.



Laika

## Laika (Minty Donald / Nick Millar) **BRIDGING**



• Venue: River Clyde,  
between the Clyde Arc and Bells'  
Bridge – Make your way to the  
City Inn or STV building  
Saturday 6 November, 15:00 – 19:00

Bridging, a site-responsive performance on the River Clyde in Glasgow city centre, laces together the banks of the river with 1.5 kilometres of heavy mooring rope. This unique collaboration between artists Minty Donald and Nick Millar and Offshore Workboats brings together 'culture' and 'industry' in a poetic evocation of the role of the Clyde – past, present and future.



• Lieu: River Clyde, entre le Clyde  
Arc and Bells' Bridge Dirigez-vous  
vers le City Inn ou le STV building  
Samedi 6 novembre, 15:00 – 19:00

Bridging est une performance qui aura lieu sur la Clyde, dans le centre-ville de Glasgow. Les berges du fleuve sont reliées par une lourde corde marine. Cette collaboration unique entre les artistes Minty Donald, Nick Millar et Offshore Workboats réunit la culture et l'industrie dans une évocation poétique de l'importance passée, présente et future de la Clyde.

**THEATRE BY MARK BROWN**

# Art built on the Clyde

**AS THE DELEGATES OF THE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMING ARTS BODY IETM DESCEND ON GLASGOW, THE RIVER CLYDE ITSELF BECOMES A PERFORMER**

**F**ROM Thursday until next Sunday, Glasgow will be hosting the biannual programme of performances and discussions known as the plenary of the IETM (International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts). The IETM, which has its headquarters in Brussels, is one of Europe's most significant performing arts organisations, with a membership of more than 1,000 companies and artists. More than 600 delegates will be on Clydeside and will join Glasgow audiences in sampling some of the best performance, live art, theatre and dance that Scotland has to offer.

For example, Nic Green's **Trilogy** (The Arches, Thursday-Saturday), a co-production between The Arches and Battersea Arts Centre, was a hit at the 2009 Edinburgh Fringe and at the Barbican centre in London earlier this year. Examining, among other things, the relationship between women and their bodies in the modern world, it has

been acclaimed as a brave experiment in contemporary feminism.

In **Alma Mater** (Scotland Street School Museum, Thursday-Saturday) performance artists Fish And Game provide audience members with portable video screens as they take us on an exploratory journey. Travel, not only around the famous Charles Rennie Mackintosh building, but also into the mixed feelings evoked by memories of your school days.

One of the most intriguing pieces being presented during the IETM event is **Bridging** (River Clyde, 3pm-7pm, Saturday), by live art innovators Laika (aka Minty Donald and Nick Millar). A self-defined "site-responsive" art work, the piece will see a huge rope being weaved 11 times across the Clyde, between the Clyde Arc (aka "the Squinty Bridge") and Bell's Bridge, creating a zigzag pattern above the river.

The massive black rope (which measures almost one mile in length) will be tied around the bollards on either bank of the



**A huge black rope, above, will criss-cross the Clyde in Bridging, an intriguing project by**

**Minty Donald and Nick Millar**

river. On every second turn, to prevent it from sagging, the rope will be pulled tight to restore its tension. The whole process will be carried out by company Offshore Workboats Ltd, which carries out much of the heavy work which continues on the Clyde.

"We've always been fascinated by the River Clyde and rivers in general", says Donald, of herself and Millar. Not only are the pair artistic collaborators, but they are also life partners who live together on a boat, also named after the Soviet spacedog Laika, which currently resides in a Glasgow boatyard; although they hope and intend that it will be moored on the north bank of the river before too long.

"Although there's been a lot of money put into the regeneration of the banks of the Clyde, I think the city of Glasgow is still not

entirely sure what to do with the river," she continues. "I think that's probably true of a number of post-industrial cities."

Although Donald is loath to explain too much about what the Bridging project means to her – she wants audience members to discover their own meanings – she hopes that others will share her enthusiasm for simply watching a "job of work" being done on a river which has been hugely deindustrialised over the last 60 years and more.

Donald is at pains to emphasise that she and Millar are not romanticising the often harsh realities of the shipbuilding industry but, rather, are raising the question of what the river means to Glaswegians today, and how it will be used in the future.

The great irony of the project is that the huge rope it uses was procured from

the Ministry of Defence. From Greenock to Clydebank, war and militarism have brought terror and tragedy to the Clyde. Yet, from the early years of shipbuilding to the present day (when the only vessels built on the Clyde are warships), Clydeside has long depended on the military for its economic well-being.

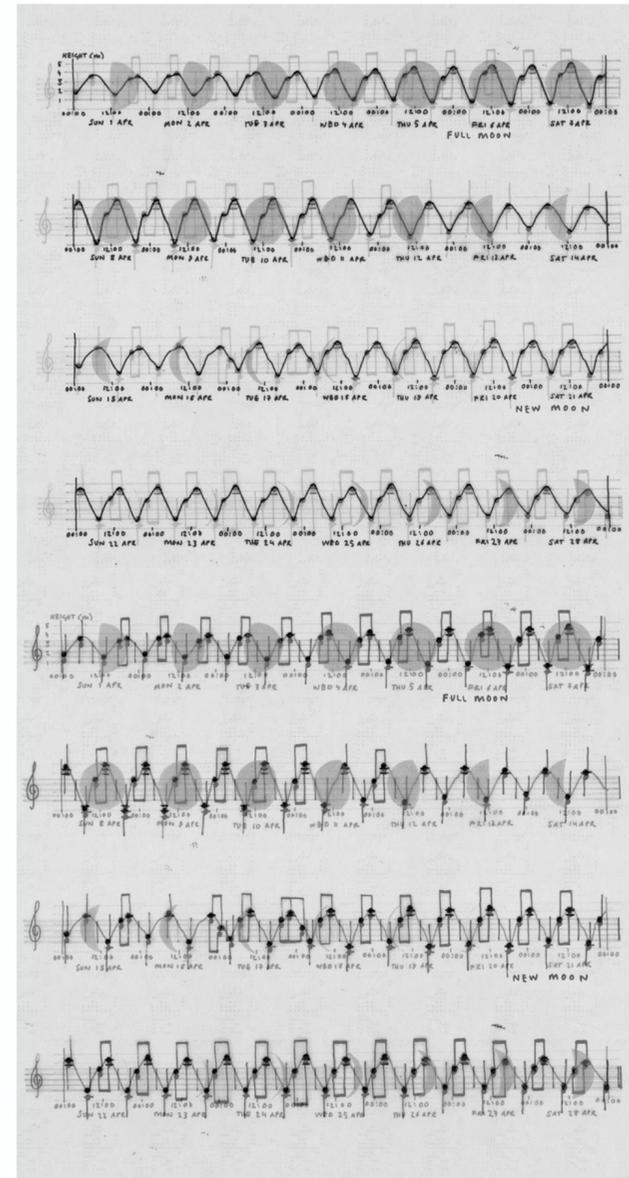
Such ironies will not be lost on Bridging's Glaswegian audience, and should prove a fascinating introduction to the city and its river for the delegates of IETM.

*Audience members attending Bridging are requested to assemble at either the City Inn, by the SECC, or the STV building opposite; for information about, and tickets for, the IETM performance programme visit [www.ietm-glasgow.eu](http://www.ietm-glasgow.eu)*



**Hanna Tuulikki**  
*Just as the Tide Was Flowing*  
 23 April 2012

Performed by Hanna Tuulikki, Nichola Scrutton, Peter Nicholson and Drew Wright.  
 Field recording by Patrick Farmer.



The river is a score: a composition for four voices and megaphones.

Tidal data for the Clyde is mapped out as a graph: time (twenty-eight days in April) against height (five meters). The graph is placed onto a musical stave and the height of the river translated into pitch: the turning of the tide marks the musical intervals. The score is performed by four vocalists, two on either side of the river.

The piece is named after a traditional song from Sussex:  
*'The tide flows in, the tide flows out,  
 Twice every day returning'*

**John Cavanagh**  
*Synodic Revolutions*  
 24 April 2012

Performed by Ceylan Hay, Gayle Brogan and John Cavanagh.

The collage of field recordings in *Synodic Revolutions* ranges from the eerie rhythmic gurglings of the Clyde at low tide to the engine of the paddle steamer Waverley and the rich spectrum of sounds heard within a nuclear submarine at the Faslane Naval Base.

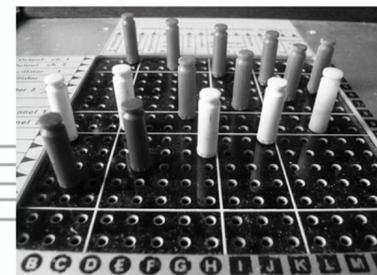
While capturing the tones and textures of the Clyde today, I came across many stories of distant river history and was struck by the prediction and detailed logging of the tides themselves. As this piece involves three performers, I've integrated three Clyde stories, using both field recordings and tide timetables in the process, with each singer's focus on one story as a catalyst to their input.

Ceylan's story concerns the Dumbuck Crannog on the Firth of Clyde between Dumbarton Rock and Bowling Harbour. This ancient burial site was discovered at low tide on the afternoon of 31 July 1898 by artist William Donnelly. The tide level was sufficiently low for Donnelly to spot timbers protruding from the foreshore silts. Had Donnelly dropped by at a different time, the crannog would have been invisible, with the oak piles submerged in up to eight feet of water. Donnelly's discovery sparked a wave of attention and controversy which brewed for thirty years. Although the crannog itself is genuine, a large collection of 'queer things from the Clyde', allegedly gathered from the site, were subsequently revealed as fakes. High tide times on the day of Donnelly's discovery were 11:16 and 23:47 in Glasgow; 10:15 and 22:46 in Greenock.

Gayle's story is associated with a sight which has graced Ardmore Point since 27 January 1974. On that night, during a ferocious storm, a Greek sugar ship, the *Captayannis*, was blown into BP tanker, *British Light*, while attempting to deliver its cargo to James Watt Dock. To save his crew, the captain of the *Captayannis* ran his ship onto a sandbank at the Tail o' the Bank, where she has lain ever since. The costs of removing the wreck discouraged any company from claiming ownership of the vessel. The *Captayannis* has become a home to many species of bird and marine life, including an unusually high number of conger eels. The tidal highs for 2 January 1974 were 02:57 (4.5m) and 15:10 (4.9m) in Glasgow; 02:34 (3m) and 14:40 (3.4m) in Greenock.

My story is from Helensburgh, the seaside town on the Firth of Clyde where I - like many Glaswegians - was taken for day trips as a child. It relates to Bell's Monument, erected in 1872 in memory of Henry Bell, who designed the first commercial steam-powered transit, *The Comet*, while living in the small town. Bell's work had a major local and global impact, giving passengers on the Clyde the first taste of travel with a lessened dependence on the tides and wind that hampered sailing ships. *Synodic Revolutions* includes recordings of the incoming tide made adjacent to Bell's Monument.

Fusing past and present together, I've used the number sequences of the tide times listed above to generate combinations of oscillators and filters, with the additional idea that using the shapes of tide patterns to programme a synthesiser pin matrix could be made to act as a kind of sonic cartography. As the synthesiser I use is an analogue device, without samplers, sequencers or memory, each of these events has to be set up manually. The photograph below gives an idea of the process.



*High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*

A suite of sound works presented as part of Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art and made in response to the tidal range of the River Clyde in Glasgow by artists: **John Cavanagh, Minty Donald/Nick Millar, Douglas Morland, Nichola Scrutton and Hanna Tuulikki.**

Monday 23 April - Hanna Tuulikki - Bell's Bridge/Millennium Bridge - 3.15pm.

Tuesday 24 April - John Cavanagh - Riverside Museum - 3.45pm.

Wednesday 25 April - Nichola Scrutton - Dixon Street - 4.05pm.

Thursday 26 April - Douglas Morland - Clyde north waterfront between Victoria and Glasgow Bridges - 4.45pm.

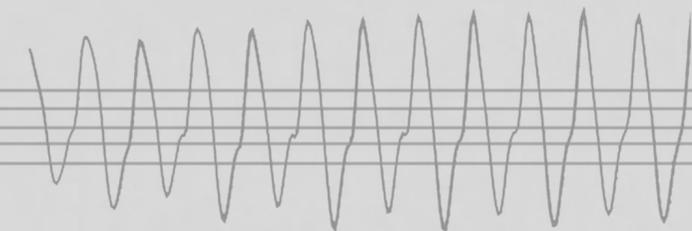
Friday 27 April - Minty Donald/Nick Millar - citywide - 5.25pm (and throughout the week).

Performances are timed to coincide with high tide.

Saturday 28 April - Trust Hall, Clydeport Authority Headquarters, 16 Robertson Street, Glasgow - 5pm and 7.30pm.

*High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* reflects on the functional and symbolic roles played by urban rivers in contemporary cities - and in particular, the role of the River Clyde in Glasgow today. It's common belief that, following the decline of shipbuilding and other maritime industries, Glasgow turned its back on the river. Now, while the riverbanks are undergoing significant regeneration, the water itself remains a relatively dead space. Through interweaving the natural cadences of the tide with contemporary urban rhythms, *High-Slack-Low-Slack-High* is an invitation to re-imagine the relationship between river and city - beyond the legacy of Glasgow's industrial and manufacturing past.

Perpetually rising and falling yet constrained within manmade embankments, detached from the city that once saw it as symbolic of its industrial prowess, the tidal river is taken as a cue to reflect on ideas of change and continuity, nature and culture, repetition and variance, in relation to the contemporary, post-industrial city.



*High-Slack-Low-Slack-High*

**Nichola Scrutton**

**Lateral**

25 April 2012

Performers include: Nichola Scrutton, Hanna Tuulikki, Claire Docherty, Kirstie Edgar, Jessica King and Morag Scott.



A 'Lateral System' is a system of navigational aids comprising shapes, colours and numbers, used to guide boats up river channels into ports and docks. Lateral is a sound work that creates a metaphorical journey up the Clyde from the mouth of the river into the city of Glasgow. Place names and the numerical information from tidal charts provide sound source materials for the periodic rhythms of a vocal 'landscape' in which depth is mirrored by density and current is mirrored by flow. The vocal material is interwoven with fragments of water recordings from the Clyde and punctuated with an array of signal sounds.

The site of the initial work, Dixon Street, is a main thoroughfare that runs from the river directly up through Buchanan Street, the city's main shopping artery. Effectively, the sounds of *Lateral* within this site connect today's shopping mecca with the history of the river as a main route for transportation of goods into the city.



**Douglas Morland**

**Keening Luna**

**(A Tidal Threnody)**

A performance in two parts

26 April 2012

As a child, at night, I often wondered what would happen if the moon were to simply just disappear. Hours spent in insomniac cosmic speculation yielded no clear picture of what a post-lunar existence might hold for us here on Earth, were that silver disc just to drift off into the dark unknown, never to return, like the slow fade of a retinal after-image. One thing I did know, at least, was that it would affect the tides in some way or other. I imagined a world without tides – eerily placid, seas and oceans like glass, a dark veil descending at night. All would be still.

Recently, I discovered just how wildly off-the-mark my hypothetical *après la lune* imaginings had been. According to scientists' projections, the effects of the moon's disappearance would be truly catastrophic for life on Earth as the incredibly sensitive set of celestial checks and balances that hold the planet's rhythms and ecosystems in complex synchronicity would be thrown into complete chaos. The length of a day would be drastically altered due to the drag that the moon exerts on the Earth's orbit. Seasons would conflate. The lack of tidal regularity would cause incredible changes to land masses. Extreme weather conditions would ensue - floods, droughts, ice caps melting, seas freezing over - entire species would be wiped out. Eventually we would all die.

It's worth noting that our moon is the only moon we know of that is quite as close, in terms of size and composition, to the planet it orbits (and they are the only tidally-locked pair we know of too). Perhaps then it's no coincidence that it's also the only moon we know of that circles an intelligent civilisation. Could it be that our large satellite not only benefits life on our planet but is an utterly essential requirement for it ever to have existed at all?

*Of the various works of art on which the primeval inhabitants exercised their ingenuity, probably none are more interesting than their boats. In these we see the first rude efforts of savage man to adventure on the deep, and to float himself on his native waters. Our noble Clyde appears to have been, from immemorial time, a favourite locality for the construction of vessels; and the deep alluvial strata, skirting the river of Glasgow, has at various periods yielded up the wrecks of canoes which these unknown savages had launched. No less than seventeen have been discovered within the last eighty years, at various places, on the plain of Glasgow; some under the very streets of the city. David Robertson, Glasgow Past and Present (1884).*

I was born in Yorkhill, overlooking the Clyde. My father grew up in Whiteinch to the clank and clangour, klaxon bursts and shrill whistles of heavy industry before he sailed off down the same river to explore the world as a young merchant seaman. This was just as the future of Clydeside shipbuilding was starting to look bleak and the resultant impact upon the culture, economy, topography and human story of Glasgow was about to be felt in all-too-real terms. River industry as relic: that's what you glean from a walk along the refurbished river front – old iron protrusions, cobbled sections of path containing rusting rail tracks and black flagstones beat an intermittent tattoo on the long stretch from Partick to Glasgow Green amidst the clean lines and smooth surfaces of the modern gloss. During its major period of dredging, narrowing and deepening in the 19th century, the Clyde yielded well over a dozen relics from a far earlier period. These prehistoric canoes were buried well inland at points that would have marked the tidal reach thousands of years ago, when these vessels were sailed. Opening a space in the imagination of the Victorian Glaswegian river-user, he too dependent on its ebb and flow, a sense of continuity may have been perceived. A ghost may have been sighted somewhere along the foggy banks. Progress and industry leads to an unearthing of the ancient, the unknowable. I can picture the black vessels emerging slowly, one-by-one, from the seams of sand and blue clay, telling tales of a people that perhaps enable us to mourn them.

At high tide an assembly gathers at the river's edge. A seemingly pointless gesture. Singing to the river. Singing to those who sailed on the river. Freed of words, female voices keen in microtonal harmony. Patterns emerge, currents mix and separate. A rising. A falling. Lungs engage. A sound is heard. The tide covers, the tide reveals. Is this how memory works? Through a series of small gestures and motions the conductor engages the assembly. Buckets, rope and vessels. In a futile undertaking, he attempts to dredge the river. Water is gathered. Water is taken to a round room. Glass vessels are filled to varying levels of fluid depth. A hand comes into contact with smooth glass. Circular motion is applied. Breath across glass. A sound is heard. A loop. An echo. Is this how memory works?

**Minty Donald/Nick Millar**

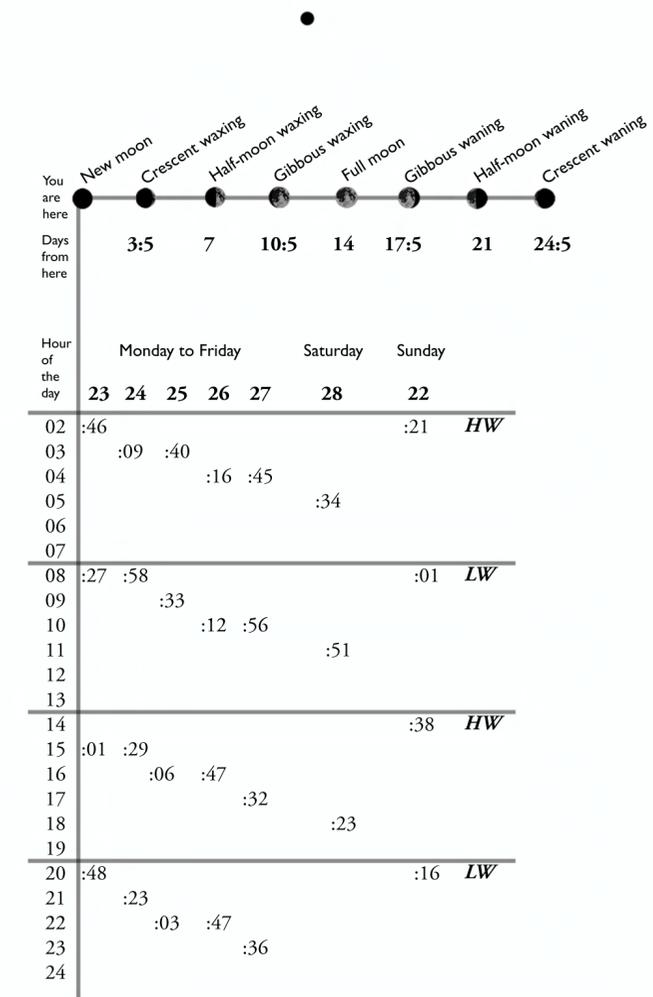
**Rivertime**

27 April 2012

*Cyclical repetition and the linear separate out under analysis, but in reality interfere with one another constantly. The cyclical originates in the cosmic, in nature: days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles, etc. The linear would come rather from social practice, therefore from human activity: the monotony of actions and of movements, imposed structures.*

Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* (1991).

How would the city feel if the rhythms of the river ran through it? What if urban schedules were infiltrated by the tempo of the tide? A refrain of ships' horns, rising and falling, interrupts the pulse of the city's transport network.



Thanks to:

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