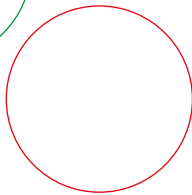
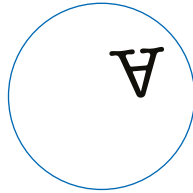
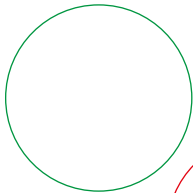


M I C R O
, T O
P I

Adj: extremely small

Suffix: a place with specified characteristics





MICRO-TOPIA

A consideration of the
contributions made
by the following
spaces.

By Rozenn Logan

(The city space)

The widest cast of the net, the city space contains all subsequent spaces with which we are concerned here. If 'city' is a word used to describe almost anything – from tiny settlements containing a cathedral to sprawling metropolises such as New York – then what can be gained from using the term?¹ Perhaps by exploring a city through the spaces it contains as opposed to its well-trodden history or overall identity, we can uncover different types of knowledge, and become aware of a different order. Walter Benjamin commented when walking the streets of Berlin that 'valuable things may be lying around but nobody remembers where'.² In order for the curious to find them, there are systems to be navigated, thresholds to pass through and powers to be played with. The artists in MICRO-TOPIA have considered the types of spaces found in cities and what knowledge may be found there. Among the more distinct spaces we find less readable places – in the form of non-places, heterotopic spaces and obsolete, undefined spaces. These less lucid, less easily articulated spaces within the city have been explored through the microcosm of the Slide Library, and are further discussed in subsequent sections.

A shopping centre, a car park, a department store. Manchester Central Library, The Printworks, Piccadilly Gardens. From the generic and unfamiliar to the local and recognisable, slides of city spaces have been selected for varying functions. Already lacking in history or identity, the non-place of the shopping centre and surrounding car park is further reinforced through reduced geometric forms and ghostly embossing in Ilektra Maipa's work. Marc Auge's notion of a non-place as one that cannot be defined as relational or anthropological is in direct opposition to the existence of the Slide Library itself.

Dominika Wroblewska's work considers both the well-known and the unremarkable in Manchester's cityscape. Treating Manchester with the same estrangement she encountered in the Slide Library,

she has created a set of drawings which highlight the minimal and the absent, the recognisable and the banal. I Chia Huang's work focuses on two well-known spaces in Manchester – Manchester Central Library and The Printworks. Her use of glass, a signifier of both industry and luxury, reinforces the evolving identity and function of these sites. The digital collages stand as documents of change, whilst alluding to the spatial and temporal thresholds contained in both the slides and the city.

● (The museum space)

The order or disorder of the museum space, and the question of knowledge versus curiosity, have fuelled many of the creative processes presented in MICRO-TOPIA. The museum attempts to understand that which is exterior and anterior to it through categorisation, through the shaping of knowledge. But at what point does this organisation of knowledge kill curiosity? And at what point does categorisation become confusing and alienating? As noted by Paul Valery – delight has little to do with the principles of classification, conservation and public utility, clear and reasonable though these may be.³ Although his encounters with museums in the early twentieth century referred primarily to the clutter and decontextualisation of artworks, the modern art museum can also reinforce rhetoric of space and acceptance of an order that can jeopardise curiosity, not exalt it.

The categorisation found in the Slide Library, however, confounds in a different way. Its order and disorder has caused delight among the MICRO-TOPIA artists delving into it. They are aligned with Marina Warner, who says 'seekers – like us – know there is something to know and that pleasure flows from the processes of making it appear.'⁴ They have played with the organising scheme, establishing new relationships through unexpected combinations. They have taken isolated moments and made them 'social'. Warner writes that 'the yearning to comprehend the vast panoply of mysteries has inspired collecting, connoisseurship and confidential exchanges of insider information.'⁵ The museum's collection as a didactic resource is well understood, and the Slide Library's original function was that of a teaching resource first and foremost. These 'confidential exchanges of insider information' however, acknowledge the new relationships formed, across objects, artworks and slides.

Frances Roddick's work considers the space of the department store alongside the theory of museum display. Her miniature city

models presented in a display cabinet juxtapose the cabinet of curiosity with the notion of consumer culture. In an age where some might argue museums are more like commercial sites of consumption – with their shops, restaurants and bars – it is a timely parallel to draw.

The Slide Library is considered in the exhibition as a type of museum in miniature within a larger institution. Both the museum and the library are considered by Michel Foucault as heterotopias of time – places in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit.⁶ A defining feature of a heterotopic space is in its providing of ‘a sort of mixed, joint experience’, in which several places can be experienced at once.⁷ Although solid walls contain the physical space of the museum and the library, the denotative space and time contained within books, artefacts, objects or artworks exceed this exterior space. This notion of a space-within-a-space can also be applied to the archive.

● (The archive space)

The Slide Library as an archive differs in function to the Slide Library as an active resource. The MMU Slide Library currently operates as both, and has been described as an ‘incidental archive’, documenting what has been taught at Manchester School of Art since the mid-1960s. Historically, it was used by teaching staff for use in lectures, however the focus has shifted to wider exhibition and project use by teachers and students alike. It now also garners attention from those who are seduced by this obsolete technology and the nostalgia it evokes, as well as the space itself. The slides are increasingly viewed as objects, with an interest in their material properties as well as their capacity as carriers of meaning. The recent near-disposal of the collection has also catalysed a renewed interest in the collection.

According to Paul Riceour, the three defining features of an archive are that it contains documents or records; that it holds a relationship to an institution, and that it has the goal of preserving or conserving those documents.⁸ The MMU Slide Library certainly ticks all boxes, and alongside the MSoA slide collection, it also preserves the Design Council’s collection of slides, which is used by a wide range of users from areas of academia, advertising, literature and exhibition-making.

Bethany Costerd and Sarah Louise Hawkins’ collaborative project *Continuum*, considers the dialogue between past and present

sculptors at Manchester School of Art. Selecting slides from degree shows past, they have isolated forms and reinterpreted them, reactivating the concepts documented by the slides. The uniformity of the white forms on the light box draws them together as a mass, as a community of structures, whilst also evoking the cleanliness of an architectural model – at odds with the expressive and non-functional forms.

The Slide Library as a space has also been considered. Although the archive remains ‘activated’ at the points at which it is passed through, the space itself feels dated and secretive. Rows of filing cabinets, themselves unremarkable, contain a much larger ephemeral space of knowledge. Matthew Bamber has presented his work in the Slide Library itself, atop the filing cabinets and amongst the equipment. His carousel of slides alludes to the didactic function of the Slide Library and its role in lectures, whilst the now archaic-sounding click of the carousel projector reinforces the focus on the obsolescence of the slide medium and other technologies. In contrast to the environment of moving image display in museums today – often in small, dark rooms and devoid of context – his work is revealed to us through the un-tampered with environment of the Slide Library.

● (The miniature space)

Considering the slide as an object as well as a carrier of meaning leads to the contemplation of its physical properties, and particularly its size. It is a prime example of *multum in parvo* – a great deal in a small space. Susan Stewart, in her contemplation of the miniature in relation to literature, says that ‘within the frame and without physical form, the *multum in parvo* becomes monumental, transcending any limited context of origin and at the same time neatly containing a universe’.⁹ The slide contains a universe ready to be enlarged and shared, to become monumental. As an object it also preserves an image of arrested time, pointing outside of itself, to what is and isn’t there. Stewart remarks:

Yet, of course, the major function of the enclosed space is always to create a tension or dialectic between inside and outside, between private and public property, between the space of the subject and the space of the social.¹⁰

The slide as a medium, then, epitomises this space. As an object it holds a universe that points to lived reality, and as a projection it magnifies the tension between interiority and exteriority.

Traditionally used in domestic or educative settings, it wasn't until the 1960s that artists began using slides in a creative context, interested in the medium's familiar and utilitarian technology, whilst seeking new ways to 'move beyond the frame, beyond everything precious and static.'¹¹ While this familiar and functional technology appealed to the conceptual and performance artists of the 1960s, the draw for many contemporary artists lies in the retrofitting of the medium with current technology and concepts. In an age of visual bombardment, the slowness of the slide projector has renewed appeal.

The slide, like the architectural model, takes a version of reality and reduces it, before enlarging it and sharing it. The idea of a miniature version of reality has always intrigued, perhaps because we can project onto it an idealised space, uncontaminated by lived reality. The slide in its frame feels somehow protected, a notion that is suggested through Emma Davies' work. Barely enlarged from the frame size, her projection of a manipulated frozen scene in Piccadilly Gardens is projected directly onto the windowsill. Unassuming and intimate, it opposes the original function of the slide as a social, sharing experience, instead standing its miniature ground whilst proffering its own suggestion of absence and loss. It disregards the traditional exhibition space, instead aligning itself with the architecture of the room.

¹ Sudjic, Deyan. *The Language of Cities*, London: Allen Lane, 2016, page 1.

² Benjamin, Walter. *A Berlin Chronicle (1932). Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, New York: Schocken Books, 1986, page 20.

³ Valery, Paul. *The Problem of Museums (1923)*, Paul Valery: Degas, Manet, Morisot, New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1960, page 202.

⁴ Warner, Marina. *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* (Ed. Brian Dillon), London: Hayward Publishing, Southbank Centre, 2013, page 30.

⁵ Warner, Marina. *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* (Ed. Brian Dillon), London: Hayward Publishing, Southbank Centre, 2013, page 30.

⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, (*Des Espaces Autres*, 1967), *Architecture/ Mouvement / Continuité*, October 1984, page 7.

⁷ Foucault, Michel. *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, (*Des Espaces Autres*, 1967), *Architecture/ Mouvement / Continuité*, October 1984, page 4.

⁸ Ricoeur, Paul. *Archives, Documents, Traces (1978)*, *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London, The Whitechapel Gallery, 2006, page 66.

⁹ Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1984, page 53.

¹⁰ Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1984, page 68.

¹¹ Alexander, Darsie. *Slideshow*, London: Tate Publishing, 2005, page 10.

