

**APHE (Association for Photography in Higher Education) Summer Conference  
Photography and Collaboration, Coventry University, July 10 - 12, 2019  
Panel: *Collaboration as a Pedagogy*, July 12**

**Cian Quayle: Tom Wood *The DPA Work* (A Reprise / Revoiced)  
Photographs of Rainhill Hospital and Cammell Laird Shipyard**

This morning I will discuss my ongoing collaboration with Tom Wood which has led to the forthcoming Steidl publication of *The DPA Work: Photographs of Rainhill Hospital and Cammell Laird Shipyard*. This presentation – although predicated on – does not focus solely on Wood's our collaboration but what this opened for student collaboration as well as with other individuals and organisations.

In 2007 we invited Tom to give a talk on his work for BA Photography students at the University of Chester. This led to a relationship, which has continued with Wood's long term contribution as a visiting member of staff. Around 2012 Wood invited me to work towards the publication of *The DPA Work*. I initially proposed two exhibitions which were shown at the University's gallery CASC (Contemporary Art Space Chester). These exhibitions also formed part of the Parallel Programme for Look 13 Liverpool International Photography Festival. The significance of the project galvanised around two distinct but related bodies of work made just prior to the closure of both institutions, at a pivotal time in the UK's recent social and political history.

I also want to explore the nature of the kind of project, which students undertake which could – on one level – be described as 'socially engaged', but which primarily emerge from their personal experience and environment, and via a sense of self awareness where they are the subject of their own practice. In their second year students are introduced to the notion of 'embodiment' as a way of describing relationships with subject matter and ideas, with makes reference to Michael Fried's interview, with Stephen Shore (2007), an interview which I am sure many of you are already familiar with. Fried and Shore work back from a recent exhibition of Shore's photographs at PS1, which revisits the scale and way in which Shore's photographs were first exhibited relative to the sequence and experience of seeing the same work in Shore's seminal photobook *American Surfaces* (1977). Fried and Shore go on to discuss the act of seeing through space and the way in which images are activated by an understanding of the photographer's sense of space and how this is negotiated.

At the end of the first year we ask students to consider their practice in relation to the notion of embodiment and specifically to draw on the recollection of a 'profound' or otherwise banal experience, and anything else in-between. This, as a way of shifting their attention away from the pictorial world of appearances towards a way of image making and thinking which, as the subject, draws their experience to the fore, in terms of their intention, process and practice.

At Chester, photography students are asked to reflect upon their lived-experience in the form of a short piece writing – not as an academic text – but as a way of articulating that experience on their own terms. This writing might also provide a means of abstracting away from that experience as that which could be reimagined, reenacted or revisited. Students present ideas, experience, personal histories and revelations for which there is no literal substitute in how to potentially make photographs in relation to what they have shared and revealed.

Students are introduced to a diverse range of practices, which includes other photographers' and artists' writing including Tony Smith's account of a night-time drive on the New Jersey Turnpike, and the way in which this experience shifted Smith's sense of space in a physical and psychological transition, which led to new understanding of objects and form in space. Visiting artists and photographers' input is also key, and recently this has included Markéta Luskačová, Anthony Luvera and A J Wilkinson. The significance of narrative and storytelling are embedded alongside the introduction of the key issues and debates, which inform contemporary photographic practice. This

provides a means of exploring the legacies of documentary and fine art photography practices, identity, text and moving image, alongside collaborative exhibition practices. The vernacular spaces and practices, which the medium embraces also affords material to reflect upon as a way of exploring wider identities and contexts.

As our collaboration with Wood began to develop Tim Daly and I initiated a year 2 Experiential Learning project, where an initial group of four students Natalie Meer, Tabitha Sparey, Julie Wem and Sharon Mosey worked together to gather data related to the histories and legacies of both Rainhill Hospital and Cammell Laird Shipyard. Students gained valuable experience in their engagement with communities, organisations, institutions and their own image making around similar or parallel contexts, which also supported the development of their own directions.

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In Walter Benjamin's 1931 essay *Little History of Photography* the Marxist literary critic and essayist writes the following:

‘As Brecht says: ‘The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality express something about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or of the A.E.G. tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations – the factory, say – means they are no longer explicit. So something in fact must be *built up* something artificial, posed.’ ’

In Wood's work what is photographed or built up is driven by the necessity to understand the world via the aesthetic of the photograph. That aesthetic is defined by the nature of the encounter with the subjects whom Wood photographs but also determined by the performance of the subjects in that specific setting. Or, what Pierre Bourdieu termed the *habitus* of their surroundings, which in part, shapes our routine, behaviour and identity. In Wood's case what at the outset was planned as a six-week commission did not readily allow for the same type of encounter, which characterises his work, where a familiarity with the people and places photographed is all important in order to *build something up* or establish the kind of relationships Wood thrives on and upon which the work depends. At both Rainhill and Cammell Laird Wood's approach was also framed by the specific nature or the *habitus* of each location, and how this determined the experience and encounter with those he photographed. In this, Wood also finds his own behaviour and practice similarly choreographed by the routine and setting. How the experience of the photographer is embodied in the images in turn contributes to how we apprehend the work.

The Documentary Photography Archive was founded by Audrey Linkman, in Manchester, in 1985. The project emerged as a result of an art historian-led initiative where: “The Manchester Studies Team focused on the history of working people, disadvantaged communities and minority groups who, until the post-war period, had largely been written out of the script.” At the same time the team began to build an Archive of Family Photographs, which would form part of integrated narratives related to histories, which couldn't be written without the same. The team made reference to vernacular and local society practices in developing approaches to collecting material, factual information and visual statements.

The DPA's first commission was Martin Parr's *Retailing in the Borough of Salford* and the work was exhibited at Salford Art Gallery in 1986, with some 1500 negatives ultimately deposited in the archive. A characteristic of the DPA commissions was that the photographer donated the entire body of material – unedited in its selection – as a record of the work undertaken. The body of work, as preserved in the archive, does indeed reveal aspects of practice and conditions, which the photographer might first miss or indeed overlook – then and now. Revisiting the work was a revelation for both Wood and I, as well as the students with whom we collaborated over the course of

the next five years. Audrey Linkman revisited the foundation of their collaboration with Wood and other photographers during this time, and the intentions of the DPA as an organisation:

It better reveals the photographer's approach and method: it reveals omission, reflects obsession, and potentially contains elements of style or technique that will be developed in future work. It tells the story of the photographer's journey. The preservation of the total body of work can also balance our understanding of the subject. The subject in a documentary photograph is the victim of the photographer's interpretation and has no means of challenge or redress. So images that show the subject in a range of different ways may help achieve a more balanced view. To this day I see framed photographs in exhibitions as torn and bleeding around the edge, ripped out of the context that endows greater depth of meaning.

The work that had sustained documentary photographers in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s had virtually dried up by the 1980s. Thatcher's 80s had no time for photo essays in magazines or illustrated articles in newspapers that highlighted injustices in society, or exposed deprivation and inequality. And, in any case, by that time documentaries that covered such topics were largely aired on television. Still photographers who wished to continue to work broadly within the documentary tradition turned instead to Arts Council grants channelled through galleries, museums and the regional arts association, in our case North West Arts.'

At the heart of this conflict, as I saw it then, was the issue of the legitimate 'voice' of the photograph. Did it/should it represent the views of the subject i.e. the aggrieved community or individual(s) or, did it/should it represent the views of the photographer? In spite of their laudable intentions, were photographers perhaps misguided when they claimed to represent the views of others?'

The exhibition at CASC similarly initiated a discourse between myself and Wood regarding how the work should be presented and contextualised, mindful of the sensitive nature of the content, and the time in which the photographs were made, their subject, and their reception some thirty years later. And also, how the form and context of the exhibition might be reconfigured and extended in published form.

To return to Benjamin's admonition, which can be interpreted on different levels in Wood's search for his identity and identification as a photographer. Benjamin's reference to something which is *built up* or constructed is one which refers to a reflexive as well as a critically or politically reflective practice.

Wood was interested in revisiting the archive in order to reconsider his formative practice, as developed across the space of five-years. An understanding of this experience and what Wood has described as the 'constraints of the medium' is particularly significant for the interpretation and understanding of the photographs and the different ways in which they might be perceived and understood. For my part, as a researcher Wood's photographs revealed the bedrock upon which further layers of practice, collaboration and meaning could be overlaid.

The exhibition *Care in the Community* was commissioned and exhibited by the Open Eye Gallery in 1988. The project also involved the support of the mental health charity MIND. Discussion at this time rounded on the notion of making 'positive images of mental health', which had implications for the kind of images, which might otherwise be included in relation to what such a general but well intentioned proposal might mean.

A six-month commission extended over a two-year period where Wood photographed in the hospital two or three days a week. Very few pictures were made as he spent a lot of time talking to the residents, who in general populated mixed wards. At this time, a minor psychological breakdown prompted by the loss of work, home, or a relationship breakdown might result in a situation where individuals, who might have otherwise recovered given the kind of support mechanisms, which we are familiar with today, and which are under threat, led to some people being institutionalised long term. Wood had been seeking permission to photograph in Cammell Laird for several years, and the

DPA commission facilitated access just before the shipyard closed, but he was then able to return when the site reopened as a ship repair yard, and the project ran across four years.

When we exhibited the work at CASC in 2013 I curated two consecutive exhibitions which featured as part of the Parallel Programme, at the invitation of Patrick Henry, then Director at the Open Eye Gallery, for Look 13 Liverpool International Photography Festival. The initial research for the project was undertaken in order to uncover the contemporary significance of this work, as well as its historic and contextual sources, which was a significant aspect of the project and key to a wider understanding of Wood's photographs. In some ways Wood's intentions and aesthetic drive opened up the space for an expanded contextual interpretation. That is not to say that Wood's awareness of the conditions of the men and women photographed in both institutions was not one to which he was not attuned. For Wood the project represented a sustained opportunity to investigate his craft as a way of finding and establishing a voice and identity as a photographer rather than an instrumental agenda driven by social issues. At the same time Wood can be identified by his subjects and the way he photographs and the underlying empathy which undoubtedly admits our insights into other peoples' lives.

Both exhibitions received varied responses and reactions, which highlighted important questions related to how decisions had been made relative to the selection and exhibition of the images. Tom and I discussed the ethics of this in some depth, not just in terms of permissions, but primarily related to the content and the status of the images, and the selection of one in place of another, especially where the Rainhill archive manifests series of images in which I became particularly interested. I was committed to ensuring that the exhibition of the photographs should make visible the context of the time in which they were made but also their contemporary significance relative to collaborative and participatory practice today. This also foreshadows the kind of discussions, which permeate the press and media, where debates related to well being and mental health, impact on all ages, and particularly in young peoples' lives, which of course forms an aspect of our pastoral role as educators.

As such it was critical to ensure that the work exhibited was contextualised in a very specific way. We both agreed that the integration of archive material was an essential aspect of a narrative, which was aesthetic and historical, but which importantly also drew attention to the conditions in which the men and women in both institutions were visible but also to some extent without a voice. In the exhibition a large wall text was prominent upon entering the gallery space, which outlined the background as well as the contemporary context of the work.

At this point I was introduced to the poetry of Clare Shaw, and this was a revelation as a result of Shaw's own experience of psychiatric care in Liverpool and contact with residents at Rainhill Hospital shortly after its closure. Shaw was fascinated to see the work and had already written a poem entitled *Poem About Dee Dee*, which referred to one of the women which Shaw recognised in one of Wood's photographs upon encountering it in the exhibition. As a co-founder of the organisation *Mad Women: The Liverpool women's Mental Health Forum*; and *Harm-ed*: a user-led training organisation. Shaw continues to work as a freelance trainer and consultant alongside her ongoing career as a poet and author. Shaw's interest and research into *ventriloquism*, later formed the basis of a residency at the University of Huddersfield, as well as lending Wood's photographs another kind of image-voice, which both amplifies and silences the meaning of this work.

As this collaboration progressed I made a selection of Wood's images, which I sent to Shaw and these provided the basis for new poems were written directly in response to Tom's Rainhill photographs. As both exhibitions ran concurrently, the cross-over between the Rainhill and Cammell Laird exhibitions was punctuated by a poetry reading and performance by Shaw (May 13<sup>th</sup> 2013). Shaw's poems re-activate the images where she speaks through the silence and *ennui* as she revoices the presence of the subjects and the spaces they inhabit.

Around the time that Rainhill Hospital closed in 1991, Wood also found a collection of sixty-eight, turn-of-the century photographic portraits, most likely made by one of the hospital's doctors, which had been thrown away in a skip outside the closed hospital. This collection of portraits further affirms

the presence of the subjects we see in Wood's Rainhill collection. This also includes another photograph that Wood was able to make of the admittance papers for one of the patients dated 1937. This man was still institutionalised, and was photographed again during Wood's residency, but now fifty years later. The inclusion of the portrait which was made at the time of this man's admittance and the contrast with a portrait made some fifty years later is testament to the tragedy and sadness of his and others' institutionalisation. The two photographs of the same person separated by fifty years do not tell us what might have been if this person had not been admitted, nor of what has taken place inside the hospital, but instead quickens the realisation of a lifetime lived, or lost and maybe now past, as we see these photographs nearly twenty-five years after they were made.

The found photographs are also a reminder of other institutional portraits made by doctors and their assistants such as those analysed in Georges Didi-Huberman's study *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878), and Hugh Welch Diamond's famous portraits at Surrey County Asylum in 1856. These photographs have an intensity that belies their original function in recording the faces and physiognomy of individuals, where it was believed that the face 'mirrored the soul'. In Didi-Huberman's analysis of Martin Charcot's photographs of female patients of Salpêtrière he writes of the patients' collaboration and participation with the physician's desire to photograph what he terms their increasingly 'theatricalised bodies', where photography occupies 'the ideal position to crystallise the link between the fantasy of hysteria [or labour] and the fantasy of knowledge.'

The visibility of the individuals in Wood's photographs represent these people as individuals and as people, first and foremost. Wood is preoccupied with finding ways of crystallising a moment, which in its photographicness renders an image out of the intensity, or banality of the situation based on his personal encounter with a sense of responsibility and empathy for those photographed. The propensity for the patients in Rainhill and the work force at Cammell Laird to image their own presence is so intense that the photographer's presence disappears, as we are caught in the *filmic* episodes of the lives before us, beyond their time and place or a style, cliché or stereotypes, which in the same moment defy and reposition our expectations and understanding of the same or similar situations, which we may have also encountered.

This aspect of the project's collaboration also marked an important phase of its development and context where the notion of ventriloquism as an act or performance where an invisible collaboration is enacted via the reinterpretation of the images. David Goldblatt's *Art and Ventriloquism* (2006) provides a parallel for the development, context and interpretation of Wood's images as they have been revoiced in this project in what Goldblatt terms 'the complex logic of ventriloquism' and its relationship with art, philosophy, and the artistic process. 'In the conversational exchange between ventriloquist and dummy, Goldblatt recognises a speaking in other voices, illusion without deception, talking to oneself, effacing oneself as speaker, being beside oneself – the ancient Greek notion of ecstasis – and the animation of inanimate objects as an unabashed anthropomorphism.' The title of this talk makes reference to a reprise, that is the repetition of an action in a performance, and the rhythm or meter, which this might be guided by. The archive of images in the DPA Work accentuates this sense of movement and the significance of habitus, gesture and action located in places of work or confinement.

In this sense I was also interested in the cinematic sense of space and the performances and rituals enacted each day. This is manifest in the way that the individuals inhabit the institutional spaces of work and care. The habitus which each setting represents as a stage of action where the space of reception is activated, and into which we are also granted access as it is revealed in the repetition of daily routine. In this ennui-like or dreamtime estrangement a sense of the immersive experience of the photographer, and the oppressive environment in which the photographs were made. Merseyside-based artist Leo Fitzmaurice also wrote an exhibition review in response to the Rainhill exhibition, which deconstructed his encounter with the exhibition and its curation in the cinematic sequencing of the images.

Amidst the cacophony of both environments, speech and identity are suppressed in the alienating setting of each institution. The men working in the shipyard were highly skilled and with the loss of work they were also set to lose their sense of worth and identity as well as income and stability. These are the consequences of the recession which this phase of our recent history represents both psychologically and economically. Tracing a path which follows the stability associated with work, family and home, to the instability of unemployment, it is not too great a leap to make the connection between both bodies of work. This is marked by the impact of subsequent government policies, and the longer term impact and impression on the city and region, from which it has to some extent recovered. The isolation and exchange in Rainhill is defined by an environment where speech, movement and utterance, which following the loss of social, economic and psychic stability become a distorted, ur-reality into which we intrude.

In Cammell Laird the intensity and hardship of work is counterpointed in the listlessness and ennui of the downtime, which foreshadows the impending decline, which formally and psychologically parallels the introspection and prone resting position adopted by the workers and patients within both institutions. The threat of redundancy was a protracted and painful process for all those concerned, and Wood was frustrated in that there was very little work being carried out in terms of actual shipbuilding, and the men just wanted to talk. He would make a portrait of the men he spent time with and give them a print. Each week, and often on a daily basis, more men were being made redundant until the yard closed, and many of the portraits here reflect this inevitability. In one group photograph we see the last four apprentices taken on at the shipyard, alongside other portraits of workers resigned to their fate.

The prospect of unemployment, as hundreds of men were to lose their jobs is visible in their faces, gesture and demeanour as photographed here. It is a male-oriented environment where individual or communal spaces afford a break from work: to eat, rest or sleep, or temporary distraction found in reading newspapers or magazines – including pornography. Other workspaces and work benches in between, or nestled away elsewhere, are festooned with pornographic images. All sit cheek by jowl in an uneasy correlation of text and image, including newspaper cuttings, magazine tear-sheets, cartoons, fragments of text, family photographs of wives, girlfriends and children. There is no judgement as to whether pornographic images in places of work are acceptable but at the time they did form part of the fabric of this type of work place, in a way which is wholly unacceptable, but here it also signifies a negation of voice, which is subjugated in a form of distraction and abjection. This is potentially problematic when viewing some of Wood's photographs, which were also included in the book and exhibition, but they formed part of the environment and fabric of the spaces inhabited by the workforce. To otherwise exclude these images would have curatorially sanitise the edit and selection, which would in effect alter the record of what this work place and similar consisted of at the time.

Benjamin recognised the liberating force and power of the photographic image but was also attuned to its mutable status where an image disconnected from its context or origin is transformed as it is understood in new ways, which moves beyond its origin or setting. The intensity of the subject matter in the emotive force of this subject matter challenges our social, political and aesthetic understanding of mental disorder and psychiatric care, which are a consequence of the vicissitudes of life and work. Wood's images have provided the bedrock upon which these thoughts and ideas have been reprised and revoiced in the depth of additional layers of meaning, which are revealed in the traces and perspectives, which have been sedimented in their stratification. Each body of work is distinct in its own right but each also marks a very specific moment in time and place, in the North West, Liverpool and Merseyside, at the end of the twentieth century.

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I'd like to end by showing the work of three students who graduated in BA Photography last year including Suzanne St Clare, Tony Hayes and Alberto Garcia Cruz. Their work emerges from their experience and the search for ideas and subject matter, and where this is found: A question asked by

this year group's External Examiner Ken Grant when he met with students to discuss their final year projects.

Alberto Garcia Cruz's work addressed issues related to globalisation, neoliberalism, migration and displacement in work which explores the North West coastline between Britain and Wales. Alberto appropriated aerial views of the Spanish coastline, which show the redevelopment, expansion and displacement relative to the stretch coastline and hinterland of North Wales.

Tony Hayes instigated a commission at Heathside Mews Care Home in Warrington where his relationship with the residents led to a series of empathetic, humorous, celebratory and melancholy portraits. Tony is currently working towards a community project, which will be exhibited at the Brindley.

Suzanne St Clare along with John Lloyd Quayle worked with Tom and I on the DPA Work project during its first exhibition at CASC in 2013. In this last year Suzanne completed her studies in BA Photography at Chester and continues to work, as a socially-engaged practitioner, with vulnerable young women on the Wirral, who are from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds across the region. Suzanne has worked with the women as participants in a collaborative way where they have co-authored their own images, at the same time as building their confidence, sense of worth in a statement and affirmation of their identity.

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#### **NB: Suzanne St Clare - Proposal for *Made of Iron***

##### **Response**

To take a group of 8 young women and respond to the brief of examining the female workforce of Cammell Laird Shipyard in 2019. The project will be a current interpretation by young female photographers of Tom Wood's 1993 - 1996 Cammell Laird, which documented only male workers at a time when the shipyard was in a state of decline.

It is intended that the photography project will highlight the changes in this monumental local business in regard to female workers, as well as celebrating the impact that Cammell Lairds has had on Wirral's economy and local families.

*Made of Iron* will consist of a combination of evening and weekend workshops and field trips.

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