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WASTE MATTER – THE DEBRIS OF INDUSTRIAL RUINS AND THE DISORDERING OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

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Abstract

By exploring the disordering effects of ruination, this article critically explores the ways in which the material world is normatively ordered. The yet to be disposed of objects in ruins have been identified as 'waste', an assignation which testifies to the power of some to normatively order the world, but also is part of an excess, impossible to totally erase, which contains rich potential for reinterpretation and reuse because it is under-determined. Through processes of decay and non-human intervention, objects in ruins gradually transform their character and lose their discreteness, they become charged with alternative aesthetic properties, they impose their materiality upon the sensory experience of visitors, and they conjure up the forgotten ghosts of those who were consigned to the past upon the closure of the factory but continue to haunt the premises. In these ways, ruined matter offers ways for interacting otherwise with the material world.

Key Words ◆ aesthetics ◆ affordances ◆ excess ◆ ghosts ◆ industrial ruins
◆ materiality ◆ order ◆ waste

THE ORDERING OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

Social order is partly maintained by the predictable and regular distribution of objects in space. Rarely subject to conscious reflection, the situation of objects in their assigned places, and the impulse to re-situate

them 'properly' when they fall out of position, testifies to a common-sense idea that there is 'a place for everything and everything in its place'. Although such schemes of material order are culturally variable across time and space, in the context of quotidian life, they appear to be part of the way that things just are, beyond critical appraisal. Thus although emerging from different genealogies, the principles of ordering objects in shop windows, homes, museums and other spaces of domestic, public and commercial display, confine things to their places. Where unusual or 'exotic' artefacts intrude upon this material order, their wildness tends to be tamed by strategies of 'containment', through which they are recontextualized and incorporated within the prevailing arrangements (Attfield, 2000).

In the outlets of commodified memories, at heritage sites, in museums and other exhibitionary spaces, in retail spaces, themed realms and designed sites, procedures are mobilized to place and contextualize objects. In these ordered settings, objects are spatialized so they may serve, for instance, as commodities, icons of memory, cultural or historical exemplars, aesthetic focal points or forms of functional apparatus. Objects are situated within a web of techniques including highlighting, mounting, window display and labelling, spatially regulated, selective procedures which banish epistemological and aesthetic ambiguity and disguise the innumerable ways of using objects, thereby limiting the interpretative and practical possibilities for those who encounter things. Carefully placed at an appropriate distance from each other and positioned against uncluttered backgrounds so that they cannot mingle, the excessive sensual and semiotic effects of objects can be purified to single meanings and purposes, to an arrangement which eclipses mystery and 'stabilises the identity of a thing' (Thomas, 1991: 4). This careful distribution of objects is also coterminous with the 'purification of space' whereby space is divided into discrete, functional, single-purpose realms (Sibley, 1988).

The common-sense obviousness of the 'proper' position of things in space is underpinned by their status as enduring fixtures around which habitual actions and routes are repetitively practised, as props in the performance of everyday routine. Accordingly, this consistent location consolidates a sense of being in place and provides proof of shared ways of living and inhabiting space. In this way, situated within a web of normative meanings and practices, objects (re)produce and sustain dominant cultural values. One has only to think of the sense of apparent material and social disorder experienced during a visit to an unfamiliar setting, where nothing is in its proper place; indeed, the whole schema of material order confounds expectations grounded in habit, even mundane fixtures such as traffic signs and everyday commodities in shops. Migration or temporary relocation requires that we either

become habituated to such material-spatial arrangements or create our own refuge which reproduces a material order in which we feel 'at home' to avoid epistemological and ontological insecurity. This importation of domestic objects and their organization within the home can lead to contestations where such arrangements appear to be manifestations of threatening otherness in familiar space, where, for instance, migrants bring customs of material distribution with them (see Edensor, 2002).

In a broader spatial and cultural context, order is maintained through constructing networks which variously comprise objects, humans, spaces, technologies and forms of knowledge (Law, 1993). All such elements are folded into regulatory systems and strategies are continuously followed to ensure their stability of meaning and purpose (at least until change is required, which then entails a reordering of elements, the dismissal of some and the conscription of others). Within these networks, the meanings and functions of objects is thus assigned through their relations with other elements in these aggregations. For instance, a commodity has its meaning fixed through the systematic ways in which it is manufactured according to an ordered sequence of stages, entailing movement through a stable set of discrete places on an assembly line, and the application of specialized tools to its shaping, to identify just a few elements in the gathering together of forces which ensure its production, marketing, display and sale. Again, these successful operations require eternal vigilance to ensure that they are not infected by disorderly and entropic tendencies.

When industrial sites are closed down and left to become ruins, they are dropped from such stabilizing networks. Prior to this however, factories are exemplary spaces in which things are subject to order: machines are laid out in accordance with the imperatives of production, shelves accommodate tools, and a host of receptacles, notices, utilities and equipment are similarly assigned to particular spaces and positions. Following dereliction, the condition of these objects reveals that without consistent maintenance, social, spatial and material order is liable to fall apart. As soon as a factory is abandoned to its fate, the previously obvious meaning and utility of objects evaporates with the disappearance of the stabilizing network which secured an epistemological and practical security.

Industrial ruins continue to litter urban Britain as old mills, workshops, breweries, forges, chemical works and rubber factories decay in the marginalized areas of cities that have not yet succeeded in attracting sufficient inward investment to redevelop such sites, especially in the North and Midlands. Industrial ruins are produced through the relentless, increasingly global, capitalist quest for profit maximization, where less profitable nodes in production networks are apt to be dropped, as

production moves to other parts of the world. Moreover, as western economies become more oriented to providing services and media and information products, different, more flexible industrial buildings are required, including retail warehouses and smaller production centres, in contradistinction to the brick-built or stone-clad factories of the 'workshop of the world'. Since the onset of a pitiless economic restructuring process in 1979, huge areas of British cities have been abandoned or demolished as heavy industrial manufacturing centres became suddenly obsolete. Simultaneously, real estate speculation has asset stripped buildings, vacating or demolishing them to offer saleable land at opportune moments. Yet the process of erasure is uneven, for many abandoned factories have subsided into disuse, lingering on in the urban landscape, bypassed by flows of money, people and energy, particularly in cities which have lost out in the contest to attract new investment.

Officially reviled and often feared as no-go areas, they nevertheless serve a number of useful social, ecological and historical functions (see Edensor, 2005a). In the following, I argue that the materiality of industrial ruins means they are ideally placed to rebuke the normative assignments of objects, and I highlight the ways in which this disordering of a previously regulated space can interrogate normative processes of spatial and material ordering, and can generate a number of critical speculations about the character, aesthetics, affordances and histories of objects. Accordingly, I will explore firstly, how discrete objects gradually become transformed under conditions of ruination and decay, secondly, how the normative aesthetics of things in space are confounded by a disruptive, alternative aesthetics, thirdly, the ways in which a confrontation with the strange tactilities, smells, sounds and textures of discarded things and ruined space can defamiliarize the ordinary feel of stuff, and fourthly, how forgotten but unsuccessfully disposed objects can prompt surprising memories. First of all though, to contextualize the discussion of industrial ruins, I discuss some of the ways in which waste and materiality have been accounted for.

WASTED SPACES AND THINGS: MATERIAL EXCESS AND THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF OBJECTS

One of the ways of materially ordering the world and imprinting power on space is by making and enforcing decisions about what matter is waste, and what is not yet over and done with. The discarding of superfluous stuff is evidently part of personal maintenance, 'fundamental to the ordering of the self' (Hawkins and Muecke, 2003: xiii), and is a process which also includes the management of personal and communal space. Yet the regulation of materiality around the body and the home has become increasingly intensive. Material worlds are more intensively

policed in order to discern the unfashionable and the 'useless', partly because of increasing material excess and also because of the modish desire for minimalistic designs which makes an enemy out of clutter (Potts, 2004).

The production of waste and its intensified disposal at both institutional and individual levels is a response to a speeded up, capitalist modernity which requires that the material world is more rigorously regulated. The dynamic tendencies of consumer capitalism are particularly geared to the production of surplus and in order for the new to be accommodated, the old must be chucked out, erased or made invisible or else it will violate public and personal boundaries and propriety. Decisions about that which is no longer fashionable, is now obsolete, or is due to be replaced by a new model or a more 'modern' object emerge out of the production and marketing strategies endemic to consumer capitalism. With the abundance of commodities, to avoid the endless piling up of previous artefacts from an increasingly recent past, an unwanted surplus must be discerned. Identified as waste or rubbish, it is irrelevant, dirty and disorderly and must be expelled and disposed of. Thus it is matter out of place, especially where it spills into and infects those proliferating spaces designed to disguise ambiguity, in which material elements (together with functions, social practices and forms of information) are discretely distributed and continuously regulated. Accordingly, regimes of disposal have developed systematic modes of expelling unwanted matter so that it may no longer be confronted. Rubbish is piled into containers, conveyed to increasingly guarded reprocessing sites, cremated, used as landfill and apparently thereby erased.

The objects happened across in ruins are in some ways comparable to those in the fading arcades of pre-war Paris which attracted Walter Benjamin. Stranded from the recent, but seemingly far-distant past, discarded and outdated, these things had abruptly been deemed unfashionable, were victims of the morbid cycle of 'repetition, novelty and death' through which the newly fashionable consigns the previously modish to obsolescence. The obsolescent artefacts of the ruined factory display a similar evanescent character, are also victims of the 'extreme temporal attenuation' (Buck-Morss, 1989: 65) whereby industrial techniques and commodities suddenly attain venerable status, and the recent past becomes ancient history. This speeded up capitalism produces an endless search for newly marketable products, as well as a quest to discover new places where production might be cheaper and more 'efficient', and new technologies of production where people and older machines are replaced by newer machines. Rendering places, labour, technological processes, products and machines instantaneously outdated, such a system produces vast quantities of new 'premature waste' (Gross, 2002). Obliterating traces of this carnage fosters the myth

of endless and seamless progress but obsolete objects draw attention to the unprecedented material destruction wrought by an accelerating capitalism, the accumulating pile of debris which relentlessly builds up. Accordingly, waste materials offer evidence for a radical critique of the myth of universal progress driven by the supposedly innovative power of capitalism and technology. In the ruin, in confrontation with the scraps and shadowy forms of the recent past, the realization dawns that industrial production does not symbolize linear progress but can represent a circular process through which things become obsolete, are thrown away, later recycled or replaced in pursuit of the always new. Michael Thompson (1979) has shown how formerly cherished things may slide into disuse, become 'transient' objects, which may further decline and become rubbish, but they can be reclaimed as useful or desirable once more, according to the vagaries of fashion and status.

Moreover, as Georges Bataille realized, production always generates its negative, a formless spatial and material excess which rebukes dreams of unity (1991). For, as Tom Neilsen remarks, '(T)he concrete matter of the city will always exceed the ambition and attempts to control and shape it, and will always have features that cannot be exposed in the representations that planning has to work with' (2002: 54). Despite the schemes to erase superfluity, discarded objects, like all waste, are apt to return for systems of disposal are rarely perfect

and matter is often more difficult to eradicate than imagined. As Shanks, Platt and Rathje declare, '(G)arbage is *in sight* everywhere' (2004: 71), and the old and about to become rubbish surrounds us. Spaces exist in which rubbish lingers on, in attics, unofficial dumps, second-hand and charity shops, lock-ups, garages, sheds and ruins of all sorts.

Besides conceiving them as exemplary manifestations of the endless waste produced by capitalism, Benjamin also searched for congealed life in discarded things, seeking out their allegorical potentialities, and a multitude of other semiotic, sensual, practical, social and aesthetic potential that reside in objects. Today we are surrounded by even greater quantities of waste



and there is a profusion of excessive resources – spaces, things, meanings – that can be utilized in innumerable ways. This glut reveals the limitations of the commodified, planned city, for as John Tagg (1996: 181) observes, urban ‘regimes of spectacles and discourses do not work . . . they are never coherent, exhaustive or closed in the ways they are fantasized as being . . . they cannot shed that ambivalence which always invades their fixities and unsettles their gaze’. Instead, they are ‘crossed over, graffitied, reworked, picked over like a trash heap . . . plagued by unchannelled mobility and unwarranted consumption that feeds unabashed, on excess in the sign values of commodities’. Similarly, in the ruin, things are in a state of ‘unfinished disposal’ (Hetherington, 2004), in between rejection and disposal. Accordingly, ruins and their contents are rather ambiguous for whilst they have not been finally erased, they disassemble and rot, seem to have lost any value they may once have possessed but simultaneously, by virtue of their present neglect and disorderly situation, there are no sanctions on how they might be used or interpreted. Where rubbish heaps might be off limits, ruinous matter has not been consigned to burial or erasure, and still bears the vague traces of its previous use and context, however opaque. Accordingly, ruins contain manifold surplus resources with which people can construct meaning, stories and practices, including abandoned things which acquire ‘unforeseen value and status insofar as they lack contour . . . precisely because they are fluid as well as opaque and resistant to fixity’ (Neville and Villeneuve, 2002: 5).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUINED MATERIAL WORLD

Work goes into the sustenance of an object over time. It is cared for, cleaned and polished, to bestow upon it an illusion of permanence, to keep at bay the spectres of waste and decay. Yet in the ruin the object enters a different temporality, where its life may be shortly at an end, depending upon the conditions of moisture, the state of dilapidation of the building in which it is housed which allows the weather into what was formerly the protective inside, the agency of non-human life, possible destruction or reappropriation by humans, and upon its own constitution, its resistant qualities. Often obscure in function and value, objects in ruins speak back to a material world in which things are contained by assigned places and normative meanings. In inverting the ordering processes of matter, the wasted debris of dereliction confounds strategies which secure objects and materials in confined locations, instead offering sites which seem composed of cluttered and excessive stuff, things which mingle incoherently, objects whose purpose is opaque, and artefacts which have become, or are becoming something

else. In ruins, processes of decay and the obscure agencies of intrusive humans and non-humans transform the familiar material world, changing the form and texture of objects, eroding their assigned functions and meanings, and blurring the boundaries between things. Ruins are replete with 'things decaying, disappearing, being reformed and regenerated, shifting back and forth between different states, always on the edge of legibility' (Desilvey, 2004).

Materially, buildings may be identified by a number of components which change over time, their 'site', 'structure' (the skeleton), 'skin', 'services' (the 'working guts'), the 'space plan' (interior walls and ceilings and so on) and 'stuff' (the furniture, tools and other objects which fill space – Shanks, Platt and Rathje, 2004: 77–8). Yet such material elements are differently affected by dereliction, some more immediately under threat than others. Soon after abandonment, given the vagaries of climate and the rate at which roofing, doors and windows are removed, ruination produces a defamiliarized landscape in which the formerly hidden emerges and the building regresses to a state which recalls its own construction. The internal matter of a building, its guts, spill out. The pipes, wiring and tubes spring out from their confinement behind walls and under floors and skeletal girders and joists emerge as plaster and wood rots and peels off. Drainage channels and ventilation shafts appear, and phone lines and electricity wires break out from their imprisonment, often in seemingly exuberant display. Catalysed by contact with moisture, temperatures and non-human life, the latent energies within matter are expended in this escape. Gravity compels



matter to cascade to the floors and collect at the base of walls. Tiles slip their moorings, glass shatters and disperses shards, mortar and bricks crumble and shed dust, plaster cracks and disintegrates, wallpaper shears off walls, and paint blisters and peels in ornate fashion.



Mixing with this array is a meld of other stuff: clinker, plastic, piles of thick lime, cleaning agents, adhesives, grease, oil, pitch. Receptacles of all sorts erode and discharge their contents and nesting material, droppings and a wealth of fungal and botanical life joins the rich stew of debris, increasingly an amalgam of indistinguishable animal, vegetable and mineral substances, of dead and living things, a mulch of matter which profanes the order of things and their separate individuality, or their membership of a category of objects.

The material status of objects in ruins is transient, so that they are in a state of becoming something else or almost nothing that is separately identifiable. Things are stripped down in stages, giving up their form and solidity over time. If objects are not rescued, curated or obliterated, initial signs of decay such as a mild tarnish or rust, herald future eventualities. For a while, a thing will retain its shape but gradually becomes hollowed out, losing its density. Such objects can be deceptive, surprisingly light or may fall apart upon contact. Moreover, the pattern and process of decay may remove a thing from its membership of a standardized group of objects, a job lot of fellow objects from which it becomes separable by virtue of an emergent individuality. Escaping such a material category, it develops its own unique blotches, warps and moulds. But paradoxically, things eventually become indivisible from other things in peculiar compounds of matter, aggregates of dust or rubble. Or they may merge with other objects or change their characteristics as they become colonized by life forms. Things get wrapped around each other, penetrate each other, fuse to form weird mixtures or hybrids. Testifying to the rapidity with which coexistent forms of non-human life usually confined to marginal spaces through constant human vigilance take their opportunities to take possession of space following abandonment, fungus settles on wood, wallpaper and upholstery, growing bigger, using up matter and enfolding it into itself. Co-participants in the making of the world, animals and plants are always waiting in the wings, ready to transform familiar material environments at the slightest opportunity. Birds nest inside old fixtures and cupboards, material gets gnawed at by mammals and insects,



or is worked upon by bacteria, often producing elaborate patterns of warping, peeling and mouldering. These traces of non-human life-forms on the material textures of ruination reveal other unheralded, non-human ways of existing and interacting with matter. Ledgers, work desks and mounds of paper bear traces of the paths made by spiders, holes created by woodworm plus nests assembled by birds or rodents, animal and botanical interventions into what was identified as ordered and apparently discrete matter.

This hybridization undoes the order of things, transgressing the assigned boundaries between things, and between objects and 'nature'. As things decay they lose their status as

separate objects, fragmenting and dissolving as discrete entities, becoming part of the soil or absorbed into non-human bodies. Things give up their solidity and form, yielding to the processes which reveal them as aggregations of matter, erasing their objective boundaries. This physical deconstruction of objects reveals the artifice through which they are structured to withstand ambiguity. This erosion of singularity through which the object becomes 'un-manufactured' remembers the process by which it was assembled: the materials that were brought together for its fabrication, the skilled labour that routinely utilized an aptitude to make similar things, the machines and tools which were used to shape it. The object's abrupt loss of the magic of the commodity – that it is a self-evident, separate thing of worth and value – seems to confirm Julian Stallabrass's observation that 'commodities, despite all their tricks, are just stuff' (1996: 175). And this loss allows us to reinterpret and use them otherwise.

AESTHETICS AND UNEXPECTED MATERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

One crucial way of ordering the material world is through the installation of particular aesthetic codes which determine or influence the

placing of objects, their subjection to particular arrangements of display informed by standardized notions about how they should best be highlighted or showcased. For instance, the windows and interiors of retail spaces, art galleries, museum display cabinets and suburban homes are replete with such notions wherein objects are organized in categories, situated a proper distance from each other, placed against uncluttered backgrounds, labelled, lighted and hung or raised on a dais to claim the attention of shoppers, visitors or neighbours. Such aesthetic codes are part of the mundane organization of matter, rarely noticed except when they are absent. They inform the common-sense ways in which we tend to 'properly' situate objects within homes and workplaces, although they are increasingly subject to reflexive control with the increasing prevalence of peddling 'lifestyles', for instance, in the slew of home improvement and garden design television programmes currently popular on British television. Their normative power can be readily identified where transgressions are perpetrated, for example, in the common outrage which greets the installation of 'inappropriate' statuary or 'lurid' painted doors in suburbia.

Because materials are usually situated according to regimes of ordering, in ruins the appearance of an apparently chaotic blend can affront sensibilities more used to things that are conventionally aesthetically regulated. At once, a sense of disarray is provoked by the ways in which objects have fallen out of previously assigned contexts, with often little clue to the previous material arrangements. Whether manifest in the serial occurrence of distinct objects randomly strewn or the coalescence of stuff in piles and other aggregations, objects seem to have reached their current situation according to no deliberate scheme of organization but through the agency of obscure processes.

However, normative arrangements are contested by other, emergent aesthetics, where things are positioned otherwise, have left the realm of human control, and their chance positioning highlights their form or texture rather than their function, foregrounding their material qualities. Positioned in these new locations, objects become unfamiliar and enigmatic, they contravene our usual sense of perspective, rebuke the way things are supposed to assume a position in regimented linearity or are separated from each other at appropriate distances. Broken windows and empty doorways frame these artefacts, large expanses of flooring accommodate them, and they take their place within a shattered landscape, contributing to a reconfigured setting. As such, objects can resonate with a powerful beauty wherein they seem most akin to pieces of sculpture, or geological or archaeological vestiges within in a barren landscape. These sculptural forms are born out of the violence of collapse, the effects of decay and the subsequent effects of hybridization. Twisted metal suggests an unhitherto expected pliability, a trail of



paperwork composes a splash of coloured design on a concrete floor, isolated machines and a multitude of unidentifiable objects lie inscrutably across floors. Even the simplest of vertical structures – lamp-posts, fences, pillars – are endowed with new intimations when they lean askew. Eruptions of blisters in plaster and sagging concrete create pleasing troughs, buckled wooden decking creates static waves across old shop floors. Bent out of shape, decaying and cast adrift from their assigned settings, objects thus often appear as sensuous and peculiar figures, creating a sort of mundane gallery of the fantastic. Moreover, as Hal Foster claims for the outmoded object which becomes charged with surreal properties and thereby a certain power, it 'might spark a brief profane illumination of a past productive mode, social formation, and structure of feeling – an uncanny return of a historically repressed moment' (Foster, 1993: 54).

Besides the reconfigured aspect of separate objects, the patterns of association which emerge out of the arbitrary combination of things strike peculiar chords of meaning and supposition, and impart unfamiliar aesthetic qualities. These ensembles are not comparable to artistic montages deliberately arrayed to conjure up remarkable associations to provoke sensations of dissonance, to forms of photomontage devised to articulate political sentiments, to deliberately chosen artefacts – often masquerading as 'typical' or 'special' – compiled in museum exhibition cases to convey impressions of a foreign time or culture, or most commonly, the commodities priced, highlighted and conjoined in window displays which are organized artfully to lure

shoppers into desiring fetishized objects. For the ad hoc montages of objects and other scraps found in ruins are not deliberately organized assemblies devised to strike chords and meanings through associations, but are fortuitous combinations which interrupt normative meanings. By virtue of their arbitrariness and the evident lack of design, these assortments are difficult to recoup into explanatory or aesthetic frameworks, for the objects which congregate together bear no obvious relationship to each other. Obeying few of the norms of arrangement, they present a cryptic company of forms, textures, relationships and meanings. In addition, these happenstance montages comment ironically on the previously fixed meanings of their constituent objects within ordered industrial space, and provide a contrast with the ever-so-carefully arranged montages of commercial and instructive space. Both these peculiar juxtapositions of things and the contorted, displaced sculptural artefacts found in ruins can have the effect of making the world look more peculiar than it did before, especially upon re-entry into everyday urban space. This accidental surrealism makes normative material order less obvious, more tenuous and stranger than it appeared previously.

A host of things remain inscrutably impervious, available solely for conjecture. Would-be-commodities, now outdated, spill across floors, or lie dormant in loading bays or on conveyor belts. Boxes full of products are piled up for export but will never now be despatched into the world, the motion of circulating objects arrested. The artefacts of production are frequently not fully formed commodities-to-be but are manufactured as components or machine parts for the supply of other workshops within the industrial matrix. Accordingly, these products can take on mysterious form, have no recognizable purpose except for the ruin's former habitué. In addition to these unrecognizable things, there are the inexplicable tools and machines used for arcane industrial processes, along with other material debris of production, the residues, off-cuts and by-products – metal spirals, shearings, plastic mouldings, filings – which, before their absorption into the general glut of intermingling stuff, provide evidence of the sensuous engagement with matter shaped into form.

The aesthetic charge of ruined industrial space is of a very different sort to the esteemed qualities of the rural tumbledowns, classical sites or medieval vestiges that have been the object of the romantic gaze. Such 'picturesque' ruins have been celebrated for their melancholic associations with time's passage, their coincidence with the sense of loss and nostalgia engendered by rapid industrialization, and as a rebuke to attendant optimistic notions of 'progress' and the futile gathering of wealth and power when inevitably all must go the way of the ruin. According to the romantic aesthetic, the ideal ruin had to be 'well enough preserved

(while retaining the proper amounts of picturesque irregularity)' (Roth, 1997: 5). Since the late 18th century, the representation of ruins conformed to specific aesthetic conventions comprising 'variety and contrast of forms, lively light and dark interplay, rough textures, and above all, rather busy foregrounds with assorted irregular trees or rambling shrubbery in one or both corners of the picture, between which a few figures and/or animals appear' (Hawes, 1988: 6). In artworks, these picturesque scenes were often combined with intimations of the sublime, stormy clouds and looming edifices depicting the requisite atmosphere of awe, suggesting unseen powers. This aesthetic cult reached its apogee with the fabrication of purpose-built ruins in the estates of stately homes, highlighting the aesthetic control and strict conventions through which ruins were apprehended and understood, a control that is completely absent in the industrial ruin. Neither the elicitation of preferred sentiments and moral lessons nor the contemplative, romantic impulse can be stimulated by contemporary industrial ruins. Instead, there is an unpredictable immanence of impression and sensation. In their unfamiliarity, the changing material artefacts of industrial ruins escape easy identification and provide material for speculative interpretation. How can such objects be made sense of now that they seem lost to the world of things that perform useful work, signify status and decorate space? In the evocative phrase of Michael Taussig referring to Joseph Beuys' art works, the ruin is now a space akin to 'a playroom or the cemetery for lost objects which never made it to the world of categories' (2003: 17) or whose categorical status has elapsed.

THE AFFORDANCES OF RUINED THINGS

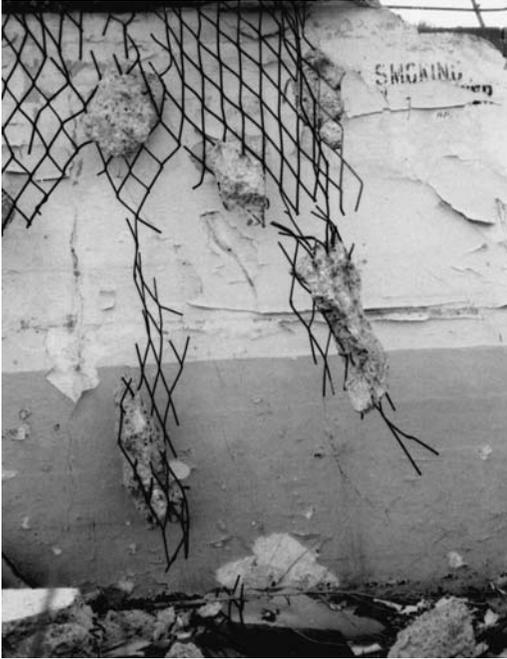
As I have already inferred, the spatial recontextualization and condition of objects in ruins draws attention to their material qualities, making evident the matter out of which they are made. This confrontation with the materiality of things can provoke a sudden awareness of the ways in which we are affectively and sensually alienated from the material world through the regulation of the sensory impact of things. In desensitized urban and domestic realms, the sheer smoothness of space, the constant maintenance of space and objects through cleaning, polishing and disposal effectively restricts and regulates sensory experience, minimizing confrontations with textures, weight and other material agencies. The reproduction of smoothed over space not only involves a control of matter but also conforms to ideas about how the 'modern' body should comport itself in the city, how it should apprehend and sense the city in accordance with 'efficient' and 'healthy' norms which banish material and sensual clutter, creating seamless walkways, clear and linear sight-lines, deodorized environments, highly regulated soundscapes

and smooth tactilities within which bodies are enabled and coerced to perform in appropriate, 'rational' ways. This further ordering of space reproduces a sensual engagement with materiality which is so normative that when disrupted it can be highly disorientating but also extremely pleasurable.



Thus the excess of matter in ruins and the objects chanced upon are not merely open to aesthetic and semiotic reappraisal, for the materiality of the ruin also impacts upon the body. To walk amongst a clutter of multiple objects and fragments is to move within a material environment which continually engages bodies, distracting and repulsing us, attracting us to unfamiliar textures or peculiar shapes, coercing us to stoop and bend, to make a path around and through stuff. As Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke assert, this sort of 'waste', this rejected and neglected matter, 'can touch the most visceral registers of the self – it can trigger responses and affects that remind us of the body's intensities and multiplicities' (2003: xiv) disturbing and intruding upon the controlled body. In the ruin, the transformed materiality of industrial space, its deregulation, decay and the distribution of objects and less distinguishable matter, provide a realm in which sensual experience and performance is cajoled into unfamiliar enactions which coerce encounters with unfamiliar things and their affordances. At first somewhat disturbing, this confrontation with the materiality of excess matter offers opportunities to engage with the material world in a more playful, sensual fashion than is usually afforded in the smoothed over space of much urban space.

Thus ways of moving through ruined space can foreground a sharp awareness of the materiality of things that are usually maintained or disposed of. The ruin *feels* very different to urban space, rebukes the unsensual erasure of multiple tactilities, smells, sounds and sights. It is not a world of silken sheen or velvety textures, polished surfaces, colour coded design, even hue, ceaselessly swept flooring, plush carpeting, silently opening doors and noiseless machinery. Instead, it contains the rough, splintery texture of a wooden work bench or floorboards, crunchy shards of glass, the mouldering dampness of paper and wallpaper, the cushioned consistency of moss and the sliminess of wet, rotting wood. In their unfamiliarity, such things invite touch. Unlike the artefacts in a store or museum, these items are available to pick up, to stroke and throw, to smash or to lift and pull apart. These pleasurable forms of matter, which assert their weight and texture and invite the body to



interact with them, are joined by matter whose sensory apprehension is less enjoyable, stuff which intimates that the body is under threat through its sensory effects. We must avoid upper floors which tremble underfoot or creak ominously, the viscous puddles of grease or the deep, dark, oily baths which served nameless industrial processes. The demise of a stable materiality must be engaged with and learnt, so we become competent in the preservation of life and limb. Moreover, even when not dangerous, matter forces the body on the defensive

by its powerful sensual intrusions: the acute acidity of industrial chemicals and rotting of dead substance may assault the nostrils, the face may suddenly become enveloped in a thick veil of cobwebs, the clatter of a swinging light fitment in the wind may cause a sharp fright, and the slipperiness of a greasy shop floor in the rain might coerce a slithery dance. The body recoils or opens itself out to these sensual stimuli, to the abundant textures, sounds and smells, to both abject and pleasurable matter disposed of in more regulated space. Unable to insulate itself against these material intrusions, the body is rendered porous, open to the impacts of matter, is a 'threshold or passage', characterized by 'multiple surfaces open to other surfaces' through which 'strange substances' are able 'to cross the subject's own boundaries' (Fullagar, 2001: 179).

This differently performing body, acting contingently in these unfamiliar surroundings, is not merely reactive to the effusion of sensory affordances but also actively engages with the things it beholds. In turn, the ruin is a space in which things can be engaged with, destroyed and strewn around expressively in contradistinction to interaction with things in regulated realms where typically, objects are visually beheld at a distance, and a disposition is required whereby commodities and other forms of material property are sacrosanct and may not be meddled with. Not only are there performative norms which militate against the more

active engagement with objects but very real sanctions for such 'destructive' behaviour. In the ruin, there is no price to pay for destroying things which have already been consigned to the category of waste and belong to nobody. So it is that in virtually all industrial ruins, windows are smashed, doors ripped off their hinges and toilets and basins shattered through assault. This testifies to another form of pleasurable action towards things which is enjoyable partly because it is usually prohibited but the constraints which delimit action upon the material world are here irrelevant, but also because it is a viscerally and sensually exciting engagement with matter.

OBJECTS FROM THE PAST AND ABSENT PRESENCES

As I have said, in the ruin all objects mingle and there are no distinctions between the seemingly trivial and the important. There is similarly no order which shapes how things ought to be consecutively viewed, no pattern or system through which preferred understandings might build up. Such a sequence of gazing is dependent upon the preferences or preoccupations of the onlooker and similarly, there are no contextualizing narratives or labels to interpret things for the visitor, no schemes of expertise which direct the attention to this or that quality, or to place it within a comprehensible framework. Because things in ruins have not yet been disposed of or sorted according to value, if the factory has been abandoned for some time, they become divested of their contemporaneity. The sudden reappearance of things which we thought we had consigned to the past and entirely forgotten can shock us into the realization that there was a sudden passing which we never properly acknowledged, and that these disappearing things were objects from our own histories. Thus besides the obscure tools and machines



we might stumble across in ruins are items which testify to the attempts of managers and workers to render industrial space more homely. Schemes of decoration which use seemingly tasteless wallpaper, furniture and curtains, posters of yesterday's footballers and pop stars, and toys and mascots from popular culture used as kitsch props by workers testify to a vernacular creativity, but they can also shock because they have been completely forgotten in the pursuit of the fashionable. Such objects are part of 'an accelerated archaeology' (Stallabrass, 1996: 176), and might appear absurd or comical yet they can provide surprising jolts of recognition that bring back knowledge and tastes that were thought to have been forgotten for ever, but are part of a shared culture. Such items are instantly recognizable and are thus part of our own pasts as well, revealing that we are complicit with the rapid disposal and ongoing transformation of the material world.

But even more than these involuntary sensations, ruins are haunted spaces replete with ghosts (Edensor, 2005b). Despite their disruptive qualities, wild objects and unruly signs populate the city, interrupting the illusions of present order. Often uprooted from their original location, they inhabit the city, its homes, pubs and gardens, and transform our 'buildings into haunted houses' (de Certeau and Giard, 1998: 137). Yet again, the ordering processes of the city do their best to confine such ghostly objects, either through obliteration of traces of the past, or through incorporation into schemes of containment, whereas in ruins, such schemes have not been mobilized and ghosts may roam free. Ruins thus swarm with ghostly intimations of the past, and objects bear these traces, haunting us with inarticulate memories, intimations and sensations about people we never met and about lives we never knew.

The material traces of people are everywhere, object-presences which conjure up the absence of those who wore, wielded, utilized and consumed them. Most evidently, the bodies of absent workers are summoned up by the intact or shredded remnants of articles of clothing. Clothing stores, lockers, cloakrooms and hooks still contain the overalls,



boiler suits and work jackets which clothed working bodies. Other vestiges of specialized work apparel litter floors and benches. Hobnail boots, gloves and hardhats also provide material that can facilitate an empathetic recouping of the sensory experience of

industrial work. Not only do these garments recall the bodies which wore them but they also bear traces of their inhabitation. Gloves are torn at the fingers and coated in grease, the knees of overalls are ripped or have been stitched, the soles of boots are coated in thick compounds of adhesive debris. A sense of what it felt like to wear these things and how they might coerce bodies into particular manoeuvres and forms of comportment is summoned up. Likewise, the presence of tools and machines conjures the bodies that used and interacted with them, becoming so habituated to these things that they came to constitute human-object hybrids. These material traces make available an empathetic recouping of what it felt like to wield a large spanner, sit next to a throbbing piece of heavy machinery, lift heavy boxes, sit in a dimly lit office answering the phone, and generally dwell within an environment of hard stone floors, constant noise and repetitive manoeuvres. Spectral bodies are further called up and possess us through other signs of their impact on space and by fixtures that accommodated them. In canteens, seats and tables remain, bent out of shape through use. Body shapes remain embedded in more comfortable chairs, footprints are marked on floors, stair-rails are shiny from serial handling and steps worn from innumerable footsteps. These objects and their material surrounds cajole us into performing the past as we put our bodies into its flow.

These objects and obscure signs, labels and traces are largely inarticulate in that they suggest multitudes of scenarios but only offer possibilities to surmise, to assemble conjectural memories, things we half know or have heard about somewhere but are just beyond grasp. For instance, in addition, scribbled onto walls are lists of products, a mysterious language that testifies to a forgotten knowledge about things, now obsolete products whose arcane names linger on: 'CPO parts nozzle short 65340', 'Heritage D15L Cov'd Sugar', '6497 Perlator', 'Botanical'. Together with the in-jokes, banter and slang, shared jokes, hobbies and individual eccentricities which resonate in the traces left by workers, and were part of the



unreflexive, affective, sensual dwelling within industrial space, these traces are evidence of a lost and forgotten skilled knowledge.

Yet such disparate fragments and traces, and the uncanny impressions they provoke, cannot be woven into an eloquent narrative. Accordingly, stories retrieved from ruins must be constructed out of a jumble of disconnected things; ghostly, enigmatic traces that remain invite us to fill in the blanks. Despite this inarticulacy of objects in ruins, these artefacts, consigned to the status of waste, are not intended to be remembered, and they announce themselves as the objects of unfinished disposal. Yet the absent presences they raise up are vital signs of prior life, for as Avery Gordon declares, it is 'essential to see the things and the people who are primarily unseen and banished to the periphery of our social graciousness' (1997: 196).

CONCLUSION

This kind of remembering embodied in these artefacts implies an ethics about confronting and understanding the otherness of the past, which is tactile, imaginative and involuntary. It cannot pretend to be imperialistic because it must be aware of its own contingent sense-making capacities and likewise, the objects found in ruins highlight the radical undecidability of the past, its mystery. The objects found in ruins are not organized, or identified as exemplary or typical or special. They cannot be narrated and woven into orderly schemes of sequential display. Instead, they are replete with fantasies, desires and conjectures, memories which are able to 'implode into the present in ways that unsettle fundamental social imaginary significations' (Landzelius, 2003: 196), haunting the certainties proffered by the powerful and the normative material apparatus through which memories are invoked. Stripped of their use and exchange values and the magic of the commodity, they can be reinterpreted anew, perhaps bearing the utopian, collectively oriented visions unconsciously embodied within them by their creators that Benjamin discerned (see Gross, 2002). This disruptiveness of the materiality of the ruin similarly dislocates the normative aesthetic and sensory apprehension of urban space, and undermines the integrity of the fashioned artefact as a discrete entity. The political assumptions and desires which lie behind the ordering of matter in space are thus revealed by the effects of objects in ruins, and they provoke speculation about how space and materiality might be interpreted, experienced and imagined otherwise.

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