

# COLLECTIVE

Satellites Programme

Laura Yuile

*Conversation of Monuments*

27.05.14 – 29.06.14

*Conversation of Monuments* is an installation and public research project initiated and undertaken by artist and Collective Critical Discourse intern Laura Yuile. This project aims to realise a plan to create a new monument for the city – one that communicates something about the present time while looking forward to an uncertain future.

Laura has converted the gallery into a makeshift, inverse tourist information centre, where information is taken from visitors rather than given out. *Conversation of Monuments* will consider our shifting conceptions of time and space and the flows of energy, information and the material that makes up the world.

Each day between 3 - 5pm Laura will be in the gallery, conducting live research consultation sessions with gallery visitors. With the public, she will explore and consider the function of monuments, the role of tourism, and the potential for a monument that is immaterial or fragmented. Engaging visitors in conversations; conducting interviews and focus groups with them Laura will focus on a different question or set of questions each week. Discussion topics will include: invisible architectures, mutating geographies, futurology and new materialism.

Laura has created three new film works for *Conversation of Monuments*; two animations and a video, which she has written and produced using stock animations, found footage and film fragments. Adopting the language of a promotional video made for a corporate context, the video starts to investigate what a modern monument could be. It poses questions about the invisible or hidden infrastructures that allow society to function and asks how we may represent this in our perceived ideas of what a monument is.

*Conversation of Monuments* is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artists based in Scotland. Satellites Programme includes five solo presentations by selected, Scotland based, emergent artists and two projects developed by interns. The programme is specifically developed to facilitate artists at this pivotal point in their career through peer review, professional development, mentoring, exhibitions and events.

Laura Yuile's work includes sculpture, video, performative installation and discursive events. Recent exhibitions include *Same Homepage*, The Project Room, Glasgow; *Processing Progress*, Mauve, Vienna; *Para/Sites: Locations and Dislocations of Media*, NYU, New York; and *Pop Up Povera*, MOCA, London. In 2013 she was artist in residence at the Inside Out Art Museum in Beijing. Upcoming exhibitions include *Ribofunk* at Embassy, Edinburgh.

**Consultation sessions daily in the gallery space from 3–5pm**



## Monuments to every moment, refuse of every moment, used: cages for infinity.<sup>1</sup>

Laura Yuile

Half a mile below the surface of the New Mexico desert, the US government is depositing thousands of tons of waste from its nuclear weapons program that will remain potentially lethal for thousands of years to come. Called the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, it raises the question of how we might prevent our descendants, for centuries to come, from accidentally unearthing this dangerous material. To find a solution, the Department of Energy brought together a number of scientists, linguists, anthropologists and sci-fi thinkers to help develop an elaborate system in the form of a monument. To warn future human beings of this danger for the next 10,000 years, this monument considers that we don't know what language will be spoken or what technology will be used.

Anthropologists specialising in non-verbal communication were enlisted to help. They studied messages that have reached us from the past, such as the pyramids, and determined that stone is the only medium to have established consistency in retaining messages for as long as 5000 years. But even the stone structures we now define as monuments have not maintained the traces of the particular historical will to memory that caused their creation in a stable way. The evolving narrative of history allows for a continual unmaking of the ideological apparatus that is being reinforced by a given monument; the monument ceases to carry out its original function and undergoes a disconnection that provokes the recycling and disposal of meaning - a disconnection that generates waste.

The problem of determining which leftover fragments of the past are 'meaningful' or worthy of conserving - and which fragments might be discarded in the 'rubbish bin' of history is evidenced in this eternal process of

recycling and reworking.

Hierarchies of broken fragments are established and differentiations between 'dirty' and 'clean' information are made, but the duration and stability of such arrangements is unclear. John Scanlan writes that memory becomes a "graveyard of progress"<sup>2</sup>; designating the past - the rubbish - to a position just below the surface, just out of sight. Garbage signifies the forward motion of life, a linear notion of progress through acts of consumption; of using up or destroying. With both the emergence of knowledge and the performance of artistic creation, we can say that we start "with loose associations, fragmentary ideas and the speculations of curiosity ... in other words, with nothing whole, fixed or identifiable but with the formlessness of what we know as garbage"<sup>3</sup>. The removal of garbage - of mess, of dirt - from sight clears a seemingly smooth path to the future, optimising progress and allowing us to rest assured that our past will not come back and haunt us.

In his 2002 essay<sup>4</sup>, Rem Koolhaas lays out a definition of "junkspace" as foretelling the present - prompting us to recognise what is already everywhere around us and substituting hierarchy with accumulation whilst promoting disorientation and seamlessness. Junkspace is "the sum total of our current achievement" and we have "built more than all previous generations together, but somehow we do not register on the same scales. We do not build pyramids". But what of the present will the future recognise as a monument? And what of our *intended* monuments will remain? According to Koolhaas:

*"The joint is no longer a problem, an intellectual issue: transitional moments are*

*defined by stapling and taping, wrinkly brown bands barely maintain the illusion of an unbroken surface; verbs unknown and unthinkable in architectural history – clamp, stick, fold, dump, glue, shoot, double, fuse – have become indispensable. Each element performs its task in negotiated isolation. Where once detailing suggested the coming together, possibly forever, of disparate materials, it is now a transient coupling, waiting to be undone, unscrewed, a temporary embrace with a high probability of separation; no longer the orchestrated encounter of difference, but the abrupt end of a system, a stalemate”.*

If architecture is in a state of permanent evolution – continuous conversion punctuated by occasional instances of ‘restoration’ – does this process claim chunks of history as extensions of Junkspace? If we are endlessly running away from our shadow, can we really understand how our bodies are situated in relation to our environment; our context in space and time? And if the majority of infrastructure is invisible, seamlessly blending into reflective surfaces and freshened air; how do we negotiate the task of *unsticking* this illusion of an unbroken surface; exposing the ragged edges of moments and the stench behind gleaming facades?

- 1 Octavio Paz, *Objects and Apparitions*, 1974.
- 2 John Scanlan, *On Garbage*, Reaktion Books, 2004.
- 3 ^^
- 4 Rem Koolhaas, *Junkspace*, 2002.

## Related Events

Laura has organised two events in relation to her gallery installation.

All events are free but require booking via Eventbrite.

### **Global Shadow, Local Mist | Coach Tour | Sunday 8th June, 2 - 5pm**

Includes contributions from William Viney, Angela McClanahan and Neil Bickerton.

Visitors are invited to join Laura for a specially programmed coach tour to a landfill site. En route and on site there will be talks and performances exploring ideas of waste and pollution in regards to material culture, knowledge production, digital and psychological space. Considering 'invisible' infrastructures and the relationship we have to them, the event will question how the infrastructure that manages and directs our waste – and the material reality of the waste itself – might serve as a reflecting pool of our times and a method of maintaining divisions and separations. Building upon John Latham's proposed classification of the Five Sisters bings as 'monuments' or 'process sculptures' in 1976; the tour takes as its starting point a proposal to view the landfill site as monument, in order to explore new ways of looking at waste and the action that might result from doing so.

The tour will leave Collective at 2pm.

### **Radio Mycelium: Interspecies Communication | Workshop with Martin Howse | Sunday 29th June, 11am - 6.30pm**

The *Radio Mycelium* workshop aims to actively examine cross-spore germination between two parallel wide-area networks - between radio-based communication technologies and the single organism network of the mycelium. Fungal transceivers sprouting mycelial antennas form an imaginary underground network. Diversity

of human networks is mapped across fungal diversity in the urban environment. The mycelium, a fungal network of thread-like cells, represents a truly underground communications network, spreading out over vast areas of earth substrate, acting with ecosystem intelligence as an interface across symbiotic networks such as plant and tree roots.

*Radio Mycelium* proposes the construction of a series of experimental situations examining a new networked imaginary, the single organism of the fungal mycelium, in relation to pathogenic, electromagnetic communications. Participants will learn how to construct simple measurement devices, and culture oyster mushrooms, amongst other simple moulds.

The influence of electromagnetic carrier waves on the mycelial network will be examined. The well-documented transformative potential of mycelium (for example, decomposing pollutants) is invoked to remediate an increasingly pathogenic electromagnetic networked culture. A series of experiments will be established and studied by participants, who will also learn how to construct simple measurement devices. This short fieldtrip will find and map sproutings of electromagnetic fungi in Edinburgh.

**Collective** is a contemporary, visual arts organisation established in 1984. Collective delivers an exciting and ambitious programme of exhibitions, new commissions, events and off-site projects. Collective produces major new work by Scotland based and international artists who are at a pivotal stage in their development.

Over the next two years, Collective will be making the City Observatory complex its new home, opening the whole site to the public for the first time. This will bring contemporary visual art into the iconic heart of Edinburgh.



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