

Creating the region – Networking the region

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Introduction: Visualising place

In 1998 Bruno Latour and photographer Emilie Hermant produced a book and web project entitled *Paris Invisible City* (Latour and Hermant 2004) .¹ The project develops a narrative of place, which, like Actor Network Theory more generally, sets great stock by connectivities and co-existences. In short, the project – using text, collaged images and an interactive web site – promotes the idea that it is interaction that forms the social. *Paris Invisible City* is a narrative of place, indeed, a form of representation, which, as the title implies, pays attention to the ‘invisible’; those things and their interactions which normally go unnoticed: the sheer multitude of ordinary objects and organisation systems that constitute a city. Rather than focus on large scale representations of Paris, Latour’s project seeks to visualise the city through those things which are bypassed within the normative representational mode: street furniture, traffic flows and restaurant bills are just some of the invisibles that Latour gives us. In this paper, we draw on the concept and form of *Paris Invisible City* to provide a perspective on the creative industries in South West Britain. Amongst the invisibles that we consider are creative clusters, museum store rooms, artist’s studios, ash, resin, heritage and a mine-engine room.

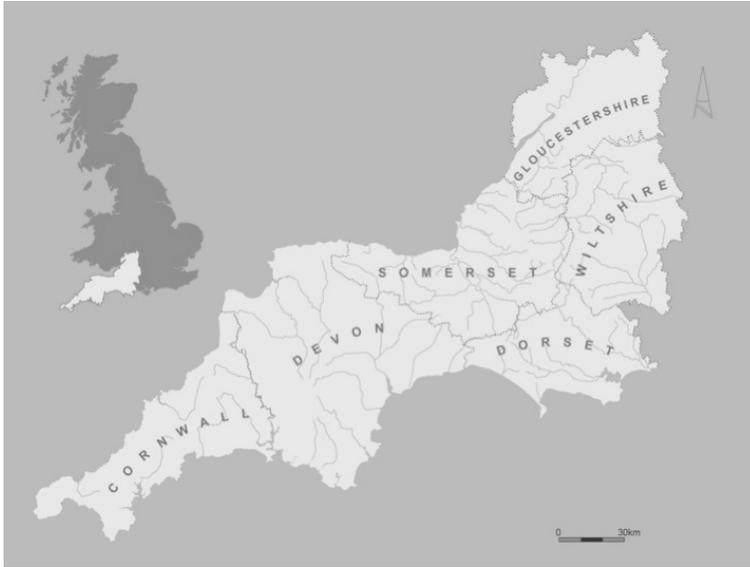


Figure 1: The South West, (map courtesy of the graphics department, Department of Geography, University of Exeter).

South West Britain, (see figure one), whilst very different from Paris, is similar in that it is gazed upon by artists and tourists. It is a place that has been visualised in countless postcards, photographs and paintings. Moreover, like Latour's Paris, the vast majority of the people, practices, objects and connections that go into making the South West and its creative products visible, are themselves, invisible. It is the sense of the invisible and the innumerable nature of these interactions that drew us, as geographers, to Latour's particular mode of considering a place. In our project on the creative industries in the South West we focus on the ideas and imaginaries of the region developed by artists and by governance officials.² As the first section of the paper will consider, there are inherent problems with attempting to create an 'overview' of this rich and diverse sector. We are faced with not only trying to grasp what and where the creative industries are within the South West, but also how these industries are impacted by events and inspirations beyond territorial borders. As current conceptualisations of regions and spaces are increasingly coming to suggest, regions can, at one extreme, be considered as territorially delinked constellations (Amin 2004). In the second section of this paper, following Latour, we trace some of the interactions which constitute these industries. Our focus is on a site-specific art exhibition installed at East Pool mine, near Redruth, West Cornwall.³ It becomes clear that the interactions which constitute the art work are occurring within and beyond the governmentally determined territory of the South West. These interactions occur between human and non-human; between artist and international funding bodies; institutions and art traditions as well as between artist, local

heritage concerns and governmentally administered funding bodies. As with Latour's project, the intention with this paper is not to claim that these two views of the creative industries of the South West – interaction and overview – should be seen as diametrically opposed, but rather that the interactions which constitute them cannot be understood without the bigger picture. Furthermore, it is clear that an overview of the whole makes no sense without an attention to, or at the very least, an awareness of those interactions.

Section 1: Overview

Latour begins with panoramas of Paris. We are going to begin with a series of representations of the creative industries within the region. No bird's-eye view could, at a single glance, capture the multiplicity of the places, people and objects that add up to the creative industries in the South West. Nonetheless, governance organisations from the creative industries have spent much time and money in trying to 'map' these industries – to pinpoint their distribution throughout the region.⁴ However, in their representation on carefully annotated maps or amassed in data sheets, we do not see the networks that link the organisations and the makers. As such, the sense of interaction and the connectivities within and beyond the region is lost. Policy rhetoric, from the UK Government's 'Creative Britain' report to the policy strategies developed by the local agencies, have led to a favoring of industrial clusters.⁵ Academic studies of these clusters (see for example Bassett et al 2002) has favored an attention to the spatial manifestations of industrial agglomeration and has paid close attention to the dynamics of their internal networks. However, such a focus has come at the expense of the analysis of those networks within which these clusters are situated (see for example critiques by Coe, 2007; and Hawkins, Harvey & Thomas forthcoming). The same is not necessarily true of the on- the-ground activity of the creative industries agencies, where networks of offices, organizations and artists have been promoted across the South West. Despite the common prevalence of narratives that appear to acknowledge the dense of networks of interactions, when these agencies come to represent the creative industries, it is only the clusters that are mapped.

As Latour and Hermant (2004) describe, when the double- click of computer data entry converts person to pixel, things are lost, but they are also gained. As the creative industries governance organisations create their maps, the living, breathing artistic maker and their practices are lost. Simultaneously, what is gained is a representation that can circulate at regional, but also at national and international level. These representations of the creative industries are reproduced on websites, in brochures, and in policy documents. They are

translated into text as ‘bigger pictures’ that have the power to draw, distribute and divert money, people and resources across the region, and so to influence future development.

In trying to understand the creative industries within the South West, it would be easy to fall into narratives of fragmentation, to consider the creative industries through diversity and difference. We could, as several industry organizations and many academics do, consider separable sectors – dividing film making from visual art for instance.⁶ We could examine different geographical formations, clusters or corridors, or different areas, bracketing the South West off from interactions beyond its governmentally defined territorial boundaries.⁷ Equally dangerously, we could fragment the creative process: considering makers apart from their funding sources, their gallery sites or their social and inspirational networks, as much literature does (see Hawkins et al. forthcoming for a critique of the problems with this move). While each strategy has its benefits (for example in deepening an understanding of a particular sector or area); none of these separable narratives alone seems to offer us adequate purchase on these industries. As others have shown, this can cause problems in the successful implementation of creative industries policies (Hartley, 2004).

In the analysis of both the text and visual form of Latour’s project, it becomes clear that rather than confront such diversity, agglomeration and complexity with notions of fragmentation, we should confront it with transference and tracking. For Latour, to represent the social is to consider the transferences and cascades of information and objects. Discrete objects and areas of study are an anathema here; interaction is central. Drawing on *Paris Invisible City*, the next section will follow just some of the traces of things; the underlying series of invisible interactions and the countless intermediaries who participate in the constitution of the region and the creative industries.⁸

Before turning attention to a closer tracing of these interactions, it is worth considering several problems that this ontology of interactions raises. Here, we set aside issues such as power relations which are often found in response to Latour’s work (Hitchings, 2003; Murdoch, 1997; 1998), instead, turning to those of scope and of spatial and temporal extent. In other words, the question becomes how and where do we stop tracing these interactions. Moreover, is it possible to make space within this narrative of accumulation for interactions which are withheld and perhaps for those things which are not connected?

One answer is provided by a central part of Latour’s Parisian narrative: the focus on the ‘invisible’. Latour’s use of the invisible can be understood in two ways. First, and most obviously, by turning our attention to these invisible connections we render a selection of

them visible. This has the potentially worrying metaphysical implication of suggesting that there is a concrete existence that is awaiting the turning of our attention toward it. The second implication of the invisible offers us a very different idea. Decoupled from the metaphysics of presence offered by the first understanding, the second brings with it a sense of the innumerable and invisible nature of these interactions. For, in paying attention to the invisible, the idea is not that we can suddenly see it all, but that we are able, indeed, only ever able, to constitute a portion of it. In other words, in thinking about the interactions which constitute the creative industries, we do not see all these interactions. Indeed, they are so innumerable that we cannot know them. However, by invoking the invisible it is possible to acknowledge the always-withheld, lost or hidden presence of these interactions.⁹ The following section explores how these ideas of invisible interactions may help us to understand an art exhibition as part of the creative industries of the South West.

Section 2: Interactions: *Mined*

When looking at art we often only see the finished thing, like the images of work seen in figure two below.

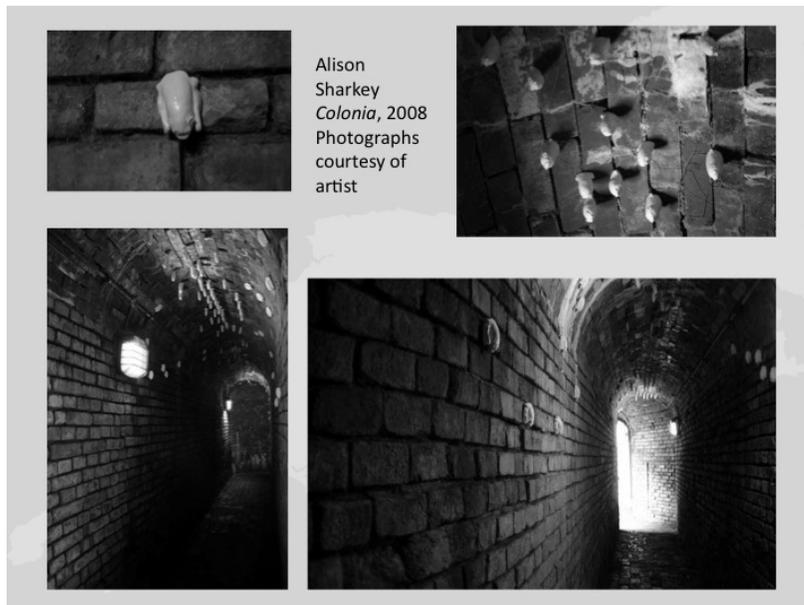


Figure 2: Alison Sharkey, Colonia, (2008) (images courtesy of the artist, see <http://alisonsharkey.com/>)

In the analysis that follows, we trace a series of the actors in the exhibition *Mined* which occurred during July 2008. The exhibition consisted of nine site-specific works installed in East Pool Mine. We are concerned less with an examination of the conceptual and aesthetic content of the finished art works and more with a consideration of the interactions that went into their making.¹⁰ As in previous research, where Actor Network Theory has been used to consider art-works (see Yaneva 2003), we understand the art process through some of the innumerable interactions which constitute it. We focus in particular here, on the exchanges between the artists and site together with interactions between sites, curators, workers and objects.¹¹

Stephen Paiges' work, *An examination into the workings of a museum* (2008), speaks very directly to the questions of representation and the invisible which sit at the heart of this paper. His series of photographs were installed across the East Pool Mine site. The central machine room where a number of the photographs were displayed bears the scars and remnants of the machinery it had once contained and has been rebranded by the National Trust as the 'Discovery Centre' - a site for staging local mining histories.¹² Paige's work is particularly apposite in this paper. Just as Latour and Hermant tried to reveal the invisible interactions that make up Paris, so Paige's photographs of archives, store-rooms and back-spaces, render the workings and the transactions; the knowledge formation processes of the museum, partially visible to its publics. The result is an understanding of the museum as a site of continual knowledge making rather than one of the presentation of a singular, existing, narrative. Instead of a history of the mine, Paiges' images offer a history of history (or a heritage of heritage): an envisioning of some of the invisibles through which the museum site and some of its stories are constituted. This is very similar to the understandings of history offered by contemporary critiques of heritage and archaeology (see, for example, De Silvey, 2006; Pearson, 2007; Harvey 2008).

In the analysis of a second installation in the *Mined* exhibition, *Colonia*, by Alison Sharkey (see figure 2) we are interested in the constitution of the art work through a study of the connections and interactions of artistic practice. The installation consisted of one hundred ceramic bats installed in the mine's engine room flue. Once an escape route for smoke, the flue is now an enigmatic walkway for visitors from one part of the museum site to another. Figure three below is a collage of some of the actors, human and otherwise whose interactions are constitutive of the art work.



Figure 3: Some of the interactions and interconnections (collage created by authors from images from the organisations websites).

Sharkey is a local artist based at Krowji, a creative cluster situated just a few miles from the mine site in Redruth's former Grammer School. The cluster, established in 2006, and funded over the years through a mixture of European Union Objective One funding, European Social Fund and money from Cornwall County Council offers work spaces for makers and office space for a number of Cornwall's creative industries organisations. Bringing together makers, creative business advisors, creative industries strategy experts as well as marketing firms and project managers for the creative industries on one site offers numerous benefits for all. Since leaving Falmouth College of Art and coming to work for Creative Skills, an organisation based at Krowji, as well as taking up a studio space, Sharkey has developed and strengthened a series of artistic and social connections that have helped her to develop her own projects and to take part in a series of exhibitions like *Mined*.¹³

The exhibition itself was funded by The National Lottery through the Arts Council and a series of heritage funding bodies, (The National Trust, Mineral Tramways, Unlocked). As a result of this funding, the artists were each provided with a small sum of money to develop their ideas. This allowed Sharkey to follow personal ambitions to experiment with the production of porcelain forms. Having experimented with ash and resin found at the site, she developed a working relationship with a local commercial pottery, less than a mile from the mine site, which helped her to develop and make the final bat shapes.

The installation form itself grew from a series of interactions with the site. On first visiting, Sharkey had walked through the tunnel-like mine engine flue and had witnessed the flight of a bat whose roosting had been disturbed by her presence. Originally drawn to other locations around the mine site, Sharkey eventually returned to the disrupted nesting of this nocturnal mammal to influence her piece. The importance of the natural histories of the site did not stop there. The final positioning of the bats was guided by the presence of small stalactites, formed from decades of rain dripping through rock. These non-human interactions were joined by the social histories of the site and its National Trust status. As we have started to outline, the visible form of Sharkey's art work was formed from human links: connections from artistic biography, local interactions at Krowji, connections with the pottery, with the National Trust, the museum staff, as well as connections with non-humans: bats, geology and landscapes.

Conclusions:

This paper has considered the creative industries of the South West through conceptualization of place and of the social developed within Latour and Hermant's *Paris Invisible City*. We began by looking at the overview. As problematic as these bird's eye views are, they still have considerable value. After all, as Latour and Hermant explain, we do not simply shift from concrete reality to abstract vision, but rather shift from one form of reality to another. The power and importance of these representations must not be underestimated, but nor should the invisible interactions which go into their constitutions, and which are hidden in the apparently totalising rhetoric of the map, be forgotten.¹⁴

The second section of this paper began to explore just some of these interactions. It is impossible to envision these innumerable connections, nor can we consider their range and geographical scope. But, we are in part excused by the understanding of the invisible which *Paris Invisible City* offers us. The invisible, which draws attention to the overlooked nature of interactions within the normative representational forms, and which would preclude us ever being able to call forth and enumerate these interactions. Instead, we are made aware that we can but begin to trace the innumerable interactions through which the social is constituted.

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¹ Latour's website address is <http://www.bruno-latour.fr>. There are links from here to Paris Invisible City.

² Negotiating the poetics and politics of cultural identity within the creative industries of South West Britain, see www.sogaer.ex.ac.uk/geography/creativeindustries.shtml. AHRC award number AH/E008887/1

³ East Pool Mine is now a heritage site, branded as 'Cornish Mines and Engines'. It is run by the National Trust in close association with the local industrial archaeological Trevithick Society.

⁴ This comes from data gathered during interviews with representatives from; Arts Council South West, Culture South West, South West Screen, Arts Matrix, we thank them for their time.

⁵ *Creative Britain - New Talents for the New Economy* DCMS 2008; available to download from: <http://www.culture.gov.uk/>. Last accessed 22nd Sept. 2008. See also *Creative Value The Economic Significance of the Creative Industries in Cornwall*, commissioned by a range of South West Cultural Agencies, 2003; available to download from:

<http://www.perfectmoment.com>. Last accessed 22nd Sept. 2008

⁶ See for example Bassett et al (2002) on the film industry in Bristol; Crewe and Forster (1993) on the fashion industry in Nottingham's Lace Market; or Banks et al (2002) on the Music Industry of Manchester; Power and Hallencreutz (2002) on the music industry in Sweden and Jamaica.

⁷ See the geographically specific references in note 6

⁸ Yaneva (2003) makes a similar point in relation to installation art

⁹ This is an understanding which finds its influence in Derrida's understanding of absent/presences (see Derrida, 1994; 2005,).

¹⁰ In practice, the analysis of an art work's content and making process is often inseparable.

¹¹ An exception here might be process art, or some forms of installation art, where the art work is constituted by the making process of artist or experiences of the viewer , (see Hawkins forthcoming, Buskirk 2003).

¹² Observations made regarding this exhibition relate to the authors' visits, made both prior to and during the art exhibition.

¹³ Great thanks go to Alison Sharkey for generously giving up her time to talk to us about her practice.

¹⁴ For critical accounts of the rhetoric of the map and alternative visions see Jackson, 1994; Cosgrove, 1999.