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**DRAFT**

## *Chapter Five*

# **Return to Battleship Island**

Carl Lavery with Lee Hassall, Deborah Dixon,  
Carina Fearnley, Mark Pendleton and  
Brian Burke-Gaffney

**[5.0]**

### PREAMBLE

**[5.1]**

In 2013, the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council funded the visit of an interdisciplinary team of scholars to Hashima Island, a bizarre, modernist ruin—ostensibly a large housing estate and mine—located in the East China Sea and situated about fifteen kilometres south of Nagasaki City. The project—Future of Ruins: Reclaiming Abandonment and Toxicity on Hashima Island—was teamed by a performance theorist and writer (Carl Lavery), a geographer (Deborah Dixon), an earth scientist (Carina Fearnley), an East Asian studies scholar (Mark Pendleton), a historian (Brian Burke-Gaffney) and an artist (Lee Hassall). Upon disembarking on Hashima in that sweltering and stifling Japanese summer, our aim was to scour the island for traces of a future to come and to think about how we might learn to exist differently with toxicity and abandoned sites.

**[5.2]**

A key part of the project was to create a multimodal map, a cartography that would move in all directions and would register the diverse and competing elements—human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic—working together to produce what now goes by the double name of Hashima Island and/or Gunkanjima (Battleship Island). The research has yielded a number of different outputs, ranging from academic articles to a film to a set of photographs to a series of performance lectures, each of which offers a different arrangement or versions of the textual fragments we have gathered and created from our time on the island. In the following, which documents the second iteration of a constantly evolving and unstable performance lecture titled *Return to Battleship Island*, we attempt to use text and image to trouble the



logic of the archive and give the island a future that more traditional forms of historical and geographical documentation sometimes move to shut down, despite their best intentions to do otherwise<sup>1</sup>.

[5.3]

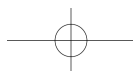
There are risks involved, of course, in this strategy. The island could disappear in an act of self-cancellation, the theatricality of the writing problematise the veracity of what phenomenologists call ‘lived experience’, the obsession with representation hide the reality of what is being represented. As with mayonnaise, then, the text might not ‘take’, and the writing coagulate into a ruin of its own. But if these things occur, if they come to pass, who is to say that such an event would be a failure? Might it not be, as we say again and again in the text below, that the failure to represent, as if in some negative dialectic, is, perhaps, a sign of success, a willingness to let Hashima go, to aerate it, to give it a future that is not subject to prediction? The dialectical reversal implicit in such an operation of negativity is certainly what the performance theorist Sarah Jane Bailes suggests in her wonderfully erudite study *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*: ‘The discourse of failure as reflected in Western art and literature seems to counter the very ideas of progress and victory that simultaneously dominate historical narratives. It undermines the perceived stability of mainstream-capitalist ideology’s preferred aspiration to succeed, or win, and the accumulation of material wealth as proof and effect arranged by those aims. Failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world’<sup>2</sup>.

[5.4]

What Bailes is alluding to here, particularly in the phrase that posits failure as a device for undermining the ‘fiction of continuity’, is the production of a different future, a future that is not negated in advance but one that is radically open, guaranteed by the receiver—someone, in other words, who can animate the text and allow the ruin to unmoor itself from its temporal and historical specificities. The future that interests us, that contests the war economy, the ‘tempus of Empire’ that Hashima both stood for and helped to produce in ‘the long twentieth century’, is perhaps nothing else than a future of breathing<sup>3</sup>. This explains why our purposefully fragmentary text is full of shifts and starts, haunted by a logic of gaps and intervals—empty spaces—that seek, above all else, to move the reader/viewer around, to give the writing some air. Or, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have it, ‘The fragment . . . involves an essential incompleteness. . . . In this sense, every fragment is a project: the fragment-project does not operate as a program or prospectus but as the immediate projection of what it nonetheless incompletes’<sup>4</sup>.

[5.5]

Such logic accounts for the composition of images in the piece—that is, the way that Lee Hassall places the stills from his film (also titled *Return to Battleship Island*) in such a way that each ‘positive’ image of the island is doubled by a wave that threatens to erase it. Hassall has no concern to





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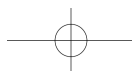
represent or illustrate the writing; rather, he seeks to produce a rhythm as well as to create an interval for the reader—a cinematic rebus, if you will, a disruptive montage that creates a kind of suspension, a dynamic abyss where wave and image are in constant movement and tension. As the literary-reception theorist Wolfgang Iser famously pointed out, reading is an affair of blank spaces, a rewriting on the whiteness of the page. In keeping with the theatricalised methodology we have adopted, our aim was never to tell ‘the truth’ of our experience (whatever that might mean) but to inspire a type of curiosity, to allow for an inhalation of atmosphere, mood and affect—all those things that defy language or, better still, that compel language to ruin itself if it wants to evoke them. The elements underpinning the text are air and wave, not soil or earth.

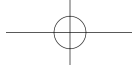
[5.6] In our attempts to explain the aims and ambition of our research into Hashima, I have often felt like one of those writers making hyperbolic and psychedelic sleeve notes for an album from some band from the late 1960s and early 1970s. These texts were often future-orientated and made claims—indeed addressed themselves—to listeners now living in some far away time, maybe even a different galaxy. There was always an ethical juncture, too—a responsibility on the part of listener to engage with this artefact from the past, this piece of shiny black acetate, in a time that was still to come but that somehow had already happened. ‘Imagine: you’re in your bedroom, a million years from now, listening to the Velvet Underground . . .’

[5.7] These reflections on the strange temporality of the future, what Jacques Derrida in *The Politics of Friendship* proposes as the time of the ‘perhaps’, are germane to our attempts to document, and give expression to, the ecobiography of Hashima Island<sup>5</sup>. This is not only because the ruins of Hashima exist, like all ruins, in a suspended, anachronistic state of constant decay, but because the ruin here is opposed, in a complex manner, to the archive—the very thing that we sought, again and again in the text, to trouble and to render porous by blasting its walls. But why this wish for architectural/archival destruction, this commitment to what we might call, in reference to the title of this collection, *radical space*?

[5.8] The spatiality of the archive, as Derrida explains in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, is essentially hermetic, closed-in, self-contained. In Derrida’s etymological desire to unearth and excavate, he tells us that ‘*Arca*, this time in Latin, is the chest, the “ark of acacia wood”, which contains the stone Tablets; but *arca* is also the cupboard, the coffin, the prison cell, or the cistern, the reservoir’<sup>6</sup>. Derrida’s notion of the archive is deadly; it is a body of texts that is domiciled, asphyxiated, deprived of air—it is also patriarchal, conservative, a violence linked to commandment, to a suppressive power:<sup>7</sup>

[5.9] The *archons* are first of all the documents’ guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also





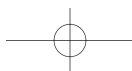
accorded hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this speaking the law, they needed at once a guardian and localisation. . . . It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place<sup>8</sup> .

Derrida posits the archive as a prosthetic (*hypomnesis*), a repression of the contingent, accidental play of memory (*anamnesis*), a gathering of texts that requires a guardian, a lawmaker, to legislate and so control its meaning, to guarantee, that is, an origin. The word *arkhe*, as he points out at the very start of *Archive Fever*, ‘names at once the commencement and commandment . . . the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods command, *there* where authority, social order are exercised’.<sup>9</sup> The historicity of the archive, moreover, is retroactive and performative; its guardians, *the archons*, do not document history; they create it, assigning meaning in reverse, editing, selecting, composing: ‘Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives’.<sup>10</sup> The archive, then, is inherently paranoid, a record that is founded on some supposed metaphysic of knowledge, which, as we know from Jacques Lacan’s writings on the mirror stage, seeks to exclude whatever would trouble its own will to power, its own desire to categorise and objectify<sup>11</sup> . Hence, what Derrida terms ‘the repression and suppression of the archive’—its insistence that only those with permission and the proper skills can interpret its artefacts—restructures the ruins of an event as it was, or, rather, was supposed to have been<sup>12</sup> . It is the archivist as restorer, engaged in an act of reconstruction and lexicalisation, fitting things together so that cracks are covered, the joints not showing, the fragments pieced together and smoothed over.

**[5.10]**

The archive and Hashima are closely aligned and entangled. In contemporary Japan, the Japan of Shinzō Abe’s conservative government, Hashima is being reconfigured as a UNESCO heritage site, a place whose historical meaning can be fixed and then launched into the future with some confidence. In this archival project, which does nothing less than negate the undecidable quality of the message, Hashima is constructed as a symbol and emblem of Japan’s heroic, industrial-military history—this at a time of chronic stagflation, when Japanese octogenarians use more disposable nappies than Japanese babies and when relations with China are in danger of escalating. In this official archive, all breath has been removed from Hashima, the meaning of the rock doubly petrified, its crumbling buildings conserved and managed. It is a paradoxical ruin, then, a ruin from which all ruination—that is to say, all temporality—has been eradicated. Indeed, it is tempting at this point to make a parallel between the ruins of Hashima Island and Albert Speer’s dreams of reshaping the city of Berlin as Germania so that

**[5.11]**





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it would retain ruin value for eternity, perpetuating an image of the Third Reich that would refuse to die.

[5.12]

But there is, as always, a very different, suppressed, archive of Hashima, an archive that successive Japanese governments have been reluctant to accept. This is an archive of forced labour (manual and sexual), of the violence of empire, of separation, exile and slavery. It deals primarily with Korean and Chinese workers forcibly recruited and trafficked to work on the mines in the island in the 1930s and 1940s and whose stories are told in a small, badly resourced museum in downtown Nagasaki.

[5.13]

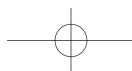
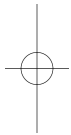
There is in any archiving impulse an ethics. This is not an ethics that would seek to tell the truth of an event as such (for how could that ever be done without some preemptive violence?). Rather, it is an ethics of representation, a style of writing or form of composing that would be sensitive to differences, that would seek to tell counterhistories, but that would also question its own will to power, its own investment in objectivity. For what is at stake in the archive—and Derrida's reading of Freud explicates this very clearly—is nothing less than a battle between Eros and Thanatos, life and death production. This struggle intimates why, in *Return to Battleship Island*, children, dancers, fireflies are privileged figures of/for the alternative archive we have attempted to create—and also why the text tries to resist petrification and solidity. If this text is like anything elemental, then, it is best imagined as a wave, the crest of which is yet to break. The fragments simply pile up, one on top of the other; their number, if not their dramaturgical placement, is purely arbitrary, a matter of energy. If the text comes to a contingent and unfinished end, this is because any neat Aristotelian denouement would contradict our purpose and imply a return to the coffin of the archive.

[5.14]

We are, however, not naive. We realise that any text in a digital age, an age dominated by what Derrida sees as the deathly salvage act of the 'save' key, will become part of an archive, a symptom of its *mal d'archive*, its fever and evil<sup>13</sup>. As such, the question is not how to stay outside of the archive, like some Hegelian and digitally obtuse *belle âme* (beautiful soul) but, rather, how to trouble it from within, an ambition that places the onus on issues to do with representation and, in particular, theatricality as opposed to performance. For where performance is always concerned to construct a world, theatricality, as we understand it, is engaged in an act of undoing, *désœuvrement*, a mode of representing that undermines, by showing its falsity, its own will to power. Theatricality—mimesis—has long been troublesome for archivists, historians and philosophers. Like Diderot's paradoxical comedian, that which is theatrical is always in two places at the same time, too queer or camp to be marshalled into some objective version of the truth of events<sup>14</sup>.

[5.15]

In our theatrical attempt to trouble the archiving of Hashima, to keep its future open and suspensive, we have been influenced, both directly and indirectly, by Derrida's notion of *teleiopoiesis*, which, for us, offers an alter-



native form of writing a spatial history. In *The Politics of Friendship*, in a discussion about Nietzsche and the future, Derrida defines *teleiopoetic* writing as ‘a joint and simultaneous grafting of the performative and the reportive’, a style of historiography that assembles, grafts, different registers of writing: ‘Rendering, making, transforming, producing, creating—this is what counts’. Importantly, the prefix *tele-* in *teleiopoesis* does not ‘render absolute, perfect, completed, accomplished, finished, that which brings to an end’<sup>15</sup>. On the contrary, it ‘permits us to play with the other tele, the one that speaks to distance and the far-removed; for what is indeed in question here is a poetics of distance at one remove’<sup>16</sup>. To engage in *teleiopoesis*, to put ‘in a teleiopoetic or telephone call’, is to send a message into the future, to wager on what is to come, to expect, perhaps, a reader whose presence is indeterminate and unknown<sup>17</sup>. It is also to engage in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls a ‘negotiation’ between imagination and document, text and image, science and fiction, a grafting or rendering—a mode of composition—that seeks, where possible, to allow a space for its repressed other to haunt and hover over what is being affirmed in the here and now<sup>18</sup>. By proceeding thus, both Derrida and Spivak offer a technique for tempering the deathliness and violence of archive fever and for contesting its tendency to fix in the name of the proper, the self-same. For, as Spivak puts it in *Harlem*, her text and image collaboration with the photographer Alice Attie, *teleiopoesis* is characterised by ‘a reaching towards the distant other by the patient power of the imagination, a curious kind of identity politics in which one crosses identity as a result of migration or exile. . . . *Teleiopoesis* wishes to touch a past that is historically not one’s own’<sup>19</sup>.

In *Return to Battleship Island*, Hashima functions as an object or nexus that allows for a connection between past, present and future and that troubles discrete differences between supposedly fixed identities. In a time of globalisation and climate change, a time when the computer has rendered the whole world an archive, *teleiopoesis* exists as an interventionist historiography, a historiography of fragments, in which the incomplete is a provocation to rethink the death drive that haunts the archive, and to open the world to the undecidability of the future. The return in *Return to Battleship Island* is not a repeat, a replaying of the logic of Japanese heritage (perhaps of all heritage); it is a return with a difference, an awareness that, in a world of ‘ruin porn’ stored in the images of today’s digital archive, we have always already been to Hashima Island. The question, then—and this is what we try to answer in the materiality of our text, in terms, that is, of style rather than argumentation—is how to return, *teleiopoetically*, to the future, how to cross the sea and to learn to breathe again.

[5.16]



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[5.17]

## RETURN TO BATTLESHIP ISLAND: VERSION 2

[5.18]

### 1. Lavery's Dream

[5.19]

Had a strange dream last night that finished with a perverse thought: What if all our research into the island, all the archive hunting, the interviewing, the study of its history and natural history, has been a ruse, an unconscious will to fiction? Silence, then, would not be defined by an absence of words but, rather, by the proliferation of language itself, by our compulsion to speak, no less. What a monstrous conjecture! That everything we will say about Hashima, its past, has been nothing other than a huge mistake.

[5.20]

### 2. Space

[5.21]

Humans are beings that participate in spaces unknown to physics. Only the bodies of the dead can be localised unambiguously. With beings that are alive in a humanly ecstatic manner, the question of place is fundamentally different, as the primary productivity of human beings lies in working on their accommodation in wayward, surreal spatial conditions<sup>20</sup>.

[5.22]

### 3. Future of Ruins

[5.23]

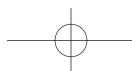
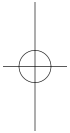
The map of Hashima from 1870 was beautiful and fragile. Drawn onto rice paper that sparkled lightly under the lights, it unfolded with a tenuous crackle. We held our breath as the folds threatened to turn into fissures but did not. Like the other maps we had looked at, sketching out different kinds of land use on the mainland, the outline of Hashima was austere, drawn in sharp pencil, but here only one colour—a mid-green—was used to highlight a rocky outcrop that cut across its centre. Around the island a sea of white paper extended, as though Hashima were riding on a cloud (figure 5.1).

[5.25]

### 4. Battleship Island

[5.26]

Hashima is situated in the East China Sea, roughly fifteen or so kilometres from Nagasaki City. In Japanese, the island is referred to colloquially as Gunkanjima—Battleship Island—on account of its resemblance to a battleship. An intense period of occupation began on the island in 1890 when the Mitsubishi Company bought the fifteen-acre site for undersea coal mining. The tunnels and chambers carved out of the rock were matched by the erection of Japan's(then) largest concrete building in 1916, followed by a school, hospital, shops, restaurants, a swimming pool and shrine, all within an encircling sea wall. This baroque environment became a site of forced labour, using Japan's colonial subjects, between 1939 and 1945. In 1959, the island reached a peak population of over five thousand. Mitsubishi closed its mines







**[5f1]** Figure 5.1. Still from the film *Return to Battleship Island* (2013) Source: Lee Hassall.

in 1974, and the site quickly became a ruin. In 2009 the island became accessible to the public as a tourist destination, and there are plans to transform it into a UNESCO heritage site. The strange, uncanny feel to the island has appealed to photographers, filmmakers and artists. It features in Ben Rivers's *Slow Action* (2011) as well as in the James Bond movie *Skyfall* (2012). In these works, however, the aestheticisation of ruins has meant, paradoxically, that the terrible history of Hashima, its exploitation of human labour and the Earth's natural resources, has been rendered invisible. The more we look at Hashima, the less we see<sup>21</sup>.

## 5. Trauma

[5.27]

On Hashima, we encountered the traces of a series of traumas, from the salt rain of the sea to the blast of an atomic bomb, and a landscape of 'ruin porn' that has become viral. To enter Hashima is to find a past made future and to lose oneself in the toxic effluent of plastic rivulets, broken silicon, and petrified steel wire. Hashima is a synthetic Saturn, a dark star of waste. To actualise the monstrous touch of Hashima—its toxicity—the good sense of academic language, with its dream of measured communication, breakdowns, prey to a viral entropy.

[5.28]

## 6. Litany

[5.29]

Hashima, Hashima, Hashima, the reptilian sound of the aspirate H. Horror, Hatred, Hell. A fucked-up mess of a thing, a shit storm, a bleeding anus, pus ball, smear, shambles, toxic, poisoned, a ruin in the sea, everything weeping.

[5.30]

## 7. Rocky Outcrop

[5.31]

Geologists are detectives of deep time, tracking the formation of the Earth to construct a deep history without vestige of a beginning or prospect of an end. In the field, we make sense of this geology by touching, tasting, smashing

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and dissecting rocks. However, after a couple of hours on the island, desperately trying to see where I could find even just a small natural outcrop, let alone touch the rock, I was feeling disconnected to the land I walked on. From what I could see, the bedrock was clad in netting, concrete, walls and plant life. I searched for outcrops in the awkward corners of buildings, to feel the waxy, dark, smothering texture of the Hashima-tan, the coal seam.

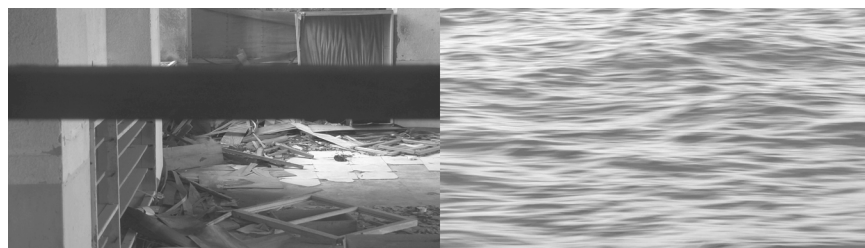
**[5.33]** We gathered a small quantity of dust from a sheltered corner of a room at the top of Hell's Staircase. An analysis of this material in the portable spectrometer indicates that the material is composed of: 65 percent organic material, including skin cells, insect faeces, pollen and other plant material; and 35 percent concrete dust.

**[5.34]** **8. Zen Garden**

**[5.35]** According to French architect Murielle Hladik, the Japanese Zen garden is rooted in a dual aesthetics of absence and transience<sup>22</sup>. So the absence of water in a Zen garden, its minimalist commitment to dry rock, is intended to evoke its opposite: namely, the flow of liquid—waterfalls, waves, floating islands. Hladik discusses this evocative aesthetic in terms of ghosts. She also suggests—and this is the central argument of her 2008 publication, *Traces et fragments dans l'esthétique japonaise*—that gardens in Japan are intended to show the passing of time, the weathering play—the elemental performance, we might say—of erosion. In keeping with the thinking of Zen, the point of this weathered disclosure is to allow for a meditation on the transience of existence itself, to show that everything solid is founded on a void, an abyss—on air (figure 5.2).

**[5.37]** **9. Concrete Geographies**

**[5.38]** To talk of Hashima as abandoned, and devastated, is to bemoan its loss of coherence as a utilitarian landscape; no longer part of an economic-industrial



**[5f2]** Figure 5.2. Still from the film *Return to Battleship Island* (2013). Source: Lee Hassall.



network of production, the site slides into a wasteful formlessness. This laissez-faire slide into entropy contrasts with the elemental metabolism that was Hashima the coal-mining site, as the physical materials that ‘made’ Hashima were used, transmogrified and reused time and again. Slag churned up from the mine shafts was used to lay out new ‘land’ that could be built on. It also fed the production of cement for the construction of buildings, paths and tunnels. Slag was combined with limestone and shale and heated by a coal-fired kiln to produce clinkers; the ashes from the fires were also fed into the mix. Pulverised along with calcium sulfates, the resulting powder would ‘set’ (via a series of chemical reactions still not entirely understood) when water was added but would then become impervious to the same so that cement could be used in marine environments in the form of sea walls, ships and so on. Into the cement would be poured hard-wearing aggregates, such as pebbles and sand, bound together by this hydraulic matrix. During the manufacturing process, cement powder could also, of course, react with the slimy mucus of noses, throats and lungs, producing chemical burns and cancers.

In order to augment the tensile strength of this newly made rock, which was prone to crack rather than bend, steel rods, made in the coal-fired steel mill of nearby Yahata, were embedded in the mixture. These preventative measures are indicative of the fact that, as the land artist Robert Smithson would no doubt appreciate, as soon as it is made, the ‘integrity’ of the concrete begins to break down. Sulfates in acid rain weaken the cement binder, and salts from seawater crystallise in the pores of the concrete, fracturing its physical lattice. As the alkalinity of the cement is reduced through carbonation (the reaction of carbon dioxide in air with calcium hydroxide in the concrete aggregate), the electrochemical corrosion of the metal reinforcing supports is enhanced. Rusting flakes further destabilise the site’s structural integrity. Roofs and walls collapse into shattered shards that reveal their embedded pebbles and sands and from which flourish bundles of steel wire like petrified sea anemones. Dripping with moisture from the humid air, the ground takes on the appearance of a newly discovered seashore.

[5.39]

## 10. Sphinx

[5.40]

It is impossible to understand Hashima—it exists in the imagination as a Sphinx. The closer you get, the more it hides itself.

[5.41]

## 11. Floating Fern

[5.42]

In December 1963, Hidekuni Matsuo visited the Hashima colliery in the hunt for life-forms—ancient life-forms. Deep in the Mitsuse prospecting pit, and accompanied by Mr. Arimatsu of the Mitsubishi Corporation, he discovered the second-oldest record in Asia of the genus *Salvinia*—a floating fern. He

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observed that ‘the Cretaceous *Salvinia* was found in the grey silty shale layer containing many pyritised nodules’. Named *Salvinia Mitsusense*, this newly discovered species was:

**[5.44]** Laminae lack apex and base: striate punctuate characters, margin entire: 11.4mm in length and 6.2mm in width. Midnerve rather thick and distinct; lateral nerves 16 in number, form an archeid at angle of 60°. Archied fine but distinctly impressed, commonly forming 4–5 regular hexagonal or pentagonal meshes. Impressions of tubercles or spines rather large. Usually one to each mesh<sup>23</sup>.

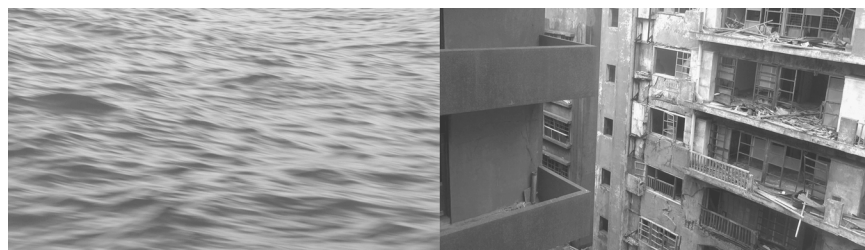
**[5.45]** It is thought that this species, found under Hashima, grew in a bituminous bog from the late period of the Cretaceous and was ancestor to the species of *Salvinia Palaeogene* and *Salvinia* Neocene (figure 5.3).

**[5.47]** **12. Archive**

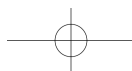
**[5.48]** It is hard to shake the feeling that Hashima is like everything else these days: an archive waiting to happen, the world becoming book, becoming image. This archive would not be *an* archive of things; rather, it would be a virtual archive, a phantom archive, an archive where what *is* is haunted by what *is not*, where presence and absence find themselves in a perpetual and cannibalistic game, as if they are actively willing our own disappearance, the death drive in the rearview mirror.

**[5.49]** **13. Portrait**

**[5.50]** To paint a portrait is not, as is commonly thought, to paint the truth of an object, as such; rather, it is to paint the object as one perceives, or even imagines it. Sickert, Soutine, Goya, Giacometti. With these names, with this concept, we arrive at the paradox of all portraiture—its dialectic, if you will—the sense in which the portrait tells you more about the painter or



**[5f3]** Figure 5.3. Still from the film *Return to Battleship Island* (2013). Source: Lee Hassall.





sculptor than the thing painted or sculpted. In this respect, there are certain axiomatic similarities between portraiture and witnessing. In both cases, the key point is not to tell the truth but to tell the truth as one sees it. This inclusion of contingency, this celebration of subjectivity, would appear to militate against all notions of objectivity, foreclosing any relationship with truth or science. How does one measure the imagination? By what scale can it be mapped? How to contain it, even to understand it? Yet here where we least expect it perhaps we abut against the real scandal of portraiture. For portraiture’s mining of the subjective, its attachment to the imaginal, results in the production of a truth that realistic or communicative representation is unable to disclose. Or, put another way, portraiture’s abandonment of the impartial look, its investment in the passionate and, necessarily, biased and blind gaze of the painter or sculptor is the very thing that reveals the hidden essence of the object. By this I mean not its unchanging core or identity but, rather, the ungraspable atmosphere or mood in which it—or any object—bathes. To this degree, all portraiture—at least all good portraiture—is always a painting about air, about how, that is, objects breathe or emanate in the midst of a streaming world.

To paint a portrait of Hashima, then, is not simply to stick to the facts; on the contrary, it is just as important, if not more so, to experiment with alternative methods, to empathise with its atmosphere, to speculate on its strangeness, to imagine oneself there and not there, to open a breach, to breathe its air. In technical or stylistic terms, this results in the same fragmentary movement, the same revolving pattern, that students of life drawing and sculpture engage in when they attempt to capture the figure or portrait of a life model as she or he moves slowly around them on a dais.

**[5.51]**

#### **14. The Other Side**

**[5.52]**

The crematorium island on the starboard side of the boat as we travelled out to Hashima raises its hideous aspiring head, and it intercepts the grey mist, while Hashima, dead ahead, seems from its desolated and rocky summit to threaten instant annihilation. It is impossible to imagine a situation with more edges than this rude, undone mass of compound matter. Amid the broken concrete and asbestos dust, everywhere are scattered the remains of dwelling and of lives lived, conveying an idea of chaotic fragments, stored away for the formation of another world.

**[5.53]**

The wind drones through a corroded angle bracket . . .

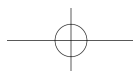
**[5.54]**

The ‘other’ side of the island is steep with tremendous valleys of concrete and wood, which seem ready to slide from their slippery base and overwhelm.

**[5.55]**

Looking away from Hashima, from the windows of the tower block, the prospect is unobstructed; it is a map formed in the archive of the imagination:

**[5.56]**





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the elements appear to coalesce in the distance and are fused with each other; earth, air, wind and water unite in one general body. A vast concrete jigsaw puzzle, crumbling and cascading down the rock; decorated here and there by romantically projecting foliage. Hashima, surrounded by its crumbling self, a sea of concrete. The sea walls are breached.

**[5.57] 15. Interviews, with Choi Chang-Seop, Eighty-One-Year-Old, Male. Interviews Conducted on 31 December 2010, 30 January 2011 and 10–11 February 2011**

**[5.58]** Q. When and how were you transported to Japan?

**[5.59]** A. It was in February 1943 as I graduated primary school and was about to begin the equivalent of junior high school. I was only fourteen years old. I was really born in 1928. We were doing drills with wooden guns at school when suddenly I was captured and taken to the county offices in Iksan. When Im Chun-son from the county office saw me, he scolded the officials asking, ‘Why did you bring this child?’ The official replied, ‘Because we had to make up the numbers . . .’

**[5.60]** Q. The year 1943 was before conscription began. Was there no way to avoid what happened? Were your family informed?

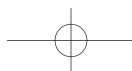
**[5.61]** A. My father had already been transported to the Aoji Coal Mine, a mine in the north run by the Japanese. As my brother feared being captured and had ran away, they took me instead. . . . My family were informed. My mother and younger sister hurried to Hamyeol station, walking a distance of two villages. They shed an ocean of tears. This outpouring of my mother’s love helped raise my spirits. ‘Make sure you eat along the way’, she said, as she gave me a wrapped rice cake. I remember breaking it up and sharing it among the others I was with . . .

**[5.62]** Q. What happened once you arrived at Hashima?

**[5.63]** A. In the central northern portion of the island was a nine-story building. . . . They divided the basement into three rooms and put about forty of us in there. I was placed in the second platoon of Harada’s second company, number 6105. I shudder at the memory but can never forget that number. . . . Sunlight could not enter the room, which was horribly damp. Coming home after intense labour, bathing and just wanting to pass out, you would just sweat constantly and not be able to sleep.

**[5.64]** Q. What kind of work did they make you do? And what was the workplace like?

**[5.65]** A. We would dig coal from the ground—it was coal mining. After just a week of observation in the mines, you were put to work. There were times when you were divided into three teams and would work for sixteen hours a day. Other times, you were divided in two and worked twelve. In groups of forty you would drop at high speed three thousand feet underground from the



mine entrance. Our bodies would shrivel with fear. The mine site was so hot, and we were sweating all the time, so we would work year 'round in a single loincloth. . . . We had to work long hours on only one bowl of rice in thin soup, so we were all malnourished. After we finished work, we would rest on a blanket spread out on the top of the seven-metre sea walls. Our legs would always convulse in pain. You could hear people screaming, 'I feel like I'm going to die'. On top of this, we received no wages. My memory is the truth.

Q. Were there people who got injured or passed away?

[5.66]

A. Of course. A guy from Kure in Jeolla Province fell off a hopper car and died.

[5.67]

Q. Was there a proper funeral held for the man from Kure who died?

[5.68]

A. After his body was cleaned, Harada had him put in funeral clothes. I didn't see if they cremated him or not, but, in any case, he was then sent back to Korea (figure 5.4)<sup>24</sup>.

[5.69]

## 16. Mitsubishi

[5.71]

Differently from the period 1880 to 1945, when Japan could forcibly recruit its labour from colonies such as Korea and defeated neighbours like China, democratisation in the 1950s and 1960s meant that a workforce now had to be seduced into working on the island. This was not easy for the Mitsubishi Company, Japan was experiencing its 'first economic miracle', and unemployment in the country was at all time low. Life on Hashima was known to be hard for miners and their families, and there was little incentive to move to a barren rock in the middle of the sea.

[5.72]

In order to counter this negative image, Mitsubishi were careful to cultivate and promote an alternative discourse, a discourse of a worker's utopia. Photographs started to circulate showing life on the island to be a heady mixture of heroic work and laid-back consumerism—workers laughing in bars, children playing in the alleyways and diving into the sea, women buying fish and vegetables, adolescents and miners studiously playing pachinko.

[5.73]



[5f4] Figure 5.4. Still from the film *Return to Battleship Island* (2013) Source: Lee Hassall.

New films were shown in the Showakan cinema before they went on general release throughout Japan; television programmes were broadcast from the island; luxury items—food processors, washing machines and tumble driers—were more readily available in Hashima than elsewhere in Japan. A state-of-the-art school for seven hundred students was built in 1958, and the most up-to-date equipment was bought for it—calculators, typewriters, projectors. There was a gymnasium, an assembly hall, a small theatre with a raised stage, and, on the third floor of the elementary school, there was, amazingly, a planetarium to teach the children about the movement of constellations. The kindergarten was painted with beautiful colours. There was a real tree decorated with ribbons and bows, and a small fountain had been installed near to a window that overlooked the sea, with fish, frogs, and terrapins. On Hashima, everything was new, shiny and desirable. This was the predominant image, the myth, the dream.

**[5.74] 17. Nostalgia**

**[5.75]** Here on Hashima, it is easy to dispel the misty charm of nostalgia in the way, perhaps, a window wiper clears the windscreen of rain, leaving it, if only for a moment, beautifully clear. Nostalgia is a product of dissatisfaction and rage. It's a settling of grievances between the present and the past. The more powerful the nostalgia, the closer you come to violence. War is the form nostalgia takes when men are hard-pressed to say something good about their country<sup>25</sup>.

**[5.76] 18. Tanaka**

**[5.77]** In the autumn of 1967, the feted sociologist from the University of Tokyo, Professor Masami Tanaka, applied to the Mitsubishi Company with the express intent of conducting a sociological survey of community life on Hashima. Tanaka, whose list of publications was impressive, and included the award-winning books *Reconstruction and Recovery: Adolescence in Contemporary Japan* (1958) and the *Satsuma Sumurai: Everyday Life and the Kagashima Elite, 1864–1880* (1964), was initially granted permission to visit the island for a week to engage in speculative fieldwork<sup>26</sup>. His aim was to gather a sample of experiences of everyday life on the island via the use of qualitative-research methods, such as interviewing residents and participant observation. Tanaka's physical presence on the island was absolutely key to his methodology.

**[5.78]** Tanaka and his young wife, the dancer Momo Tifune, arrived in Nagasaki City in the sweltering and turbulent month of August 1968 to meet with representatives of Mitsubishi in their central office located near to the shipyard docks at the mouth of Nagasaki harbour. As specified in a letter dated 7





March 1968, Tanaka was to have a long interview with representatives from Mitsubishi and then undergo a routine medical. Following these formalities, Tanaka was to obtain a special permit allowing him access to buildings, apartments and people. He would also be issued a ticket for the ferry and given a booklet of meal vouchers to spend in the restaurant situated in the small precinct of shops running between Hell’s Staircase and the cinema.

Tanaka was drawn to the island for its novel strategies for creating *and* upholding social cohesion. In a series of pilot interviews conducted with former residents of Hashima by his research assistants in Tokyo, Tanaka had been fascinated by the techniques used by the island’s inhabitants to circumvent the evident tensions that could arise from living in such cramped and claustrophobic living conditions. At that time, Hashima was one of the most densely populated places on earth. In 1955, for instance, more than 1,400 lived in a single hectare, and its reinforced-concrete tower blocks were packed with people in a state of permanent motion.

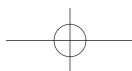
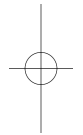
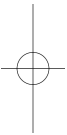
We have no real record of what occurred in Tanaka’s meeting with the Mitsubishi company in August 1968, but he was prevented from visiting the island, and the study was eventually abandoned. Some said that Tanaka’s tuberculosis, the same tuberculosis that would eventually result in his long, drawn-out death in a Kyoto hospital in 1979, was the sticking point—that the Mitsubishi company was terrified by the prospect of an outbreak of plague in the packed corridors and tunnels of Hashima. Others suggested that Tanaka’s public sympathy for the Zengakuren was the real issue behind Mitsubishi’s decision to block his entry<sup>27</sup>. However, these rumours cannot be substantiated. A more likely reason is that Mitsubishi were simply not interested in academic research and had no real intention of ever letting Tanaka carry out his study for fear that he might disturb the utopian narrative that was—and continues to be—disseminated by some of its former residents (figure 5.5).

### **19. Toxins**

In an age of atmospheric toxins, to place one’s trust in one’s primary surroundings—be it nature, the cosmos, creation, homeland, situation, etc.—takes on the guise of an invitation to self-harm<sup>28</sup>.

### **20. Children**

Our physical encounter with Hashima is increasingly figured in terms of an encounter with children—those kids who played baseball on rooftops overlooking the ocean, gazing out at the water. The ruin of Hashima, its death, if you will, is inseparable from a meditation on the vitality, the open-endedness, of childhood. Perhaps, too, this is why we can’t help but see Hashima as a fading relic that is inherently futural, that points forward to what will





[5f5] Figure 5.5. Still from the film *Return to Battleship Island* (2013). Source: Lee Hassall.

have been. The more one reflects on the children of Hashima, the more astonishing is their ability to concentrate on the games they played, when everything—the waves, wind, the glint of sunlight on water—was pulling them elsewhere, outwards, away, to the sea.

## [5.86] 21. Rhinoceros

[5.87] To think of Hashima is to bring to mind Albrecht Dürer's image of a rhinoceros: heavy, saturated, depressive, militarised, all in chains.

## [5.88] 22. The Falling of Buildings

[5.89] We took a compass clinometer into the field in an attempt to read the lie of the rocks, concrete and all, on Hashima. It is used to record the dip and slip of layers of rock, sedimented and folded over millennia, and to give some clue as to their condition of origin as, perhaps, a deep sea, a shallow marshy coastline, as well as the tectonic forces that compress and stretch these. By understanding the dip—that is, the angle of tilt from the horizontal—and the strike—that is, the direction of the dip—and modelling these on a stereonet, we can also speculate as to future geomorphologies.

[5.90] On Hashima, the buildings cluster onto a rocky outcrop. And they are dipping. None of the walls of the buildings are at ninety-degree angles—that is, standing straight up. They all lie between eighty-four and eighty-nine degrees. They are slowly unfurling away from the outcrop; and they will tend to reach a tipping point together and fall against the encircling sea wall.

## [5.91] 23. Love Story

[5.92] I'm aware—who couldn't be—that Hashima was a place of suffering and discrimination during World War II, especially, but in the 1950s a different type of atmosphere reigned on the island, an atmosphere, we might say, of optimism, perhaps even a kind of happiness in dwelling. This is certainly



how Sakamoto Doutoku, our guide, talks of the island, and the images of the time show people going about their business—working, shopping, playing, drinking in bars, going to the movies to watch samurai films, watching television, cooking. It’s striking to see the playgrounds and swimming pools on Hashima, and Sakamoto tells stories of adolescent love affairs on the shadowy, clandestine rooftops and of waving to his future wife across an abyss of sky that separated his tower-block apartment from hers.

**24. Dance**

[5.93]

Perhaps the reason why Hashima disturbs us so is that it exists in an intimate confederacy with the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. Hashima and Nagasaki are caught in a sad dance, moving through the old century, the twentieth century, the century of flame and ashes, the century that weighs on us still, like the thick lead blankets of an X-ray room. To think about Hashima, we need images that conglomerate and combine, that mix and match, that allow stuff to congeal, that allow history to be seen as so much sticky tape and layering: one thing on top of the other, a hodge-podge, a ricochet, a shocking magnet, a wave action (figure 5.6).

[5.94]

**25. Fireflies**

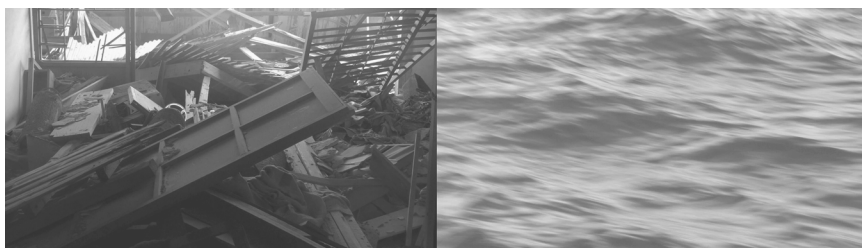
[5.96]

For some, Hashima, was a place of noise, laughter and tears, a place of childish creativity and invention. When Mitsubishi gave the order to abandon the island in January 1974, people were shocked and saddened. The children outlined the word *Sayanora*—or goodbye—with their bodies on the concrete playground in front of the school building, and someone photographed this bodily writing, this choreography, from the air.

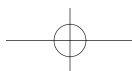
[5.97]

In the essay ‘Oikos’ Jean-François Lyotard speaks of the necessity of remaining, like Einstein, a child and how this ‘childishness’, this immaturity, might allow for a different mode of relating to the world<sup>29</sup>. Is this childish-

[5.98]



**[5f6]** Figure 5.6. Still from the film *Return to Battleship Island* (2013) Source: *Lee Hassall*.





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ness still possible today? In the 1960s, the murdered Italian filmmaker and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini suggested, beautifully, that the *luccioli*—or fireflies—deserted Europe with the demise of Communism in the 1940s. History and natural history combined. A kind of species extinction. A thousand ecologies in that phrase of Pasolini's.<sup>30</sup>

[5.99] Could we say the same thing about Hashima but in a way that would conflate children with fireflies? And might that conflation and desertion be at the root of the ecological disaster, the ecocide that the island so obviously brings to mind? The ecocide of Hashima is Janus-faced: it looks both ways, to past and future in the same impossible, stuttering moment.

[5.100]

NOTES

[5n1] 1. *Battleship Island* was written by the entire team but was delivered by Carl Lavery and Deborah Dixon at the University of East London as part of the Centre for Cultural Studies' conference, Radical Space, in October 2013.

[5n2] 2. Sarah Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and The Poetics of Failure* (London: Routledge, 2011), 2.

[5n3] 3. See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1994).

[5n4] 4. Philippe Lacloue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. P. Barnard and C. Lester (Albany: SUNY, 1978), 43.

[5n5] 5. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins (London: Verso, 2005), 26–48.

[5n6] 6. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 23.

[5n7] 7. 'What is at issue here . . . is the violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival violence*'. Ibid., 7, emphasis original.

[5n8] 8. Ibid., 2.

[5n9] 9. Ibid., 1.

[5n10] 10. Ibid., 18.

[5n11] 11. Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience', in *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. B. Fink, in collaboration with H. Fink and R. Grigg, 76 (London: W. W Norton, 2002).

[5n12] 12. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 29.

[5n13] 13. Ibid., 26.

[5n14] 14. This is based on Jean Genet's notion of theatricality in plays such as *The Balcony* (1995) and *The Blacks* (1957). For more on the distinction between theatricality and performativity, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[5n15] 15. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 32.

[5n16] 16. Ibid.

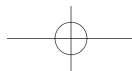
[5n17] 17. Ibid., 34.

[5n18] 18. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Alice Attie, *Harlem* (Calcutta: Seagull, 2012), 42.

[5n19] 19. Ibid., 11.

[5n20] 20. Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, Volume 1: Bubbles; Microspherology, trans. W. Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), [1998] 2010), 83.

[5n21] 21. Much of this text is taken from the project's website, The Future of Ruins: Reclaiming Abandonment and Toxicity on Hashima Island, <http://www.futureofruins.org.uk>. See also the final report: Carl Lavery, Deborah Dixon, Carina Fearnley and Mark Pendleton, *Care of the Future* (Swindon: Arts and Humanities Research Council, [2013]), <http://www.futureofruins.org.uk/report.html>.





*Lavery with Hassall, Dixon, Fearnley, Pendleton and Burke-Gaffney*

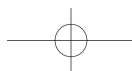
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22. Murielle Hladik, *Traces et fragments dans l'esthétique japonaise* (Wavre, Belgium: Mardaga, 2008), 137–67. **[5n22]**
23. Hidekuni Matsuo, 'A Cretaceous Salvinia from Hashima Island: Outside; or the Nagasaki Harbour, West Kyushu, Japan', *Transactions and Proceedings of the Palaeontological Society of Japan* 72 (1967): 519. **[5n23]**
24. The Association to Protect the Human Rights of Nagasaki's Korean Residents, eds., *Straining to Hear Gunkanjima: Records of the Koreans and Chinese Forcibly Transported to Hashima*, trans. M. Pendleton (Tokyo: Shakaihyōronsha, 2011), 40–47. **[5n24]**
25. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (London: Penguin, [1985] 2011), 258. **[5n25]**
26. Masami Tanaka, *Reconstruction and Recovery: Adolescence in Contemporary Japan*, trans. K. Hiyata (Ipswich: University of Suffolk Press [1958] 1999); and Tanaka, *Satsuma Sumurai: Everyday Life and the Kagashima Elite, 1864–1880*, trans. K. Hiyata (Saint Joseph: Michigan Alma Press, [1964] 2001). **[5n26]**
27. The Zengakuren is a left-wing militant student movement that was critical of Japan's close relationship with the United States and that protested the war in Korea in the 1950s and the US invasion of Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. **[5n27]**
28. Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, trans. A. Patton and S. Corcoran (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), [2002] 2009), 108. **[5n28]**
29. Jean François Lyotard, 'Oikos', in *Jean-François Lyotard: Political Writings*, trans. B. Reddings and K. Gaiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1988] 1993), 106–107. **[5n29]**
30. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'The Power Void in Italy', trans. C. Mott, *Corriere della Sera*, 1 February 1975. **[5n30]**

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