

# Unbecoming

Peter Aeschbacher  
Sara Bomans  
Aleks Catina  
Agnishikha Choudhuri  
Sing d'Arcy  
Lorella Di Cintio  
Susan Hedges  
Ed Hollis  
Heather Peterson  
Mark Pimlott  
Fátima Pombo  
Remco Roes  
Jonsara Ruth  
Kirsty Volz  
Lisa Zamberlan



UNBECOMING

IDEA JOURNAL 2013



UNBECOMING

**IDEA** JOURNAL

The Journal of the Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association

Formed in 1996, the purpose of IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association) is the advancement of education by encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture education and research within Australasia; and being the regional authority on, and advocate for interior design/interior architecture education and research.

The objectives of IDEA are:

- to be an advocate for undergraduate and postgraduate programs at a university level that provide a minimum 4 years education in interior design/interior architecture;
- to support the rich diversity of individual programs within the higher education sector;
- to create collaboration between programs in the higher education sector;
- to foster an attitude of lifelong learning;
- to encourage staff and student exchange between programs;
- to provide recognition for excellence in the advancement of interior design/interior architecture education;
- to foster, publish and disseminate peer reviewed interior design/interior architecture research.

www.idea-edu.com

#### MEMBERSHIP

Institutional Members:

Membership is open to programs at higher education institutions in Australasia that can demonstrate an on-going commitment to the objectives of IDEA.

Current members:

AUT University, Auckland  
Curtin University, Perth  
Massey University, Wellington  
Monash University, Melbourne  
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane  
RMIT University, Melbourne  
Swinburne University, Melbourne  
University of New South Wales, Sydney  
University of South Australia, Adelaide  
University of Tasmania, Hobart  
University of Technology, Sydney  
Victoria University, Wellington

Affiliate Members:

Affiliate membership is open to programs at higher education institutions in Australasia that do not currently qualify for institutional membership but support the objectives of IDEA. Affiliate members are non-voting members of IDEA.

Associate Members:

Associate membership is open to any persons who support the objectives of IDEA. Associate members are non-voting members of IDEA.

Honorary Associate Members:

Andrea Mina, George Verghese, Gill Matthewson, Harry Stephens, Jill Franz, Lynn Chalmers, Marina Lommerse, Tim Laurence, Gini Lee, Julieanna Preston.

IDEA JOURNAL 2013

© IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association) 2014

ACN 135 337 236

ABN 56 135 337 236

Published at: Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

Registered at the National Library of Australia. ISSN 1445/5412

#### IDEA JOURNAL 2013 UNBECOMING

Guest Editor: Ed Hollis

Executive Editor: Rachel Carley

#### PROVOCATION

Designing interiors is the process, we say, of finding a place for everything, and putting everything in its place. Alberti claimed that 'Beauty is that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse...' (Leone Battista Alberti)

But it shouldn't be, and it never is for long; and Bruce Mau replied, in his Incomplete Manifesto for designers: 'Make Mistakes Faster.'

We want to know about

Interiors from the past that went wrong, are broken or disappeared.

Interiors from the present that are ugly and useless.

Interiors from the future we haven't planned.

Comedies and satires, but above all, Tragedies

Once upon a time, interiors were rooms: enclosed aesthetic - and therefore ethical - systems. Marie Antoinette pressed the button in her boudoir, and the windows were replaced with mirrors, excluding completely the uncertainty of the world outside the room, and replacing it with the perfection of her own reflection.

But when the revolutionaries dragged the Queen away, they left the door ajar, broke the locks, and smashed the mirrors, destroying the visual and moral coherence of the room. They did it in the name of liberty, for an enclosed room, in which everything has been considered, which dictates to its occupants exactly how it should be used, permits of no freedom.

It is ironic that the modernist architects who vandalised the formal integrity of the room: Frank Lloyd Wright, who took away its comforting corners, Mies, who dissolved its walls into glass and polished onyx, and Le Corbusier, who turned it into an incident on a promenade, were determinists who believed that their formal games could predict and provoke the aesthetics and ethics of behaviour.

The room has passed into history and has become ideologically impossible. This is something the insurgents of the Arab Spring know as they trash the leopardskin Louis Quinze of their masters, and it is something of which even the curators of Versailles are aware: last year they refurbished the old royal apartments with contemporary furniture for a month or two, despite the inevitable catcalls.

Interiors only grant their occupants freedom if it they are incomplete – either in space (deprived of enclosure, violated) or time (wrecked, collaged, rearranged, redecorated). Only then are their occupants obliged to complete them, to take an aesthetic, and therefore ethical, stance. A broken chair in an untidy room reminds us that freedom is not a right, or a luxury, it is the obligation to think, act, and participate.

And freedom requires us to engage with (but not to accept) all sorts of infelicities, for the incompleteness that grants it is, of its nature, unbecoming. It's an ugly word: a negative, the disintegration of a state of being; but it's a necessary negative: Interiors are misused, they fall apart, they are forgotten – because we live in them.

Designing interiors is the process, we were taught once upon a time, of finding a place for everything, and putting everything in its place; but it isn't that, and never was. Interiors are always unbecoming, and their fragmentary arrangements invite rearrangement and fragmentation all the time. Their nature is liberty.

This issue of the journal invites interdisciplinary collaborations with landscapists, geographers, gardeners, and other lovers of the changing environment of life as well as politicians, anthropologists and theologians: papers, projects and reviews that explore the emerging consideration of the ethics of the interior: how does, or could, the interior provoke, rather than dictate, behaviours and responses? How can design make its users neither its objects, nor its subjects, but its citizens?

This is a call for unbecoming meditations on the interior: ugly images, and stories about things that went wrong. It is provocation for provocations. This is a proposal for an issue of IDEA, in which we explore the liberating wrongness of interiors, and the ways in which it can foster incomplete knowledge, the willingness to make mistakes, and the ethics of freedom of enquiry.

#### EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Dr Rachel Carley (Executive Editor)  
Dr Suzie Attiwill  
Dr Daniel Huppertz  
Nicole Kalms

#### EXTERNAL ADVISORY BOARD

Graeme Brooker, Middlesex University, UK.  
Dr Deidre Brown, Senior Lecturer, University of Auckland, New Zealand.  
Dr Jooyun Kim, Professor, Hongik University, Seoul, South Korea.  
Dr Stephen Loo, Professor, University of Tasmania, Australia.  
Dr Julieanna Preston, Associate Professor, Massey University, New Zealand.  
Dr Gennaro Postiglione, Associate Professor, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.  
Lois Weinthal, Chair, Ryerson University, Canada.

#### COPY EDITING

Marie Shannon  
marieshannon@clear.net.nz

#### PRODUCTION

Design: Propaganda Mill  
www.thepropagandamill.com  
admin@thepropagandamill.com

Printing: Fergies Print and Mail  
www.fergies.com.au  
+61 (7) 3630 6500  
sales@fergies.com.au

Cover Image: Sara Bomans & Remco Roes, "Nothing will come of nothing, speak again," 2012 © Sara Bomans & Remco Roes.

Correspondence regarding this publication should be addressed to:

Dr Suzie Attiwill  
c/o IDEA Journal  
Interior Design  
RMIT University  
GPO Box 2476  
Melbourne 3001  
Australia  
suzie.attiwill@rmit.edu.au

# Contents

- 2 Editorial **Unbecoming**  
Ed Hollis
  
- 6 Visual Essay **The Vanity and Entombment of Marie Antoinette**  
Heather Peterson
  
- 20 **Impossible Totality and Domesticity: Designed interiors as monsters**  
Peter Aeschbacher and Fátima Pombo
  
- 36 **Reflexive Dwelling: The body as representation of wall**  
Kirsty Volz
  
- 44 Visual Essay **Erased Domesticity: an abandoned house in Detroit**  
Lorella Di Cintio and Jonsara Ruth
  
- 60 **Dressing Surface Wounds**  
Susan Hedges
  
- 68 Visual Essay **Between Everywhere, Connecting Everything, and Nowhere**  
Mark Pimlott
  
- 88 Visual Essay **Nothing will come of nothing, speak again**  
Sara Bomans and Remco Roes
  
- 100 **Eye Candy: the Manhattan residence of Joseph Holtzman**  
Lisa Zamberlan
  
- 114 **An 'Unbecoming' Cohabitation? Reconsidering the narrative of the Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba**  
Sing d'Arcy
  
- 130 **The Failings of a Fleet of Fools: Encountering the interiors of disused power stations**  
Aleks Catina
  
- 142 **Redefining Waste for the Twenty-first Century: A new role for interior designers**  
Agnishikha Choudhuri
  
- 154 **Biographies**

## DISCLAIMER

To the extent legally permissible, the editors, authors and publishers exclude or disclaim all and any liability (including liability arising in contract and tort) to any person, whether or not through this publication, for any loss howsoever arising and whether or not caused by the negligence of any of the editors, authors and publishers resulting from anything done or omitted to be done in reliance, either whole or partial, upon the contents of this publication.

# The Failings of a Fleet of Fools: Encountering the interiors of disused power stations

Aleks Catina :The Cass, London Metropolitan University,  
United Kingdom

## ABSTRACT

*'It is a philistine prejudice that conflicts and problems are dreamt up merely for the sake of their solution. Both in fact have additional tasks in the economy and history of life, tasks which they fulfil independently of their own solutions.'*<sup>1</sup>  
- Georg Simmel

*In November 1982 the New Scientist published a map of eleven power stations in Greater London which were lined up for decommission. With their institutional raison d'être expired these objects no longer justified their monumental scale in the heart of the post-industrial city. Two shells, at Battersea and Bankside, escaped demolition and were earmarked for civic use. The encounter with these found interiors challenges the design expert to reflect upon what these seemingly alien spaces offer to an age in which the image of the contemporary prevails over sense of continuity.*

## DYSTOPIC VOIDS

A man is being strapped to a chair in the centre of a circular empty space of awe-inspiring proportions. There are no windows in the rough concrete walls, rising 200 feet high towards a remote natural light above. A single steel ramp leads from the perimeter to a raised central platform: 'Don't fight it son, confess quickly,' hisses one of the uniformed henchmen adjusting the buckles, 'if you hold out too long you could jeopardise your credit rating.'<sup>2</sup>

Terry Gilliam, the director of the 1985 film *Brazil*, from which the above dialogue is taken, could not have found a more fitting location for the macabre torture scene concluding his dystopian satire. The cooling tower of the decommissioned power station complex in Croydon captured a type of interior that emerged during the dying days of the nationalised power supply in Britain. Coinciding with the second miners' strike and Margaret Thatcher's second term in office, Gilliam's film location unwittingly depicts a historical space, seemingly disconnected from the possibility of change. Through the wide-angle lens the disused industrial interior appears as a space primed for uncertainty and fear. Gilliam's sequence portrays these spaces as failed institutions, which retain the aura of menace in their state of desertion.<sup>3</sup> The thought of what might lie behind the walls

of the former 'cathedrals of power' in their state of economic impotence could not have offered much comfort to the cinema audiences of 1985. The demolition of many of these unbecoming spaces, retained within the walls of disused power stations hence can be seen as a catalytic process.

One of the film's visions became reality in 1991 when the disused *Croydon B Power Station*, which had served for the exterior shots of the Ministry of Information, was blown to bits. Only the two brick chimneys, adorned in a reduced Art Deco-style masonry, escaped destruction.<sup>4</sup> The demise of the industrial landscape as an integral part of the modern metropolis has been subject to rich theoretical discussions over the last decades. Tim Edensor's scholarly contribution to the debate on the industrial ruin establishes the potential of these derelict spaces to enable remembering and social practice, as well as the perception of cultural values found within the barren.<sup>5</sup> Leading on from Edensor's observation, this paper aims to point towards a critical discussion of new uses and modes of inhabiting the *unbecoming* remains of the past, and their changing role in the contemporary city. To discuss the potential outlined by Edensor with regard to the opportunity the industrial ruin offers, reference will be made to Georg Simmel's essay, in which the author explores the role of conflict *in the economy and history of life*, focusing on two central propositions.

In *The Conflict in Modern Culture*, written as a lecture during the last months of World War I and shortly before the author's death, Simmel presents a critique of the changing premise of art in the cultural context of modernity. His argument proposed the central cultural ideal emerging in the late nineteenth century in Western civilisation as *life*, which he describes as an infinite strive 'to become more, gain greater value.'<sup>6</sup> Despite this positivist framing of *life*, which he bases on Nietzsche's original concept of 'will to power', he contextualises this new age as lacking the coherence and universality of the past, where art could play an instrumental role in the expression of commonly shared cultural ideas, by the proposition of an appropriate *form*. In modern culture, it is *form* which no longer is able to retain the identity-shaping role it had in the past, as it is itself too easy to comprehend to offer enduring representations of the transitional nature of *life*. Simmel perceives contemporary life, to which he does not attribute a finite aim, as too full of contradictions to stand still, or to give rise to a permanent form. Formulating a tragic view he concludes: 'The bridge between the past and the future of cultural forms seems to be demolished; we gaze into an abyss of unformed life beneath our feet. But perhaps this formlessness is itself the appropriate form for contemporary life.'<sup>7</sup>

A secondary, yet not less prominent concept that Simmel's describes in *The Conflict in Modern Culture* introduces the role of the professional expert, as the central cultural protagonist of the modern age. Simmel identifies a division of approaches to the cultural challenges of the age, and attributes this to the emergence of *occupational expertise* as the predominant way of perceiving and producing responses to cultural questions.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the cultural stakeholder of the past, the expert proposes a response to questions of cultural significance based on his professional bias, and seeks validation for his proposition within his own field of knowledge.



Simmel's pessimism informs the approach of this paper with regard to the problematic encounter with the physical presence of the industrial past in the contemporary city. This encounter can be a catalyst for reflection on the contemporary values and value makers which seek to give shape to our cultural ideas, in the form of responses to unbecoming spaces. In the first section, three protagonists of contemporary culture – the artist, the developer and the architect – are introduced through selected episodes from the tale of *Battersea Power Station* following its decommission.<sup>9</sup> The images presented by each of these examples are relevant to the idea of conflict as a means of representing the cultural condition of their respective age.

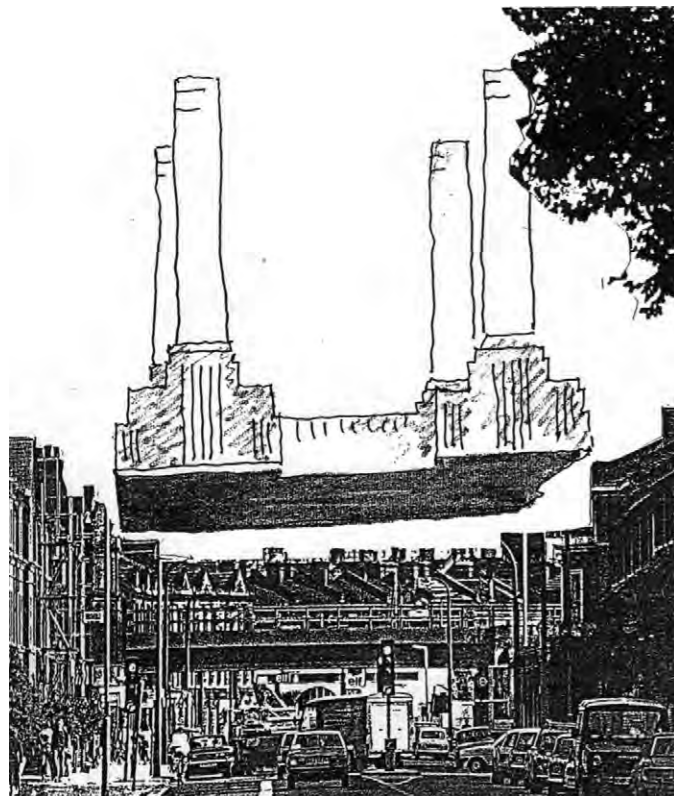
The second section, "Denied Spaces", introduces a discussion on the possibility of retaining the quality of conflict in new interiors that are created within the remains of old structures. The *Tate Modern* serves as the second example of the way in which an encounter with the industrial past is presented and offered to the public in contemporary culture. Its new programme provides an example *par excellence* of a heterotopia in the spirit of the nineteenth century, as described by Foucault.<sup>10</sup> In an ongoing

redevelopment, the parasitic *Tate Modern* project claims to redefine the museum for the twenty-first century.<sup>11</sup> Yet, denying *Bankside* its past might compromise the potential to retain a beneficial quality of conflict, which could set the contemporary heterotypic space apart from the its nineteenth century predecessors. The final example, the *Berghain* nightclub in one of Berlin's redundant power plants of the Cold War era, proposes a different type of presence of the ghost within the shell. Here the contradiction in the change of use remains unresolved, for the benefit of what can be experienced as an enduring encounter with the past as a lived experience. Michel Foucault's image of the *Ship of Fools* will be consulted in an attempt to relate the shell, the building's figure of a post-industrial legacy within the city, to a changing content within.

The bridges with the past might have been demolished, as Simmel suggests, however, from his criticism a set of possibilities arises with regard to the potential of unresolved conflict. This paper does not cite the success stories of a developing coherence with regard to a central or emerging cultural identity in our times. Instead the aim is to differentiate, to some extent, between varying degrees of a failure to evolve towards an acceptance of an unbecoming image of the past as a relevant reference for the cultural condition of our own age.

## EXPERTS WITH WRECKING BALLS

The architect Cedric Price, in an iconoclastic vein, proposed to demolish the freshly Grade II listed non-structural walls at *Battersea*. Dubbed the *Bat Hat*, the proposition consists of a set of provocative sketches and collages produced in the spring of 1984<sup>12</sup> (Figure 1). With a sense of lucid opportunism, the architect took a good look at the four fluted pre-cast concrete chimneys and boldly underscored the surreal quality of this image: a set of hollow Doric columns, supporting nothing but thin air. By denying vertical enclosure and emphasising an architecture of celebratory exteriority and tectonic transparency, Price capitalised on the image of the ancient temple in the state of ruin – some 140 feet off the ground. Others simply described it as an over-turned pool table, hovering over the city.



It would be wrong to attribute the *Bat Hat* to a purely monumental impulse. More in keeping with the architect's oeuvre, the proposal represents an uncompromising belief in the fluidity of unified space, framed by a legible structure. Price shared the abstract, modernist notion of his generation; that to set free the space within could be to hand it back to the city.<sup>13</sup> His was a libertarian vision based on educated idealism. The provocation, conveyed in a set of simple sketches and collages, can be said to illustrate Simmel's idea of *occupational expertise*: an architect's stab at the Gordian knot of *Battersea*.

Price's idealist view, not to call it ideological disposition, on the potential of architecture to serve as a catalyst for social change, can be traced through most stages of his career. His most enduring contribution to the architectural imagination had been conceived twenty years earlier; the *Fun Palace*, a conceptual project that Price developed under the intellectual guidance of Joan Littlewood.<sup>14</sup> It is beneficial for further reference to dwell on the *Fun Palace* proposal, keeping in mind that there is a relationship between free space and the free choice of the individual. This is not a literal link founded on language alone, but an idea, which played a role in the reflective encounter

that Littlewood and Price hoped to offer to the user. It was to be a form of instructive 'fun', in the sense of Berthold Brecht's *Epic Theatre* theory, brought to an age of early cybernetics.<sup>15</sup> The spatial openness and accessibility of the scheme, to which a radical rethink of the role of walls was instrumental, renders a vision of a user-centred political space. However, the idea of participation as fun was fundamentally didactic. A telling diagram associated with the *Fun Palace* project entitled *Organisational Plan as Programme*, introduces scientific formulae and terms such as 'Modified People' and 'Individual Preference Valuations'.<sup>16</sup> By extension the liberation of architectural space from fixed boundaries entrusted the user with freedom, but also invested him with the responsibility to reflect and make use of it well, that is to an ideologically biased programme of self-betterment. If the *Fun Palace* can be understood as a radical architectural re-think of the relation between event and enclosure, it must also be seen as an instrument for the purpose of social engineering.

In architectural circles the perception has been maintained that the *Bat Hat*, like the *Fun Palace*, implies a set of playful spatial gestures.<sup>17</sup> It is, however, not wrong to state that it can be read, in relation to Price's programmatic rendering of fun,

**Opposite**  
Figure 1: Vision of the *Bat Hat* as architectural 'fun'. Cedric Price, unknown (*Bat Hat*), photomontage, dimensions: unknown, 1984. (Image courtesy of Building Design and BDonline).

**Above**  
Figure 2: The Grade II listed remains of *Battersea Power Station* in London has been in a desolate state since the early 1990s. ©Photo: Matthew Day, 2012.

as a monument to the social utopia of an emerging age of the self-directed individual. The *Bat Hat* in 1984 - coincidentally the same year that the original *Fun Palace* scenario was envisioned in Littlewood's article - presents a monumental afterthought to the libertarian ideals of the 1960's. For Price, as for many modern architects, new architecture was to be a vehicle for the expression of central cultural concerns, and as such the past presented an obstacle which must be liberated from its form in order to fit in.

Once the Orwellian year was upon Britain, consumer culture, as subjected to persiflage in Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, had taken hold of the public imagination. In this new context *fun* had become a type of panacea, mass-marketed to a nation displaying a newly evoked appetite for consumption. Enter John Broome, the entrepreneur and free-market evangelist who bought up *Battersea Power Station* during the Thatcher years. His scheme for the transformation of the industrial ruin into an Edwardian *Tivoli*-type amusement park can serve as an example of an antithesis to Price's proposition: retain the strong external walls as a decorative barrier against unauthorised access and charge an entrance fee for the experience of mindless entertainment centred on a glorification of the Imperial past. Fittingly, instead of Price's dreamed-of controlled demolition of the external walls, Broome paid for the roof of the building to be removed, to make space for amusement rides. The scheme went bust shortly after. The site was left barren for the next two decades (Figure 2).

Broome's farcical endeavour - which followed in the footsteps of Margaret Thatcher's revisionism on matters of society's aims and values - in its loud, patronising manner, can be read as an alarming signal that the experience of Britain's industrial history had come up for sale.

In January 2013 *The Daily Mail* published a set of visuals by Rafael Viñoly Architects and the interior architects Johnson Naylor, illustrating the future development of *Battersea Power Station*.<sup>18</sup> They depict, in the highly rendered fashion which has taken over architectural representation in recent decades, a type of lifestyle enclave, fitted out with 800 luxury flats, high end pastime

facilities, exclusive corporate space; even a tennis court on the roof of the building, where *Pink Floyd* raised an inflatable pig in 1976. The once-mighty colossus is to be dwarfed by the raised access level to the leisure and business complex implanted within. Is this any longer an image that one can put into context of the demise of Britain's industrial age? Battersea's identity is no longer subject to the gaze of *occupational expertise* by experts like Price or Broome, who set their respective schemes, each in their own more or less critical way, in a national cultural context. More recently, the unbecoming edifice of the past has been reframed as an attainable icon, or a brand. In the developer's promotional video, the once subversive image immortalised on *Pink Floyd's* album cover for *Animals*, appears as a framed, not to say tamed, picturesque souvenir from an alien past, hung on the wall of a luxury flat overlooking the Thames.<sup>19</sup> The "pig on the wing" can no longer retain the quality of conflict it might have evoked in a generation which saw coal smoke escape through Battersea's Doric chimneys. Form, as Simmel would suggest, has failed to endure the flux of meaning asserted by a shifting cultural context. A different quality of images of Battersea, insistent on evading conflict, is proposed to potential property investors in the new development. The sophisticated 3D renders of interior and exterior views are less concerned with *life*, as Simmel would have it, but with lifestyle. In an age of mass-communication the expert professional of Simmel's essay has handed over the task of reflecting on cultural values relating to the past to the designer of images, whose clientele is a global audience of potential buyers. Giving definite form, or resolution, to an unbecoming problem, is the very purpose of this imagery.

## DENIED SPACES

In September 1982, shortly before the power station's final decommission, the comedy group *Monty Python* (minus Terry Gilliam) used the lavishly decorated corridors of *Battersea A* as the setting for a sequence in their feature film *The Meaning of Life*.<sup>20</sup> J. Theo Halliday, who had conceived the overall layout and volume of the original *Battersea Power Station* in the 1920s, famously designed the control rooms and turbine hall of *Battersea A* to the highest material specifications of any such building.



The interiors speak of prestige, grandeur and corporate power. The use of bronze, Italian marble-clad pilasters and immaculate parquet flooring along the corridors lent a sense of grandeur. The *Pythons* took the reading of Halliday's interior to the extreme. In the section *Middle of the Film*, a surreal dream sequence titled *Find the Fish* portrays the quest for a fish inside a house. From the exterior the house is a stately mansion, shown in the opening shot, yet inside it is *Battersea A*. The speaking roles introduce Graham Chapman in outlandish drag, fitted with bronze-plated taps for breasts, and the director Terry Jones as a man with ridiculously long arms (Figure 3). The surreal dialogue, conducted in a mock-posh manner, reiterates the question of the missing fish and names locations in the domestic home, such as the drawers in the bureau and the wardrobe, as possible hiding places. The props, notably comfortable chairs, a hat stand, carpets and a fireplace, underscore the fantasy that this is the interior of a lavish mansion, which happens to be fitted with an excessive number of gauges, dials and consoles, manned by workers in uniforms.

*Monty Python* depicted the pompous glamour of Halliday's Art Deco interior as belonging to a time of Empire and authority, an age gone by. The staging of a surreal mockery of a degenerate aristocracy in *Battersea A's* control rooms took full advantage of the intelligence of the audience of the 1980s, with the assumption

that they would be in on the joke, to see the irony. The opposite is true of the developer's treatment of the object, and the public, thirty years on. A promotional video of the *Battersea Power Station* redevelopment project revisits the control rooms.<sup>21</sup> The scene depicting future use is uncannily similar to the *Find the Fish* sequence, albeit deprived of the sense of irony. There are waiters, as well as a saxophone player, affluent people drinking wine. In this developer's dream the control room has, quite literally, been transformed into the restaurant of a hotel.

The anticipated resonance of these new images, in contrast to Monty Python's subversive mockery of a bygone Imperial past, comes close to what Edensor criticises as a *sand-blasted*, commodified version of the old.<sup>22</sup> Where the artist had seen the opportunity to critically rise above the trappings of the past, the developer sees the opportunity to sell nostalgia as cultural capital. The trend to seek resolution through transformation on the basis of a complete divorce from past meanings can be described as a persisting trend in the encounter with the unbecoming.

The industrial ruin as a hollow backdrop to London's iconic transformation of its post-industrial image can be traced back to only a few years after Broome's defeated wrecking balls departed from *Battersea*. The former *Bankside Power Station*, designed by

Above  
Figure 3: Monty Python's surreal dream sequence challenges the perception of an authoritarian space and plays on the idea of a 'Ship of Fools'. *The Meaning of Life*, directed by Terry Jones, 1983, film still. Image: Universal Pictures



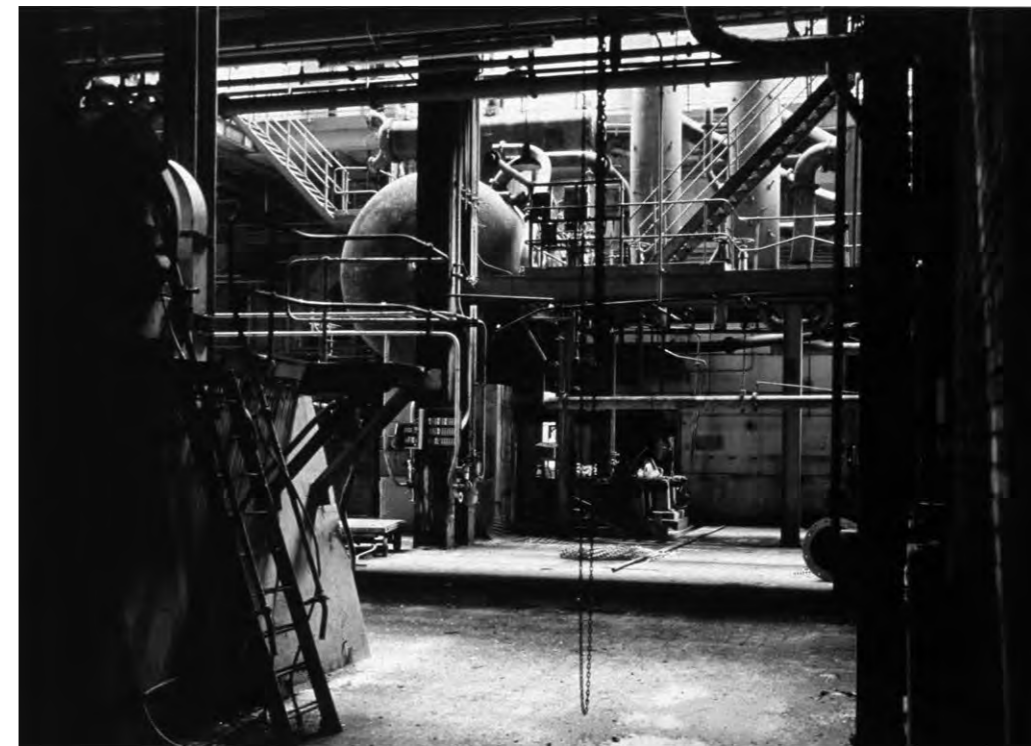
Giles Gilbert Scott from start to finish and located just a few miles down stream from Battersea, is a more refined piece of architecture. The striking symmetry established by the central chimney of the detailed brick volume surpasses the more accidental composition of two halves a few miles up the Thames. Completed in 1963, the power station across the water from the City's Anglican cathedral presents a more radical architectural proposition than anything dreamt up by Price and Littlewood around the same time. The height of the central chimney is, to date, the highest point closest to the majestic dome of St Paul's. The revision of class relations in post-war Britain has never been monumentalised more emphatically than in this archetypal *cathedral of industry*. And yet, *Bankside* was, for the best part of its industrial life and beyond, barely loved by the British public. There was no heritage listing in sight when the power station was decommissioned. Up until only seven years before the opening of *Tate Modern* in 2001, the Godless cathedral was earmarked for demolition. The decision to transform it into a museum for modern art can be seen in the context of cultural revisionism started by Thatcher, a 'Re-branding of Britain', devised under New Labour in the dying years of the twentieth century.

Herzog & de Meuron's initial proposal for the housing of the *Tate Modern* (1995-2000) as a ghost in a shell left little to the imagination, as far as the original structure's inner world and its role in the *tasks in the economy and history of life* is concerned. Its construction saw an almost complete gutting of the power station in a quest to maximise the available exhibition space. From the beginning the curatorial challenge of *Tate Modern* has been to fill all the sprawling space with content. Ten years on, one might object that the vast amount of space available has led to a curatorial policy of hoarding, where temporary retrospectives address the artist's work in terms of quantity, often to an exhausting effect. *Tate Modern* might be *the place* to see modern art, but it is not a place where this encounter is moderated through selected quality as much as exposure to rampant quantity. Not unlike the IKEA store occupying the footprint of the demolished power station in Croydon, *Tate Modern* has an abundance of floor space to fill, which calls for an ever more complex programme, offering new distractions and destinations to break up the impression of wandering around in a large storage facility. The recently started 11 storey extension, the creation of yet more gallery space in an alien structure adjoining the back of the building, therefore promises spaces to relax and unwind in, more cafes and break out spaces.<sup>23</sup> The subtext of this vision seems to be that the visit to the museum – traditionally a intended as an educational as much as a beguiling experience – might well be described as borderline stressful, if not outright discomfiting, when one is faced with the sheer limitless scale of *Tate Modern*. The spectre of the unbecoming, which was to be dispelled by the new design, has come back to haunt it. In this light one could attribute Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* installation inside the *Turbine Hall* in 2010,<sup>24</sup> the spilling of eight million individually hand-crafted porcelain replicas of an agricultural product, with a powerful ironic charge: the production of art as a device for filling the spaces of the museum, which otherwise remain meaningless.

Little remains of the 'traces of redundant power';<sup>25</sup> as Edensor has it, that the building carried in its state of ruin. In its striving to outgrow the initial symbiotic relationship and find a new, more

resolved and permanent form the parasite programme will soon have completely taken over and suffocated the host space. The new extended scheme assigns the vast central space known as the *Turbine Hall*, once the nave of Giles Gilbert Scott's proud cathedral, the role of a leftover transitional circulation space between two gallery wings. In the spirit of Simmel's critique of the emergence of form in contemporary *life* one should ask if a heterotopia more empathetic to our times lay dormant within. Through the images created by artists, rather than the gaze of the architect, one can attempt to encounter the *Turbine Hall* anew, if only in hindsight.

In the mid 1990s the Tate commissioned a series of artworks themed around the decommissioned power station. An oil painting by Anthony Eyton<sup>26</sup> shows the view down the central corridor of the *Turbine Hall*, the dilapidated machinery still in place. The eye is led to explore and survey. The space cannot be grasped at once. Yet, from this position, where the foreman of a work unit might once have stood, the gaze of a disciplinarian past is offered to the viewer. The mighty turbines, painted in vivid strokes, assume the role of tragic bystanders in the scene. Between them, a building site, scaffold barriers and red and white tape, is populated by dwarfed figures in hard hats. The artist captured a moment of transition between the old and the unknown.



Above  
Figure 4: Thomas Struth, *Bankside 5*, 1995, photograph, colour, Chromogenic print, on paper, 506 x 608 mm, Tate Britain, London. Image: Tate Images.

The contribution by the German photographer Thomas Struth frames the same disused space from a different perspective (Figure 4). The tableau depicts the cluttered narrowness of a workspace. It focuses on human-scale objects, stairs and rails, raised platforms in the middle ground. A discarded piece of netting seems to have been left behind by a worker on the last shift. The image could be a look over the shoulder, a moment of departure. Equally, it could be a first glimpse, the arrival of a new, aestheticising gaze.

Nostalgia is absent from either work. Yet both depict a possible encounter between the city and the past. Here we find the *terrain vague*, a part of the city's fabric where life has come to a halt, captured by the image but not explained.<sup>27</sup> The use of these spaces, or their usefulness to us, seems less a matter of expertise or numbers, but of intuition and imagination. To interpret to what extent the images, in their description of an unresolved conflict, add greater value to our understanding of the complexity of modern life cannot be directly discussed here. However, through contemplation of the possibility of connecting with the past in an immediate manner, one can begin to understand the relevance of the conditions of the past to our contemporary lives.

#### POSTSCRIPT ON THE SHIP OF FOOLS<sup>28</sup>

The *Berghain* club must be one of the most desired interiors in Berlin. It is anything but a secret or exclusive address. Tourist web sites advertise its name along with sightseeing tips and restaurants. In a city that exemplifies the realm of the *terrain vague*, desolate spaces in limbo between decay and redevelopment, nightclubs customarily occupy niches left behind by the retreat of industry. An abandoned department store in Berlin Mitte and a disused electricity substation close to *Checkpoint Charlie* can be cited among the most prominent examples of the last twenty years. The infamous club *Ostgut*, the *Berghain's* predecessor, also occupied a decommissioned railway warehouse in the *Ostbahnhof* area, before it was displaced across the rails by the development of the *o2 World* indoor arena. While none of these appropriations can be understood as solutions to the larger problem of Berlin's industrial decay, they do trace an evolution of a type, which might be described as reaching a point of high sophistication, even mass appeal, in the *Berghain* today.

By 4am on a Sunday morning one can expect a long queue to have formed in front of the dilapidated façade of the former power plant from the Stalinist era. The bass line penetrates the wall, heightening expectations. It will not stop until sometime after dusk on Monday. Many will not gain access tonight. There is no guest list, no VIP, no special reason why the solemn bouncers will turn you away. Uncertainty is part of the ritual. Don't talk back, just leave. It's not for you.

To note the obvious, the *Berghain*, in the code upheld by the techno music scene, is a fiercely egalitarian space. No expensive frock or designer outfit will see you past the door. A blog entry themed around the club boasts that nobody will stand out at the *Berghain*. The myth prevails that

when the American pop princess Lady Gaga turned up at the club one night after a gig, hardly anyone batted an eyelid. By contrast, the gruesome-looking doorman is a semi-celebrity. He has a Wikipedia entry to his name and interviews in the *New York Times*. In the public's imagination he is the guardian of what one mainstream weekly titled the "Empire of Madness."<sup>29</sup> Illustrating the same article, an exploded axonometric diagram of the power plant, populated with hundreds of stylised figures, details all the levels of the club, as if it were a map of Dante's *Inferno*. One annotation reads: 'unisex toilets. always packed. to many this is a playground.'<sup>30</sup>

From the dungeons of the underground fetish rooms of the ominous *Laboratory*, to the mainstream environment of the *Panoramabar* and the ice cream café, each space has a considered and coherent appeal.<sup>31</sup> Add as little as needed, retain as much as possible, embrace what is found. Dull industrial materials, such as rubber bar tops or concrete couches, are used throughout. The large format artworks, amongst them photographs by the Turner Prize winner Wolfgang Tillmans, the most famous boasting a close-up rendering of a vagina, do not adorn the space, but accentuate the character of a misappropriated interior. By retaining the notion of the disused disciplinary space, it remains a forbidden place, which can only be conquered temporarily. The transitional action is like a whisper under the hammering techno beat, that none of this, and none of the 1500 people, should actually be here. It is a ship of fools, whose existence can only be justified as long as the foolishness persists.

Between intoxicants, public copulation and ice cream, the interior world is governed by a surreal set of rules and rituals. All this is sustained by the tragic acknowledgement that the institutional power to enforce discomfort and delight is limited to the parameter of the interior. Photography and film are strictly forbidden. In the toilets there are no mirrors to gaze at one's image. The whole experience centres on a complete denial of reflection. There are no means of escape into detachment. Other than the formal institutions of society in Foucault's description of heterotopias, here the mirror, the agent or instrument enabling the establishment of the Other Space, is shattered, destroying the real and retaining the fiction. The doorman to the *Berghain* grants, or denies, entrance to a mock-institution, a voluntary asylum where patients queue for admittance, to take leave from the opposite of their mirror image, the utopia of a self-directed life.

*Berg-hain*, by accident perhaps, is an assembly of the words meaning mountain and grove. The uncanny interior of the disused power plant is nowhere close to the iconography presented in Nicolas Poussin's painting *Triumph of Pan* (1634). However, the contents of the two spaces, in Berlin's hedonist temple and on the master's canvas may transcend the ages. It is a tantalising thought that the transitional nature of the space without function could play host to a contemporary experience resembling the ecstatic pleasure we ascribe to the Dionysian Mysteries of the ancient world. In the late morning hours of Sunday the blinds above the eighteen-metre high dance floor are ritually opened, just long enough to blind the steaming crowd with a glimpse of an outside world. They are then shut again, plunging the space into countless more hours of hedonistic darkness.



## CONCLUSION

'The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.'<sup>32</sup>

It has been proposed here that a tantalising play with the disciplinarian character of these former institutions can be used to play out, and advance, a contemporary perspective on the conflicting role that they continue to occupy in our imagination. At their core, these spaces, places for rituals of discipline now alien to us, offer up a direct encounter with conflict, which is otherwise illusive to our lives. Having expired their authority they can serve the city as *Ships of Fools*.

It is not strictly suggested that *Battersea Power Station* or *Bankside* could have become *heterotopias* of the transgressive nature found in the converted Friedrichshain power plant in Berlin. Yet, recognising the shift in the meaning of unbecoming spaces and the tasks they can assume in our times gives rise to a subversive reading of their new role in today's cultural economy. The quality this paper has been eager to stress is described in relation to Simmel's imaginative perception of conflict, rather than the image of the resolved, as cultural capital. In these lost interiors we find the components that help us to build better ships, which address not only where we want to go, but also the type of adventures we want to encounter.

## NOTES

1. *Brazil*, DVD, directed by Terry Gilliam (1985, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2003).
2. Edensor: 'Ruined factories are replete with the traces of this redundant power; poignant reminders of the ordering functions necessary for the maintenance of industrial networks. There is something comical about these remaining signatures of hierarchy and authority. Like a strident order barked out by a solitary sergeant in the middle of a deserted space, no one is there to listen and obey.' Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 67.
3. *Crodyon B* was designed by the British architect Robert Atkinson (1883-1952) in 1939.
4. Edensor: '(...) through their very allegorical presence, ruins can cause

us to question the normative ways of organizing the city and urban realm, and they contain within them stimuli for imagining things otherwise. Hidden in ruins are forgotten forms of collectivity and solidarity, lost skills, ways of behaving and feeling, traces of arcane language, and neglected historical and contemporary forms of social enterprise.' Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 167.

5. Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 380.
6. *Ibid.*, 393.
7. Simmel suggests that contemporary individuals are not driven by central ideals but define 'specialized answers from occupational experience.' *Ibid.*, 380.
8. Gavin Stamp, "The Battle for Battersea: an architectural wonder in its day, London's famed power station stands on a crossroads." *WMF* (Spring 2004), accessed February 28, 2013, [http://www.wmf.org/sites/default/files/wmf\\_article/pg\\_22-27\\_battersea.pdf](http://www.wmf.org/sites/default/files/wmf_article/pg_22-27_battersea.pdf)
9. Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 26.
10. Tate, "Vision," <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/tate-modern-project/vision> (accessed August 6, 2013).
11. Ian Latham, "Battersea Power Play," *Building Design* 685 (1984): 7
12. Price comments: 'Finally, in the Bat Hat, (...), we have divested the existing building of all that froze the immediate site, leaving only that which is considered important - its height and familiar profile. Thus the remains become a friendly shelter within a large free-space for which others, and other times, can provide uses.' Cedric Price, *Cedric Price: the square book* (Chichester, John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 90.
13. For a collection of articles reflecting on the future of leisure and the arts in the year 1984, the theatre director Joan Littlewood wrote: 'In London we are going to create a university of the streets – not a "gracious" park, but a foretaste of the pleasures of 1984. It will be a laboratory of pleasure, providing room for many kinds of action.' The article includes annotated drawing by Cedric Price, illustrating Littlewood's vision. Joan Littlewood, "A Laboratory of Fun," *The New Scientist* May 14, (1964): 432.
14. On the connections between *Fun Palace* and Berthold Brecht's Epic Theatre see: Stanley Mathews, *From Agit-Prop to Free Space: The Architecture of Cedric Price*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 52.
15. The mentioned diagram was produced by Gordon Pask, who headed the Fun Palace Cybernetics Subcommittee. Mathews, *From Agit-Prop to Free Space*, 74.
16. Philip Christou, "Making Fun of Buildings," *Building Design* 1648 (2004): 25.
17. The Daily Mail run two articles on the redevelopment scheme in January 2013. "Watt a View! Inside the Planned Penthouse Flats at Battersea Power Station Where the Most Expensive Will Cost a Cool £6MILLION Each," *Mail Online*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2260042/Battersea-Power-Station-Inside-planned-penthouse-flats-cost-cool-6m-each.html> (accessed February 28, 2013).
18. Battersea Power Station, "Vision," <http://www.batterseapowerstation.co.uk/> (accessed August 6, 2013).
19. *The Meaning of Life*, DVD, directed by Terry Jones (1983, Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 2011)

20. Battersea Power Station, "Vision," <http://www.batterseapowerstation.co.uk/> (accessed August 6, 2013).
21. Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 131.
22. Today *Tate Modern* welcomes four million visitors a year and is the most visited museum of modern art in the world. The original conversion was designed for a visitor number of two million per year: 'The expansion will create a less congested, more welcoming environment. The exhibition and display space will be almost doubled, enabling us to show more of our Collection. There will be more cafés, terraces and concourses in which to meet and unwind.' "Vision," <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/tate-modern-project/vision>. (accessed August 6th, 2013).
23. Ai Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds*, 2010, Tate Modern, London.
24. Edensor, "Ruins and their Phantom Networks," *Industrial Ruins*, 63.
25. Anthony Eyton, *Bankside – The Turbine Hall*, 1995, oil on canvas, 1514 x 1268 mm, Tate Modern, London.
26. Solà-Morales: 'The photographic images of terrain vague are territorial indications of strangeness itself, and the aesthetic and ethical problems that they pose embrace the problematics of contemporary social life.' Ignasi de Solà-Morales, "Terrain Vague," in Cynthia C. Davidson and Anyplace Conference Anyone Corporation, *Any: [books and Conferences of the 11-year Program]* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 122.
27. Referring to the German moral satire *Das Narrenschiff* by Sebastian Brant (1457-1521). Sebastian Brant, and Joachim Knappe, *Das Narrenschiff: mit allen 114 Holzschnitten des Drucks Basel 1494* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005). Michel Foucault used the image of a 'ship of fools' symbolically in the introduction to *Madness and Civilization*. The ship reappears later as a concept of a heterotopia. Michel Foucault, *Madness and civilization: a history of insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).
28. "Im Reich Des Wahnsinns - Gesellschaft/Leben." <http://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/texte/anzeigen/28877> (accessed February 10, 2014).
29. *Ibid.*
30. Karhard Architektur + Design: Architektur, "Berghain", <http://www.karhard.de/architektur/barclub/berghain.html> (accessed August 6, 2013).
31. Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 27.