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PREFAB:

Dissident Art-Making Against the Capitalist Common Sense

Martin Fowler, MA.

Thesis

submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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and

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In memory of

Tom Leonard

(1944 – 2018)

‘in solidarity and friendship’

Acknowledgements

I speak a different idiom, but I think of these same things (Williams, 2001, p.11)

I began making the objects which would gradually come to form *PREFAB*'s collection of anti-commodities when my son, Beau, was three years old. In June of this year – 2022 – he will turn nine. In November, my daughter Lexie will be twelve. Together, with my wife Katy, the four of us have lived in our house in the centre of Carlisle – the Border City – for almost a decade.

It is now thirty-two years since that fatal day in July 1990 when my maternal grandfather Jimmy Newlands and my close friend Peter Campbell died. My grandmothers - Elizabeth Fowler (nee Hogg) and Jessie Newlands (nee Arundel) – a constant presence throughout my childhood – died in 2002 and 2009 respectively. My paternal grandfather - John 'Jock' Fowler - died in 1956.

Analogously, with this lived history in mind – a history marked by work, displacement and consumption – the *PREFAB* anti-totems mark, or map, the development of an artistic praxis away from the naïve understanding of classical ways of seeing and knowing, to a political modernist purview. Spanning the Keynesian post-war consensus circa 1955, the project's understanding of socio-economic history was generously supported by Dr. Ian Chapman from the Institute of Business & Economics at University of Cumbria. Simultaneously, the work's transition from the pull of classical realist convention – fostered in Glasgow School of Art circa 1993 – to the problematizing decoding/encoding of counter-canon making was supported by Dr. Mark Wilson from the university's Institute of the Arts.

Towards this unfamiliar end, the unwavering support provided by the critical realist viewpoint of Dr. David Butler provided *PREFAB's* much needed theoretical line-through. Brought to bear on the false-consciousness of life in the auteurist academy, the vital significance of this oppositional socially-purposive perspective was underscored by the shared experience of prison education and the complexities facing the contemporary bourgeois dissident. As Raymond Williams writes in *Drama in a Dramatised Society* (1983):

The specific conventions of a country, a society, a period of history, a crisis of civilisation – these conventions are not abstract. They are profoundly worked and reworked in our actual living relationships. They are our ways of seeing and knowing. (Williams, 1983, p.18)

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1.1 Thesis Abstract: *PREFAB* – Dissident art-making against the capitalist common sense



(Fig.1) A prefab, Moredun, Edinburgh circa 1980.

men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please (Marx, 1968, p.96)

PREFAB is a political modernist project whose threefold purpose, through development of a theory-in-praxis framework, is to counter the naïve assertions of the realist aesthetic (the dominance of which serves to reproduce capitalist common sense), as well as the conformism of the ‘art for art’s sake’ avant-garde. In the third place, *PREFAB* wishes to repudiate the hagiographic emphasis of liberal art history & theory in the evaluation of the arts. Contrariwise, in the world of work, no less than in the academy and culture, women and men ‘make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under

circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.’ (Marx, 1968, p.96).¹ On this model of structured agency, focusing on real social and economic determinants, *PREFAB* instead features an ‘author as producer’² frame of analysis, where the object of study is the materialised memories of the life and times, or *lived experience* (through the decades, circa 1930–95), of a working–class Edinburgh family. Namely my own.

The intellectual formation of *PREFAB*’s integrative synthesis of making and writing was informed, signally, by Marx’s profound insight that *social being determines thought*, by Antonio Gramsci’s counter–hegemonic inventory of traces – a *knowing oneself as a product of the historical process to date*³ – and by the dialectical *distanciation* techniques, or ‘the separation of the elements’,⁴ of Bertolt Brecht’s anti–illusionist ‘epic’ theatre (and by affiliated political modernists in the interwar era and since). The project’s primary sources also include the demythologising semiology of Roland Barthes, the cultural materialist⁵ formulations of Raymond Williams, Janet Wolff’s Marxist sociology of art, Avery Gordon’s exploration of the hauntological imagination, and Lukacs’s critique of the ideological reproduction of the capitalist commodity–scape.

Determined therefore (in paraphrase of Godard’s slogan) *not to make political art but to make art politically*, (Godard : MacCabe, 1980, p.19)⁶ the *PREFAB* how–is–what case studies address the Scottish nativism grounded in invented traditions of neo-tartantry,⁷ the ideological distortions of the

¹ Marx, K., ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in One Volume*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1968, p. 96.

² Benjamin, W., *Understanding Brecht*, Verso, 1998.

³ Gramsci, A., *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, p. 324.

⁴ Willet, J., ed., *Brecht on Theatre*, Methuen, 1978, p.37.

⁵ Bottomore defines materialism as: ‘(a) a denial of the autonomy, and then of the primacy, of ideas in social life; (b) a methodological commitment to concrete historiographical research, as opposed to abstract philosophical reflection; (c) a conception of the centrality of human praxis in the production and reproduction of social life and, flowing from this, (d) a stress on the significance of labour, as involving the transformation of nature and the mediation of social relations, in human history’ (Bottomore, 1985, p.324).

⁶ ‘The problem is not to make *political* films but to make films *politically*.’ MacCabe, C., *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, BFI/Macmillan, 1980, p.19.

⁷ By coincidence, a key date in the emergence of Scottish neo-Romanticism as embodied in the invented traditions of tartantry, is marked by the visit of George IV to Scotland in August 1822. Stage-managed by Sir Walter Scott, the visit included a military review in which the British monarch, keen to improve his popularity after a series of personal scandals, appeared on Portobello beach in

‘thing-world’ of finance–capitalism, with especial interest in the fetish forms of reification⁸ evocative of the proletarian popular culture of my grandfather’s prefab–worldview. Reproduced from *indexical* signs of post-war capitalist consumer culture, the *PREFAB* ready-mades accompanying the written thesis, comprise a family history of redux commodities, parodic fetishes of nation–state, and Marxist signage: a laboratory of didactic experiments in what may also be called *critical realist* method (in complex unity with critical realist theory) against the dominant conventions of bourgeois ways of seeing, knowing, and telling.

philabeg, sporran, and elaborate Glengarry, to inspect 3000 volunteer cavalymen and honour the Highland clans. It is estimated that 50,000 people turned out to watch the spectacle. The event is recorded in a painting by William Turner de Lond titled *George IV, 1762 - 1830. Reigned as Regent 1811 - 1820, as King 1820 - 1830 (At a military review on Portobello Sands 23 August 1822)* (1828).

⁸ In *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (1983) Bottomore defines reification as: ‘The act (or result of the act) of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things which have become independent (and which are imagined as originally independent) of man and govern his life. Also transformation of human beings into thing-like beings which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the thing-world. Reification is a ‘special’ case of ALIENATION, its most radical and widespread form characteristic of modern capitalist society’ (Bottomore, 1983, p. 411).

1.2 Bunnit Husslin



(Fig.2) *Willie at his easel*, gouache on paper, the (new) Art class, HMP Perth 2007.

‘Marxism is a realism’ (Lovell, 1980, p.9)

In the summer of 2002, after two years working full-time with the ‘LTPs’⁹ and ‘Y.Os’¹⁰ at HMYOI and HMP Glenochil, I took a job in the ‘Learning Centre’ at HMP Perth. Employed as a Prisoner Learning Lecturer in Art my task was to reenergise an art-room which had become jaded, both pedagogically and creatively, through institutional neglect.

⁹ A Scottish prison system acronym for ‘Long Term Prisoner/s’.

¹⁰ A Scottish prison system acronym for ‘Young Offender/s’.

The Learning Centre, or 'Education', as it was known by 'cons' and 'screws' alike, was, in reality, a group of small class-rooms bundled together in a 'temporary' building which smelled strongly of cigarettes and bleach. Standing at the north end of the prison courtyard between C-Hall's vast sandstone bulk, the graves of the hanged,¹¹ and the prison Infirmary,¹² this incongruous box-shaped construction – its brown harled exterior and pitched roof called to mind the quaint familiarity of a suburban bungalow - provided both vocational and non-vocational courses for men serving sentences ranging from 12 months to 20 years. A minority of the Art class's ten or so students were 'Short-termers': 'Mainstream'¹³ prisoners who, within the jail's inverted hierarchy, lacked the kudos of 'the lifers' who formed the majority of the group.

Self-appointed leader of this ragtag bunch was Bobby. Only two years older than me, Bobby, or Bob as I called him, was a 'lifer' doing 15 years for murder. A die-hard Rangers fan from the west of Scotland, Bobby's quick wit and weightlifter's physique (assiduously developed in the prison gym) presented, initially, a formidable challenge to my fledgling authority. Across the table from the wise-cracking Bobby, sat 'Dunky'. This charismatic 'ex-para' and accomplished ceramicist, spent most days hunched over a spinning pottery wheel, a thin roll-up clenched permanently and absentmindedly between his teeth. In contrast, to 'Dunk's' glowering

¹¹ I had been working at Perth for approximately 9 months when a member of staff told me that some 50 yards away, on the other side of the small garden outside the art class, lay the graves of executed convicts. Condemned to death and for their bodies to lie forever within the walls of the jail, the grave-site, marked only by a vertical brush mark of white paint on the original Napoleonic perimeter wall, contained three bodies. The last of these was a Polish man and former soldier, named Stanislav Miska. Reduced to vagrancy and petty criminality following the end of WWII, Miska had murdered, during a bungled break-in at Clock-Tower cottage in Kenmore, the wife of the local gamekeeper. Captured after a number of days on the run, Miska was executed by the British hangman Albert Pierrepoint in 1946.

¹² The doctor who dealt with the majority of the prisoner's requests for prescription medication was notorious amongst the prisoners for turning men away empty-handed. As a result, he was referred to, by one and all, as 'Dr. No'.

¹³ Like all jails, Perth's prisoners were divided into two categories - 'Mainstream' or 'Protection'. The majority of prisoners who had been placed 'on Protection' or, in jail parlance - 'behind their doors' – were sex-offenders. They were known throughout the prison, and the wider prison system, as 'The Beasts'.

intensity was Andy; once a self-employed 'spark' and now indolent observer, Andy provided the latest 'jail chat' and sardonic comment on the day's events. Regaling the class with stories about life as an international cocaine smuggler and the trials and tribulations of industrial scale cannabis farming, Andy epitomised the anti-authoritarian spirit of this often naïve, yet street-wise, society. Greeting such stories with good-natured scepticism was Jack, an ageing bank-robber with failing health who, due to a failed escape attempt some years before, was categorised under the unusual title of 'Strict Escapee'.¹⁴ The reality of this rather exotic appellation was that Jack was escorted between Education and D-Hall separately, and at all times, by two very large prison officers.

Nearby, working diligently at a paint-spattered easel and seemingly aloof from such goings on was Alistair. A double murderer and confirmed psychopath,¹⁵ Al, as Bob, ever the antagonist, referred to him, was, in 2002, half way through a 20-year sentence (his second life-sentence) and working, to everyone's amusement, toward an Open University degree in Ethics.

Intelligent and highly-manipulative, this narcissistic yet emotionally crippled man with long white hair and piercing eyes who, it was rumoured, had been the victim of horrendous abuse as a child, was treated with wary condescension. Producing seemingly endless paintings of Iona and its ancient Benedictine abbey, the class rumour mill had it that the severed head of Alistair's last victim lay buried somewhere on this, the most sacred of Scottish islands.

At odds with the more pugnacious members of the group was Euan. A gaunt looking

¹⁴ Armed with an imitation hand-gun and a knife made from wood, Jack had knifed, or 'chibbed', a prison officer in the thigh during his failed escape. Coincidentally, although not a native of the east coast, Jack knew my home area well, having robbed a local Bank of Scotland at some point during the 1970s.

¹⁵ Prior to my tenure, Alistair had been sent to Carstairs State Mental Hospital, Scotland's maximum security asylum, for diagnostic assessment. He had been returned to HM Perth as a diagnosed psychopath who, not being psychotic, was, in Carstairs opinion, untreatable. A few years after I left Perth, I heard that Alistair had died in his sleep, in his cell.

*Highlander dressed in a baggy jail-issue sweatshirt, Euan spent his long days copying, in painstaking detail, iconic Scottish landscapes torn from old copies of the Reader's Digest calendar. I remember once, that this quiet gentle man, during a conversation about the appropriate use of oil thinners and glazes, mentioned, rather matter of factly that, on occasion, he had drunk methylated spirits. A former forestry worker from the central Highlands 'doing' 12 years for murder,¹⁶ Euan seemed to personify, in contrast to the romanticist scenery celebrated in his paintings, the reificatory condition of a rural population scarred by the morbid symptoms of exploitation and forced migration. As John McGrath writes in *The Year of the Cheviot, the Preface to The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil* (1974):*

For years the Highlands have, to most people, been shrouded in mist. Either the mist of romanticism – the land of solitary splendour, Gaelic twilight, and sturdy, independent, gently-spoken crofters. Or the mists of inevitable backwardness – a land that missed the boat, with no resources and a dwindling population, a land inhabited by lazy, shifty, dreamers who cannot be helped, in which nothing can alter.

The realities of Highland life, and of the Highland people, are very different. The realities are created by the actions of a feudal system leaping red in tooth and claw into an imperialist capitalist system, becoming more repressive, more violent as it does so (McGrath, 1993, p.vi)

Outside, in the cramped hallway, sat Wayne. A member of the prison's 'Discipline' staff,

¹⁶ To everyone in the class, Euan's 'lifer' appeared to be a gross miscarriage of justice.

former Royal Marine, Falkland's veteran and one-time oil-rig worker during the North Sea oil boom circa 1985, it was Wayne, with his 'Death or Glory' and '45 Commando' tattoos, who served as the genial,¹⁷ yet no-nonsense conduit between the often rambunctious class and an otherwise faceless regime. If provoked, Wayne, who boxed in the army and headed-up the prison riot squad, had a good line in disarming patter. In a memorable exchange with Russell, one of the more lairy members of the group, Wayne, correcting the former's assertion that his uniform offered little protection replied, with a big smile and much to the amusement of the wiser heads: 'This uniform doesn't protect me from you, it protects you from me'.

Last, but not least, was Willie.¹⁸ A larger-than-life presence from the east coast, it was this gentle articulate man who, more than anyone, came to epitomise a radical humanism which, in its most humble yet heightened moments – the tentative construction of a lopsided clay ashtray, the making of a birthday card for a loved one, or the accurate rendering of line and tone – defined the often beleaguered class and its sense of dignity.

Though largely resilient to the indignities of prison life, these rogues, hard-men, comedians and street philosophers serve, for present purposes, as a cross-section of a tribalistic post-industrial Scotland marked by unemployment,¹⁹ poverty and alienation. As Stuart Jeffries

¹⁷ Wayne, who remains a good friend, provided me with unflinching support during my 4 years at Perth.

¹⁸ Willie was a guest at my wedding in Carlisle in 2015.

¹⁹ As Hood and Young note in *Multinationals in Retreat: The Scottish Experience* (1982): Where the Scottish operations have suffered disproportionately, the reasons given normally related to low productivity, overmanning, restrictive practices or poor labour relations. Within a multinational system comparative plant performance may be closely monitored, and poor performers are highly vulnerable. If a plant is fairly small, does not represent a unique source for a particular product or component or has no research and development unit, then once again closure is a strong possibility when multinationals are taking restructuring or rationalisation decisions.

Low productivity can result from management countenancing inefficient working practices, but it also relates to investment levels. There are instances in the cases – Singer and Hoover in particular – where low investment made closure almost inevitable, although in Singer this cannot be disassociated from the first-level problem of corporate mismanagement (Hood and Young, 1982, p.151).

writes in *Everything, All The Time, Everywhere: How We Became Postmodern* (2021), of the socio-economic condition of post-1979 Britain:

High inflation, itself the product of public expenditure cuts, made unemployment rise sharply in the early years of her (Thatcher's) rule, creating an industrial reserve army that would chasten employed workers considering industrial action that might end up with their own addition to the dole queue. But the British electorate might well have thought itself misled. The electoral slogan 'Labour isn't working' was made to seem ridiculous by the fact that unemployment averaged 10 per cent between 1979 and 1985, compared with 3.3 per cent between 1955 and 1979 – the so-called golden years of Keynesian economics.

Union membership fell by more than 20 per cent between 1979 and 1988 as Thatcher introduced employment acts that undermined the disruptive power of organised labour, requiring secret pre-strike ballots and ending the closed shop. She changed the rules of the game so that power shifted from labour to capital, enabling companies to close down inefficient plants and increase productivity – the latter itself a cause of higher unemployment during the 1980s. Thatcher's neoliberal economic revolution entailed that, by making workers more productive, fewer of them were needed to achieve the same levels of production. Hence redundancies. (Jeffries, 2021, p.91)

*And so it was that one morning, not long into my tenure, I busied myself self-consciously with the class's tired collection of scrappy magazines and battered art books. Upon opening an old hard-back edition of MacMillan's *A History of Scottish Art 1460-1990* (1990), I was surprised*

when two Tunnock's Teacake wrappers fell to the floor. Picking the pieces of flattened silver foil from the scuffed linoleum, I naively asked no one in particular if someone was planning a collage. 'No', came the matter-of-fact response. 'They're going to smoke smack²⁰ off them'. There was some derisory laughter. I may have muttered a face-saving 'Fuck's sake!'

*Analogously, in that unwitting and momentary encounter, echoed, approximately twelve years later by my picking up of a discarded Lambert & Butler cigarette packet from a Carlisle street, the ground was laid for PREFAB's dialectic of 'low' grade material and Marxist pedagogy. Defamiliarising my formative experiences of the formalist 'art for art's sake' ethos of the Scottish academy circa 1992, such demystificatory experiences provide, I now understand, PREFAB's counter-canonic subversion of bourgeois ways of seeing, knowing and telling. As such, the prisoner's repurposing, albeit illicit and self-destructive, of the indexical traces of Scottish working-class consumer culture and, inadvertently, the pre-given meanings of modernist collage is, in a Gramscian sense, a refutation of the 'polished surface' (Lovell, 1982, p.85) and 'closed' (Lovell, 1980, p.85) text of conventionalist method. As Lovell writes in *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics & Pleasure* (1980):*

It is when the reader successfully performs the task of unravelling the meaning of the text through the relationship between this dominant discourse and the remaining discourses of the text's hierarchy, and assents to (misrecognises) the 'reality' presented, that the text performs its ideological role. Secondly, the classic realist text may be identified by the manner in which it 'inscribes' subjects within it – these subjects being author, character and reader. The classic realist text depends upon

²⁰ I estimate that between 60% of the men I worked with at Perth were using heroin.

identification between imputed reader and character. The moment of ideological recognition – that this is indeed the way things are – only occurs when the reader accepts the position offered by the text. In so doing the reader is constituted as a subject and the work of ideological production is complete. Thirdly and consequently, the classic realist text is closed. The meanings which it generates are fixed and limited and depend on the reader's acceptance of the position offered by the text. And finally, the constituted reader is passive, the consumer of pre-given meanings, not their active creator (Lovell, 1980, p.85)

Opened as a 'temporary' facility in 1993, Perth prison's prefab 'Learning Centre', an unlikely setting in which to begin the long work of 'unravelling' (Lovell, 1980, p.84), was demolished in 2010: all trace of it covered by a thick layer of institutional tarmac.

1.3 Keywords – Theory-in-Method of a Political Modernist Project



(Fig.3) A prefab arriving for assembly circa 1945

‘...not the reflection of reality, but the reality of the reflection’ (MacCabe, 1980, p. 110)

- Ideology – Conventions of Seeing & Telling
- Invented Tradition – Tartanry & Fetish Objects
- Realism & Narrative
- Modernism & Montage
- Political Modernism (aka critical realism) Versus Classical Realism
- An ‘Inventory of Traces’ Or, the structured agency of an ‘author as producer’ approach
- Commodity Fetishism & Reification
- *PREFAB*: a Theory-as-Method Praxis

Inspired by Raymond Williams’s *Keywords* (1976), the purpose of this ‘theory chapter’ by another name, is to lay down a conceptual foundation or framework, adequate to the task of contextualising the *PREFAB* ready-mades in their critical and aesthetic evolution.

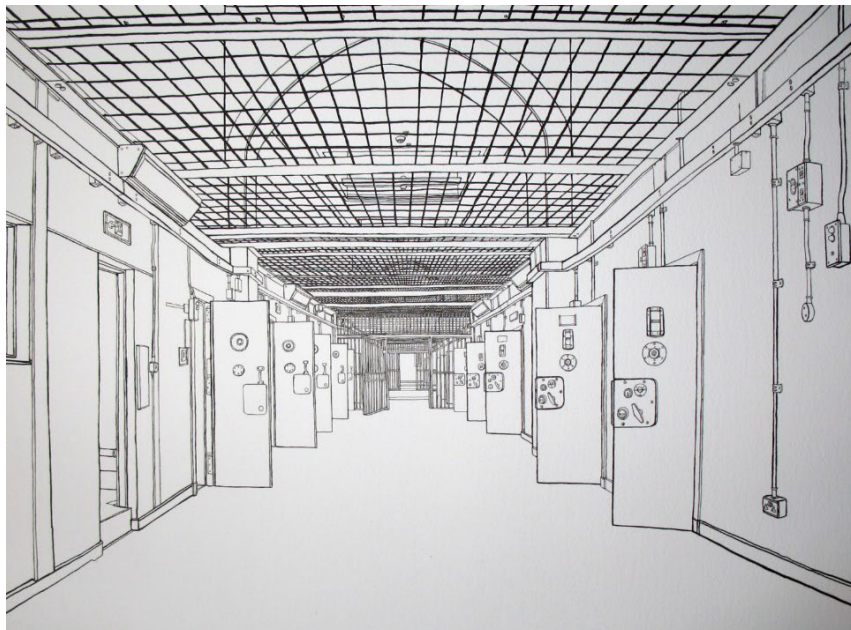
1.3.1 Ideology – Conventions of Seeing & Telling

An ideology is a point of view, a standpoint, a way of seeing. Where I stand influences what I see, perspectively so to speak. An ideology is thus a particular purview, a way of seeing associated with a particular interest, or interest group. An ideology in this common sense is an organised set of beliefs articulating the interests of a particular worldview - liberals, fascists, conservatives, republicans, monarchists, socialists, environmentalists, feminists, all share a general way of seeing the world. But, we can observe also beyond the atomised, beyond the purview or extent of particular ideologies in circulation, in any given period – epitomised, in part, and in *PREFAB's* case, by the governing convention of Scottish 'easel-painting' circa 1992 - a generalised set of prevailing values that coincide (and conflict) with prevailing interests. So much so that this may be called a dominant ideology, whose ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class as manifest, in *PREFAB's* conjunctural view, by the traditions of the North British art academy of the mid to late 20th century. In this sense, reproduction of the dominant ideology reflects or corresponds to the prevailing order of things as they are, as a common sense thus taken for granted in establishing cultural norms. In this way, the *PREFAB* anti-commodities serve, in a superstructural sense, as excavations of the latent relations of capitalist culture: a reified condition manifest in the ideological forms of false-consciousness defined, in *PREFAB's* hypothetico-inductive manner, by my grandfather and a lived experience emblematised in the consumption of cigarettes, cheap lager and televised sport. As Terry Eagleton writes in *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991):

The force of the term ideology lies in its capacity to discriminate between those power struggles which are somehow central to a whole form of social life, and those which are not. A breakfast-time quarrel between husband and wife over who exactly allowed the toast to turn that grotesque shade of black need not be ideological; it becomes so when, for example, it

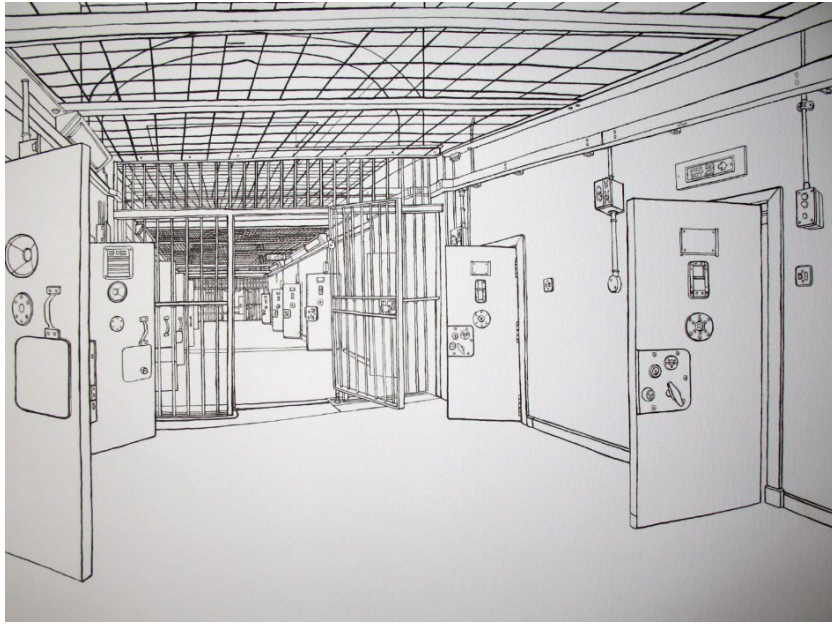
begins to engage questions of sexual power, beliefs about gender roles and so on (Eagleton, 1994, p.8)

What is the dominant ideology? In *PREFAB*'s political modernist purview, it is an upside down logic, in Marx's words, a '*camera obscura*' (Marx, 1991, p.47), through which ruling ideas define common sense and distort the real relations of the base to its ideological superstructures. In the field of the arts and culture, the realist aesthetic is common sense - seeing (singular perspective), knowing (bourgeois conventions) and telling (classical narration). For present purposes, classical narration is defined – as Brecht understood the oppositional relation of 'Epic' theatre (anti-naturalist, non-Aristotelian) to dramatic theatre (naturalist, illusionist, Aristotelian) – by technical attributes such as fixed perspective, mimesis (rendering 3D on 2D plane), linear development (one scene makes another), and the implicating of the viewer in a stage situation.



(Fig.49) 'Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.' (Brecht). *The*

Top Flat, E-Hall, HMP Perth, ink on paper (2010).



(Fig.50) 'Those who don't know the truth are dummies, but those who know the truth, and call it a lie are criminals' (Brecht). *The Top flat, E-Hall (the 'Lifer's Hall')*, HMP Perth, ink on paper (2010).

By contrast, the oppositional aesthetic of *PREFAB*, arising in struggle against the *things as they are* of ruling orthodoxy seeks to counter the illusionism of a classical seeing – as learned in Portobello High School's Art department circa 1988 and later in the Mackintosh designed 'life-room' at Glasgow School of Art circa 1992 – and that which denies effectivity of form. Rejecting this illusionist method - evinced in my representational brush and ink drawings of Perth prison (Fig. 49) - *PREFAB* refutes the seamlessness of classical narrative conventions which, identified with heroic deeds, obscure the tracks of history in the individual psychology of the principal protagonists. Introduced into cultural studies by Williams, the term conventional is analogous with a Gramscian conception of common sense, namely ways of seeing which become conventional, that is understood and taken for granted, conventional wisdom, in a phrase. In *PREFAB*, such convention, grounded either in the orthodoxy of classical realist figure-drawing or illusionistic figurative tableaux, is critiqued (and countered), not least, by residual

critical realist experiments such as *PREFAB's A Brief History of Neoliberalism Table Decorations* (2018) (Fig.83) or the redux *McEwans Export cans* (Fig.75). Thus framed, *PREFAB's* auto-biographical ethnographical and materialist methodology applies, contrary to conventionalist praxis, the distanciation techniques of Brecht's Epic theatre as espoused in the following excerpt from *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre* (1930):

- WITH INNOVATIONS!	
Opera had to be brought up to the technical level of the modern theatre. The modern theatre is the epic theatre. The following table shows certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre.	
DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
Plot implicates the spectator in a stage situation wears down his capacity for action	Narrative turns the spectator into an observer, but arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations experience the spectator is involved in something suggestion	forces him to take decisions picture of the world he is made to face something argument
instinctive feelings are preserved the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience the human being is taken for granted he is unalterable eyes on the finish	brought to the point of recognition the spectator stands outside, studies the human being is the object of the inquiry he is alterable and able to alter eyes on the course
one scene makes another growth linear development evolutionary determinism man as a fixed point thought determines being	each scene for itself montage in curves jumps man as a process social being determines thought

Feeling	Reason
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(Brecht : Willetts, 1978, p.37)

Historically informed, modern, contemporary, new, but not a catechism of fetishised 'progressive' techniques frozen in time, this counter-canonic or anti-auteurist approach (in contrast to the psychopathology or dynamics of contemporary formalist discourse) evident in the *PREFAB* anti-commodities, seeks to turn universal logic on its head. As Benjamin writes in *The Author as Producer* (1977):

I should like to demonstrate to you that the tendency of a work of literature can be politically correct only if it is also correct in the literary sense. That means that the tendency which is politically correct includes a literary tendency. And let me add at once: this literary tendency, which is implicitly or explicitly included in every political tendency, this and nothing else makes up the quality of a work. It is because of this that the correct political tendency of a work extends also to its literary quality: because a political tendency which is correct comprises a literary tendency which is correct. (Benjamin, 1977, p.86)

Opposed, therefore, to an upside logic which organises the preponderance of things in general in favour of the ruling, prevailing interest, the project's redux beer cans and welding masks covered with Tesco carrier bags, aims, in the producer's mind's eye, to assert a counter-canonic approach: a refuting of ruling-class ideology and its concealment, distortion, or displacement of lived history. Consequently, this theory-in-practice method seeks to create a counter-meaning opposed to and in repudiation of, the distortion of the real in the interest of the ruling order. Analogously, *PREFAB*, is averse to Foucault's discourse theory as defined by its radical anti-referentiality. Against a theoretical

purview which is not anterior to anything and grounded in the belief that there is no referent outside of discourse, the *PREFAB* objects insist on both referentiality and a materialist conception of art-making as a socially-purposive production.

Consequently, *PREFAB* is unwilling to accept received conventions of bourgeois seeing and knowing and telling as defined, in my experience, by an ahistorical and thus apolitical use of 'traditional' (Renaissance) image-making: a credo shaped by a naïve-understanding in which materiality, unconnected, in a discursive sense, to the causal networks of neoliberalism, underwrites prevailing notions of the autonomous object and its illusionistic aspect. Faced with a philosophical formulation in which material – isolated from capitalist systems of exchange - is regarded merely as stuff.

Grounded in lived experience and, relatedly, to my artistic formation amidst 'ruling ideas' - manifest in, not only, the (Scottish) academy, but the Edinburgh gallery system circa 2000, the prison system circa 2005 and more recently, but no less alienating, in my experience of neoliberal academia – *PREFAB* rejects the formative institution and its normative meanings. In this way, *PREFAB's* referentiality seeks to confront and impede the ideological reproduction of the ruling order. And, in the process, cement my role as a dissident anti-capitalist art-maker determined to disturb both the how and what of naturalist recording. In this sense, the target of *PREFAB's* critical realist method is the classical realist academy as epitomized by the Drawing & Painting dept. of Glasgow School of Art circa 1992. As such, the project's oppositionalist artworks counter the classical realist canon of 2D image-making as coterminous with the dominant ideology – and incorporating postmodernism¹ as a style (irony) - in every successive age, and stage, of capitalist culture.

Opposed to formalism, the inductive approach, evident in the *PREFAB* anti-commodities (Fig.36), is

¹ What Williams refers to as the new conformism.

underscored by lived experience. Enabling a totalising perspective, this critical theoretical view-point relates object and meaning, directly and continuously, to ruling ideas and interests in flux. As such, superstructure, comprising as it does, both the state and social consciousness, is defined here as everything which is not directly to do with the forces and relations of production - namely the family, the institution or artistic practice. As Williams writes: '...cultural theory is about the way in which the specifics of works relate to structures which are not the works. That is cultural theory' (Williams, 2007, p.185).

Responding, like Engels before him, to the reductionism or 'mechanical causality'²³ (Bottomore, 1983, p.44) of superstructure theory, Williams, following Gramsci, proposes that the superstructure must contain 'operational qualifications...not direct, nor simply operational, but subject to lags and complications and indirectnesses' (Williams, 2001, p.164). Rejecting the limitations of this so-called 'mechanical-Marxism', or economic determinism, in which the superstructure is both static and unchanging - a mere reflection able only to reproduce or reflect the base - Williams's cultural materialist purview proposes instead that the superstructure has a dialectical relation to the base and its 'homologous structure' (Williams, 2001, p.164) as an organic whole or, reflecting Brecht, a 'complex unity'. As a result, this effectivity understands culture as determined and determining.

Williams's formulation - underscored by Gramsci's notion that all human beings are intellectuals, but that only some choose to function critically - supports therefore a process of 'individuation' (Williams, 1972, p.165). A critical-consciousness in which the 'subject' (the individual or spectator), no longer related through the conventions of ruling class common sense, to 'system', where once 'system' controlled 'subject' (Williams, 1972, p.165), is reformulated. A process in which, as Williams writes, 'each term of the proposition has to be revalued' (Williams, 1972, p.165) in order to avoid a

'setting of limits' (Williams, 1972, p.165). Within this mental framework the forces and relations of capitalist production (the base) determine a superstructure which is everything not directly to do with the relations of production, namely: religion, education, family, institution and culture.

Analogously, Williams, seeking to explain superstructural theory's dialectical nature of the productive and non-productive, cites Marx's *Grundrisse* (1858). Williams writes:

There is a difficult passage in the *Grundrisse* in which he argues that while the man who makes a piano is a productive worker, there is a real question whether the man who distributes the piano is also a productive worker; but he probably is, since he contributes to the realization of surplus value. Yet when it comes to the man who plays the piano...there is no question, he is not a productive worker at all. So piano-maker is base, but pianist superstructure. As a way of considering cultural activity, and incidentally the economics of modern cultural activity, this is very clearly a dead-end. But for any theoretical clarification it is crucial to recognise that Marx was there engaged in an analysis of a particular kind of production, that is capitalist commodity production (Williams, 1972, p.165)

So it follows, that *PREFAB's* radical materialist anti-conventional approach problematizes the prevailing orthodoxy (and formative experience) of conventional classical realist making. Such bourgeois formalist method, evinced in (Italian) Renaissance master works such as Masaccio's *Holy Trinity* (1428) in the Santa Maria Novella in Florence (a repository of iconic Renaissance painting which I visited in 2002 and 2007), is spurned by *PREFAB's* collection of redux fetish objects. In repudiation of the *things as they are* of classical seeing and telling, these parodic counter-hegemonic forms - whether anti-militarist medals (Fig. 61) or bogus sporrans (Fig. 62) - evince the work's growing awareness of ideological reproduction through the routinized processes of a naturalist

convention. A convention, which, for present purposes, is defined by, or manifest within, formal attributes of unilinear (one-point) visual perspective, seamlessness, 'high' grade material and prevailing notion of the artist as quasi-religious genius. In short, a system through which ruling ideology is presented as a general interest rather than the interests of the few in possession of definitional authority. Framed in this way, the aim of *PREFAB*'s bogus talismans is to establish a counter meaning: a means to confront naïve understanding whilst, with Marx's metaphor of the camera obscura in mind, seeking to reanimate (and re-evaluate) 'real life-process' (Marx, 1991, p.47) in order to reveal the real forces and relations of capitalist production. Marx writes:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.

Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a

definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. (Marx, 1991, p. 47)

So defined, *PREFAB*'s self-reflexively superstructural objects, underscored by Brechtian techniques of denaturalising and distanciation, seek to lay bare the relationship of forces and relations of production, and to unify, intellectually speaking, both the theoretical and material. As such, the *PREFAB* ready-mades are the product of culture – the superstructural - but speak to and ideally articulate an integral relationship to economy – the base. In short, every text is of a context. As Williams writes:

Ideology is a process accomplished by a so-called thinker consciously indeed but with a false-consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or his predecessors (Williams, 1983, p.155)

1.3.2 Invented Tradition - Tartanry & Fetish Objects

In a parallel encounter with Edinburgh's mystificatory totems,¹⁰⁰ *PREFAB*'s redux sporrans, possibly the most acerbic and vandalistic – if, at times, close to becoming what Williams describes in his analysis of Brecht in *Drama From Ibsen To Brecht* (1964), as 'simple seeing' (Williams, 1976, p.323) -

of the project's anti-totems, seek to decode an authoritarian sign-system grounded in my formative experience of Tattoo and tartanry: a 'purposeful mixture' (Barthes, 2012, p.225) whose signifiatory allure is emblematised by bronze effigies and serried ranks of fancy dan pouches. As such, the *PREFAB* sporrans – an act of sabotage – confront, in the context of Ukania's constitutional impasse - a national reliquary which, as Nairn notes, could still, circa 1979, assert a largely untroubled sense of unity underscored by 'the old 1707 gene structure' (Nairn, 1997, p.188), and prevailing notions of North-British exceptionalism. Nairn writes:

This spirit country has its own curious topography...First, inquiry is normally inhibited from treating the 'inner essence' on its own by an indispensable national aversion to theory: a pudeur which shrinks from 'that sort of thing' and disguises the national reticence as healthy concern with measurable realities. This structural philistinism has the effect of preserving the Royal State (that is the mode of authority whose force is actually legitimised by the 'State occasions' people love so much). On a more sociological plane, it has the effect of keeping the intellectuals in their place: a 'place' of responsible sobriety and dedication, rather than that thinking disaffection which has upset so many other modern societies. The success of these effects shows (for example) in the unease that still clings to any use of the term 'intellectual' in Queen's English: the word jars because it doesn't fit. Ukania-Britain aims (and still largely succeeds) in having what Samuel Taylor Coleridge called a 'clerisy' – a Royal (but not bureaucratic) thought-elite devoted to the brass-rubbing or coining of 'traditions' upholding organic community, rather than an 'intelligentsia' gnawing at its vitals (Nairn, 2011, p.92)



(Fig.63) 'Society cannot share a common communication system so long as it is split into warring factions' (Brecht). *The Ill-Informed Scottish Nationalist Day-Wear Sporran* (2018).



(Fig.64) 'For what's the use of talking with a man who has a disease and thinks about the stars?' (Brecht). *The Big Meaty 'One O' Us' Day-Wear Leisure Sporran* (2019).

With the 'structural philistinism' (Nairn, 2011, p.92) of Auld Reekie's 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006, p.6) – whether nationalist unionist or unionist nationalist - in mind, the aim of *PREFAB* sporrans such as *The William Pitt The Younger Night-Wear Sporran* (2018) (Fig.61), and *The Ill-Informed Scottish Nationalist Day-Wear Sporran* (2019) (Fig.62), is to deconstruct both the castle's phantasmagoria and the polysemic (or multi-accentual) character of nation-State fetish. In so doing, the parodic sporrans seek to challenge the fixed meanings of a mythologised object which serves, paradoxically, as both imperialist heirloom and anti-English talisman. As Benedict Anderson notes on this problematising afflux of history, culture and identity:

For present purposes, the two relevant cultural systems are the religious community and the dynastic realm. For both of these, in their heydays, were taken-for-granted frames of reference, very much as nationality is today. It is therefore essential to consider what gave these cultural systems their self-evident plausibility, and at the same time to underline certain key elements in their decomposition (Anderson, 2006, p.12)

Taking Anderson's viewpoint, the socially-purposive aim of the redux tartanry is to decode, in parodic form (and in common with the anti-commodities of *PREFAB SUPERMARKET*), the mystificatory power of Scotland's neo-romanticist faith articles, whilst simultaneously repudiating, if only in a localised sense, received notions of authenticity, value and disposableness. As Nairn, a self-described 'anarchist optimist' (Nairn, 1997, p.181), writes:

It is the taboo-aspect of the Royal-National vista which heightens the radiance, and keeps the danger at bay...What the taboo does is localise this fear of alien powers, and prescribe ritual antidotes. Particular 'danger spots' are chosen as the terrain of symbolic confrontation and

exorcism. The whole situation can then be rendered free from danger by dealing with or, rather, avoiding the specified danger spots completely. Such 'abstentive behaviour' bestows special meaning on the chosen object or institution: a magic comes to seem inherent in them. Visitors and outsiders may not understand this 'irrational' identification, because they

do not share the community inwardness it represents...Anything which changes it might change everything. Again, foreigners (or brittle rationalists) are liable to scorn the evident illogic...how on earth can a totem, fetish or crown be fateful for everything? (Nairn, 2011, p.105)

Framed in this way, *PREFAB*'s totalising¹⁰² perspective finds that the 'decomposition' (Anderson, 2006, p.12) of Scotia's national totems, whether religious or dynastic in origin, is complicated by neo-nativist separatism and the reificatory effect of capitalist commodification. Formed thus, the Art Brut purse (Fig.65) bears the influence of Leonard's pre-Referendum anti-nativist purview:

At last, after two years of political vacuity... the debate about Scottish independence has begun... It is nothing to do with 'self' determination, and nothing to do with imperialism...nothing to do with the Scottish Enlightenment...nothing to do with whether Protestantism and Presbyterianism represented the triumph of lateral diffused democracy over hierarchical centralised Catholicism...nothing to do with a 'desire for fairness'...the debate is on the organisation of state governance—and that, in the twenty first century, means an argument about the nature and provision of *capital*. (Leonard, 2014)

Confronted then, with the 'pudeur' (Nairn, 2011, p.92) of bourgeois ways of seeing and knowing, and notions of place, belonging and identity,¹⁰³ the blasphemous sporrans (blasphemous because I once

¹⁰² As Lukacs writes: 'Thus the objective forms of all social phenomenon change constantly in the course of their ceaseless dialectical interactions with each other. The intelligibility of objects develops in proportion as we grasp their function in the totality to which they belong. This is why only the dialectical conception of totality can enable us to understand *reality as a social process*. For only this conception dissolves the fetishistic forms necessarily produced by the capitalist mode of production and enables us to see them as mere illusions which are not less illusory for being seen to be necessary. These unmediated concepts, these 'laws' sprout just as inevitably from the soil of capitalism and veil the real relations between objects' (Lukacs, 1971, p.13)

¹⁰³ Lukacs writes: 'The divorce of the phenomena of reification from their economic bases and from the vantage point from which

believed in them) (Fig.62) challenge the authority of the nation-State's anachronistic totems. Conflating these invented symbols with modern equivalents, or signifiers, of the 'low' grade consumables such as packets of cheap ham and gaudy curtain tassels which populated my grandparent's council flat circa 1980, the rebel pouches - aided by a neo-Brechtian montage of object, caption, message and signage (a form of pedagogical punctuation) seek to lampoon the mystificatory artefact and its residual claim on the national imaginary.

1.3.3 Realism & Narrative

Informed by John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Janet Wolff's *The Social Production of Art* (1981), *PREFAB*'s theory-in-praxis nexus runs counter to classical realist orthodoxy. In so doing, it seeks to habituate ruling-class ways of seeing, knowing and telling within a taken-for-granted synthesis of ideology and aesthetics. Defined here as the dominant ideology in the arts, classical realism services the reproduction of bourgeois ideas and interests. For the purposes of this project therefore, 'residual' (Williams, 2011, p.171) is defined in relation to the technology and technique of classical realism. Williams's writes:

By 'emergent' I mean, that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created. But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part – and not yet a defined part – of effective contemporary practice. Indeed it is significant in our own period how very early this attempt is, how alert the dominant culture now is to anything that can be seen as emergent. We have then to see, first, as it were a temporal relation between a dominant culture and on the one hand a residual and on the other an emergent culture. But we can only understand this if we can make distinctions, that usually require very precise analysis, between residual-incorporated and residual not incorporated (Williams, 2001, p.171)

Underscored by Williams' cultural materialist viewpoint which, in turn, is informed by Brecht's anti-naturalist or anti-illusionist purview, *PREFAB* refutes the 'residual-incorporated' (Williams, 2001, p.171) tendency evident in pre-*PREFAB* works such as my series of 2D historical satires *Scotland the Brave: A Graphic History of Scotland 1514-2014* (2010-12) (Fig.52).²⁴ In so doing, *PREFAB* contradicts *Scotland the Brave's* naive fealty to the conventions of classical narration. Absorbed from the formative example of early-career Bellamy and his transcription of Renaissance masterworks such as Bellini's *The Feast of the Gods* (1514)²⁵ and their subsequent reproduction of 'residual-incorporated' (Williams, 2011, p.171) convention, the intention of *PREFAB's* oppositional approach is thus to lay bare the effectivity of form as content and reject the seamlessness of classical harmony. And so, in a Brechtian sense, *PREFAB's* anti-commodities posit that socially-purposive art-making must challenge the expediency of naturalist seeing and alter the way in which the message is conveyed. As a result, Brecht's anti-naturalism – now channelled through the influence of political modernist exemplars such as John Heartfield's photomontages circa 1930 and the immersive installations of the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn circa 1998 – underwrites a praxis opposed to the form over content method. A method characterised, in my view, by a fixed relationship to object and the falsity of illusionistic depth as reproduced in drawings such as *The Battle of Culloden, 16th April 1746* (2013) (Fig.52) and *The Highland & Lowland Clearances 1730-1890* (2013) (Fig.53). As Lovell writes of Brecht's critique of realism (circa 1940) and its relation to orthodox Marxism:

Conventionalist Marxism defines realism in art in terms of its second connotation, that is by reference to historically developed conventions of realism. This is because conventionalism challenges the very possibility of the realist goal. There *is* no knowable reality outside of 'signifying practices' and conventions in terms of which that reality is constructed. There is

nothing accessible to us with which any given 'signifying practice' can be compared, or to which it can correspond. Ultimately, 'reality' becomes nothing more nor less than the 'signifying practice' itself. Therefore realism is necessarily identified in terms of a particular signifying practice rather than in terms of correspondence to reality. The goal of realism is an illusion. Art cannot 'show things as they really are' (Lovell, 1980, p.79)

Opposed to conventional realism's 'signifying practice' (Lovell, 1980, p.79), *PREFAB* applies a deconstructive (at times destructive) form of counter-canonic lampoon. Manifest in its collection of remade consumer products - titled *SUPERMARKET* - and presented in Carlisle's Market-hall in April 2019 – *PREFAB*'s 'correspondence to reality' (Lovell, 1980, p.79) is grounded in the pivotal, or damascene moment, which defined the project's formation. Breaking with the naivety of natural seeing, this theoretical shift – inspired, in part by early-career Picasso's use of anti-illusionist depthlessness and found-object (as seen in Cubist works such as *Still-Life With Chair Caning* (1912)) is emblematised in the realisation that a discarded cigarette packet, recovered from a Carlisle street, may produce a new, critical realist, means of seeing and telling. A method which, in turn, leads to a substantial (and on-going) critique of commodity fetishism's reificatory²⁶ condition. As Benjamin writes of Dada's similarly counter-canonic approach:

The revolutionary strength of Dadaism lay in testing art for its authenticity. You made still-lives out of tickets, spools of cotton, cigarette stubs, and mixed them with pictorial elements. You put a frame around the whole thing. And in this way you said to the public: look, your picture frame destroys time; the smallest authentic fragment of everyday life says more than painting. Just as a murderer's bloody fingerprint on a page says more than the words printed on it (Benjamin, 1977, p.94)

As such, the ambition of the *PREFAB* anti-capitalist object was to establish, in Lovell's words, a 'Marxist sociology, the project of placing art within the structure of social relations' (Lovell, 1980, p.2). So informed, the *PREFAB SUPERMARKET* – in which the conventional tropes of the 'traditional' British market-stall serve as a formal and theoretical framework for a collection of parodic anti-commodities - sought to rematerialize (without nostalgia or sentimentality) the objects which epitomised my formative years circa 1980. Of the obsolescence of bourgeois forms, ways and means, Brecht writes:

This confusion among musicians, writers and critics about their situation has enormous consequences, which receive far too little attention. Believing themselves to be in possession of an apparatus which in reality possesses them, they defend an apparatus over which they no longer have control, which is no longer, as they believe, a means *for* the producers but has become a means to be used against the producers (Brecht : Benjamin, 1977, p.99)

Not satisfied to function merely as pedantic 'art-activism', yet another example of a bourgeois-individualist common sense functioning uniquely outside history, technology and commerce - the stall aspired to present a personal collection of reimagined commodity forms as re-memories, melancholic and political. Indebted to Brecht's rejection of Lukacs's assertion that the conventions of 19th century realism were adequate to 'the task of exposing the nature of society and history in art' (Lovell, 1980, p.76), this model of creative determinacy underwrites a critical detachment no less, geared to 'show things as they really are' (Lovell, 1980, p.76): a praxis defined in terms of its goal and not its conventions.

So it follows, that Brecht's critical realist purview, comprised of 'a theory of social reality, of aesthetic pleasure, and of the relationship between knowledge, pleasure and political action' (Lovell, 1980, p.78), is used in *PREFAB* as a way of opposing, culturally and pictorially, the prevailing orthodoxy of the capitalist common sense. Taken as a paradigm of dialectical practice, Lovell writes of Brecht's (critical) realism:

He defines realism exclusively in terms of its goal, rather than its conventions. He argues that conventions must be made absolutely subservient to this goal, and that as social reality changes, so different conventions will be appropriate to its depiction. Any approach in art which sticks rigidly to given conventions, whether 'realist' or 'non-realist', regardless of their adaptability to the task of 'showing things as they really are', he calls formalist, and conversely any art which does succeed in this task he calls realist, again regardless of the types of convention it uses. Realism in art is simply art which reveals the real, whatever conventions it uses, while formalism is art which systematically distorts the real (Lovell, 1980, p.77)

Seeking to burn one's artistic bridges so to say, *PREFAB*'s manifesto – defined, in part, by the preceding quote – aims to develop a form of political modernist montage. For present purposes, montage is understood as modernism's way of denying the determining worldview of classical realism. Evinced in an early *PREFAB* work such as the *Lambert & Butler Cigarette Packet* (2014) (Fig. 39), this Brechtian counter-method, simultaneously deviant and denaturalising, is manifest in an instinctive retrieval: a recovery underpinned, dialectically, by a disorientating synthesis of modernist collage and contemporary prison (sub)culture. In an analogous manner for me, the discarded Lambert & Butler packet, simultaneously dislocated and dislocating from conventions of easel,

canvas or 'life-room', seems to possess 'the power to haunt' (Gordon, 2008, p.109): an opportunity for the pulling together of a new theoretically grounded composite, of indexical trace and reflexive sociological imagination. Of such deviations and 'haunting', Gordon writes:

Haunting was the language and the experiential modality by which I tried to reach an understanding of the meeting of force and meaning, because haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with...or when their oppressive nature is denied...What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. I used the term *haunting* to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises spectres, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future (Gordon, 2008, p.xvi)

Salvaging an ostensibly banal object from an indifferent scene was, I now see, instrumental in the theoretical and methodological shifting that gave rise to *PREFAB*. Repurposing the allure of the commodity-form – whether Tunnock's Tea-Cake wrapper or pristine fag packet - offers, superstructurally, a basis for an evolving Marxist politics of praxis. At which point, found-object, or, in Gordon's word, the 'totems of absence' (Gordon, 2008, p.108) provide:

...potent evidence of what is harrowingly present...a repertoire of counter images, part of a movement to punctuate the silence, to break the *studium*-like quality of

disappearance, to 'lay claim to another reality'. Repossessing what has been taken away (Gordon, 2008, p.109)

Modernism & Montage

For present purposes, modernism is defined as a challenge to the orthodoxy of realist seeing. As such, modernism and its emergence in the mid-late 19th century and early 20th century, is understood in relation to and against realism in seeing (unilinear, singular, fixed) and telling (classical narrative technically renders a seamless continuity which resolves problems). In contrast, emergent montage as a form of telling breaks the flow of naturalist drama and fractures the seamlessness of the bourgeois worldview. Approached in this way, montage is discontinuous and open, where classical narrative is closed. Thus, realism is to modernism as classical narrative is to episodic/fragmentary montage. In this sense, the development of montage - which I first experienced in a compelling yet decontextualized and so problematic encounter with Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) at the Glasgow Film Theatre circa 1992 - is a reaction to and against the orthodoxy of narration (the latter being characterised by a cause and effect logic of one thing after another) which is thus linear and consequential and therefore in contrast to the dialectical disposition of montage as seeing and (episodic) telling. Adorno writes:

It can be said that philosophy, and theoretical thought as a whole, suffer from an idealist prejudice in so far as it disposes solely over concepts; only through them does it treat what they are concerned with, which it itself never has. Its labor of Sisyphus is that it must reject the untruth and guilt that it takes on itself, thereby correcting it when possible... Modern art has registered dissatisfaction with this ever since Picasso disrupted his pictures with scraps of newspaper, an act from which all montage derives. The social element is aesthetically done

justice in that it is not imitated, which would effectively make it fit for art, but is, rather injected into art by an act of sabotage (Adorno, 1970, p.258). Similarly and yet in contrast, the political modernism of the pre- and interwar years likewise contests hegemony of realism in the arts, but crucially does so in opposition to the whole of the dominant social order rather than just the conventions of the dominant aesthetic. In such a way, *PREFAB* defines the two avant-gardes which comprise the period 1905-1980. A conjuncture which, in *PREFAB*'s historical and theoretical formulation encapsulates and derives a theory in praxis approach. Taken together, as method, as theory as method, political modernism is a critical realism, a Marxist realism if you will, because it is determined to disclose *things as they really are*: an understanding, in the fullest sense, of the operation of capitalist ideology in the consumer age or the era of commodification of everything (pre- and to greater extent, inter- and post-war, the third phase representing an apogee of consumerism). This ideological identification works much like the process of displaced identification upon a fetish object that transforms the thing into an acquisitive value and fantasy relation. Lastly, this mature understanding of ideological transmission – in Thompson's words 'meaning in the service of power' - also shows that the superstructural, the cultural levels of social discourse are contrary to the cognitive reductions of economic Marxism/instrumental reason, meaningful and productive (real), and functioning dialectically in history. The implications of these findings for political art-making, minimally, are that form (the politics of representation - art made politically) and content are a both/and not an either/or, and need to be understood as such in devising aesthetic strategies and techniques for the present time. Taking the example of emergent modernism and its rejection of 19th century ways of seeing and knowing - a result of scientific/technological advances during the interregnum circa 1880 – 1920 - Brecht writes in *A Short Organum on the Theatre* (1948)

It was as if mankind for the first time now began a conscious and co-ordinated effort to make the planet that was its home fit to live on. Many of the earth's components, such as coal, water, oil, now became treasures. Steam was made to shift vehicles; a few small sparks and the twitching of frogs' legs revealed a natural force which produced light, carried sounds across continents, etc. In all directions man looked about himself with a new vision, to see how he could adapt to his convenience familiar but as yet unexploited objects. His surroundings changed increasingly from decade to decade, then from year to year, then almost from day to day. I who am writing this write it on a machine which at the time of my birth was unknown. I travel in the new vehicles with a rapidity that my grandfather could not imagine; in those days nothing moved so fast. And I rise in the air: a thing that my father was unable to do. With my father I already spoke across the width of a continent, but it was together with my son that I first saw the moving pictures of the explosion at Hiroshima (Brecht, 1978, p.184)

And so, counter to the illusion of seamlessness manifest in the fixed perspective and conventional figuration underscoring pre-*PREFAB* works such as my drawings from the Anatomy & Clinical Skills laboratory at Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary circa 2010 (Fig.34), the present project dispenses with bourgeois naturalist orthodoxy. Evident in *PREFAB SUPERMARKET*'s montage of indexical trace, ready-made and didactic text – this counter-canonic method seeks to replace the teleological with a structural agency grounded in the specificities of my historical conjuncture. In short, *PREFAB*, drawing on the denaturalising aesthetic of early-career Picasso's cubo-constructivist experiments, seeks to relate, by displacing the reificatory nature of the commodity-form, the object to its ideological context. As Benjamin writes:

The interrupting of the action, the technique which entitles Brecht to describe his theatre as

epic, always works against creating an illusion among the audience. Such illusion is of no use to a theatre which proposes to treat elements of reality as if they were elements of an experimental set-up. Yet the conditions stand at the end, not the beginning of the test. These conditions are, in one form or another, the conditions of our life. Yet they are not brought close to the spectator; they are distanced from him. He recognises them as real – not, as in the theatre of naturalism, with complacency, but with astonishment. Epic theatre does not reproduce conditions; rather, it discloses, it uncovers them (Benjamin, 1977, p.100)

In this way, *PREFAB*'s rematerialized Export cans and their defamiliarising conflation of found object, images of champion boxers and Marxist slogans – a correspondence between words and things - refutes the conventions of the figurative canon²⁷ and, in turn, the commodificatory nature of the Edinburgh gallery system. As such, the redux Export cans apply Brechtian principles of interruption, caption and montage in a parodic simulacra indebted to Brechtian method:

With the principle of interruption – the epic theatre adopts a technique which has become familiar to you in recent years through film and radio, photography and the press. I speak of the technique of montage, for montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted.

(Benjamin, 1977, p.99)

Loaded with visual references to the lobotomised nature of my grandfather's pastimes,²⁸ the remade cans apply for a means to deconstruct the reificatory condition of the Edinburgh working class (and lower middle class) circa 1980. Drawing from Wollen's descriptions of early-career Eisenstein's

²⁷ At Glasgow School of Art circa 1992 – the Drawing & Painting curriculum featured a mandatory 5 hours per week of life-drawing.

²⁸ Like him, I, too, enjoy drinking cheap lager and watching televised sport.

experiments in theatre, the stall's 'poster-like, often caricatural vignettes' (Wollen, 2013, p.27) serve to develop a materialist aesthetic, circumscribed by a capitalist academy and economy. In *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (1980) Colin MacCabe writes:

The constant emphasis of this montage is on separation, on division, on the fact that there is no object constituted outside a practice which simultaneously produces a subject. If many film-makers would take the pro-filmic event as sufficient in itself, Vertov's emphasis is that to constitute this event in self-sufficiency is to impose already a view on it, to produce it for and with its appropriate subject. Montage before shooting entails a commitment to placing before the camera material which is not unified in itself but which already invites contradictory positions from which to see it (MacCabe, 1980, p.43)

Linking back, in an ideological sense, to Barthes's notion of readerly and writerly-ness, *PREFAB* uses montage to propose a preferred meaning: a method which understands that the encoded sign cannot readily be determined or fixed at the point of reception (decoding). But rather, that interpretation can be influenced by semiotic strategies intended to promote or encourage oppositional seeing. In this sense, *PREFAB* is an exercise in 3D semiotics.

1.3.4 Political Modernism (aka critical realism) Versus Classical Realism

PREFAB's political modernist purview is defined here as a problematizing attitude to the invented traditions and 'saturated stratum' (Benjamin, 1977, p.99) of bourgeois seeing and telling. As such, it repudiates both the fixed unilinear view of classical perspective and the naïve-realism of 'art for art's sake' formalism of the modernist avant-garde: naïve in the sense of denying their own effectivity and of supposing transparency of seeing content via form, without the interference of the latter upon

the former. As Benjamin notes in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936):

To put it another way: *The 'one-of-a-kind' value of the 'genuine' work of art has its underpinnings in the ritual in which it had its original, initial utility value.* No matter how indirectly, this is still recognizable even in the most profane forms of the service of beauty as a secularized rite. The profane service of beauty that emerged with the Renaissance and remained significant for three hundred years thereafter did eventually, at the end of that time, following the first major upheaval to assail it, clearly reveal those foundations. What happened was: when, with the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, namely photography (simultaneously with the dawn of Socialism), art felt a crisis approaching that after a further century became unmistakable, it reacted with the theory of '*l'art pour l'art*' ('art for art's sake'), which constitutes a theology of art. From it there proceeded, in the further course of events, almost a negative theology in the form of the idea of a 'pure art' that rejected not only any kind of social function but also any prompting by an actual subject (Benjamin, 2008, p.11)

Following Benjamin (on Brecht) a political modernist theory-in-method is herein developed. Anti-identitarian in position, as per Brecht's pluralist conception of 'complex seeing', such a theory-in-method aims to lead the viewer/reader through to a preferred field of polysemic possibility (ideological positioning) and interpretation of the material exhibited and narrated. Opposed then to

the status quo ante ‘things as they are’ embodied in bourgeois liberal humanism, the project posits that the nation-state’s residual and emergent²⁹ conventions must be related, critically and conjuncturally, to the causative effect of ruling class hegemony. In turn, the project rejects a false consciousness defined, in Eagleton’s words, as that which ‘may mean not that a body of ideas is actually untrue, but that these ideas are functional for the maintenance of an oppressive power’ (Eagleton, 1994, p.24). From this, *PREFAB* problematizes the ‘invented’ traditions’ (Hobsbawm, 2007, p.2) of bourgeois society and culture, through a series of didactic experiments in critical realist method. As Williams writes:

...the inextricable interrelations between politics, art, economics, family organisation – is one I maintain. The way I would put it today is that these are indissoluble elements of a continuous social-material process...The difficulty...is that in certain epochs it is precisely experience in its weakest form which appears to block any realisation of the unity of this process, concealing the connections between the different structures – not to speak of the unnoticed relationships of domination and subordination, residue and emergence, which lend their particular nature to these connections (Williams, 2015, p.138)

Applying Williams’ cultural materialist viewpoint to the problem of making political-art politically, *PREFAB* is thus influenced, in a sociologically-poetic way, by Brecht’s multi-linear montage method, ‘each scene for itself’ (Brecht : Willett, 1978, p.37) approach, in which

²⁹ For the purposes of this project, ‘emergent’ is defined in Williams’s understanding:

By ‘emergent’ I mean, that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created. But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part – and not yet a defined part – of effective contemporary practice. Indeed it is significant in our own period how very early this attempt is, how alert the dominant culture now is to anything that can be seen as emergent. We have then to see, first, as it were a temporal relation between a dominant culture and on the one hand a residual and on the other an emergent culture. But we can only understand this if we can make distinctions, that usually require very precise analysis, between residual-incorporated and residual not incorporated (Higgins : Williams, 2001, p.171)

assemblage and counter-conventional display frame pseudo-consumables and parodic nation-state emblems. Aiming to 'break the spell' (Brecht) of received cultural norms, this collagist/montagist approach, a form of non-linear story-telling theatre, aims to relate the works to their conditions of production. A counterpuntal model of creative determinacy - within which individual output is regarded as a product of history and class – and to which Brecht's alienation technique, or 'A-effect' (Brecht, 1978, p.125), may be applied. In the essay *The Street Scene* (1950) Brecht writes:

We now come to one of those elements that are peculiar to the epic theatre, the so-called A-effect (alienation effect). What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view (Brecht, 1978, p.125)

On this model, and deploying 'A-effects' evolved in the making, the projects totalising and materialist view of history, evidenced in its dialectic of the 'low' grade and the practical activity of people (manifest in the juxtaposition of faux-commodities with the sights and sounds of the Market-hall) understands creative agency as 'a process and not a state' (Williams, 1972, p.165). As Brecht writes of this author as producer purview:

When the epic theatre's methods begin to penetrate the opera the first result is a radical *separation of the elements*. The great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production – which always brings up the question 'which is the pretext for

what?': is the music the pretext for the events on the stage, or are these the pretext for the music?... So long as the expression 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (or 'integrated work of art') means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up (Brecht, 1978, p.38)

Framed in this way, *PREFAB*'s satiric sporrans (Fig.62) and their defamatory synthesis of used ham packets and curtain tassels, exhort a denaturalisation of hegemonic convention. In so doing, they confront the taken-for-granted nature and structure of tartanry. A cultural construct, no less, through which the state functions as the instrument for organising consent to the structure of political society. Of such theoretical oppositions to bourgeois conventions of originality and hierarchy, Marx writes:

The form of intercourse determined by the existing productive forces at all previous historical stages, and in its turn determining these, is *civil society*. The latter...has as its premises and basis the simple family and the multiple, the so-called tribe...Already here we see how this civil society is the true source and theatre of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationships and confines itself to high-sounding dramas of princes and states (Marx, 1991, p.57)

Taking the premises and productive forces of 'the so-called tribe' (Marx, 1991, p.57) as the starting-point of its critical realist enquiry, *PREFAB*'s latter-day Marxist approach is concerned therefore not simply with the character of the author, but with the character of the age. Against formative experiences of the classical realist academy circa 1992, thought and practice, and through a form of denaturalised naturalism or making strange,³⁰ *PREFAB*'s denaturalised naturalism takes inspiration from the humanist anti-nihilist purview espoused by Leslie who, drawing from Benjamin's rejection of the art object (and commodity's) 'entrapment in bourgeois economy and bourgeois categories' (Leslie, 2000, p.230), notes:

'But Benjamin values the collective laughter inspired by slapstick comedy and Disney cartoons as an 'antidote', a 'therapeutic detonation of technologically created mass psychoses. This indicates that 'mimetic capacity' can also be used as a release. The mimetic capacity permits revision of experience and new and befitting ways' (Leslie, 2000, p.155)

Subsequently, *PREFAB* opts for a vulgarising mix of 'poor' material and de-skilling so as to emulate and further develop Brecht's anti-classical experiments. This object-oriented, socially-purposive design aims to challenge, through a synthesis of political modernism + hypothesis, simultaneously, the mystificatory allure of post-imperial Britain, Scottish neo-nationalism and the capitalist commodity- scape. In turn, this Marxist-sociological method is understood as neither a creed nor a catechism of progressive effects, but a critical laboratory in which material and method may be channelled critically, consciously and purposively towards that which constitutes opposition at any given moment. In this way, *PREFAB*'s project and formulation depends reflexively on critiquing the present composition of the ruling order of things. As Williams, quoting Emerson, writes:

...as a description of facing up to things as they really are, and not as we imagine or would like them to be – ‘let us replace sentimentalism by realism, and dare to uncover those simple and terrible laws which, be they seen or unseen, pervade and govern (Emerson : Williams, 1983, p.259)

1.3.5 An ‘Inventory of Traces’ Or, the structured agency of an ‘author as producer’ approach

In theory and method, *PREFAB* is a repudiation of the dominant conventions of the western canon and its quasi-religious conception of ‘aura’ (Benjamin, 2008, p.7). As such, the project’s counter-canonic approach - a refutation of classical realist figuration - is underscored by Benjamin’s conception of the auratic object. Defined as an exclusionary mechanism applied by the dominant social group and manifest in attributes such as rarity, singularity and uniqueness, such ‘naturalising’ vocabularies, or, in Benjamin’s words ‘the authority of the thing’ (Benjamin, 2008, p.7), are understood as nothing less than the effective suppression of class antagonism. So it goes that in *PREFAB*, prevailing conceptions of the auratic are subverted and substituted for a counter-conventional, de-naturalising mix of the mimetic and the parodic. In this sense, the anti-auratic object looks to challenge the ‘eternally settled’ (Eagleton, 2008, p.93) verities of bourgeois meaning and the ‘constructedness’ (Eagleton, 2008, p.93) of ‘high culture’. Leslie writes:

Benjamin negates any idea of artistic autonomy in his version of art as embodiment of corporeal, material nature. His conception of aesthetics includes categories such as ‘tactility’ and shock – forces that act on the body. It is dislocated from a bodiless idealist aesthetic based on illusion, the imaginary and fictitiousness. Bourgeois idealist conceptions of art are wound into a narcissistic ideology that argues art is born from itself. Benjamin’s approach reinterprets the ground of aesthetics sensuously (Leslie, 2000, p.150)

Drawing from my lived experience of my maternal grandparent's council flat circa 1980, *PREFAB* seeks to rematerialize (and re-evaluate) the indexical traces of capitalist consumer culture - as related to Gramsci's inventory of traces – when their pristine modernity has declined. Central to this object-oriented approach is the use of biography as referential structured agency: structured, that is, in the context of the forces and relations of economy, culture and society prevailing in any given period and thus not reducible to discourse alone. As such, the project draws, sociologically and methodologically, upon Gramsci in its belief that the starting-point of critical elaboration is the process of knowing oneself.³¹ Consequently, this auto-anthropological approach is related superstructurally, to the formative causal factors of family, social class, education, religion, and against conventional art history. Such methods provide a counter-point to the art world's conventional hagiographic possessive-individualist notion of individual creativity in which – common to the neoliberal academy – originality equates to the uniqueness of artistic agency: a riposte, no less, to the psycho-dynamics of formalist critique. As Gramsci writes:

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. The first thing to do is to make such an inventory (Gramsci, 1971, p.324)

Elaborated on its own inventory of traces and informed by Benjamin's conception of the author as producer, *PREFAB* sets out, through this practical materialist approach, to activate a dialectic of lived history and urban detritus towards a 'consciousness of what one really is' (Gramsci). In this sense of oppositional authorship, the project's theoretical substructure supports, in a structural sense, its opposition to the relativistic 'discourses' of conventional³² or formalist ways of seeing and

knowing. As Gramsci writes of a situation in which thinking and production reflect the context of their making, 'Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously 'born' in each individual brain: they have had a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion...' (Gramsci, 1971, p.192). Defined thus, *PREFAB's* inventory of traces serves to denaturalise the 'common sense', taken-for-grantedness of both classical realist credo and auteurist convention. Conceived in this way, the critical-creative endeavour evinced in *PREFAB's* Marxist realist simulacra, a politics of representation no less, which scrutinises 'the reality of appearances' (Lenin : Eagleton, 2008, p.97), whilst aiming to expose the deficiencies of formalist method. Benjamin notes:

Within major historical periods, along with changes in the overall mode of being of the human collective, there are also changes in the manner of its sense perception. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it occurs, is dictated not only naturally but also historically...So far as the present is concerned, conditions are more favourable to such an insight. And if changes in the medium of perception occurring in our own day may be understood as a fading of aura, the social conditions of that fading can be demonstrated (Benjamin, 2008, p.9)

In this context, the making of inventories counters the presented totalities and morbid symptoms of ruling-class hegemony.³³ And as such, it aims to replace the 'either/or' of bourgeois liberal humanism with the demystifying 'but/and' of counter hegemonic method. As Benjamin notes, in a dialectical treatment 'the rigid, isolated object (work, novel, book) is of no use whatsoever. It must be inserted into the context of 'living social relations' (Benjamin, 1977, p.87). A method which in turn prompts Benjamin to ask, not simply, what is the relation of the work to the 'production relations' (Benjamin, 1977, p.87) of its time, but rather, 'what is its position *within* them?' (Benjamin, 1977,

p.87). Consequently, the experimental market-stall, aware that 'the authority to write is no longer founded in a specialist training but in a polytechnical one' (Benjamin, 1977, p.90), understands, at long last and in Benjamin's words, the distinction 'between author and public' (Benjamin, 1977, p.90). Relatedly, the bourgeois art object or gallery (whether private or public), if devoid of the 'correct tendency' (Benjamin, 1977, p.86), offers nothing. As Benjamin writes 'so long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat only *in the mind* and not as a producer...no wonder then that the effect of the collective was never revolutionary' (Benjamin, 1977, p.91). Minded, as such, the aim of the *PREFAB* anti-commodities is to transform the relation of the dominant ideology to cultural production. This 'functional transformation' (Brecht : Benjamin, 1977, p.93) is then able, in Eisler's words, to transform, in Heartfield's case, a book jacket into a 'political instrument' (Eisler : Benjamin, 1977, p.94), or 'a concert into a political meeting' (Eisler : Benjamin, 1977, p.96). In this sense, *PREFAB* aims to push-back against the cultural logic of late-capitalism which, as Eagleton notes, sees 'social reality less as oppressively determinative than as yet more shimmering webs of undecidability stretching to the horizon (Eagleton, 2008, p.126).

1.3.6 Commodity Fetishism & Reification

In a superstructural setting, relating both the forces and relations capitalist production and an 'apparatus power' (Wayne, 2018, p.222), as evinced, yet unexamined, Janet Wolff writes in *The Social Production of Art* (1980) Ideology is not expressed in its pure form in the work, the latter acting as a passive carrier. Rather, the work of art itself re-works that ideology in artistic form, in accordance with the rules and conventions of contemporary artistic production. For example in order to understand how a particular painting is subversive, it is necessary to look beyond its explicit, or implicit, political content, and to investigate its particular use of aesthetic conventions and its position in relation to other works of art... to show systematically the various ways in which the arts can adequately be understood only in a sociological

perspective...against the romantic and mystical notion of art as the creation of 'genius' transcending existence, society and time, and...rather the complex construction of a number of real historical factors (Wolff, 1981, p.65)

Therein, *PREFAB*'s radically neo-classical purview, counters a tendency to understand or read the image simply within its psychological and hence subjective meaning and formation. This ahistorical approach – originating from the belief that originality is the outcome of an individual's motivations, artistry and technique - appraises material and art-object as autonomous elements: things or signs disconnected from their ideological contexts. In this liberal hagiography, in truth a form of liberal rationalisation, her bourgeois criteria is unwilling and unable to countenance neither the material conditions of the people who produce the commodity, nor their phantom-like presence as congealed within said commodity-form. By contrast, *PREFAB*'s reclaimed fag packet, redux beer cans, abject sporrans and faux medallions – underscored by Marx's materialist dictum 'Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life' (Marx, 1991, p.47) - reject the orthodoxy of the individualist, or auteurist, purview.³⁴ As Michael Lowy notes in *Fire Alarm* (2016), this anti-social viewpoint subordinates Marx's materialist metanarrative whilst the theory of labour value is replaced with 'flexible, agonistic language games' (Lowy, 2016, p.2). By contrast, *PREFAB*'s historical materialist approach challenges the classical realist academy's failure to relate index, object or person, to the lived contradictions of history. As the socially-minded Wollen understands, in a situation where the 'undeformed, undisintegrated, merely suggestive versions of 'reality' serve as the best propaganda for the status quo' (Wollen, 2013, p.13).

³⁴ In *The Politics of Modernism: Against The New Conformists* (1989) Williams writes: 'Are we now informed enough, hard enough, to look for our own double edges? Should we not look, implacably, at those many formations, their works and their theories, which are based practically only on their negations and forms of enclosure, against an undifferentiated culture and society beyond them? Is it only an accident that one form of theory of ideology produced that block diagnosis of Thatcherism which taught despair and political disarmament in a social situation which was always more diverse, more volatile and more temporary? ...Or, in the case of several kinds of recent art, can we raise again the question whether showing the exploited as degraded does not simply prolong the lease of the exploiter? Are we not obliged to distinguish these reductive and contemptuous forms, these assayers of ugliness and violence, which in the very sweep of their negations can pass as radical art...' (Williams, 1989, p.175).



(Fig.70) 'Don't tell me peace has broken out' (Brecht). *The Award For Bravery In Increasing CEO's Remuneration Package* (2018).

Indicatively, *PREFAB SUPERMARKET's* (Fig.72) reanimated commodities challenge a capitalist common sense in which the emblematic individual-consumer comes to 'regard them (the commodities) as the true representatives of his societal existence' (Lukacs, 1971, p.93). Marx writes:

To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work,

but rather as material...relations between persons and social relations between things (Marx : Harvey, 2010, p.39)

Grounded in a Lukacsian conception of reification – defined in Lukacs’s words as a condition which ‘requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange’ (Lukacs, 1971, p.91) - *PREFAB* views the alienating nature of the commodity-form or fetish as that which reduces relations between people to the character of a thing. In this way, the capitalist commodity-fetish - possessing a ‘phantom like objectivity; they are merely congealed quantities of homogenous human labour’ (Marx : Harvey, 2010, p.18) – serves, in *PREFAB*’s oppositional way of seeing and knowing, as the indexical link between dominant ideology and a lived experience shaped by the naturalising afflux of kitsch consumer culture. As Lukacs defines the ‘phenomenon of reification’ (Lukacs, 1971, p. 83) in his essay *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*:

The essence of commodity-structure has often been pointed out. Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people (Lukacs, 1971, p.83).

It follows that the commodity-fetish³⁵ underscores Lukacs’ theory of thingification as deriving from the German *Verdinglichung* or ‘making into a thing’. Framed thus, the commodity-fetish is a substitute object of desire: an artefact whose function is to displace psychic pain or displaced onto that which was once believed in. In this sense, capital’s exponential growth and unchecked accumulation circa the mid-late 20th century results in a metabolic process in

which use-value - 'the usefulness of a thing' (Marx) - is overcome by the reificatory mechanism of surplus-value. As Marx notes, the 'reader will bear in mind that the production of surplus value, or the extraction of surplus- labour, is the specific end and aim, the sum and substance, of capitalist production which may arise from the subordination of labour to capital' (Marx, 2013, p.204). On this insight into the reified nature of capitalist systems of exchange³⁶ and customary separation of the signifier from the signified, *PREFAB* approximates a Brechtian 'show and tell': imparted, that is, in its rematerialized sporrans and prams, it aims to demystify the commodity-form. In short, to show the 'movement of the particular to the universal' (Marx : Harvey, 2010, p.63), a reification of which Marx writes:

So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour. It is as clear as noon-day that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But,

³⁵ Originating from the Portuguese word *feticio* meaning witchcraft as derived from the Latin *facticius*, meaning 'to paint, to adorn, to embellish' (Mulvey, 1996, p.47).

³⁶ The fact is, therefore, that definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits; presuppositions and conditions independent of their will (Marx, 1991, p.47)

so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than table-turning ever was (Marx, 2013, p.46)

Opposed to the reificatory original, the *PREFAB* Export cans are, to use Freud's words, a form of 'counter wish': a means to contradict that 'sensuously super sensual thing' (Marx : Liedman, 2018, p.412) through the subversion of what Mulvey calls the 'formal systems of conceptualisation' (Mulvey, 1996, p.157). As such, it is the repudiation of commodity fetishism and its reificatory nature as related to the lived history of my working-class family which provides the line-through of *PREFAB*'s theory and praxis. As Jeffries notes:

The image is the commodity today', Frederic Jameson wrote, 'and that is why it is vain to expect a negation of the logic of commodity production from it; that is why, finally, all beauty is meretricious.' His point was that, for artists, to produce beautiful commodities was to abandon the role the Frankfurt School had accorded to art: to indict an intolerable world (Jeffries, 2021, p.181)

Thus, *PREFAB* attempts to invert the commodity-forms fantasy space by mixing both Marxist pedagogy and the vernacular language of the Edinburgh proletariat with the objectivism of the fetishized commodity. As such, the aim of the redux beer cans and, I now understand, the *PREFAB* project in general, was to counter the fetish's 'phantasmatic topography' (Mulvey, 1996, p.74) whilst reframing and repurposing what Williams describes as the 'bad magic' of the capitalist commodity-scape. In this context, the reificatory effect of the commodity, linking back to dominant power

ideology, is understood as the mechanism or system which displaces or re-symbolises the real, onto the fetishized and mythologised object. And subsequently, the means by which ideology is materialised in actual living existence and becomes a dominant received convention. As Williams remarks on the reificatory character of capitalist advertising in the *The Magic System* (1961):

If we were sensibly materialist, in that part of our living in which we use things, we should find most advertising to be of an insane irrelevance. Beer would be enough for us, without the additional promise that in drinking it we show ourselves to be manly, young in heart, or neighbourly (Williams, 1961, p.2)

1.3.8 *PREFAB*: a Theory-as-Method Praxis

Understood as a theory-in-method of Brecht's political modernist formulation (a 'philosophy of praxis'), praxis is defined here as the theoretical apparatus of orthodox Marxist realism manifest in the denaturalising aesthetic of *PREFAB*'s political modernist objects. However, *PREFAB*'s materialist aspiration, by dint of its being defined in relation to Brecht's Marxist aesthetics - a doing politics by other means - is, in political modernist terms, evidence of a transformative attitude to art-making. As Gramsci proposes, a philosophy of praxis which combines the science of politics and history, may demonstrate:

The basic innovation introduced by the philosophy of praxis into the science of politics and of history is the demonstration that there is no abstract 'human nature', fixed and immutable (a concept which certainly derives from religious and transcendentalist thought), but that human nature is the totality of historically determined social relations, hence an historical fact which can, within certain limits, be ascertained with the methods of philology and

criticism (Gramsci, 1971, p.133)

In *PREFAB*, dialectical materialism is understood, first, as a thesis-antithesis-synthesis articulation of reality, and second, as 'the law of the unity of opposites' (Bottomore, 1985, p.122).³⁷ As Marx writes in *The German Ideology* (1846):

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.

Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process (Marx, 1991, p.47)

³⁷ Writing in *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (1983) Tom Bottomore defines the nature of the dialectic, the 'law of the unity of opposites':

It is as such an emergent novelty that the mind is understood by this materialist version of dialectics. At the most basic intellectual level of logic, the contradictory nature of reality is taken to imply that contradictory statements are true of reality and consequently to require a special dialectical logic that supersedes logic, with its essential principle of non-contradiction. Dialectical, in contrast to 'reflective' (or analytical) thought grasps conceptual forms in their systematic interconnections, not just their determinate differences, and conceives each development as the product of a previous less developed phase, whose necessary truth or fulfilment it is; so that there is always a tension, latent irony or incipient surprise between any form and what it is in the process of becoming (Bottomore, 1985, p.122)

Framed in this way, *PREFAB*'s dialectical materialist method is counter to the Hegelian spiritual-idealist conception in which man descends, not from 'earth to heaven' (Marx, 1991, p.47), but 'from heaven to earth' (Marx, 1991, p.47). In short, dialectical method enables a theory-in-praxis nexus within which, through the repurposing of the 'low' grade and ready-made, is intended to reanimate relations between form and content, people and things. This bringing down, from 'heaven to earth' (Marx, 1991, p.47), is evidenced, with varying degrees of effectiveness and equivalency, in *PREFAB*'s use of discarded cigarette packets, Tesco carrier-bags and empty packets of ham as antagonistic stand-ins for nation-state myth and commodity-form. Consequently, over time, the *PREFAB* objects are inscribed in a flux relation of scholarship, artistic practice and political-professional objection to things as they are. As Marx writes:

In political democracy...man, not merely one man but every man, is there considered a sovereign being, a supreme being; but it is uneducated, un-social man, man just as he is in his fortuitous existence, man as he has been corrupted, lost to himself, alienated, subjected to the rule of inhuman conditions and elements, by the whole organisation of our society – in short man who is not yet a real species being (Marx, 1991, p.9)

By subverting, in Williams's words 'the identity of opposites' (Williams, 2001, p. 160) in order to enable a 'progressive unification through the contradiction of opposites' (Williams, 2001, p. 160), *PREFAB*'s dialectical method recalls Harvey's description of Marx's theory of materialist activity:

While his ideas derive from Hegel, Marx's 'dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it'. Hence derives the notorious claim that Marx inverted Hegel's dialectics and stood it right side up, on its feet...Marx had,

therefore, to reconfigure dialectics so that it could grasp the ‘transient aspect’ of a society as well. Dialectics has to, in short, be able to understand and represent processes of motion, change and transformation. Such a dialectical method does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary, precisely because it goes to the heart of what social transformations, both actual and potential, are about (Harvey, 2010, p.11)

With Harvey’s clarification in view, *PREFAB* recognises dialectical materialism as the practical basis of both orthodox Marxism and the theoretical base from which Engels developed his non-linear conception of causation.³⁸ As a result, *PREFAB* proceeds from the understanding that historical progression is dialectical and thus counter to the linear ‘one scene makes another’ (Willett, 1978, p.37) of ruling class narration.³⁹ Thus defined, *PREFAB*’s theory-praxis nexus acknowledges that history progresses only when the inherent contradictions of society are resolved. Marx writes:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond

³⁸ As Williams notes on the relation of cultural production or art making to Marxist pedagogy: ‘Consciousness is restored as a primary activity: that is the central result of this alternative Marxist tradition. But this consciousness is still social, and it is centred in history. And what is most challenging is that this is held to be true not only of what is called ordinary consciousness – which in practice is related to society and history by people of many beliefs – but also, and even especially, of creative consciousness: that area which in orthodox studies is always seen as essentially different and as ‘beyond’ society.’ (Williams, 2001, p.160).

³⁹ In Brecht’s little commented upon play *He Said Yes/He Said No* (1933) the dialectic of a young boy taken ill on a high mountain pass and an ‘ancient Custom’ which demands that he be thrown into the valley below, provides as a metaphorical framework for the dialectical tension between the individual and invented tradition:

THE TEACHER: *Do you want us to turn back home for your sake? Or do you consent that you should be hurled into the valley, as the Custom prescribes?*

THE BOY: *He pauses for thought. No, I do not consent. My answer was wrong, but your question was more so. Whoever says A does not have to say B. He can recognise that A was wrong. I wanted to fetch medicine for my mother, but now I have become ill myself and it is no longer possible. And I want immediately to turn back as the new situation demands....If there is indeed something to be learnt beyond the mountains, as I hope, then it can only be that in a situation like ours one has to turn back. And as for the ancient Custom I see no sense in it. What I need far more is a new Great Custom, which we should bring in at once, the Custom of thinking things out a new in every new situation*

(Brecht, 1997, p.59)

to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general (Bottomore, 1985, p. 42)

1.4 Ghostie Men (Portobello, 1988)



(Fig.38) *Head and Bottle* (1975), Philip Guston, oil on canvas.

My granddad, Jimmy Newlands, had large broad hands and his fingers were stained with nicotine. When he stood up, his strong body bent forward at the waist and his arms curved outwards as they hung, simian like, by his sides.

He had a big lump on his back. I could see it under the yellowed dress-shirts he wore in the house. The lump was a morbid symptom of a life spent unloading the deep and dangerous cargo-holds of international freighters. From some angles the lump was so pronounced that, as a kid, I wondered if he was in fact a real-life hunch-back.

When he wasn't 'at his work' he sat in his black PVC covered armchair watching the horse-racing on Channel 4. When the racing wasn't on and there was nothing of

interest on Scotsport, he read The News of the World or The Sun. On the arm of the chair (which nobody else used) there was always positioned a packet of cigarettes with a plastic lighter balanced neatly on top. On the other arm rested a plastic ashtray. He was rarely without a cigarette.

Sometimes, early on a Sunday morning, when I was a wee boy, I'd 'chum'⁴⁰ him across 'the field' (in reality, a large swathe of muddy, council run, football pitches) in silence, to get 'the messages'.⁴¹

Once, I was startled to see him standing at our front gate. He had brought a plastic bag full of potatoes for my mother. I wonder now if they were pilfered from the hold of a foreign ship.

In 1988, aged sixteen, I painted an image of Lenin's head on my bedroom wall. Spanning approximately 5ft sq., the painting was an adolescent homage in cheap paint and Socialist Realist style. Captivated by an account of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in my 'Higher History' class, the image of Lenin was soon joined by the batch production of the same propaganda image (now strangely reversed in the print process) in red and black lino-cut. In reply to my Art teacher, Miss Lyon's concern that my prolific print-making risked a deterioration in quality, I precociously replied 'Quantity has a quality all of its own'.

The small bedroom, behind the kitchen at the back of the house, had been the pantry of this

⁴⁰ Edinburgh vernacular meaning to accompany someone on an errand.

⁴¹ Edinburgh vernacular for the shopping.

Georgian townhouse which, at some point in the 1960s, had been divided into two parts. Having sold their one-bedroom ground-floor tenement flat on Musselburgh's North High Street, my parents bought the ground floor, or 'lower-villa', as my mother prefers to call it, in 1973 for £11,000.

Below Lenin's head hung a small radiator which never worked and to its right sat an MFI wardrobe with a wonky door. In the winter I slept with a heavy coat over the thin duvet.

The Portobello in which we lived was divided along religious lines. The code was simple. It was demarcated by separate schools and churches⁴² and allegiances to Kirk or chapel. This otherness was naturalised by an every-day sign-system of navy-blue blazers, iron railings encrusted with flaky green paint, football strips and club scarves. People were 'Proddies' or 'Fenians'.⁴³ In keeping with Scotland's own brand identity-politics, such estrangements were circumscribed by the machinations of the Scottish Premier League and a city subsequently populated with 'Hibeers' - fans of Hibernian FC ('Hibs') (predominantly Catholic republican) or 'Jam tarts' - supporters of Heart of Midlothian FC. (Protestant, unionist and royalist). The latter, of whom my childhood friend Pete was one, were affiliated, through Protestantism, to their Glaswegian counterparts Glasgow Rangers or 'The Huns', as we knew them. To my mind, the epitome of boorish diehard loyalism.⁴⁴ Geographically distant from the 'Central-Belt's'

⁴² I was in my early thirties before I had occasion to enter the local Catholic church.

⁴³ Although Scotland's east coast has historically experienced a lesser degree of religious sectarianism than its west coast, it is important to note that such prejudices did permeate the eastern cities. A notable example of such discrimination can be found in D.C Thomson's (publishers of much-loved comics such as Dennis the Menace and the Bash St. Kids) operated a 'No Catholics' policy until 1985.

⁴⁴ The echo of this boorish prejudice could be heard on match days in the popular anthem of their Edinburgh counterparts, the 'Jam Tarts', who sang: 'Hullo, hullo, We are the Gorgie ⁴⁴, You know us by our noise, We're up to our knees in Fenian blood, surrender or you'll die!'. In Scotland, sectarian prejudice runs deep.

sectarian mind-set, 'Aberdeen fans' were simply referred to, by one and all, as 'Sheep-shaggers'.

Pete was a 'Jambo' at a time when the city was defined by the tribal violence of the 'casuals'. There were tales aplenty of unsuspecting fans being chased for their lives by marauding packs of the dreaded CSF ('Casual Soccer Fun') or 'Hib's Baby Crew'.⁴⁵ As a precaution, he tucked his maroon and white scarf inside his jacket when we travelled 'up the town' on the bus to see the game.

By contrast, I had no club allegiance. When quizzed in the street or playground about my club loyalties, I would reply, to startled looks, 'I don't support a team'. The son of an amateur racing-cyclist, squash-player and top-class marathon-runner, my sporting heroes were obscure characters such as the enigmatic Fausto Coppi, Eddy Merckx, Emil Zatopek and Abebe Bikila.

Some demarcations were less explicit. If quizzed for long enough my mother would eventually assert that Catholic homes weren't as clean as Protestant ones, or, that 'Fifers' were indeed 'strange folk'.

In the early hours of Sunday 22nd July 1990 Jimmy died aged 72. He died in his small twin bed in the neat little double-bedroom he shared with my gran. The cause of death was a stroke. His death was sudden and unexpected. He was still working: a part-time

⁴⁵ My friends and I were once chased along Princes Street by a group of casuals. Some years later, when I saw *Trainspotting* 'at the pictures', I was startled to see the experience recreated in the film's opening sequence.

job cleaning the dockers' changing rooms. The day before, Pete died, along with his mother and father, in a car-crash on the M6. He was 16. A monochrome picture of their battered Renault appeared on the front of the Evening News.

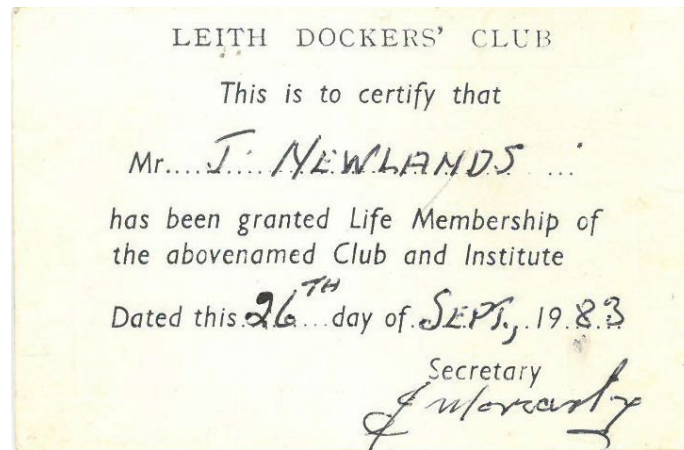


(Fig.8) 'The suffering of this or that person grips me because there is no escape for him' (Brecht).

Jimmy Newlands with his daughter (my mother) Margaret, outside their Ferniehill prefab, Edinburgh, circa 1963.

On grandad's death I inherited £100 and left for art-college to make Bellany-esque images of the disused carousel which rusted underneath a ripped tarpaulin on 'The Prom'. Much later, my mother gave me his fake leather wallet inside which I discovered his Leith Dockers Club Life-Membership Card and my gran's Edinburgh Corporation bus pass.

1.5 Project/Formation (Edinburgh, circa 1918-83)



(Fig.4) My grandfather, James 'Jimmy' Newlands Leith Dockers' Club Life-Membership Card.

The inflexible rule that the proof of the pudding is in the eating (Brecht)

The present project is a political modernist undertaking. The foundation of its object-oriented approach relates, conjuncturally and theoretically speaking, to a triptych of primary terms, namely Ideology, Realism and Modernism. These foundational terms underwrite *PREFAB's* critical elaboration of the lived experience of both myself and my family between 1945-2020. Informed primarily by personal recollections and anecdotal evidence taken from other sources, *PREFAB's* intention is to demythify the signficatory allure of invented tradition whilst confronting the reified nature of capitalist consumer culture. So it follows, that this analysis opens with the recalling of my lived experience of the Portobello and Edinburgh of the 1970s and 80s, my art college apprenticeship in the early-1990s and subsequent exposure to a formative artistic influence such as

the early-career paintings of the Scottish painter John Bellany (1942-2013).⁴⁶ Of particular significance is my recovered memory of watching, aged seven, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo at 'The Castle'; of working 'behind the scenes' at the city's Assembly Hall on The Mound; and the material world of my maternal grandparent's council flat in the city's Moredun district.



(Fig.17) 'He who laughs has not yet heard the bad news' (Brecht). Me (with wings) outside the 'stair-door' at Moredun Park Gardens circa 1977. The window of my grandparent's 'front-room' can be seen at the top of the photograph.

The son of a fisherman and boat-builder, Bellany was born in the small fishing-village of Port Seton which lies seven miles south-east of Portobello. And it was as a 16-year-old pupil at Portobello High School that I was introduced to Bellany's captivating images of ship-bound fishermen, anthropomorphic skate-fish and dark North Sea horizons. Though critically-naïve at this point, Bellany's rejection of prevailing conventions of both 'hard-edged' abstraction and Scottish provincialism, his paintings provided the catalyst for my decision to study painting. In turn, Bellany's humanist visions of a Presbyterian community defined, in part, by the precarity of deep sea fishing and by Calvinism, were, to my adolescent eye, a compelling example of an image-making opposed to

the *belle peinture* of 19th century French Impressionism and the naïve-Realism of Highland scenes and still-life painting on display in the city's New Town galleries. As such, Bellany's use of biography as structured agency spoke to my own lived experience of a Portobello seascape marked by the 'morbid symptoms' of the Thatcher government's 'free-market' credo. As Wayne writes in relation to Stuart Hall's analysis of Thatcherism:

...Hall notes...Thatcherism has been an economic failure in many ways. This is a significant shift in fact and despite disclaimers somewhat at odds with Hall's argument that Thatcherism had successfully changed the terms of political debate. 'It has shifted', he argued elsewhere, 'the parameters of common sense.'... Hegemony for the dominant classes is less about really solving the economic structural problems, than managing them on terms that are most beneficial to the dominant classes and in ways that do not provoke responses...that might endanger the system. As Gramsci wrote, the conjuncture is the terrain of the 'incessant and persistent efforts' by the dominant classes to 'conserve and defend the existing structure' not actually to resolve what are in fact 'incurable structural contradictions' (Wayne, 2018, p.225)

⁴⁶ Bellany came to exert such a dominant influence on my paintings that after having been initially rejected by his alma mater Edinburgh Art College, I applied for direct entry into Year 2 at Glasgow School of Art's Drawing & Painting course. The reason being that the course was then managed by Bellany's close friend, the Fife born painter Sandy Moffat. Such was Bellany's influence during these early years that in the 2nd year of my degree I was compelled to write to him and proclaim my admiration. Kindly, he replied. A Christmas card with an image duly arrived at our grotty flat in Glasgow's Hill St. It bore an image of one of a recent painting and was signed with his best wish



(Fig.26) 'It's never too late for those whose time has come' (Brecht). *The Boat Builders* (1962),

John Bellany, oil on hardboard.



(Fig.27) 'My business is too difficult. My business is trying to arouse human pity' (Brecht). *Star of*

Bethlehem (1966), John Bellany, oil on hard board.

The results of Thatcher's economic liberalism could be seen in our deteriorating state school and the shuttered buildings lining the Promenade. Within this increasingly individualised mono-mythic society, Bellany's so-called 'New Scottish Realism' – an incongruous mix of the late-career Leger,⁴⁷

Breughel's home-spun humanism and the emotional austerity of the 'Kirk-Session' (Bellany's parents were stalwarts of the local church) – offered an alternative vision of East coast identity. In addition, iconic works such as *The Boat Builders* (1962) (Fig.25), *Star of Bethlehem* (1966) (Fig.26) and *Bethel* (1967) (Fig.27) provided, methodologically speaking, a timely riposte to a state school art curricula defined by 19th century *en plein air* Impressionism (mid-career Monet was a particular favourite) and the 'moralising zeal' (Hyman, 2000, p.46) of Jacques Louis David's neo-classical salon painting. As such, early-career Bellany's simultaneous repudiation of classical realist illusion and 'art for art's sake' formalism now calls to mind John Berger's description of the radically counter-conventional work of Gustave Courbet. Berger writes:

Courbet believed in the independence of the artist – he was the first painter to hold a one-man show. Yet to him this meant independence from art for art's sake, from the prevailing Romantic view that the artist or his work were more important than the existence of the subject painted, and from the opposing Classic view that the inspiration of all art was absolute and timeless. He realised that the artist's independence could only be productive if it meant his freedom to identify himself with his living subject, to feel that *he* belonged to *it*, never vice versa. For the painter as such that is the meaning of Materialism...But Courbet's acknowledgement, with all the force of his imagination, of the actuality of the objects he painted, never deteriorated into naturalism: a thoughtless superficial goggling at appearances – a tripper's view of a beauty spot, for instance. One does not just feel that every scene he painted *looked* like that but that it was *known* like that (Berger, 2001, p.64)

However, by the late-1990s Bellany's humanist visions and their later magical realist counterparts - a notable example being *Caged Cockenzie Man* (1981) (Fig.28) – had, to my mind, degenerated into an

increasingly decorous form of bourgeois subjectivism. Indicative of a wider cultural malaise, 'contemporary' Scottish figurative painting had settled, theoretically and methodologically, into a form of redux Kailyardism emblematised in paintings such as James Guthrie's *A Hind's Daughter* (1883) or George Henry's *A Galloway Landscape* (1889). This bourgeoisification of Scotland's cultural imaginary - instigated in part, by the exclusionary nature of Glasgow City of Culture (1990) - was evident in Bellany's increasingly absurd cast of anodyne *leit motifs*. In hindsight, this reductive turn towards formalist commercialism was buoyed by the pomp and circumstance afforded by devolution and its conflation with a residual, yet misguided, sense of Scottish exceptionalism. An exceptionalism manifest in the subsequent scandal which surrounded the new parliament's ballooning and unapproved cost.⁴⁸ In this context of political chicanery and cultural façade, Bellany's late-works turned towards a subjectivist formalism. Manifest in images of bare-breasted women (often inexplicably posed with fish balanced on their heads) set to a formulaic back-drop of gaudy boats and Cinemascope skies, Bellany's nostalgic phallogentric fantasy images (In some paintings he appears centre-stage as a charismatic Christ figure)⁴⁹ were evidence of his work's increasingly bourgeois naturalist style. In short, an oeuvre now completely disconnected, aesthetically and methodologically speaking, from the concrete realities of a Central Belt increasingly defined by the dematerialisation of production. Consequently, Bellany's performative displays of *alla prima* 'painterliness' - in essence a pastiche of Matisse-like (or lite) *joie de vivre* - encouraged what was arguably the kitsch universalism and middle-order sentimentality of the 'New Glasgow Boys'.⁵⁰ Recasting Scotland's lumpen-proletariat as a form of 2D noble savage, this formalist counter-revolution in oils - notably evinced in the naïve-Realism of Peter Howson's *Heroic Dosser* (1987) (Fig.29)⁵¹ - offers a further example of a Scottish cultural milieu defined by the prevailing orthodoxy of the possessive-individualist artist.



(Fig.30) 'Poverty makes you sad as well as wise' (Brecht). *The Heroic Dossier* (1987), Peter Howson, oil on canvas.

As Williams writes:

...in the case of several kinds of recent art, can we raise again the question whether showing the exploited as degraded does not simply prolong the lease of the exploiter? Are we not obliged to distinguish these reductive and contemptuous forms, these assayers of ugliness and violence, which in the very sweep of their negations can pass as radical art, from the very different forms of relating or common exploration, articulation, discovery of identities, in those consciously extending and affiliating groups of which, fortunately, there have been at

⁴⁸ With an original budget of £50m, the Holyrood parliament was finally completed, three years behind schedule, at a cost of £430m.

⁴⁹ By this stage in his career Bellany owned homes in Edinburgh, Paris, Cambridgeshire and Italy.

⁵⁰ When I attended Glasgow Art School in the early-1990s, the New Glasgow Boys were still referred to in almost reverential terms by some tutors, despite the fact that they had graduated more than 10 years before.

⁵¹ By contrast, Howson's little known early-career drawings of his lived experience as a young 'squaddie' in the British army, display a critical realist purview of institutionalised bullying and racism.

least as many? (Williams, 1990, p.175)

Analogously, looking back thirty years on, the terms of *PREFAB*'s evolved critical realist rejection of the Scottish culture calls to mind Berger's⁵² scathing critique of late-career Picasso's homage to Spanish masterworks such as Velazquez's *Las Meninas (The Maids of Honour)* (1656) or Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (1814) . As Berger writes:

To me it represents a decline: a retreat, as I have tried to show, into an idealized and sentimental pantheism. But even if this judgement is mistaken, the extraordinary fact remains that the majority of Picasso's important late works are variations on themes borrowed from other painters. However interesting they may be, they are no more than exercises in painting – such as one might expect a serious young man to carry out, but not an old man who has gained the freedom to be himself (Berger, 1993, p.183)

Having graduated in 1995, my growing disenchantment with Scotland's formalist *arriere-garde* was influenced by my lived experience of the Edinburgh labour market. Time spent in the Portobello Job Centre dole-queue, four and a half years (full-time work at £125 per week) with the Office Angels 'temp agency' (jobs included 'Hire Car Distribution Driver' working for Europcar at Edinburgh airport, packing cases of whisky into HGVs at Seafield and operating the enveloping machine at the Bank of Scotland on Leith Walk), to eventual (by way of full-time 'casual' contract work in the FE sector) 'permanent' employment in prison education,⁵³ brought home the lived contradiction between

⁵² Ironically, in the late-1960s and early70s, Bellany was an acquaintance of Berger and an advocate of his theoretical purview as espoused in *Permanent Red* (1960).

⁵³ Following my return from a 3 month sojourn as a Guest Student at the Dusseldorf Kunstakademie, I 'signed-on' for a brief period of time in the winter of 1995. At my first 'signing-on' appointment the man behind the desk suggested that I join the Parachute Regiment. I explained that having just spent 5 years at the tax-payer's expense studying Fine Art that I had no intention of joining the

ahistorical figurative easel-painting and capitalism's 'casualised' workplace. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the critical agency of such prolonged socio-economic estrangements and the inability to reproduce one's life materially, was fertilising the ground for *PREFAB*'s later damascene moment in 2014. The impact of this damascene moment, understood incrementally within my small studio, enabled *PREFAB*'s repudiation of taken for granted conventions of classical realist method manifest in my one-point, or fixed perspective, drawings of Perth prison (Fig.49). Of the importance of grounding cultural materialist method in the appropriate historical conjuncture, Williams writes:

Yet the key task of all theoretical analysis is identification of the matrix of any formation, and here the affiliation is clear: there were texts because there were syllabuses and there were syllabuses because there were institutions and there were institutions of that only marginally open kind because the drive for a majority public education of the most serious sort, as part of a more general democratization of the culture and the society, had first been halted, leaving an expanded but still privileged and relatively enclosed space, and then in the counter-revolution of the last years – from Callaghan to Joseph to Thatcher – pushed back, spreading unemployment and frustration amongst a generation which was still, on the whole, theoretically contained by the protected and self-protected modernisms of the intermediate stage (Williams, 1990, p.172)

Drawing fresh inspiration from early-career Picasso's cubo-constructivist experiments such as *Still Life with Chair-Caning* (1912) and the late-career paintings of Philip Guston, the project of *PREFAB*, as I now understand it, is to repudiate my experience of what Williams calls the 'self-protected

army. When I told my father of the encounter, he thought it was a great idea and urged me to enlist: 'You could go in as an officer. Better than being a squaddie'.

modernisms' (Williams, 1990, p.172). Opposed as such, to the 'politics of the New Right' (Williams, 1989, p.62), *PREFAB's* biographical and theoretical line-through wishes to emulate the ambition of Janet Wolff's *The Social Production of Art* (1981). Wolff writes:

Art is a social product. This book attempts to show systematically the various ways in which the arts can adequately be understood only in a sociological perspective. It argues against the romantic and mystical notion of art as the creation of 'genius', transcending existence, society and time, and argues that it is rather the complex construction of a number of real, historical factors (Wolff, 1993, p.1)

Armed in this way, *PREFAB* emerged, in my mind, as an opportunity to revolutionise my approach to making and the invented traditions and protocols of the Scottish academy. Framed in this way, *PREFAB's* parodic batch production – grounded in a dialectic of 'low' material and Gramsci's self-reflexive pedagogy for life - rejects a hierarchy of determinants in which metanarrative is subordinate to the 'floating discourses' of liberal humanist orthodoxy. As Leslie writes of Benjamin's critique of bourgeois ways of seeing, knowing and telling:

Repetition need not be the cheerless ideological reflex of entrapment in bourgeois economy and bourgeois categories – it might be a basic gesture in a model life that takes nothing for granted, except the reality of experience, but always tries to start afresh, mediating the new and the old correctly, in order to respond genuinely to the demand of the now, sensitive to the specific configurations in the world (Leslie, 2000, p.230)

Against both capitalist common sense and conformism of bourgeois culture dominant in the art world and academy, *PREFAB's* how-is-what, theory-in-practice approach is articulated by

the semiology of early-career Barthes and his acknowledged debt to Brecht. In particular, it seeks to demythify the collective fantasy of the capitalist commodity-scape by relating invariably bourgeois art-making, conjuncturally and methodologically, to, in this case, a family comprised of shop-workers,⁵⁴ miners, 'dockers',⁵⁵ a merchant seaman, a welder, a council glazier, a chauffeur, and (myself) a university lecturer. Grounded within the wider context of a British post-WWII reconstruction defined by the Beveridge Report's attempts to eradicate 'Want...Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness', the prefab home serves here as the embodiment of the country's move to a mixed economy, a universalist welfare state and nationalisation of the utilities. Drawing on Keynesian macroeconomic theory, this concord, unprecedented in the history of British labour relations, sought to end the 'boom + bust' cycle of industrial capitalism through the introduction of corporatist demand-led

⁵⁴ My paternal grandmother Elizabeth 'Bet' Fowler (*nee* Hogg) (1923 – 2003) was a Floor Manager in the children's clothing section of Goldberg's department store – located in the Tollcross area of Edinburgh - until she was forced to leave her job following a near fatal aneurysm. Following emergency life-saving surgery (following the surgery, my mother accompanied her to the appointment with her consultant neurologist – a man who my grandmother had great respect for. The surgeon told her 'I've given you twenty years Mrs. Fowler'), lied about her age – she was sixty by then – and found work in the gloves and handbags section of Jenner's department store on Prince's Street, where she worked until she was in her early seventies. She was born the youngest daughter of a family of 11 children on Windy Ghoul farm in Tranent in East Lothian. The farm no longer exists but a small council estate now bears its name. Her father was a farm-labourer and her mother died in child-birth. Upon being called up to be a Wren in WWII, she was posted to the south coast of England and for the first time in her life she had her own bed and one she didn't have to share with her siblings.

⁵⁵ Coincidentally, as David Graeber notes: 'A world without teachers or dock-workers would soon be in trouble. But it's not entirely clear how humanity would suffer were all private equity CEOs, lobbyists, PR researchers, actuaries, telemarketers, bailiffs or legal consultants to simply vanish' (Jeffries, 2021, p.27).

. Influenced by Roosevelt's New Deal and the USSR's Five Year Plan, Keynes programme of social and economic reconstruction implemented, for the first time, statutory labour rights such as holidays, sick pay, pensions and the right to a minimum of work. For my grandfather, the latter was particularly significant given that for many years Leith dockers such as he and my mother's uncle Alec,⁵⁶ (Fig.19) had for years suffered the indignities of casualised labour. Gathering each morning (six days a week) at 7:45am before 'the stand', dockers were subject to what was known colloquially as the 'duck egg'⁵⁷ system of 'non-contract' hiring, of which my mother recalls:

⁵⁶ Of her uncle Alec, my mother recalls:

He got into a lot of trouble when he was single and in the house I think. Cos' he used to go, when he wis single an' they were aw' still in the house, he used to go and listen to aw' they speakers at the Foot o' the Walk or up The Mound. And he used to come in spouting forth aw' this, stuff, and ma grandad seemingly used to go mad (laughs) cos' he was so political, an' like Alex, an' he used to come in spouting, aw' the, aw' this, and he used to get into trouble (laughs)

⁵⁷ In *Voices of Leith Dockers: Personal Recollections Of Working Lives* (2001), Ian MacDougall cites the anecdotal testimony of a retired Leith docker named Tom Ferguson who explains: '7.45 they would go up on the stance. They would ring a bell or flash the lights, and then the gaffers would go up. If ye werenae there in time, well, ye didnae get a job, see. And then after the stance wis cleared and if there were men left then about eight o' clock or five past eight the window would open and the National Dock Labour were roond. And then you would go across there and get your book stamped. Now on occasion where a foreman wis left on the stance and there wis men still standin' idle and were standin' waitin they widnae go on tae him because they didnae fancy the job he had, or they knew that something else that wis better wis comin' at dinnertime, they hung back, see. So then the manager, the port manager, wid have tae comeout on tae the stance and he would say tae them, you know, 'Come on. Are ye goin' tae go tae work? So he would start by callin' out duck eggs. And that wis what we called the National Dock Labour Board stamp. It wis green. So he would shout, 'Right.' Say it wis a Thursday mornin' and it wis possibly maybe somebody had five or six duck eggs – they'd been idle a' week and they still didnae want tae go tae work – the port manager would shout, 'Right. Six duck eggs.' See. So he would stand there for a minute or two waitin'. And he would say, 'Six duck eggs. The last call for six. Now if you don't go in ah'm goin' tae burst ye.' Which means that he widnae pay ye, he wid jist burst you for that week. So a' the duck eggs that you had in that book ye would get nothin' for. You would jist get no pay at all. So then you would get maybe one or two stragglers wi' six duck eggs would go forward and hand their books up' (MacDougall, 2011, p.197)

You got a duck-egg aye. if it was rainin' my mother used to say 'Oh he'll get a duck-egg the day.' But they still had to go away down, and see, but even at that sometimes it depended, they all had to just stand there an' see who got picked. Y'know, see who got picked, because if there was only so many dockers needed for that boat. An' the rest of them...An' if it wis rainin' as well and they were rained off, sometimes they got rained off and that was a duck-egg as well (laughs)

Alec, older brother of my maternal grandmother Jessie Newlands (nee Arundel) (1.5.23 – 28.11.09), was a Communist shop-steward in the port and it was 'Sandy' who found a job in the 'closed shop' (under union practices only the close relatives of existing dockers were eligible for employment) for Jimmy. Consequently, and with Brecht's radical materialist approach in mind, *PREFAB* meditates, critically and consciously, on the wants, needs and desires of an emblematic working-class family, located at the pivot point between Fordist heavy-manufacturing and post-Fordist service economy. Framed thus, the project unpacks my early recollections of Jimmy's lived history so as to rematerialize, in some small trace, the nature of his material world. Whilst simultaneously, and in the context of Scottish separatism, as a way to confront both the mystificatory allure of invented tradition and complex questions of identity, place and belonging.



(Fig.13) 'To live means to finesse the processes to which one is subjugated' (Brecht). John 'Jock' Watson Fowler outside his miner's cottage, The Jewel, Edinburgh, circa 1935.

The son of John 'Jock' Watson Fowler (27.10.15 – 11.5.56), a former miner, merchant sailor and foundry-worker, my father, John Watson Fowler (b. 1945), was raised, with his twin brother James ('Jimmy') and younger sister Sheila, in a prefab in the Greendykes area of Edinburgh. Leaving Niddrie Marischal School in 1960 aged fifteen with no formal qualifications John began his working life as an apprentice in MacKenzie & Moncur's foundry in Balcarres Street, Edinburgh.⁵⁸ Following this, he was employed as a fabrication-welder at Cockenzie Power Station⁵⁹ in East Lothian and later on as a welding-instructor at Robb Caledon shipyard in Leith.⁶⁰ With the support of the Adult Education system, he sought progression from 'being on the tools' ('I didn't want to spend my life in a boiler suit' he once told me) to a teaching position in the Welding and Engineering department at Leith Nautical College. However, following the trauma of unexpected redundancy circa 1985,⁶¹ he found a new job lecturing in Welding and Refrigeration at Telford College (now Edinburgh College). Over time, he was appointed to the role of Project Team Leader responsible for establishing training

apprenticeships with companies across Scotland. Through such work placements, the trainees – mostly young working-class men – received training and an accredited qualification. Although energised by the challenges of a managerial post, he was, unfortunately, not immune to the often brutal nature of an increasingly under-funded FE sector. I distinctly remember the day he returned from work, deeply upset at having made two members of staff redundant. Not long after this bitter experience he retired in 2004, aged fifty-eight, with a final salary pension. As Sennett and Cobb write in *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972) ‘The more a person becomes emotionally involved in rewards from higher authority, the more dependent he becomes on someone else who is not a comrade for the things that give him self-respect’ (Sennett & Cobb, 1972, p.197).

⁵⁸ Given the relatively small and nepotistic character of the city’s manufacturing base it is no coincidence that, at the time of his untimely death in the mid-1950s, Jock was employed by the same firm.

⁵⁹ The huge twin chimneys of the power station dominated the local area, specifically the small adjoining harbours of Cockenzie and Port Seton. In a Bellamy painting of the late-1970s titled *Cockenzie Man*, he depicts one of the tall grey chimneys from the top of which protrudes a bird cage in which a self-portrait of the artist with a monkey’s body crouches inside. The power station was decommissioned in 2013 and the chimneys were demolished in 2015.

⁶⁰ In the late 1970s my father worked, as a welding instructor, at Robb Caledon Shipbuilders on Victoria Dock in Leith. The site is now occupied by the Ocean Terminal shopping centre and Vue Cinema.

⁶¹ I remember the largely unspoken insecurity of this forced hiatus; a troubled time defined by tense conversations about moving ‘down South’ and job applications to distant places. At one point he was offered a job as a welding instructor in an English prison.

Of my father's father John, or Jock (as most men of his generation with that first name were known), I know very little. He was born and raised at 44 Jewel Cottages, in east Edinburgh. The site on which his small brick cottage once stood lies half a mile from the house in which I grew up and in which my parents still live. I was an adult when my father told me that his father's house, Jock's birthplace, had once stood there. The plot is now home to a beat up bus-shelter and a gaudy hut selling take-away coffee (Fig.21). Jock was a merchant-seaman and later a pit-head engineer at Newcraighall colliery. According to family lore, as a young sailor Jock 'jumped ship' in Australia, but was returned to his vessel by immigration officials.



(Fig.22) 'Writers can't write as fast as governments make wars; because to write demands thinking' (Brecht). The site where Jock's cottage once stood, The Jewel, Edinburgh, 2021.

Jock died when my father was eleven years old. Working in Fife he collapsed and, it was reported, 'dead before he hit the ground'. My father's uncle Jim (my gran's⁶² younger brother – one of eleven children born to a philandering farm labourer from East Lothian) was sent across the Forth to identify the body. For weeks afterward my father waited at the front window of the prefab for sight of his dad coming up the road from his work.

Newcraighall was a small mine. One of a number of local collieries such as Gilmerton,⁶³ and The Jewel,⁶⁴ it opened in the 1920s and was superceded by the building of the 'super-pits' at Monktonhall⁶⁵ and Bilston Glen in the 1960s.⁶⁶ With shafts a mile deep and tunnels running

⁶² Widowed at 28 my gran remained single for the rest of her life. As her first born grandchild I was very close to her and yet she never once mentioned her late-husband. There were no family photographs on her well-dusted sideboard.

⁶³ 'Jock' Fowler was employed for a long period of time as a miner in the Newcraighall pit. Footage of the mine, which was closed in the late-1980s, can be seen in Bill Douglas's trilogy *My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973) and *My Way Home* (1978). Douglas (1934-1991), raised in the small pit village which lies approximately 5 miles to the south east of Edinburgh, was the illegitimate son of a local miner. Raised by his maternal grandmother in abject poverty. Douglas's final film, *Comrades* (1986), told the story of the Tolpuddle Martyr's and their failed attempt to resist the lowering of agricultural wages. On Sundays, as a small boy, my dad, my sister and I, would walk across the fields to Newcraighall from Portobello, en route to our gran's flat in Musselburgh. The old iron bridge at Newcraighall which had been built for the locals to cross the railway which transported the coal into Edinburgh was still there, even though the track underneath was long gone.

⁶⁴ So-called after the miner's slang term for the coal – 'the jewel'.

⁶⁵ The last pit to close was Monktonhall colliery which was 'mothballed' in 1987 and demolished in 1994.

⁶⁶ In 1984 Bilston Glen was, amongst all the Scottish collieries, scene of the most violent confrontations between police and miners.

northwards under the Firth of Forth, these large pits produced on average 1m tonnes of coal per annum. As a result, by the late-1960s the small local pits were no longer in operation. The names of other small pits such as 'The Klondyke',⁶⁷ 'The Woolmet', 'Newtongrange'⁶⁸ and 'Gilmerton'⁶⁹ now exist only in fading memories and the names of the new cul-de-sacs and 'retail parks' which dot the outskirts of the city. As a boy, my father remembers seeing redundant miners playing 'pitch and toss' on the large concrete caps which were used to seal off the defunct shafts. During my childhood, the site of the Gilmerton pit was long occupied by a desperate looking scrap-yard guarded by a vicious Alsatian. The last time I passed, a small business selling garden sheds was in-situ and the fine stone building which housed the Newcraighall Miner's Welfare was occupied by a company selling bespoke kitchens. By the late-1990s the 'super-pits' were also closed. Having opened in 1967, Monktonhall closed in 1997. Its twin towers, a topographical landmark of my childhood, were demolished in 1998. As Thompson reminds us, the purpose of historical materialist narrative is:

...to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan.....from the enormous condescension of posterity (Thompson, 1991, p.3).

Jimmy was born in the slum tenements of Edinburgh's Canongate.⁷⁰ In 1918, The Canongate, like its poverty-stricken neighbour The Cowgate (coincidentally the birthplace of the Irish republican revolutionary James Connolly) sat between Scottish & Newcastle's Holyrood brewery⁷¹ (Fig.20) and

⁶⁷ The site on which the Klondyke pit stood is now occupied by the Fort Kinnaird retail park. I can remember as a child passing the brick-works which stood adjacent to the mine and which used the waste or "slag" from the pit to produce the bricks. The only remaining trace of the Klondyke is a row of brick miner's cottages and a church which is now home to the Craigmillar Arts Centre.

⁶⁸ During my time as an art teacher at HM prison Saughton (now HMP Edinburgh) in 2003/4, I worked with an inmate named John who was from Newtongrange. John was serving a two-year sentence for possession of heroin.

⁶⁹ The Gilmerton was approximately one mile from my gran and grandad's Ferniehill prefab.

⁷⁰ An abiding memory of my mother's is of her father telling her that from the window of the slum tenement which he shared with his ten siblings, that they could see the Queen Mary's Bathhouse which is, to this day, located on the eastern boundary of Holyrood palace. The Canongate slum was demolished at some point in the 1960s and replaced with a modernist council estate which was later sold into private ownership on the greatly inflated Edinburgh property market.

⁷¹ The site is now occupied by the Scottish parliament.

the Palace of Holyroodhouse.



(Fig.21) 'The worst illiterate is the political illiterate, he doesn't hear, doesn't speak, nor participates in the political events. He doesn't know the cost of life, the price of the bean, of the fish, of the flour, of the rent, of the shoes and of the medicine, all depends on political decisions. The political illiterate is so stupid that he is proud and swells his chest saying that he hates politics. The imbecile doesn't know that, from his political ignorance is born the prostitute, the abandoned child, and the worst thieves of all, the bad politician, corrupted and flunky of the national and multinational companies' (Brecht). Scottish & Newcastle's Holyrood brewery, Canongate, Edinburgh, circa 1960. The site is now home to the Scottish Parliament.

Formed in 1856 by William McEwan and later merging with Newcastle Breweries in 1960 to form Scottish & Newcastle, the 'S & N' brewery,⁷² as it was known locally, also occupied 'the Fountain Brewery',⁷³ to the west of the city-centre in Fountainbridge.⁷⁴ Arguably, the brewery's demise⁷⁵ (at its peak the 'S & N' breweries were producing 2 million barrels of beer per annum and employed

over 1000 ancillary staff) epitomises the city's ideological shift from Keynesian welfare-capitalism to finance-capitalism - emblematised by Scottish Widows, Scottish Equitable and Standard Life (post-school destination of many of my former class-mates) – to the service sector economy of the present. The dematerialising of the city's productive capacity and subsequent emergence of its rentier economy was exemplified in the demolition of S & N's Holyrood⁷⁶ site to make way for 'executive' apartments and the bullet-proof windows and brutalist architecture of the Scottish parliament. On the other side of the city, on the brewery's former Fountainbridge site,⁷⁷ now stand a large multiplex cinema and a ten-pin bowling alley.⁷⁸ Quintessentially, as Wayne writes:

As we have seen, economic liberalism, which Thatcherism successfully installed as the hegemonic political economy, unleashed economic changes that led to Thatcherism being outflanked on key political and cultural issues. The very geographically uneven spread of economic liberalism, its dependence on a southern base that is substantially a traditional 'rentier' economy based on finance, property assets and servicing the elites, gradually opened up on its 'northern' flank legitimacy questions concerning conservatism's powerbase

⁷² In the late 1930s, Jimmy worked as a lorry driver for 'S & N' (as the brewery was known locally) during a time when the city's economy was dominated by the brewery, Leith port and the outlying coal mines.

⁷³ The Fountainbridge site closed in 2004 and four years later the remainder of the company was taken over in a £7.8 billion "buy-out" by Heineken and Carlsberg.

⁷⁴ Bordered by these vast work-places, the Edinburgh of my childhood was permeated weekly by the breweries pungent smell ⁷⁴of boiling malt which, carried on the prevailing westerly from "the Pentlands", blew through Dalry and Prince's Street, down into Jock's Lodge and finally into Portobello.

⁷⁵ The brewery was subsumed into the Heineken conglomerate in 2008.

⁷⁶ The clearance of the Holyrood site also made way for Scotland's devolved parliament.

⁷⁸ Plans are now in place for a large city-centre hotel.

in the British State vis-à-vis the subaltern nation of Scotland. Economic individualism had many other contradictory impacts on conservatism. One boom – helped by North Sea oil revenues – sandwiched between two recessions was enough to give the Conservative Party an undeserved reputation as the party of social mobility (Wayne, 2018, p.228)

Erected in 1946, my maternal grand-parents, Jimmy and Jessie's prefab, at 33 Ferniehill Place (Fig.6) (one of the 1.2 million houses proposed for construction between 1945 and 1951)⁷⁹ was built by the Aircraft Industries Research Organisation Housing (AIROH) on land formerly used to grow cabbages. Each temporary dwelling, of which 4000 were assembled on the outskirts of the city, measured 675 x 62.7 sq. ft., weighed 10 tonnes and could be erected (on-site) circa 1946 in 7 hours. My mother recalls that when her parents were first married *'They lived in a room in my uncle's house in Craigentenny. They lived in a room there....til' they got a prefab. That's what they did, they just lived in a room in someone else's house'*. During the first half of his life, Jimmy found work as a 'butcher's boy' (he delivered meat to the palace), as a lorry driver for 'S&N' and as a miner at Gilmerton colliery. As such, his material world was framed by the daily and often nightly moving, unloading and reloading of 'goods' and the council flat he and Jessie were moved into after eviction from their prefab.



(Fig.7) 'What a miserable thing life is: you're living in clover, only the clover isn't good enough' (Brecht). The Newlands family prefab (rear view), Ferniehill Drive, Edinburgh circa 1955.

The holds which Jimmy unpacked as a docker were filled with exotic things. There were apples from New Zealand, whale-meat from Iceland, the occasional 'banana boat' from South America, Volkswagen cars from Germany, rags, pulp and lamp-black from Finland, pipes from Turkey and American scrap-metal. The 'scrap boat' as it was known provided regular but dangerous employment. Piled with huge pieces of unsecured metal its unsteady cargo was known to give way without warning. Dockers were maimed. Some were killed.⁸⁰ In addition to the 'scrap-boat', there were deckchairs from Denmark, and timber from the mountains of Canada. Sometimes Jimmy found work on the 'sulphur boats' from Chile or Australia. My mother remembers the effects of such unregulated labour: *'He came home, and his hair, he wis' just pure white. All his clothes...they travelled home in the sulphur! Travelled home on the buses! People sittin' on the buses getting' all that, you know!'*

⁷⁹ In actuality only 130,000 'prefabs' were constructed in the UK during this time. (Wikip

Stimulated by the indexical signs of wrappers and tins, my memories of his cheap consumables, embodied in the *PREFAB Lambert & Butler* cigarette packet and redux McEwan's Export lager cans (an emblem of my own formative teenage experiences), became the focus of the project's re-materialist enquiry. Consequently, these indexical memories of a grandfather who, in my experience was, unlike my gran, a largely non-verbal peripheral presence,⁸¹ have unexpectedly provided the stimulus for *PREFAB's* collagist 3D memorials and political critiques of neoliberalism. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) Harvey defines neoliberalism as:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to

⁸⁰ In the course of my granddad's working life, three men were killed in the docks and many others lost fingers, legs and arms.

⁸¹ Unlike my 'grans', who were a constant source of advice and physically distanced affection.

guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit. (Harvey, 2005, p.2)

As such, these now fabricated artefacts, drawing from my memories of a council flat's cramped kitchen and living-room, populated with indexical traces of the consumer culture of the Edinburgh working-class circa 1980 - cigarette ash, empty beer cans, tabloid newspapers folded atop a footstool and fat coagulating in a frying-pan - act as referent and contextualisation for *PREFAB*'s political modernist praxis. And through this, *PREFAB*'s consciously parodic commodities aim to conflate, conjuncturally and materially speaking, the so-called 'Golden Age' (Hobsbawm, 1996, p.270)⁸² of Jimmy's working life with the post-1973 'Crisis Decades' (Hobsbawm, 1996, p.270).⁸³ For as Marx writes in *The German Ideology* (1846) 'the multiple, the so-called tribe, is the true source and theatre of all history' (Marx, 1991, p.57). In this way, too, *PREFAB*'s commemorative 'folk' objects and Scottish nation-state fetish symbols may, in retrospect, be understood in two ways. First, they enable, at a superstructural level, a counter-conventional praxis intent on rematerializing Jimmy's lived history both in relation to my own and as a way to understand the 'composite

⁸² As epitomised in the Beveridge Report of 1942⁸² - to the indexical trace of the socially-purposive Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act (1944).

⁸³ As Hobsbawm notes '...world output of manufacturers quadrupled between the early 1950s and the early 1970s and, what is even more impressive, world trade in manufactured products grew tenfold' (Hobsbawm, 1996, p.261).

construction' (Wayne, 2018, p.217) of class, value and ideas within post-war and now post-social democratic Scotland. In addition, these reconstructed items – appearing haphazard, amateurishly abject in appearance, class-conscious and politically informed – seek to connect, if only in some limited and localised way, the unfurling contradiction between the life of a docker and that of his bourgeois dissident grandson. And thus, with this cultural materialist, as opposed to culturalist, method, *PREFAB's* beer cans, make-shift prams and salvaged fag-packet seek affinity with Williams who wrote of his birthplace in Pandy:⁸⁴

Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start ... My grandfather, a big hard labourer, wept while he spoke, finely and excitedly, at the parish meeting, of being turned out of his cottage. My father, not long before he died, spoke quietly and happily of when he had started a trade-union branch and a Labour Party group in the village, and, without bitterness, of the 'kept men' of the new politics. I speak a different idiom, but I think of these same things (Williams, 2001, p.11)

In *PREFAB*, my memories of my grandfather's cigarette-packets and beer cans inform a radical materialist approach embodied in what is arguably the pivotal object in *PREFAB's* formation, namely *The PREFAB Lambert & Butler Cigarette Packet* (2014) (Fig.37). Picked intuitively from a street one hundred miles from

Edinburgh and twenty-four years after Jimmy's death, the empty Lambert & Butler cigarette packet marks, in hindsight, a damascene moment, and intellectual rupture from the canon of Scottish easel-painting. Consequently, my recognition of the reclaimed packet as alternative source of value activated, methodologically and aesthetically, a dialectical efflux of indexical

trace and Marxist theory. Of such defamiliarised moments of seeing and knowing, Avery Gordon writes:

For the searcher of essences...It is the detail, the little but heavily freighted thing that sparks the moment of arresting animation that enlivens the world of ghosts. The enchanting detail cannot be predicted in advance or calculated for methodological rigour. It is without doubt, and despite Barthes's desire to create a science of it, a highly particularised, if also fully social, phenomenon (Gordon, 2008, p.108)

As such, the signifiatory effect of the street detritus was two-fold. In the first instance, it recalled, immediately and vividly, like a flashback in a Hollywood movie, the living-room of my grandparent's council flat. Secondly, it created an opportunity to challenge the valuations of possessive-individualist method. In my mind, the denaturalising impact of the discarded packet appeared to (re)connect lived history with the present. In an instant, a dialectic of tossed-aside packet and Carlisle's English Street, flashed-up an unexpected synthesis of 1980s Moredun and the socio-political character of a contemporary 'Border City'. So, with Jimmy's lived experience of cargo-holds and council flats in mind, the picking up of the empty, yet polysemically loaded package

had, inexplicably, at that moment of seeing, evoked an unexpected 'thing-power' (Lukacs). This thing-power activated a hitherto unseen connection between my life in Cumbria and the materiality of a smoky living-room, producing, for me, a vandalistic inversion of Howson's naïve-realism, marked by his repeated aestheticisation of poverty, or the subjectivism of late-career Bellamy.

Despite its potential to shape a new form of imaginary, a significant period of time passed during which the empty box, reflexively plucked from the side of the road, lay unused in my small studio. It was, after a period of reflection and influenced by what I was reading, namely Harvey's *The Condition of Post-Modernity* (1989) and Willett's *Brecht on Theatre* (1978), that I fixed a small black and white repeated image of a Gilmerton prefab to the front of the packet. Anchoring, in a Barthesian sense, an archival image of an Edinburgh prefab to a used-up box enabled *PREFAB* to 'act upon' (Friere), in a modest tentative fashion, the lived history of uprootedness and displacement; whether from hand to street, street to pocket, prefab to council flat, or even Scotland to England. In an undated journal note Williams, reflecting on *Border Country* (1960), his part fictionalised account of his Welsh childhood and subsequent self-imposed exile in Cambridge,⁸⁵ writes that he felt himself to be 'a stranger...in a village which was formerly one's own essential world, but in which one no longer plays any part' (Smith, 2008, p.272). Such 'hidden injuries' are recalled and revealed in the following excerpt from a transcribed conversation with my parents, Margaret and John Fowler, in June 2019, they recall the experience of being moved out of their respective prefabs:

Martin: ...were gran and grandad happy to leave the prefab to go to Moredun or was it

⁸⁵ 'The experience of isolation, of alienation and of self-exile is an important part of the contemporary structure of feeling' (Williams, 2011, p.325)

a wrench to go?

John: Ye didnae hav' any choice!

Margaret: They had no choice. But they didnae want to leave the prefab.

Martin: So they would have stayed if they'd had the chance?

Margaret: And so would your other gran. Everyone would have stayed in their prefab.

But they were getting' ti' the end of their life.

John: I hated the flat! I hated them!

Margaret: Your mother hated that flat.

John: Oh it was...

Margaret: Yer' mother wis' never happy at Greendykes.



(Fig.19) 'I want to go with the one I love. I do not want to calculate the cost. I do not want to think about whether it's good. I do not want to know whether he loves me. I want to go with whom I love...' (Brecht). Gran and me in Moredun, circa 1984.

My father recalls a confrontation with the milkman who delivered to their flat. On being asked by my dad – about to set off early one morning on his push-bike to attend his work-placement at Edinburgh’s Napier College (now Napier University) - why the milk wasn’t being delivered, he was told by the irate delivery man that the family hadn’t paid their bill. To my dad’s reply that because he was calling for the money during the day and everyone was working full-time, the man said ‘Yer nothin’ but a bunch o’ schemies’.

To the back of the box, I attached a hand-made flesh-coloured stand cannibalised from a failed painting. In hindsight, this organic reconfiguration of process and object signals, to my mind, a further paradigmatic shift. Namely the determination to break from conventional figuration whilst wishing to avoid what Frederic Jameson describes as ‘the post-modern characteristic of evoking the past while denying the reference of history’ (Jameson : Mulvey, 1996, p.67). In turn, *PREFAB*’s now deviant totem marks an emphatic shift towards an art-

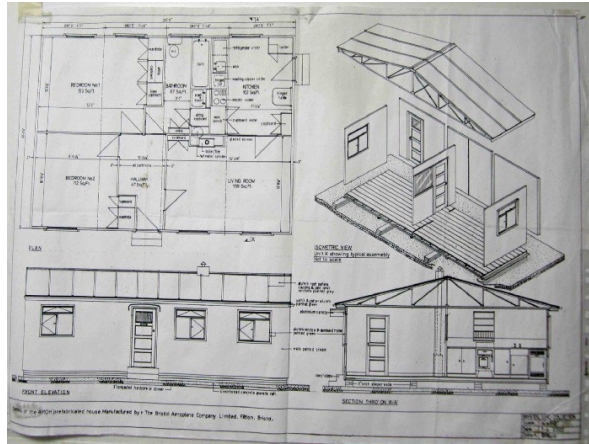
making intent on functioning 'heterogenously but cooperatively, as metaphor, as weapon, as salve' (Gordon, 2008, p.151). As Gordon writes:

Disappearance imposes itself on us where we live: within the already understood meanings that have been appropriated, worked over, settled into a structure of feeling that oscillated between the banal and the magical. The power of disappearance is the power to control everyday reality...to disturb 'the essential concepts of our culture' (Barthes 1986 : 5) and how we make of them our breathing world...But, and this is the very difficult part, haunting is *also* the mode by which the middle class, in particular, needs to encounter something you cannot just ignore, or understand at a distance, or 'explain away' by stripping it all of its magical power (Gordon, 2008, p.131)

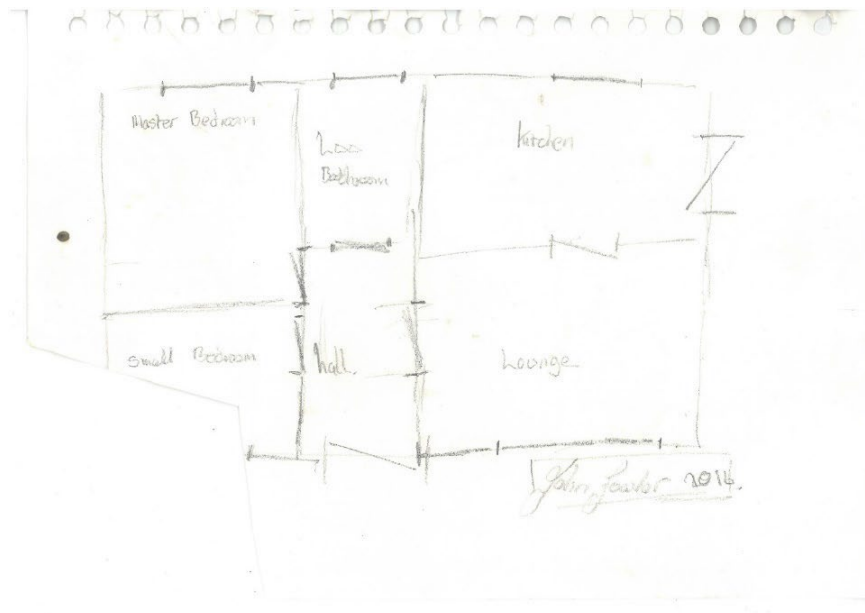
Framed thus, my gathering-up of the phantom-like carton (re)activated, temporally through time and space, *PREFAB's* historical and material appraisal of loss, removal and exile. Further, the surprisingly robust packet (it's silver patina was unmarked and its interior still bore the indexical whiff of tobacco) and its dialectic of the used-up and Jimmy's lived history, drew out, methodologically and theoretically so to speak, the complexities of figuration, representation, and identity. Consequently, the now adulterated carton resigified, to my mind, as a form of both counter-canon object and radical commemorative. In this way, the box came to epitomise a rejection of classical realist convention through the denaturalising methods of collage and assemblage. Rebuking, what Timothy Hyman describes in *Carnavalesque* (2000) as the 'closed body of the Renaissance' (Hyman, 2000, p.17) and its conventions of draughtsmanship and gilt edged framing, the repurposed free-standing detritus was able to

reassign the 'assigned value' (Barthes) of bourgeois naturalism. As Gordon writes:

Haunting is not just talking in your office, or doing a study, or the kind of liberal memory that restricts the official story to 'the personal, private anguish of individuals'...Haunting is more magical than that; it is about reliving events in all their vividness, originality, and violence so as to overcome their pulsating and lingering effects. Haunting is an encounter in which you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter of things: the ambiguities, the complexities of power and personhood...the looming and receding actualities, the shadows of ourselves and our society (Gordon, 2008, p.134)



(Fig.5) 'The human race tends to remember the abuses to which it has been subjected rather than the endearments. What's left of kisses? Wounds, however, leave scars' (Brecht). A plan drawing of an AIROH prefab.



(Fig.6) 'Let nothing be called natural in an age of bloody confusion, Ordered disorder, planned caprice. And dehumanized humanity, lest all things be held unalterable!' (Brecht). My father's sketch of the floorplan of his Greendykes prefab (2016).



(Fig.10) 'Sin is what is new, strong, surprising, strange. The theatre must take an interest in sin if the young are to be able to go there' (Brecht). My Auntie Janis (left) and my mother outside their prefab circa 1962.



(Fig.11) 'People are too durable, that's their main trouble. They can do too much to themselves, they last too long' (Brecht). The Newlands family circa 1955.



(Fig.12) 'You don't need to pray to God any more when there are storms in the sky, but you do have to be insured' (Brecht). Portobello Old & Windsor Parish Church, Bellfield Street, Portobello. Christened in St. Andrew's Church, Musselburgh in 1972, I was forced to attend Sunday School and Bible Class at Old & Windsor until I was 13-years-old.



(Fig.14) ‘We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself’ (Brecht). The Fowler family outside the Old & Windsor Parish church,⁸⁶ Bellfield Street, Portobello. Edinburgh circa 1955. Front row from left to right: ‘Jimmy’, Sheila and my dad, John. In the back row stand my grandmother Elizabeth ‘Bet’ Fowler (nee Hogg) (23.6.23 – 11.9.03) and John ‘Jock’ Watson Fowler. Not long after this photograph was taken, Jock, a physically fit non-smoker, died suddenly, presumably as a result of his being on his feet for prolonged periods of time, from a deep veined thrombosis, whilst working in Fife for the Edinburgh foundry MacKenzie & Moncur’s.

⁸⁶ The Old & Windsor Parish Church still stands but is now a ‘community hub’ having been closed by the Church of Scotland in 2017, its congregation amalgamated with St. Phillip’s Church, Joppa. My mother attended Old & Windsor weekly, from 1972 until 2017, serving as an Elder, member of the choir and active participant in the Women’s Guild, Young Wives and Quilting association. My sister and I attended the church’s Sunday School and Bible Class until we were teenagers. In 1984, aged 12, I joined the 2nd Portobello Sea Scout group which used the church hall. Approximately 50 yards from where my dad stands in the photograph are three mature trees which stand in memorium to my friend Peter Campbell and his mother and father, Morag and Douglas, who were killed in a car-crash on the M6 near Winwick in Greater Manchester on 21st July 1990.



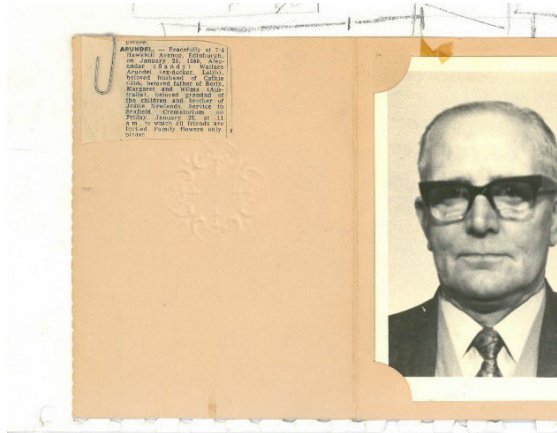
(Fig.15) 'Alas, we who wanted kindness, could not be kind ourselves' (Brecht). The wedding of my parents, Mr. John Watson Fowler and Margaret Victory Fowler (nee Newlands) at Liberton & Northfield Church, 25th May 1968. From left to right: Jim Hogg, Elizabeth 'Bet' Fowler, James 'Jimmy' Fowler, John Fowler, Margaret Fowler, Janis Newlands, Sheila Fowler, Jessie Newlands, Isa Hogg and Jimmy Newlands.



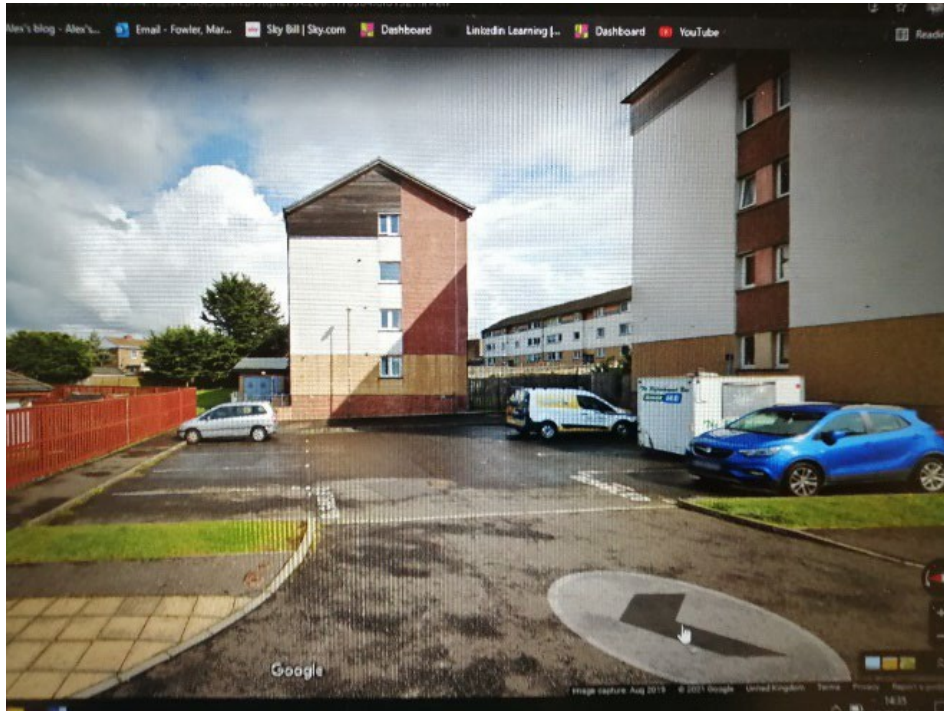
(Fig.16) 'Little changes are the enemies of great changes' (Brecht). Me and my maternal grandmother 'Jessie' Newlands in the back-garden of 11 Durham Road, Portobello, 1973.



(Fig.18) 'You may proclaim, good sirs, your fine philosophy... But till you feed us, right and wrong can wait!' (Brecht). Me and my sister Jennifer, outside Moredun Park Gardens, Edinburgh, circa 1980.



(Fig.20) 'People remain what they are even if their faces fall apart' (Brecht). My maternal grandmothers eldest brother Alexander 'Alec' (or 'Sandy') Arundel. Alec, a lifelong Communist, spent his working life as a docker and shop steward in Leith port.



(Fig.23) 'Don't accept the habitual as a natural thing. In times of disorder, of organized confusion, of de-humanized humanity, nothing should seem natural. Nothing should seem impossible to change' (Brecht). Moredun Park Gardens in 2019. What was previously the front of the flats is now the back, where the entrances to the stairs (or 'closes') used to be. The new entrances and stairwells are located where, in my grandparent's day, the shafts which housed the bins were kept. Each stair had its own large wheel-mounted bin fed by a system of rubbish chutes. The chute's heavy metal hatch could be pulled right back on its hinges and suddenly let go. Hitting the wall with force, it made an almighty booming sound which reverberated up and down the landings.⁸⁷



(Fig.24) 'If in art an appeal is made to the emotions it means reason has to be switched off'
(Brecht). Portobello High School circa 2017.



(Fig.25) 'There is nothing so interesting on stage as a man trying to get a knot out of his shoelaces'
(Brecht). Portobello High School being demolished in 2018.



(Fig.28) 'I am made to laugh about those who cry, and cry about those who laugh' (Brecht). *Bethel* (1967), John Bellany, oil on hard board.



(Fig.29) 'Intelligence is not to make no mistakes, but quickly to see how to make them good' (Brecht). *Caged Cockenzie Man* (1981), John Bellany, oil on canvas. The vertical form from which the caged monkey-man protrudes is in fact one of the twin chimneys which served Cockenzie Power Station. When I was born, my father was working night-shifts at the plant. The station and its huge iconic chimneys were demolished, to great fanfare, and promises of 'local regeneration',

in 2015



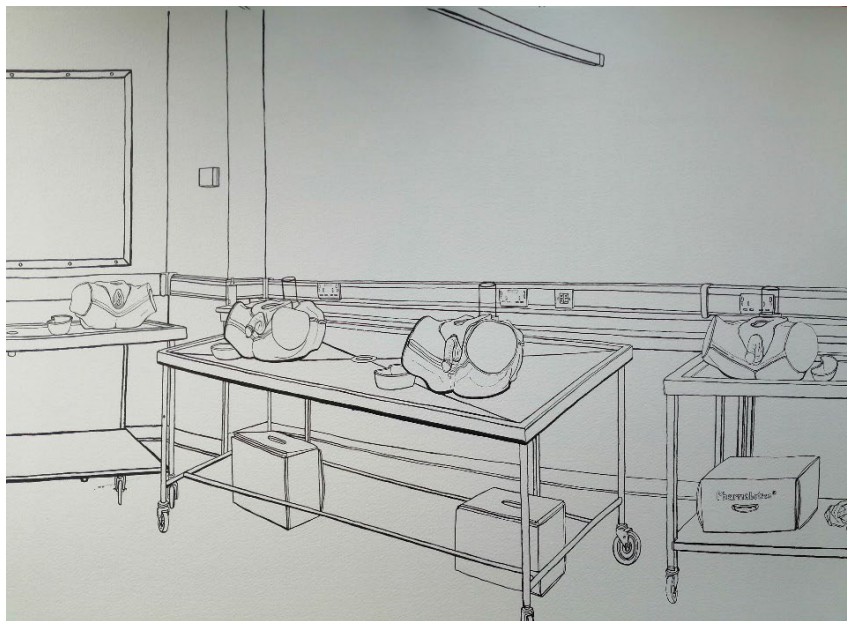
(Fig.31) 'When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no longer heard. The cries, too, fall like rain in summer' (Brecht). Pete (centre) on Ben Lawers, circa 1988.



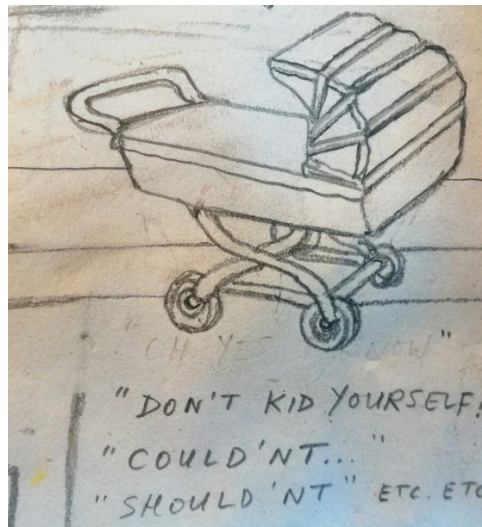
(Fig.32) 'Temptation to behave is terrible' (Brecht). My Degree show, Drawing and Painting dept., Glasgow School of Art, July 1994.



(Fig.33) 'There are many elements to a campaign. Leadership is number one. Everything else is number two' (Brecht). *The Painter* (1976) Philip Guston, oil on canvas.



(Fig.34) 'I don't like where I'm going and I don't like where I've been. Why am I in a hurry?' (Brecht). *The Clinical Skills laboratory, RVI hospital, Newcastle* (2010), ink and brush on paper.



(Fig.35) 'No one will improve your lot if you do not yourself' (Brecht).

Pram (2016), pencil on paper



(Fig.36) 'I don't know what a man is. Only that every man has his price' (Brecht). *The PREFAB*

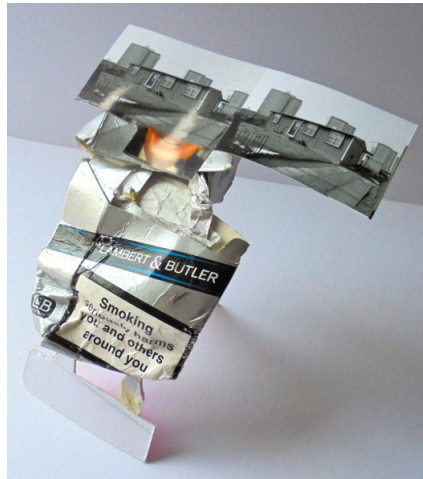
Matchmaker's Pram (2015).



(Fig.37) 'Some party hack decreed that the people had lost the government's confidence and could only regain it with redoubled effort. If that is the case, would it not be simpler, If the government simply dissolved the people and elected another?' (Brecht). *The Thatcher Hayek Pram* (2016).

PART TWO – MAKING STRANGE

2.1 Access To The Silence (Arthur's Seat, 1986)



(Fig.39) *The PREFAB Lambert & Butler Cigarette Packet* (2017).

... one thing I've noticed, on my odyssey through Western culture...is that most of the heroes of the literature I was reading didn't seem to work a great deal of overtime. As far as I can remember, not many of them even seemed to be on a 40-hour week. In fact, not to labour the point, a hell of a lot of them never seemed to have done a stroke of work in their lives. Which is unfortunate. 'To be or not to be' is a bit of a metaphysical luxury if you're on a 40-hour week, with three nights overtime, as an awful lot of people are. Or if you're a woman cleaner working nightshift at four bob an hour or something ridiculous, saying 'Hello' to your husband as you come in in the morning and he goes out, your lifestyle won't be made all that more satisfying by sitting down and comparing him to 'a summer's day' (Leonard, 2013, p.96)

Early one Sunday morning in the winter of 1986, my dad and I were walking the dog on Arthur's Seat when, walking towards us from the opposite direction, we spotted the Right Honourable Sir Malcolm Rifkind KCMG QC.

In those days, the recently appointed Secretary of State for Scotland in Margaret Thatcher's third-term Conservative government, had a house in nearby Duddingston village.

In his memoir, Power And Pragmatism (2016), Sir Malcolm, a native of Edinburgh, recalls that, although lacking in 'social pretensions', his childhood home in Warrender Park Terrace was nevertheless described in Alexander McCall Smith's novel The Sunday Philosophy Club (2004) as:

...a handsome construction...a high tenement in the Victorian manner...in six storeys of dressed stone...Some of the roofs were bordered with turrets, like the slated turrets of French chateaux...the edge of the roofs had stone crenellations, carved thistles, the occasional gargoyle, all of which would have given the original occupants the sense that they were living in some style, and that all that distinguished their dwellings from those of the gentry was mere size. But in spite of these conceits, they were good flats, solidly built...originally intended for petit-bourgeois occupation (McCall-Smith : Rifkind, 2016, p.2)

Warrender Park's 'carved thistles' and 'occasional gargoyle' contrast sharply with the 'temporary' home in which my father and his siblings were raised. An indexical trace of the Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act 1944 by which the Ministry of Works proposed to address Britain's post-WWII housing shortage, the legislation recommended the building of 1.2 million 'prefab' houses between 1945 and 1951. The all-aluminium Greendykes prefabs of my father's childhood were Aircraft Industries

Research Organisation Housing (AIROH). Each house measured 62.7m sq. and weighed 10 tonnes. Arriving on the back of a flat-bed truck, the houses were assembled from 4 sections. Two hundred and thirty-three were built in Greendykes between 1945 and 1947. In 1964, my father's family were moved out of 52 The Avenue and resettled in a new council flat at 1/5 Greendykes Terrace. This flat was subsequently demolished in the early-1980s. Of their lived experience of uninsulated unheated prefabs, my parents recall:

Margaret: 'I kid you not, yer dad wid be the same, the actual icicles would be that length (gestures with her hands a distance of approximately 5 inches) inside the windows! Ah've never seen icicles now cos' o' aw' the central heatin', but, d'you get the icicles like that? Ah mean you could have stabbed somebody with the icicles! They were, they were that – an' ah'm not exaggerating! (laughs) weren't they? it was freezin'! Ah'm no kiddin' ye Martin! The icicles were absolutely and I mean you could have done danger wi' the icicles eh?'

John: 'Aye, cos' the windows leaked. You'd get the condensation

Margaret: 'You had coats on the top of the bed, just like Billy Connolly said. You had blankets. They horrible itchy blankets. Eh? You had maybe a square, eh? When they got more money, you got a square bit of carpet. An' ye' were frozin' eh? when ye had to get ready, for yer, to get ready. Cos' I mean when ye got out yer bed!...'

John: 'An' yer feet had to touch the linoleum (laughter) it wis like gettin' an' electric shock! Ye had, ye had paraffin heaters. Ours cowped over once and set fire to the curtains (laughter). Somebody knocked it over and set fire to the curtains (laughter)... that wis another hammerin'! (laughter) 'The bloody curtains!' (laughter).

On Arthur's Seat - as we continued our steep ascent towards the Stone Age terraces on the Eastern side of the old volcano - the hill was deserted, apart from the distant, yet still advancing figure.

Clearly now, we could see the approaching figure was tall and thin and dressed in a Harris Tweed suit topped with a deer-stalker hat. He wore a shirt and tie, and his trousers were tucked into an expensive looking pair of green wellies. I could tell they were expensive because, unlike the ones in our house, they had buckles and a label stitched on the side. Large framed glasses gave his eyes a strange magnified look. I had never seen anything like it. In the familiar context of the hill the visual effect of the man's outfit was no less striking than if he had been wearing a general's dress uniform or a clown suit.

By contrast, my dad was wearing a green 'work's parka' - the kind with the orange padded lining and the big furry hood - and a pair of steel toe-capped shoes. He'd got them, by way of my mum, from my grandad who'd recently benefitted from a clothing concession secured by the Dockworker's union. Each docker was to receive two winter coats and two pairs of 'steelies' - either boots or shoes. Finding himself with a surplus of winter gear, he'd passed them to my old man. However, despite the gift of the coat and heavy-shoes there was an irreconcilable rift between them.

Years before, when working night-shifts and with a new baby, my dad had become enraged at the older man's abuse of his daughter's good nature. Having fallen into the habit of drinking with my father's uncles at the 'Store Club' in Musselburgh, my grandad

had taken to staggering the 100 yards from the club to my mum and dad's tiny flat where he would demand his 'tea'. Things reached a head and words were said. To this day, my father maintains he once stepped over the old boy lying drunk in the gutter on Musselburgh High Street.

'Here's Rifkind comin' my dad said. 'Don't say hello'. From a few yards in front the beak nosed figure hailed us, if rather self-consciously, with a plummy 'Good morning!' My dad blanked him and we passed by in an awkward silence.

2.2 Places Of The Mind – Philip Guston & Other Influences



(Fig.40) Philip Guston's living-room, Maverick Road, Woodstock, circa 1975.

There is something ridiculous and miserly which we inherit from abstract art: that painting is autonomous, pure and for itself. But painting is 'impure'. It is the adjustment of 'impurities' which forces paintings continuity (Guston)

As a model, in my mind, the paintings which the American artist Philip Guston made between 1969 and his death in 1980, offer an example of a stylistic break analogous to *PREFAB's* paradigm shift. In some part, Guston's late-paintings are a reckoning with the formative traumatic experiences of his childhood. Guston's father, Louis Goldstein was a Russian Jew forced to flee, with his wife Rachel, the anti-semitic pogroms of his native Odessa. Arriving in Canada, the much longed for improvement in the family's circumstances failed to materialise

and the family moved on again to Los Angeles. In California their financial situation continued to deteriorate and Guston senior was forced to scrape a living as a 'junk-man'. Leading a horse and cart through the city, he made a meagre living scavenging amidst the urban waste of Depression-era America. Roughly painted images of scrap-metal, heavily-grained wood, bent nails, bricks, old shoes, car tyres, frayed ropes and flat-irons resurface forty years later in the paintings of his youngest son. Then, traumatically, in 1923, when Guston was eight-years old, Louis committed suicide. The young boy discovered his father's body hanging from the wooden beam of an outhouse. This grievous blow was closely followed by the death of the artist's beloved older brother Nate. Academically gifted and a talented athlete, Nate was hit by a car in a neighbouring street. His legs crushed, gangrene set in and he died shortly after. Years later, Guston, the by then acclaimed artist, summed up his decisive break from his mid-career 'Abstract Impressionist' signature style:

American art is a lie. A sham. A cover for a poverty of spirit. A mask to mask the fear of revealing oneself. A lie to cover up how bad one can be. It is an escape from the true feelings we have (Guston)

In a photograph of a room in Guston's house on the aptly named Maverick Road,⁸⁸ we encounter a wooden floor, edges of rugs, a wicker chair, an ashtray on a tall stand, a stool, a chest of drawers, and, on the white-washed wall, an array of small paintings. As Barthes writes:

In Brecht, an ideological critique is not made *directly* (or else it would have once more

⁸⁸ The house on Maverick Road, near Woodstock in upstate New York, was home to Guston and his wife Musa (*nee* Mayer) until his death, aged 66, in 1980. The house is now owned by Guston's daughter, Musa Mayer.

produced a repetitive, tautological, militant discourse); it passes through aesthetic relays; counter-ideology creeps in by means of a fiction – not realistic but *accurate*. This is perhaps the role of the aesthetic in our society: to provide the rules of an *indirect and transitive* discourse (it can transform language, but does not display its domination, its good conscience) (Barthes, 2010, p.104)

Taken then as evidence of Guston's awareness of the polysemic nature of the image, these paintings are the photograph's punctum. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes defines the punctum as 'that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' (Barthes, 1993, p.27): it is the punctum which offers us 'a power of expansion' (Barthes, 2000, p.45). Consequently, Guston's dialectic of biographical agency and roughly worked representations of America's disposable commodities, signal a shift in artistic allegiance. Through this dislocation Guston substitutes skill - the 'hero' (Barthes) of bourgeois culture - for the 'anti-heroic' (Barthes) of the proletariat or, in his case, the 'stumblebum'. In short, the 'bad painting' of 'crapola', 'dirty' colour, and clumsily drawn lines. The mature canvases and small paintings on sheets of Masonite are an inventory of half-smoked cigarette butts, bent steering wheels, tuberous legs and assorted 'crapola' (Guston). They are a knowing oneself through a rudimentary amalgam of cartoonish props, biographical reference and the influence of other dissident predecessors such as Goya or de Chirico.⁸⁹ In this sense, the chain-smoking heavy drinking Guston, now self-exiled in rural Woodstock, assembles a counter-canonic inventory of

⁸⁹ Of these shadowed and deserted town-scapes Robert Hughes writes: 'It is an airless place, and its weather is always the same. The sun has a late-afternoon slant, throwing long shadows across the providing the illusion of well-being. Space rushes away from one's eye, in long runs of arcades and theatrical perspectives; yet it is elongation, which gives far things an entranced remoteness and clarity, is contradicted by a Cubist flattening and compression – de Chirico had been in Paris just before the war, at the height of Cubism...When the picture plane is flattened but the things on it are still wrenched out of reach by de Chirico's primitive and inconsistent one-point perspective, the eye is frustrated' (Hughes, 1993, p.217)

alienation and resistance amidst the lived contradictions of modern America. Of his stylistic break Guston recalled:

So when the 1960s came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic. The war, what was happening to America, the brutality of the world. What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything – and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue. I thought there must be a way I could do something about it. I knew ahead of me a road was lying. A very crude, inchoate road. I wanted to be complete again, as I was when I was a kid...Wanted to be whole between what I thought and what I felt (Pfeiffer, 1989, p.16)

In Guston's paintings things have a causal relation to other things. An empty bottle is a sign of alcoholism, cigarettes stain fingers, ketchup covered French fries induce fatal heart attacks, and ropes and tyres speak of violent indiscriminate death.⁹⁰ As Guston told an audience in 1970:

...I was reading an article last night by Paul Goodman...He said that he sometimes felt as if he was living in his country but his country had been occupied by a foreign power...And then you start thinking about 'Where am I?' or 'How can I fit or produce and live in this situation?...In other words, how do you survive?...You even become increasingly ashamed of being connected with the 'Modern Movement in Art', or you begin to really hate modern art altogether. There's nothing wrong in that. I mean, actually it works, it's very good because it makes you question yourself almost every day, about what you're doing. Are you a painter?

⁹⁰ In a 1930s Los Angeles exhibition, a number of Guston's anti-racist paintings were attacked by the KKK. The surviving paintings bare the trace of knife marks and bullet-holes.

Should you be a painter? Why be a painter?' (Coolidge, 2011, p.231)

In their public unveiling at the Marlborough exhibition in 1970, Guston's vulgarised cartoon world, conspicuous in heavy-handed lines and gauche brushwork, was derided as a 'new style of cartoon anecdotage' (Kramer); nothing less than 'the artistic equivalent of a pseudo-event' (Kramer). The once urbane artist was, as the New York critic Hilton Kramer opined in his now infamous review, *A Mandarin Pretending To Be A Stumblebum* (1972). Lee Krasner called the new work 'embarrassing'. Only Guston's old time friend and fellow immigrant, Willem de Kooning, understood that the chain-smoking hoods and lima-bean heads represented a striving for artistic freedom; a 'longing to inhabit'. In reply to what he described as his 'excommunication' from the New York art world, Guston remarked:

You know, comments about style always seem strange to me – 'Why do you work in this style, or in that style?' – as if you had a choice in the matter... What you're doing is trying to stay alive and continue and not die (Guston)

The repudiation Guston speaks of is similar to what, in the eyes of some of my family and life-long acquaintances, was the similarly perverse and wanton relinquishing of artistic and professional merit for *PREFAB SUPERMARKET's* array of modified litter. As Marx writes in the *Thesis on Feuerbach* (1846):

We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived...We set out from real active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and

echoes of this life process (Marx, 1846, p.47)

On reflection, the 'emergent novelty' (Bottomore, 1985, p.122) of late-career Guston and the picking up of the *Lambert & Butler* cigarette-packet recall Brecht's⁵⁴ description of Breughel's dialectical images of an Alpine peak 'set down in a Flemish landscape... old Asiatic costumes confront modern European ones' (Willett, 1978, p.157), and *The Tower of Babel* (1563) 'has been put up askew'⁹¹ (Brecht : Willett, 1978, p.159). In *PREFAB's case*, a form of redux Arte Povera is thus underscored by a theory-praxis-nexus in which dialectical logic supersedes that of classical bourgeois logic. This resistance produces a dissident praxis in which moribund genre painting, the signficatory allure of neo-conceptualism and commodity-fetish may be subverted by an organic person-centred form of object-fetishism. Of his similarly counter-conventional making, Guston recalled:

Just as strong in my memory as the Old Masters is once seeing an old-fashioned ice-truck in Manhattan which had a bucket painted on it, with the grain of the wood and everything and spilling out of it these cubes of ice. Sometimes, when my painting is getting too artistic, I'll say to myself, 'What if the shoe salesman asked me to paint a shoe on his window? Suddenly, everything lightens, I feel not so responsible and paint directly what the thing is (Coolidge, 2011, p.303)

The incongruous panels (made in a surge of productive activity between 1968-70) featuring cartoony klansmen, gnarled tree-stumps and dilapidated model T-Fords, evidence the artist's

⁹¹ As Brecht notices, the 'delivery of building materials is a very laborious business: the effort is obviously wasted: a new plan seems to be being put into execution higher up, cutting down the scale of the original enterprise' (Willett, 1978, p.159).

determination to confront, methodologically and aesthetically, the received conventions of American subjectivism. Relating these late-works to their particularly violent conjuncture, Guston recalled (in a lecture at the Yale Summer School of Music and Art in 1973) the social and political context in which these deviational works were made:

The Chicago Convention was going on and I was stuck in front of the TV like everybody else, watching this thing and reading about it, and I went in one night and started doing this (probably charcoal drawing *Untitled*, 1968). It just, like, came out....I painted Ku Klux Klan....I'm not interested in the Ku Klux Klan, but I was interested in the hooded figures as representing...They became real characters to me (Coolidge, 2011, p.223)

Analogously, Sydney Nolan's paintings of the infamous bushranger Ned Kelly, depict a barbarous world, similar to that inhabited by Guston's bloodied hoods and blank brick walls. Nolan's incongruous depictions of Kelly's pursuit through the Goulburn Valley are about an individual's refusal to comply with authority (the images were painted when the artist was AWOL from the Australian army), and to counter the provincialism of Australian painting. Consequently, the *Kelly* paintings are about escape and resistance: a flight, both methodological and philosophical, from bourgeois cultural norms and authoritarian control. In hindsight, such recalcitrant motifs – whether KKK hoods or murderous bandits - inform, consciously or not, *PREFAB's* often vandalistic approach. In this sense, Guston and Nolan's mature works, whilst not assimilable into a political modernist project per se, evince a political avant-garde opposed to apolitical abstraction. As such, these contrapuntal images may be approached as examples of an oppositional aesthetic: a determination to depose orthodox

means of making, and thus motivated by an emerging political modernist mentality seeking to reject normative paradigms. In this way, both may usefully be located as dialectical in approach and effect. By which I mean these dysphoric images, uneasy or unhappy, with what Barthes calls 'repressive values' (Barthes, 1980, p.275), oppose, in this case, the 'rule governed-conventional transpositions' (Barthes, 1980, p.275) of 'art for art's sake' formalism. For as Barthes notes in *The Rhetoric of the Image* (1980): 'the more technology develops the diffusion of information (and notably of images) the more it provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning' (Barthes, 1980. P.279).

Consequently, Guston and Nolan's paintings, with their juxtaposition of the blood-spattered, the empty sky, staring eyes and upended constables, are, and always have been, to my mind, a rejection of the ruling-class common sense: a dialectical image-making - situated in contexts of forces and relations of production - and thus against the seamlessness of classical narration. They are as such, examples of what Williams defines as an 'emancipatory practice' (Williams, 2007. P.174) internalised through many years of looking and re- considering. Analogously, it seems to me, Guston and Nolan's pictorial critiques of the urban/provincial bourgeoisie informed my picking-up of the discarded cigarette-packet. This picking-up, in contradiction of a received conception of logic, enables, in the words of Esther Leslie, an author as producer purview of 'industrial material culture...and the starting point for the longed-for release from its reifying grip' (Leslie, 2000, p.10). As Marx writes in *The German Ideology* (1846) on the condition of 'the Man' and not 'real historical man':

He does not see how the sensuous world around him is, not a thing given direct from an eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of

society...the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one (Marx, 1991, p.62)

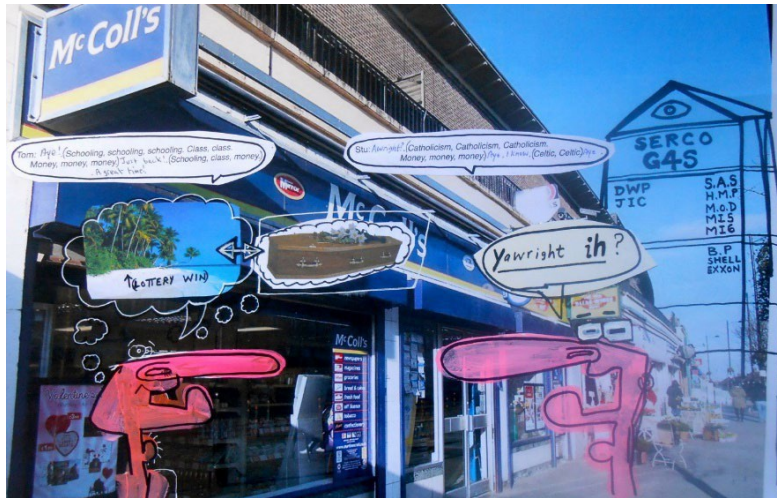
The recovery of detritus, of the cast-aside, whether a worn out shoe, a hanged bandit or discarded cigarette-packet, may come to exemplify Benjamin's anti- progressivist, by which I mean linear-consequential conception of history. As such, one might argue that Guston *et al* represent what Benjamin defines as 'the place where historical materialism breaks through historicism's picture of history' (Benjamin, 1974, p.3). In this way, *PREFAB*'s aim is to demonstrate art as production against the liberal hagiography of hegemonic art history accounts. Against these hegemonic accounts, typified by the new conformism of bourgeois narration, *PREFAB* proffers a Brechtian-Marxist praxis for present times. As Benjamin notes in Thesis VI: 'In every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it' (Benjamin, 1974, p.4). In *PREFAB*'s case, the disavowal of canonic understanding and subsequent development of a materialist aesthetic occurs, dialectically, at the fulcrum of Guston's transgressive images, Brecht's 'foregrounding of the production process' (Mulvey, 1996, p.13) and the lived history of an Edinburgh dock-worker. As Willett notes:

There were in fact three threads that went to make up Brecht's own epic theory...the playing in quotation marks, the portrayal of new and complex processes and the detached, unemotional style (Willett, 1964, p.17)

Serving then as a model for *PREFAB*'s critically-conscious dialectical art, Brecht's opposition to bourgeois naturalism provides a starting point from which to strike against the formal

(and theoretical) limits of post-modern deconstruction and its apolitical signifiers.

Looking back, the dereifying fag-packet originates from pre-*PREFAB* works such as *The Newsies* (2014) (Fig.32) and *The Cabinet Of* – (2014) (Fig.33). These rudimentary instinctive parodies of classical realist method – whether embodied in 19th century political cartoon or the canon of European figuration - evince an emergent counter-conventional synthesis of found-object (in *The Cabinet Of* – a double-page colour spread taken from *The Guardian* newspaper serves as political modernist ground), glossy digital prints, reclaimed hardboard, luminous acrylic paint, and marker-pen. In some ways, these acerbic anti-Tory anti-nationalist images bear the traces of a long ago internalised affinity with Karel Appel and the C.O.B.R.A⁹² groups brand of redux Art Brut. Such anti-avant-garde method, manifest in de-skilling, folkloric elements and, in Appel's case, the repurposing of old paintings recovered from Dutch flea-markets, propose instead a materialist riposte to the ahistorical ironies of neo-conceptualism and minimalism circa 1970.



(Fig.43) ‘There are men who struggle for a day and they are good. There are men who struggle for a year and they are better. There are men who struggle many years, and they are better still. But there are those who struggle all their lives: These are the indispensable ones’ (Brecht). *The Newsies* (2016) mixed-media on board.



(Fig.46) ‘Those who take the meat from the table teach contentment. Those for whom the taxes are destined demand sacrifice. Those who eat their fill speak to the hungry of wonderful times to come. Those who lead the country into the abyss call ruling too difficult for ordinary men’ (Brecht). *The Cabinet Of* – (2015) pen on digital gloss print.

Referencing (in homage to), the Dubuffet-esque figures of Appel and Asger Jorn, the *Newsies* pictures (which, like the *PREFAB* packet, were displayed on stands so that the object could present a two-sided narrative) and their cartoony narratives are populated by two ill-informed phallus-nosed men. Rendered in gaudy pink on a glossy image of a traditional newsagents, these pictures, a form of anti-painting if you will, were inspired by Guston's *Poor Richard* (1972). In this pre-Watergate satire of Nixon's tour of Mao's China in 1972, 'Tricky Dicky's' scrotum-like face is accompanied by a Frankensteinian Spiro Agnew (Guston depicts him with a bolt through his neck) and shape-shifting National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. The latter is symbolised by a pair of inscrutable thick-lensed spectacles. In later scenes the nasty trio appear as anthropomorphic cookies, sponge cakes and 'pot pies'.

Positioned at the pivot point between the long economic boom years of the Keynesian post-war consensus circa 1944-1971 (a result of the Bretton Woods system of exchange rate stability as embodied in the establishment of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) – and Nixon's decoupling of the dollar from the 'gold standard' – Guston's political satires provide, for present purposes, a link between Fordism and, in Jeffries words, the emergence of the 'conceptual economy' (Jeffries, 2021, p.27). Analogously, the protagonists of the *Newsies* images both voice and think (with the aid of hand-written and/or partly typed speech bubbles glued roughly to the picture surface) their sectarian prejudices, latent chauvinism and half-baked views on Scottish independence. Views determined, to my mind, by the reificatory condition of commodity-culture and ideologically imposed austerity. In one scene, for example, a bulbous Day-Glo head reflects disconsolately 'Christ! Not many middle class folk are going to like this painting!' As Barthes writes:

Propensity for division: fragments, miniatures, partitions, glittering details...a bird's

eye view of fields, windows...line drawing...in short, depending on your point of view, all the articulation of the semanticist or all the raw material of the fetishist. This propensity is labelled *progressive*: art of the rising classes proceeds by just such framing (Brecht, Diderot, Eisenstein) (Barthes, 2010, p.70)

Prototypically then, the cigarette-packet, whether fragment or miniature, recalls, like Louis Goldstein, a man who, because of his 60-hour week, was estranged from both family and city. In retrieving the tossed-aside carton a chain reaction, both semiological and sociological, was activated in my imagination. This recollecting of things past or, in Williams' words, a 'felt experience', produced a momentary identification: the recognition of the commonalty between a rematerialised memory of an estranged grandfather, the gauche images of late-Guston and an English street. Much later, the not-so-empty packet called to mind Benjamin, who wrote of those 'crude and material things' wherein 'thinking suddenly halts in a constellation overflowing with tensions' (Benjamin, 1974, p.10).



(Fig.41) 'The main objective is to learn to think crudely. Crude thinking is the great one's thinking'
(Brecht). *Interior* (1972) Philip Guston, oil on board.



(Fig.42) 'He who fights, can lose. He who doesn't fight, has already lost.' (Brecht). *Untitled* (1969)
Philip Guston, oil on board.



(Fig.44) 'Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are'

(Brecht). *The Newsies* (2016), mixed-media on board.



(Fig.45) 'Mixing one's wines may be a mistake, but old and new wisdom mix admirably'

(Brecht). *The Newsies* (2016), mixed-media on board.

2.3 Unrelated Incidents (Military Tattoo, 1979 & Assembly Hall, 1984)



(Fig.47) The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (1979).

The unreality of a spangled fairy doll on top of a Christmas tree...with its dazzling effect upon devoted but dazed beholders (Beaton : Nairn, 2011, p.31)

On a warm August evening in 1979, when I was seven years old, my parents⁹³ took me and my sister to 'The Castle' to see the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. Wrapped inside the large bin-bags which my mother had brought with her in case of rain, we huddled between our dad

⁹³ My mum, Margaret Victory Fowler, born on 7th May 1945. Though V.E Day was declared on the 8th, my gran decided to mark the momentous occasion by giving her first child the middle name Victory. My mother has been a member of the Portobello Old & Windsor Parish Church (Church of Scotland) since 1973.

- an atheistic anti-nationalist republican (he refused to stand for the national anthem), and our mum - a royalist Labour-voting Presbyterian, as a magnificent parade of soldiers marched back and forth between the stands and the flood-lit fortress. The castle's stoic-looking warriors were dressed in splendid kilts, tasselly sporrans, bearskin hats, and over their broad shoulders they carried SA80 assault rifles with lethal looking bayonets. From high above us, Royal Marine commandos whizzed past on 'flying foxes' and below, a pack of Alsatian dogs raced over an obstacle course of wooden see-saws, plastic tunnels and hoops of fire. At the climax of this bewitching phantasmagoria, the castle spoke.

And yet, amidst the 'near hypnotic impact' (Nairn, 2011, p.90) of the tartan magic show there was, to my father's eye anyway, one identifiable anomaly. One bum note. 'She', was housed in a sort of make-shift balcony with a roof, a 'Royal Box', decorated with gold frill, Union flags and naff heraldry. Next to her sat a dour-looking flunky in a naval uniform. The grim looking pair had, it seemed, no need of bin-bags.

Many years later I learned that the stronghold's rich paternal baritone belonged to Edinburgh's privately educated, part-time Baptist lay-preacher and theatre director, Sir Tom Fleming OBE.⁹⁴ Strange that the source of the castle's omnipotent burr, a budget Wizard of Oz with a Morningside accent, was the BBC's go-to royal wedding commentator and volunteer organ player at the small church in Canonmills which still stands opposite the BP garage.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ The patrician Fleming, a former pupil of Edinburgh's most prestigious 'public' schools, lay-preacher⁹⁴ and member of the Royal Victorian Order,⁹⁴ was a prominent figure within the Scottish cultural scene circa 1950-1990.

⁹⁵ This small place of worship, on the boundary between the New Town and the former slum housing along the Water of Leith is a short walk from what used to be the National Galleries of Scotland warehouse on Beaverhall Road. I worked in this small industrial unit as a student and again briefly after I had graduated from art-college. The unit provided warehouse storage for the retail merchandise which was sold in the galleries shops. For £4.50 an hour I packed cardboard boxes with Claude Monet calendars, Van Gogh mouse-mats and inflatable versions of the tormented soul from Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893).

Five years later my mother found me a job, round the corner from the castle on Ramsay Place, in the Assembly Hall. Employed nightly, after school, as a backstage 'runner' for the plays A Satire of the Three Estaites (1540) and The Wallace: A Triumph In Five Acts (1960). The former, written in the impenetrable babble of Lallans, was filled with a spell-binding cast of grotesquely masked characters named Deceit, Flatterie and Falsehood. Later in the run, a bloodied but unbowed Wallace raged impotently inside a prefab version of the Great Hall at Westminster. The programme notes revealed – much to my father's amusement – that the faux-Wallace was in fact a former welder from Perth.⁹⁶



(Fig.9) 'If art reflects life, it does so with special mirrors' (Brecht). My mother, Margaret Newlands in Ferniehill circa 1963.

Coincidentally, my lightning-quick dashes through the theatre had been duly noted by the voice of the castle himself - Sir Tom - the play's Director (and then a leading figure in the literary politics of pre-Devolution Scotland), who, I overheard in a meeting with the assembled cast, joke of the danger they faced in being run over by a skinny red-headed boy in plimsolls travelling at speed.⁵⁰

On the same stage from which the rebel knight railed at Edward, Margaret Thatcher opined – four years later - to Scotland’s Proddie clergy that ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat’.⁹⁷ The ‘Iron Lady’ declined to say what the man might do when he found there was no work.

As a runner or ‘gofor’, my job was to relay messages between the Front of House Manager, the ushers and the Back Stage manager. The Front of House Manager was a large portly man with fair hair and a well-groomed beard: a Henry VIII lookalike, to my eye, re-costumed in an immaculate tuxedo. Like the archetypal capitalist in a George Grosz satire, he spent each evening at a large table strewn with ticket stubs, piles of coins and grubby bank-notes.⁹⁸ His Assistant Manager, a warm-hearted man nicknamed ‘Pinky’, smelled of cigarette smoke and strong aftershave, and wore a fancy tux. Under the tux he wore a striking turquoise shirt with an elaborate ruffle stitched down the front. Pinky checked the tickets at the front door and, when the audience were settled, I would join him outside the heavy front doors where, from our stone platform high above the city we could see across Prince’s Street, over the Forth and beyond, to the Fife hills. In such moments, Pinky, with a wry smile and eyes narrowed theatrically against the curling smoke of yet another Silk Cut, would swing an imaginary golf-club and send an invisible ball arcing into the night sky. One evening he spotted a young woman, ‘a late-comer’, in a floral print summer dress and high-heels hurrying across the courtyard. With a lingering gaze he took a long drag on his cigarette and remarked quietly, to no one in particular it seemed, ‘Here’s a nice bit of talent’. He laughed when I asked him what he meant.

In the austere courtyard below sat a small wooden hut made from chipboard. A temporary addition to the gloomy quadrangle, this incongruous white-washed box

stood in as the theatre's 'refreshment kiosk'. Opposite the make-shift hut stood, on an elevated plinth, an imposing statue of John Knox. Each night, under his stern gaze, I stocked the emulsion smelling box with shrink-wrapped trays of Coca-Cola and small tubs of vanilla ice cream. When the interval was over, I carried the unsold tubs back up the long stone steps and into the theatre.

In the quiet times between the interval and the show's climax, when there was no work to be done, I would sneak off to explore the labyrinth of deserted stairs and passage-ways which lay at the back of the massive old building. The walls of these dusty stone corridors were hung with vast history paintings encased in ornate gold frames whose gilt edges were warped and cracked. The paintings told a recurring story. Hundreds of white men in wigs and frock coats sat in rows of wooden pews. Arranged in regimental formation and fixed forever within a darkening chiaroscuro, the eyes of this infallible elect were fixed on a robed figure who stood on a stage: the same stage from which 'The Wallace' now raged, somewhere below.⁹⁹

It was on one of these illicit forays that I found a crisp new 'fiver'. It lay flat and unclaimed on the landing of a particularly remote staircase. The smooth iridescent surface of the thin blue paper contrasted vividly with the stair's dull stone. Halted in that startled moment as I skipped down the stairs, it took a minute or so to comprehend this encounter with something of almost immeasurable value. I folded the clean note carefully in half and stashed it deep in the pocket of my school-trousers. In a second, I had unexpectedly doubled my night's wages.

2.4 Definite Articles



(Fig.48) The Assembly Hall, Edinburgh.

Scotland has become an independent socialist republic.

At last.

Eh?

You pinch yourself.

Jesus Christ. You've slept in again.

(Leonard, 1995, p.16)

In order to denaturalise the kitsch phantasmagoria of the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Barthes's decoding of the encoded meanings of a *Paris-Match* magazine provides an appropriate frame:

I am at the barber's, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the

tricolor. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier is giving the French salute*); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier (Barthes, 2012, p.225)

Faced with the 'curious topography' (Nairn, 2011, p.92) of Ukania-Britain, the contrarian accessories reject tartanry's¹⁰⁴ 'pawky simplicities' (Nairn, 1997, p.206) and the 'chest beating' (Nairn, 1997, p.206) of, in the nativist idiom, a Scottish exceptionalism grounded in the potentially destructive power of neo-Highlandism. A situation within which objectification is common to the processes of nationalist othering or, in other words, a dehumanising in order to subjugate. Thus, Scotia's bogus cultural inheritance, in reality, the indexical tracteries of (English) 19th century capital accumulation - reproduced by the myth-making Anglo-Welsh Allan brothers¹⁰⁵ and manifest in Rawlinson's 'philibeg'¹⁰⁶ - is exposed by a totalising worldview of historical materialist method which is both

alone they can be understood, is facilitated by the fact that the (capitalist) process of transformation must embrace every manifestation of the life of society if the preconditions for the complete self-realisation of capitalist production to be fulfilled' (Lukacs, 1971, p.95)

¹⁰⁴ Hugh Trevor-Roper writes in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983): 'The idea of differentiated clan tartans...seems to have originated with the resourceful manufacturers who, for thirty-five years, had had no clients except the Highland regiments but who now, since the repeal of 1782, saw the prospect of a large market' (Hobsbawm, 2007, p.30)

¹⁰⁵ Of the Allan brothers *Vestiarium Scoticum* (1842) Trevor-Roper writes: It appeared in a sumptuous edition limited to fifty copies. The series of coloured illustrations of tartans was the first ever to be published and was a triumph over technical difficulties. These illustrations were executed by a new process of 'machine printing' and, in the words of a scholar writing fifty years later, 'for beauty of execution and exactness of detail have not been excelled by any method of colour-printing subsequently invented'. John Sobieski Stuart, as editor, supplied a learned commentary and new proofs of the authenticity of the manuscript: a 'traced facsimile' of Bishop Leslie's autograph in it and a 'transcript' of his receipt for it. The manuscript itself, he said, had been 'carefully collated' with a second manuscript recently discovered by an unnamed Irish monk in a Spanish monastery, unfortunately since dissolved; and another manuscript, recently in the possession of Lord Lovat, was also cited, although it had unfortunately been carried to America and there lost; but it was being actively sought...' (Hobsbawm, 2007, p.33)

historical materialist and counter-canonic. This dialectical, or reflexive, rendering of meaning through form and intent is, in addition, an opportunity for a critical realist rejection of the oneness of seeing common to classical narration. In short, within the context of a subaltern nationalism of empire, Brecht's 'crude thinking' – a *plumpes denken* – encouraged by Thomas Hirschhorn's political modernist exhortation 'Quality No!, Energy Yes!' – enables an aesthetic and conceptual antidote to the vulgarity of naïve realisms – whether of right, left or centrist orientation. As Nairn writes: 'Essentially what today's all-or-nothing nationalism denies is this complex if unromantic inheritance. It has forgotten about the partial, negotiated, but nevertheless real autonomy of domestic sovereignty' (Nairn, 1997, p.204). Against such naïve formulations, the *William Pitt The Younger Night-Wear Sporrans* (2018) (Fig.62) presents a counter-hegemonic synthesis of ruling-class ceremonial and 'low' material now sceptical of the 'givenness' (Hall, 2021, p.156) of Scotland's cultural signifiers.

Functioning then as a kind of 3D adjunct to Leonard's political modernist credo¹⁰⁷ - summarised in the poet's pithy remark 'How do you say no to 'Yes'?' - *PREFAB's* position on nationalism and 'Scottishness' is, simultaneously, sceptical of a nativism's neoliberal coda *and* antagonistic towards my family's conversion to repartitioning and a separatist party referred to, throughout my formative years, as the 'Tartan Tories'.¹⁰⁸ An example of false-consciousness of a kind the Scottish writer James Kelman notes:

¹⁰⁷ As Leonard pointed out: 'The national can mean jumping inwards from a perimeter, then trying to pack essentialisms supposedly within the perimeter into the core self to 'demonstrate' its validity (be it 'Scottishness' etc). This to me is laziness and a lack of clarity and questioning. It is the acceptance of 'givens' before the enquiry itself, rather than starting from the immediate, and compiling the givens case by case, outward. E-ducere, to educate, to lead outwards' (Leonard, online journal, 2015)

¹⁰⁸ For many years the Scottish nationalists were known to my parent's generation of working-class socialists as the 'Tartan Tories'. The roots of this derogatory term can be traced back to 1979 when the SNP sided with the Conservative party of Margaret Thatcher in a vote of no-confidence in Callaghan's Labour government. Callaghan described the SNP politicians as 'the turkeys who voted for Christmas'.

No formal distinction exists between the 'Yes' position and that of the 'No' campaign. In each case we share a platform with people whose politics are an anathema to us. What is at the core of nationalism? Is it 'Scottishness'? What is 'Scottishness'?...The idea that I shall stand shoulder to shoulder with the ruling class on behalf of and in defence of 'Scottishness' is ludicrous. This independence question has been agreed by the British State. They can just about live with it. They will find ways...Nationalism is the primary condition that will allow the ruling class to keep its clenched glove firmly on the neck of the majority of people (Kelman, 2014)

With this 'narrowness', 'subjective illusion' and 'romantic nonsense' (Nairn, 1977, p.181) in mind, the Sassenach sporrans are underscored, in theory and method, by Marx's notion of 'real historical man' (Marx, 1991, p.62) as opposed to 'Man' (Marx, 1991, p.62) a reified and thus ahistorical counterpart. Evidence of an evolving or embryonic political modernist praxis, evidenced in the earlier *PREFAB* prams with their allusions to the craft properties of the conventional scale-model, or the redux *Export* cans nostalgic mash-up of expressionism and lobotomised past-times such as televised sport *The Ill-Informed Scottish Nationalist Day-Wear Sporran* seeks to challenge the 'dominant naturalism' (Williams, 1976, p.317) or, in Nairn's words, the 'fakelore of Gaelicism' (Nairn, 1997, p.207) in which identity is regarded as pre-existing and ready-made. Consequently, the central focus of these grungy ante-upping sporrans, is to enable a critical detachment: a distancing through which the spectator may enter upon a 'process of producing themselves and their situations' (Williams, 1976, p.318). In this way, the sporran's labels – at times a form of Brechtian pamphleteering – play a key role.

Referencing, in a dissident mannerism, the *Vestiarium Scoticum* (1842) – the Allan brother's catalogue of made-up clan tartans – the labels, which utilise a range of approaches including cut-up bits of white-washed cardboard or the rectilinear stickers used on domestic freezer bags – function

in much the same way as the anti-naturalist devices in Brecht's Epic theatre. Thus, similar to one of Brecht's actors prefacing his or her lines with 'he said' (Williams, 1976, p.319) or using either third person or past tense, *PREFAB's* self-conscious stickers and tabs such as *The £1400 Subsidy (Per Scottish Person) Fantasy Sporrán* or *The Thick-Sliced, Subsidised, Proud One-Nation Night-Wear Sporrán RRP?* (juxtaposed with a pre-existing upside down label reading Thick Sliced Breaded Dry Cured Ham) perform an analogously denaturalising role. The bellicose pouches provide a complex seeing, where 'thinking above the flow of the play is more important than thinking from within the flow of the play' (Brecht : Williams, 1976, p.321), in order to degrade orthodox meaning. As Nairn writes of such objective, critical presentations:

New identities have to be made. Nationalists like to imagine them as pre-existing – Sleeping Beauty awaiting her Prince's speech – but they are not in fact a ready-made inheritance. Politics alone brings them into effective being...struggles or movements bestowing a sense of possibility and of a strategy pursuable against obstacles and over time. These alone create a practical standpoint in the present from which an 'inheritance' can be estimated, or rendered less ambiguous. Great risks and defeats are the usual accompaniment of such struggles (Nairn, 1997, p.186)

Hell-bent on applying Brecht's 'direct, self-revealing address to the audience' (Williams, 1976, p.321), the self-conscious and ironic money-bags originate, in part, from an earlier series of drawings titled *Scotland The Brave: A Graphic History of Scotland 1514-2014* (2014). These monochrome hand-drawn satires are an early example of an approach seeking to distance itself, in practice, from over-reliance on naturalist convention, as seen in preceding works such as *The Tension of a Line: A Portrait of Perth Prison* (2010).¹⁰⁹ A notable example of *Scotland the Braves* naive aide-memoires, is *The*

Battle Of Culloden, 16th April 1746 (2014) (Fig.52). Effected in the style of 18th century Scottish satirist James Gillray, and positioned within the book's radical anthropology - an intuitive, if misunderstood, use of montage - between representations of *The Highland and Lowland Clearances (1730-1890)* (2013) (Fig.53) and *The Trial Of John MacLean, High Court, Edinburgh, 9th May 1918* (2013) (Fig.54)), it recalls the last battle to be fought on British soil. In the drawing, a seagull wearing a lop-sided Jacobin bonnet is fatally pierced with broadswords, daggers, syringes (an oblique reference to my lived experience of illegal opiate use within the prison system and to Scotland's escalating number of heroin-related deaths)¹¹⁰ and government decree, both past and present.¹¹¹ Perched in a grotty public toilet, the stoic bird, surrounded by artificial limbs, skulls and the detritus of imperial conquest, is accompanied by a web-footed Tesco bag singing Flower of Scotland.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Created during a year-long unsubsidised 'Artist's Residency' in Perth prison: a project fulfilled whilst holding down full-time employment.

¹¹⁰ At the time of writing, Scotland has recorded, for the third year in succession, the highest level of drug deaths (1,339 – a 5% increase on 2019) in Europe.

¹¹¹ I exhibited the *Scotland the Brave* drawings in the Scottish parliament in June 2015. Having signed an agreement that I would abide by protocols relating to exhibiting artists (namely that I would only engage in conversation with an MSP if they instigated it), I was shocked when upon viewing a drawing dealing with heroin addiction in the Scottish prison system, an SNP MSP who chaired the 'Justice Committee' remarked 'Well, if they weren't taking heroin they'd be throwing slates from the roof'. Having witnessed first-hand the pain and destruction wrought by the use of smack in Perth, I impertinently replied 'But you wouldn't say that if it was your son, or grandson, or brother, or nephew.'. At this she promptly turned away to deal with more important matters.

¹¹² I remember quite vividly as a young boy being taken to visit Culloden battlefield. About the rather non-descript boggy field

Predating the Damascene moment with the discarded Lambert & Butler cigarette packet circa 2015, the drawing displays a critical-naivety in which symbol and meaning are taken as fixed and uni-linear. Nonetheless, the appearance of the hand-drawn Tesco bag represents, I now understand, an early precursor to *PREFAB's Post-Fordist Welding Masks* and their use of supermarket carrier bags. Whilst significantly, the hand-printed titles at the bottom of each drawing (a method appropriated from Gillray) and the use of speech bubbles and passages of historical information, can now be seen as precursors to the ham-packets sardonic labels. Pushing back against the conventions and apparatus of the bourgeois academy, such critical-objective emphases recalls Brecht's words on the bourgeois theatre's techniques of production:

Today we see the theatre being given absolute priority over the actual plays. The theatre apparatus's priority is a priority of means of production. This apparatus resists all conversion to other purposes, by taking any play it encounters and immediately changing it so that it no longer represents a foreign body within the apparatus. The theatre can stage anything; it theatres it all down (Brecht : Williams, 1976, p.320)

Consequently, the historical materialist pouches signal the emergence of a neo-Brechtian aesthetic attuned to both the multi-accentual and non-linear. To this end, the redux sporrans and their political modernist captions – developed further in a recent series of faux medals with inscriptions and labels reading 'This Object Seeks To Demystify Ruling-Class Fetish Symbols', 'Saxe-Coburg Gotha

there hung a feeling of reverence, of irreparable loss. The Well of the Dead into which the bodies of the dead clansmen were piled, served as a brutal memorial to the barbarity of what is for many Scots solely an English atrocity. It was only much later through my own reading that I understood that Lowland Scots had been complicit with Cumberland's forces in the quashing of Highland resistance. As Devine notes, during the second Scottish Jacobin rebellion ¹¹² of 1745 Charles Edward Stuart's army, including disaffected secularists and mercenaries who, despite differences in religious faith, were united against an *ancien regime* notable for distributing 'places, patronage and rewards among only a favoured few' (Devine, 2006, p.36). To my mind, the common causal factor linking and motivating the Jacobite insurgency of 1745 (aside from the Stuart attempts to ascend to the British throne) and that shaping *PREFAB's* critical realist objects, is the provision of capital as determined by a Protestant elite.

(Bogus) Fetish Symbol', 'Refurbishment Of Royal Palaces = £364m – Cost Of New Royal Yacht = £200m - 4.3m Children Live In Poverty In The U.K' and 'For God & Empire (One Motto Of The Ruling-Class)' - sarcastic citations and irritating taunts - a means to anchor meaning - instance an approach in which praxis functions, in Hall's words, as a 'work of totalisation perpetually in process' (Hall, 2021, p.13). In *The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees*, Hall writes:

Ideas of 'national identity' and 'national greatness' are intimately bound up with imperial supremacy, tinged with racist connotations and underpinned by a four-century-long history of colonisation, world market supremacy, imperial expansion and global destiny over native peoples. It is therefore much more difficult to break because the ideological terrain of this particular social formation has been so powerfully structured in that way by its previous history. These historical connections define the ways in which the ideological terrain of a particular society has been mapped out. They are the 'traces' which Gramsci mentioned: the 'stratified deposits in popular philosophy,' which no longer have an inventory, but which establish and define the fields along which ideological struggle is likely to move (Hall, 2021, p.153)

Deconstructing the 'stratified deposits' (Hall, 2021, p.153) of my childhood memory of Tattoo and Assembly Hall, the collection of faux military medals seek - in a development of the anti-romantic sporran's use of counter and complex seeing - to juxtapose the aesthetic conventions of British militaria with the 'poor' materials of the staff canteen. Assembled on the day of the Royal wedding in May 2018, the bogus medallion *The Halliburton Award For Gallantry And Boosting Shareholder Dividends* (2018) looks to repurpose the nation-State pennant as a site of Jacobin resistance. Redolent of a primitive primary school classroom aesthetic, the phony award was inspired by

Leonard's blunt anti-Establishment - and socially-purposive appeal¹¹³ - to 'throw some of the baggage back!'. Rejecting, in his words, the 'hopelessly agenda corrupted' (Leonard, 2014, Preface) language of state commemorative and its complicity in the reduction of social experience to mere 'bought behaviour-pattern' (Leonard), the anti-royalist medal is intended as a riposte to the hypocrisy of a Ukanian imaginary circa 2014, under-written by the conflicting forces of the residual conservatism of the inter-war years and an emergent social liberalism. This dissident view, simultaneously anti-militarist and anti-capitalist, was encouraged by Kelman's (a close friend of Leonard's) anti-establishmentarian view of British democracy. Kelman states:

We're indoctrinated by the State to assume that every shade of opinion is included in its own political process. It suggests that we can all be accommodated within a political framework that is so extraordinarily hierarchical that it includes a large extended family, each of whose members we must address as Your Majesty. One day I'll be offered one of these medals of Empire...The OBE or the MBE or whatever it is artists, sports stars and social celebrities are offered. Maybe I'll accept the offer, who knows, I'm guessing! Then I'll discover for myself whether or not we're allowed to break the monotony and use a synonym. When Prince Charles presents me, no, forget that! When one of the nephews of a third cousin of Prince Charles presents me with the medal, instead of addressing him as Your Gracious Majesty, I'll go for a synonym. Thank you! Your Benevolent Magnificent. Thank you! Your Benign Radiance! Thank you! Your Merciful Glory!...When we play about with these synonyms we land in territory usually associated with Almighty God. This territory is fundamental to the elitist hierarchical load of shite we know as British democracy. Of course it is farcical, but the

¹¹³ Delivered, one Saturday afternoon, over a cup of tea and a plate of biscuits, in his study overlooking a pedestrian crossing on the edge of Glasgow's Kelvingrove park.

crucial factor is that within this political framework there is no place to go. (Kelman, 17th Edinburgh Independent Radical Book Fair, 2014)

With Leonard's humanism in mind, the medal's critically-conscious rebel spirit is embodied in a collagist frontispiece 'decorated' with an image of a grimacing Dick Cheney juxtaposed with pseudo-Baroque scrolls snipped from an empty can of Stella Artois. Mounted on cardboard torn from a discarded Amazon Prime package, the medal (Fig.61), and its various iterations, evidences an experimental re-materialising of the indexical traces of neo-Victorian ceremonial, along with allusions to the causal forces of finance-capital. In this too, the anti-auratic citation – bolstered by Kelman's use of a (Glaswegian) working-class vernacular – is, in Brechtian usage, a negation of the negation. As Leslie notes on Benjamin's attempt to resolve the real contradictions between new technologies and auratic object:

'In notes for the 'Artwork essay' Benjamin writes how the 'passionate' inclination of contemporary masses to 'bring things closer' and bridge the distance between themselves and objects may be only the reverse side of the sense of an increasing alienation from things and from the self. In this way, loss of aura becomes a precondition for political action, because it both signals and makes possible a clarified understanding of the alienated relationship of people to things and to themselves' (Leslie, 2000, p.152)

Giving short shrift to the hegemony of nation-State lingua-franca, *PREFAB*'s seditious medal was also inspired by Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1931) and the sociograms of American artist Mark Lombardi (1951-2000) (Fig.55). Drawing on the former's satiric representation of the Chicago stock exchange and the latter's conflation of classical realist line-drawing with the systemic corruption of

(American) capitalism,¹¹⁵ *The Award For Gallantry* sought to counter, in a local sense, the naïve- realism of the likes of *Poppies: Weeping Window* (2018) by Paul Cummins (Fig.56). Displayed - without substantive explanatory captioning - to great acclaim on the ramparts of Carlisle Castle in November 2018 (the ramparts from which the Jacobin arriere-garde were hung as the Forty-Five neared its bloody climax at Drumossie Moor), *Poppies* provided further evidence of a dominant ideology at work in fetishistic memorialisation¹¹⁶ in the service of power.¹¹⁷ Against sentimental glorification of the war dead, *PREFAB*'s rebel honor opposes a 'display-identity' (Nairn, 1997, p.207)¹¹⁸ underscored, in this instance, by Cummins's brand of state-sanctioned formalism. Analogously, of Brecht's fractious relationship with the Berlin avant-garde circa 1930, Stephen Parker writes:

Brecht attacked the naivety of avant-gardists...arguing that these impoverished practitioners were in thrall to prevailing economic interest. They did not recognise their

So be careful how you call
Those un-deferential
Ever essential
Quite indefensible
Yet indispensable
Throwouts from the deepest pit of all!

¹¹⁵ As the curator Robert Hobbs notes in *Mark Lombardi: Global Networks* (2003): 'Certain things that are listed in the drawing are in red. These represent court judgments, actual dollar amounts. That is verifiable information. And I think that Lombardi himself realized that not everything could be verified. So I think what you have instead is names. We know about connections of names. Exactly what is that connection is hard to characterize. So that is a line with an arrow in one direction, or an arrow in two directions. So it's really the abstract component of the work of art. It's what can be represented, and – really – what cannot be represented' (Hobbs, 2003)

¹¹⁶ 7000 men from Carlisle's Border Regiment were killed in WWI.

¹¹⁷ As Brecht's Galileo remarks to Andrea, his young apprentice: 'Unhappy is the land that breeds no hero! No, Andrea...unhappy is the land that needs a hero' (Brecht).

¹¹⁸ Despite their best efforts to confront the causative effect of capitalist seeing and knowing, when *PREFAB*'s medallions were presented in Carlisle's large Market-hall they were naïve to the reality of the market's free-hold. Owned by Carlisle City Council, the hall is let to the arms manufacturer BAE Systems. Providers of 'precision munitions, artillery systems and missile launchers to a global customer base' (BAE Systems website), BAE owns a 99-year-head-lease on the Market-hall with an option to extend the term by 51 years. In turn, the UK's largest arms producer sublets the market to the Council ¹¹² on an under-lease coterminous with the head-lease. The Council then sub-underlet the stalls to the Market-hall tenants on 'easy in-easy out leases'.

dependence in a situation in which art had taken on the form of a commodity within the apparatus of the culinary entertainment industry, which Brecht was determined to expose through parody (Parker, 2014, p.277)

Rejecting conventionalist ways of seeing and telling, the '*H' Jones* bauble¹¹⁹ satirises the mystificatory portrayal of British war hero and martyr Lt. Col. 'H' Jones VC (1940-1982)¹²⁰ - whilst offering a belated riposte to the advisor in Portobello Job Centre who, in light of my then recent completion of post-graduate studies in European Fine Art, suggested, in the winter of 1995, that I join the Parachute Regiment – in order to confront residual notions of Ruritanian heroism.¹²¹ As Nairn writes:

Speech, or the style of command are the nerve of 'class': 'class' is the nerve of an 'Unwritten Constitution' where power is wielded through Majestically-descended 'conventions'; and the moral identity which is the framework of British nationalism (Nairn, 2011, p.70).

Featuring ready-made over-sized barcodes and 'No. 1 BRAND' and 'SPECIAL OFFER' branding, this prefabricated anti-medallion strives, in Anderson's words, against a naïve-understanding in which 'the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1997, p.7).¹²² In this way too, the *Jones* award aims to subvert dangerous 'delusions of immemoriality'

¹¹⁹ In reality, a small hand-made cruciform cut from rusty steel-plate.

¹²⁰ Formerly 3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment and posthumous 'hero' of the Falklands War.

¹²¹ Jones was killed by Argentinian machine-gun fire as he stormed an enemy position. It is important to note however that Jones' actions caused the death of two of his 'bodyguard', compelled, as they were by military protocol to follow his every move.

¹²² In July 2021 I completed a second series of parodic medals. The target of these more elaborate awards was the British Royal family, represented by unflattering photographs of key members surrounded by images of vicious looking corgis. In turn these collaged images were related to a hand-written text detailing the projected costs of palace refurbishments and a new royal yacht (approximately £300m and £200m respectively) and statistical information on the level of child poverty (figures estimate 4.3m British children live in poverty) in 'modern' Britain.

(Nairn, 1997, p.211) and so challenge the ancient-regime's maudlin 'language of continuity'

(Anderson, 2006, p.11). Mulvey writes:

The fetishist overrates his object, and ignoring the common-sense value attributed to it by society, secretly attaches mysterious powers to it. But, however intensely invested, this secret belief is vulnerable, acknowledging, ever more secretly, what is simultaneously disavowed. For an individual, the fetish object may be invested with private magical or sexual significance, but distortions of value and attributions of inappropriate meaning may also be shared by social groups in a kind of collective fantasy. The fetish thus acts, either individually or collectively, as a sign, signalling the intervention of fantasy into the normal course of the reality principle. And the intervention of fantasy signals a point of anxiety which cannot face the possibility of knowledge, and in the process of avoiding it, erects a belief in an object that, in turn, denies knowledge of its actual value. While supporting the suspension of disbelief, the fetish also materialises the disavowal, the unspeakable, the repressed (Mulvey, 1996, p. 122)

Framed thus, the *PREFAB* anti-fetishes propose a form of anti-reification, or reverse reification.

Refusing to 'do as one's told' (Nairn, 1997, p.205), this 'disincorporation' (Nairn, 1997, p.217)¹²³ of Britishness and militariness, in 'discount store manner' (Hyman, 2000, p.70), refuses a 'tacky Heritage sideshow' (Nairn, 1997, p.211) whose signification allures as a cover for militarism, monarchism and monetarism. As Nairn sardonically remarks of the Yookay's mystificatory totems: 'Wha's like us? Damned few, and all dead. Well, yes actually we killed most of them off in our North-British uniforms' (Nairn, 1977, p167).

¹²³ Queen Elizabeth's recent awarding of a George Cross medal to the NHS comes to mind.

2.5 *PREFAB*: Photo epigrams – Part 1



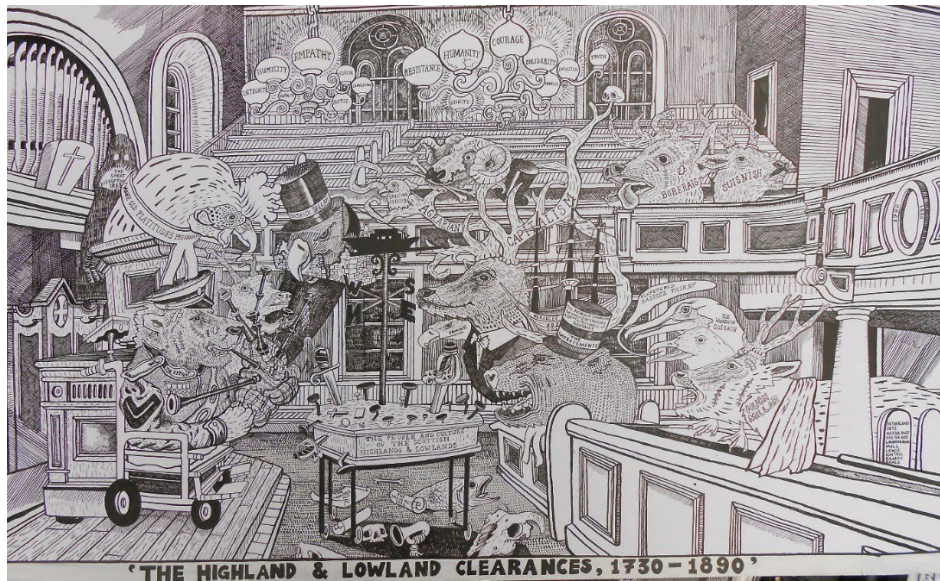
(Fig.51) 'In the dark times, will there also be singing? Yes, there will also be singing.

About the dark times' (Brecht). *Andy*, HMP Perth, pencil on paper (2007).



(Fig.52) 'War is like love; it always finds a way' (Brecht). *The Battle of Culloden, 16th April 1746*

(2013).

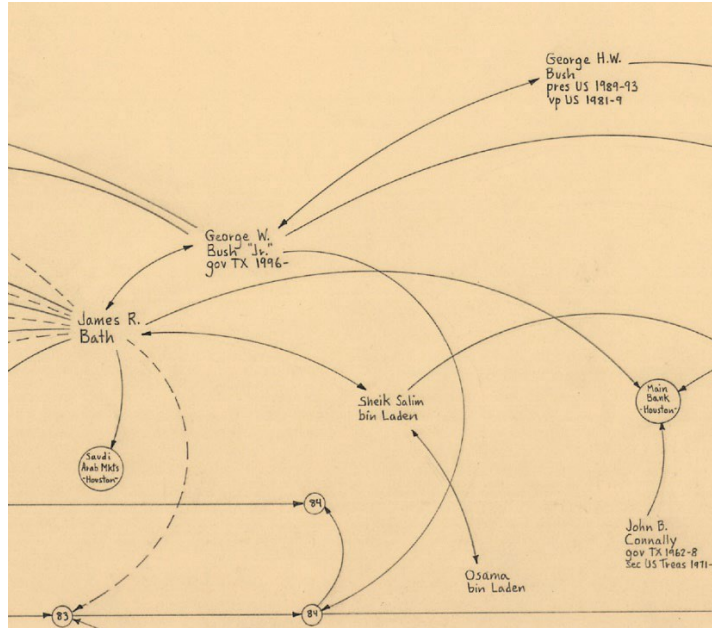


(Fig.53) 'Mankind lives by its head. Its head won't see him through. Inspect your own. What lives off that? At most a louse or two' (Brecht). *The Highland & Lowland Clearances, 1730-1890* (2013)



(Fig.54) 'For once you must try not to shirk the facts: Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts' (Brecht).

The Trial of John MacLean, High Court, Edinburgh, 9th May 1918 (2013)



(Fig.55) 'The wickedness of the world is so great, you have to keep running so your legs won't be stolen from under you!' (Brecht). *George W. Bush, Harken Energy and Jackson Stevens 1979-1990,*

Mark Lombardi.



(Fig.56) 'Don't be afraid of death so much as an inadequate life' (Brecht). The grave of my grandad's eldest brother - Private R Newlands 58759, 11th Bn., Cameronians (Scottish Rifles),

Alexandria, Hadra.



(Fig.57) 'Corpses sour you. They are bad for objectivity' (Brecht). *Poppies: Weeping Window* (2018), Paul Cummins, Carlisle Castle.

July 13th

monarchism, militarism, monetarism



sep 18th  choose your flag

(Fig.58) 'What they could do with round here is a good war. What else can you expect with peace running wild all over the place? You know what the trouble with peace is? No organization'

(Brecht). *Sep 18th – Choose Your Flag* (2014), Tom Leonard.

August 28th



(Fig.59) 'He thought in other heads, and in his own, others besides himself thought' (Brecht). *The*

Holy Grail of Marketing Brands (2014), Tom Leonard.

August 14th



"As member of Nato, an independent Scotland would spell out its opposition to nuclear weapons."



N, I, M, B,
Y, I, S, M,

(Fig.60) 'The defeats and victories of the fellows at the top aren't always defeats and victories for

the fellows at the bottom' (Brecht). *N, I, M, B, Y, I, S, M,* (2014), Tom

Leonard.



(Fig.61) 'Thinking is one of the greatest pleasures of the human race' (Brecht). *The Halliburton Award For Gallantry And Boosting Shareholder Dividends* (2019).



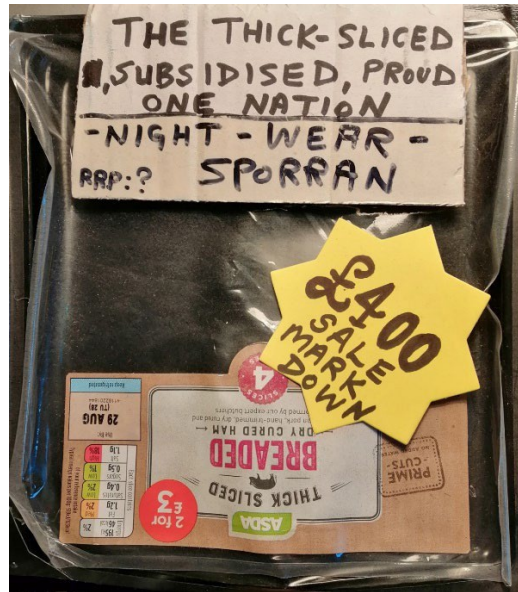
(Fig.62) 'It's all right to hesitate if you then go ahead' (Brecht). *The William Pitt The Younger Night-Wear Sporran* (2018).



(Fig.65) 'If you join the rat race — you're in the race of rats' (Brecht). *The Invented Clan McLeod Night-Wear Sporran* (2019).



(Fig.66) 'When something seems 'the most obvious thing in the world' it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up' (Brecht). *The £1400 Subsidy (Per Scottish Person) Fantasy Sporran* (2019).



(Fig.67) 'What happens to the hole when the cheese is gone?' (Brecht). *The Thick-Sliced Subsidised Proud One-Nation Night-Wear Sporrán* (2019)



(Fig.68) 'The finest plans have always been spoiled by the littleness of them that should carry them out. Even emperors can't do it all by themselves' (Brecht). *The 'H' Jones Award For Micro-Management In The Face Of The Enemy* (2019).



(Fig.69) 'When the waters poured into Atlantis, the rich men still screamed for their slaves'

(Brecht). *The Fruity Blasts (No Added Sugar) PREFAB Sporrans* (2018).



(Fig.71) ‘General, your tank is a powerful vehicle. It smashes down forests and crushes a hundred men. But it has one defect: It needs a driver. General, your bomber is powerful. It flies faster than a storm and carries more than an elephant. But it has one defect: It needs a mechanic. General, man is very useful. He can fly and he can kill. But he has one defect: He can think’ (Brecht). *PREFAB* beer cans, Market-hall, Carlisle, April 2019.



(Fig.72) ‘Whenever there are great virtues, it's a sure sign something's wrong’ (Brecht). The *PREFAB Kestrel Lager Can* ‘repatriated’, Moredun Park Gardens, 2018.

2.6 Outside The Narrative (Carlisle Market-Hall, 2019)



(Fig.73) The *PREFAB Post-Fordist Welding Masks* and prams, Market-Hall, Carlisle, 2019.

The theatre is precisely that practice which calculates the place of things *as they are observed*; if I set the spectacle here, the spectator will see this; if I put it elsewhere, he will not (Barthes, 1977, p.69)

I opened the stall each morning at 9am. For some reason it felt incumbent upon me to align my ‘stall’ with the protocols of the wider Market-hall. At that time of the morning the market, comprised of fifty or so stalls arranged around a central cruciform of intersecting pathways, was reassuringly quiet. Only the no-frills cafe diagonally across from mine, was open. The café was run by a pinched looking woman in her late-thirties who seemed to view me and mystuff with some suspicion. At that time of the morning,

my direct neighbours, Hayley's Pets & Plants and the Top 2 Toe Nail Salon, were still shuttered. The only other sign of life was at Romano Pizza. Its proprietor, a friendly man from Rome, would be busily preparing for a lunchtime rush of office-workers and school-kids. By comparison, I felt rather idle and faintly ridiculous: the pretentious 'artist' in 'Unit 66'.

It was clear that my stand's assortment of gaudy polemic and ironic signage had marked me out as bogus: something to be approached, if at all, with a degree of scepticism. The woman at Fabrics & Threads ('Navy Poly-cotton 60 ins. wide only £2.99 p mtr'), kept her distance and, if the other stall-holders caught my eye they offered only a perfunctory smile. Amidst this uncertainty, the friendly Roman provided a much-needed source of camaraderie.

Located on a busy corner in the centre of the market, 'Unit 66' was a former shoe stall previously been run by 'an old married couple', recently retired. Many of the other units were empty, a result, the pizza chef confided, of a recent increase in rent. Apparently, many of the other traders believed that the increase meant it was 'only a matter of time' before the eclectic mix of clothes stalls, cobbler, vape-counter, fruit and veg stall, card shop, newsagent, florist and beautician, would close. People seemed convinced the place would become, in their derisory words, a 'food-hall'.

Amongst my motley collection of parodic commodities was a batch of over-sized Kestrel Lager cans (one of my grandad's favourite drinks); 'The Prefab Nixon Shock Cigarette Lighters' (their display stand was decorated with a colour photograph of a leering

Richard Nixon); 'The Ann Pettifor Heterodox Economist Torches', displayed in a ready-made 'point of sale' removed surreptitiously the previous week from the local Poundland; and a batch of lacquer-coated 'Prefab Feminist Economist Tennent's Lager Cans'.

On the shelves below sat garish toy M16 machine-guns mounted on roughly made cardboard bases - inscribed with Marxist slogans such as 'A Tool For Primitive Accumulation', 'A Tool For Defence' and 'Between Equal Powers Force Decides'. Next to the fake assault rifles were arranged nine oversized redux Duracell and Energizer AA batteries; 'The General Augusto Jose Ramon Pinochet Ugarte Cigar Box' (discordantly placed between 'The Antonio Gramsci Common Sense Is The Ruling Class Sense Cigar Box' and 'Brecht's Complex Seeing Cigars (motto: Quality Augsburg Cigars - Revealing The Causal Networks Since 1920)'); fashioned, with the help of my young daughter, from used toilet rolls and roughly sawn plumber's pipe smeared with brown paint, the faux cigars had ashy tips made from yellowing masking-tape speckled with thick dots of felt-tip pen.

On the stall's lower shelves were displayed the parodic medals 'The General Jorge Rafael Videla Medal Awarded For Evil' and 'The George W. Bush Medal Awarded For The Liberation Of The Kurds'. These were juxtaposed with reconfigured welding-masks wrapped in Tesco carrier-bags and redux cans of Stella Artois decorated with photographs of Lenin and Brecht. These asymmetric cans were inscribed with statistical data from the 'finance-house' Credit Suisse - '42 individuals now have the same net-worth as 32 billion people'.

Stacking the shelves called to mind the small white-washed kiosk at the Assembly Hall and my mother who, for a brief period of time in the 1980s, worked part-time as a 'merchandise' for St. Ivel. On one occasion my sister and I had to hang around the fridge cabinets of a Musselburgh supermarket while she hurriedly 'priced-up' tubs of butter and cheese.

The didactic Stella cans were matched with a batch of oversized cans of McEwan's Export. These surprisingly macho cans were decorated with iconic images of the champion boxers who I admired as a boy (and still do). Though certainly no pugilist, my father was an avid fan of fighters such as Marvellous Marvin Hagler, Barry McGuigan, and Nigel Benn. Along-side these rather nostalgic folk items were the more cerebral 'A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism Table Decorations'. Roughly made aide-memoires, these Marxist-sociological ornaments featured an explanatory montage of neoliberalist¹²⁴ credo in the form of Bald eagles and references to economic liberalists such as Hayek and Friedman, juxtaposed with nods to Marx's theory of surplus value. The 'ornaments' were intended for the desks or mantel-pieces of interested spectators.

One morning a group of white middle-aged women with Scottish accents passed the stall. Noticing the 'William Pitt The Elder Night-Wear Sporrans' one of the women remarked jokingly to her friend 'There's something for you Jean!'. Having glanced momentarily at the sardonic sporrans and their cheeky mix of fake-fur, Union flag fabric, budget tassels and Brechtian captions, the friend angrily retorted 'Ach! What a load of rubbish!'. From my

¹²⁴ Defined by Jeffries as 'the economic philosophy that sought to roll back the state and make the disadvantaged responsible for their well-being' (Jeffries, 2021, p.10).

standing position on the edge of the stall's raised platform I said something about an English Tory Prime Minister being the inventor of the sporran. 'Och! Rubbish!' she remarked. Over her shoulder, the friend explained with a smile 'She's a big nationalist'.

*Later in the week, a white-haired man in his seventies (pot-bellied, well-groomed and dressed in casual clothes) stopped at the edge of the stall. He had noticed, high on the top-shelf, The Prefab Post-Fordist Welding Masks. Prompted by this familiar symbol he began to recount his working-life as a welder. 'Fifty years for Bendalls', ¹²⁵ he told me. I told him my dad had been a welder, but the old guy was set on his monologue. He was, he said, 'time-served...from apprentice at fifteen to retirement at sixty-five...'. His pride was palpable as was his sense of loss. 'All changed now' he said wistfully - twice, before turning away. I remember feeling relieved that he hadn't thought I was taking the piss. As Benjamin writes in *Commentaries on Poems by Brecht*: 'Whoever wants to make the hard thing give way should miss no opportunity for friendliness'. (Benjamin, 1977, p.74)*

¹²⁵ Bendalls Engineering was founded in Carlisle in 1894 as a family owned business. In the 1920's, the company manufactured the body panels for Donald Campbell's Bluebird land and water record breaking speed machines. During the 1950's, Bendalls Engineering became one of the first suppliers of bespoke equipment into Windscale, Britain's first nuclear facility. In the 1970's, Bendalls manufactured pressure equipment for the burgeoning North Sea oil and land based petrochemical industry. In 1996, Bendalls Engineering was bought by Carr's Milling Industries PLC, now Carr's Group PLC, and became an essential part of the expanding Carr's Engineering Division. Our operational base, as of 2006, is a purpose-built 5000 square metre engineering facility in Kingstown Industrial Estate in Carlisle' (Bendalls website)

2.7 Reports From The Present (*PREFAB SUPERMARKET*, Carlisle, 2019)



(Fig.74) *PREFAB/SUPERMARKET*, Market-Hall, Carlisle, April 2019.

The table is finished, carpenter. Allow us to take it away. Stop planing it now. Leave off painting it. Speak neither well nor ill of it: We'll take it as it is. We need it. Hand it over
(Benjamin, 1977, p.31)

In April 2019 *PREFAB*'s political modernist objects were displayed in Carlisle's Market-hall. Using an auto-ethnomethodological approach, evident in the use of anecdote and memory as the base for a political modernist praxis, *PREFAB*'s parodic objects offered their unwitting audience of market-traders, shoppers, passers-by and interested art students, a lampoon of a traditional market-stall. With its defamiliarising mix of joke-shop aesthetic, anti-capitalist polemic and home-spun folk memorial, the stall – titled *SUPERMARKET* (Fig. 74) offered an irreverent radical tableaux of class-conscious commentary in the form of found-object, a copy of a National Lottery sign (the kind which stand outside newsagents), and boxes of *Good Doggy*

Dog Whistles.¹²⁶ This 'interested simulacrum' (Barthes, 1972, p.215), appearing, from a distance, to offer prospective spectators an array of low-value kitsch, designed to engage an audience out-with, in Wayne's words, the 'apparatus power' (Wayne, 2018, p.222) of the bourgeois institution. In this way, the installation's faux-merchandise, juxtaposed denaturalised versions of the familiar, whilst simultaneously opposing bourgeois conventions of white wall, picture frame, and plinth. In Brecht's case, in the context of East Germany circa 1945 – 1953, the 'Epic' opposed the politico-aesthetic authority of 'Socialist Realism': the prevailing orthodoxy as arbitrated by Lukacs and his 'Moscow clique' (Brecht : Willetts, 1993, p. xvi).

Berger writes:

Politically revolutionary artists hope to integrate their work into a mass struggle. But the influence of their work cannot be determined, either by the artist or by a political commissar, in advance. And it is here that we can see that to compare a work of imagination with a weapon is to resort to a dangerous and far-fetched metaphor. The effectiveness of a weapon can be estimated quantitatively. Its performance is isolable and repeatable. One chooses a weapon for a situation. The effectiveness of a work of imagination cannot be estimated quantitatively. Its performance is not isolable or repeatable. It changes with circumstances...There is no foreseeable quantitative correlation between the quality of a work of imagination and its effectiveness. And this is part of its nature because it is intended to operate within a field of subjective interactions which are interminable and immeasurable. This is not to grant to art an ineffable value; it is only to emphasise that the imagination, when true to its impulse, is continually and inevitably questioning the existing category of usefulness (Berger,

¹²⁶ The sides of which displayed an ironic repeating image of Winston Churchill's head collaged onto the body of a bulldog.

2001, p.223)

In this sense, the (encoded) aim of the satiric simulacrum of *SUPERMARKET*'s anti-naturalist mise-en-scene was to estrange both myself and the audience from hegemonic forms of 'interaction' (Berger, 2001, p.223) and 'usefulness' (Berger, 2001, p.223). Instead, *PREFAB*'s mock mimetic display, a form of one-man Brechtian installation, sought to lay bare the ideological limits of every-day routines of consumption and civic ritual. As Williams writes in *The Long Revolution* (1961):

We tend to underestimate the extent to which the cultural tradition is not only a selection but also an interpretation. We see most past work through our own experience, without even making the effort to see it in something like its original terms. What analysis can do is not so much to reverse this, returning a work to its period, as to make the interpretation conscious, by showing historical alternatives; to relate the interpretation to the particular contemporary values on which it rests; and, by exploring the real patterns of the work, confront us with the real nature of the choices we are making (Williams, 2011, p.74)

With its didactic Brechtian captioning the intention of the stall was also to introduce students from the University of Cumbria Institute of the Arts, to not only counter-conventional modes of curation and display, but to Marxist realist method. Rejecting the prevailing orthodoxy of classical realist venue and curation, the bogus stall was framed, methodologically and sociologically, as an example of a dissident and critically-conscious art-making. Both episodic

(epic) and anti-illusionist, *SUPERMARKET*'s bogus commodities were intended therefore as 'barriers to empathy' (Brecht): a means to reject, not simply, the 'cathartic phenomenon' (Brecht, 1972, p.106) of bourgeois seeing and knowing, but to debunk a received convention in which naturalism is taken as the natural successor to realism. A condition which, as Williams (citing Lukacs) contends, occurred when the bourgeoisie ceased to play a progressive historical role in 19th century Europe. As Brecht noted: 'Reality changes, in order to represent it, modes of representation must change' (Willett, 1978, p.51). That aside, the stall's anti-cathartic commodities and Marxist signage evince a 'complex seeing' enabling not, in Williams's words the 'revolutionary entry into a new world' (Williams, 2015, p.216), but an author-as-producer approach opposed to the vicissitudes of the neoliberal possessive-individualist academy and capitalist relations of exploitation. As Williams notes:

The notion of complex seeing, which becomes so important, is not to be associated with revolutionary entry into a new world, because that repeatedly in the plays does not happen. There is no transformation – there are modes of evasion, necessary to protect yourself against an oppressive society. That is a preoccupation to be deeply respected, given how much people have to do so. But it is notable how much he had to distance even this theme, setting so many of his major plays back in time (Williams, 2015, p.216)

In this way, the market-stall's anti-capitalist anti-subjectivist method, allied, in some part, to a form of hauntological imaginary underwritten by a willingness to confront, in Brecht's words, the culinary nature of bourgeois art-making. As such, *PREFAB SUPERMARKET*'s anti-culinary approach is manifest in a series of hand-made signs mixing the vernacular language

of (British) 'High Street' sale-signage (Everything Must Go or 2 For 1), with the didactic axioms 'Pessimism Of The Intellect - Optimism Of The Will', 'Modern Art For Modern Times', 'Anti-Value', 'Exchange-Value', 'Common Sense Is The Ruling Class Sense', and 'Accumulation For Accumulation's Sake: Production For Productions Sake'. Simultaneously Brechtian and Barthesian, the signs were intended to 'quicken' the meaning of the objects whilst enabling an art-making which is 'at once a protest (because it unmasks) and a reconciliation (because it explains)' (Barthes, 1981, p.74). Accordingly, the signs served to provide, in a Benjaminian sense, a form of fragmentary or constellative theses. A means to (re)frame capitalist commodity relations whilst seeking to reveal the 'monstrous otherness' (Mulvey, 1996, p.70) of economic liberalism. As Benjamin writes:

The relationship between the minute precision of the work and the proportions of the sculptural or intellectual whole demonstrates that truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter (Benjamin, 1978, p.29)

Grounded in a 3D semiology indebted to materialist theory, the garish signage functions as a means to steer readerly-reception toward writerly-design. With the repudiation of the Scottish figurative canon (and the 'soft' abstraction or 'non-representational' school of painting also prevalent in Glasgow School of Art circa 1992) in mind, the aim of *PREFAB* artefacts juxtaposing proletarian folk heroes such as Marvellous Marvin Hagler with mimetic 'goods' is to reverse, albeit locally and momentarily, the commodity's 'movement of the particular to the universal' (Marx : Harvey, 2010, p.63). And, in so doing, give voice, albeit in this instance a masculine and proletarian one, to a hitherto undisclosed interiority. In short,

the remade anti-bourgeois can becomes, in Mulvey's words, a 'site of anxiety' (Mulvey, 1996, p.73), a way to confront the 'privileged autonomy' (Mulvey, 1996, p.157) of museum, canvas and sculpture. In turn, the redux Export can is intended as a sociological poetic or poetics of feeling, in which an estranging dialectic of working-class iconography and capitalist commodity may serve as a new and oppositional imaginary. As Willett's notes of Brecht's 1926 essay *Emphasis on Sport*:

...Brecht was insisting on the need for what he called a 'smoker's theatre', where the audience would puff away at its cigars as if watching a boxing match, and develop a more detached and critical outlook than was possible in the ordinary German theatre, where smoking was not allowed. 'I even think', says a fragment, that in a Shakespearian production one man in the stalls with a cigar could bring about the downfall of Western art. He might as well light a bomb as light his cigar. I would be delighted to see our public allowed to smoke during performances. And I'd be delighted mainly for the actors' sake. In my view it is quite impossible for the actor to play unnatural, cramped and old-fashioned theatre to a man smoking in the stalls (Brecht : Willett, 1978, p.8)

Similar, I'd suggest, to late-Guston's rejection of mid-20th Century American modernism – epitomised, to my mind, in Jackson Pollock's (a close boyhood friend of Guston in 1930s LA) quasi-religious late-career abstractions – PREFAB's anti-auratic assemblages rely upon a method of speedy construction and 'poor' material. Disavowing figurative realist and subjectivist convention, this repudiation enables a praxis wherein the momentary and connotational may be fixed as a form of political surrealism. Whilst, to a lesser extent, serving

to activate a practical materialist reimagining of formative influences such as Bellamy and Max Beckmann. Consequently, the can's anti-classical aesthetic, wherein aura is defined by rarity, singularity, essence, originality and uniqueness – are demythified by the introduction of *PREFAB* 'A-effects' - plastic-lettering, slathered paint, runny glue and references to Marx's conception of surplus-value. In this sense, the aim of the can is to resignify (and de-reify) the fetishized original. And through this dereifying, reveal the real relations, the ghostly form, concealed within the commodity. In 1970 Guston said of his struggles with image-making:

The canvas is a court where the artist is prosecutor, defendant, jury and judge. Art without a trial disappears at a glance: it is primitive or hopeful, or mere notions, or simply startling, or just another means of making life more bearable. You cannot settle out of court (Rickey, 1989, p.166)

On an aesthetic level, the make-shift street-shrines Hirschhorn, like the contra-logic of Heartfield's anti-Nazi photomontages – underscore the *PREFAB* market-stall's 'observable badness' (Williams). Indebted to Hirschhorn's pseudo-shrines – comprising a montage of the raggedy-looking teddy bears, photocopies, clothes pegs, cling-film, football scarves, fan posters, artificial flowers, candles - mimic the spontaneous public memorials encountered at road-sides. By contrast, Hirschhorn's bogus sepulchres, commemorating modernist artists such as Mondrian or Freundlich (Hirschhorn's *Raymond Carver-Altar* (1999) commemorated the American modernist writer in the context of a Glasgow housing estate), confront the 'security system' (Hirschhorn, 2004, p.15) of the commodity-form. Of Hirschhorn's dereifying simulacra, Buchloh writes:

In particular it is Oldenburg's aesthetic of tatters, fragments and charred pieces of cardboard collected in the streets that articulated the sculptural transformations of the advanced stages

of consumer culture of the 1950s. These had brought about the total fragmentation of spatio-temporal experience, the devalorization of the use-value of objects, the ever-increasing rapidity of their planned obsolescence, and the perpetual acceleration of the cycles of object acquisition and expulsion to which Hirschhorn now responds with such precision. But Hirschhorn not only resuscitates Oldenburg's iconic approach to mass culture...he also repositions sculpture within the participating radicality of that historical context. Theirs were dialectical constructions embodying at all times spectatorial experience without reifying it, dissolving fetishistic objects without denying the pervasiveness of objecthood, conceiving sculptural constructs as mass-cultural mimesis in which the actual governing conditions of experience in public space were articulated without being monumentalized (Buchloh, 2004, p.79)

In the evolution of the *PREFAB* project, Hirschhorn's work serves therefore as counterpart to Guston's canonically constrained rebellion. As Hirschhorn recalls of his orthodox formal training in Graphic Design circa 1980:

As students we were always encouraged to go beyond the Rolls-Royce juxtaposed with the hungry Third World child. It took me a long time to understand that the really important thing was the Rolls Royce juxtaposed with the hungry Third World child (Buchloh, 2004, p.18)

Proletarianising cultural production in order to break with the prevailing conventions of the formalist avant-garde, Hirschhorn's reimagining of the art object, whether orthodox forms of design, drawing or sculpture, is of course indebted to Rodchenko's constructivist experiments. Building thus on the formal and theoretical breakthroughs of the Soviet avant-garde, Hirschhorn's format-busting 'sculpture' and proto-Cubist collage aims to debunk institutional convention to ensure the works

material value is 'ostentatiously withdrawn' (Buchloh, 2004, p.46). Analogously, the

PREFAB SUPERMARKET enacts a similarly devaluatory and revaluatory method. In short, Hirschhorn's assemblages, along-with Brecht's tough-minded materialism legitimise, theoretically and methodologically, *PREFAB*'s dissident use of the cast-aside. Framed thus, Hirschhorn's manipulation of the 'unestablished values' (Hirschhorn, 2004, p.15) of both the mass-produced and the cultish informs, methodologically speaking, *PREFAB*'s synthesis of Guston's *Interior* (Fig. 41) and Brecht's estrangement technique. A dialectic, no less, in which the devalued and the historical seek to challenge common sense notions of the autonomous object. As Brecht writes of the denaturalising and explanatory character of 'Epic' theatre:

The spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play. The production took the subject-matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding. When something seems 'the most obvious thing in the world' it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up (Willett, 1978, p.71)

Conscious of the polysemic capacity of stall, political modernist 'stock' and the context of the Market-hall's residual sign-system, a hand-written sign affixed to the stand's central column announced: 'This is an exhibition of Modern Art which reproduces a market-stall with home-made commodities as a means to critique 'our' economic system'. A form of didactic punctuation mark, this sign, I now understand, highlights *PREFAB*'s literarized theatre and its attempt to bridge the semiological gap between object and audience.

Adopting this direct address to the spectator is a further example of *PREFAB*'s

defamiliarising of the familiarising calligraphy of the neighbouring stalls. One such sign, exhorting the shopper to 'BUY NOW BEFORE THE NEXT FINANCIAL CRASH', was spotted by a middle class woman who, passing the stall with her husband, remarked sarcastically 'That's nice!' Relatedly, in another attempt to place the audience 'outside the scene' (Willett, 1978, p. 37) I placed two wire shopping-baskets in prominent positions on the floor. Filled with bits of FA-Cup shaped painted cardboard, these mordant awards were decorated with an assortment of printed labels reading 'MONO-MYTH', 'ME', and 'ME, ME, ME'. Surprisingly popular,¹²⁷ these prizes – wrapped, ironically, in sellotape to ensure their durability - were costed at an affordable and arbitrary £4.00. Importantly, the quality of these sardonic 2D anti-trophies bore little relation to their retail price. As Williams writes:

A Marxist theory of culture will recognise diversity and complexity, will take account of the continuity within change, will allow for chance and certain limited autonomies, but, with these reservations, will take the facts of the economic structure and the consequent social relations as the guiding string on which culture is to be understood (Williams, 1958)

¹²⁷ A number of the faux-trophies were sold.

PART THREE - CONCLUSION

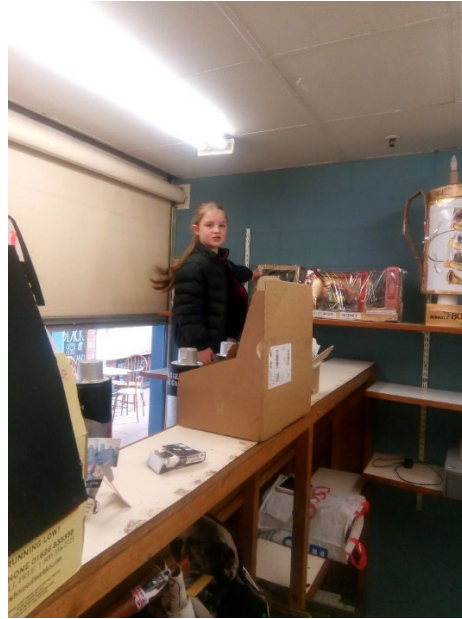
3.1 PREFAB: Photo epigrams – Part 2



(Fig.75) 'Everyone needs help from everyone' (Brecht). *PREFAB McEwan's Export Cans* (2016).



(Fig.76) 'There will always be hope because there will always be children' (Brecht). My children, Beau and Lexie, installing *SUPERMARKET*, April 2019.



(Fig.77) 'Love is the wish to give, not to receive.' (Brecht). Lexie installing *PREFAB* prams, April 2019.



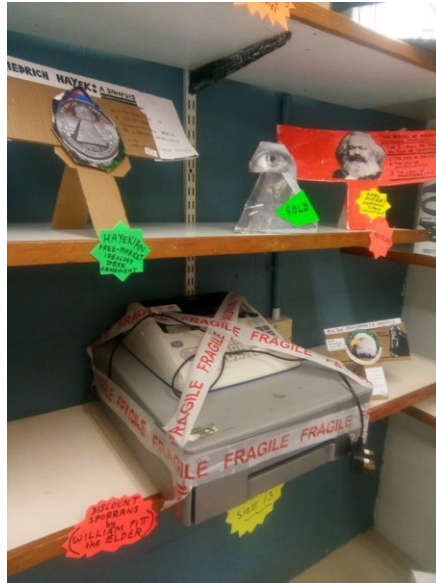
(Fig.78) 'Everyone chases after happiness, not noticing that happiness is right at their heels'
(Brecht). Beau with *PREFAB* cans.



(Fig.79) 'For those who follow in our wake' (Brecht). Lexie installs a satiric trophy.



(Fig.80) 'If you don't have fun, you don't have a show' (Brecht). Beau models the *PREFAB Post-Fordist Welding Mask*.



(Fig.81) 'What is the robbing of a bank compared to the founding of a bank?'

(Brecht). *SUPERMARKET* shelf, 2019.



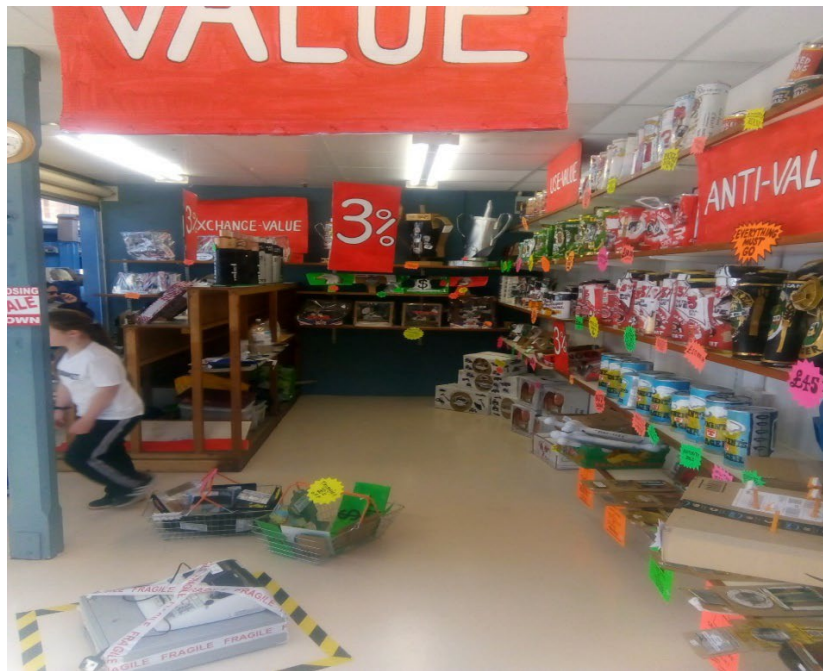
(Fig.82) 'Pleasures, First look from morning's window, The rediscovered book, Fascinated faces
Snow, the change of the seasons, The newspaper, The dog, Dialectics, Showering, swimming, Old
music, Comfortable shoes, Comprehension, New music, Writing, planting, Traveling, Singing, Being
friendly' (Brecht). *SUPERMARKET*, Carlisle Market-Hall, April 2019.



(Fig.83) 'Sometimes it's more important to be human, than to have good taste' (Brecht). *PREFAB Neo-Liberal Desk Ornaments.*



(Fig.84) 'Don't accept the habitual as a natural thing. In times of disorder, of organized confusion, of de-humanized humanity, nothing should seem natural. Nothing should seem impossible to change.' (Brecht). Lexie with *PREFAB* pram



(Fig.85) 'Don't expect the theatre to satisfy the habits of its audience, but to change them.'

(Brecht). Lexie amidst redux commodities.



(Fig.86) 'You can't write poems about trees when the woods are full of policemen.' (Brecht).

PREFAB in Carlisle Market-Hall, 2019.



(Fig.87) 'To those who does not know the world is on fire, I have nothing to say' (Brecht).

A SUPERMARKET shelf, 2019.



(Fig.88) 'Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the keenness to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the skill to manipulate it as a weapon; the judgment to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the running to spread the truth among such persons' (Brecht). SUPERMARKET, 2019.



(Fig.89) 'People who understand everything get no stories' (Brecht). *PREFAB Tartan Special cans.*



(Fig.90) 'None will improve your lot if you yourself do not' (Brecht). *PREFAB beer cans and critical realist signage, April 2019.*



(Fig.91) 'The world of knowledge takes a crazy turn when teachers themselves are taught to learn.'

(Brecht). *PREFAB A Brief History of Neoliberalism Table Decorations.*



(Fig.92) 'What are you working on?' Mr. K. was asked. Mr. K. replied: 'I'm having a hard time; I'm preparing my next mistake' (Brecht). Cans and parodic medals.



(Fig.93) 'For though the world has stood up and stopped the bastard, the bitch that bore him is in heat again' (Brecht). Marxist Realist signage, 2019.



(Fig.94) 'Grub first, then ethics' (Brecht). *PREFAB Kestrel Lager Cans.*



(Fig.95) 'Why be a man when you can be a success?' (Brecht). *PREFAB Mono-Myth Trophies.*



(Fig.96) 'Every day, to earn my daily bread I go to the market where lies are bought. Hopefully I take up my place among the sellers' (Brecht). *SUPERMARKET*, April 2019.



(Fig.97) 'Those against politics are in favor of the politics inflicted upon them' (Brecht). *PREFAB Plastic Martyr Bones*.



(Fig.98) 'All art forms are in the service of the greatest of all arts: the art of living' (Brecht).

SUPERMARKET (detail), Carlisle 2019.



(Fig.99) 'We attacked a foreign people and treated them like rebels. As you know, it's all right to treat barbarians barbarically. It's the desire to be barbaric that makes governments call their enemies barbarians' (Brecht). *The BAE Systems Award For Improving Share Price* (2018).



(Fig.100) 'As crimes pile up, they become invisible' (Brecht). *The Halliburton Award For Violence* (2018) and *The Share Price Share Price Award For Valour* (2018).



(Fig.101) 'Such a lot is won when even a single man gets to his feet and says No' (Brecht).

SUPERMARKET.



(Fig.102) 'For time is short and the unknown surrounds us; and it isn't enough just to live unthinking and happy, calmly bearing oppression and only learning wisdom with age' (Brecht).

SUPERMARKET promotional material, 2019.

3.2 Intimate Voices: Conclusions of a Political Modernist project

'Unhappy is the land that needs a hero.' (Brecht, Galileo)

In 2015 my Scotland the Brave graphic satires – including The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (2014) and Ken Murray & Alex Stephen Open the HM Barlinnie Special Unit, Glasgow, 1973 (2014) – were exhibited at the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh.

Protocol demanded that exhibiting artists should not, in any circumstance, engage MSPs (average salary at the time £64,470 excluding allowances (travel, staff costs) and expenses (accommodation etc.)) in unsolicited discourse. Conversation was permitted only if the politician instigated it. With this 'speak when you're spoken to' diktat in mind, I positioned myself, awkwardly, on the polished checkerboard marble floor of the £431 million building's (the original budget was £40m) faux-classical 'Black & White' corridor.

At some point an MSP happened along, en route, no doubt, between private office and the subsidised restaurant¹²⁸ with its majestic panoramas of Arthur's Seat and the 'Radical Road', and all the while safely ensconced behind the best bullet-proof glass that money could buy (my security guide proudly announced, 'it really is the people's parliament'). Sheafs of official looking documents clamped to their chest, the elected official stopped to peruse my Gillrayesque montage of images. Noticing their reaction to my sardonic references to 'law and order', I took my chance to ask the MSP – whom, serendipity dictated, was a member of the Orwellian sounding 'Justice' committee – if they were aware that at least 70% of Scotland's

¹²⁸ The MSP's restaurant is subsidised – by Scottish tax payers - to the tune of £12.29 per meal.

(male) prisoners were, in my experience as an art teacher in HMP Perth, habitual heroin users? With eye's widening and lips pursed, the people's tribune replied: 'Well, if they weren't doing drugs, they'd be on the roof throwing down slates.' To my (I thought acute) rejoinder: 'But you wouldn't say that if it was your brother, or son or nephew?', there was no further reply. The small procession – with a coterie of lackeys in tow – turned on its heel and processed onward, I supposed, to the next tartan-draped soiree.

'We're prisoners right enough. But so's fleas in a fur coat', said the late Tom Leonard (1944–2018), poet of vernacular Scots and acerbic critic of bourgeois norms. Tom was a friend of mine – a mentor and scabrous anti-establishmentarian instigator. In his debt and chief among influences, my research–practice project is historical and materialist in scope and approach.

Against ruling ideas¹²⁹ and interests, the project of *PREFAB* was motivated by a threefold ambition. In the first place, by a desire to devise a method of art-making counter to the dominant ideology of the art–world, academy and official culture which, secondly, articulated an anti-capitalist consciousness, produced during the aftermath of the 'long boom years' of the post-war social democratic order (circa 1989) down to the crisis of our present times. (The present crisis is manifest in deformation of the welfare state, austerity politics, populism, and the corresponding rise of ethnic nationalism.) The third strand of the intellectual development of *PREFAB*, entwined dialectically with the preceding pair, was to trace the structural-biographical formation of an emergent dissident art-practice (my own), as an inventory, that is, of the aforementioned *historical processes to date*.

¹²⁹ 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.' Marx, K., & F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1970, p. 64.

From this *starting point of critical elaboration*, the historical *and* materialist basis for the research was as an enacted re-memory of the lived experience of my working–class grandparents, Jimmy and Jessie Newlands, and in elective affinity with the lineage of the political modernist¹³⁰ movement. (The latter emerged in the arts of mainland Europe during the first decades and up to the midpoint of the twentieth century as a feature of an explicitly Marxist, revolutionary–left politics of that earlier period of world crisis.)¹³¹

Embodied in the personal history of a child of 1980s Edinburgh, the *PREFAB* home of the Newlands family has served to provide materialised traces of a capitalist culture of commodification. Alongside, that is, the authority of church and state as primary definers of a subsequent coming of age in Thatcher’s Britain, which marks, too, succession of a neoliberal era, which in turn has by now reached a point of crisis created by its own contradictions.

PREFAB has disavowed the moral compass of the liberal arts and art history whose habitual orientation is to privilege the psycho-pathology of the individual artist as solely determining of the ‘transcendent’ (quasi–religious) character of ‘great’ artworks (i.e., atomised of their historical and material circumstance).¹³² Instead, my critical and creative need (as neophyte political modernist) has been to locate art-making within the determining limits of socio–economic class, education and professional development.¹³³ For, as Williams stressed, ‘you cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without understanding its formation ... the relation between a project and a formation is decisive; and ... the emphasis of Cultural Studies is precisely that it engages with *both*,

¹³⁰ Rodowick, D. N., *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, University of California Press, 1994.

¹³¹ For example, Hobsbawm, E., ‘The Arts, 1914–45’, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century, 1914–91*, chapter 6, pp. 178–198, 1994.

¹³² Wolff, J., *The Social Production of Art*, 2nd edition, Macmillan, 1993.

¹³³ Berger, J., *Ways of Seeing*, BBC/Penguin, 1972.

rather than specializing itself to one or the other.’¹³⁴

In following Brecht (whom Williams and Barthes both acknowledged as key influence in their respective intellectual projects), as intimated here and (I hope) instanced throughout, the point of *PREFAB*’s theoretically informed practice has been to develop aesthetic forms which disclose the reified values of capitalist art and thought, in order therefore to imagine an anti-capitalist critique of the wider world through my own critical–creative practice. *PREFAB: Dissident Art-making Against Capitalist Common Sense* is a modest contribution towards these ends (i.e., in other words, ‘to show things as they really are’).¹³⁵

Lastly, by way of conclusion, the words of Brecht’s Galileo – great, unheroic astronomer and thinker – who nonetheless achieved a realignment of the material world into its proper orbit:

ANDREA: ...Your hands are stained’, we said. You’re saying: ‘Better stained than empty’.

GALILEO: Better stained than empty. Sounds realistic. Sounds like me. New science, new ethics (Brecht, 2006, p.106)

¹³⁴ Williams, R., ‘The Future of Cultural Studies’, *The Politics of Modernism*, Verso, 1989, p. 151.

¹³⁵ See Williams, R., ‘Realism’, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Fontana, 2nd edition, 1983, pp. 257–62.

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5. My father's sketch of the floorplan of his Greendykes prefab (2016).
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7. Jimmy Newlands with his daughter (my mother) Margaret outside their Ferniehill prefab circa 1963.
8. Margaret Newlands in Ferniehill circa 1963.
9. My Auntie Janis (left) and my mother outside their prefab circa 1962.
10. The Newlands family circa 1955
11. Portobello Old & Windsor Parish Church, Bellfield Street, Edinburgh.
12. John 'Jock' Fowler outside his miner's cottage, The Jewel, Edinburgh circa 1935
13. The Fowler family outside Portobello Old & Windsor Parish Church circa 1955.
14. The wedding of John Watson Fowler and Margaret Victory Newlands in 1968.
15. Me and my maternal grandmother 'Jessie', in the back garden of 11 Durham Road, 1973.
16. Me (with wings) outside the 'stair-door' at Moredun Park Gardens circa 1977.
17. Me and my sister Jennifer, outside Moredun Park Gardens, circa 1979.
18. Gran and me in Moredun circa 1984.
19. My maternal grandmother's eldest brother Alexander 'Alec' or 'Sandy' Arundel.
20. Scottish & Newcastle's Holyrood brewery, Canongate, Edinburgh circa 1960.
21. The site where Jock's cottage once stood, The Jewel, Edinburgh.
22. Moredun Park Gardens, 2019.

23. Portobello High School circa 2017.
24. Portobello High School being demolished circa 2018.
25. *The Boat Builders* (1962), John Bellany, oil on board.
26. *Star of Bethlehem* (1967), John Bellany, oil on board.
27. *Bethel* (1967), John Bellany, oil on board.
28. *Caged Cockenzie Man* (1981), John Bellany, oil on canvas.
29. *The Heroic Dossier* (1987), Peter Howson, oil on canvas.
30. Pete (centre) on Ben Lawers in 1988.
31. My Degree Show, Drawing and Painting dept., Glasgow School of Art, July 1994.
32. *The Painter* (1976), Philip Guston, oil on canvas.
33. *Pram* (2016), pencil on paper.
34. *The Clinical Skills laboratory, RVI hospital, Newcastle* (2010), ink and brush on paper.
35. *The PREFAB Matchmakers pram* (2015).
36. *The Thatcher Hayek Pram* (2015).
37. *Head and Bottle* (1975), Philip Guston, oil on canvas.
38. *The PREFAB Lambert & Butler Cigarette Packet* (2017).
39. Philip Guston's living-room, Maverick Road, Woodstock, circa 1975.
40. *Interior* (1972), Philip Guston, oil on board.
41. *Untitled* (1969), Philip Guston, oil on board.
42. *The Newsies* (2016), mixed-media on board.
43. *The Newsies* (2016), mixed-media on board.
44. *The Newsies* (2016), mixed-media on board.
45. *The Cabinet Of* – (2015), pen on digital gloss print.
46. The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (1979).

47. The Assembly Hall, Edinburgh.
48. *The Top Flat, E-Hall, HMP Perth* (2010), ink on paper.
49. *The Top Flat (the 'Lifer's Hall')*, HMP Perth (2010), ink on paper.
50. *Andy, HMP Perth* (2007), pencil on paper.
51. *The Battle of Culloden, 16th April 1746* (2013).
52. *The Highland & Lowland Clearances, 1730-1890* (2013).
53. *The Trial of John MacLean, High Court, Edinburgh, 9th May 1918* (2013).
54. *George W. Bush, Harken Energy and Jackson Stevens 1979-1990* (1990) Mark Lombardi.
55. The grave of my grandad's eldest brother Private R Newlands 58759, 11th Bn., Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), Alexandria, Hadra.
56. *Poppies: Weeping Window* (2018) Paul Cummins, Carlisle Castle.
57. *Sep 18th – Choose Your Flag* (2014), Tom Leonard.
58. *The Holy Grail of Marketing Brands* (2014), Tom Leonard.
59. *N,.... I, M, B, Y, I, S, M,* (2014), Tom Leonard.
60. *The Halliburton Award For Gallantry And Boosting Shareholder Dividends* (2019).
61. *The William Pitt The Younger Night-Wear Sporrán* (2018).
62. *The Ill-Informed Scottish Nationalist Day-Wear Sporrán* (2018).
63. *The Big Meaty 'One O' Us' Day-Wear Leisure Sporrán* (2018).
64. *The Invented Clan McLeod Night-Wear Sporrán* (2019).
65. *The £1400 Subsidy (Per Scottish Person) Fantasy Sporrán* (2019).
66. *The Thick-Sliced Subsidised Proud One-Nation Night-Wear Sporrán* (2019).
67. *The 'H' Jones Award For Micro-Management In The Face Of The Enemy* (2019).
68. *The Fruity Blasts (No Added Sugar) Prefab Sporrán* (2018).
69. *The Award For Bravery In Increasing CEO's Remuneration Package* (2018).
70. *PREFAB* beer cans, Market-Hall, Carlisle, April 2019.

71. The *PREFAB Kestrel Lager Can* 'repatriated', Moredun Park Gardens, 2018.
72. The *PREFAB Post-Fordist Welding Masks* and prams, Market-Hall, Carlisle, 2019.
73. *PREFAB/SUPERMARKET*, Market-hall, Carlisle, April 2019.
74. *PREFAB McEwan's Export Cans* (2016).
75. My children, Beau and Lexie, installing *SUPERMARKET*, April 2019.
76. Lexie installing *PREFAB* prams, April 2019.
77. Beau with *PREFAB* cans.
78. Lexie installs a satiric trophy.
79. Beau wears the *Post-Fordist Welding Mask*.
80. *SUPERMARKET* shelf, 2019.
81. *SUPERMARKET*, Carlisle Market-Hall, April 2019.
82. *PREFAB Neo-Liberal Desk Ornaments*.
83. Lexie with *PREFAB* prams.
84. Lexie amidst redux commodities.
85. *PREFAB* in Carlisle Market-hall, 2019.
86. A *SUPERMARKET* shelf, 2019.
87. *SUPERMARKET*, 2019.
88. *PREFAB Tartan Special Cans*.
89. *PREFAB* beer cans and critical realist signage, April 2019.
90. *PREFAB A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism Table Decorations*.
91. Cans and parodic medals.
92. Marxist Realist signage, 2019.
93. *PREFAB Kestrel Lager Cans*.
94. *PREFAB Mono-Myth Trophies*.

95. *SUPERMARKET*, April 2019.
96. *PREFAB Plastic Martyr Bones*.
97. *SUPERMARKET* (detail), 2019.
98. *The BAE Systems Award For Improving Share Price* (2018).
99. *The Halliburton Award For Violence* (2018) and *The Share Price Share Price Award For Valour* (2018).
100. *SUPERMARKET*.
101. *SUPERMARKET* promotional material.

