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NOTES FOR A PERFORMANCE  
RE/VISIONING A SMOKY MEETING

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Louise Adkins & Nikolai Duffy

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## NOTES FOR A PERFORMANCE RE/VISIONING A SMOKY MEETING

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### Preface

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NOTES FOR A PERFORMANCE – (RE) VISIONING A SMOKY MEETING is the culmination of a four-month artist residency at the Tetley Centre for Contemporary Art in Leeds. Working with the Tetley's industrial archive (located in-house and at West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds) the residency was concerned with imagining the past and how cinematic language informs our understanding of it. The aim of the residency was to develop performative works concerned with unknown and unverified histories identified in the archive, focusing on the Tetley building and its business history in conjunction with the (newer) cultural institution. This publication is a compendium of research material from the Tetley's archive alongside the performance script, performance documentation and selected photographic works from the archive. In addition the publication includes commissioned texts, *Winston is for Real* by artist Pavel Büchler and *A Smoky Meeting – an Intervention in a Heritage Site* by artist Nick Cass.

The Tetley archives are vast and varied, ranging from testing notes, minutes from meetings, executive correspondence, advertising copy, and staged photographs of senior management. Dominating the collection are images of male board members, the management is uniformly male, white, and collared. The gendered nature of these images pointed to a clear narrative of male privilege mirroring current social political and economic discourse. The boardrooms in which these images are taken are heavy set, leather-bound, and regimented. The gender bias in the archive became a dominant visual reference when developing the work and casting the ten male performers.

Smoke and smoking featured heavily within the photographic archive, in meetings, visits, portraits and numerous social events. The performance utilised cigarette smoke and smoking (a historical anachronism used in cinema) as a material trope of the past. The smoky atmospheres in the photos informed a cinematic 'smoky meeting' tableau that became the starting point for the performance work. In narrative terms smoke and smoking was used as an unfocused recollection of the past, in a sense a metaphor of collective memory.\*

The residency period focused predominately on developing a new performance script using audio description commentary as a means to embed multiple (visual) readings of the 'smoky meeting' tableau. The script was built from a collage of archival material, fragmented and recurring. This was at times, in an extended form of a sentence, often a phrase or word, spliced with language from different documents. The archive and related text extracts were interested in the ways in which the discourse of business administration (from the late 19th and early 20th centuries) bore an uncanny resemblance to the corporate and commodified



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## A HISTORY OF SMOKE

## Dialogue between Nikolai Duffy &amp; Louise Adkins

*Ten men sit around the table, reading, listening,  
nodding smoking. Some confident sitting forward,  
some tense and erect others relaxed, settled.  
Cigarette's raised to lips, a suck, a draw and drag.<sup>3</sup>*

commodified language of today. This language saturates every aspect of personal and professional life in our contemporary age; a saturation so ingrained- and often so unconscious - that the divide between the personal and the private is a false one, a relic of a bygone age. The age of the smartphone is the dissolve of distinction.

This was also one of the interesting points of disconnect between this age and the Tetley archive, and the reason why so much of the archive, from a contemporary perspective, seemed shot through with nostalgia. Throughout the archive there was a clear dividing line between the world of business and the private life of the individual. Only on rare occasions did these lines blur in the correspondence, as for instance when Tetley makes reference to his daughter in a postscript; but it is the unusualness of such forays into the private that make that particular distinction between then and now so stark.

The following text *A History of Smoke* can be read as a comment and response dialogue between the poet Nikolai Duffy and artist Louise Adkins, observing and at times expanding on the themes interrogated whilst researching and writing the performance script.

**NIKLAJ DUFFY:** Smoke as both history and veil on the present. Smoke hesitates, in the shape of a curl, the manner of its vanishing. Something then nothing, though the smell lingers. To mine history, to rethink it, change its shape, redraw it in the present and to get a sense, palpable in the chest, of gaps and consistencies, that things, by and large, are the same, though the clothes change, and the manner of speaking, while everyone's lives are decided still, by men more often than not, around the grain of a table, orchestrated by algorithms, systems and the push of buttons. In a short essay on Derrida's notion of *différance*, translated as 'Elliptical Sense,' Jean-Luc Nancy invokes the phrase 'the lightening of meaning' which, Nancy writes, refers to the 'knowledge of a condition of possibility that gives nothing to know.' In such a situation, Nancy suggests, 'meaning lightens itself [...] as *meaning*, at the cutting edge of its appeal and its repeated demand for meaning.'<sup>5</sup> Central to this idea is the way in which the lightening of meaning leads to an irreducible contradiction within language. The question of the meaning of language is one, which cannot be weighed, in the sense of decided or measured, such that the most that might be said is that it is a question that escapes thematisation. Things mean only insofar as meaning, reference, is outside itself, insofar as 'it is an exile, an errancy, a balancing oscillation from *oneself to oneself*.'<sup>6</sup> It is hard to know what words might best describe such a language, how they might shepherd a body to the page and spell life. Order is everything. Gesture is a fragile art made of many pieces, the majority of which go unnoticed; it is what Stefan Brecht, in another context, has called a *non-verbal, irrational communication, an interlinear interchange*.<sup>7</sup> However we think of it, meaning happens at the juncture of these oppositions.

**LOUISE ADKINS:** Material tropes of pastness, such as smoke and smoking locate recent histories in opposition to today's self-assured healthy *new world*. They provide a phantasmagorical, dreamlike and blurred impressionist moment of the past that is rooted in filmic constructions and recent histories. The ephemeral materiality of smoking informs our imagined understanding of the past. It creates *a fug that renders the room impressionistic*. It provides a link to collective memory, nostalgia and affect that is informed by filmic narratives of the past.

1 *Collective memory as organic memory of the individual, which operates within the framework of a socio cultural environment. Collective memory as the creation of shared versions of the past, which results through interaction, communication, media and institutions within small social groups as well as larger cultural communities.*

MAURICE HALBWACHS

2 AUDIO DESCRIPTION otherwise known as AD is media narrative commentary used in cinema.

3 ADKINS, L & DUFFY, N., 'Notes for a Performance - (Re) visioning a Smoky Meeting'. Extract from performance script P.30.

4 JEAN-LUC NANCY, 'Elliptical Sense,' in Derrida: A Critical Reader, ed. David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.41.

5 NANCY, 'Elliptical,' p.42.

6 JEAN-LUC NANCY, *The Gravity of Thought*, trans. François Raffoul and Gregory Recco (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998) p.77.

7 STEFAN BRECHT, *The Original Theatre of the City of New York: From the Mid 60s to the Mid 70s*, Book 1, *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978) p.278.

**ND:** Smoke gets in the eyes, fibres, lungs. And it hesitates, in the shape of a curl, the manner of its vanishing. Something then nothing, though the smell lingers. To mine history, to rethink it, change its shape, redraw it in the present and to get a sense, palpable in the chest, of gaps and consistencies, that things, by and large, are the same, though the clothes change, and the manner of speaking.

JACQUES DERRIDA: *[T]he conditions of archivization implicate all the tensions, contradictions, or aporias we are trying to formalize here, notably those which make it into a movement of the promise and of the future no less than of recording the past.*<sup>8</sup>

Whose lives are decided still, by men, around the grain of a table, orchestrated by algorithms, systems and the push of buttons.

**LA:** The atmospheric fug that cigarettes and smoking provide create an unreliable understanding that innately questions the truth and factuality of the imagined scene. The act of smoking positions the *smoker* (performer) directly in the past, it provides the performance moments with a *full stop a draw* and a point of pause; a deep-breath and a moment of reflection. The act of smoking also frames the performer by creating an actual point of light, a 'marker' towards an imagined past. Smoking is a multifaceted, paradoxical material that links the past in (both) negative associations; poisonous, addictive, shameful, destructive and in positive associations; contemplative, youthful desirable, masculine and erotic.

**ND:** The symbol of status between finger and thumb and death on the tongue. Just as *the concept of the archive must inevitably carry in itself, as does every concept, an unknowable weight.*<sup>9</sup> *The present anti-smoking legislation represents merely a new extreme of intolerance and risk aversion in a society where health in itself has come to be regarded as a value beyond argument.*<sup>10</sup>

**LA:** *A Smoky Meeting (re)* presents collective memories of the past, played out alongside multiple (real life) exposés by the media of historic sexual abuse. Created during the Hollywood sexual harassment scandal, the contextual framework of the work mirrored the cinematic alongside the (re) visioning and (re) critiquing of historic sexual behaviours. These historic events, like the smoky meeting are reliant on uncertainty; they lack witness and exist in opposition to today's received cultural landscape of health and sexual conduct. The gender bias evident in the archive draws obvious parallels to the powerful, male boardrooms of today. However this simplistic paradigm of gender and white privilege fails to engage with wider geopolitical inequalities of religion, wealth, and race. The *#metoo* campaign and related scandals concerning corporate, political impropriety mirror themes focused on in the archive. Masculinity like smoking has become problematic for contemporary culture, the *#metoo* critique of masculinity cynically distracts from neoliberal marketization, depersonalisation and corporate greed. Masculinity like smoking is not a moral problem in itself, moreover it is the ever increasing anti-*(insert cause, group or behaviour)* legislation feeding our ever intolerant and risk averse society, that it.

**ND:** Surfaces can be difficult to read and the slate is never wiped clean, not really. Lines of reference are tangled, an entire condensed pattern of connection. Driven to abstraction. Besides, it is not always easy to be what one says; matter lost in grammar and convention, and convergence too the edge of letting go. To move in the spaces language opens. A place where life and writing come together; an engagement with history, ground, that is also a way of thinking the rifts of life, its relative strangeness, the stuff of things, some of it choppy than the rest; a whole made up of pieces, fragments: the gaps, the inconsistencies, the blind sights. Most often, contradictions are restless and ambiguity pulls in more than one direction.

**LA:** The performance and the contextual framework focused the relative proximity of the past, a past that is loaded and dangerous. Ancient histories are more regressive and so can be neutralize however, when referring to recent histories there are vestiges of an experience and a collective memory. For us recent history is still close by, it is near and relatable, it is a sensory history, it is a history we can smell, a history we can feel and a history we can touch... if we want to.

8 JACQUES DERRIDA, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.29

9 DERRIDA, *Archive Fever*, p.29.

10 BÜCHLER, P (2018) 'Winston is for Real' Wild Pansy Press (Leeds).

PERFORMANCE SCRIPT IN THREE SCENES

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The performers

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Andrew



Marcus



Lee



Nigel



Harrison



Scene 1

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INTRODUCTION

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James



Eliot



Steve



Will



Henry



**LOCATION : The Tetley Boardroom**  
**( WILL & ELIOT are smoking )**

**LEE** I open the door from the corridor into an empty room. I blink adjusting to the dim light. Across a sea of haze I find myself in a boardroom, rectangular, regular, oak-panelled. The door from the corridor opens. A man enters.

**WILL** In the smoky atmosphere, ten men sit around the boardroom table, four men each side, one man at either end. A mix of ages, from late teens to 50s, some bearded, some clean-shaven, some in glasses. Wearing casual clothes, each in his own style. Some talk, leaning across the table towards each other, faces animated.

**LEE** Spotlights beam at the far corners. Shadows of bodies, water bottles, across the surface of the smooth table. Light spills in from the open door

**WILL** I open the door from the corridor into an empty room. I blink adjusting to the dim light. Across a sea of haze I find myself in a boardroom.

**MARCUS** ( lights a cigarette )



The door opens from the corridor into a sparsely populated room. Our eyes blink adjusting to the dim light. Across a sea of haze we find ourselves in a boardroom.

**WILL** I met him accidentally in a brewery. The man inhales, lips tightening around the filter of the cigarette.

**MARCUS** A long-polished table stretches almost the length and width of the room: solid, sturdy, historical.

**HENRY** The door opens from the corridor. Button backed chairs, leather upholstered mahogany.

**LEE** The facts are these: Some time ago our representative was informed that she was entirely without Spirits

**HENRY** Oil paintings of distinguished men watch us, one of them, I am told, my, our, your grandfather. A single beam of strong light cuts through the haze. Smoke hangs across the paintings. The stare of the men softened, shrouded.

**JAMES** I open the door from the corridor. I blink adjusting to the dim light. Across a sea of haze I find myself in a boardroom, rectangular, regular, oak-panelled.

**WILL** Taking a step further into the room I approach the table: honey-coloured wood, glossy surface reflecting the light. Feet on the parquet floor, heavy boots, one heel balanced. Ankles crossed.

**JAMES** Feet on the parquet floor. Black shoes, grey socks, sides of the soles, resting on the floor. One foot twitches slightly, then the other.

**WILL** Wide moustache, waxed at the ends. Delicate features, long dark brown hair, hanging down the back. Beads around the neck, chestnut brown. Silver ring on the index finger.

**JAMES** I am anxious that experiments on passing yeast over ice into still ages should be made in the winter.

**ELIOT** The door opens from the corridor. Our eyes blink adjusting to the dim light. Across a sea of haze we find myself in a boardroom. Taking a step further into the room we approach the table honey-coloured wood, glossy surface reflecting the light.

**HENRY** I am convinced that the most dangerous infection in a brewery which is clean and in which good materials are used come in via the yeast.

**HARRISON** I open the door from the corridor. A long-polished table stretches almost the length and width of the room solid, sturdy, historical.

**ELIOT** Ten chairs around the table waiting for their occupants button-backed, burgundy leather, tall backs bordered with brass studs, wide restful arms. The right hand laid out for smoking.

**JAMES** A line of ten glasses, on the table, clear tumblers for water, ashtrays at regular intervals.

**LEE** ( lights a cigarette )

< PAUSE >

**HARRISON** Please do not misunderstand me: the beers are now mainly very good but there is distinct room for improvement.

**JAMES** A man stands, his left hand on the table, draws on his cigarette, 50s, bald, shaved grey hair at the back, thick-framed glasses, slim and slight. Holding his script in both hands, he turns away from the table, half hidden by smoke.

Walks around the perimeter of the room,  
sits carefully.

**STEVE** ( lights a cigarette )

I open the door from the corridor.  
A line of ten glasses.

**ANDREW** ( interrupts STEVE )

Ten chairs around the table button-backed,  
burgundy leather.

**HARRISON** I am convinced that the most dangerous  
infection in a brewery which is clean and  
in which good materials are used come in  
via the yeast.

**MARCUS** Packets of cigarettes. Cigarette held loosely  
between the index finger and middle finger,  
smoke curls. Smoke curling up from the lit  
cigarette, left hand holding the paper.

**HENRY** A man in his twenties, dark hair, stubble.  
Long-lashed eyes. Lifts his cigarette with  
his left hand. Leaves it hanging between  
his lips, almost chewing. The fingers of  
his left hand drum the table silently.  
Right arm relaxed across his thigh.

**STEVE** On examining the particulars of  
brewing's received this morning, I  
noticed a tendency to get the opacities  
of some of your beers too low.

**NIGEL** ( speaking loudly )

My gaze travels down the long table,  
beyond the imposing chair at the end.  
Hanging above a portrait of a bearded man.

< PAUSE >

( the men finish their  
cigarettes in silence . . . )





## Scene 2

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### THE FROG

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( NIGEL lights a cigarette )

**LEE** The white ceiling is long and low, with white painted beams. Three chandeliers a dozen brass candles. A line of ten glasses, on the table, clear tumblers for water, ashtrays at regular intervals

**WILL** To our left the wood panelled wall stretches away.

**STEVE** If you place a frog into a pan of boiling water, the frog, understandably, would immediately jump out. But if you place the frog into a pan of water at room temperature and then very gradually turn up the heat, something very interesting happens. The frog does not move.

**MARCUS** I should strongly advise you to shift this matter to the bottom because under the new regulations you might be prejudiced.

**HENRY** ( lights a cigarette )  
The white ceiling is long and low, with white painted beams. Three chandeliers a dozen brass candles.

**STEVE** The older man strikes the match, holds the flame to the cigarette, reflection gleaming on the lens of his glasses. A line of ten glasses, on the table, clear tumblers for water, ashtrays at regular intervals. Inhales, cigarette to the right of his mouth.

**WILL** Gentlemen and directors, a family likeness perhaps, balding, suited, bespectacled, some in academic gowns, one of scarlet.

**LEE** The white ceiling is long and low, with white painted beams. Three chandeliers A line of ten glasses, clear tumblers for water, ashtrays at regular intervals.

< PAUSE >

We are obliged by your enquiry but have no interest.

**HENRY** ( **interrupts LEE** )

Within the wall opposite patches of light, the white screens seal off the outside world and conceal the room.

**HARRISON** ( **lights a cigarette** )

The celebrated lecturer on chemistry states that scurf on steam boilers may be prevented, either by acidulating the water with sulphuric acid, or putting in sawdust of any kind of wood.

**ELIOT** Smoking cigarettes bodies forth an implicit language of gestures and acts that we have all learned subliminally to translate [ ... ] with the explicit intention of defining character and advancing plot.<sup>1</sup>

< PAUSE >

Ten chairs around the table. Waiting for their occupants button-backed, burgundy leather, tall backs bordered with brass studs, wide restful arms. The right hand laid out for smoking.

**MARCUS** We find that you sometimes weigh together and include on your delivery notes goods intended for more than one department. To obviate the inconvenience caused us by checking goods received under such methods, we shall be glad if, in future, you will make out a separate invoice for each order.

**STEVE** As the temperature of the water increases, the frog becomes more and more subdued until it is no longer capable of climbing out of the pan. Though there is nothing to prevent it jumping out, the frog will sit there and boil to death.

**HENRY** The white ceiling is long and low, with white painted beams. Ten men sit around the table, reading, listening, nodding smoking. A man in his twenties, dark hair, slight dark beard. Three chandeliers a dozen brass candles. A line of ten glasses, on the table, clear tumblers for water, ashtrays at regular intervals

**NIGEL** I should strongly recommend a method which I think you will find satisfactory in every way.

**HENRY** Cigarettes raised to lips. A wall of men's faces and smoke. Some confident sitting forward some tense others relaxed, settled.

**ANDREW** ( **lights a cigarette** )

A young man with short dark hair. Face serious. Light reflects on his rounded glasses, on the three chandeliers above. Clear tumblers for water, ashtrays intervals.

**JAMES** I must express my thanks to you for the facilities, which you have given me for carrying out the Original Gravity Work.



**ELIOT** Smoking cigarettes bodies forth an implicit language of gestures and acts that we have all learned subliminally to translate [ ... ] with the explicit intention of defining character and advancing plot.<sup>2</sup> During the year many things have happened. The new Licensing Act, many protests, both in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. By the time you read this report you will know all that is to be, the worst part is we shall not be able to supply alcohol to anyone under-18 years of age.

**ANDREW** ( interrupts ELIOT )

The nature of the frog is geared to sense sudden changes in its environment, but not slow, gradual changes. They notice change largely through contrast. Change might be experienced as churn and the problem with churn was that it takes time to settle.

**LEE** We now understand from your communication that this procedure is irregular and we express regret.

**MARCUS** Right arm bent, elbow resting on the shiny smooth table-top, cigarette held loosely between index and middle finger, smoke curls, smoke curling up from the lit cigarette. Left hand holding the papers

< PAUSE >

My right arm bent, elbow on the table, smoke from the lit cigarette held between index and middle finger. In my other hand, papers.

**NIGEL** You are to be congratulated on having so fully supplied yourselves with English and foreign barleys very early in the season.

**WILL** ( lights a cigarette & interrupts NIGEL )

Experience has shown them that this is the only safe plan if they are to avoid the summer frets and the well-known Burton "stink".

**ANDREW** Upright in the leather upholstered chair, eyes focussed on the paper in hand, cigarette raised to lips.

**HARRISION** I was immensely interested in work on removing carbonates in the water and in the water used for mixing with Irish moss.

**LEE** The man in the baseball cap stands, leans his hands on the table as he addresses his peers/colleagues. Please state size of drawing wheel, which will decide whether it is possible to fit it against the wall within packing's.

**STEVE** Change must be introduced slowly and without telling anyone, so that each small change is barely noticeable. Make temporary changes that become long term; institute new change while people are busy adjusting to a previous change; hide changes in larger items; gradually isolate unwanted individuals and teams, particularly those who fit into the actively disengaged category.

**HENRY** I think it will be best for you to come to me at once. The Polariscope is an instrument requiring much practical experience and this he would soon have, if working here under our superintendence's

**LEE** Cigarettes raised to lips.  
A suck a draw and drag

**MARCUS** He leans back, placing his hands behind his head, elbow angular, a pause. He lowers his paper reaches for a water bottle remove's the stopper. Holding it tight in his right hand he pours the clear liquid into the glass.

**JAMES** ( walks into the space smoking a cigarette )

In today's market, we find a whole series of products deprived of their malignant properties coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol. The list goes on virtual sex as sex without sex, the [ ... ] doctrine of warfare without casualties; the contemporary redefinition of politics as the art of expert administration as politics without politics.

**STEVE** Make temporary changes that become long term; institute new change while people are busy adjusting to a previous change; hide changes in larger items; gradually isolate unwanted individuals and teams, the actively disengaged category.

**NIGEL** ( interrupts STEVE )

I am thankful to say the elevations are over & business is running its ordinary course.

**JAMES** Today's tolerant liberal multiculturalism as an experience of the Other deprived of its Otherness. Virtual reality simply generalizes this habit.<sup>3</sup>

**MARCUS** I am fully aware of the difficulties of late in getting sufficient labour to keep things up to the old mark.

< PAUSE >

( the men finish their cigarettes in silence . . . )





### Scene 3

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#### SMOKING

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**ELIOT** ( lights a cigarette )

A man around 40, cropped dark hair, hazel eyes. I walk around the room, one hand in my pocket, steps measured, and lean against the mantelpiece, listening. A cigarette between my fingers as I hold my chin in my hands.

**HENRY** ( lights a cigarette )

I walk around the room, one hand in my pocket, steps measured, and shield the flame of the lighter with my hands, shoulders rounded, hunched. Lips thin as they tighten around the cigarette.

**LEE** ( interrupts Henry )

All these circumstances exert a strong evil influence upon the quality of the malt produced, which varies considerably and against which the maltster can do nothing, as he is dependent on these atmospheres and other influences.

**ELIOT** A silhouetted man walks towards the windows in the thick air - distant city lights piercing the darkness, hands

stuffed into pockets, unhurried

**HENRY** Make temporary changes that become long term; institute new change while people are busy adjusting to a previous change; hide changes in larger items; gradually isolate unwanted individuals and teams, the actively disengaged category

**JAMES ( lights a cigarette )**  
I grasp the glass in my left hand, raise it to my lips, sip, replace the glass on the table, pick up my papers, cigarette, smoke. He clamps his lips as he inhales, pauses, exhales.

**ANDREW** New documentation should be easy to navigate and complete, preferably of the checklist variety. Enable employees to internalise change and see themselves as active agents in the organisation by canvassing their opinions on generic topics. Run surveys. Hold staff briefings and invite questions. Listen, smile, ask employees to expand on their ideas.

**WILL** Further to our recent conversation, I would like to try to arrange for some hostesses to do an exchange visit with their counterparts. They are attractive, uniformed hostesses operating on the sea front for the convenience of visitors. They are extremely photogenic and they are popular with the papers.

**ELIOT** I walk around the room, one hand in my pocket, steps measured. A match is struck. As he speaks, smoke drifts from his mouth, carrying with it his words.

**ANDREW ( interrupts Eliot )**  
I entered through a door from the corridor, shield the flame of the lighter with my hands, shoulders rounded, hunched. Lips thin as they tighten around the cigarette.

**ELIOT ( interrupts Andrew )**  
Its flame leaps for a moment, the flare, reflected in the sheen of the table. He clamps his lips as he inhales, pauses, exhales.

**MARCUS ( lights a cigarette & interrupts Andrew )**  
I should like to know the nature of the small curdy settlement, which first forms in bottled beer in the warm cupboard.

**ELIOT** The cigarette glows hot orange, a puff of breath and the match out. He clamps his lips as he inhales, pauses, exhales.

**JAMES** Very harsh, very little difference, lacks character and has slight harshness, has a lingering "Iodine" taste.

**WILL** One foot tucked behind the other, parquet floor, my arm lies on the wide arm of the chair, part upholstered in deep red leather, the end of the arm carved, scrolled and curving downwards.

**LEE ( lights a cigarette )**  
The man raises a cigarette to his lips in his right hand. Around 40, the peak of his baseball cap shades his blue/green eyes. Silver piercings in his nose another on his lip. His beard full, bushy, mid brown. The short sleeves of his (colour to be inserted) top, reveal strong tattooed arms. He strikes a match. The flame flares, dies. His hand reaches towards the ashtray, taps the cigarette.

**NIGEL** Curiously enough this beer shows no signs of unsoundness, but all the other samples require no comment

**ANDREW** In the same way decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like real coffee without being real coffee, Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being reality.



**WILL** A young man, around 20, big, broad shoulders, ginger beard, strawberry blonde hair, rises, sits in the vacant chair of another man.

**JAMES** Pours water into his own glass. Others push theirs across the table. He fills their glasses.

**ELIOT** A match is struck ... but I didn't/don't inhale. A hand reaches towards the ashtray, taps the cigarette.

**HENRY** Dark blue tunic, black trousers. A man paces, early 20s. He completes a circuit of the room. The silhouette lowers into the chair. Short soft edged hair, broad shoulders, left hand raised to forehead, fingers reaching to touch dark hair

**ANDREW** What awaits us at the end of this process of virtualization is the experience of 'real reality' itself becoming a virtual entity.

**MARCUS** I lean back, placing my hands behind my head, elbow angular, I pause, I lower my paper, reach for a water bottle, remove the stopper. Holding it tight in my right hand, I pour the clear liquid into the glass

< PAUSE >

I lean back, put my hands behind my back, lower my paper, reach for a water bottle, remove the stopper.

**NIGEL** His gaze travels down the long table, beyond the imposing chair at the end, raises a glass to his lips. Hanging above a portrait of a grey haired man.

**WILL** He raises the glass to his lips. We all know that our refrigeration is not good.

**MARCUS** The youngest of the men, eighteen, blonde

curly hair, draws on his cigarette, turns the pages of his papers, picks up his glasses, puts them on, rises, studies a painting, silver watch-strap catching the light

**HARRISON** I am sending on a number of boxes containing our apparatus.

**JAMES** ( interrupts HARRISON )

I opened the door from the corridor. A long-polished table stretches almost the length and width of the room solid, sturdy, historical. A man shifts the position of his chair.

**STEVE** Hold staff briefings and invite questions. Listen, smile, ask employees to expand on their ideas. Over time, the frog will, without panic, simply allow itself to be boiled to death.

**ELIOT** A match is struck its flame leaps for a moment, the flare, reflected in the sheen of the table. The cigarette glows hot orange, a puff of breath and the match out. I am glad to see you have commenced making ... your new casks\* possible deletion!. They are strong and well made. He raises a glass to his lips.

< PAUSE >

The youngest of the men, eighteen, blonde curly hair, draws on his cigarette, turns the pages of his papers, picks up his glasses, puts them on, rises, studies a painting. Light shines on and through the water bottles. He raises a glass to his lips.

**HENRY** Ten men sit around the table, reading, listening, nodding smoking. Some confident sitting forward some tense and erect others relaxed, settled. Cigarette's raised to lips, a suck a draw and drag.

**LEE** Tetley died on matters of state value.  
 Ten men sit around the table, reading,  
 talking, listening, nodding, smoking.  
 Some confident sitting forward some tense  
 others relaxed, settled.

< PAUSE >

( the men finish their cigarettes  
 in silence & leave the room )

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**NOTES**

- 1 Cigarettes are Sublime, p9
  - 2 Cigarettes are Sublime, p9
  - 3 Zizek, A Holiday from History, np
- 

**ACTORS**

James Brewer  
 Eliot Edmund  
 Henry Haigh  
 Steve Hart  
 Marcus Heywood  
 Harrison Hirst  
 Zhouyi (Nigel) Lai  
 Andrew Lane  
 Will Livermore  
 Lee Warner

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Audio description contribution  
 by Anne Hornsby

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WINSTON IS FOR REAL

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Pavel Būchler

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THE IDIOMATIC smoke-filled boardroom – that is, a meeting of a company executive shrouded in cigarette smoke rather than a boardroom on fire – is as unimaginable today as the presence of a young man with heavily tattooed arms wearing a nose ring, t-shirt and a baseball cap would have been in a boardroom of the 1930s or '60s. Or, to be precise, the imagination can conjure up both scenarios, of course, but neither corresponds to reality and lived experience. Almost at the same rate at which the dress code of a tailored suit, white collar and neck tie has gradually loosened its grip on boardroom proceedings in the last forty years or so, the institutional hostility to smoking has progressed from a nervous, health-alarmed disapproval to hysterical demonization and from designated zones, smoke-free offices and buildings to a universal ban. And while a baseball cap may be still only a rare sight on most company boards, ashtrays are definitely out.

The situation that Louise Adkins has staged in *Re/visioning* a smoky meeting presents not a critical review of the evolution of social norms and conventions – as could be expected of *re/revisioning* – nor is it an attempt to retrofit symbolically tokens of transgression into anachronistic propriety or to satirise, like a comedy of

manners, the customs of an era and much less to distil some timeless essence from it. The incongruous encounter of a baseball cap and cigarettes at a boardroom table offends against the rules of historical reconstruction as much as it disregards the requirements of a credible contemporary analogy. Is it, then, a mixed metaphor for a heterotopic social *atmosphere* or a practical joke on moral relativism? Out of the fusion of contradictions arises not a speculative *what-if* question but a concrete confrontation. As an event clinging to a fine point of the law which permits 'a person to smoke where the artistic integrity of a performance makes it appropriate,' Louise's work puts to the test the spirit of the legislation as an expression of the times we live in and brings to the fore its political message: the artistic license shall keep in step with contemporary mores.

Smoking is bad for health. It has always been. It is as dangerous, noxious and addictive today as it was in 1931 or 1963 or at any time in the history of tobacco. True, the popular understanding and medical evidence of its harmful effects have grown over the years but smoking has always, rightly, had its critics and it has always been reviled as the devil's invention by puritan moralists. Equally, there is nothing new

about repression and prohibition of all sorts wearing the guise of concern for public health, safety and well-being. Little has changed. The present anti-smoking legislation represents merely a new extreme of intolerance and risk aversion in a society where health in itself has come to be regarded as a value beyond argument. Much the same as ever.

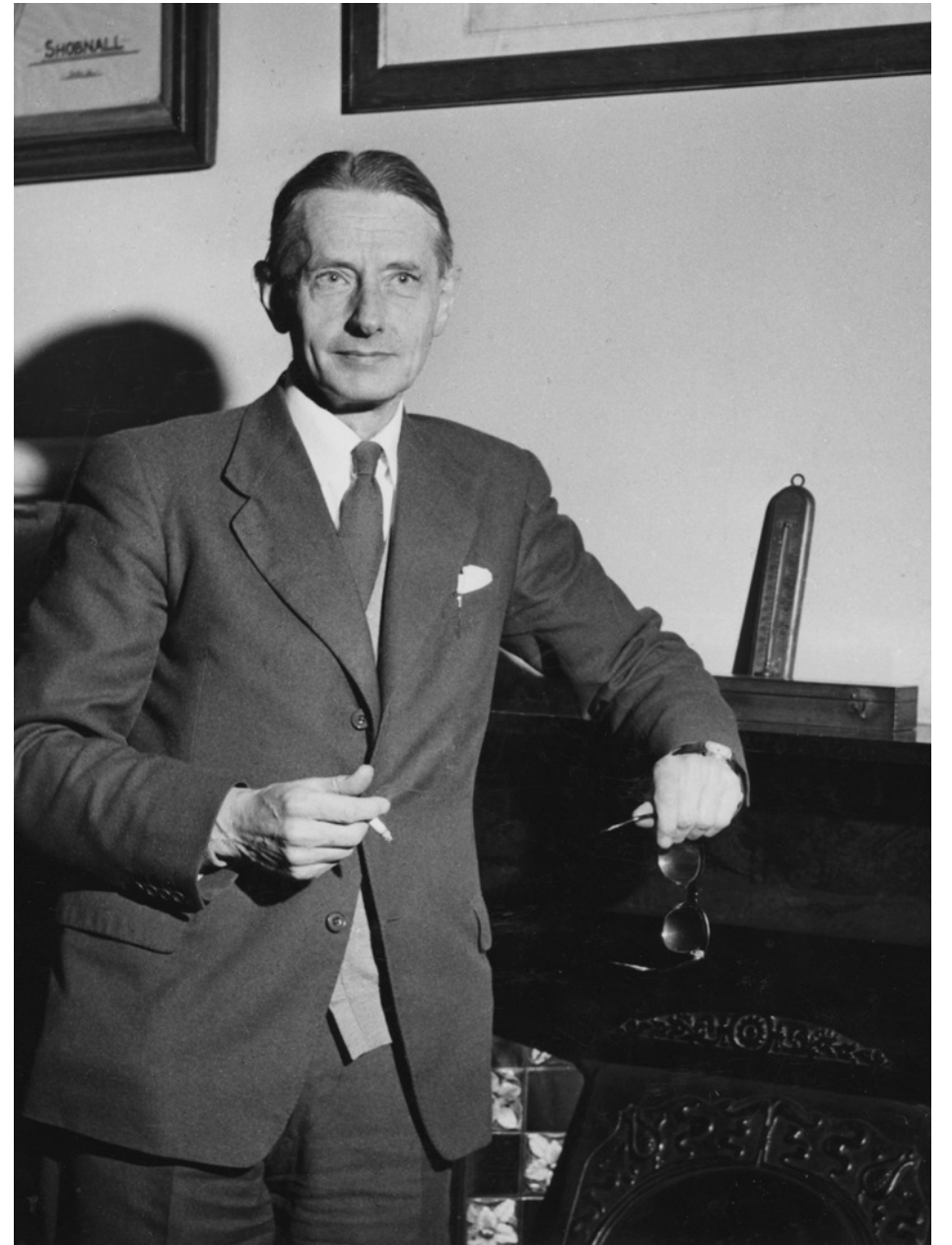
But there is something else. The legal exemption that allows artists to perform on stage an otherwise illegal activity gives art a permission it does not need – the permission to picture reality. And it grants us, the audience, the right to see and examine the core of reality in an unfamiliar sight or to recognise the fictional in the familiar. There is a threat barely concealed in this overt benevolence that has repercussions beyond the clampdown on smoking and breathes a new life into the old tendency to police culture. It hides in the condition of *integrity* and the slippery notion of *appropriateness*, which the current moral zeitgeist can far too easily turn into the imperative of correctness. It is not for the law to guard artistic integrity or for courts and officials to adjudicate on how the integrity of a work of art makes something appropriate, that is to say fit for cultural consumption. What is appropriate is

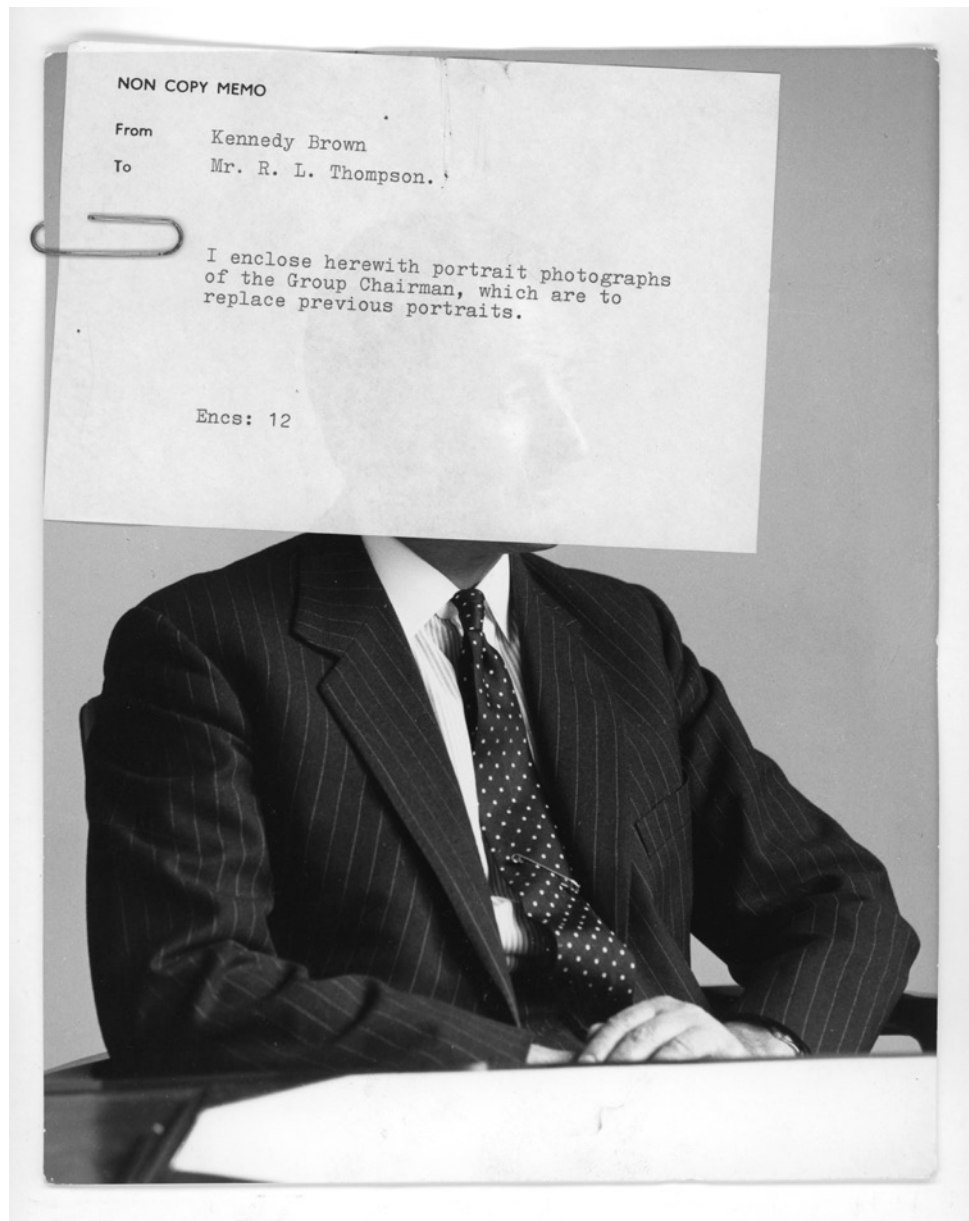
negotiable. It is a matter of context and practice (neck tie vs. baseball cap). The purpose of the law is to protect our lungs. It is not its business to protect our brains from self-harm by prescribing the criteria for how we make art, how we look at it and what we think. Art cannot ignore the law anymore than it can tell us how to live but it can offer us a perspective, as Louise's experiment does, on how the authority of the law promotes the majority moral consensus, prejudices and fears and, in turn, how it shapes the way we live and act, and let us think what we will.

One more thing. The title of this brief note is taken from a 1970s' advertising strapline for an American cigarette brand. In Louise's script, the character sporting the baseball cap is called Lee. I fancy that the name of his 1960s' impeccably groomed and sharply dressed counterpart among the Tetley Brewing Company management may have been Winston. Lee is the performer's real identity and Winston is a fictitious one – but Mr Winston was for real.

\* \* \*







## A SMOKY MEETING AN INTERVENTION IN A HERITAGE SITE ?

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Nick Cass

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### THE TETLEY AS HERITAGE SITE

*A centre for contemporary art and learning in a landmark heritage building.*<sup>1</sup>

The Tetley was established in 2012 in the former headquarters of the Tetley Brewing Company. The brewery and the family who ran it have been a central part of Leeds' identity as a city for nearly 200 years. Acknowledging this history, the website for the art gallery now occupying the building describes:

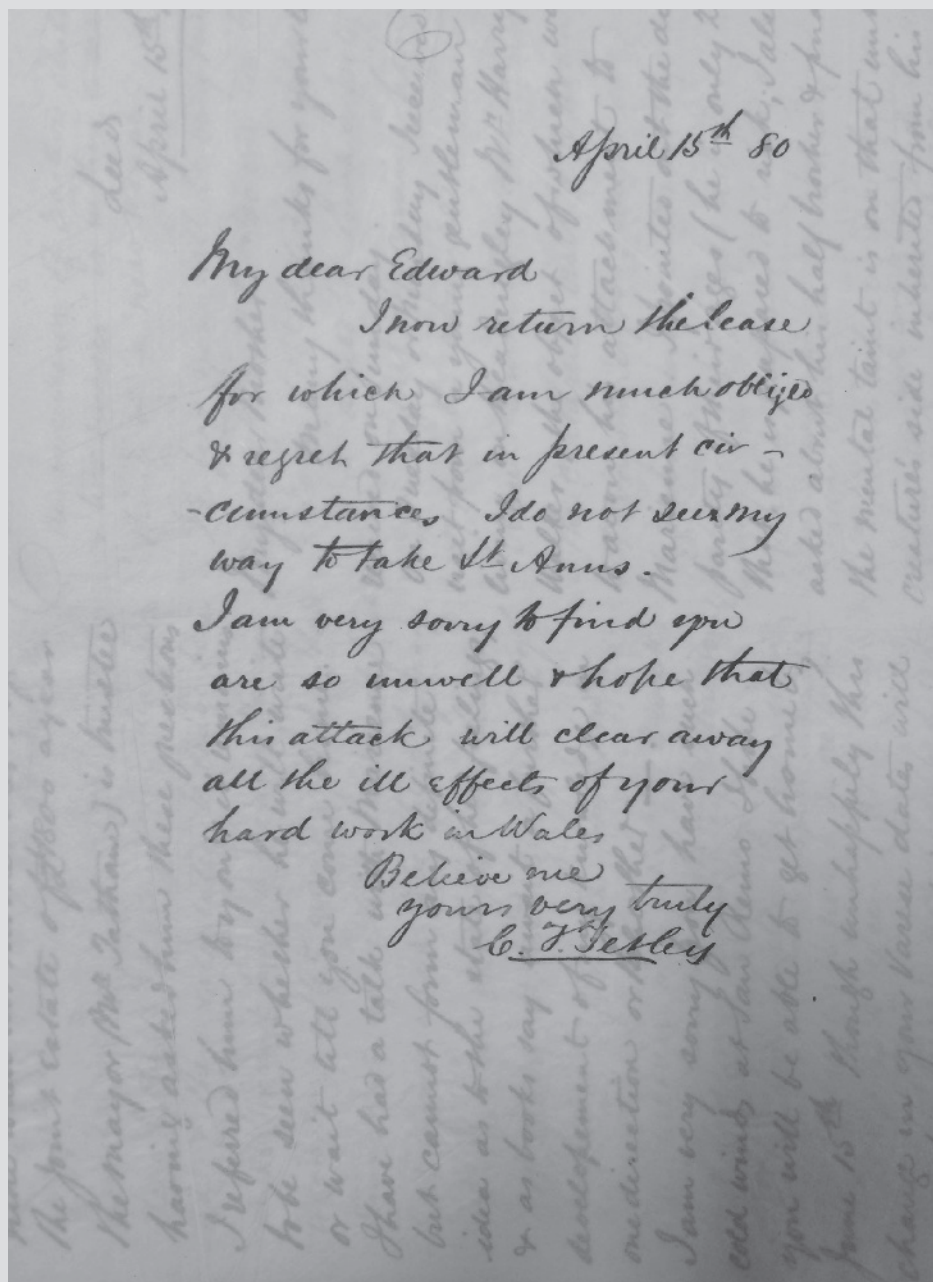
*the brewery site has important social and industrial significance and the brewery and its people have contributed greatly to the rich history of the city.*<sup>2</sup>

Close to the centre of the city, this art-deco building, built in 1931, was a key 'landmark' of Leeds' industrial landscape. Started by Joshua Tetley in 1822, the brewery grew to become one of the largest manufacturers of cask ales in the world. Becoming part of the the global conglomerate Carlsberg in 1998, the Leeds brewery site was eventually closed by the parent company in 2011, as the result of global economic conditions and a need to streamline the supply chain. A campaign by the Leeds based arts organisation PSL led to the building's transformation into an arts centre; matching the re-purposing of many industrial sites. The Tate Modern in London, Tate Liverpool and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead being iconic UK examples of galleries occupying ex-industrial heritage buildings. The conversion of the Tetley headquarters into a gallery space conserved key aspects of the building's identity, including exterior and interior architectural features, and retaining the oak panelled board room. This intersection of historic fabric with contemporary gallery is an important aspect of the identity of The Tetley.

This history of the Tetley as piece of Leeds' industrial heritage can be found not only within the architecture, but also within the archives, held jointly by the gallery and Yorkshire Archive Services. The archive comprises of a range of documentation and ephemera relating to the history of the brewery; in particular, it contains reports, letters, recipe books and a wide range of photographic material. Little detailed archival work has, however, been possible, and the material remains relatively unexplored.

It is this combination of industrial history and its related archival material in the context of an arts centre contemporary art centre which led the artist, Louise Adkins to seek out the opportunity to explore these archives, and ultimately produce *A Smoky Meeting*. Her work centres on forms of performance and installation as methods by which





to investigate and respond to historic events and narratives. In responding to the invitation to write for this publication, my intention it is to work through the idea that works like *A Smoky Meeting* should not be seen as ‘interventions in heritage’, but as an ‘active assembling’ in which ‘art’ and ‘heritage’ are not distinguishable, separate, stable elements. This corresponds to Rodney Harrison’s argument that:

*Heritage is not a passive process, but an active assembling of a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future.*<sup>3</sup>

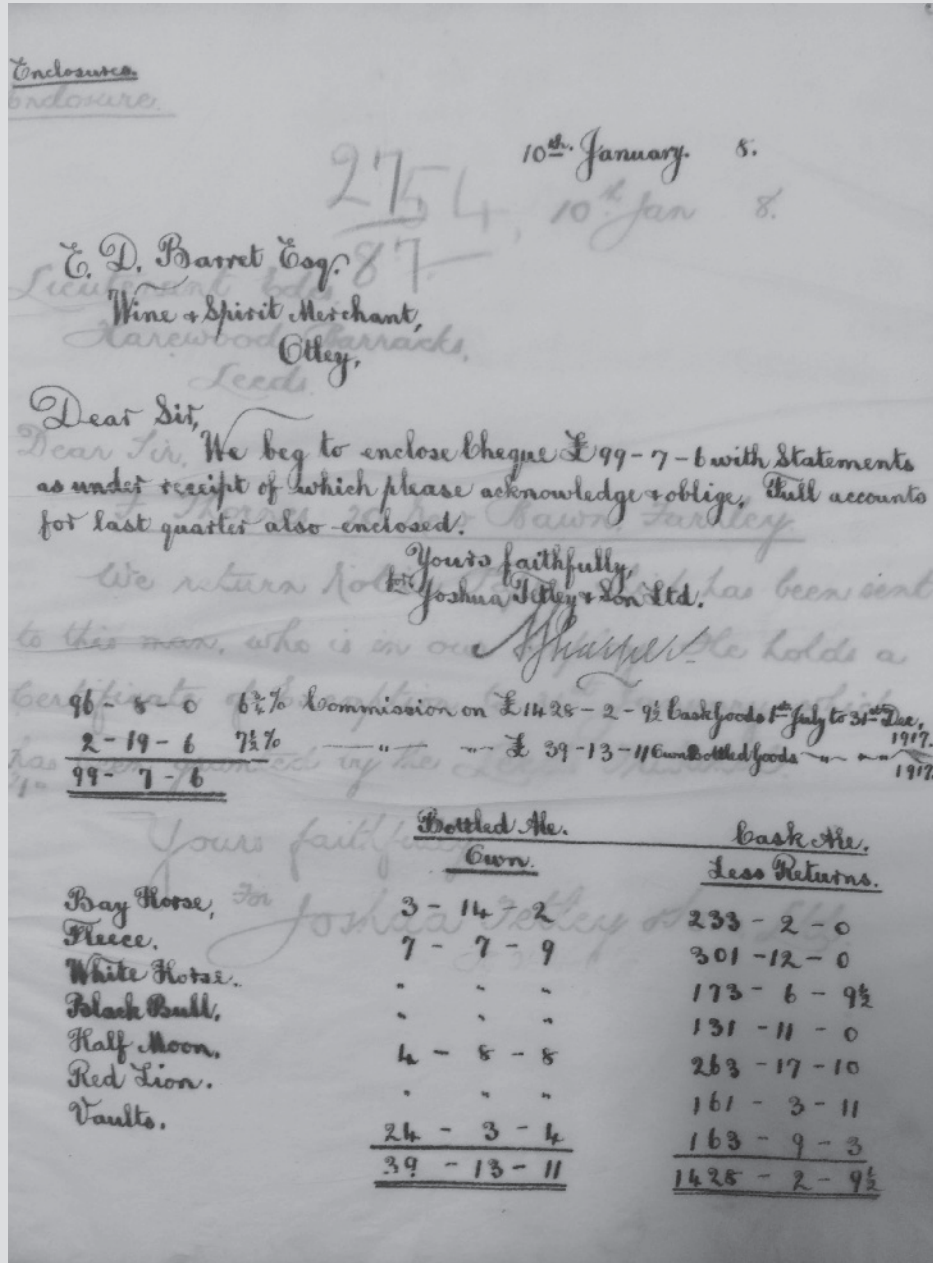
#### INTERVENTIONS

There is a clear and growing awareness that artists’ work with museums, archives and heritage sites has rich potential. One particular way in which this potential has been enacted in the UK is through the Memorandum of Understanding between the National Trust, and Arts Council England. Originating in 2008, this agreement between a key national heritage institution and the major funding body for contemporary art, signalled that this juxtaposition, of art with a heritage context, would enable visitors to see both, and thus their world, in new and exciting ways. Key to this collaboration, according to the document, was the belief that the ‘dialogue’ created between the contemporary art and its historic environment would open up new narratives and new meanings for audiences.<sup>4</sup>

This recent focus on the relationship between artists and the institutions that might commission their work, has been described a number of ways. Hal Foster is often cited for his description of what he called the ‘archival impulse’.<sup>5</sup> Focussing more clearly on ‘interventions’ within museum collections, Claire Robins argues the current work of artists in museum contexts can be traced genealogically to the perhaps ‘sporadic’ institutional critique of Dada and Surrealism, through the more sustained critique in the work of artists such as Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke in the 1970s, to the more recent work by artists such as Andrea Fraser, Fred Wilson and Mark Dion.<sup>6</sup> Arguing that there is strong potential for interventionist artworks, Robins suggests an intervention:

*‘engages’ with an existing context, for example, a museum’s collection, its architecture, social histories, or with museological concerns, curatorial practices, interpretive strategies, publicity materials, corporate sponsorship and so on.*<sup>7</sup>

Janet Marstine defines a ‘critical practice’; a productive conflation of socially engaged practice and institutional critique; resulting, potentially, in the disruption power imbalances between museums and their communities through a sustained effort to redistribute agency between those traditionally seen as ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the institution.<sup>8</sup> Joanne Morra has drawn on the extensive series of contemporary art commissions at the Freud



Museums, to suggest that this work needs new conceptual categorisation, and denotes 'site-responsive' as a way to think about art that is made to be seen in spaces other than the white cube.<sup>9</sup> All of these recent ways of thinking about the relationship between artistic practice and archives, museums and heritage sites can inflect on an understanding of *A Smoky Meeting* as an intervention into the archive of The Tetley.

A SMOKY MEETING, 29 NOVEMBER 2017

For the first performance of *A Smoky Meeting* on 29 November 2017, I joined the other participants in the lobby of the Tetley. In some ways, our experience had begun the week before, with an emailed disclaimer, alerting attendees to the fact that the performance involved cigarette smoke. This warning was reiterated by a member of staff just prior to our ascending the stairs to the boardroom; the performance involved smoking, we were to feel free to leave the environment at any point if the smoke became overwhelming. In fact, the smoke was escaping its containment, drifting down the stairs, both literally and metaphorically reaching out to the approaching audience.

Walking in to the 'rectangular, regular, oak panelled' boardroom, already thick with smoke from a smoke machine and theatrical cigarettes, ten people were seated around a long meeting table, engaged in low, murmuring conversation. As my eyes adjusted to the intense, spotlight atmosphere, one of the men, for they were all men, started to speak:

*I open the door from the corridor into an empty room. I blink adjusting to the dim light. Across a sea of haze I find myself in a boardroom, rectangular, regular, oak-panelled. The door from the corridor opens. A man enters.*

A second member of the meeting responded:

*In the smoky atmosphere, 10 men sit around the boardroom table; 4 men each side, one man at either end. A mix of ages, from late teens to 50s, some bearded, some clean-shaven, some in glasses. Wearing casual clothes, each in his own style. Some talk, leaning across the table towards each other, faces animated.*<sup>10</sup>

Already slightly disoriented by the unfamiliar presence of smoke, I tried to make sense of what I was experiencing. The performers were describing themselves, in the room that we, the viewers of this 'smoky meeting', were also in. In this way, the performance was deeply unsettling, the narrative unfolding within the performance offered no singular thread, no obvious sequential conversation between the performers, no 'clarity' was possible, other than the temporal and spatial now the performance. A hazy atmosphere indeed.

As the 'meeting' progressed, several looping, fractured narratives became slightly clearer, if only through their repetition. There is a worry about how infection might be



brought into the brewery in the yeast. A new procedure for processing the delivery of goods is required. There is disappointment that the Licensing Act now prevents the sale of alcohol to those under eighteen. The 'boiling frog' metaphor is being used to describe how unpopular change might be brought in 'slowly and without telling anyone, so that each small change is barely noticeable'. In this way, the powerful, unsettling poesis of this performance enveloped the viewers, the complex temporal and spatial nature of 'The Tetley' as an archive was made manifest in the space.

#### PERFORMANCE AS RE-ENACTMENT

Re-enactment, or 'first person interpretation', is a popular methodology of historical interpretation. Seen as a way to engage museum visitors more actively, these interpretations are usually founded on detailed archival research and documentation, actors performing the illusion that we have somehow 'travelled back to the past'.<sup>11</sup> However, much of the criticism of 'heritage' interpretation suggests it is a 'spectacle [...] responsible for the numbing of our historical responsibility'; replacing fractured, disjointed events, with unified narratives which obscure the reality of historical experience.<sup>12</sup> In his key critique of 'the heritage industry', Robert Hewison wrote that 'the urge to recreate' aspects of our former lives, from the Iron Age to the iron foundry, is evidence of the persistent fantasy that it is possible to step back into the past.<sup>13</sup> Despite the pervasiveness of this view within contemporary heritage critique, the period interior methodology of preservation, of which the Tetley boardroom is one example, still encourages viewers to perceive these as being 'from the past' and therefore not contiguous with their own contemporaneity.

To think about *A Smoky Meeting* in the context of a 'landmark heritage building', it is hard not to start from this perspective of re-enactment. However, in her call for volunteers to be involved with the performance, Adkins was clear that this was not a 're-enactment', but a:

*'(re)visioning or (re)imagining the past. The work is concerned with lost and un-witnessed stories and histories [as a] starting point. The work seeks to interrogate cultural and historic authenticity, narrative myth making and the viewer's ability to reflect and imagine the past.'*<sup>14</sup>

So rather than using the creative process to 'reveal' untold stories, with *A Smoky Meeting* Adkins set out to examine the very processes by which stories are first 'collected', in archives and then recast as a narrative in the present, suggesting Walter Benjamin's 'dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order'.<sup>15</sup> Within the performance, the reassuring 'factual' nature of heritage interpretation was replaced by a disturbing lack of orientation. The title of the performance alludes to a meeting. Is it an 'annual general





meeting'; a meeting of 'the board'? Is it one particular meeting; or representative of a number of meetings taking place over time? Who is meeting who, though? The liminal and self-conscious nature of the performance suggested that this was not a 'representation' of a meeting that took place in the past, for which copies of minutes might be found in an archive box, this was a meeting which took place, (in my case) sometime after 6pm, on Wednesday 29th November 2017 during which it was the audience who were meeting the performers in order that they might reflect on the past life of The Tetley.

#### ADKINS AS 'ARCHIVAL ARTIST'

As both a heritage site and an art gallery championing contemporary practice, Adkins clearly saw the potential to work within these archives. In many ways Adkins is, in Hal Foster's terms, an archival artist. In her work she seeks to 'make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present'.<sup>16</sup> Further:

*the work in question is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private. Further, it often arranges these materials according to a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition.*

It is the way in which Adkins 'shared' what she found in the archives, which made *A Smoky Meeting* such a compelling performance. Working with both a professional audio describer and a script writer, the process began with the artist creating a tableaux of the meeting room, which was then 'audio described'. This audio description was then combined with material from the archives and other cultural references, to create a first script for the performers' rehearsal. These rehearsals were then audio described on two further occasions; the script again being re-edited to incorporate the additional descriptions of the rehearsals.

Adkins is strongly influenced by the cinematic, citing both *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), a film by Johan Grimonprez, and Slavoj Žižek's companion essay *A Holiday from History and Other Real Stories* as key reference points for their exploration of spectacle. In particular, however, it is the 'rashomon effect' which is a central method by which the complex and fractured nature of history and memory is made manifest in her work. The rashomon effect, named after the 1950 film *Rashomon*, by the acclaimed director Akira Kurosawa, is the way in which a single event can be described from multiple perspectives, with often conflicting interpretations. In Kurosawa's film, the story of a murder is told in four different ways, each of which with a conflicting view of the 'truth' of the event.

Adkins is interested in audio description as a method of cinematic visualisation which enables the rashomon effect to be embedded within the script. Adkins 'directed' the process using the cinematic language 'long shot', 'close up' and 'cropped frame'.<sup>17</sup>



8<sup>th</sup> Sept 5

James Allport Esq  
 Midland Ry  
 Derby.

Dear Sir,

We understand that  
 on the issue of alterations Antone  
 stated at Leeds you are likely  
 to have Archie to let - on what  
 full details by the opportunity of  
 sending some in due time - being  
 much straitened by the loss of  
 them letter for Mrs. Stan C.

Yours respectfully,  
 J. A. Tetley Esq.

25% Elongated cells	25% Elongated cells	25% Elongated cells, to chair formati
2 pints gave quickest results, but 1, 2 or 3 pints gave equally good final results (24 hrs), bright beer with small compact flocculum.	2 pints gave brightest beer but rather excessive flocculum.	2 pints but some Hunslet Final r 1, 2 or fined e well bu pints e rather excessi floccul

Through this circular process of creating, describing, writing; creating describing and writing; the resulting performance not only 'performed' the archive, it knowingly performed itself performing the archive in a way which challenges the processes of history and commemoration, and adopts the, perhaps familiar, poststructuralist position that events can not be told from singular, truthful perspectives.

FRACTURED TEMPORALITY

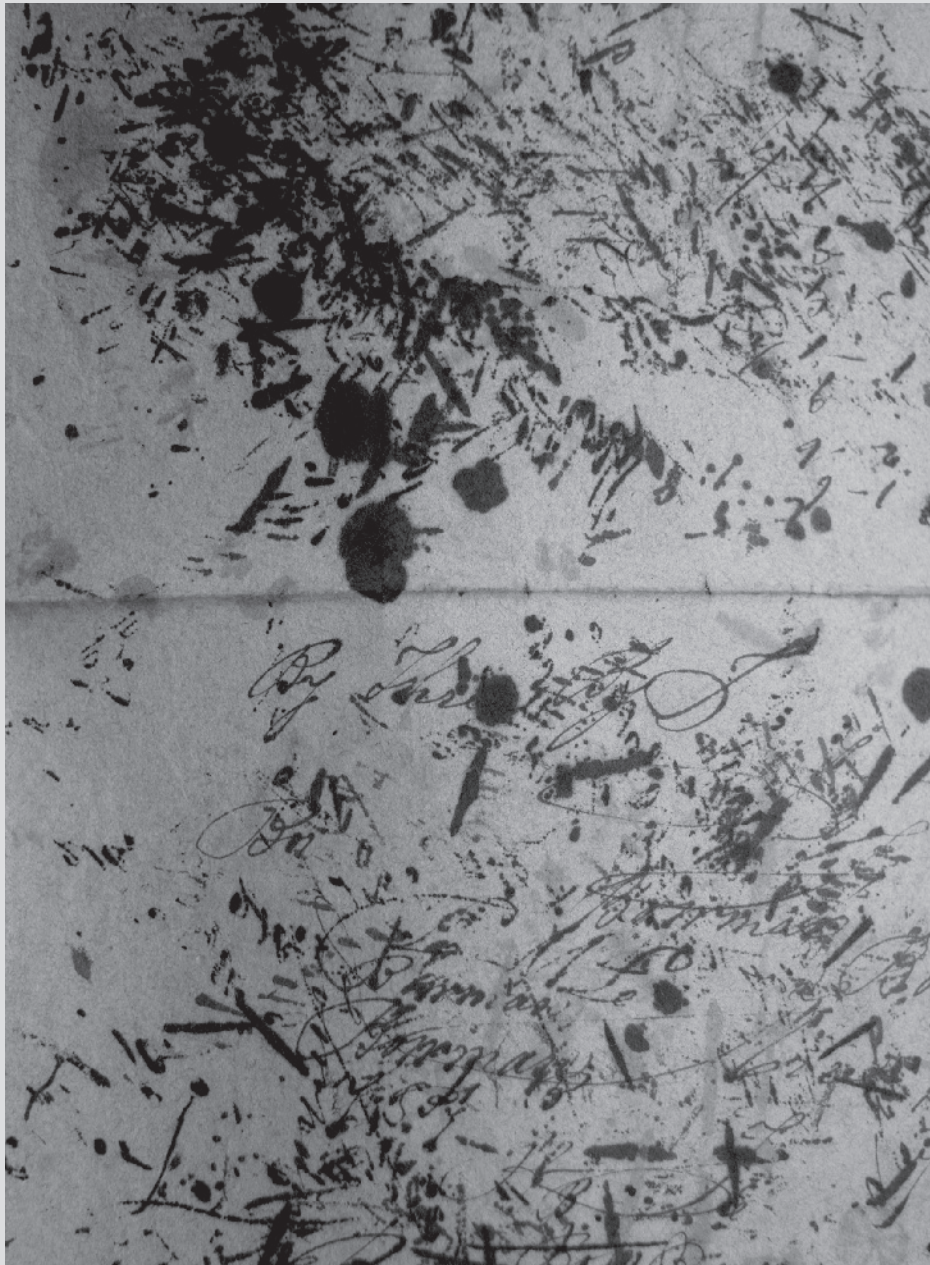
That the performers were smoking is, however, temporally, jarring; it set the performance in a particular time frame. It has been a long time since smoking was allowed in public buildings. However, the power of the metaphor is much more significant than simply suggesting the audience is witnessing the historical reenactment of a staff meeting of the Tetley Brewing Company when people were allowed to smoke. Why is it smoky? The clouds of smoke, haze or 'fog' allude to confusion, disorder and an inability to find ones way in a world whose edges are made indistinct. The exact opposite of what should be happing in meetings which are usually about establishing clarity, purpose, direction. Thus, in a meeting, the haze might also be more mental than physical. This too, was important for Adkins. Throughout the research process, what emerged for the artist was the

*performativity of meetings, how people perform versions of themselves within meetings and how, in many ways any real communication is lost by the formality of the environment. In many ways meetings are scripted performances and the archive has many many images of boardroom meetings.*<sup>18</sup>

The repetitive nature of the 'empty' 'management-speak' within *A Smoky Performance*, combined with references to Slavoj Žižek, clearly points toward a critique of neoliberal capitalist spectacle.

Given that the visual language of cinema is a key reference point for Adkins work, In *A Smoky Meeting*, the strong beams of light used to illuminate the scene also illuminated a connection with the very basis of cinema as projection, subtly indicating the filmic and thus illusory and fantastical nature of the performance. Also, the image of the 'search-light', as famously seen in the Fox Searchlight Pictures logo, draws on the rich (art) history of light as a key metaphor for providing knowledge in the face of ignorance, whether 'biblical' or 'rational'. In this case, it was a searching for historical narrative within the archive of the institution. Thus, the strong lights perform a dual function, 'illuminating' the contemporary event and the historical past; suggesting it is in the act of looking that the heterotopic and hodological nature if this relationship is made manifest. Of course, it was no accident that the light also drew in the audience as performers; their shadows were cast, their movement around and in and out of the smoky room became a performance





for the other viewers. This liminality between audience and performance, reality and illusion draws further references to the use of haze as a visual device of temporal slippage between then and now, inside and outside, here and there.

In horror films fog is a key trope, indicating forthcoming disaster, or even temporal disruption. For me, thinking about the liminality suggested by the performance's use of smoke invoked John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980), a film in which mist represents a creeping window to the past, allowing ghostly sailors to rise from their graves and 'slip through' into the contemporary world to right a historic wrong. It is these metaphors which richly resonate with the museum and archive as a heterotopic site in which time accumulates.<sup>19</sup> The smoke is both metaphor and factual experience; both alluding to confusion and creating it for the viewer, invoking the liminality of engaging with the past in the present, the smoke literally representing the absent presence of the meeting in the boardroom; a 'residual haunting' of the space by the ghosts of the past.<sup>20</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Interventions within heritage sites are often described as having the temporary function of revealing new narratives, reimagining singular narratives as multiple, complex and sometimes contradictory. However, this assumes a distinctiveness between the two seemingly disparate discourses; that the heritage site is a stable construct, which is temporarily disrupted by the artwork. Adkins' performance *A Smoky Meeting*, cleverly confounds this distinction by being both contemporary art and heritage as dialogical processes of meaning making, constituted from an assembling of places and practices and people.<sup>21</sup> It demonstrated this through the way in which it 're-created' an event which brought the boardroom to life, not as an archival 're-enactment', but an interpretive one which both recalled factual events, and challenged the way in which heritage sites present those histories, through the very transparent means by which it referred to its own construction. As Mark Godfrey has argued, artists are legitimate interpreters of history; a key strength is their ability to make work with narrative content which simultaneously critiques modes of historical representation.<sup>22</sup>

The site-responsivity of *A Smoky Meeting* produced a complex experience which richly evoked the entangled nature of history and the present moment, entangled as it is with the personal thoughts ideas and experiences of the individual viewers, and the broader political and social formations within which we are enmeshed.



## NOTES

- 1 *Welcome to the Tetley*
- 2 *Tetley Archive*
- 3 RODNEY HARRISON, pp.228-229
- 4 Arts Council England and National Trust
- 5 HAL FOSTER
- 6 CLAIRE ROBINS
- 7 CLAIRE ROBINS, p.2
- 8 JANET MARSTINE
- 9 JOANNE MORRA
- 10 Performance script
- 11 KEVIN WALSH
- 12 KEVIN WALSH, p.83.
- 14 *Volunteering*
- 15 WALTER BENJAMIN, p.60
- 16 HAL FOSTER, p.4
- 17 Discussion with artist
- 18 Personal correspondence with the author. 15 January 2018
- 19 MICHEL FOUCAULT, pp.22-35
- 20 Here, I acknowledge CATHERINE BERTOLA's use of the term as the title for her work 'Residual hauntings' at the Bronte Parsonage Museum in 2011.
- 21 RODNEY HARRISON, pp.228-229
- 22 MARK GODFREY

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## POSTSCRIPT

Nikolai Duffy

*essay, n. from the French,  
essai, to weigh, try,  
measure, inquire into;  
a rough copy; first draft.*

Think of the power.  
Of a single word.  
Like for example *fact*.  
When I know what matters.  
Is between.<sup>1</sup>

any view is mosaic  
a gathering of all that takes shape  
and then loosens out  
a tassel unravelling perilous and  
close to  
the heat of the embers  
unmistakable scent of the residue  
thickening to mould  
the way at certain times a label  
takes hold and  
stays

**ND:** According to the 17th century Jesuit priest, mathematician and physicist Francesco Maria Grimaldi, diffraction is the bending of waves around obstacles and the spreading out of waves past small openings. The effects of diffraction are most definite where the wavelength is of a similar size to the diffracting object. Small particles in the air can cause a bright ring to be visible around a bright light source such as the sun or a halogen lamp. The word diffraction comes from the Latin *diffringere*, meaning to *break into pieces*.

The fug of smoke in a room, opinions given and made.  
The power of a boardroom and wood panelling.

*Whether the mask is labeled fascism, democracy, or dictatorship of the proletariat, our great adversary remains the apparatus—the bureaucracy, the police, the military. Not the one facing us across the frontier of the battle lines, which is not so much our enemy as our brothers' enemy, but the one that calls itself our protector and makes us its slaves. No matter what the circumstances, the worst betrayal will always be to subordinate ourselves to this apparatus and to trample underfoot, in its service, all human values in ourselves and in others.*<sup>2</sup>

Counter-thread fact with vertigo; suggest vertigo as a precarious ground from which to approach notions of knowledge and understanding and life and relation.

*Vertigo, The terms shift. The relation of the terms shifts. The richness undermines itself. If everything is like something else, no one likeness means anything. And in which case we are left only with gesture rather than any one specific analogy, a gesture that makes the terms transparent for the very structure of language, of signification [...] Transparency for the structure of signification – and for its limits: the silence, the infinite, the nothing, all it is not able to hold.*<sup>3</sup>

*The greater the bureaucratization of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence. In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one could argue, to whom one could present grievances, on which the pressures of power could be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant.*<sup>4</sup>

Maurice Blanchot writes, *to live with the unknown before one (which also means: to live before the unknown, and before oneself as unknown) is to enter into the responsibility of a speech that speaks without exercising any form of power.*<sup>5</sup> A poetics of another language works by indirection, in side step, yet what it affects is the motivation toward reservation, toward a quiet holding back, a swelling of the irreducible measure of distance. Among other things, this other language is an 'element of structure' that spreads out and scatters. It has this dispersal as its precondition. It is other ways leaking into filament; a scurrying sideways of signification; diffraction, deflection. On the edge of writing, it stammers and chinks a present tense for reference.

*hesitate, from the Latin, meaning to stick. Stammer.  
To hold back in doubt, have difficulty speaking.*<sup>6</sup>

1 ROSEMARIE WALDRUP, *Blind sight* (New York: New Directions, 2003) p.48.

2 SIMONE WEIL, 'Reflections on War', *International Review*, 1:1 (1938), p.54.

3 WALDRUP, *Lavish Absence: Recalling and Rereading Edmond Jabès* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p.96.

4 HANNAH ARENDT, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Publishers, 1970), p.18.

5 MAURICE BLANCHOT, *René Char and the Thought of the Neutral, The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.302.

6 SUSAN HOWE, *My Emily Dickinson* (New York: New Directions, 2007), p.21.

NOTES FOR A PERFORMANCE  
RE/VISIONING A SMOKY MEETING

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Biographies

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LOUISE ADKINS is an artist and senior lecturer at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University. Her practice has grown out of performance, artists' film and installation works concerned with constructed histories and the (re) visioning of historic events identified in archives, libraries, collections and heritage sites. In 2012 she founded *Between* an international programme of performance art commissions. In 2016 she was awarded the Amanda Burton Scholarship for *Between Art and (Re) enactment – Historical Representation, the Actual and the Possible* from the School of Fine Art, Art History and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds.

NIKOLAI DUFFY is a poet, publisher, and Senior Lecturer in American Literature at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is the author of *The Little Shed of Various Lamps*, *Up the Creek*, *Relative Strangeness: Reading Rosmarie Waldrop*, and, as editor, *Gap Gardening: The Selected Poems of Rosmarie Waldrop*. He has also published various essays on experimental writing practices, contemporary poetics, and small press publishing. He is the founding editor of *Like This Press*, publishing handmade collections of poetry, short stories, and essays.

JONATHAN HITCHEN is a book designer and senior lecturer in Graphic Design at Manchester School of Art. When he's not teaching, or trying to persuade computers to make drawings, he works with The Modernist Society on their quarterly magazine. In 2017 he made work that examines the relationship between an audience and 3d glasses in *Strelnikov's Glasses and Other Stories* (Society of the Spectacles, HOME MCR). He's currently working on projects with The Portico Library about Peter Mark Roget and the Jorge Luis Borges short story *The Library of Babel*.



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The archive is managed by West Yorkshire Archive Service, and all text used in the script can be accessed via the following document finding numbers:

*WYL756/1, WYL756/38/1, WYL756/BOXES 40, 41, 45, 46, 56, 57, 58, 80, 135, 136, and 138.*

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