

Whiteheads waited, like all abandoned spaces. And patiently, it watched itself decay.

It's the familiar narrative of change and constant ageing, *Time* with a capital *T*, call it what you like. Derelict space is time stripped naked, like an x-ray. If you consider Time as an inevitable march towards endings then a building is simply a deferred ruin. By this logic, the entire planet will eventually be a vast sequence of derelict spaces under constant assault by the seasons. The spaces never confront us, their nature is to *envelope*. They wrap themselves around us without a moment's thought, just as nature doesn't care slowly picking them apart. Derelict spaces don't do anything. They don't need to do anything: they wait, everywhere.

The last decade fostered an explosion of interest in the derelict and decaying, increasing the already considerable challenge of how to do justice to the subject matter, how to move beyond straight-forward documentation of the environments to give voice to the structures themselves, to articulate what remains.

A short review of recent cinema displays evidence of a strong fascination with the visual representation of derelict space, just as some recent literature offers an exploration of the human psyche in relation to contemporary ruins. Right now Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* is the leading example of a work that considers what's important in the face of the large scale decay of human spaces. The recent film adaptation continues the exploration of post-apocalyptic imagery, takes the baton from other recent examples; *I am Legend*, *Children of Men*, *28 Days Later*.

A brief walk will help you appreciate that derelict environments are easily found all over the world, providing dusty traces of the past with a glimpse of the future. Forcing us to consider what's important by showing us the end.

This fascination with derelict space is a consequence of living in a Post-Industrial society, a time when abandoned Industrial spaces keep appearing. Asking what's important, in this context, is asking what's worth preserving: *What do we want to carry into the future from the past?* Then locating the other question hidden within the first: *How do we preserve what we decide is worth keeping?*

Matt's solution is to confront the space with itself, then embed it within other environments. He captures the nuances of those environments hidden in abandoned corners; the crumbling factories, the decommissioned industrial zones, the empty spaces devoid of human activity (restricted for their own protection, or ours, or both).

The Photosphere is a simple concept: *It repeats the experience of the world by refusing to offer a single vanishing point to orientate the viewer.* In fact, every point on the 2m sphere's surface is a vanishing point, encouraging the viewer to circle it repeatedly and explore its spaces.

The image that constitutes the outer skin of the Photosphere records an environment from a single point in space, which means that the vanishing point of the Photosphere is buried in the centre of the sphere itself. In this way it presents a compacted Spatial-Temporal Matrix, employed to maximum effect to articulate restricted spaces from a non-human viewpoint.

The Photosphere, simply, is the articulated expression of a space from its own perspective. Derelict spaces wait because they can't articulate themselves.

Naturally, the Photosphere can easily be employed to articulate *any* space, in the way that the camera might be employed to record anything. It's to Matt's credit that he chooses to employ the process as a conceptual art strategy. *Transient Reflections*, for example, was a Photosphere installation inside the derelict Whiteheads Steelworks in Newport, South Wales. The helium-filled Photosphere was tethered to a brick inside the echoing space for one working week, returned to the exact point of its creation, so the vanishing point in its centre was aligned to the point in space from which it was originally photographed. In this way it reflected the space like a mirror ball so you might approach it expecting your own reflection to emerge on its surface. Of course, it did not. Because the Photosphere is not a reflective surface, it's *a reflected moment*.

As the Whiteheads interior continued to decay, slowly stripped bare by the seasons, *Transient Reflections* preserved the space's viewpoint on the sphere's exterior, making physical the tensions of time on its own skin, a membrane quivering in the wind caught between the tragedy of the past and the inevitability of the future.

Whiteheads waited, and the *Transient Reflections* work was its reward; the manifestation of its "inner self." For a time the Photosphere was quite literally the unchanging reflection of the space inside the actual derelict environment, the decaying building's image of itself. The installation came near the end of Whitehead's life, a month later it had been demolished.

"The past is at its best when it takes us to places that counsel and instruct, that show us who we are by showing us where we have been, that remind us of our connections to *what happened here*."

- William Chapman

Returning the reflected moment to the exact point of its creation is only the "First Life" of the Photosphere, when it can be found in the heart of its own space. In its "Second Life" it becomes a documentary object, inverting of the narrative typically developed around derelict spaces: The Photosphere arrives in situ, uses the interior as an exterior, a moment which expands from a point in time and space, a moment that's a bubble; the physical expression of a moment which we can carry.

The value of documentation is precisely because the past is a direction we can't point to or return to *except* through the documentation we create *in the present*. In its "Second Life" the Photosphere is a portable moment. *Transient Reflections*, for example, is a second of Whiteheads time stretched across a sphere that's 2m in diameter. It's a moment literally caught and compacted down onto its skin. The Photosphere is a migratory memory, an object of nostalgia.

As derelict spaces are often *spatially* restricted the past is *temporally* restricted. The innovation of the Photosphere is make the documentary photograph occupy its own physical space in the world, to transform the Temporal into the Spatial, and make the Spatial become Temporal, literally capturing *Place*.

"Chronotope" was Mikhail Bakhtin's term for the spatial-temporal foundation of all narratives, literally translating from the Greek as "time-space."