

E-mail sent sometime in 2012 to shed some light on *Carbon Dating* and *Portal Fragment*

Hi,

I may be too late with this but here are a couple of pointers in relation to the two works in the show. I don't think we really got a chance to talk properly about them, so I wanted to send you these to clear up any possible red herrings I may have generated in chatting with you. If this is 'too much information' [hands held up in front of face], then just pretend I didn't send you this.

best,
d.

***Carbon Dating* - Title**

Carbon dating is a technique that archaeologists use to determine the age of an artefact. It's a process that's frequently used to determine if an artefact is as old as someone claims it to be .e.g. the Turin shroud. Visible in the video are diagrams which have been drawn through sheets of carbon paper, blowing in the wind. So there's a bit of word play, carbon paper being something that we might relate to a certain time-period, and to a certain kind of bureaucracy perhaps; a desire for certainty (through duplication and data accumulation) and perhaps control, in a pre-digital world. A couple of years ago, I spent some time going through some archives in London (early sixties to mid seventies). There were photographs and plans, but also endless stacks of type-written documents duplicated using carbon paper.

Brutalism

I'm concerned that by beginning my description of *Carbon Dating* by mentioning that the campus under discussion was designed in the Brutalist style, might place unnecessary emphasis on this detail. Just to clarify, the specific fact that the campus could be described as Brutalist ISN'T particularly important and I don't expect it to be obvious to the viewer from watching the piece (even though the interviewee does mention the early Sixties at one point early on). My interest in it stems from the fact that people tend to have very polarised views about these kinds of spaces. They tend to become more sensitised to certain aspects of the space and their own behaviour or sense of themselves in buildings from that era, because they are so different from the more traditional ones in which they usually spend their time. In many ways, living/working in a Brutalist building is akin to living/working inside a sculpture.

Memory

One important thing is that the interviewee is recalling the time she spent working on this campus a couple of years previously. It's not explicit, but her descriptions are couched in the language of remembering. The piece is dealing with her memories of a particular space - a campus. I was interested in things she had *learned* from the space, what you might call *embodied knowledge*. It's pretty clear that she was consciously taking note of a lot of these issues at the time (she gets the buildings a grounds guys to come in to fix the hole in her wall for example), but there are other memories that emerge through talking herself through the space again. I think that there is a sense of this *remembering* in the work.

Diagrams

As I mentioned when we were chatting, the diagrams in 'Carbon Dating' are taken from this book by Kevin Lynch:

<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/what-time-place>

The book is designed with space in the margins which contain doodles - attempts to create diagrammatic representations of the things being discussed in the text. The diagrams I used come from a section about managing change. Obviously, although the source is important, I don't expect the viewer to recognise them, but I think they create a tension in the piece between what's being said and what can be seen - language and image.

Permeability/Boundaries

Windows, holes in walls, concrete under carpet, zones.

Towards the end, she even talks about the permeability of boundaries between academic disciplines.

In a way, this is where *Portal Fragment* comes into the equation. It's constructed using materials that have a very particular resonance - dropped ceiling materials being designed to be used to create (what else) ceilings in certain kinds of places; office or institutional spaces perhaps, although they're frequently used in a domestic setting too. Dropped ceilings are also often used as a cheap solution in the refurbishment of buildings from the Sixties/Seventies - libraries and hospitals etc. They separate the space in a building into habitable space and what's called *the plenum space* - the space above the ceiling where cables, ducting and other infrastructural elements can be hidden.

In the show at White Box in New York, these ceiling elements were used to make a kind of boundary. The piece forms a semi-permeable layer - like a kind of screen, preventing the whole space being visible from the street at a single glance. It's just leaning against the two walls, in a corner. Regular visitors to the space would know that the gallery frequently builds a wall at the point where the piece is sited, so it attempts to relate to their memory of what this space has previously been like. *Portal Fragment* has a front and a back, both of which are visible. *Carbon Dating* is positioned in relation to it to create a semi-enclosed space (like a kind of cockpit), which might be palpable when sitting (on the chair, deliberately placed) between the works. The chair is also situated so that the viewer can see out the window as they are watching the video. The plinth, designed for this occasion, also plays with these ideas of permeability, inside/outside.

***Portal Fragment* - title**

This title also refers to boundaries and permeability - a portal being a kind of entrance or gateway. So one could ask the question, 'if this is a portal fragment, then what does the whole portal look like?' Are there many of these fragments waiting to be assembled into a huge gateway structure of some kind? What kind of place has a huge entrance-way made from dropped ceiling elements? Portals usually being an outside/inside boundary, why is it being constructed from materials that are not designed to withstand the elements?

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