

Mediated Meaning: Objects in Contention

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The methodology of Object Enabled Mediation rests on four key concepts: duration, singularity, displacement and trace. Each of these has been partly articulated in recent writing in archaeology. The catalyst for integrating these concepts as a schema for engagement has been Mieke Bal's work on political art, developed through her close reading of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's installations (Bal 2010). Through this, I show that creative opportunities for engagement occur along the faultlines that run through a wide range of contemporary contexts; the provocative idea of heterotopia that has intrigued social science since Foucault's incomplete formulation half a century ago.

As a particular form of intervention within a broader range of mediation practices, Object Enabled Mediation builds on the special and particular properties of the material world; the "unruliness of things", whether everyday artefacts, images, monuments or cityscapes. Working with things and images within the political space of the faultline requires a slowing down of time, duration, to enable the possibilities in memory to flourish. Mediation by means of the material world also requires the avoidance of closure through using the tension between singularity and particularity, avoiding for a while the completion that comes with narrative and explanation, when "truth value circulates like electricity through a wire". Within this political space, the properties of the trace are crucial – the "negative presence" that evokes memory without direct representation, allowing affect and the engagement which breaks down the stereotype and restores personhood.

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Mediated Meaning: Objects in Contention

Stanford Archaeology Center Distinguished Lecture, 11 October 2012

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My purpose here is to set out a schema for a form of engaged practice within the field of archaeology and material culture studies, a process that I call Object Enabled Mediation. More broadly, this is a case for practical action – phronesis – and a methodology for contributing to the objectives of social justice, however these may be defined (Flyvbjerg 2001; Schram and Caterino 2006). More broadly again, Object Enabled Mediation is framed by cosmopolitanism – “ethics in a world of strangers” (Appiah 2006).

The methodology of Object Enabled Mediation rests on four key concepts: duration, singularity, displacement and trace. Each of these has been partly articulated in recent writing in archaeology (González-Ruibal 2008; Olsen 2010; Olivier 2011; Shanks 2012). The catalyst for integrating these concepts as a schema for engagement has been Mieke Bal’s work on political art, developed through her close reading of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo’s installations (Bal 2010). Through this, I show that creative opportunities for engagement occur along the faultlines that run through a wide range of contemporary contexts; the provocative idea of heterotopia that has intrigued social science since Foucault’s incomplete formulation half a century ago (Foucault 1986).

In developing the schema for Object Enabled Mediation, I first remodel extracts from work by Miller (2008), González-Ruibal (2008) and Olivier (2011). These brief cases show how material scenarios could be used for mediation. From this, I turn to a close analysis of a project that meets the conditions identified here for Object Enabled Mediation, and which has been, and continues to be, successful in mediating the consequences of large scale urban regeneration. This case study shows how the concepts of duration, singularity, displacement and trace can be effective in the political spaces of everyday life.

Here, the context is the city, conceptualized as an integrated system of structures, networks, economic and social relations and legacies that, together, define it as a place. This view of the city is one of perpetual dissonance, captured in Edensor’s foregrounding of ruins: “As disordered and messy sites, ruins provide a contrast to the increasingly smooth, highly regulated spaces of the city. Occurring in the back roads and interstices of the urban fabric, ruins deride ideals which champion the virtues of seamlessness” (Edensor 2005:53). Faultlines in the city show the tension between hygiene, ranging from waste management to narrative heritage, and transgression, whether the insistence on different readings of

heritage, rebellion, or riot. The potential for Object Enabled Mediation is to work along and within these fracture lines.

This context of urban faultlines is well expressed in Friedrich Engels' first impressions of Manchester, the city where I live and work, when he first walked these streets in December 1842, when he arrived aged 22 as an understudy at the Salford mill owned by his father. "The town itself", he wrote, "is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks". Engels attributed this to the combination of "unconscious tacit agreement" and "outspoken conscious determination" to keep separate the parts of the city intended for middle class use from the areas reserved for working class housing. This faultline is clear in Engels' account of his walk from the Cathedral and Long Millgate – older houses "whose former inhabitants have removed with their descendants into better built districts" – and down into the courts and lanes: "irregular cramming together of dwellings in ways which defy all rational plan" where "even the shops and beer houses hardly take the trouble to exhibit a trifling degree of cleanliness"; "filth and disgusting grime"; "a privy without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants can pass into and out of the court only by passing through foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement". The nadir is the river, "a narrow, coal-black, foul-smelling stream, full of debris and refuse", "a long string of the most disgusting, blackish-green, slime pools ... from the depths of which bubbles of miasmatic gas constantly arise and give forth a stench unendurable even on the bridge forty or fifty feet above the surface of the stream" (Engels 1892: 45, 48-53).

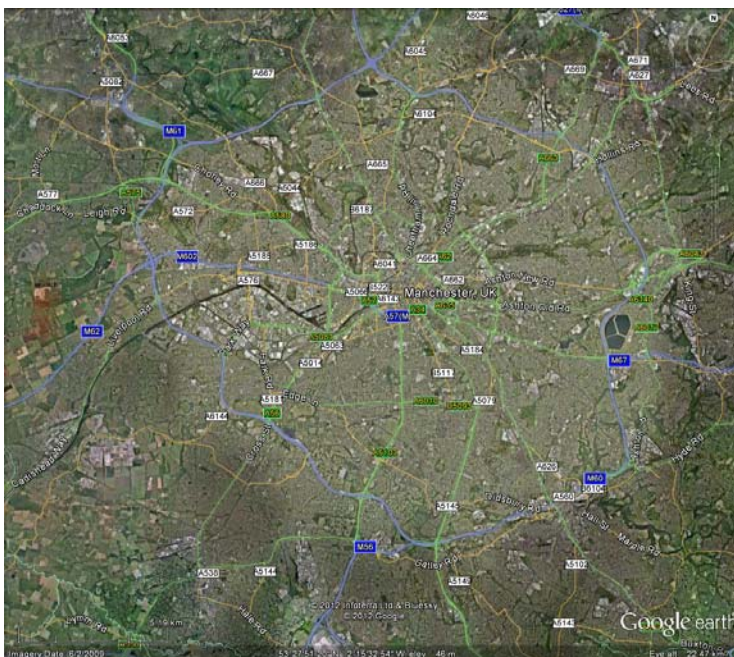


Figure 1 Manchester. Salford is one of ten local authorities that, together, make up the city region

Today's Manchester no longer has "slime pools" or "miasmatic gas". But retracing Engels' walk from the "Old Church" to the banks of the River Irk is to follow a contemporary faultline that displays Edensor's disorder and mess of the ruin – the fissures in the formal facades. Near the Cathedral – Engels' "Old Church" and the heart of the commercial city today - the artifice of heritage is impeccable in the neat facades of Cateaton Street, the imposing commercial architecture of the Triangle and the playful reconstruction of the Printworks as a complex of cinemas, bars, restaurants and clubs. Long Millgate, ten minutes towards the river, is evidently outside fashionable Manchester; a functional mix of office buildings and bill boards behind Victoria Station. Further still along Engels' route, in Dantzic Street, is a ubiquitous urban wasteland of car lots and brownfield sites. And Warford Street, which abuts the river, is an unwanted corner of waste bins, rubbish and urban debris. There may no longer be "foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement". But Warford Street today is a long way from the formal narrative of the ordered, restored and continually progressive city.



Figure 2 Engels' walk re-traced

Concepts for Engaged Practice

Object Enabled Mediation is founded in readings of the past as a construct of the present, based in turn on a raft of late nineteenth and early twentieth century thought, itself shaped

by the complexities and contradictions of urban life and the imminence of violence: Proust, Bergson, Benjamin, Merleau-Ponty, Adorno (Olsen 2010, Olivier 2011).

At the core of the revival of *phronesis* is the rejection of modernism's constant and multiple acts of distancing and of the claims for a detached and disinterested authority over the agenda for enquiry and the rights of interpretation. From this follows the insistence that all aspects of practice are imbued with power and politics. This is now well established, of course, and does not need to be justified as a first principle. Thus González-Ruibal contrasts epistemic and political power with their opposites; resistance to hegemonic knowledge and oppressive politics. He notes that, in standing against dominant interests, archaeology can be a progressive force, recovering "the muted presence of the subaltern". Following from this commitment to political engagement, of one form or another, González-Ruibal proposes that archaeology is "a technology for producing (material) memory", a "discipline of things". The nexus in which memory is shaped - *milieux de mémoire* - is rendered tangible through objects, collections of objects, landscapes and other dimensions of the material world (González-Ruibal in press; Hall in press)

Engaged practice of this kind requires non-neutrality and that the academic practitioner takes a stance. This is because the disavowal of the privileged, detached status of interpreter is coupled with the recognition that readings of the past involve dispositions of power and must as a consequence be political. This is often not made explicit in contemporary archaeological writing, in preference for an implied or assumed community of practice in favour of the dispossessed, marginalized or subjugated. Nevertheless, and following Flyvbjerg, there is a broad consensus for situational ethics (Flyvbjerg 2001; Hall 2005). Such an approach has been characterized by Meskell as "cosmopolitan archaeologies", based in an ethical commitment for extending obligations to communities and recognizing and acknowledging archaeologists' roles as participants: "honoring these obligations might take many forms and is dependent upon context, which means that we cannot expect to formulate a set of prescribed solutions that can be applied internationally.... our obligations may entail addressing the political and economic depredations of past regimes, enhancing local livelihoods, publicizing the effects of war, or tackling head on the incursions of transnational companies and institutions" (Meskell 2009: 1).

In sharpening this approach to achieve a more explicit methodology for engagement, I will first develop four key concepts: duration, singularity, displacement and trace. While each of these is, to varying degrees, already articulated in contemporary archaeological writing, Bal's critique of Doris Salcedo's political art is particularly valuable. Leaving aside the issue of aesthetics, Salcedo's collections of pieces and installations can be regarded as artefacts assembled for a purpose. While ignoring the distinction between art and archaeological assemblage may be a heresy, it serves to focus on how material things – whether objects or images – can be deployed to create a political space of engagement.

Duration is, self evidently, a concept of time. In developing the value of this idea, both archaeological and art theory draw on Bergson's distinction between two kinds of memory. *Habitude*, or "habit knowledge", is based in the practical competences of working with things, the material world. "Pure memory", in contrast, is based on the recollection of images (Bergson 2004).

Habitude has clear connections with tacit knowledge, the ability to do things without conscious effort (Collins 2010), and with the body as cyborg, or prosthesis, in which material things are inalienably associated with the organic body (Haraway 1997; Olsen 2010). The notion of memory as *habitude* leads Bergson to represent time as clusters of "sedimented" events, rather than as linear narrative. Because time in this form is in memory, it is constantly mediated in the present, in Benjamin's *jetztkeit*, or "now-time", an "unsettled present" in which there are "fragments of times gone by" (Olivier 2011: 61).

Because archaeology is so concerned with the everyday use of material things – practical competences – Olivier sees the discipline as embraced by *habitude*; as only about understanding how memory is deployed: "the key to the workings of archaeological memory lies in the nature of archaeological matter ... Faced with perpetual deterioration, the function and identity of an archaeological construct have to be constantly reaffirmed and readapted; faced with the pressures exerted by a continuously evolving present, repetition is the *sine qua non* of perpetuation: inhabited places – dwellings, cemeteries, work spaces etc. – owe their existence to the repetition of individual acts and transformations that allow them to remain functional. Once abandoned, they die, the reproductive work that erodes and eventually deconstructs them having been definitively interrupted" (Olivier 2011: 69). In turn again, the present constantly anticipates the future. Olivier expresses this as a paradox: "the past does not lie behind us, like some older state of things. It lies ahead of us, with us" (Olivier 2011: 9).

The ways in which the materiality of the past is mediated in the present and engages with the future is also evident in Bal's study of Salcedo's work. Salcedo is concerned with violence, originating in the specific events of disappearance and death in Columbia, but achieving a far broader engagement through affect. Bal shows how Unland (1995-98) changes time by means of the way in which the viewer has to approach the installation, and through what Bal calls "foreshortening". The viewer first sees the work as an assemblage of three ungainly, cobbled-together domestic tables, of no apparent significance. To make sense of this, the viewer must walk into the assemblage for a close view of the table surfaces. Only at this close perspective can the viewer realize that the table surface comprises hundreds of very small holes across its surface, each threaded with a single human hair. Without the use of any words or explanation, this evokes the scalps of the disappeared dead.



Figure 3: Doris Salcedo, *Unland*

In *Unland*, time for the “close viewer” is slowed by the sense of the immensity of the artist’s labour and by the immanence of death in each of the human hairs. Bal calls this the “performance of duration”: “foreshortened time is distorted – made wider or thicker – and condensed. It thus comes forward to touch the viewer, so that she experiences the almost tangible pull of time. It also challenges the ontological, temporal cut made between past and present” (Bal 2010: 149). Such “slow time” is an example of Bergson’s concept of living “in duration”. In duration, time is as a form of “gathering”, with each moment accompanied by the memory of earlier ones. There is no narrative here – no collection of images or biographies of the dead, nor even a catalogue of names. There is rather habitude, the endless repetition of drilling each minute hole in the table and of threading it with a single human hair.

A second key concept is singularity. In Bal’s conceptualization, singularity stands in tension with particularity; where singularity expresses the unique value of a thing or image – what Benjamin (1968) called its “aura” – particularity fixes the object in time and place enabling in turn a linear narrative. This is of course not a rejection of narrative per se, of history; that would be absurd. Bal’s point is rather that the particularity of narrative allows a subject such as violence to be compartmentalized and held at arm’s length; a problem of strangers in a far away country or in a different part of the city. In turn again, this can result in the sentimentality of sympathy. In her work, Salcedo seeks – and achieves – an effect whereby the viewer recognizes the singularity of the objects while not being able to pack the installation away into a narrative compartment which would, in this case, be “violence in Columbia”. Singularity without particularity enables the discomfort of encountering violence and its effects to become endemic and anticipatory of what could happen to anyone, anywhere.

The power of singularity is well demonstrated in Salcedo’s *Atrabiliarios* (Defiant) installations, made from 1991. Niches have been dug in the gallery wall and each contains a pair of carefully arranged, worn shoes, covered by translucent animal skin, coarsely sutured

to the wall. The shoes are traces of those who have disappeared and the animal skins evoke faded photographs. In this work, Salcedo insists on both the singularity of violence in Columbia, and the generality of violence everywhere: “a worn shoe, with traces of sweat and dirt, of corns, calluses, and the distortion of bones that come with aging and labor, of the idiosyncrasies of the toes and bones of a particular individual whom we have never met and will never meet because she is dead or otherwise disappeared” (Bal 2010: 53). Each pair of shoes is individually arranged and, as with the individual human hairs woven into the table top in *Unland*, the viewer has to look closely through the translucent animal skins to make out the objects. This closeness and individuality of form emphasises singularity, while the absence of any words, explanation or narrative avoids particularity. While *Atrabiliarios* is about violence in Colombia, it is also about violence everywhere else, remembered in the present and anticipating the future.

The third key concept is displacement. By this, Bal means the removal or re-representation of things away from where they were first found or encountered, and in a new space, creating new meanings. At first pass displacement is contrary to much that archaeology stands for. In mainstream archaeological thought, artefacts are meant to be preserved or represented in context, as faithfully as possible to the conditions in which they were found. Consequently, displacement requires some justification. This can be achieved by again following Bal in her critique of Salcedo’s political art.



Figure 4: Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*

Here, the case in point is “*Untitled*”, a series of sculptures made from used furniture between 1989 to 2001 (Bal 2010). In evoking the people – now lost, disappeared – who used these ordinary things, the effect lies in their wrenching from the privacy and intimacy of homes and into the public space of the gallery. Each piece of used furniture is singular. But, as with the avoidance of particularity, the lack of any context or interpretation prevents closure through recourse to a narrative. We never quite “know” what the collection of objects “means” – a tension that, Bal argues, results in affect and engagement through recognition of something of ourselves.

Displacement also avoids the numbing effects of saturation – of the callous familiarity which comes from the “ordinariness” of cruelty, violence and death. The importance of this has been stressed by González-Ruibal in his exploration of supermodernity, of landscapes of destruction: “archaeology has to run against trivialization and preserve the aura. It must keep memory in place, but at the same time it should work against the saturation of memory. This issue ... is particularly worrying in the recent past. Memory has two enemies: oblivion and the overabundance of recollections. By producing too much remembrance, archaeologists – and historians – run the risk of blunting memory and making it banal” (González-Ruibal 2008).

A fourth key concept is the trace. The trace, or “vestige” has been recognized as a particular quality of the objects that archaeologists work with. Working from Benjamin’s concept of *jetztheit* - “nowness” – Olivier draws out the qualities of the “unsettled present” in which there are “fragments of times gone by” (Olivier 2011: 61). This results in “periodic re-activation”, re-inscription and translation of traces – vestiges of the past – that are similar processes to those deployed in psychoanalysis: “remembering, or if you prefer, the resurgence of the past, does not proceed by drawing on some supposed stock of memories, which, for archaeology, would mean a store of ancient artifacts. It happens in the present, through the re-inscription of structures inherited from the past that have translated differently” (Olivier 2011). For Shanks, the trace is the “non-absent past”, “the impression made on the past by the present. This is “actuality”, “the moment of discovery or opportunity, when the past flashes up in the present and prompts reaction” (Shanks 2012: 134-135).

The idea of trace is also important to theories of photography, and to integrating the coterminous histories of practice in archaeology and photography in the tradition of Sontag (1977) and Barthes (1980). “Photography”, Sontag showed, “is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects photographed are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos. ... All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (Sontag 1977: 15).

How trace, whether in the vestige of the material object or the memento mori of the photograph, works in the political spaces of engagement can be shown by returning again to Bal’s interpretation of *Atrabiliarios*. For Bal, the trace is “negative presence”, the conscious avoidance of direct representation, and an index that an object or image provides to an absent person: “the trace is marked by the absence of the content of which it is literally the senseless container. This is the material paradox: it is both material and materially empty” (Bal 2010: 34). The power of *Atrabiliarios* is the way in which the pairs of shoes, each in a niche in the gallery wall, is the negative presence of a person killed. This is reinforced – doubled – by the way in which the translucent animal skins, sewn into the wall, evokes the faded photograph, the death quality of photography that anchors Barthes’ reading of the

medium (Barthes 1980). Together with singularity, displacement and the slowing of time into duration, the work – and others like it – establish political spaces of engagement.

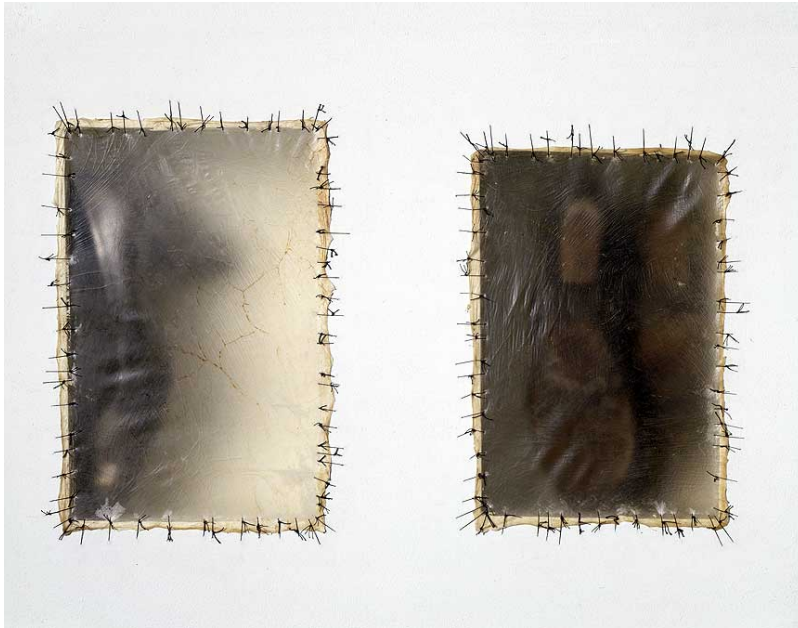


Figure 5: Doris Salcedo, *Atrabiliarios*

Bal develops the idea of a “political space” in which these four key concepts can work by turning to Mouffe’s useful distinction between the “political” and “politics”. In this, the “political” is “the dimension of antagonism ... constitutive of human societies”. This is the space of engagement and contestation, and of work within the faultlines. In contrast, “politics” is “the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created” (Mouffe 2005:9, quoted by Bal 2010: 10). Politics is about closure and settlement, and the re-establishment of control. Returning to the re-enactment of Engels’ walk through Manchester, the political is about the contrast between the affluent heart of the city and the circumstances of those excluded to the margins. Politics, in contrast, is the investment in the conventional heritage of restored buildings and destination economy of the city centre (Pine and Gilmore 1999).

Working in the political spaces of faultlines requires an openness to all possibilities and a methodology of listening in which the expert acts as facilitator and enabler rather than as the authority and arbiter. Achieving mediated outcomes depends, in the conceptual terms set out here, on holding out against the closure that comes when singularity gives way to particularity and narrative explanation. This poses considerable challenges for academic practice, even when there is a clear political purpose to the work.

This can usefully be conceptualized in terms of Latour’s demonstration of meaning as residing in systems of “circulating references” (Latour 1999). In his detailed studies of research in action, he shows how processes such as preparation, instrumentation, observation, recording, codification and publication comprise as set of “transformation”

that are kept constant by the links between them – references: “the earth becomes a cardboard cube, words become paper, colours become numbers, and so forth. An essential property of this chain is that it must remain reversible. The succession of stages must be traceable, allowing for travel in both directions. If the chain is interrupted at any point, it ceases to transport truth – ceases, that is, to produce, to construct, to trace, and to conduct it. ... Truth value circulates here like electricity through a wire, so long as this circuit is not interrupted” (Latour 1999: 69).

Interpretation, then, inexorably trends towards closure through particularity and narrative, transforming open and transgressive political spaces into conventionalized settlements; in academic practice, the lecture, journal paper, or book.

This tendency is evident in responses to the most recent, and dramatic, faultline to open up across Manchester – the riots that broke out across this and other cities in August 2011. Starting in London and spreading to Salford and Manchester two days later, some 20000 people from a cross-section of communities and backgrounds took to the streets, attacking police, burning cars and buildings and looting shops (Guardian 2011). In Zizek’ (2011) phrase, this was “abstract negativity”, “zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing”: “we had total control of the precinct. There’s a massive police station there, and they couldn’t do anything. It was ours for a day. Salford was more like a party atmosphere. Everyone was stood around, drinking... smoking weed, having a laugh. I became involved in the riots in Salford because it was a chance to tell the police, tell the government, and tell everyone else for that matter that we get fucking hacked off around here and we won’t stand for it.”. Unemployed man, aged 22, Salford. Guardian 2011: 20).



Figure 6: From the August 2011 riots to the August 2012 Olympic Games opening ceremony

The “politics” (in Mouffe’s term) of the August 2011 riots have been straightforward. Within a matter of days, their cause was attributed to “criminality, pure and simple” and to the “troubled families” that are also a more general burden on the welfare system. A full and formal enquiry was discounted and, instead, a Riots and Community Victims Panel reported within a few months recommending measures such as improved socialization within the school system (Riots and Community Victims Panel 2012). One year later, a re-unified Britain was represented in the spectacle of the opening ceremony of the Olympic

Games, claiming back the heritage of the industrial city as the cauldron of technology and creativity.

Keeping open an alternative space of enquiry that can make sense of what happened in August 2011 and that can offer beneficial outcomes for those caught up in the violence, for whatever reason, is more difficult. This can be seen in the still unfolding work of the Guardian and London School of Economics' project, "Reading the Riots". While the extensive and still-growing corpus of accounts collected from those who took part reveals myriad motivations, interests and post-hoc justifications, analysis and synthesis is a process of narrowing and synthesis, a reading leading towards coherence, narrative, causality and conclusions, as indeed any research project must do.

In terms of the concepts set out here, the opportunity for mediation in the aftermath of events such as the August 2011 riots will depend on holding the city's past-in-the-present – its *jetztzeit*, "now-time". This is why Bal's concept of "foreshorting" is so valuable; it can create a reflective slowness along faultlines such as these.

Faultlines

In this conceptualization of the city, it is a place of perpetual faultlines and fissures along, and within, which political spaces exist and are opportunities for mediation. Thus the narrative heritage of the city is impelled by, and defined through, the constant presence of its opposite: ruined and decomposing buildings and infrastructure; dirt, "matter out of place" in Mary Douglas's classic formulation (Douglas 2002); and debris. This is the dimension of the British post-industrial city that has been explored by Edensor, who sees "ruined space" as "ripe with transgressive and transcendent possibilities", "opportunities for challenging and deconstructing the imprint of power on the city" (Edensor 2005: 4). "Ruins", Edensor writes, are "excess matter, containing superfluous energy and meaning, which are disorderly intrusions, often in more central areas of the city" that "always come back to haunt the planners' vision of what the city should be" (Edensor 2005: 62).

An opposite of this concept of the ruin, and an expression of the danger of being overwhelmed by the anarchy of "matter out of place" is evident in the bureaucracies of urban management and hygiene. For instance, the objective of the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority is "zero waste": "'our aim is zero waste' succinctly describes our aim for Greater Manchester, whereby we will create a Society that maximises the sustainable use of resources". This strategy converges with the experience economy in the aspiration for orderly behaviour, enhanced by the offer of a "waste experience", comprising a half day tour of a landfill site, a Material Recovery Facility and a Mechanical and Biological Treatment Centre, enhanced by interactive games and videos (GMWDA 2012).

Inner city heritage management aspires to authentic restoration, the eradication of any surplus materiality, and celebration. Salford's recently restored Ordsall Hall lays out a claim

for historical precedent and authenticity for this part of the city: “Ordsall Hall – Salford’s Grade 1 listed Tudor manor house – was first recorded in 1210. Since then, it has been home to medieval gentry, Tudor nobility, Catholics loyal to the crown, butchers, farmers, an Earl, an artist, priests, scout troops, mill workers, cows and several ghosts” (Salford City Council 2012). Similarly, Manchester’s Museum of Science and Industry is devoted to the history and sequences of technological and industrial development in the city (<http://www.mosi.org.uk/>), and the Museum of Transport offers a “journey through time”: “your amazing time-travelling journey will take you all the way from an elaborately painted Victorian open-top horse drawn bus, to the streamlined prototype of Manchester’s Metrolink tram. In between you’ll be able to see and sit in fascinating vehicles that range from a 1920’s solid-tyred bus, to early trams, trolley buses and even the ‘charras’ that took Manchester folk on their outings to the coast and countryside” (<http://www.gmts.co.uk/museum/journey.html>).

At the same time, though, other formal sites are less linear and stable. The People’s History Museum, on the bank of the Irwell, is a restored turbine hall coupled with a new building encased in Corten steel that weathers to a rust-like appearance. This facility houses key archives, such as those of the TUC and the British Communist Party, as well as an array of objects: political cartoons, posters, badges, tokens, medals, commemorative ceramics, photographs, “Thomas Paine’s death mask, Keir Hardie’s pit lamp and Ben Tillett’s leather bag from the 1889 Dock Strike” (<http://www.phm.org.uk>). The Working Class Movement Library, across the river in Salford, is a large and eccentric collection bound up in the activism of its founders, Ruth and Eddie Frow. Again, there is little attempt at narrative, and the collection is rather a “gathering” of books and archives against an eclectic theme: “working people have always struggled to get their voices heard. The Working Class Movement Library records over 200 years of organising and campaigning by ordinary men and women. Our collection provides a rich insight into working people’s daily lives as well as their thoughts, hopes, fears and the roles they played in the significant events of their time” (<http://www.wcml.org.uk>).

The instability along these frontiers between orderly narrative and transgressive disorder is expressed in The Ancoats Peeps, a project coordinated by Dan Dubowitz (www.ancoatspeeps.com; Dubowitz 2011). This has included the construction of Cutting Room Square, the first public square to be built in the area, which is centred on five towers each with images from the cutting rooms from the adjacent Royal Mills. These images present the decomposition and disorder behind the gentrification of urban regeneration economics. In Dubowitz’s account: “a fire had wrecked the roof and now mature trees were growing in the space. In the pattern room the plasterwork had long since been washed away exposing the brickwork but the patterns, made of a waterproof velum, remained vivid, hanging from the walls. The patterns and the patina of the brick walls almost merged in the light of dusk and so I went back to photograph this space on midsummer’s day and had to

wait until late in the evening for dusk. While I waited I was aware not only of butterflies and birds but also of a rabbit”(www.ancoatspeeps.com).



Figure 7: Ancoats Peeps and Cutting Room Square, Manchester

Complementing Cutting Room Square are the “peeps” – brass eyepieces set into walls that offer a glimpse of a space that has been walled up for some time, but is also unstable in its content. No explanation – narrative – is provided and it is never quite clear what is being seen: industrial fragments, surfaces, close details of parts of machinery (Dubowitz 2011). In Bal’s terms, Dubowitz’s installation in Ancoats “foreshortens” time by forcing the viewer to take a close look while denying narrative sequence or explanation.

Diverse, less structured assemblages such as these reveal dissent, disorder, challenge and periodic violence: 1819, when cavalry charged 60 000 demonstrators demanding political representation, killing fifteen and injuring hundreds, Chartist meetings on Kersal Moor in 1838, the child labour endemic to Manchester’s economic boom through the nineteenth century; the protest in Bexley Square, Salford, in 1931, violently repressed, organized crime and its consequences; the destruction of community life that has followed from the modernist urban planning projects of the mid-twentieth century; and the August 2011 riots, still in the process of explanation and narrative writing. These more complex and contradictory histories are invariably absent from the cheerful, hygienic narratives of technological progress and linear historical antecedents.

Doris Salcedo’s more recent work, *Shibboleth*, expresses the faultlines that are ever-imminent in the city. Installed in the core of the renovated Battersea Power Station, *Shibboleth* dissected the Turbine Hall floor, starting as a crack and opening into a cavern that unsettled the viewer through both allusions to obscured memories of the past, now cracked open, and the forewarning of violent disruption in the future (Bal 2010). *Shibboleth* breaks the closure of narrative, forcing the awareness of disruption and disorder as the constant co-dimension of order and completeness, in the same way that, in Mouffe’s terms, “the political” stands with “politics”.



Figure 8: Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*

Conjectural Mediations

In framing the concept of Object Oriented Mediation, it is my contention that the concepts of duration, singularity, displacement and trace can be transposed from art into archaeology to establish “political spaces”. This kinship is based on a shared purpose of working with conflict and its consequences – the objective of turning stereotyped “enemies” into humanized “adversaries” (Bal 2010). Salcedo’s purpose is not to “solve” Colombia’s endemic violence. It is rather to confront those who have generalized away violence and death in Colombia as the fate of distant, generic strangers with the trace of an unseen person whose humanness is evoked through their once-worn shoes. Similarly, the special power of archaeology is to evoke the past in the present through the non-verbal meanings of things.

While, as I have shown, this approach benefits from and builds on recent work on the politics of materiality, it also takes a different but complementary direction in emphasising dissonance and fracture in preference for the constitutive role of the material world enabling and constructing identities and expression. Olsen, for instance, writes about “the constructive qualities of things”: “things are normally in place, at least enough of them to make our existence predictable and secure. When we wake up tomorrow, the bed, room, and house are still there. So are our private belongings, other houses, the streets and

pipelines that connect them, buses and cars, shops and factories, gardens, mountains, and trees. They constitute our incontestable acquisition. We do not wake up to a completely new world every morning, having to start all over again from scratch” (Olsen 2012: 158). In contrast my interest, and the opportunity for Object Enabled Mediation, is in dissonance, in circumstances in which things may not be there, or may be violated, denying the comforts of unspoken familiarity.

The value of this shift in emphasis can be shown by revisiting three fragments of work by Miller (2008), González-Ruibal (2008) and Olivier (2011). In each example, I show how a conjectural opportunity for mediation exists within the assemblages with which archaeologists routinely work.

Here is Dave, Portrait 17 in Miller’s ethnography of a London street, and addicted to heroin:

“While telling his tale, he sat the entire time in a corner chair. To his right was a glass fronted set of drawers filled to capacity with CDs; to the left was an old set of pine drawers he would occasionally rummage in to find the photo albums he needed when he wanted us to visualize his story as it poured forth. In both cases, it was the sheer weight of these material resources that seemed to keep Dave from floating off in this haze of drink, heroin and depression. Their weight lay in their specificity. Each CD album comprised a multitude of tracks, each photo album was full of images, and every track and every image was grounded in a particular memory and time” (Miller 2008: 164-165).

In this example, the two sets of traces – the CDs and the photos – are all that survives in a house where Dave has sold or traded everything of value for a fix. He grasps the CDs and the images as memory prompts, inevitably incomplete, invariably unsatisfactory, to Miller’s evident disconcertion: an ethnography morphed into unplanned therapy.



Figure 9: Ambush site Ethiopia (photo courtesy of Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal)

The second example shows how these kinds of material heterotopias could be used in a political space of active intervention. González-Ruibal (2008) looks for a form of practice

that emphasises “manifestation” rather than “narrative”, enabling political engagement. Here is a fragment from his fieldwork in Ethiopia:

“Take the remains of an ambush from the late 1980s on the road that leads from Ethiopia to Sudan through the region of Metekel. We have no bodies there. But we do have four trucks and an anti-aircraft gun, all perforated by shrapnel. We can reconstruct the event, in a forensic way, and tell the story of a government convoy that was destroyed by guerrilla fighters during the Ethiopian Civil War (1974-1991). We have gruesome, specific details – such as an RPG hole that perforated the back of the driver’s seat in one of the trucks; the fuel deposit blown up by a piece of shrapnel; dozens of shell casings dispersed by the explosion; the seat of the anti-aircraft gunner pierced by countless fragments”.

Trace is very evident here, a “negative presence” equivalent to the disappeared person who shaped the worn shoes in Salcedo’s *Atrabiliarios*: the driver’s seat in one of the trucks, contoured to hold the driver’s body, and shattered by a rocket-propelled grenade; the anti-aircraft gunner’s seat, peppered with shrapnel. There is also singularity: the arrangement of the trucks and an anti-aircraft gun encountered on a remote road in Ethiopia. But there is no easy narrative. Although it can be inferred that this was an ambush in a broader area of conflict, there is no first-hand account, documentary evidence or explanation of what happened. It can reasonably be assumed that people were killed, but there are no bodies, names or identities. As a result, this site cannot easily be compartmentalized as a specific, violent incident involving distant strangers. There is, rather, more general affect, an association with violent conflict playing daily from media across the world, something that cannot necessarily be avoided by avoiding this particular road in Ethiopia.

By using the photograph, rather than the material assemblage – the image of the seat in which, without doubt, the truck driver died – an appropriate *mise-en-scene* can be created for mediation, an opportunity for engaging participants and breaking stereotypes. There is a wide range of potential mediation scenarios that could centre on González-Ruibal’s set of images from this death scene in Ethiopia. Here’s one, taken from the Ministry of Defence’s Joint Doctrine Note, “The UK approach to unmanned aircraft systems”:

“As systems become increasingly automated, they will require decreasing human intervention between the issuing of mission-level orders and their execution. For example, a mission may require an unmanned aircraft to carry out surveillance or monitoring of a given area, looking for a particular target type, before reporting contacts to a supervisor when found. A human-authorised subsequent attack would be no different to that by a manned aircraft and would be fully compliant with the LOAC, provided the human believed that, based on the information available, the attack met LOAC requirements and extant ROE. From this position, it would be only a small technical step to enable an unmanned aircraft to fire a weapon based solely on its own sensors, or shared information, and without recourse to higher, human authority. Provided it could be shown that the controlling system appropriately assessed the LOAC principles (military necessity; humanity; distinction and

proportionality) and that ROE were satisfied, this would be entirely legal” (Ministry of Defence 2011)

In this imagined scenario, an assemblage from the past (sometime during the Ethiopian Civil War, 1974 to 1991) is deployed in the present and directed at a future in which remote, automated killing is contemplated. Power comes from singularity (the jagged hole in the back of the driver’s seat; the gunner’s seat pierced by shrapnel). This is “held” more generally, without being dismissible to a matter of distant strangers, partly through displacement from remote North Africa to the metropole, but also because it is caught in “archaeological time”, a stratigraphic unit that gathers up evidence over seventeen years in a “layer” bracketed as 1974-1991. This is “living in duration”, “slow time” that has the potential of engaging through affect.

The opportunities in “duration” can be developed further by re-visiting a second potential mediation opportunity – Olivier’s reading of the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, “frozen” as it was on 10 June 1944, when almost its entire population was executed. The intention had been to create a perpetual memorial preserving the village “as it really was”. Oliver shows that this was, of course, an impossible project and that, over the subsequent seven decades, “as time went on, and new parts continued to replace the original ones, Oradour took on the surrealistic look of a contemporary theme park based on ruins” (Olivier 2011: 56-57).



Figure 10: Dr Desourteaux’s car, Oradour-sur-Glane

Oliver uses the example of Dr Desourteaux’s car, left where he had parked it moments before he was executed by the SS: “what is most striking is that this object looks less and less like a car. In the years since 1944, the paint has peeled off, baring the rusted metal that has had to be coated with an anti-corrosive varnish. The smaller parts of the car, like the windshield wipers, the rear view mirrors, and the bumpers, disappeared long ago. The windows and the seat covers no longer exist either. The tires have literally disintegrated.

The chassis now sits directly on the ground, slightly lopsided, and the bottoms of the car doors have fallen off. What we see today is not so much a car from the 1940s as an unrecognizable remnant from the past, or more exactly, a fossilized car from the first half of the 20th century as it appears to us at the beginning of the 21st” (Olivier 2011: 57).

Again, there is “trace” – the “negative presence” of Dr Desourteaux and the brutality of his killing. But the limitations of the memory project – and basis of Olivier’s critique of it – is the insistence on both particularity and narrative, allowing Oradour-sur-Glane to be “bracketed off” by visitors as belonging to an increasingly distant past, with nothing to do with the present: the site has been manicured, the grass around the car cut.

One could, of course, re-think the presentation of Oradour-sur-Glane, attempting to overcome the ontological “break” that obscures the connection with the present and the future, and the resurgence of neo-fascist politics across Europe. But here I am more interested in the car as an assemblage “encased” in duration, “slow time”.

There is no narrative for this assemblage over the sixty-seven years between Dr Desourteaux being shot and Olivier publishing his account of the car. This, again, is an archaeological “layer” in which the ever-active intermediation that transforms the material world is evident, in the same way that the convention of slow motion or time-series photography is used to show processes such the growth of plants through the seasons. What gives Olivier’s account of this particular car its valency as a “manifestation” is its association with the moment of Dr Desourteaux’s death; it is not “any” car (for example, a wreck in the “car graveyard” in a forest in Sweden – Holtorf 2011). This quality gives this assemblage of car parts “aura” in the sense defined by Benjamin: “the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced (Benjamin 1968: 221).

Again, we can project a scenario in which images of Dr Desourteaux’s car are deployed in a “political space” of mediation. Because the “slow time” of duration is so evident here, the model that comes to mind is again Salcedo’s “Untitled”, the series of sculptures from used furniture. These sculptures evoke the people who owned and used these items, which are now filled or encased in concrete – buried. The objects are also displaced from homes and into the gallery. They explore the fine distinction between “singularity” – the individuality of the object, and “particularity” – the specificity required for linear narrative. There is a fine line between creating narrativity through particularity while refusing to fix it through singularity. Bal argues that this continual tension leads to “recognition” which achieves affect and engages the viewer as participant (Bal 2010).

From this, one could envisage mediation in which the “singularity” that is explored is the arbitrariness of political violence: Dr Desourteaux happens to drive to the village, gets out of his car and is immediately executed. The retreat to particularity is blocked by the evocation of the trace and by “living in the duration” of a full lifetime, over which the trace –

the car – has been steadily transformed by the imperceptible processes of weathering. This denies arbitrary violence the hygienic solution of the particular event, and counters the ways in which media are saturated with representations of violent, arbitrary death and execution.

There are many other provocative fragments in the archaeological literature that have the potential to be used in mediation scenarios, and the ways suggested here. But there are far fewer case studies of such mediation in action, allowing a testing of the practical value of the key concepts of duration, singularity, displacement and trace. One such case study returns to the city and to Salford, close to the heart of Manchester.

Mediation in practice: Lost Streets

The August 2011 riots in Salford were centred on Salford Precinct, a brutalist concrete shopping mall dating to the 1960s. Previously, this was a high-density factory suburb with rows of terraced houses built in the later nineteenth century, made emblematic of the northern industrial city through L.S. Lowry's paintings, contemporary photography and fiction such as "Love on the Dole" and "A Taste of Honey" (Greenwood 1933, Delaney 1959, Greenall 2000, Rosenthal 2010).



Figure 11: Harold Riley, Brindle Heath

The stereotype of the "slum" and "slum dweller" was long associated with Salford and was used as the motivation for extensive clearance and compulsory purchase orders to enable public housing projects (Roberts 1990). Here is Albert Jones, Chairman of the Planning and Development Committee, in his Foreword to the planning proposals for the Salford Precinct area in 1963: "nothing can now be done to compensate for the rewardless lives of those who dwelt here in the past, but it seems fitting that such a project as this should be built

where they lived, and the first great buildings are now rising from the remains of their homes”.

The 1960s redevelopment replaced Victorian terraced housing with high-rise tower blocks each with 120 apartments, lower, eight storey units and an integrated shopping centre. The objective was to “obtain family houses in an intimate and varied form and with maximum sunlight and aspect at a still relatively high density”, along with open spaces where “the activities and requirements of all age groups of children can be appreciated and provided for, from small quiet toddlers’ areas to the larger kick-about areas giving space for teenagers to be as noisy as they wish” (Salford City Council 1963; Albert Jones was jailed at Manchester Crown Court in 1965 for soliciting a bribe from a property developer).

Forty years later, it had become a priority to again redevelop the area. Repeating the sentiments of Councillor Jones in 1963, the City Council’s 2009 planning guidance for the area described “high levels of deprivation, very low average household incomes, very low levels of economic activity and high levels of unemployment. Communications within the area are poor, because of the original design of the area, the widespread use of gating and non through roads”. The prospectus – now for a private finance initiative rather than for public housing – offered “outstanding homes in a neighbourhood of choice: a space to live, work and play; a neighbourhood for now and ready for the future” (Salford City Council 2009).

A long history of the extensive demolition of older houses, often backed by the use of compulsory purchase orders, and failed or incomplete regeneration projects, is characteristic of Salford more broadly. These public policy initiatives have been made more difficult by outward migration. For example, the Lower Broughton area of Salford had a population of 18 500 in 1930; today, its population is approximately 2500 (Cassidy 2012).

This is the context for the Lost Streets of Salford project, launched in 2005. Inspired by, and based on, Cape Town’s District Six Museum, the impetus for The Lost Streets of Salford are the street signs recovered, kept and collected after demolition (Rasool and Prosalendis 2001; Cassidy 2012). Over one thousand streets have been demolished in Salford over the past seventy years, and some of the resulting brownfield sites have been vacant scars for more than three decades: “there are currently hardly any architectural features left untouched by demolition, ... This has resulted in the formation of a kind of ghost city, which most residents over the age of 40 or 50 can still remember living in” (Cassidy 2012).

The Lost Streets of Salford collection, which has been shown in a range of places across the city over the past few years, and which has an expanding on-line catalogue, includes the recovered street signs, photographs and home movies contributed by one-time residents, oral histories and interactive mapping, in which participants locate their former homes in the current layout of the city (Cassidy 2012;

http://www.streetsmuseum.co.uk/Streets_Museum/enter.html).



Figure 12: Lost Streets of Salford

Unlike the ambush site in Ethiopia or Dr Desourteaux's car in Oradour-sur-Glane, which have been imagined as potential political spaces for mediation, Lost Streets of Salford already functions as such a space, and with marked success. Events are invariably well attended, with a good deal of active participation and discussion. This is what Boym (2001) has termed "reflective nostalgia". Rather than disguising or denying contradictions and insisting on a unitary tradition (Boy'm's "restorative nostalgia", clearly allied with formal heritage and linear narrative), reflective nostalgia is about the ambivalences of longing and belonging, and a concern with the nature of the past and the passage of time. As Cassidy (2012) notes, the political antagonisms that animate this engagement are anger at top-town, consultant driven local urban regeneration and the dysfunctionality of such policies from the point of view of residents: streets demolished against the wishes of residents; houses acquired through compulsory purchase orders and then left boarded, sometimes for years; brownfield sites left undeveloped, sometimes for many years; and rumours of deals and profit-taking by private sector development partners.

Cassidy, who has coordinated a series of Lost Streets events and installations over five years, sees the participatory principles of the project as having built trust: "the method of reflecting on the loss of schools, clubs, teachers, shops, parks, streets, flats, factories, cultural traditions and so on bonds the community together and acts as a form of therapy. Judging by the reactions of ex-residents interviewed to date, many have a deep emotional attachment to place and community. Many remain in the exhibition space for long periods and become upset when recalling events associated with removal and demolition or their past life in the district" (Cassidy 2012).

But this alone does not explain Lost Streets' continuing success, as there have been similar community projects that have failed to achieve this degree of commitment, even when far better funded. For the purpose of my argument here, it is notable that Lost Streets of Salford uses each of the qualities of "political art" that have been identified: duration, singularity, displacement and trace.

In each of its major installations, Lost Streets is anchored by the display of its collection of street signs that have, fortunately, escaped the "zero waste" strategy of the Greater

Manchester Waste Disposal Authority. As in Cape Town's District Six Museum (where the street signs were salvaged and then hidden away after the apartheid era cleansing of a mixed-race area for whites-only housing), participants do not specifically "view" the street signs, or discuss them. They are more a familiar, framing presence. They have "aura" and it is important that they are the "real thing"; they have personal association as the place names for locales where participants, or their parents or grandparents, lived. Perfect copies would be considered unacceptable.

The signature collection of street signs confers singularity, making quite clear the distinction between Salford and Cape Town despite the overt cross-referencing of the two projects. But the collection also establishes duration – the foreshortening of time. As individual artefacts, none of the signs has an individual history; each could have been on a street corner for three months or for thirty years before being rescued in the face of a demolition crew. They are not arranged in the exhibition in any evident order, and are not linked to any particular context. They are rather "gathered" as material indices of the sort of "habitude" conceptualized by Bergson, as an instinctive type of memory and remembering. This creates "slow time" within the political space of the installation, and in the interactions of its participants.

This "gathering" of place indicators, displayed without any particular ordering or context, stands in contrast to the tradition of re-created, time-specific contexts in local history museums. As with many such museums, Salford Museum and Art Gallery has recreated Victorian street scene – Lark Hill Place – created by the City Council at much the same time that Councillor Jones was commenting on the "rewardless lives" of those whose houses were to be demolished. Here, the visitor is invited to "take a step back in time to Lark Hill Place, an atmospheric re-creation of a typical northern street during Victorian times. ... The ambience is set at teatime on a winter's evening when the street gas lamps have just been lit. The sounds of children playing, horse-drawn carriages and a 'knocker-upper' fill the street. Walk down the street and take a peek inside the many shops and houses, including a toy shop, chemist, grocers, a blacksmiths and an artisan's cottage. ..." (Salford City Council nd). Lark Hill Place seeks – and achieves – particularity, claiming authenticity and precision in linear time. In this sense, it is the opposite of the "gathered" singularity and slow time of the Lost Streets installation.

Museum installations such as Lark Hill Place – and the museum tradition of contextual representation more generally – seek to create an impression of being "really there", "transported back in time". Again, establishing an effective political space for engagement and mediation requires the opposite - displacement. In confronting a social issue as sustained and extensive as a lifetime of compulsory purchase orders, urban clearance and re-housing and the failure of utopian regeneration schemes, being "really there" engenders the risk of over-saturation and banality. This alternative – the "theme park" of urban

regeneration – can be experienced by visiting one of the many streets of deserted, boarded-up houses awaiting demolition.



Figure 13: Cardiff Street, Salford

Cardiff Street, where I spent a morning in March 2010, was emptied out, deadened and deserted. There were a few traces of departed residents – a withered bouquet of flowers, some domestic rubbish in a tip – and one remaining resident in defiance of his Compulsory Purchase Order, cleaning his car in intense rage and attributing the imminent loss of his house to a sinister and corrupt Town Hall conspiracy. Cardiff Street would fail as a site museum because, in Latour's terms, the string of references between actors and objects that make up a network of meaning has been broken by the extent and effectiveness of the invisible power of the local authority (Latour 1999). We could imagine it as a sort of Oradour-sur-Glane, frozen in time to preserve and represent the folly of urban clearance. But this would be to fall into the trap of restorative nostalgia that Olivier has so effectively analysed (Boym 2001, Olivier 2011).

Lost Streets of Salford, though, uses displacement for more than the purpose of avoiding saturation, banality and restorative nostalgia. The project also uses displacement strategically, through the selection of venues. Some of these have been community venues with their own particular histories and roles: the Salford Lads Club, the Langworthy Cornerstones Community Centre, Chapel Street and Hope United Reformed Church. Others have been chosen for their political associations: at the annual commemoration of The Battle of Bexley Square, when unemployed Salford workers demonstrated for basic human rights in 1931; in the form of enlarged family photographs were wrapped on to industrial storage containers and set out in a Salford street awaiting demolition, and in an industrial building. Others again have engaged with more formal representations of heritage: at the Salford Museum and Art Gallery, upstairs from Lark Hill Place, and in a joint project with the Working Class Movement Library, where tools collected from Salford workers were wrapped

in text collected from books in the library's collection (Streets Museum nd). While some of these choices of venue have evidently been more effective than others, there is clearly an instinctive feel for the ways in which the selection of a political space can make a point and accentuate an intervention.



Figure 14: Lost Streets of Salford. Industrial installation

In all of these installations, the Lost Streets project has made effective use of trace as the “negative presence” of those who have been caught up in the machinery of state power and bureaucracy. Clearly, street signs are a trace of the buildings and human life on the lost streets that they represent. But of particular interest here is the use of photographs – the snapshots from family albums that participants bring to the installations, where they are displayed, viewed, discussed and archived on the project web site.



Figure 15: Lost Streets of Salford photo collection (www.streetsmuseum.co.uk)

In the on-line archive, photos are invariably “gathered” by streets, with minimal captioning, and without any attempt, or apparent wish, to create a “presented” and documented linear narrative (Streets Museum nd). Here are some examples:

Bannerman Street: “Brian Smith, Stephen (baby), Winifred and Hilda. Photographs sent by Hilda Smith. The family lived in Bannerman street from 1964 to late 1979, when the street

was demolished. The Higher Broughton community contained family networks that had lived in the area for generations”.

Brindle Heath Road: “Brindle Heath Road, near the old Jewish Cemetery, undated. Sent by Mr Frank W. Helps”.

Nora Street: “ Nora Street, 1960s. Sent by Ken and Anne Morris”.

In the installations, photos are assembled across whatever surfaces are available, ordered by street, but again with no attempt at linear narrative. Composition is invariably conventional, usually small groups of people posing in the street for the camera, capturing a moment.



Figure 16: photo assemblage, *Lost Streets of Salford*

The effectiveness of the trace in the installation lies in convening this eclectic range of “instances” into displaced space of the gallery. The photographs evidently convey mortality, in the sense established by Barthes (1980). Many of the people in the photos have died, or will die shortly. Combined with the signs from destroyed streets, these collections of images of people suggest the custom of putting photographs on gravestones, although this is not a local convention. There is a general sense of immanence, rather like a distant but approaching storm; a sense of sadness that could turn into anger; the sound of bulldozers approaching to sweep away the cheerful or cheeky faces posing for the camera.

Olin (2012) has described this as “tactile looking”, as “touching” photographs and “basking” in the gathered assemblage of images. For this to be effective, there has to be “less to look at” (Olin 2012: 17). The effectiveness of the *Lost Streets* photos is that they are ordinary

and repetitive in their composition and minimal in their captioning, or “thin” (Marks 2000), while at the same time remaining singular; of named people, in known places. Just as Salcedo’s *Atrabiliarios* is both the singularity of Colombia and the prevalence of violence that can affect any of us, anywhere, so the *Lost Streets* is both the singularity of urban housing policy in Salford and the prevalence of impersonal state power that can be manifested in a myriad ways.

The *Lost Streets* of Salford continues to be successful in convening new and well-supported events. There is a push for permanence – for a gallery that can be “home” to the collections and the events organized around them. If achieved, this could be successful; it could also lead to the closure that can follow from settled narrative. There is scope for further mediation. While local politicians clearly recognize the importance of recognizing the legitimacy of this political space, the administrative bureaucracy of housing and planning administration is faceless and absent. All of these are pathways for the future; as an instance of Object Enabled Mediation, the *Lost Streets* of Salford clearly works.

Object Enabled Mediation

Taken together, the key concepts of duration, singularity, displacement and trace, developed through the prism of conjectural opportunities for engaged practice and tested against the case of the *Lost Streets* of Salford, offer a schema for Object Enabled Mediation.

Object Enabled Mediation works along and in the faultlines of specific circumstances, conceptualized here as the city, but potentially anywhere.

Framed within cosmopolitanism – situational ethics – Object Enabled Mediation takes a stand that can be articulated in terms of social justice and an awareness of the imbalances of power and their consequences. The opportunities for social justice are manifest in the contemporary city but, of course, are to be found anywhere where archaeology is practiced.

Object Enabled Mediation does not depend on achieving resolution or closure, although resolution and closure may be achieved. It rather seeks to move from stereotypes of enmity, based on class, gender race or any other de-humanizing vector, to circumstances in which antagonism can be expressed in humanized terms of personhood. Such humanization creates the conditions for a political space where a just outcome is possible.

As a particular form of intervention within a broader range of mediation practices, Object Enabled Mediation builds on the special and particular properties of the material world; the “unruliness of things”, whether everyday artefacts, images, monuments or cityscapes. Working with things and images within the political space of the faultline requires a slowing down of time, duration, to enable the possibilities in memory to flourish. Mediation by means of the material world also requires the avoidance of closure through using the tension between singularity and particularity, avoiding for a while the completion that comes with narrative and explanation, when “truth value circulates like electricity through a

wire". Within this political space, the properties of the trace are crucial – the “negative presence” that evokes memory without direct representation, allowing affect and the engagement which breaks down the stereotype and restores personhood.

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