EVERYBODY'S OWN VACANCY:

CONTAINER CONTEXTS

Rozenn Logan

<h1 style="text-align:center">Everybody's Own Vacancy:</h1>

Container Contexts

'History is representational, while time is abstract; both of these artifices may be found in museums, where they span everybody's own vacancy.'[1] - Robert Smithson

When Robert Smithson wrote *Some Void Thoughts on Museums* in 1967, he described the experience of visiting a museum as 'going from void to void'.[2] Smithson's thoughts on this nullity that can be found in museums is of particular interest to an exhibition triggered by the shipping container, and that is presented, for the most part, inside an art museum. An important question, and one which will be looked at in further detail later, is why choose to present such an exhibition in the ultimate of art 'containers' - the white cube - in the first place? Perhaps to some, it would be more logical to eschew the compartmentalising (and arguably restrictive) effects of the gallery space altogether. These museum voids, however, this vacuity of which Smithson speaks, is also an intriguing immaterial quality of the shipping container. The container is the temporary, mobile medium of enclosure and the same could be said of the art museum - temporary spaces which are filled with objects, ideas and people, before being emptied again and returned to a blank state of vacancy. Smithson saw the nullity in the museum as one of its major virtues, and was primarily interested in what he called 'the gap' - a gap that 'exists in the blank and void regions or settings we never look at'.[3] *Everybody's Own Vacancy: Container Contexts* is particularly concerned with this void, this gap, the temporary enclosure of movable space associated with the shipping container. The exhibition considers this most commonplace and familiar of objects, along with the properties of containerisation, and how its emergence has affected how we think.

In literal terms, containerisation refers to the system of intermodal freight transport using standardised shipping containers, the introduction of which transformed the global economy and led to globalisation. Beyond the economic and logistical impact of the system, however, there are worthwhile grounds for considering its effects in other areas. Alexander Klose's book, *The Container Principle*, which charts the impact of containerisation across media and cultural theory, has been an important resource for this exhibition. Klose presents several 'container situations' - points at which the container 'intruded' into various disciplines and reconfigured the established order of things, and

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[1] Smithson, Robert, Ed. Flam, Jack. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, London: University of California Press

[2] Smithson, Robert, Ed. Flam, Jack, Ibid. page 41

[3] Smithson, Robert, Ed. Flam, Jack, Ibid. page 44

Rozenn Logan 2018

subsequently, ways of thinking.[4] The exhibition takes an oblique look at the theme, positioning the philosophical at its core and with a particular focus on the spatial. A prevailing thread throughout the exhibition is the question of what it means to enclose and move (a) space - and if that space contains people, objects, ideas - or nothing at all. What are the implications of this in the organisation of material, people and knowledge? What does it mean to be a floating piece of enclosed space, or perhaps a mobile island? And what does it mean to pull a space out of its context, using it as a vehicle to highlight other issues? The exhibition *contexts* have been selected for their capacity to represent key container characteristics, whilst allowing for a range of subthemes - containing varied trajectories and topologies. The work of varied thinkers and theorists concerned with space will be considered with reference to the artworks and theme. Marc Augé's theory of Non-Places, along with Michel Foucault's notion of Heterotopias, and the architectural principles of Le Corbusier, among others, will be considered in relation to the space of the container. There is an intentionally recursive aspect to the exhibition, of a theme within a theme, contained within a theme. There are thematic overlaps, as several of the artworks could be slotted into multiple contexts, as their multi-layered nature is revealed.

The term container can mean very different things. In contemporary visual practices, countless artists, designers and curators have used the shipping container directly in their work or as a mode of exhibition display, whether static or itinerant. That is not the focus here, however, although the image of the shipping container itself does of course feature. The shipping container is a *visiotype*, as Uwe Porksen has described, analogous to the stereotype but with more power - images that are 'more important than the catchphrases' and 'key stimuli of consciousness'.[5] A powerful visual symbol, with immediate associations, it also encapsulates a myriad of cultural symbols, transcending much more than just its physical, and expected, rectangular steel form. The artists selected here have explored characteristics pertaining to the container as a material and metaphorical agent.

Standardisation

The first room of the exhibition presents the theme of *Standardisation* and conditions associated with it - automation, industrialisation, intermodality and uniformity. Arguably the defining material principle of containerisation, the standardisation of containers to universal dimensions, with the ability to travel between multiple modes of transport, changed everything. With this change came the new mechanised face of the ports, and the redundancy of human hands. No longer were goods loaded onto the ships individually and manually. The initial lack of human presence in Gallery 1 reinforces this automation,

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[4] Klose, Alexander. *The Container Principle* (Hamburg, 2009), English translation, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015, page 6.
[5] Cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 74.

starting with **Alicja Kwade**'s sculpture *Used and Tired*. A modified wooden pallet, slumped against the wall, it signals the redundancy of the organic - both material and human. The pallet in itself however, had a more than significant role to play in the growth of distribution. As Klose comments, '(...) it was a much smaller, unspectacular loading medium that first allowed transport from the factory floor to the final buyer to become a reality: the pallet.'[6] Kwade's pallet can of course not be used, its simple form distorted. Representative of Kwade's oeuvre more generally, through the gentle manipulation of everyday objects, *Used and Tired* asks us to consider one of the most common objects of transit intermodality, and by removing its power, she manages to highlight its simple efficacy - an object that works hard, and is ultimately a flattened, primitive version of the container.

The principles of organisation and uniformity were integral to the success of containerisation, a strategy that is visible in the work of **Michael Johansson**. His sculptural installation *Han hade packat hela natten (He had been packing all night)* presents five objects of uniform size, each made up of various boxes, bags and cases. Whilst each structure is the same size and shape as the previous one, they are composed of an increasing number of box-like objects. By stacking and slotting together different objects to create standardised repetition, Johansson's message seems to be clear - strive for uniformity. Despite this, his work doesn't conceal the heterogenous, and the role of smaller containers coming together to form a unified whole is visible, unlike in the shipping container - where the contents are almost always concealed. This echoes one of the most famous container principles - the Matryoshka Doll, or Russian Doll. Whilst Johansson's objects do not embed themselves inside one another in the same way, there is a similar sense of efficiency, and surprise. Whilst there is a humour in both Johansson and Kwade's reconfiguration of everyday objects, their work speaks of the elements of organisation, in both society and, in Johansson's case, museum collection and display. As Geir Haraldseth has commented of Johansson's work, 'the objects may be arbitrary, but the surrounding systems aren't', much like the shipping container - unremarkable and seemingly unassuming - it forms part of an enormous system of organisation.[7]

As a system of spatial organisation, the container principle in architecture presented standardised living cells, as per Le Corbusier's vision of standardised modular rooms. The inspiration for the size of the 'cell at human scale' came to Le Corbusier in his luxury cabin on the ship that brought him from Europe to South America for his lectures - 'A man is happy, lives just like at home, sleeps, washes up, writes, reads, receives his friends - all

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[6] Cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 186.

[7] Haraldseth, Geir. *Objects Subjected,* online catalogue introduction, publisher details unavailable, 2010, page 6, http://www.michaeljohansson.com/objects_subjected.pdf

this in a 15m² room'.[8] As Klose points out, the size of a 20-foot standard shipping container also happens to be 14.77 square metres. Is the ship's cabin analogous to the living cell of modern architecture? **Maayan Strauss**'s photographs aboard a container ship present the living and working quarters, minus the workers, and speak to this binary of a maritime and urban living containers or cells. Her series *Freight*, taken during her first container ship journey from Israel to New Jersey, documents the different spaces aboard such a vessel, with an emphasis on the isolated, personal spaces of the workers. Struck by the untapped, remote environment for rife artistic inspiration, Strauss subsequently went on to establish the *Container Artist Residency* programme. Describing its programme as being 'anchored in a context yet without a fixed physical location', it places emphasis on globalisation as a backdrop to an artist's practice.[9] Could this be the gesture of artist reduced to the status of a package? Strauss's own photographs - of the onboard kitchen, the cabin and the office - recall the container principle in architecture, as a standardised living cell, as per Le Corbusier's standard-sized living units. The living quarters depicted in *Freight* allude to the cabin as a container in itself, whilst also intersecting it with the concept of modern architecture's industrialisation. In describing how Le Corbusier came to the idea of the prefabricated, standardised, modular room, Klose outlines its relation to containerisation:

> As a concept, this was nothing more than a container to be lived in, *avant la letter* [*sic*]. By showing cells over empty spaces at one time and over filled space at another, Le Corbusier demonstrated a central element of the container stacking principle that was brought to bear in the cell structure of container ships or in the construction of a container terminal, long before its technological realisation in transport logistics.[10]

Strauss's photographs activate the consideration of the container principle in architecture, and **Jordi Colomer**'s photographic work, from his wider project *Anarchitekton* - comprising film, photographs and sculptural models - reflects the standardised living cell back onto itself. A figure is seen carrying small-scale models of the buildings visible in the background. Apartment blocks in Barcelona, Brasilia, Bucharest and Osaka are reduced to portable scale, contained and paraded in front of the real edifices, as well as in other parts of the cities. Colomer's treatment of the standardised living space reinforces the homogeneity of such uniform building projects, whilst humanising them, reminding us of their heterogeneous interiors and 'contents' - 'The container is a shell for the

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[8] Cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 264.

[9] Strauss, Maayan. maayanstrauss.com, no date, accessed on 23rd May 2018.

[10] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 250.

heterogeneous, for the explosive mixture - in microcosm, as a base unit for (mass) housing, and in macrocosm, as a spatial form for shaping the modern environment'.[11]

Anarchitekton shows the removal of uniform living cells from their stacked urban reality, and their relocation, not to a static place but into a contained state of transit. This physical displacement not only illustrates a condition of the shipping container but also the failures of the deployment of the container principle in architecture - it is as if it is literally running away from its physical reality, into a fictional space of temporality, to exist happily as a concept but not as a concrete actuality. The work also hints at the burgeoning use of shipping containers in architecture: in designer housing, city-centre business parks, storage units and beyond. As architect Aaron Betsky said of architectural container firm LOT-EK, the use of existing modules, already part of the industrial world, became a symbol of multiple architectural aims: 'It was a building block, an expression of systems, a moveable bit of a changing society, and something that could be found, rather than having to be constructed by using up resources.'[12] In this sense, Colomer's throwaway cardboard models of living containers point to the dispensability of contentious concepts in modern architecture.

The stackability of standardised cells is tested in **João Vasco Paiva**'s *Mausoleum*, a teetering, monumental sculpture composed of less-than-monumental materials. In the spirit of Le Corbusier's proclamation that 'these cells must be stackable by the millions',[13] Paiva's monolithic mass could resemble an ill-stacked apartment block - concrete containers the same shape and size (albeit with unique markings), one on top of the other. There is an arbitrary lack of care to the order here, however, not present in Le Corbusier's vision. Perhaps because they are in fact stone casts of polystyrene marketplace boxes, used to store and transport a range of goods in Hong Kong's wet markets, and hence as temporary containers, a permanent, uniform system of stacking is not of concern. This perhaps resonates more clearly with the Japanese Metabolic movement in architecture, which produced buildings made up of micro living apartments or 'capsules', that were designed to be added and replaced as required, and most notable in the Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo. Metabolism's ideals, as suggested by its name, stemmed from the idea of applying biological growth principles to the development of cities, something that is reflected in Paiva's sculpture, in which the stacking feels as though it could go on forever, if it were not for the limits of the roof.

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[11] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 334.

[12] Cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 287.

[13] Cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 264.

The environmental concerns raised within Paiva's work are reflective of his practice more widely. Despite their transient use, the life-span of polystyrene is anything but, as its projected decomposition is officially stated as being from '500 years to forever'.[14] This is an important reminder of the environmental issues surrounding commercial shipping, and the impacts of urbanisation on natural resources. Despite their uniformity in shape and scale, each block bears the individual marks and textures of different polystyrene boxes, highlighting the everyday as sacred, a common theme in Paiva's work. His interest in 'deconstructing complex urban environments to create a set of identifiable codes (...)' is at once multi-layered and simplistic.[15] He is concerned with the spaces, systems and objects produced by the creation and expansion of cities. His work relates to what Marc Augé coined *Non-places* - places that cannot be defined as relational, historical or concerned with identity.[16] These spaces, formed as a result of 'supermodernity' - a period defined by excess (excess of time, space and of the individual or ego) are often formed with a purpose or end point in mind. Examples are the chain hotel, the service station, the supermarket, the airport and the motorway, along with other spaces of transit. Could the container also be an example of non-place? It signifies the qualities of excess whilst abolishing the notion of place, and as a structure is indifferent to its contents, and perhaps to identity.

The title of the work of course, denotes further layers of meaning. When speaking of his decision to move from his home county of Portugal to Hong Kong, he has said: 'At the time I felt everything in Europe was the same (...) I was tired of the historical weight I had to carry on my back'.[17] A work of Institutional Critique, *Mausoleum* stands as an un-enterable tomb, an immovable presence in questioning not only what we consider sacred in our day to day lives but what our cultural institutions label as worthy. Using the familiar critique of the museum as mausoleum, a place 'where things go to die', Paiva also asks us to consider the art container, and thus the canon, in the context of contemporary display.

Taus Makhacheva's film *Tightrope* continues this meditation on the standards of art, and the cultural containers with which we judge aesthetic ventures. Over the course of 73 minutes, a tightrope walker traverses the void between two hilltops in Dagestan, transporting sixty-one artworks from one summit to the other. The cube-shaped shelving unit constructed to rehouse the newly relocated artworks reinforces the notion of the museum as container, especially given the sixty-one artworks are to-scale copies of

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[14] Science Learning Hub, *Measuring Biodegradability,* published online 19th June 2008, accessed on 5th August 2018, www.sciencelearn.org.nz,

[15] Edouard Malingue Gallery, artist biography, edouardmalingue.com, accessed on 26th June 2018.

[16] Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (Second English-Language edition), London/ New York: Verso 2008, page 63.

[17] Moore, Christopher. *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, published online on 18th March 2015, accessed on 5th July 2018, www.randian-online.com

works from the Dagestan Museum of Fine Art. The geometry of the shelving unit speaks of standardisation, its metallic structure in stark contrast to the surrounding terrain. Not only that, but the act of transporting each individual artwork by hand recalls the traditional and awkward movement of break bulk cargo, before the introduction of standardised shipping containers. At times carrying one or two works, and at others moving several paintings simultaneously using a balancing pole, the tightrope walker Rasul Abakarov undertakes this precarious act above the mountainous void, playing with these symbols of worth, yet executed with the utmost seriousness. The idea of transporting such valuable art objects without protective packaging, never mind in such a precarious context, is ludacris. It also comments on the cultural history of Dagestan, where the artist is from, and where cultural institutions must compete for resources within the larger Russian federal framework, where they are rarely prioritised.[18] This gesture of moving a museum across a stark void, carried out in Dagestan - home to the most heterogeneous population in the Russian Federation - is also a comment on the racial homogenising present in many parts of Russia.

With standardisation came automation. When previously, human hands would load individual and diverse goods directly onto the ships, now the stackable containers worked with the mechanised cranes and forklifts to slash the time, and also the jobs. For those who did retain their jobs, the nature of the port cities - as vibrant cities full of life - and the job itself changed drastically:

> (...) for merchant seamen, shore leave used to mean a few days carousing in the bars and shebeens of some exotic port city; suddenly, it meant instead a few hours waiting in a floodlit car park(…)[19]

The floodlit car parks and loading bays have become the backdrop of automation and industrialization in commercial shipping. **Magali Reus**'s ambiguous machines jutting out of the wall are set against this metaphorical backdrop. *Leaves (Cliff Patterns, July)* and *Leaves (Peat, March)* are enlarged padlock forms composed of layered materials with a high production finish. Their organic titles belie their form, highly technical to produce and mechanical in demeanour. She teases us with the use of familiar components, and alludes to functional objects, yet we fail to understand their meanings, despite recognising their visual codes. The functions of her sculptures are unknown, perhaps mirroring the sense of confusion and discomfort felt by workers faced with alien machinery, brought in to replace familiar processes. Liam Gillick has said of Reus's

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[18] Sutton, Kate. *Taus Makhacheva*, Artforum, published in print in February 2016, accessed online on 6th August 2018, www.artforum.com

[19] Farley, Paul and Symmons Roberts, Michael. *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*, London: Vintage, 2012, page 48.

allusive work: 'It is as if the artist were operating in a state of distracted automation'.[20] In this case, the works suggest a superior design, or perhaps a promise, set within an enigmatic substructure favouring the container as device.

Alicja Kwade
Used and Tired
2015
Image via: *www.mixedmedia-berlin.com*

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[20] Gillick, Liam. *Background Operations*, Eds. Coelewij, L, Dirié, C, Reus, M, *Magali Reus*, Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2016, page 127.

Michael Johansson
Han hade packat hela natten (He had been packing all night)
2005
Image via: www.michaeljohansson.com

Rozenn Logan 2018

Maayan Strauss
Freight series
2011
Image © Maayan Strauss

Jordi Colomer
Anarchitekton
2002 - 2004
Images © Jordi Colomer

Joao Vasco Paiva
Mausoleum
2015
Image via: edouardmalingue.com

Magali Reus
Leaves (Peat, March)
2015
Image via: theapproach.co.uk

Taus Makhacheva
Tightrope
 2015
 Image via: ensembles.org

Displacement

Displacement is both a literal and figurative condition of the container and in establishing what it means to enclose and relocate a space, one must ask what it contains, if anything at all. If goods - for consumption by whom and where? If people - why? If ideas or knowledge - in what form and how are they dispersed? There are clear associations with the word displacement, most often with a human face. Human displacement refers to the forced movement of people from their home or country of origin, whilst in physics, displacement is a (vector) quantity that refers to 'how far out of place an object is', it is the object's overall change in position.[21] This notion of being *out of place* is integral to the container space. Surely the contents of a container in transit are perpetually out of place, destined only to be 'in place' once the final destination is reached or, perhaps, destined to never feel 'in place' if the final location was not desired in the first place.

It is difficult to talk about displacement without talking of boundaries, both solid and immaterial. The physical boundaries of the container are considered in more depth in the following section, however the geopolitical boundaries find their place here. Containers are continually crossing borders and boundaries. What are the consequences of physically removing a space, in the form of a piece of land, and displacing it to foreign waters? The creation of a mobile island, and the act of pulling a space out of its context, has been used to highlight contemporary issues of citizenship and national identity in the work of **Alex Hartley**. *Nowhereisland* raises important questions of belonging, mobility, transcultural relations and environmental responsibility. An Arctic island, discovered and declared by the artist, is partly removed from its location, attached to a tugboat and sailed from Svalbard to Bristol. The piece of land in question, revealed by a receding glacier, was first discovered by Hartley in 2004, yet the project unfolded and evolved over the course of eight years. It involved not only arctic expeditions but meetings with lawyers, rejections of proposals to name the island, multiple applications, visits and rejections to Norwegian and Svalbard authorities for secession of the island, and the final declaration of the new nation of *Nowhereisland*, complete with an embassy. The embassy traveled with the island along the south coast of England, visiting various coastal ports and towns, accepting new citizens who subsequently contributed to its constitution as a nation, and who became known as Nowherians.

In its incarnation here, *Nowhereisland* is presented as a series of physical material documenting its lifespan. Photographs of its journey from Svalbard, across the south coast of England and finally into Bristol are accompanied by documents charting the claiming, naming and removal of the island, along with a piece of the island itself, representing the island in its current, multiplicitous form since being broken into

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[21] The Physics Classroom, *Distance and Displacement*, date of webpage publication unknown, accessed online on 24th August 2018, www.physicsclassroom.com

thousands of pieces and given to its citizens. Also displayed is a list of the *Nowhereisland* constitution, made up of propositions contributed by the Nowherians, of whom there are 23, 003 in total.

If containers, as defined by Klose, '(...) always consist of themselves as a shell and of their contents', then the physical form of *Nowhereisland* might appear incongruous.[22] But its configuration, physicality and concept speak to the multi-faceted conditions of the container as explored in the exhibition. As summarised by Situations, the organisation who produced the project, 'it is an artwork that opened up over time, over space and through participations with others'.[23] It existed as a physical place as well as an abstracted space, and like much of what the container represents, it was all of the following things: it was temporal, physical, conceptual, nomadic, interactive, disruptive and geopolitical. It might not have contained anything physical other than its geological form, but what it did fence off, relocate and create was a myriad of ideas, interactions and conversations pertaining to the idea of place, space, movement, colonisation and citizenship. As one Nowherian proposition stated - '*every Nowherian has a right to be nowhere, even if others think they should be somewhere'*.[24] A 'moveable bit of a changing society', shaped by displacement over time, it is particularly pertinent to current questions of what it means to be an island and to what it means to belong.

The human face of displacement is all around us, the current refugee crisis reaching numbers never before seen, with an estimated 68 million people displaced from their homes worldwide. Containers have played a significant role in these matters, not only in being used as a dangerous mode of travel across territories but also in providing temporary housing and in delivering aid to refugee camps. Richard Mosse's work meditates on the organisation of displaced people in regards to temporary space. His *Heat Maps* series are composed of hundreds of smaller photographs digitally stitched together, taken using a military-issue thermographic camera. This heat-reading technology renders sources of light and bodies white, and is capable of detecting thermal radiation from several miles away, even through smoke and fog. Using this technology to document refugee camps and staging areas in southern Europe, Mosse focuses on the makeshift architecture employed to house refugees. *Skaramaghas,* a panoramic print over 7 metres in length, depicts the shipyard refugee camp of the port city of Piraeus, where the shipyard goes about its daily business, with only a fence separating it and the camp. The sheer scale of the piece reinforces the magnitude of the current crisis, whilst the medium allows us to focus on the camp architecture - on the enclosures, fences,

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[22] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. pp. 340-341.

[23] Ed. Doherty, Claire. *Public Report: Nowhereisland in Review*, Bristol: Situations, Page 10, accessed online on 2nd August 2018.

[24] Cited in Gardner Carl, *What constitutes a nation?* Eds. Hartley, A, Kovats, T, *Nowhereisland*, London: Victoria Miro, 2015, page 111.

containers and tents - with little other visual interference. The image juxtaposes the commercial shipping containers, ubiquitous brands such as MAERSK visible, with the storage containers used in the refugee camp adjacent. Seen through the encampment infrastructure are heat spots, either inside the containers or tents, or in the form of people walking around, with the sea glistening brightly behind - a reminder of the entry point of the port, and the separation of the residents from the wider world.

> These measures for organising space justified by crisis or a declared state of exception should be able to be disassembled as quickly as they can be put up (...) Once again, it is a matter of specific forms of politics with images. The container settlement for foreign construction workers or asylum seekers says to the neighbourhoods of citizens, who find themselves mostly unwillingly confronted with this situation, "I'll be gone soon! Don't worry, this is just a temporary installation".[25]

As Klose describes, the spatial containment of displaced people finds itself visually aligned with the notion of the temporary. The purpose of the camps is to provide a temporary base, it is not a permanent place for permanent residents. Yet, many people have been in them for over a year, with few signs of leaving. The visiotype of the container signals the temporary - inherent to its condition and its original purpose, the idea that container should move and so those housed within them will also soon be moved.

> Though what he is making is indisputably art, his eye remains always that of a documentarian, one committed to finding new ways of revealing what is hidden by walls and fences, by distance and disinterest.[26]

Mosse's interest in the failure of documentary photography to adequately portray the scale of humanitarian crises is perhaps the reason for his hybrid aesthetic, rooted in between documentary and fine art image-making. His repurposing of military surveillance equipment is perhaps his answer to highlighting (aspects of) these crises that go unseen. The technology both humanises and dehumanises the subjects. Whilst they are reduced to anonymity through the vagueness of the details, appearing simply as 'mere biological traces', it also reinforces the notion that we are all the same, underneath it all.[27] This idea of human containerisation is further explored in the work of **Miroslaw Balka**, in his sculptural installation *Kategorie*. A concrete tunnel stands resolute in the gallery space, inviting entry but cold in its invitation and appearance. Suspended from the ceiling are five coloured threads attached to motors, which continually rotate in an anti-clockwise direction. The five threads are representative of the colours used in Nazi concentration

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[25] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. pp. 307-308

[26] Kastner, Jeffrey. *Review: Richard Mosse, Jack Shainman Gallery*, ArtForum, April 2017, page 209.

[27] Jack Shainman Gallery, *Richard Mosse: Heat Maps*, www.jackshainman.com, accessed on 16th August 2018.

camps - red for political prisoners; violet for Jehovah's Witnesses; green for criminals; pink for homosexual and bisexual men; and black for Romany people, alcoholics and individuals with learning disabilities, among others.[28] The physicality of the work evokes that of the container whilst the contrast of materials - delicate thread and imposing concrete structure - is representative of the fragility of past, and current, lives. The anti-clockwise directions of the motors signify going back in time, attempting to undo the harm, with their audible engines inextricable from the experience. Balka is primarily interested in the physical experience of the work - the movement of the threads as someone passes through, disrupting their turning, whether by direct contact or the movement of air produced, and the sense of containment, is of prime importance. Balka's work is commonly concerned with the temporary spaces created throughout history, most notably in the history of human suffering, and most frequently in relation to Polish suffering. A significant work of his in this context is *How It Is*, an enormous container measuring 30 x 10 x 13 metres that was installed in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in 2010. An ode to space and darkness, the container further demonstrated Balka's ability to combine simplicity of form with multi-layered and complex meanings. The emptiness captured and rendered dark, the void of the unknown, had clear associations with the plight of immigrants. Both *How it Is* and *Kategorie* use the spatial with the language of movement, requiring the viewer to pass into or through, whilst contemplating the more perilous passages of others in the safe space of the gallery.

This idea of organising and containing people in displacement is further reflected in **Anna Boyiazis**' work *Finding Freedom in the Water*. Saturation of media imagery in the context of a Western gaze means you could be forgiven for at first mistaking this image of people floating in faraway waters, clutching water containers, as an attempt by displaced people to stay afloat. The title, however, together with the peacefulness and almost choreographic arrangement of the subjects, indicates otherwise. The photograph is part of series entitled *Burkini Island*, which documents a community swimming initiative on the island of Zanzibar. The majority of Zanzibari girls are unable to swim despite living on an island, a situation that is likely down to the conservative religious culture and associative lack of 'suitable' swimming attire. The Panje Project was developed to teach women and girls to swim and provides them with burkinis - full length swimsuits which allows them to enter the water 'without compromising their cultural or religious beliefs'.[29] Alongside raising questions of gender containment within conservative religious societies, the work alludes to ideas of boundlessness and of breaking down social boundaries. It also depicts a different image of industrial containers, used to aid freedom in a positive and safe way in the water.

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[28] White Cube, *Exhibitions: New Order,* whitecube.com, accessed on 3rd June 2018.

[29] Stacke, Sarah. *On 'Burkini Island', Muslim girls can finally learn how to swim*, National Geographic, published online June 27, 2017, accessed on 5th August 2018.

The displacement of goods and cargo is the primary function of the container. With containerisation came the relocation of labour from local or national workers to international outsourcing. This allowed multinational companies to make the production process truly global:

> (...) it relativised the idea of the site of production to an extent not seen previously, since the boxes contain mostly intermediates, parts of parts, which are first shipped around the globe several times and handled in the most varied places before they come to market as fully assembled final products.[30]

This is an idea explored in the work of both **Michael Johansson** and Nina Beier. Johansson brings together different parts of disparate everyday objects into welded grids in the form of punch-out assembly kits. Fascinated with the organisation of objects, and often organised by colour, the new compositions of mis-matched parts remove any pretence to functionality, further reinforced by the welded metal frame holding them rigidly in place. These 'kits', titled *Some Assembly Required - Starter Kit, Manual Lawn Mower Assembly Kit* and *Engine Bought Separately - Krups,* speak to the globalised production of household goods, with a majority being made overseas and composed of parts from many different locations. The production line and journey of these parts is reversed, the act of becoming whole facilitated by the container, which in turn expedited the displacement of labour, with much cheaper labour available overseas.

Nina Beier's interest in everyday objects centres on their social histories, and she is drawn to the meaning attached to them through capitalism and consumer growth. Her series of real hair wigs presented in frames uses wigs grown by women in China and India that have been bleached, permed, dyed, cut and styled in order to imitate a variety of western hair types.[31] Her bizarre act of framing the wigs alludes to them as being objects of worth, or perhaps artifacts of the present, open time capsules documenting current hair trends. Trapped/contained under glass they signify movement halted, and speak of the relationship between images and objects in consumer visual language. Describing them as 'an image of hair and just hair at the same time', Beier uses them to investigate the tension between an allusion and a product. Her interest in modes of production highlights not only the physical materiality of her objects but also the dispersion of objects and cultures as a result of globalisation. These western-style wigs made in Asia 'function as testaments to the reality of their own production', as well as examples of the displacement of ideas in a globally-connected world.[32]

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[30] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. pp. 102-103.

[31] Spike Island, Nina Beier, European Interiors, www.spikeisland.org.uk, accessed on 19th August 2018.

[32] Beier, Nina. *The Politics of Art*, Mousse Magazine, published October/ November 2015, page 252, accessed online on 18th August 2018.

The idea of the container as a time-capsule is further discussed in relation to Darren Almond's work in the subsequent section, however it is introduced into the exhibition via the work of **Božica dea Mastasić**. Her kinetic sculptures *Panacea* are two capsule-shaped forms of identical dimensions and present us with a solution or remedy for all difficulties or diseases, as per the title and the associated homogenised forms. This generalised visual offering can be read in several ways. At once highlighting our dependence on modern medicine and our impatient need to find solutions quickly, it also stands to represent a quick-fix to all of our world's problems. The container as time capsule - a hermetically sealed box that moves from place to place without revealing its contents is represented here by a softer, more organic, contoured form. Its colour and production, however, suggest the super-modern and the industrial, as if deposited it in the gallery space as an alien and futuristic package. Formally contrasting with the expected shape of the container, it develops further layers of meaning in relation to the theme of displacement, as a result of its kinetic condition. Moveable yet rooted to the same spot, it cuts through the space of the gallery. Activated by the viewer, or participant, it moves with conviction only to return to its original position, as if pulled back, trapped, or perhaps just loyal. Boundaries and binaries are questioned and become lucid - the limits of an artwork, the role of artist and viewer, boundaries of space, and the relationship between sculptures and objects. In its playful, almost therapeutic effect, its shifting of space and viewer creates a tension with expected meanings of containment and displacement.

Alex Hartley
Nowhereisland
2004-2012
Image © Alex Hartley
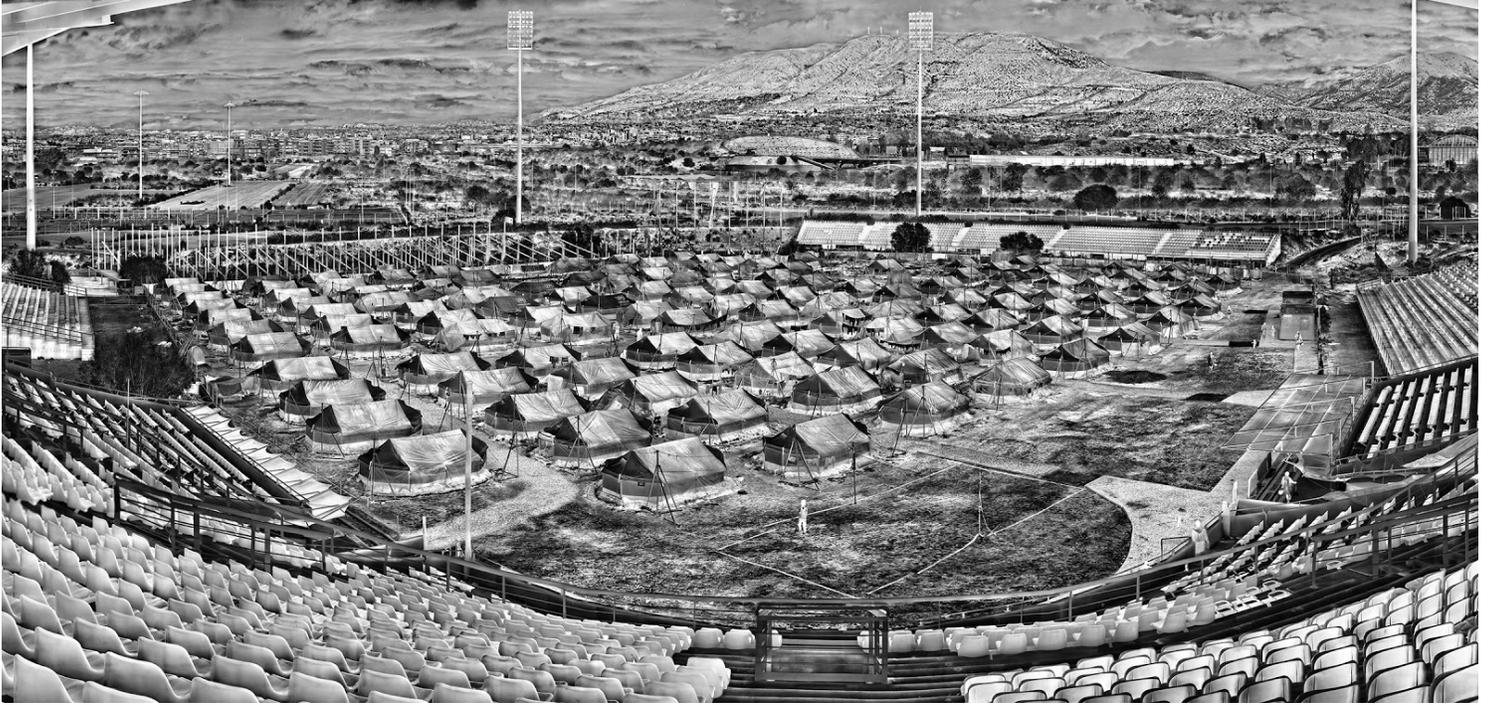
Richard Mosse
Hellinikon Olympic Arena (Heat Maps)
2016
Image © Richard Mosse

Miroslaw Balka
Kategorie
2005
Image via: www.artsy.net

Anna Boyiazis
Finding Freedom in the Water
2015
Image © Anna Boyiazis
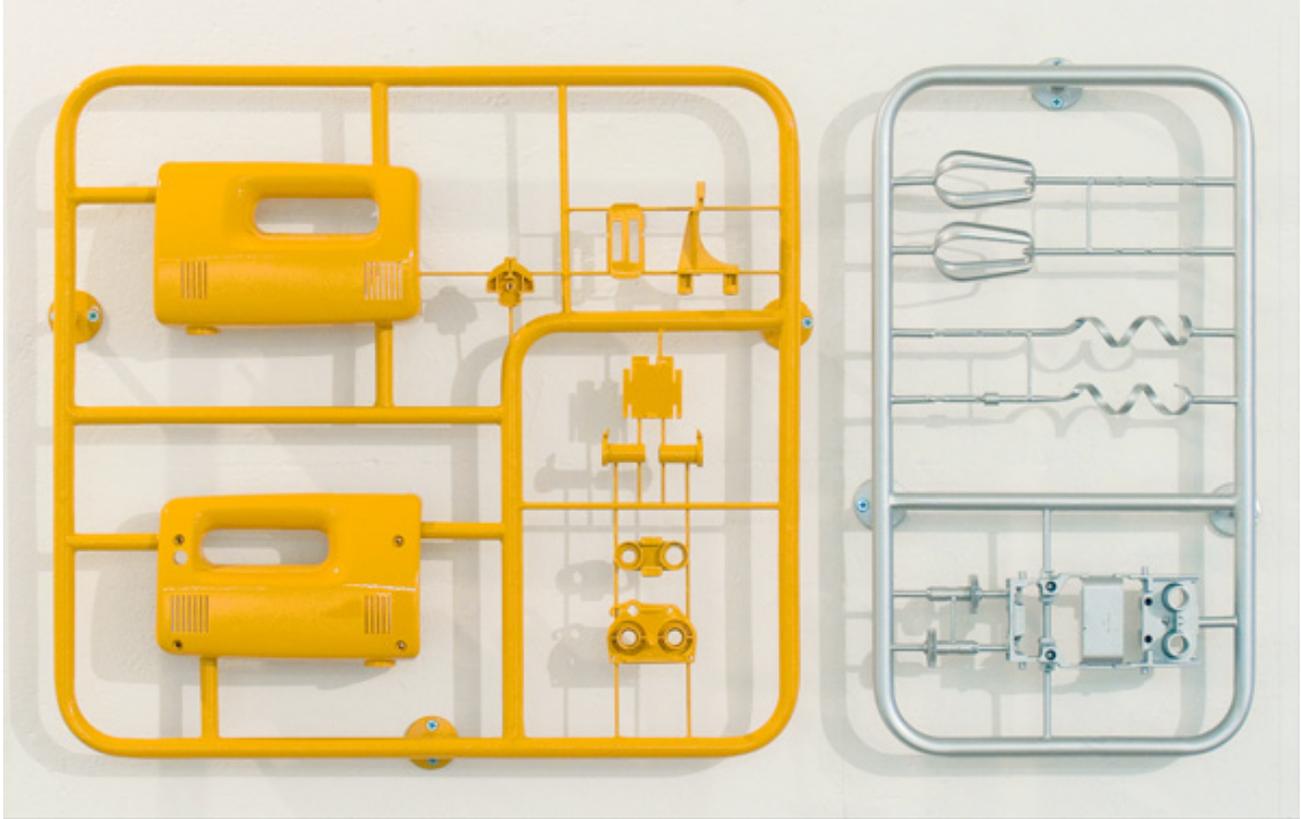
Michael Johansson
Engine Bought Separately - Krups
2011
Image via www.carasi.it
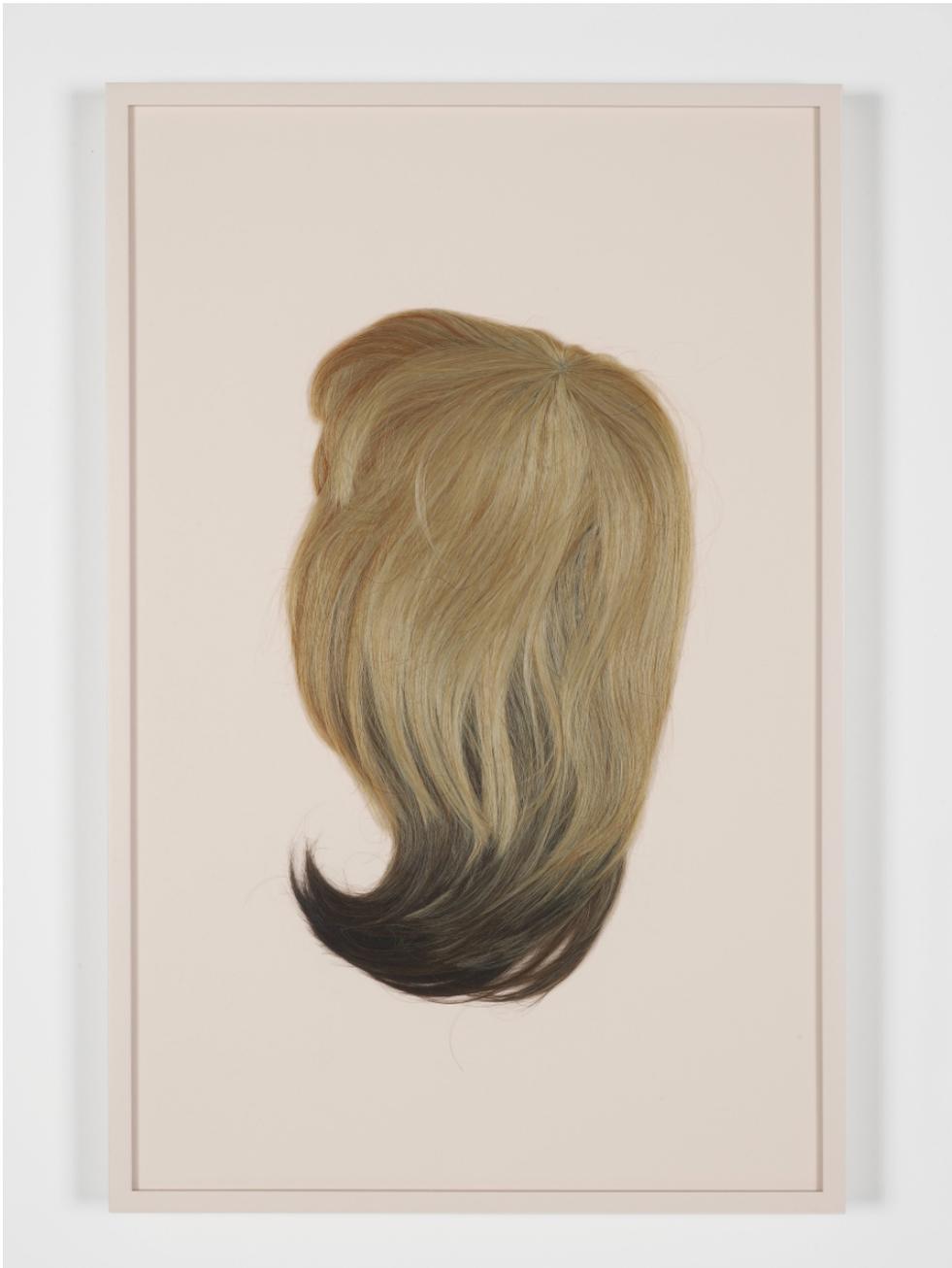
Nina Beier
Layered Side-Swept Ombre
2015
Image via: www.laurabartlettgallery.com

Božica dea Mastasić
Panacea
2011
Image via: matasic.com

Spatiotemporal

In *The Container Principle*, it is suggested that 'containers make it easier to recognise the temporary and use it.'[33] Due to its ephemerality, perhaps we do require assistance in identifying and using the temporaneous, and maybe this large metal box of relatively simple design is indeed a useful aide. The container is the ultimate liminal space, establishing its own spatial order whilst traversing multiple time zones, yet sustaining its internal environment - unchanged by the external world. If the contents are indeed 'timeless and spaceless in the duration of transport and storage', what are the implications for the temporary in this context?[34] The container may facilitate the temporary in its usage of internal space, but what about its treatment of space external to it? The ship became a container in itself, a container of containers. In 1967, Michel Foucault described the ship as the epitome of a heterotopic space - '...a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself…'.[35] Certain principles of heterotopic space as defined by Foucault could be applied to both the space of the container and the container ship - there is a break with traditional time, and an ability to juxtapose several incompatible spaces in a single real place.

Whilst the inside of the container may not be subject to time, the container ships themselves are still at its whim. Space, however, is been treated quite differently. Containerisation is often said to have 'dried up the sea', essentially continuing the straight lines of the railroads into the ocean and across the globe. Container transport companies would even boast of their ability to ignore weather and local and geographical conditions - *'At Seatrain, we move containerised cargo in a functional world, not a conventional geographical one*'. Global container transport thus carves its own system and zones of space and time, a quality highlighted in **Adriane Colburn**'s work *Strategic Centre*. Containerisation visualised the ocean as if nothing could get in its way, or rather, in the way of trade - as if travelling across a flat, smooth surface and eating up space along the way. Colburn's wall-based sculpture, or drawing, takes this idea of the systematic ocean itinerary, and reduces it to a series of criss-crossing lines. Sampled from AIS data, which tracks all marine vessels using satellites, the work presents a cross-section of cargo ship traffic. The lines visualise the ships' movements and ocean currents, and is perhaps why the artist sees the work as a drawing. This reinforces the idea of flattening the ocean to create a new system, and spatial order. The vibrant colours are sampled directly from cargo ships and shipping containers, a further nod to the container as cultural *visiotype*.

If the container potentially killed space and left only time remaining, then what are the

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[33] Holert Tom, Terkessidis, Mark, cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 308.

[34] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 20.

[35] Foucault, Michel. *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias, (Des Espaces Autres, 1967), Architecture/ Mouvement / Continuité,* October 1984, page 9.

implications for building time directly into the container space?[36] **Darren Almond**'s series of photographs are documentation of his work *Meantime*, in which Almond built a digital clock inside a shipping container, and sailed it across the Atlantic. The clock was set to Greenwich Mean Time, irrespective of where it was and whichever time zone it passed through. The simplicity of the concept, albeit not execution, is dazzling in its profundity. By taking time on a journey, it puts a precision on the temporary, which is somewhat difficult to do. Much like Colburn's sculptural drawing, Almond's container clock defies the local conditions, steadfastly chugging away, indifferent to its environment. As pointed out by Klose, there is another layer to the title *Meantime* - in the meantime. The space inside of the container is always waiting - waiting to arrive, waiting to depart, waiting to be filled or waiting to be emptied. In transit it is quite literally in between, in between locations, and in between spatiotemporal conditions. Here we can also revisit the idea of container as time capsule, quite literally. Containers have been likened to time capsules in a less-direct manner, as hermetic containers of cultural objects, that could provide a cross-section of societies today.(footnote? Page 4) External conditions do at times intervene and disrupt the system as an estimated 10,000 containers are lost at sea each year. These accidents that result in goods being washed up on shores can provide an unprecedented view into contemporary consumerist habits. Those that don't reveal their contents, and stay floating adrift, come to be known as 'inaccurate drifters' that help oceanographers predict currents. Not alway helpful, however, these rogue containers tend to float just below the surface of the water and can cause damage to unsuspecting ships and marine life.

This environmental question, of human inventions and materials polluting the oceans and outliving us, resonates with the work of **Jean Francois Boclé**. His installation *Everything Must Go*! is a direct comment on the environmental effects of capitalism, but weaves further layers of meaning relating to postcolonialism, borders and the transatlantic slave trade. Not only are we viewing the toxicity of consumerism made possible through globalisation, but also dealing with the legacies of imperialism and the humanisation of depraved systems of trade - each bag here also representing a human life. Visually it cuts a 'space-time' section of the ocean and deposits it in the gallery, presenting an undulating body of static water. Materially it speaks to the evacuability of containers, in this case of plastic carrier bags, and their relation to the temporary. All of the bags are empty, but the space inside them has been carefully considered. The site-specific installation requires the use of specific, although readily available, blue plastic bags, and its installation requires a certain wafting technique in order to fill the bags with air before placing them gently on top of one another. They are therefore both empty and full in equal measures. In parallel to the drying up of the seas is the 'liquefaction of the land' and that '(...) the previously firm ground is made liquid, and territories are inundated with global currents: of

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[36] Heine, Heinrich, cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 92.

goods, people, money, ideas, and belief systems'.[37] This idea is materialised with Boclé's work, the firm terrain of the gallery space transformed into a guilty mass of blue.

The physical constituents of the container as an enclosure inevitably lead to the consideration of the space inside - an intentional, temporary, often loaded space. It also leads to the contemplation of the relationship between inside and outside. Gaston Bachelard noted that 'philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being'.[38] If it is supposed that the inside should contain being, and the outside non-being, then the objecthood of the container, and its relationship to the thing or things it contains, is deepened further. Hannes Böhringer wrote a scathing description of the container in 1993, in relation to its tension with 'being':

> The container holds everything, but all that is shit: separated, distinguished and yet in its isolation made uniform with all the others. The content-holder, the steel box, in which being (*Sein*) crumbles into beings (*Seiendes*) (Weber-Heidegger), is a toilet, drain and container, devaluer of values (Nietzsche), closed space that is fully empty. The container is no longer a vessel that captures the world and embodies man, it is the magic black box of nothing, end of man and of the world, the death of God, the end of the end and of the beginning, endlessness of the tentative, a vacuous container that loses what it contains.[39]

The notion of being crumbling into beings and 'a vacuous container that loses what it contains', is explored in the work of **Diogo Pimentao**. His performance and drawing work *Empli*, meaning 'filled' in French, sees him repeatedly agitate a cube made of white paper, taped together with masking tape. As he shakes the cube, sometimes aggressively, sometimes more gently, the sound of moving parts reverberate inside. At times he places the cube on the gallery floor and looks as though he might open it, but, after considering it from various angles, he continues agitating it. Eventually, after a period of around five minutes, he begins to unstick the masking tape and unfold the box, revealing its contents as broken pieces of graphite tumble to the floor, leaving behind a large scale graphite drawing on the folded paper, which he pins to the wall. The thousands of tiny broken pieces of graphite remain on the floor, a reminder of his performative process of drawing. The gradient-like drawing, with lighter areas fading into darker corners stands as an internal environment turned inside-out, a documentation of a gesture of enclosure and movement. Turned into a flat artwork, transformed from sculpture to drawing via performance, the work is a subtle meditation on an intervention in space.

In contemplating what it means to enclose and move ideas or knowledge, the role of the

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[37] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 100.

[38] Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, page 212.

[39] Cited in Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 66.

container in computing is of significance. As Klose outlined, in computing the container exists 'on the one hand as the designation of a certain type of program that operates like a transport container, and on the other hand as a spatial organisational structure for information'.[40] These spatial organisation structures are recursive, recalling once more the image of the Russian doll - folders containing folders within them.[41] These computer systems and networks are housed, naturally in data centres. In 2017 there were an estimated 8.4 million data centres around the world.[42] The physical storage of data, is a notion that can confound - understanding data and the Internet as imperceptible components of 'the ether' doesn't fit with the concrete reality of data centres. This is something that **Emma Charles** explores in *White Mountain*, her second film exploring the spatial environments of data centres. It focuses on Pionen, a data centre built into a former nuclear bunker in the centre of Stockholm that has a peculiar architectural design and aesthetic. The architectural brief was the 1972 sci-fi film *Silent Running*, and the centre includes features such as artificial waterfalls, streams, fake fog, fish tanks and greenhouses, and is frequently referred to as the 'James Bond' of data centres. Beyond the aesthetic appeal, of both the centre and the film, Charles' work widens the spatiotemporal question in visualising the physical containers of data and matter, and tracing the storage of temporality itself. Her consideration of the geological features of the centre are in contrast to the modern infrastructure, juxtaposing the historical with the new. This comparison points to a theory on which there has been ample discussion - on the space of the Internet as non-place. As a hypermodern void that facilitates our society of excess information, space and egos, with the added condition of being instantaneous, the empty container space of the Internet, waiting to be filled with meaning, could indeed be an archetypal non-place.

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[40] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 56.

[41] Klose, Alexander. Ibid. page 69.

[42] Statista, Number of data centres worldwide in 2015, 2017, and 2021 (in millions), accessed online on 23rd August 2018, www.statista.com

Adriane Colburn
Strategic Centre
2018
Image via: www.adrianecolburn.com

Darren Almond
Meantime
2000
Image © Darren Almond

Jean Francois Boclé
*Everything Must Go!*
2018
Image via www.designboom.com

Diogo Pimentao
Empli
2010
Image via: www.schleicherlange.com
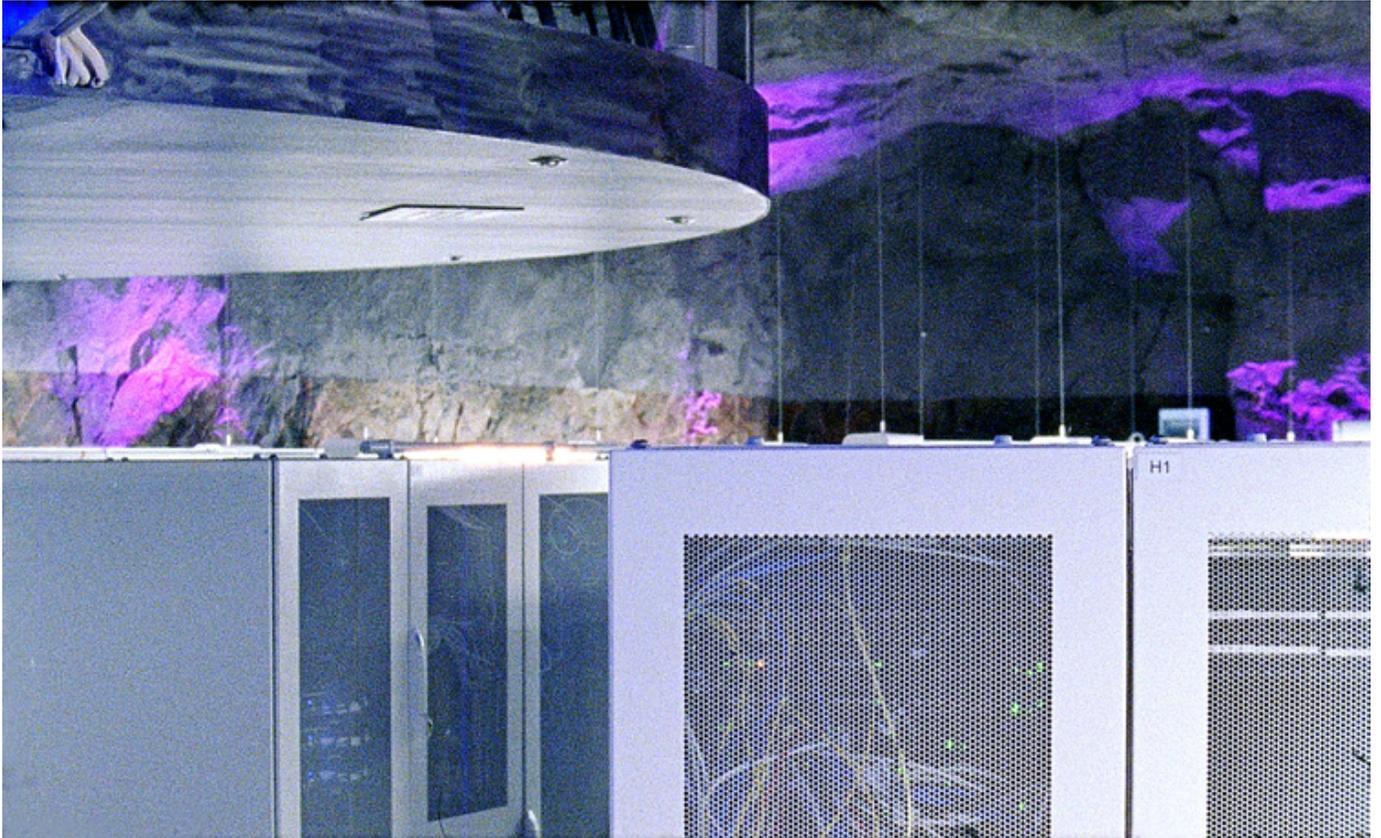
Emma Charles
White Mountain
2016
Image via: www.emma-charles.com

Escapement

The act of being contained evokes the opposite state - of being free of constraints and physical walls. Cargo at times escapes from shipping containers, as data at times escapes computer containers, or is leaked. When ideologies attempt to escape restrictive systems of containment it is viewed as a threat. Some art might be trying to escape the gallery. Other art does not need the gallery, whilst some art clearly still does, and some art wouldn't exist without the gallery. If there are no boundaries, what do you have to push against? *The Powerless Structures* series of works by **Elmgreen & Dragset** is case in point. The artists take the Modernist invention of the white cube gallery space and insert it into various spatial interventions. But without the ideological structure of the white cube in the first place, these works of Institutional Critique would not exist. *Dug Down Gallery/ Powerless Structures Fig.45* is located in East Park behind John Hansard Gallery, and presents a whitewashed gallery space dug into the earth. It speaks to the visual codes of the white cube - that of a supposed neutrality, one in which 'the outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light (…)'.[43] In this case, however, the outside world cannot be eliminated, as the white cube itself has strayed into the urban environment, and is at the whim of nature. Containing no artwork other than the blank space of the gallery itself, *Dug Down Gallery* sits as a useless prototype of itself, the architecture of the space the principle qualities of consideration. It might appear on one hand as an empty swimming pool, on the other a sunken container that has lost its way. The artists' treatment of space across their practice locates social and institutional conditioning across a spectrum of spatial realms:

> Elmgreen & Dragset work with and belabor space in its multiple meanings - as architectural space, mental space, private space, sexual space, art space, public space - simultaneously domesticated and alienated in their displacements, repetitions and overlaps. Identities and intensities flicker and are gone, to appear elsewhere.[44]

This idea of identities and intensities flickering and disappearing is particularly pertinent - as if seen in a film, under erratic lighting we see images flickering and fading, before the darkness swallows them and by an unseen magical gesture they appear in a different space and time. By enclosing the gallery space and relocating it, the artists ask for its identity to be regarded and treated differently - the hushed tones and considered steps inside the gallery are not deemed necessary in the park. By displacing the quintessential art container, the artists have captured one of the museum voids of which Robert

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[43] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999, page 15.
[44] Bang Larsen, Lars. *The Cure of the Cube*, in *Elmgreen & Dragset Performances 1995-2011*, Ed. Iannacchione, A, Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2011, page 80.

Smithson speaks, and recontextualised it. The positive nullity he described has here been visualised and relocated to just outside an institution of the type it aims to critique. The institution, of course, has not only authorised but curated the selection of works, and so the act of Institutional Critique has been assimilated into and accepted by the institution itself, even initiated by it. Jens Hoffman asks, 'Is it simply inevitable, when one engages with the world, to sooner or later be absorbed by the object of one's criticism?'[45] Brian O'Doherty also spoke of this when he said that the white cube 'has incubated ideas that would have abolished it'.[46] But in returning to Smithson's view that the nullifying effect of the gallery is something to be accentuated, perhaps we do still need an institutional structure of sorts, less to validate art but to provide a framework against which we can push back and propose alternative imaginaries. Smithson said that 'installations should empty rooms, not fill them'.[47] In this respect, perhaps it is the potential vacancy of the container that enables it be considered as a metaphor for wider spatial and social organisation.

Elmgreen & Dragset
Dug Down Gallery / Powerless Structures Fig.45
1998
Image via: www.perrotin.com

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[45] Hoffman, Jens. Escape Artists, Ed Iannacchione, A, Ibid. page 100.

[46] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999, pp.80-81

[47] Smithson, Robert, Ed. Flam, Jack, Ibid. page 41