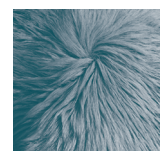


# SOUTH KIOSK AND THE OLD ~~WATERWORKS:~~ A STREET LOUD WITH ECHOES



*The pencil of the planner or developer designs incrementally, adding to the fabric of the built environment. But on occasion, entirely new realities are designed, erasing the histories of worlds that came before.*

A Street Loud With Echoes continues South Kiosk's research project into the pioneering work of architecture critic Ian Nairn whose 1955 edition of Architectural Review revolutionised planning policy in the UK. Tracing a path along the Thames as it flows towards the estuary, the exhibition unravels the constructed identities and foundation myths of new towns and developments that epitomised post-war planning in the UK.

Cover image credits in order of appearance: *Alphaville* by Maeve O'Neill (1, 2), *The Marshes* by Donald Harding (3) and *Plot* (Plotland images courtesy of Nina Humphrey) by Shaun C Badham.

South Kiosk is Ben Evans James, Dave Charlesworth and Jake Biernat

With thanks:

Maeve O'Neill, Shaun C Badham, Donald Harding, Carlos Romo-Melgar, Warren Harper, Holly Willats, The White Bus Cinema and Sebastian Kite.

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WEEKEND**

## PLOT

SHAUN C BADHAM

## ALPHAVILLE

MAEVE O'NEILL

## THE MARSHES

DONALD HARDING

TEXTS BY  
AND

BEN EVANS JAMES  
CARLOS ROMO-MELGAR

12.30-5.30 Friday, Saturday, Sunday  
Opening Night 17th October 6pm  
Closing 17th November

**SOUTH KIOSK**  
Unit DG1  
The Bussey Building  
133 Rye Lane  
London SE15 3SN



# UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF TRUTH

BEN EVANS JAMES

Managing the unfolding of fact and fiction across space, Donald Harding's *The Marshes* is an assemblage of film, audio and text. Taking place throughout the former marshlands of Erith and Belvedere and around the Thamesmead area, Harding describes this edgeland as 'neither urban nor rural, caught in the machinery of economic regeneration. A landscape rearranged by real estate values where developer's plans are marked up and ways of life marked down'. (Harding, 2018).

While there is no set path for the visitor to navigate the work, the most immediate entry point comes from a series of directional speakers installed throughout the gallery. Here we encounter recordings of Harding's phone conversations with local residents who describe their view from various points in and around the Thamesmead area. These recordings are the result of Harding's improvisation with the public phone boxes in the area where he would call and wait for someone to answer. The description of this landscape by its inhabitant's echoes Nairn's subtopian polemic *Outrage* around which this show is based – 'the doom of an England reduced to a universal subtopia, a mean and middle state, neither town nor country, an even spread of abandoned aerodromes and fake rusticity, wire fences, traffic roundabouts, gratuitous notice-boards, car-parks and Things in Fields' (Nairn, 1955) Harding's recordings from Thamesmead reveal additions to this list that include betting shops, Chinese takeaways and an infamous, now boarded up pub, where a shotgun was once fired into the roof.

Weaved alongside the essayistic form of these audio stories, Harding intersperses a separate narrative through a first wall text that questions the discovery of bones by construction workers employed on a building site within the Thamesmead area. At first thought to be human, the bones



are eventually identified as equine and originating from the "Marsh Cob" – a breed of horse whose presence Harding ascribes to the landscape of the area. Mounting a camera on a horse and allowing it to wonder freely, Harding creates a filmic component to the work that takes the form of a kind of psychogeographic *dérive* where the camera drifts across the landscape. Occasionally, the horse appears to interact with individuals or elements in the landscape causing the animal (and the camera) to alter its course.

Placed in opposing spaces within the gallery, the audio story, wall text and film begin to build a narrative of place for the viewer through the communities who reside there. In the final part of the work a second wall text historicizes the Marsh Cob, tracing the relationship of the horse to the area through key historical junctures. From the Saxon Kings of Kent to the filming of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, there is shown to be one constant in the landscape – the Marsh Cob horse. It is around this threshold – where the gallery visitor is caught between film, audio and wall texts – that questions around the veracity of the Marsh Cob might surface. Caught between hearing snippets of the sound work and seeing short flashes of the film – the visitor is left to piece together the fragments of their experience and to assess the plausibility of the facts being communicated.

In *The Marshes*, Harding constructs the Marsh Cob as a breed of horse animated by the real Gypsy Cob, a well worked horse within the Gypsy and Traveller communities of Thamesmead. Providing a fictional character that mediates between reality and representation, the Marsh Cob is used as a conduit through which the artist explores the erasure of histories brought about by the landscape's cycles of economic development. Making visible Harding's subjectivity and his status within the communities around Thamesmead as both an insider (a Londoner) and an outsider (a North Londoner), the fiction highlights the difficulty Harding felt in creating an appropriate response to a temporary context as complex as Thamesmead. His use of the Marsh Cob, acknowledges this dislocation without undermining his attempts to uncover truths and facts through the work (Sharpe, 2016).

*The Marshes* creates a lie with a sharp focus; a fabrication designed to uncover truths. As such, it requires a labour from the viewer to think both fictionally and factually at the same time; the installed work managing the plausibility of truth across space, leaving the visitor to piece together the fragments of their experience and to assess the veracity of the facts communicated. In *The Marshes*, Harding has created a work that achieves a condition of honesty by employing a lie.

@benevansjames







# THE SLIPPERY DIMENSIONS OF PROSPERITY

CARLOS ROMO-MELGAR

'I grew up in a place called Alcobendas, where this was not a very realistic dream', said Penélope Cruz in her acceptance speech for the best actress Academy award in 2008. Alcobendas, like many other dormitory suburbs of Madrid, has always been a subordinate of the capital city, preventing it from gaining authority in the urban conversation.

Each city speaks a language that is given to you. With it, one develops skills like the sense of orientation, walking pace, sensory expectations or access to things, among other facets. My city, Salamanca, although historical, wasn't very different. I always felt staying there would have a very negative effect on the way I think. Growing up there shaped my view of the world, in particular of the built environment. I realised many years after having left that environment, that I was unconsciously using it to gauge other experiences of place. Every time I saw free-standing buildings, separated from each other following the metrics of modernism (oh dear Neufert), I couldn't help but feel compassion for the damage that environment could have on their inhabitants. In fact, while studying architecture, I felt a sort of comfort watching excerpts from *Koyaanisqatsi* showing the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe. The education I was given showed me that certain languages enable, and certain languages restrict the life they allow to exist. It wasn't until I changed country and continent moving to Chile that I was



Image: Ramroth, Planning for Disaster. Kaplan, 2007. The demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe building complex was televised, creating a new perception on social housing.

The design for a city hall, state capitol, or national capitol provides a setting for politics while simultaneously legitimating the political structure as a symbolic statement. Yet public architecture often goes beyond legitimation. In a democracy, people have historically crafted an authority structure to provide delimited, responsive, and accountable government. The presence of democratic processes in public buildings reaffirms our civilizing instincts. Through the buildings that they design for public institutions and business enterprises, architects often provide a spatial presence of everyday politics. (Mayo, 1996. P.82)

confronted with a totally different language. While social formations thrive in what I considered unexpected places, I couldn't help but compare these places to where I came from. What happens to people who grow up in a different urban language? Do they desire or miss different things from myself?

The fictions of ideologies are written in architectural form. These are later on subject of a cycle of reenactment and historical record, where loss can't be avoided. Those with a stronger identity end up representing societies, cultures, religions.

Working for an advertising agency in Chile, I was once asked—as an European—to scout an appropriate location that could signify Paris in Santiago. We look for the spaces that convey the message we want, how we want. Form doesn't follow function, form follows... intentions?

[A]rchitecture itself manufactures reality in a more profound way. By expressing the economic, social and political ideologies of the society that creates it, and by organising these ideas into the spaces we inhabit, architecture manufactures real worlds out of abstractions. To understand how architecture operates, fulfils this role as the interface between the imaginary forces that it embodies and the real form that it takes, we need to think of the way it performs, the way it enacts ideas into the world. [...]

Enactment has two distinct definitions. First, it describes the theatrical acting out of a part or character, the dramatic representation of narrative through the performance of language, action and gesture. Secondly, it is the moment a law is passed into effect by a legislative body. We could understand architecture through these two definitions of enactment. (Jacob, 2012)



Still from the music video Sapokanikan by Joanna Newsom

Joanna Newsom's lyrics present a cut-up collection of diverse sources highlighting layering and oblivion in the construction of civilisation. In words of Christopher Laws concluding his analysis of the song's references: 'Repeatedly enacting departure, it wonders at the nature of change and our inability to coexist; yet despite a note of warning, it is not overly solemn, with a lively social and historical consciousness, and a formal lightness in its fluttering and swelling, in the patterns of Newsom's voice and the twinkling of the glockenspiel.'

in my life. These are heterotopian spaces which could be seen as pull quotes from other urban fabrics' stories, have lost their roots, but still narrate a broader political sense of place. Following a hauntological interpretation (temporal and ontological disjunction where presence is replaced by a non-origin), these spaces are ghosts both from the historical and the personal realm. It's only the smaller scale—the bus stop, the light pole, the bollards—that give clues of particular context. Phenomena of the built environment are sometimes persistent, an embodiment of the *genius loci*. What if that spirit is designed? What if the ghosts around us are nothing but a weaponised mundane activity such as building?

Moving to more prosaic environments, when I pass by the intersection between Essex Road and New North Road in London, I have a similar feeling to the one I had living in Monseñor Miller in Santiago de Chile. Also, that feeling was preceded by the one I got walking around Kreuzberg when I visited Berlin in my teenage times. Among other physical attributes, the rhythm in the fenestration, material or colour choice, these allow me to reenact experiences and previous moments



Houses in El Alto, Bolivia by Freddy Mamani. Photo by Alfredo Zeballos.

[T]here are many historical examples of newly established

elites who commissioned the construction of extravagant built environments as a way of concealing their lack of real power. In a never-ending cycle, countries and empires have built monuments, temples and buildings of sacred, symbolic or political importance in an attempt to demonstrate their power, claim a right to a territory, commemorate new rulers or establish their presence – often in salute to existing political or religious powers. (Muratovski, 2016)





Skopje 2014, under construction. Images: Sinisa Jakov Marusic and Darmon Richter

Between 2006 and 2017, the Macedonian government developed a series of cultural interventions establishing linear connection between the old Kingdom of Macedon and contemporary Republic of Macedonia. These interventions are nominated 'Antiquization' by its critical proponents, as the city centre of Skopje was re-built on a neo-classical style. This process is characteristic for the destruction of the metabolist/brutalist heritage of post-earthquake Skopje, in an attempt to rewrite a history of politics which ignores a socialist past.

Studying architecture in pre-crisis Spain, I was excited with Madrid Housing Institute's experimental approach to social housing. Bringing major architectural firms to the city somehow created a futurity. I was enraged seeing residents of MVRDV's Mirador building complaining on public TV about their assigned flats—'too orange', 'too industrial'—situated in a context where architects were meant to operate in their own intellectual bubble. Then, the crisis came, and 'we' started looking with suspicion at any experimental approach. Maybe it was the underlying ideology, the way financial impulse was fabricated, the factors to blame. However, that wasn't relevant in architecture(al) education.

The physical environment is out there for us to construct stories, to influence others. But sometimes the way we tell stories creates a breach between differentiated parts of society. Mass construction as a way of solidifying ideology often results first in the creation of alterity. Then, the displacement of people, but also of ideas and identities that the ruling class wants to get rid of. This situation is



The Walled City of Kowloon (九龍城寨) was a settlement in today's district of Kowloon in Hong Kong. The lack of governance that characterised the Walled City turned it into the most densely populated spot in the world. This urban phenomenon has been widely studied in the architecture academia. Often, this fascination has been characterised by an uncritical approach which ignores the position of the Walled City at the intersection of several international and local conflicts.

so common we have created an inextricable link between newness and nostalgia: we have wrapped a sense of suspicion around change.

In my opinion, when we face development, nostalgia shouldn't be the source for our critique. Instead the understanding of communities, habits and costumes could give us clues of what is at stake. This implies a certain level of complexity and it's probably worth mentioning now the acknowledgement privilege. I long for the walled city of Kowloon, which I would have loved to visit, but probably not to live in. Many times we are fascinated by the richness of a struggling culture, but we tend to ignore a more transversal look of their situation. For example, we need to consider the gallery space, for which this text has been written, as a privileged one. Citing Ruben Pater in *Politics of Design* 'reading this sentence makes you part of the 85% of the world population that is literate'.



Meme credit @socialpracticemafia

Reality itself is as fragile and fleeting as any cultural value [...] As reality changes, the world also changes dramatically, While cultural values define our way of reading and judging specific things in the world, reality as such refers to our general understanding of what kind of entities the world is and isn't made of. Changes in the status of reality bring about a mutation in the fundamental composition of the world, and thus also in terms of the possibilities of existence, action and imagination within it. [...]

'[R]eality' is the name that we assign to a state in which the dimension of essence (*what* something is) and the dimension of existence (*that* something is) are inextricably bound to each other, without merging into one another. As different forms of essence and existence alternate, and as their relationship varies over time, we witness the passage between successive forms of reality. (Campagna, 2018)

Whenever you are confronted with a new development and a sudden strike of nostalgia invades your thoughts, I would invite you to reflect: What (in particular) am I nostalgic about? To what extent am I responsible for this situation happening? How is my opinion shaped by the media I consume?

@carlosromomelgar

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