

Thin Air
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The Psycho-Vocalic Discoveries of Alan Smithson

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1. Emptiness is not a zero

Places have something which remembers. The sentimentality of calling it a mind or a spirit can, perhaps, be legitimately avoided by the use of the word 'psyche'. There is no way of measuring whether or not the psyche is the collected mental impulses of the many feeling, bewildered beings thronging through the room or whether, as I think is more probable, the particular proportions of the room mould the air in such a way as to retain energy pockets and mental crises, informing not only the incident as it occurs, but also being informed by the incident interminably afterwards. One knows intuitively in a place whether a great deal has happened, whether one or two terrible things have happened, or whether nothing ever has or ever will happen.²

That was an excerpt from the tape dictations of Alan Smithson. My task during this lecture is to give you an idea of the true implications of Smithson's remarkable, pioneering and as yet little known sonic research work. Artist Paul Rooney³ has been commissioned by Leeds Metropolitan University and Sound and Music to make a sound work about Leeds Metropolitan University's (previously Leeds Polytechnic's) H Building, often known as H Block, which is a nine story modernist concrete block designed by Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardall on Woodhouse Lane in Leeds, England. Alan Smithson undertook a number of sonic experiments within the building in the 1970s. I met Paul Rooney after I delivered a talk on Smithson at the Mobile Academy in Berlin in 2003. Fortuitously Paul remembered this talk, and I am grateful to him for giving me the forum – as a part of his collaborative

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2 Smithson, Alan. Tape 4 (1972). In the author's possession. Most of the biographical information relating to Smithson in this lecture comes from his written journals along with his dictated tape recordings, so I have only annotated the direct quotations from either source. This particular excerpt from the tape dictation is heavily influenced by a lecture given by artists Rose McGuire and Jeff Nuttall (see pages 4-5 of these lecture notes), to the point where Smithson seems to be reading verbatim from a transcript he has obtained.

3 Artist Paul Rooney was born in Liverpool in 1967 and trained at Edinburgh College of Art. Paul works with text, sound and video, often focusing on the presence of history within the 'voices' of real and fictional individuals. He uses or references narrative forms such as short stories, songs, audio guides and lectures.

sound work – to present an expanded version of that lecture. Paul has also kindly arranged for me to make a sound recording of my voice, which is both appropriate for the paper's content and will allow it be heard by more people than I could ever possibly physically lecture to. I have gathered my material on Smithson over a span of twelve years in total, which has involved a number of visits to Leeds and to H Block itself during that time. In putting together this version of my presentation I must thank Paul for his invaluable new contributions to my research. Thanks also go to Ron Crowcroft, a contemporary of Smithson, who has provided many of the images to accompany it.

Alan Smithson was born in 1953 in Leeds, Yorkshire, England. At the age of 7, alone in his grandmother's Leeds Quarry Hill council flat and engrossed in a book about the First World War, Smithson heard a male voice suddenly call the words 'buried alive, still alive' over a primitive radio. The radio was switched off at the time. Smithson rapidly became more interested in paranormal phenomena, joining a local psychic society. It was there that he discovered that one of his ancestors who had died in 1898, Raymond Smithson, was not only an amateur ventriloquist but was also the founder of spiritualism in Leeds. A powerful medium, he had once levitated a small table, with three men on top of it, to the ceiling, 'on which the men wrote their names with carpenter's pencils'.⁴ This fact is noted in Smithson's journal, a collection of diaries crammed with notes and diagrams, which, along with his dictations to audio tape, form the primary source for the research history and theoretic postulations I will attempt to outline. A number of the photographs that accompany this lecture are also from Smithson's own files.

In 1971, whilst studying Three-Dimensional Design at Leeds Polytechnic, Smithson encountered a book on the 'new acquisitions' shelf in the Art and Design library. The book was 'Breakthrough', Latvian experimental psychologist Konstantin Raudive's study of the new Electronic Voice Phenomena research.⁵ In 'Breakthrough', Raudive describes the strange voice phenomena that had been recorded by himself and others from radio or TV broadcasts, or which had been discovered through the process of simply recording empty space. The voices, uttering enigmatic phrases in undefinable accents and with strange stresses and tones, seemed to be coming from a world other than our own.⁶ Smithson was instantly fascinated by these new discoveries and rapidly became the foremost EVP enthusiast in the UK.

Another crucial event for Smithson at this time was his attendance, in 1972, at a lecture given to the Leeds Polytechnic Landscape Architecture Department by artists Rose McGuire and Jeff Nuttall. The latter was also a tutor in the Leeds Polytechnic Fine Art department. The lecture was about an 'old friend' of Nuttall's whose loss of identity led him to be able to experientially merge himself with any space, be it a building or landscape, enabling him to sense the traces of any

significant events that had happened in that location.⁷ One phrase from the lecture struck Smithson as perfectly capturing the sonic potential of space, a potential that he was just beginning to explore: 'I know that emptiness is not a zero but a significant absence of what has been or will be. Thus no place is static but partakes continuously of its own change by recalling its past and projecting its future.'⁸

[Indistinct sounds can be heard at the rear of the lecture room.]



2. She shrugs and vanishes

Smithson had stayed in Leeds to study largely because of the reputation of Leeds College of Art, most of which had been absorbed into the new Leeds Polytechnic, and into the new H Building. Both opened in January 1970. In order to fully understand Smithson's research and findings it is necessary to be aware of the history of this context.

In the mid-fifties Harry Thubron had turned Leeds College of Art into one of the most revolutionary art schools in the world, basing his famous Leeds 'basic research' course on the principles of the Bauhaus. Students were taught to articulate their own ideas rather than to specialise in specific skills or particular media, and were even dissuaded from making 'art' as such: process being more important than result.⁹ 'In many ways we were walking into the unknown,' Thubron wrote, '[but] I think this is a vital and necessary element'.¹⁰ This revolutionary approach was continued into the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹ Students were also given instruction in current ideas in a wide spectrum of areas such as technology, poetry, psychology and music, as well as having access to a programme of visiting lecturers that included artists, composers, literary critics, playwrights and historians.¹² A Studio International article on Leeds in 1969 compared it to the nomadic Living Theatre; the democratic musical environments created by Cornelius Cardew (who was a regular visitor);

7 Confirmed by conversations between the author and Chris Royffe, Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts and Society and Head of the Leeds School of Architecture, Landscape and Design, who was also present at the McGuire-Nuttall lecture (August 2009).

8 Nuttall, Jeff. *Performance Art Memoirs, Volume 1*. John Calder (1979), 159. Note 2 above refers to pages 157-158.

9 Bates, Merete. 'Yorkshire's Answer to Hornsey and Guildford'. *The Guardian* (6/69).

10 Thubron, Harry. *Basic Research*. Leeds College of Art exhibition catalogue (1959).

11 Parkin, Michael. 'Techno-Artist'. *The Guardian* (13/2/64).

12 Peter Suchin, in the text 'Visiting Lecturers at Leeds Polytechnic 1979-1982', wrote: 'What was very good about having such a range of people was that the student was subjected to a number of varying, sometimes conflicting, artistic, critical and cultural positions, as opposed to a narrow and apparently coherent picture of what it meant to be an artist or other type of cultural agent at that time. This broad church or practices, ideas and opinions was echoed in the course's internal philosophy... It was thus appropriate that a fine art course whose defining model was (rightly or wrongly) one of pluralism made it a point of its teaching practice to bring in for presentations and discussions such a plethora of people and, as it were, multiple points of view. This approach in effect forced the student (and some of the staff too, I expect) to debate, either amongst themselves or, as it were, internally, the complexities, contradictions and "undecidables" of contemporary culture. It provided a broad cultural education for the student, as opposed to something which might be termed "training".'

4 Smithson, Alan. *Journal 2* (1972).

5 Raudive, Konstantin. *Breakthrough*. Colin Smythe Ltd (1971).

6 Harding, Mike. *An introduction to EVP*. Audio CD sleeve notes. PARC.

and the Esalen Institute in California.¹³ Patrick Heron, writing in *The Guardian* at this time, described Leeds College of Art as ‘the most influential in Europe since the Bauhaus’.¹⁴ In 1972 the ICA gave the entire college a show in their galleries: ‘Leeds in London’, an unprecedented event for any art school, regional or not.¹⁵ Fluxus members Robin Page, Robert Filliou and George Brecht often taught at Leeds, Brecht providing a link right back to the Black Mountain College and John Cage.¹⁶ Brecht and Filliou were a major influence on the young Alan Smithson, who – perhaps because of the subtlety of his own design ideas, or the fleeting and barely audible nature of his sound recording process – was fascinated by their self-effacing art works, by the idea that art or design could almost disappear, that any artistic or designed statement could be on the edge of not being said at all. Brecht and Filliou’s ideas inevitably extended to teaching and learning. One of their collaborations involved the creation of the Non-School of Villefranche, which, perhaps appropriately, never got further than a letterhead. The motto, translated from the French, stated:

Carefree Exchange of Information and Experience.
No students. No teachers.
Perfect freedom,
At times to listen,
At times to talk.¹⁷

Is this the ideal that Leeds was heading for?

The first Smithson audio sample I would like to play for you comes from February 1972. The sample was recorded on his portable Philips compact cassette tape recorder – a newly available piece of technology at the time – late at night whilst Smithson was sleeping over, alone, in the H Building Fine Art studios. It was a common practice in those days for Fine Art students to lock themselves in to the building in order to continue working on their artwork, evading the evening inspections of the porter, and though Smithson was not a Fine Art student he took advantage of this practice, mainly because he needed long periods of silence to have any chance of picking up any voice phenomena. The voice on this audio sample, according to Smithson’s notes, is saying ‘Kindheit zongora silent’. As is customary in presentations about EVP recordings, I will play shorter samples like this one three times so that you can pick up the jist of the utterance. To repeat, it is saying ‘Kindheit zongora silent’. [*Sample 1 audio recording is played.*]

Smithson was thrilled by this voice, his first confirmed EVP recording, but he found it difficult to interpret the words. This was until he realised that the voice

was polyglot, a mixture of languages, like some of the ‘alien’ voices which had previously been discovered by Raudive and others. Smithson was confirmed in this realisation after meeting Fine Art student George Szirtes, who told Smithson about his family history, information which Smithson was eventually able to connect to the polyglot phrase.

Szirtes was born in Budapest in 1948. His mother, a professional photographer, had survived Ravensbrück concentration camp during the Second World War; his father was deported to and survived a labour camp. The family, including 8-year-old Szirtes, left Hungary with a group of other émigrés during the revolutionary turmoil of 1956, walking across the border into Austria.¹⁸ Whilst chatting to Szirtes one afternoon, Smithson told him of a story he had read in the local paper, which had something of a Hungarian connection, about a local exhibition of some drawings of a concert pianist who had survived Belsen.¹⁹

As the conversation continued, Szirtes mentioned to Smithson the difficulties he was having trying to play an old piano in his Leeds flat.²⁰ A previous tenant had left the instrument which Szirtes was longing to play: it reminded him of the piano that was in his parents flat in Budapest. The neighbours who lived above him, an old woman called Lottie and her middle-aged daughter Joan – Smithson does not note whether Szirtes revealed their surname – were both neurotic, depressive and undergoing treatment, some of which involved electro-convulsive therapy. They had asked him not to play the piano, or if he was going to, to let them know in advance; and even then, he was to play quietly. Szirtes presumed the sound of a piano would have caused them to relive some unspeakable trauma: these were not ideal circumstances for making music. But, respectfully, Szirtes asked their permission every time he wanted to play, and always tried to play the piano quietly, in the way they had asked.

Smithson later thought of what a barely audible piano may sound like, and he imagined Szirtes playing so quietly that all that could be heard was the dull taps of finger tips on the keys, barely louder than the branch tips that were often blown by the bitter Yorkshire wind onto Smithson’s own bedroom window.²¹ The artist George Brecht, who as I have said, visited Leeds often around this period, had told

18 Sears, John. George Szirtes. The Literary Encyclopedia website.

www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5716 (accessed August 2009).

19 Anon. ‘The Crippled Pianist’. *Yorkshire Evening Post* (10/8/70). The article was about an exhibition by the Assistant Director of Leeds Polytechnic and former Principal of Leeds College of Art, Eric Taylor, who had witnessed the capture of Belsen in 1945. Taylor was too shocked to draw at the time of the liberation, but was able to put to paper his remembered images afterwards. Taylor later talked to a survivor, a Hungarian Jewish woman who had been a concert pianist. She consented to Taylor making a sketch of her emaciated hands. ‘Let people see what they have done to me’ she told him. Taylor resigned his Assistant Director post in protest at the detrimental re-organisation of art and design that was imminent after the College of Art was merged with the Polytechnic.

20 Confirmed in Szirtes, George. *Briefly 2: Furniture*. Tuesday, September 9, 2008. George Szirtes, poet and translator. Website blog. <http://georgeszirtes.blogspot.com/2008/09/briefly-2-furniture.html> (accessed August 2009). And by email conversations between the author and George Szirtes (September 2009).

21 I am reminded here of the statement by tutor Tony Earnshaw that was in the *Leeds Fine Art Prospectus* of the time: ‘Albert Camus has written of a German Officer captured by the Russians during the last war. This man, in spite of appalling conditions and the ridicule of his fellow prisoners, built for himself, from packing cases and rubbish, a “mock piano” at which he sat and made silent music that only he himself could hear’. Various authors. *Leeds Polytechnic Fine Art Department Prospectus* (circa 1971). Thanks to Ron Crowcroft for showing me his copy.

13 Serest, Meryle. ‘An American in Leeds’. *Studio International* (May 1969 Volume 177 number 911).

14 Heron, Patrick. ‘Murder of the Art Schools’. *The Guardian* (12/10/71).

15 Gosling, Nigel. ‘Leeds United on Parade’. *The Observer* (14/5/72).

16 Conversations between the author and Dr Derek Horton, former Head of Research, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Leeds Metropolitan University (July 2009).

17 Erloff, Michael (ed). *The Eternal Network Presents Robert Filliou*. Sprengel Museum, Hannover exhibition catalogue (1984), 116. The original text reads: ‘Échange Insouciant d’Information et D’Expérience./Ni élève, ni maltre./ Parfaite licence./parfois parler./parfois se taire.’

Smithson about some ‘piano music’ he had written called ‘Incidental Music: Five Piano Pieces’, the first piece of which was simply an instruction to tilt a piano stool so that it leant against the piano. Szirtes could play this piece in his flat without a problem, Smithson suggested to him, as well as piece number 3: simply photographing the piano in its situation; or piece number 5: simply seating himself at the piano.

Szirtes wrote a great deal of poetry while at the Polytechnic, encouraged by the Complimentary Studies poetry seminars that were led by poet Martin Bell. Years later Szirtes wrote a poem called ‘Piano’:

You must woo her with wealth and work,
Until one day, like the butterfly she is,
She shrugs and vanishes into the sudden dark

Of history and other shady business.²²

The poem ends with these paradoxical lines, about the huge black piano disappearing into nothing. But such are the shortcomings of frail memory. And such is the ‘sudden dark’ of historical events, destroying worlds without warning.

So Smithson, after thinking about Szirtes a great deal and undertaking much research into modern languages, eventually realised that the word ‘Kindheit’ in his voice recording meant ‘childhood’ in German, and ‘zongora’ was the Hungarian word for ‘piano’. ‘Silent’ is English of course. Here is the sample again. [*Sample 1 audio recording is played.*] I will now play you another entry from Smithson’s dictated audio tape journal, from November 1972:

Could the phrase ‘childhood piano silent’, if that is what this is, refer somehow to Szirtes’ memories of Budapest? Could it be a memory from this time stirred by his contemporary encounter with the piano in his Sheepscar flat, a memory which had been emphasised, somehow, by the ache of its own denial, due to it not being allowed to be fully reclaimed – because the Leeds piano was not properly played? If so, then this presents us with the possibility that spaces can somehow hold human memories – that the voices on my tapes could be sonic embodiments of, or emanations from, the mental processes of people who had worked or studied in the space being recorded. This could explain the odd character of the voices that I have recorded: rather than being utterances that are spoken, they are, or seem to be, voices of remembrance.²³

This possibility was a crucial discovery for Smithson, and I do not have to point out to you how profound its implications are if his supposition can be verified. It was at this point in his research that Smithson realised that he had gone far beyond the concerns of the EVP enthusiasts, their predictable world of ‘paranormal’

22 Szirtes, George. ‘Piano’. *Reel*. Bloodaxe Books (2004), 36.

23 Smithson, Alan. Tape 6 (1972).

voices of aliens or of the dead. Smithson wrote in his journals that the other EVP researchers had become, he felt, little more than quasi-spiritualist mediums with recording devices. Smithson was convinced his research was different: he seemed to be able to record the interior voices of the living in audible sonic form. The dead were still present somewhere within these recordings – the utterances seemed to be charged by the traumas of history – but the dead were being channelled by *living* memory, by waves of pulsing sentient recollection that had been caught in the electromagnetic subHertz waves within the room atmosphere itself. In his journal, amongst a number of equations and diagrams, Smithson wrote:

When certain infolded patterns on the longitudinal electromagnetic waves normally present within a H Building room are overlaid by a powerful, significant memory (the mind is also, of course, electromagnetic in nature), the memory may be transposed to the ‘interference zone’, as I will call it (an area of diluted atmosphere, of thin air if you will, left in the wake of the charged memory like the charred ground after a forest fire, and which allows the room and the memory wave beams to cross more easily). This transposition seems to become feasible if the memory’s engram – biochemical activity – and wave aspect are contorted through anxiety. [...] The electromagnet of any audio tape recorder applies a sound as a magnetic flux to the ferric oxide coating on the tape. This oxide permanently ‘remembers’ the flux it sees. The process of recording sound on a tape machine however, even given the receptivity of the tape to longitudinal waves and electromagnetic force, can not normally pick up brain waves as sounds audible to the human ear. But in the H Building this seems to be possible, because the waves are unusually enhanced.²⁴

The tape recorder technology was also able to detect these subtle magnetic phenomena, Smithson further conjectured, partly because the building was, incredibly, already mimicking this technology. The particular material qualities of the ground, granulated blast furnace slag that was mixed with the H Building’s concrete acted in a similar way to the oxide on the audio tape, permanently imprinting psychic disturbances in the magnetized air around and within it.

Smithson is not only saying that human thought waves can expand beyond the human body into space. He is also claiming that buildings, or the H Building at least, can contain some kind of sonically audible data bank of these thought waves, formed from a conflation of fragments of the more charged human memories that have been sparked within the rooms. He at one point names this as ‘site-anamnesis’.²⁵ Again, I have no need to emphasise to you the significance of these ideas if Smithson is proved to be correct. There are those, however, who have

24 Smithson, Alan. Journal 5 (1972).

25 Ibid. I am presuming that this bears no relation to the formulations of Socrates on the eternal knowledge of the soul recollected through ‘anamnesis’. Though I may be wrong.

poured scorn on such far-reaching discoveries. A colleague from Michigan, Dr Simon Phillipson, recently sent me an email commenting on a paper I published on British university buildings, in which I discuss Smithson, asking me to consider whether Smithson had simply been recording himself talking in his sleep.²⁶ Needless to say, the potential value of this research is too important to dwell on such cavils. Indeed the bombardment of derision I have been subjected to since my work on Smithson became public can also be seen as a validation of that research, because Smithson's discoveries, I would argue, pose a threat to the basis of rationalist scientific discourse itself, signifying a return to older conceptions of the body's relationship to space. Stephen Connor, in his study of ventriloquism, has written:

...[the] sense of the division between the lit and visible world of the body-brought-to-knowledge and the obscure and formless privacy of the body, the division between the body in knowledge and the body in experience, may itself be seen as the production of a scientific sensibility. In the pre-scientific conception of the body of the late classical and medieval periods, the body is seen as both open to and in complex interchange with manifold external influences, agencies, and *energies*, natural, divine, and demonic.²⁷

[*Indistinct sounds can be heard at the rear of the lecture room.*]



3. Dreadful something

Smithson passed an architecture degree course at Leeds Polytechnic in 1975: he had transferred from design, via a conversion course, to architecture in his second year. He then took his PG Architecture Diploma from 1975 to 1977. This switch to studying architecture was largely an attempt to provide some context for his private research into the H Building. Smithson, as I have said, had been attracted to studying at Leeds because of its reputation for radicalism, but he now also became convinced that the disruption of educational norms that was being initiated in the H Block had somehow contributed to the building's anamnetic uniqueness. The building had hosted so much freedom of thought and action that the resulting electromagnetic storm, so to speak, had left its mark on H Building permanently.

Happenings, then performance art, became the means for the most radical practices in the Leeds Fine Art department in the 1970s. During these years the performances that occurred in the H Block Fine Art studios became more and more cathartic and provocative, often involving physical harm to the artists, or their audience.²⁸

26 Email conversations between the author and Dr Simon Phillipson, Head of Research, University of Michigan, A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning (June 2009).

27 Connor, Stephen. *Dumbstruck*. Oxford University Press (2000), 13. (My italics.)

28 Smithson, Alan. *Journal* 8 (1974).

The Fine Art lecturers provided the initial source of disturbance at Leeds. Robin Page, according to Smithson's journal, tried to scream a plant to death in one performance. Fellow tutor Jeff Nuttall campaigned for human body parts to be allowed in art performances, and in a local newspaper press cutting found pasted in Smithson's journal, Nuttall claimed: 'So far as student violence is concerned I am warmly in support of it... There are no plans for violence, it is a spontaneous thing, an action, to precipitate fracture.'²⁹ Interviews to get onto the Fine Art course were famously tough, in order to weed out those not up to the demands of the course or to coping with the hostility of the wider public to confrontational work. 'I think I heard some tale,' wrote Smithson, 'about an interview where the applicant was asked whether he thought his work was "precious". When he replied "no" one of the interviewers threw his portfolio out of the window'.³⁰ The Fine Art prospectus, appropriately, had a picture of a mousetrap on the front of it.³¹

Over these years Smithson noted some of the more charged student performance art events at Leeds in his journal. Claire Watson dissected a parrot in a local pub, and made Molotov cocktails out of oil-cans (Watson, incidentally, also lived in an upturned boat from one menstrual cycle to the next, a performance to which I refer in my 1996 essay 'Maternal Space'³²). Ron Crowcroft invited people to a performance, then proceeded to hammer the entrances of the space shut with timber, trapping the audience inside (with hammering by Claire Watson). Ian MacKay performed with a guillotine and a latex-cast penis. Mari Hobbs used her own blood to make prints (attracting the attention of the media in the process).³³ Rob Elliot did a performance which involved walking on broken glass. Kevin Atherton was told to 'finish his glass' in the Fenton – the main Fine Art pub, where most of the teaching also took place – so he ate it, and excreted blood for a week. Another two students beat people up as art.³⁴

Derek Wain, a student from Bradford, with Leeds student Peter Parkin, wanted to reflect the violence of society at large. To do this they locked the audience into the Fine Art performance room, and as the song 'Camptown Races' was played over loudspeakers, proceeded to shoot live budgies with air pistols, staple live mice to boards, and smash up TV sets, before they were attacked by shocked audience members with the very iron bars they had been using to smash the TVs. The lights

29 Miller, Ron. 'I Back Student Violence Says a Leeds Polytechnic Lecturer'. *Yorkshire Evening Post* (18/2/71).

30 Confirmed by email conversations between the author and ex-student Paul Carter (July 2009).

31 Various authors. Leeds Polytechnic Fine Art Department Prospectus (circa 1971).

32 Gomperts, Annette. 'Maternal Space'. *Metropolis Journal* (May 1996).

33 Anon. 'Mari's Shocker'. *Daily Mirror* (?) (circa 1975). This is an unattributed press cutting on the web page set up by student Paul Carter: <http://www.getpaulcarter.com/leeds/index.htm> (accessed August 2009). The articles referring to Peter Parkin and others are also on this site.

34 Thanks to Ron Crowcroft, Paul Carter and Robert Joyce for confirming some of these events. Another student cut his chest with a razor blade until he was covered in blood. Another sewed thread into his scalp (Dave Hill, Claire Watson's boyfriend). Another was raided by the bomb squad because of his fake bomb 'sculptures' (Paul Carter). Another drilled the eyes out of a pig's head and then sewed them onto his own ears. In the early eighties, in an exhibition called 'Fireworks' that was attempting to highlight violence against women, someone placed a fridge full of faked severed female limbs in the Polytechnic gallery (which had a large window out onto the street), along with pornographic images ripped with razorblades. The Polytechnic gallery window and the entire exhibition was smashed in protest by enraged feminists. The unpleasant atmosphere that developed between the Polytechnic and the public of Leeds because of this incident was to last for years.

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were then switched off, while the two students continued to fire the pistols at random causing even more panic than was already caused by the animal abuse.³⁵ The Daily Express claimed ‘the two arts students presenting the show had to flee for their lives.’³⁶ Smithson wrote that he had heard a rumour that the performance was deliberately set up to question whether the extreme, shock-inducing performance work in the department could continue in the manner it had, without destroying itself by becoming a media circus. The Mari Hobbs and Peter Parkin press articles were not the only attempts to stoke controversy around the Fine Art course. At one stage a Daily Mirror reporter had been caught snooping around the H Building studios at night, no doubt looking for some scurrilous or shocking material to titillate its readers in the age of Andre’s bricks and P-Orridge and Cosi’s porn.³⁷

The Yorkshire Ripper had, by the late seventies, embarked on his string of murders, electrifying the air of northern England with fear, a static charge that was particularly felt by women. Smithson suspected that these circumstances – the Ripper’s reign, the bloody performances, the public and media wrath – may be the reasons for the building’s ability to contain and emanate its ‘memories’. ‘The atmosphere inside H Block had been punched so full of holes’ Smithson wrote, ‘by the little detonations of traumatic cognition, experience and recollection within it, that the same thought waves were becoming stuck there like squealing beasts in a forest full of trapping pits’.³⁸

Which brings me to the next audio sample. The phrase is: ‘Leap. Spill blood. Ça ira.’ [*Sample 2 audio recording is played.*] ‘Leap. Spill blood.’ English of course. ‘Ça ira’, is French for ‘it’ll be fine’. ‘Leap. Spill blood. It’ll be fine’.

[*Indistinct sounds can be heard at the rear of the lecture room.*]

We must dig into the more distant past to unearth the seeds of this phrase. Smithson had embarked at this time on a period of wider research into the history of the site upon which H Block was built, from which he was able to arrive at an interpretation of the utterance you have just heard. Smithson learned, from studying old maps in Leeds Central Library, that an army barracks once stood on the H Building site. This tallied with stories he had heard about soldiers being sighted walking up the H Block staircase, then disappearing into thin air.³⁹ The 1st West Riding Brigade Royal Field Artillery (Territorial Army) were mobilised on the site in 1914 before being sent out to the trenches.⁴⁰ Smithson discovered an account by one of their number, Frank Watson, who wrote:

Leeds was a very unmilitary city, and we had to face a good deal of

veiled hostility from various quarters: partly genuine pacifism – that is, opposition to war in any circumstances – partly an ancient prejudice connecting soldiers with immorality and drink, and partly a strong objection felt by trade union leaders to their young members coming under the personal influence of the ‘boss class’ to which they conceived the officers to belong.⁴¹

‘The poor bastard Territorials,’ Smithson wrote in his journal, ‘Ordinary men who were originally only meant for Home Service, their training was inadequate, their armaments were obsolete, and they had hatred coming at them from every corner. They were blamed for the horrors of war, for licentious debauchery and for pathetic subservience at one and the same time. The Leeds fine art performance students, vilified by all and sundry, have got it easy in comparison. The Territorials were lucky if they got out alive,’ Smithson concluded.⁴² After they landed in France, and were marching through Boulogne to catch their train for the front, the Leeds troops whistled the French Revolutionary song ‘Ah! Ça Ira’.⁴³ Perhaps the real feelings of the troops, as they whistled, can be more easily imagined if we realise what the lyrics could have been if they actually sang them. Here is a translation of some fragments of the song:

Ah! It’ll be fine, it’ll be fine, it’ll be fine,
Equality will reign everywhere...
The aristocrats, we’ll hang them!
And when we’ll have hung them all
We’ll stuff a spade up their arse.⁴⁴

‘All through the spring night,’ Watson writes, ‘we rumbled along in the wagons and, after stopping at every signal post in the Pas de Calais, we pulled up in Hazebrouck. Here a sergeant reported that one of my men had got up and dived out of the window somewhere en route, and that the man was known to be an occasional sleepwalker. I wrote him down as our first casualty. The guns told us we were nearly there at last.’⁴⁵

The diving soldier was indeed a casualty, or so he appeared to be. Here, then, we have the ‘leap’ mentioned in Smithson’s recording, a leap out of a train window, a leap, possibly, from oblivion into freedom. And we have the ‘Ça Ira’ whistled by the volunteers, the ‘all will be fine’ of a world dreamed into turning itself upside down. Could the soldier leaping into the night have dreamt, as he walked in his sleep, of escaping into a just world?

35 Almond, Marc. *Tainted Life*. Pan (2000), 61-62.

36 Anon. ‘The Fine Art of Killing Budgies’. *Daily Express* (27/5/77).

37 Email conversations between the author and ex-student Paul Carter (July 2009). Genesis P-Orridge was also a visiting lecturer to the Leeds Fine Art department – thanks to Peter Suchin for this information.

38 Smithson, Alan. *Journal* 8 (1974).

39 Conversations between the author and Alan Hay, Multimedia Designer, Leeds Metropolitan University (July 2009).

40 Mitchell T.D., Lt Colonel J.C. ‘Mitch’. *The West Riding Regiment Royal Artillery (Territorials)*. Yorkshire Volunteers Regimental Association website. www.yorkshirevolunteers.org.uk/wrarty.htm (accessed August 2009).

41 Purdom, C. B. (ed). *Everyman at War*. J.M. Dent (1930), 22.

42 Smithson, Alan. *Journal* 8 (1974).

43 Purdom, C. B. (ed). *Everyman at War*. J.M. Dent (1930), 23.

44 Anon. Ah! ça ira. Wikipedia website. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ah!_ça_ira (accessed August 2009).

The original text is: ‘Ah ! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, L’égalité partout régnera.../Les aristocrates on les pendra!/Et quand on les aura tous pendus/On leur fichera la pelle au cul.’

45 Purdom, C. B. (ed). *Everyman at War*. J.M. Dent (1930), 24.

But Smithson was convinced that the words on his recording were not uttered by dead soldiers, but by Fine Art student Mari Hobbs. In the following extract of tape number 15, Smithson mentions Mari Hobbs' blood prints and, unusually, reports one of his own dreams of the time:

I saw Mari on the Poly steps yesterday. She told me that the newspaper had printed the interview with her about the prints she did of the sanitary towels; 'Mari's Shocker' the headline was, but they called them drawings in the article and didn't even realise they were made with menstrual blood.⁴⁶ They really missed a trick there. Mari was still depressed about her beautiful, expensive film camera that had fallen out of the top of H Block while she was doing a time-lapse film of the city.⁴⁷ I said to her that the footage, if she can save any of it, may mean a lot more than what it would have done if it hadn't fallen. It could become a record of a sort of pure release, and of a violent destruction, simultaneously. I thought it was a nice idea, but it didn't seem to cheer her up. Last night, while doing a recording-sleepover in the print workshop, I had a vivid dream, which I remembered, for once. In the dream I was standing in Martin Bell's third floor H Block office at night-time, looking out towards the jaundiced lights of the by-pass and the BBC building across the road. Martin, who was looking well, as if he'd not been drinking as heavily as recently, was standing reading his poem 'From The City of Dreadful Something' to the empty room: 'Hell is a new brute building called Polytechnic', he shouted, 'full of hard slab stairs and peeling walls and low ceilings and handles that come off and there is particularly noise drilling banging grinding throbbing that follows you from room to room always in the room immediately above the ceiling...'⁴⁸ I then saw Mari's camera fall in slow motion, a few yards away from the open window I was looking out of. Without thinking I ran and leapt out of the window into the night. Someone had told me a few days before about Ian Hinchliffe improvisationally jumping 'into the void' out of a second floor window as part of one of his performances,⁴⁹ and I remember telling them about the First World War soldier jumping out of the train, or was it the story about the interview portfolio? I think I must have had all of this at the back of my mind somewhere. Anyway, I leapt out and reached to catch the camera as it fell, but just as my hands were about to grab it I looked back to see the entire building disappear into the cold air. The whole block, gone. All that was left for acres behind or below me was mounds of rubble flecked soil. I don't know what happened to the camera. I

woke up just before my body was about to smash onto the roof of a car coming down the inner ring road. What disturbs me now, thinking about it, is that like the soldier on the train, I am prone to a little sleep-walking myself on occasion. I hope my somnambulising body doesn't try to throw itself out of a window like my dreamed body did.⁵⁰

Smithson recorded the audio sample we have heard adjacent to Mari Hobbs' Fine Art studio space. 'Leap. Spill blood. It'll be fine,' he claimed the recording says. Is the recording, as Smithson claims, Mari Hobbs recollecting her camera's fall, ruminating in distress on its fate while searching for the comfort of some deeper meaning for its destruction? It is unclear whether Smithson had told Mari of his First World War research, of the leaping soldier. But, Smithson obliquely asserts, 'perhaps the building told her'. In Journal 9, Smithson writes: 'And the acts of recollection are not only transposed to the space, but changed, so that the room, generating a... [the journal is indecipherable here] in the interference zone, participates in the formation of the act of remembrance itself, informing it's content and form within a diffuse ambient psyche, or consciousness.'⁵¹ Again, this would be an astonishing discovery if corroborated. Smithson continually wrestles with this idea through the progress of his journals, though some of the notes from this period are almost impossible to understand and are corrected and re-written into dense clots of runic figuring. So in response to audio sample 2, Smithson asks himself whether the consciousness of the building was somehow speaking through Mari, through Mari's painful recollection, to reassure her, or to reassure itself, that all will work out for the best.

That what appears to be defeat can also be a sort of victory. The recording again. [*Sample 2 audio recording is played.*]

[*Indistinct sounds can be heard at the rear of the lecture room.*]



4. Silence: a hole

Smithson was pleased to pass his post-graduate diploma in 1977 but did not immediately look for a job in an architects practice. He was still consumed by his esoteric research, by his, by now, obsessional devotion to H Block. Because of this, he badly missed being around the building on a day-to-day basis, though he was able to return sporadically to undertake recordings thanks to his friendships with students still finishing their courses. The next audio sample I will play for you comes from early 1978, recorded at night in the recording studio that lecturer John Darling had set up inside the H Building. The words that can be heard are 'Nel paese delle meraviglie, keeping us alive, one hundred point six.' [*Sample 3 audio*

46 Anon. 'Mari's Shocker'. *Daily Mirror* (?) (circa 1975).

47 Confirmed by email conversations between the author and ex-students Ron Crowcroft and Robert Joyce (August 2009).

48 Bell, Martin. 'From The City of Dreadful Something'. *Complete Poems*. Bloodaxe Books (1988), 139.

49 Confirmed in Nuttall, Jeff. *Performance Art Memoirs, Volume 1*. John Calder (1979), 102.

50 Smithson, Alan. Tape 15 (1975).

51 Smithson, Alan. Journal 9 (1975).

recording is played.]

During Smithson's post-graduate diploma he met Fine Art students Paul Strohmeyer-Gartside and Sebastian Morley at a Fine Art student performance. The date of this meeting is unclear but was probably January 1977. Green Gartside and Tom Morley, as they were calling themselves, were glowering at the student, who's performance involved him eating until he was sick.⁵² Smithson was later on the receiving end of a thorough deconstruction of the event by Gartside and Morley, along with a stinging critique of the lack of rigorous thinking undertaken by many of the staff and students. In an essay at the time about the shortcomings of Leeds, they wrote 'The students flounder in their individual neurotic wildernesses, whilst the staff are somewhere [else] thinking about their own work.'⁵³ Gartside had given up painting at this point to make text works, as the influence of conceptual art had started to make itself felt in the Poly.⁵⁴ He had also been changed utterly after the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy Tour' arrived at Leeds Polytechnic in December 1976 (one of the few gigs from that tour that was not cancelled), but Gartside was also keen to berate the severe intellectual shortcomings of the first wave of punks. Gartside, Morley and Smithson would often meet up in the Poly canteen to drink seemingly endless quantities of coffee, Gartside talking enthusiastically of European politics, of the leftist autonomous political movements emerging in Italy that were trying to incite change independently of the Communist Party or other established parties or unions. Bologna's Radio Alice became a beacon for this movement, broadcasting live phone-in discussions along with taped 'subversive' cultural infills combining music, political rallying cries and poetry.⁵⁵ Alice proclaimed, in one of these poetic-philosophical infill tapes, that the Italian state was fearful of what they were doing. This is a translation from the Italian:

Desire is given a voice...The silence, the uncanny, the 'unstated', that which remains to be said, frightens...

The subject changes? The new subject is collective and does not speak.

Or speaks when it wants to.

Silence: a hole.

Let's allow holes to grow, let's not fear orifices, let's fall into them and pass on elsewhere.

Wonderland.⁵⁶

52 Bracewell, Michael. 'Its Not Easy Being Green'. *The Guardian* (7/99).

53 Robinson, Alan. Strohmeyer-Gartside, Green. Soviet, Tom. 'Show Us Your Uniqueness' in Rushton, Steve. Wood, Paul. *Politics of Art Education*. The Studio Trust (1979), 48. Thanks to Peter Suchin for this article.

54 Reynolds, Simon. *Rip it Up and Start Again: Post Punk 1978-1984*. Faber and Faber (2005), 199.

55 Plant, Sadie. *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International and After*. Routledge (1992), 130.

56 Tullii, Claudio. Re: [RK] 'Radio Alice -- Free Radio -- Collective A/Traverso'. Rekombinant website mail archive (2003). <http://www.mail-archive.com/rekombinant@autistici.org/msg00539.html> (accessed August 2009).

Gartside, who had read about Radio Alice in late 1976, insisted to Smithson that the station could realise the dream of the artistic avant-garde, the dream of bridging the gap between art and real life. The station was named after Lewis Carroll's Alice, because they wanted to subvert the very foundations of reality in the way Carroll had.⁵⁷

In March 1977, the British newspapers were filled with reports of battles between police and students in Bologna. Gartside moved to London by the summer of that year, but kept in touch with Smithson via a number of densely written letters, and packages, one of which included cassette tapes of some of the broadcasts Radio Alice had made during the riots, that Gartside had somehow obtained and copied. Alice broadcast news of the Bologna events as they occurred, 0 On one of Gartside's tapes the police raid which closed the station down was described on air by the Alice presenters as it was happening (this slide is the text of the broadcast, translated from the Italian). I will now play this tape for you. [*An audio recording is played.*]

The police are behind the door with bullet proof jackets, guns in their hands and all that stuff...The police have started again to pound on the door. Alice. There are the police at the door – they're coming in! They are in! We have our hands up! They are in! We have our hands up!... [*The transmission is then interrupted.*]⁵⁸

Though he had little knowledge of Italian, Smithson was fascinated by this recording. He was particularly intrigued by the fact that the word 'Alice' is spoken just as the police are about to break in to the room. This could, of course, be the presenter announcing the name of the station as he answers the phone. But something else could also be happening. Could this actually have been a plea to Lewis Carroll's Alice, the radio station's surreal patron saint, to suddenly appear to them through a rabbit hole – leading to a beautiful garden – to lead them all elsewhere? Or rather, to lead them into the uncanny? Are they calling on her to save them before they are silenced, so that they can continue to speak what is unsaid? There was, of course, the low hum of empty radio air after the transmission was interrupted, after Alice had gone forever. Perhaps that silence, Smithson speculates in his journal, was the hole that Alice, both Alices, have bequeathed to us. 'Let's fall in...and pass on elsewhere. Wonderland.'⁵⁹

Here is Smithson's audio sample again from early 1978, recorded at night in the recording studio inside H Block. The words that can be heard are 'Nel paese delle meraviglie, keeping us alive, one hundred point six.' [*Sample 3 audio recording is played.*] 'Nel paese delle meraviglia', Italian for 'in wonderland'. 'Keeping us alive', English. 100.6 was the frequency of Radio Alice. 'In wonderland, keeping

57 Anon. 'Radio Alice: Radio in Action in Italy'. *The Red Menace*. (Spring 1978. Volume 2, Number 2).

See: www.connexions.org/RedMenace.htm (accessed August 2009).

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

us alive. 100.6'. As you can hear, these words are almost obscured by the sound of loud banging on what sounds like the studio door. Smithson is clear in his journal, however, that he was sleeping soundly when the recording was made, that he was not woken by the bangs, and that no-one else was in that part of the building that night, as it had been locked at 11pm by the porter.

In autumn 1978 Smithson heard a song on the radio by Scritti Politti, the group Gartside had formed with Morley. 'Keeping us all alive,' the lyrics went, 'something in Italy'.⁶⁰ The song seemed to be evoking the beacon of hope that Alice had provided Gartside in Leeds. Had Gartside conceived this song, months earlier, in the same recording studio that Smithson had made his own recording in? Smithson, writing in his journal, was convinced: 'Green had placed so much hope in Radio Alice and the struggles of the 1977 movement that Alice's uncanny voice had somehow spoken through him. The remembered moment of Alice, and Green's moment of artistic creation, had charged each other sufficiently for them to weave themselves into the ether, and there lie dormant as a new voice. Ready to speak when it wants to.'⁶¹

[Indistinct sounds can be heard at the rear of the lecture room.]



5. Sad, awful, nasty

That 1978 recording was the last that Smithson made in the H Building. His whereabouts are unknown in the years that immediately follow, though we do have verification that in the early to mid-eighties he was living in a bedsit in Chapeltown, and that he worked for the Leeds City Council Planning Department, Building and Landscaping Section, based in the Merrion Centre. A neighbour of his at this time, Rita Dowd, told me that he was always very friendly, though not exactly outgoing.⁶² She said that 'he seemed to become more and more melancholy whenever his sleepwalking increased, which was often accompanied at this time by loud bangs and yells.'⁶³ She told me:

Around springtime that year [April 1986] Alan showed me some newspaper articles about all the trouble in the Fine Art department at the Poly, he was really distraught about it. Desperate he was. He kept mentioning 'H' in connection with it all, he was very concerned for her, I presumed this was a friend of his who was still studying there. The Yorkshire Evening Post had said that some women students had alleged that Fine

Art degrees were being given in return for sexual favours.⁶⁴ The staff were saying that this was a smear campaign by students unhappy with their degree marks. The tutors claimed that the Fine Art course were suffering because staff numbers had declined, resources had been cut and more was to come – the Thatcher government were going to cut all fine art courses by at least twenty percent. Education would soon have to compete in the market place like everything else. Meanwhile the National Advisory Board had recommended closing the Leeds course. Students had given evidence about lack of teaching, that the sound studio had run into disrepair and had been closed down, that performance work, which Leeds had been famed for, had been marginalised or not supported, even that the Poly building itself was falling apart – the glass roof in the Fine Art area was covered in polythene sheets to keep the rain out.⁶⁵

Though there are no journals extant from this later period it can be inferred from his earlier notes that the decline of the H Building would have devastated him. 'The whole block hurts, I know it,' Smithson had said to Rita, 'Every room hurts'. The building represented to Smithson a new way of being in the world, an attempt at a better future. He now saw that dream being destroyed. What was happening was the logical result of the Leeds anti-art school's radicalism; it was only a matter of time before the strain of maintaining a constant openness to what was possible, in the world as it is, became too much for it. And too much for those involved. Jeff Nuttall, quoted in the Strohmeyer-Gartside essay, admitted that the lecturers were partly to blame for not providing support for the more uncompromising, and vulnerable, students. Nuttall said: 'One of the hugely tragic things – I think it has something to do with the three attempted suicides since I've been here – is the discrepancy between the immense and rather desperate and inarticulate sense of urgency to strike a purposeful ideal on the part of the best students, and the avoidance of dynamics by the staff, who are quietists...the difference...is really fucking sad, awful, nasty...'⁶⁶ Fellow tutor Geoff Teasdale added: 'The Titanic is slowly sinking, by the first row of portholes one year, the second row the next year...'⁶⁷

Smithson no doubt felt during this period that he knew H Block so intimately that he could almost communicate with it. Or that he could at least understand its plight like no-one else. His later journal notes relating to 'H', in their more confessional, poetic passages, resemble the letters of an infatuated admirer. And

64 Anon. 'Boss Backs Bid to Save Poly Course'. *Yorkshire Evening Post* (1/4/86).

65 Pollock, Griselda and others. *Leeds Fine Art Review Body*. Internal Leeds Polytechnic report (October 1985). In a letter to this Fine Art Review Body, set up to look into the allegations, one student wrote: 'At the moment the roof is leaking in numerous places and some areas of the glass roof have been temporarily replaced with polythene sheets. When it rains canvasses and pictures get soaked and in gale force winds the studio has to be evacuated for student and staff safety. During my first year the studio was completely closed during term time – for repairs to the roof – for nearly two weeks.'

66 Robinson, Alan. Strohmeyer-Gartside, Green. Soviet, Tom. 'Show Us Your Uniqueness' in Rushton, Steve. Wood, Paul. *Politics of Art Education*. The Studio Trust (1979), 45.

67 Ibid, 46.

60 Gartside, Green. 'Skank Bloc Bologna', Scritti Politti, St. Pancras Records 7" (1978).

61 Smithson, Alan. Journal 14 (1978).

62 Conversations between the author and Rita Dowd (August 2009). Any details about Smithson from this period are from these conversations.

63 Ibid.

if infatuation can involve absolute selflessness, then Smithson, in the end, seemed prepared to give himself absolutely. In the face of the destruction of the object of his obsession, he presumably felt that the ultimate Romantic gesture – self destruction – was his only option. Rita said that Smithson had worried her one evening by talking admiringly of the remarkable disappearance of Louis Le Prince, the nineteenth century inventor and founder of the Leeds Technical School of Art. Le Prince went missing on the eve of his great triumph, the promotion to the world of his pioneering single lens moving image camera. He got on a train from Dijon to Paris in 1890, but never arrived. We do not know if he leapt out of a window, what is certain is that he disappeared forever.⁶⁸

Smithson left his bed-sit late one night in August 1986. He was never seen again. He left all of his personal effects behind: his work clothes were even left draped over his bedside chair with his tie spread across the seat, ready for the next morning. A packet of Nice biscuits were unopened on the kitchen table. Rita discovered Smithson's journals and tapes in the flat before the police arrived, and luckily took them into safekeeping before the house clearance people did. We all have Rita to thank for the survival of Smithson's remarkable legacy.

Emily Dickinson once wrote, 'Art – a house that tries to be haunted'.⁶⁹ George Szirtes had quoted this line in a Radio 3 interview transcript I read the day before my last interview with Rita.⁷⁰ After saying goodbye to her, and with the Dickinson phrase somehow hovering within my head, I went to visit H Block for the first time in about a year. This was in September 2009. The Leeds Fine Art course had survived its closure threat and continues to this day, but H Building itself, when I arrived there, was abandoned. All of its workshops, studios and offices had been moved to a new building across the road, on the site of the factory workshops where, in the nineteenth century, Louis Le Prince pioneered moving image photography.

[Indistinct sounds can be heard at the rear of the lecture room.]

As I loitered near the large yellow skip in the H Building car park, containing a few boxes, broken swivel chairs and tables that had recently been cleared out of the block, I got chatting to a cleaner, Lena Maskill, who was emptying her trolley in an adjacent bin. She had been working in the H Block for fifteen years, so I asked her if she had any memories of the building. It was during this conversation that she told me the story with which I will conclude this lecture.⁷¹

A year previously, the cleaner who worked with Lena told her that the Gypsum ceiling tiles had been removed in the men's toilets at the end of the ground floor corridor, the corridor for the Fine Art studios. They found that somebody had been living up there for months. A foreign student. This was not the first time

a discovery like this had been made, either, as there had been quite a few foreign students found living secretly like this in the dark throbbing ceiling spaces of the buildings. They would come down in the morning to attend all their lectures and, at the right moment every evening, climb back in to crouch and crawl in the suspended darkness. 'So you just don't know what's about, here, do you?' Lena said.⁷²

This anecdote seemed to connect with me, knowing what I do of the H Building and its past. The story of these people, forced to journey from the far corners of the earth for an education, embedding themselves into the building at night, incubating in its warm darknesses their dreams of a better future for themselves – it all seemed absolutely in keeping with the character, if you will, of the building as I now know it. I felt, as Lena spoke of the stowaways, as if the building had provided for them, had offered sanctuary to them, somehow. If you will permit me to speak in such a manner.

There are those who discount Alan Smithson's findings, but even if all of their disparaging accusations about his methodologies are true, the combined impact of his work is still, for me, incontrovertible. Smithson is asking us, ultimately, whether the historical past speaks within and through us, or whether it remains silent. Does it confront us, he asks us, or does it hide away? Is it fixed or shifting? Is it placed or nowhere? Smithson may not have answered these questions, or not in ways that we can easily understand. But he asked them. That is his legacy – he asked the emptiness to speak. To murmur its somniloquy from the darkness of history: its new strange dream of the future.

[Indistinct sounds can be heard at the rear of the lecture room.]

68 Kilburn, Scott E. 'The Career of L.A.A. Le Prince'. *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* (1931).

69 Dickinson, Emily. Johnson, Thomas Herbert. Van Wagenen Ward, Theodora (eds). *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Harvard University Press (1997), 554.

70 Tusa, John. *The John Tusa Interviews: interview with the poet George Szirtes*. Radio 3 (6/3/05). Transcript: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/szirtes_transcript.shtml (accessed August 2009).

71 Conversations between the author and Lena Maskill (September 2009).

72 Ibid.

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Published by Sound and Music, Somerset House,
3rd Floor, South Building, Strand, London
WC2R 1LA.

ISBN 978-1-907378-01-0 (PDF edition)

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Volume 1 by Jeff Nuttall, published by John
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'From The City of Dreadful Something' (extract)
by Martin Bell from Martin Bell, *Complete
Poems* published by Bloodaxe Books.
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Paul Rooney would like to thank:

William Rose, Sue Ball, Ron Crowcroft, Annette
Gomperts, Rita Dowd, Rose McGuire, Moira
Innes, Paul Carter, Doug Sandle, Derek Horton,
Peter Suchin, Robert Joyce, Lena Maskill, Chris
Royffe, George Szirtes, Sean McAdam, Geoff
Teasdale, Mari Hobbs, Green Gartside, Richard
Whitelaw, Sound and Music, Dave Ronalds,
Charles Quick, Chris Bailey, Leeds Metropolitan
University, Leeds Central Library, Alice Morgan,
Jimmy Singh, Sonia Beck, Phill Harding, Jackie
Kerr, Jeremy Akerman, Peter Connolly, Suzanne
Fairless-Aitken, Alessandro Gallenzi.

Special thanks go to Keith Rowntree, Principal
Information Assistant (Archives), Leeds
Metropolitan University, who maintains the
Leeds College of Art Archive, located in the
Library at Leeds Metropolitan University Civic
Quarter Campus. This is part of the University's
Archive and Special Collections. Keith is actively
seeking donations and would welcome any
information, stories, or reminiscences relating
to the collections: k.rowntree@leedsmet.ac.uk

Project manager: William Rose

Book design: Joe Gilmore, Qubik
www.qubik.com

In memory of Alan Smithson and Jeff Nuttall



'Thin Air' is a site-specific artwork by Paul Rooney commissioned by Leeds Metropolitan University in collaboration with Sound and Music. It was first presented on the occasion of Expo Leeds (25-28 September 2009, Leeds, UK). The work is a repeatable pre-recorded sound lecture with visuals that was presented in one of the teaching spaces within Leeds Metropolitan University's Broadcasting Place development, which opened in September 2009. This publication served as expanded lecture notes to accompany the work.

Details on future presentations of 'Thin Air' can be found at www.thinair.org.uk.

Funded by



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