CHAPTER 5

Dissonance and Contestation: Ruining Heritage and Its Alternatives

This entire book could have focused on issues of heritage and preservation and the cultural activities invested in such sites and locations. The decline of manufacturing in the Western world over the last five decades has in part been matched by the growth of tourism and the heritage and cultural industries. It would have been possible to fill these pages with accounts and reflective analysis of abandoned, derelict or transparently ruined sites (contemporary and more self-evidently historical) which have played host to myriad cultural events as part of the heritage industry’s mission to preserve the past for the future. Broadly speaking such activities take place either to attract paying visitors to locations already at least partially secured—and materially maintained—for posterity or to function as part of campaigns and crusades to save such places from planned demolition, deliberate abandonment or further entropic ruination.

This chapter investigates two huge post-industrial sites in the Ruhr region of Germany: the Landschaftspark ironworks in Duisburg-Nord and the Zollverein coal mine outside Essen. Here, during my German field work, I encountered two equally ambitious, but different in form, examples of how the cultural industries have approached the regeneration of the ruins of heavy manufacturing industry, both closed in the 1980s. Following the coal mine and the ironworks I consider the compelling story of an abandoned high modernist seminary—St Peter’s—outside Glasgow in Scotland and the attempt by an imaginatively ambitious public art organisation, NVA, to reinvent this extraordinary contemporary ruin.
Reactivating Industrial Ruins of the Ruhr: Duisburg-Nord’s Landschaftspark and Essen’s Zollverein

My focus on Germany is divided between two very different objects of ruin and their relationship with cultural agency. Whilst Chap. 8 of this book is devoted to the Cold War ruins of Berlin, this chapter offers two models of heritage conservation, very different from the artist-led occupations of, for example, Teufelsberg or Tacheles in Germany’s capital city. Like other industrial heartlands of Europe, the Ruhr Valley was subject to huge decline for approximately two decades from the early 1970s. These changes were neither ‘natural’ nor necessarily inevitable, but were variously the consequence of government policies, a decline in carbon resources (in the case of coal) and Capital’s inexorable drive to relocate and restructure in search of greater productivity, profitability and an ever shifting reserve army of labour (Marx 1996). As elsewhere in the Western world (e.g. the west of Scotland, Teesside and South Wales in the United Kingdom or Pittsburgh and Detroit in the United States) it was the heavy industries of mining, steel making, engineering, shipbuilding and chemicals which were the main victims of such global economic movements.

In Duisburg-Nord the Meiderich Ironworks began production in 1901 and throughout its 84-year history produced special varieties of pig iron as well as countless environmentally damaging by-products such as slag, dust, sludge, gases and waste water. At the time of closure in 1985 it was owned by the Thyssen Group of companies. In Essen the Zollverein anthracite mine ceased drawing coal from the earth in 1986, whilst the coking plant finally closed in 1993. First opened in 1847, Zollverein was once the largest coal mine in the world. By the mid-1930s it had become fully modernised with automated work flows and production systems, following the principles of Fordism¹ and Taylorism.² I was interested in visiting both of these sites as they seemed to represent striking examples of projects far removed from others I have described in Greece, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sicily, for example, but were, nonetheless, critically important tropes of the cultural industries’ response to urban and industrial ruination. This is not to say they were typical or representative of such responses since both Zollverein and Landschaftspark are both highly ambitious, large scale and multi-Euro-funded projects supported by national and federal governments in Germany as well as private trusts and foundations. Both are driven by a variety of forces and motives which are
economic, cultural, historical and political. That both fit squarely into the multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses and practices of the heritage industry does not diminish their interest or appeal as complex, thoughtful and creative responses to de-industrialisation and economic decline. President of Germany (1999–2004), Johannes Rau, articulated the driving sentiment behind both the Zollverein and Landschaftspark projects when he said:

There were times when a coal mine site and its pit head towers were considered useless scrap iron, rubbish and torn down. We must not become illiterates of memory. (Rau qtd. in Marth 2018, p. 87)

**Zollverein and PACT⁹ in Essen**

Across Europe and beyond, the original Zollverein works were regarded as a ‘technical and aesthetic masterpiece of modernity’ (Marth 2018, p.32) and its design deeply influenced by one of the key principles of the Bauhaus, namely that there should always be a close connection between industrial design and architecture. This extended through to the design of door handles, stair railings and lamps and in the symmetrical arrangement of the buildings along two visual axes, all of which spoke to the Bauhaus maxim of form following function. In 2001 Zollverein was awarded the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site and in September 2018 hosted a two-day symposium entitled ‘100 years of Bauhaus in the West’, followed in 2019 by a Bauhaus-inspired festival of exhibitions, concerts, performances, lectures and workshops. Twenty-first-century Zollverein seems deeply aware and proud of its arts and crafts heritage as well as its industrial legacy.

I visited Zollverein on 7 May 2018 and had made arrangements to meet with Yvonne Whyte, Head of Production and Project Development at the PACT art centre, and Delia Bosch and Sebastien Scholz from the main Zollverein administrative offices. Before these encounters I had time to wander around parts of this 100 hectare site. It is difficult to convey the scale of both the site as a whole and the various buildings in particular. Most of the plant and the buildings which housed the equipment have been preserved, but require constant maintenance to keep them safe for visitors and employees. Thus the massive coking and mixing plants, the winding-engine house, the miner’s washrooms, the coal washery, the boiler houses, the extraction and compressor hall, numerous workshop
spaces and many other startling constructions still exist and can be experienced sometimes from within or from safe distances outside. From the closure of both mine and coking plant the 30-year process of turning Zollverein from a working pit into a cultural heritage site and museum seems, as far as I can judge as an outsider, to have been accomplished with considerable skill and ingenuity. Most of the facilities deemed to be essential for a modern museum have been deftly housed or built into existing buildings and plant. Thus the large Ruhr Museum and cafe is sited within the old Coal Washery, the PACT Art Centre within the miners’ washrooms, shops and teaching studios within the Picking Belt Hall, the Red Dot museum of contemporary design in the Boiler House and the restaurant and casino in the Low Pressure Compressor House. There are many more. Bicycles can be hired to tour the site, and while entrance to the overall area is free it costs to enter the museums. The visitor attractions blend events, projects and exhibitions tied thematically to coal mining history and a wide range of sporting and cultural activities which have with little to do with Zollverein’s history per se. Thus in the old coking plant there is an ice skating rink and the Works Swimming Pool, both open only on a seasonal basis. Beyond these in various parts of the site there are a variety of galleries and workshops specialising in ceramics, jewellery and printing. Further still there are spaces for art installations which include an ‘Experience Field’ for the development of the senses and the SANAA building devoted to Japanese architectural practice. And so it goes on. You would need several days to experience all these projects and buildings and I barely scratched the surface. All the above are organised and administered by the overall Zollverein project, but the main focal point for theatre, dance, media and performance is PACT, an independent arts centre located in the miners’ original bath and shower house.

I was shown around PACT by Yvonne Whyte and later we had a long conversation. Founded in 2002, PACT inhabits a large and architecturally diverse building where the original structural layout for baths, showers, locker rooms, windows and social spaces have been retained, without, of course, the fixtures and fittings. Although it has a superbly well-equipped theatre, all the internal areas are used flexibly for performance, seminar discussions and as exhibition or screening sites. There is also a large social space with a cafe which local residents from Essen are encouraged to enjoy alongside visiting artists. PACT is much more than an arts centre devoted only to public performance, rather it likes to describe itself as an ‘artists’ centre’ with a variety of functions and possibilities. From the outset
PACT’s artists’ residencies and exchanges lay at the heart of the project with an emphasis on sharing and exchanging practice. In a statement about PACT’s aspirations and policies stress is put on relational models of provision:

Rather than seeking immediate results, PACT’s work is primarily laid out to make lasting provisions for a plurality of models. It is characteristic of PACT’s concept that all areas of activity are closely linked and mutually enriching. Under the roof of the former pithead bath at the Zollverein colliery, PACT has created a space for lively encounters and exchange between actions, experience and theoretical discourse which supports and forges long term co-operative practices and partnerships. (PACT 2018)

Yvonne tells me that in any single year 30 residencies of up to three weeks are offered to artists across the world and these are as much for research and experimentation as they are for rehearsal and production. An international panel decides on the successful candidates who are given a grant to cover living expenses and travel costs. In addition, resident artists can draw upon dramaturgical and production support, such as technical assistance, project management, as well as press and publicity. The support of artists in this way extends to opportunities for engaging with academics and thinkers beyond the cultural sphere through seminars and conferences. Extensive documentation on PACT’s website reveals a wide range of events which speak, on the one hand, to the present and future of the Ruhr area and its regeneration and, on the other, to global issues such child health, urbanisation, migration, diversity, sustainability, climate change and the promotion of public spaces in cities. The public performance programme places PACT squarely on the European circuit for dance, theatre and experimental performance. The billboard (see Fig. 5.3) during the time of my visit announces imminent performances from the likes of Berlin-based company Rimini Protokoll and Forced Entertainment from Sheffield in the United Kingdom. The presence of such companies in PACT’s programmes immediately positions the project as one willing explicitly to promote work from the contemporary postdramatic avant-garde and this disposition raises complex issues about the site and its desired relationship with performance. I was curious how PACT’s profile and working practices, articulated with great passion and cogency by Yvonne, connected to Zollverein’s industrial history and the present lives of Essen’s citizens. PACT receives the bulk of its funding from Germany’s regional
government, the Ministry for Culture and Science of the state of Rhine-Westphalia, and, in addition, smaller grants from the City of Essen and other private trusts and foundations. Regional state funding is now on a three-year revenue basis. I sense that PACT is perceived more as a regional and national resource, rather than a local, city-based one. Indeed, Yvonne was keen to emphasise the centre’s international profile and reputation, whilst at the same time explaining how over the last three years they have begun to take steps to engage more proactively with the local area. Significantly, Yvonne invokes the difficulties of changing local perceptions about Zollverein, particularly in relation to the gendered nature of an iconic site of heavy industry. Her words are salient in respect of the challenges and difficulties faced by those who—for the best of reasons perhaps—wish to transform a former colliery, ruined by loss of original function and use, into a cultural and heritage centre of multiple educational, artistic and leisure activities. In our conversation, Yvonne remarked:

We are cut off from the city of Essen which is an area of high unemployment … when it closed in 1986 it was a no-go zone. No women came to the site. It was just for men. It was closed off and not in social consciousness that you could go there, and so for many years remained totally isolated. The redesign of the site had no connection with the local area … an elite site.

Fig. 5.1  PACT (Art Centre), Zollverein. 
(Image: Simon Murray 2018)
Fig. 5.2 Coal Washing Plant (Bauhaus) Zollverein. (Image: Simon Murray 2018)

Fig. 5.3 PACT Summer Programme 2018, Zollverein. (Image: Simon Murray 2018)
And we programme largely experimental work which did not appeal much to local people. But three years ago at the height of the refugee crisis there were three camps on the site and kids would come in. So we opened a café where anyone could come and we tried to appeal to old and new families … slowly and surely we are making these connections, but it does not really connect to our programme. Two years ago we took over the disused paint shop and now workshops take place with students – furniture making, language classes etc. … Now we have two people who have outreach and community responsibilities – we’ve never had that before. The kids are the best though – they throw themselves into everything. (Whyte 2018)

In certain schematic respects it is important to separate PACT from the wider context since the former has an administrative and strategic independence from the total Zollverein project. However, spatially and experientially PACT is an inescapable part of this huge colliery complex—you could not enter PACT without being visually and sensually conscious of its sitedness—but yet it possesses many of the qualities, ambitions and dispositions of an urban and cosmopolitan cultural centre. It has connections with several universities in the Ruhr region and actively exploits links with certain student cohorts in these institutions. For me, PACT presents an interesting conundrum, namely the performance and function of a
cutting-edge twenty-first-century arts—or artists’—centre located within an industrial museum. If there are contradictions or creative tensions—conceptual or practical—in this relationship they do not appear on the surface to damage or constrain either part of the Zollverein equation. For the purpose of this book my brief encounter with Zollverein and PACT added productively and provokingly to the complex and nuanced task of understanding the range of possible relationships which sites of ruination might have with performance and other cultural activities. Ruined of its original function as a coal mine Zollverein has been reactivated through leisure and cultural projects in a startling way.

**Landschaftspark in Duisburg-Nord**

I had been in correspondence with Joachim Mannebach for several weeks before visiting Duisburg-Nord’s Landschaftspark—Landscape Park—on 8 May 2018. The previous day I had immersed myself in the Ruhr’s other massive reclaimed industrial site, Zollverein. Superficially, these are similar projects: a coal mine and an iron works both saved from demolition after de-industrialisation and closure in the mid-1980s, both reinvented as cultural projects and both offering major statements about remembering the past, the value of heritage and the diverse strategies by which the legacies of industrialisation might be re-thought for present and future generations. Identifying, understanding and making choices about these legacies remind us that the heritage industry is always ideological in terms of which narratives and from what perspectives are being presented and reconfigured. Zollverein has UNESCO World Heritage status and a built environment based upon the high modernist principles of the Bauhaus. As a recognised UNESCO site it almost certainly receives greater funding than the Landschaftspark, but is also subject to more regulatory constraints than its sister project down the road in Duisburg-Nord. Joachim, a member of the Events Management team, is generous with his time and takes me to some of the main buildings on the site before I’m given a bicycle to roam freely around the whole park. Whilst both Zollverein and Landschaftspark were propelled by similar ambitions—namely to preserve and re-animate sites of heavy industry—the actual thinking and process by which these respective projects have developed since the late 1980s are significantly different. At one level Zollverein, notwithstanding the remarkable PACT artists’ centre within it, seems to frame itself more as a ‘museum’ than Landschaftspark, whilst the latter has been more
self-consciously experimental and rule-breaking in its quest to find new relationships between landscape, ecology and the monstrous constructions which lie at the centre of the park.

In 1991 the task of reinventing and redesigning the rapidly decaying and derelict Duisburg-Nord ironworks was awarded to the radical landscape architect Peter Latz and his company, Latz+Partners. Latz’s design plans were to keep the main structures—power station, blast furnaces, blowing house and gasometer, for example—but to enable them to become something other, or beyond their original purpose and function in the making or iron and steel. Rather than to freeze the existing plant and buildings in time and to separate them spatially and conceptually from the gardens and parklands which were being imagined, the different components should invade, blend, juxtapose and embrace each other. Thus a postmodern landscape design permitted gardens to be embedded within and amongst the ruined plant of the steelworks with, for example, clipped hedges, streams, parterres and rose gardens emerging in dialogue with weathered concrete, rusting steel gantries, vertiginous walkways and long since defunct machinery. Joachim puts it like this:

The idea was to keep these remaining structures and monitor the process of nature regaining some kind of control over the site, to encourage this wild growing … We support the project by touching the ruins, caring for them, carefully refurbishing materials so they don’t collapse, intervening only when necessary, often leaving things to themselves … In some places you are free just to ignore the past, but in some places you stumble across it and can’t overlook it, you have concrete plates and rusting equipment next to roses. (Mannebach 2018)

For Latz and his team a critical principle of the design lay in an understanding about the relationship between time and memory and a conviction that the act of remembering is a constantly shifting and contingent process. This derelict but reinvented ironworks and the park which surrounds and lives within it are provocations to remember anew and so to perceive and witness the material world—‘natural’ or man-made—in unexpected, challenging and surprising ways. Inspired by land artist Robert Smithson in his essay ‘A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic’ (1967), Latz believed that his designs for the Landschaftspark would be imaginatively generative through an association of juxtaposed material events and sites, enabling memory not to recreate with mathematical
precision, but to propose new perceptions, perspectives and thoughts. In an earlier, but associated, context Smithson in 1967 writes about the derelict industrial sites of Passaic (New Jersey) imagining them as monuments of and to the future:

Along the Passaic River banks were many minor monuments such as concrete abutments that supported the shoulders of a new highway in the process of being built. River Drive was in part bulldozed and in part intact. It was hard to tell the new highway from the old road; they were both confounded into a unitary chaos. Since it was Saturday, many machines were not working, and this caused them to resemble prehistoric creatures trapped in the mud, or, better, extinct machines—mechanical dinosaurs stripped of their skin. On the edge of this prehistoric Machine Age were pre- and post-World War II suburban houses. The houses mirrored themselves into colorlessness. A group of children were throwing rocks at each other near a ditch. “From now on you’re not going to come to our hide-out. And I mean it!” said a little blonde girl who had been hit with a rock. (Smithson 1967, p.53)

James Corner in a collection of short essays entitled ‘Learning from Duisburg-Nord’ (2009) returns us to the present of the Landschaftspark, and writing how the place performs itself, says:

I know of no other park that maintains such a contradictory range of landscape experiences, where the sometime unsettling appearance of post-industrial dereliction, decay and entropy sits alongside obviously designed materials, planted gardens and public spaces. Here an extraordinary sense of temporality is so uncannily arranged that one sometimes feels as if the park is a symphony of radically divergent movements, moods and measures. (Corner 2009, p.21)

It takes time and immersion in Landschaftspark to register the subtleties and nuances implied in James Corner’s account and, unfortunately, my visit was too short to engage with these in many of their intricacies. It has only been through subsequent reading and research that my embodied experience of this complex and ingenious site has been remembered in a way that begins to do justice to Latz’s design and how Landschaftspark is activated and practiced today. At the beginning of our conversation Joachim is at pains to remind me that colleagues at both Zollverein and Landschaftspark prefer not to speak of their projects in terms of preserving ruins since, he says, ‘they were recaptured just at the right moment … in
the northern Ruhr they had not been left alone for long enough to turn into crumbling ruins’ (Mannebach 2018). Interestingly, Joachim points to the paradox that it was only after the closure of the plant—and others like it—that people began to notice what had been taken for granted for over 100 years. Like Zollverein, the Meiderich steelworks had been a restricted site for all except those who worked there, and, like its Essen neighbour, the Duisburg-Nord plant was a hugely gendered space with the presence of women almost exclusively restricted to roles in the canteen and in administration. The devastation of heavy industry experienced by the Ruhr area in the 1980s, the legacy of extreme pollution and environmental damage left in its wake and the rapid social and economic changes which were a consequence of all this invited local people, activists, policy makers, academics and politicians, to take stock of what had been lost and—as importantly—what might be done to acknowledge and remember the experiences generated by these sites.

The range of activities offered by Landschaftspark in 2019 is diverse, imaginative and intriguing. On the one hand it certainly functions as a museum and an educational resource, but on the other, the invitation is to treat the whole site as an ‘adventure playground’ (Winkels and Zieling

Fig. 5.5 Blast furnaces, Landschaftspark. (Image: Simon Murray 2018)
Fig. 5.6  Water channels, Landschaftspark. (Image: Simon Murray 2018)

Fig. 5.7  Gantry crane and elevated rail tracks, Landschaftspark. (Image: Simon Murray 2018)
Fig. 5.8  Theatre in the old Blowing House, Landschaftspark. (Image: Simon Murray 2018)

Fig. 5.9  Frieze by Bernd and Hilla Becher, Landschaftspark. (Image: Simon Murray 2018)
Latz’s refusal to let the redesigned site simply become a fixed and frozen museum, an artefact to be seen but never touched or experienced sensorially in any other way, is manifested at one extreme in scuba diving (to a depth of 13 metres) in the old gasometer, climbing walls and cross-golf up and around the former ore bunkers, and mountain bike courses across the whole site. Participants in these various activities range from casual daily visitors through professional sports people to training for police, fire fighters and the military. On my visit I watched firefighter rescue teams stage and rehearse the rescue of an accident victim strapped into a stretcher and lowered down the side of a building. Whilst there are, of course, restricted areas, visitors are encouraged to roam around the site and, within the limits of safety, construct playful activities shaped and proposed by its material landscape. Between and overlapping with these different parameters of Landschaftspark there are a wide range of activities and events, either cultural or around the promotion of business and commerce. Joachim took me on a tour of two very different spaces: the 500 seat theatre in the Blowing House and a huge building which was originally the Power Station. The Blowing House complex contains, replete with much of the original machinery, two Pump Houses and a Compressor House. The main Blowing House space is excellently equipped in terms of
lighting rig and sound technology and has a flexible seating structure. We watched from the back of the auditorium as someone was practicing on a grand piano in this elegant space with walls of the original bare concrete or stone and with graceful original windows. The other parts of the Blowing House contain a foyer, bar and meeting area all intermingled with original pumping, heating and ventilating machinery. The 6000 square metre Power Station building is a startling experience at 170 metres in length, 34 metres wide and holding up to 4000 people. It is used for large-scale theatre, music, opera and installation events on the one hand and, on the other, for conferences, promotional motor shows, gala dinners, lighting and laser spectacles. In addition to these two iconic spaces theatre, dance and performance pieces are often sited in different parts of the whole complex. Joachim informs me that many of the theatre and music events are chosen for their popular appeal and he is honest about the perpetual financial pressures which always require attention to the number of visitors who define the ‘bottom line’ on most of these occasions. Nonetheless, I note in the strikingly produced Winkels and Zieling book that signature theatre directors and choreographers of the contemporary avant garde, such as Alain Platel, Peter Brook, Philipp Stolzi, Christoph Marthaler and Robert Wilson have all had work performed at Landschaftspark. Joachim also tells me that South African artist and installation/performance-maker, William Kentridge, will be presenting work at Landschaftspark as part of the Ruhrtriennale in the late summer of 2018.

There is much more to say about the range of activities in this multifaceted place, a location which simultaneously confounds and confirms many of my expectations and assumptions about the heritage and cultural industries. Landschaftspark needs to be understood, experienced and sensed through many different lenses and layers of materiality and context. In terms of context we should position the project within the much wider framework of ideas, imagination, thinking, policy making and financial support which seem to have been characteristic of various responses to the plight of the whole northern Ruhr area over the last 40 years. Landschaftspark’s idiosyncratic and radical re-thinking of industrial heritage and regeneration has been driven by Latz’s plans and sustained and extended by the project team which has been in place ever since. But it has also been the beneficiary of an enabling infrastructure within the wider
Ruhr region which has been present to support and help finance the venture and to make active connections with the wider cultural world beyond this part of Germany. The Ruhrtriennale\(^5\) has been an integral part of this relationship and project. Joachim is thoughtful, honest and reflective as he tells me the story of Landschaftspark so far. We are strangers, but he hints at those particular qualities of the experiment—for that is what it is— which he particularly prizes and would like to see developed further if resources permitted. I sense he is well aware of the difficult balancing act between sustaining the openness and accessibility of the place with an unfolding arts and cultural programme which somehow speaks to and further explores Latz’s radical design thinking. It is also a temporal challenge to negotiate the material force field of the past in the form of the plant, engineering and equipment which refuses comfortable nostalgia and embraces environmental and ecological prefigurations which are open, negotiable and questioning. James Corner summarises the spirit and practice of Peter Latz’s legacy like this:

Peter Latz seized the opportunity to work with the deep structures of the site. He did not impose his own will or signature, but instead cultivated the hidden processes and forces inherent to the site itself. It is a profoundly temporal work, essentially growing a new reality from an old foundation, a reality where traces of the old remain, not simply as vestiges but as the alchemic medium within which the new springs forth. (Corner 2009, p.22)

After its closure as an ironworks Landschaftspark become a brownfield site and it is within this context that some of the most rewarding ecological experimentation is taking place. A bio-diversity research and audit day in June 2001 revealed over 1800 species of flora and fauna living within the park, and from 2005 a branch of the Biologische Station Westliches Ruhrgebiet moved into the former sampling building. Here, its role ranges from collecting scientific data, planning for the care of nature reserves to providing expert advice on renaturation schemes. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of the Landschaftspark project is as a laboratory in which to explore new relations between decay, ruination, the built and the natural environment and the human and cultural behaviours which might productively intersect with these.
ST PETER’S KILMAHEW AND NVA\textsuperscript{6}: A PLACE FOR OUR TIMES

At a seminar organised by NVA during the Venice Architectural Biennale in 2010 to discuss the historical background and possible futures of the ruined St Peter’s seminary near Glasgow, one of the participants, writer and artist, Emma Cocker offered an outline agenda for understanding a ruin. Later she wrote under the heading of \textit{Open Poetics}:

To refer to the poetics of the ruin is not to describe it adjectivally, even pejoratively, but instead signals towards the critical nature of its open-endedness, the unresolved or unfixed relationship between its fragmentary parts. The term ‘poetics’ is not used to evoke the sensibility or quality of the ruin within poetic representation, but rather intimates towards the making and unmaking of the ruin; its construction through processes of de-construction and re-construction. (Cocker 2011, p.93)

Cocker’s words provide context and frame for this chapter. At the beginning of this project I had planned to reflect upon and tell the story of the ruined St Peter’s Seminary through a sequential series of panels which would punctuate this book at various points from start to finish. These panels would mark the unfolding narrative of St Peter’s up to and through the writing of the monograph until its culmination—the day before perhaps—when I pressed the ‘send’ button dispatching nearly five years of labour to the publisher. This book would have been finished, but NVA’s project, I imagined, would continue to reveal itself to the adjoining community of Cardross on the River Clyde, to Scotland and to the world beyond in the years to follow. In the spring of 2019 I decided to relinquish this strategy, partly because I had restructured this book, but, more significantly, the project I am about to consider came to an unexpected end in the summer of 2018. I deliberately use the indefinite article ‘an’ here rather than the more categorical and definitive ‘the’ since the story of St Peter’s has had many apparent endings, only for these to be ruined as yet further plans and strategies for its recuperation have emerged.

The St Peter’s story has prompted huge attention over nearly 40 years from the architectural, faith and heritage communities (Watters 2016). In addition, as the narrative has unfolded, it has generated sporadic passion and excitement from a curious general public across the West of Scotland and beyond. For the purposes of this book it offers a compelling, multi-layered,
complex and generative case study around contemporary ruin thinking and cultural practice. I explore such multi-faceted complexities below, but as a preface to this section it may be useful to summarise these here.

- St Peter’s seminary is a very particular ruin, but it is unequivocally a ruin in the most uncontested and unambiguous sense of the term. No mere dilapidation or casual abandonment here.
- Since the Roman Catholic Church finally gave up on St Peter’s in the mid-1980s it has been subject to a wide range of (ultimately) doomed proposals and projects for repair, reuse and restitution.
- Few contemporary sites have prompted so much thoughtful and intense debate around the reclaiming and re-purposing of ruins. Such deliberations are epitomised by a published account (To Have and to Hold: Future of a Contested Landscape, 2011) of the conversations of a group of academics, artists, writers and architects at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2010.
- NVA’s aspirations and plans for St Peter’s constituted an ambitious and radical attempt to offer alternative solutions to the challenge of material ruination with cultural, performative, educational, ecological and community practices at their heart.
- The story of NVA’s attempts to ‘rescue’ St Peter’s from its ultimate entropic fate prompts productive questions around what constitutes ‘failure’ and ‘success’ in such ambitious heritage projects.

St Peter’s and the Kilmahew Estate: A Brief History

The Kilmahew Estate lies in woodland abutting the village of Cardross on the north side of the Firth of Clyde. Half way between Helensburgh and Dumbarton, Cardross is some 25 miles from Scotland’s largest city, Glasgow. The first chapel (St Mahew) on the Kilmahew site was recorded in early Christian times, another was built by the Laird of Kilmahew in 1467 and in the sixteenth century the first castle and keep were constructed on the estate. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a new mansion house was commissioned (1868) and extensive, much admired gardens were sculpted and landscaped. The contemporary histories of St Peter’s and Kilmahew may really be traced to 1948 when the Archdiocese of Glasgow acquired the whole estate and began to house theology students there from nearby St Peter’s College at Darleith. During the 1950s
the Archdiocese started negotiations with the Glasgow firm of architects, Gillespie, Kidd and Coia for a new purpose-built seminary. Construction began in 1961 and after many delays was finally completed in 1966, although some of the interior fittings were not finished until 1968. With hindsight one has a sense of the fated nature of St Peter’s even before it was completed, since at the closure of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, church policy moved away from the education of novice priests in secluded rural areas into city conurbations and communities. As a result of this policy change St Peter’s was closed in 1980, only 14 years after its formal opening. There followed four years between 1983 and 1987 when the Catholic Church made one final attempt to sustain the building by running it as a drug rehabilitation centre for the city of Glasgow. This closed in 1987.

This spare historical account reveals little of why, over the next 30 years, St Peter’s was to become a passionate and complex arena for heritage discourses, conservationists, local councils, activist groups and arts funding bodies. The defining reason lies in the radical nature of the design of the building by Gillespie, Kidd and Coia’s two young architects, Isi Metzstein and Andy MacMillan who were given the task of drawing up the architectural plans for this seminary above the Clyde. The firm had already been responsible for designing a number of modernist Catholic churches across Scotland, but St Peter’s was soon regarded as one of the most startling and brilliant examples of their portfolio, as these comments testify:

- There can be little doubt that the architecture of Gillespie, Kidd and Coia can be considered of international standing (Baines cited in Watters 2016, p.164).
- Internationally significant work (which occupied) a central position in the history of Scottish architecture in the latter half of the twentieth century (Duerden cited in Watters 2016, p.164).
- St Peters put Scottish architecture in a European league (Watters 2016, p.164).
- This most remarkable building is comparable in some respects to the work of Le Corbusier. (Ziedler and Duerden cited in Watters 2016, p.164).
- (Metzstein and MacMillan) … arguably the greatest living architects in Scotland today (Benson cited in Watters 2016, p.165).
St Peter’s therefore is deemed within the world of modernist architecture to be an exemplary building—albeit one which leaked and had other structural problems—deserving of restitution and some kind of salvation. Whilst it is this order of recognition which propelled various attempts in the 1990s and early 2000s to propose plans for its conservation and preservation, interventions into this rapidly decaying building were driven by other forces as well. On the one hand, there is love and respect for an iconic high modernist building as it once—and briefly—was, but, on the other, there is clearly an allure and sense of excitement for St Peter’s as a ruin in its own right. Few of the conservation and heritage schemes for St Peter’s in this period proposed a complete and faithful restoration of the original building—which given the cost were out of the question—but many of the propositions were also justified in terms of discourses around abandonment and solutions which valued uncontrolled space and wastelands in idyllic landscapes (Watters 2016, p.58). Art historian at the University of Edinburgh, Richard J Williams, put it like this:

As a contemporary ruin it is more moving than it would be fully restored or stabilised. How to incorporate these views in any discussion about its future is open to question. But as a starting point it is worth admitting that for many, St Peter’s appeal lies not so much in its architecture, as its marvellous decay. (Williams 2006, p.30)

During this period ideas and proposals for St Peter’s never lose sight of its historical value as an extraordinary example of modernist architecture, but increasingly begin to explore other reasons and rationales for repurposing the whole site. Penny Lewis, editor (2003–2008) of the Scottish architectural magazine, Prospect, and a zealous campaigner for St Peter’s, began to suggest that any future for the building and its surrounding estate had to be based in cultural and artistic activities and worth. Diane Watters writes about Lewis thus:

She broadened the ruins appeal significantly beyond the narrow bounds of architectural historians. Lewis adapted the Stamp discourse of the tragically misused and abandoned architectural masterpiece into a new narrative of an ‘iconic’ ruin as the locus for contemporary artistic pilgrimage, and for efforts to uncover more abstract values of ‘hidden beauty and meaning’. (Watters 2016, p.158)
Fig. 5.11  Kilmahew St Peter’s, Cardross. (Image: Simon Murray 2017)

Fig. 5.12  Kilmahew St Peter’s, Cardross.  
(Image: Simon Murray 2017)
It is in 2008 that NVA first enters the St Peter’s narrative and from this point until 2018 becomes the lodestar for both the debates and the practices which it is hoped will frame and propel futures for both the ruin itself and the surrounding Kilmahew Estate. In 2009 it is awarded a grant of £45,600 from the Scottish Arts Council (now Creative Scotland) to explore the potential for temporary and permanent art works on the St Peter’s and Kilmahew sites. But what sort of organisation was NVA? In order to position and understand its approach to St Peter’s it seems important to capture a little of its history and to get a sense of its dramaturgies, politics and aesthetics.

Angus Farquhar formally set up NVA in 1992 and long before St Peter’s emerged on the company’s radar it had an appetite for dramaturgies of ruin and decay. From the early 1980s Angus had been a member of an industrial band called Test Dept., a percussion group, furious at Thatcherism, the deliberate dismantling of manufacturing industry and the Miner’s Strike in particular. Angus says, ‘we used lead piping, hammer handles and sledge hammers fashioned into drumsticks which we rained

Fig. 5.13  Kilmahew St Peter’s Open Doors Event, August 2017. (Image: Simon Murray 2017)
down on a variety of metal foraged from countless scrapyards that pock-marked the Thames’ (Farquhar in Watters 2016, p.192). His taste for dereliction, ruin and making art in special locations was evidently forged during this time as the band regularly played in disused factories, empty railway stations and abandoned arches. In 1989 Test Dept. collaborated with Welsh theatre company, Brith Gof and Mike Pearson in Gododdin (see Chap. 7). In this early period Test Dept. and an embryonic NVA also collaborated on a performance called The Second Coming (1990) scripted by Neal Ascherson9 and sited in a disused locomotive building and repair yard (the size of two and a half football pitches) at the St Rollox railway works in Glasgow’s Springburn district. Within the multiple practices of Test Dept., Brith Gof and the emerging NVA we can trace a shared pattern of interest in working at scale and in locations of abandonment, dereliction or in remote rural settings. In 2003 NVA made The Hidden Gardens which transformed an area of industrial wasteland behind Glasgow’s Tramway10 into a sanctuary garden dedicated to peace. This was a critical response to the Iraq war and the garden is now a permanent feature, has a small classroom and offers opportunities to volunteers for growing food and involvement in cookery programmes. Possibly, in The

Fig. 5.14  Kilmahew St Peter’s, Cardross. (Image: Simon Murray 2017)
Hidden Garden we may discern seeds of ideas to be (re)planted in the early stages of the St Peter’s project some ten years later. For 27 years, often in partnership with other professional or artist-led organisations, NVA produced and curated over 20 projects, many of which engaged with the temporary transformation and theatrical activation of urban and rural landscapes. A full archive of NVA’s activities can be found at NVA.org.uk. Often these attended to issues of ecology and sustainability harnessing different art forms to explode and broaden awareness of contemporary Scotland.

I interviewed Angus in February 2015 and again in December 2018. Whilst NVA’s St Peter’s project had been under way for six years when we first talked it was this almost four year period between our conversations which marked the most confident and energetic span of NVA’s active engagement in the Cardross seminary. However, by the time we had spoken again, late in 2018, NVA had announced its decision to close as an organisation and hence had no choice but to withdraw entirely from the regeneration of St Peter’s. In 2015 Angus had spoken optimistically about St Peter’s whilst still acknowledging both the demanding complexity of the project and its tortuous history of failed attempts at renaissance. He said then:

I think actions do speak louder than words because it has been the graveyard of many plans and aspirations. They have been through every single model of standard regeneration and the complexities of the site have spat back out every one of these options. In the end – maybe out of desperation – the establishment has acknowledged there might be an alternative methodology, and it’s our tenacity and teamwork which has got us to this position … We (NVA) felt it was time to go beyond the one-off. So, this is definitely about what we are going to do in the next 20–30 years. I do like insurmountable challenges. (Farquhar 2015)

When NVA entered into the St Peter’s narrative in 2008 it brought with it the knowledge, skill and experience of generating substantial funding for projects, working at scale, a disposition to work across art-forms (e.g. theatre, performance, music, lighting, design, installation and visual arts) and practices which were always underpinned by a strong ethos of teamwork and an ethical and political commitment. However, as Angus notes above, the prospect of regenerating St Peter’s was in a different league from the company’s previous projects. NVA also entered this arena
at a time when all the other players who had sought to find solutions to St Peter’s ruination had apparently exhausted their will and energies to continue with the task. From the outset, and in contrast to previous developments, the period from 2009 proved to be a settled one where the interested protagonists (Classical House, Historic Scotland, St Peter’s Building Preservation Trust, Twentieth Century Society, Urban Splash) fell in behind NVA and worked together (Watters 2016, p.174). The 2009 proposition put forward by Angus and Rolf Roscher11 from the landscape architects ERZ was significantly different from all those that had come before. Its basic elements centred on a ‘publicly funded scheme of cultural and local benefit’ (Watters 2016, p.174) with phased plans for development over five years depending upon the success (or otherwise) of funding applications. Apart from the kind of multiple usage imagined by NVA, to be realised in various stages as the building was progressively made safe and basic facilities installed, what differentiated this vision from those that came before was NVA’s approach to the ruin itself. By ‘approach’ I am not simply meaning the material pragmatics of repair and reconstruction, but how to deal with history, heritage, conservation and the meaning and nature of ruination. There can be few ruin projects which have devoted so much time and energy to debating and thinking through the complex issues of how to approach a ruin, of what questions to pose to the ruin. Initially, the main forum for this conversation was the Venice Architecture Biennale of 2010 where NVA had been invited by the Scottish government to organise a seminar with academics, architects, landscape architects, artists and writers to discuss St Peter’s within the wider frames identified above. A record of these debates was published a year later in a book entitled To Have and to Hold: Future of a Contested Landscape (Van Noord [ed.] 2011). This short publication, thoughtful and accessible in equal measure, is a compelling volume raising important issues and considerations around heritage and ruination. If it has a message it is one of the virtues of open-endedness and of a pragmatism informed by, and practised through, public engagement. It also centrally challenges the idea and the wisdom—even if money was no object—of aspiring to restore ruined buildings to an imagined original and foundational state. These perspectives might be encapsulated in this absorbing statement from NVA’s Kilmahew/St Peter’s website:

Our vision accepts loss and ruination as part of the history of the place. The imaginative re-use of this great modernist structure reflects the same social
dynamism and ambition with which it was conceived: a spirit of working to improve things and imagining a better world. Rather than rubbing off the hard edges to create a polished version of the past, the intention is to preserve a raw sense of otherness, excitement and revelation. (http://nva.org.uk/artwork/kilmahew-st-peters/)

From my first-hand experience of St Peter’s, through extensive reading around the project and conversations with Angus and geographer Hayden Lorimer it seemed that the developing process, although continuously framed within an ethical philosophy of ‘open-endedness’, had constantly to hold in harness highly practical activities of clearance, making safe and repair with critical thought and allowing events and projects to take place. Holding on to an unfolding vision of St Peter’s rooted in public or community participation, education, environmental and ecological research and arts practices at the same time as dirty and dangerous repairs were taking place (e.g. removal of asbestos) was a precarious act of high-wire balancing. As grants and fund-raising began to bear fruit—but at different stages—priority decisions had to be made as to which parts of this huge site should receive immediate or later investment and how much of this resource should be devoted to activities (small or larger scale) with local and West of Scotland publics.

In 2011, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) awarded £100,000 to a three-year project entitled The Invisible College led by Hayden Lorimer from the University of Glasgow, in conjunction with the universities of Strathclyde and Edinburgh. The proposal for this emerged from conversations between Lorimer, Angus and Ed Hollis and was inspired by the notion of education ‘without walls’ and of models of heuristic learning—knowledge generated through making, through practice and through experimentation. As an institution without walls, ‘The Invisible College’, first imagined and established by seventeenth-century scientist and philosopher, Robert Boyle, was dedicated to furthering knowledge through experimental investigation. The AHRC grant could not be spent on any material repair or reconstruction, but afforded the opportunity to think St Peter’s through and around practice and experimentation. It offered the possibility of playfully experimenting with the still completely ruined St Peter’s as a ‘field station of the future’ (Lorimer 2013) and with participants (local people and students) who Lorimer and Angus chose to imagine as ‘active protagonists’ (Ibid), working in small projects on the Kilmahew estate and—tentatively—within the building.
itself. Philosophically central to these projects was a resistance to the idea (the fiction?) of the romantic and lonely individual soulfully immersing him/herself in the contemplation of the ruin with the hope of experiencing the sublime. Instead, these projects were acts of sociality, conviviality and cooperation with permission to ‘noise up the place’ (Ibid) through playful experimentation. Often with a strong theatrical or performative quality, a number of these projects stand out: dressed theatrically in forensic white scrubs the ‘active protagonists’ investigated and measured the toxicity of the land around the seminary; with miniature figurines they playfully repopulated the estate as a model community, creating an archaeological dig of $9 \times 1$ metre square areas; and as an historical mapping exercise they were invited carefully to trace and follow traditional paths and tracks across the estate—the ancient routes once walked by pilgrims, drovers, poachers, worshippers and wanderers. With the figurines group what began as a playful childlike exercise in constructing imaginary geographies soon became a serious and practical exercise documenting and performing patterns of access, ownership and land use. A subsequent exhibition of artefacts and figurines was presented at Glasgow’s Lighthouse.\footnote{14} For the purposes of this book, the role of performance in enabling various publics to invest actively—and practically—in the unfolding future of St Peter’s is significant. Here the tools and perspectives of performance—occasionally shading into theatre itself—afford opportunities for these groups to engage with the St Peter’s project through action, through embodied investigation, through play and through a physicalisation of the imagination. In addition to these more overtly performance projects, other activities such as plant and vegetable cultivation schemes, archaeological digs, physical archiving, debates and a soundscape commissioned by geographer Michael Gallagher were also organised. The Invisible College became, in part, an exercise of thinking through—and out of—practice, a portfolio of creative research projects which signalled in a very material way the directions and ethos which Angus and his team believed that a future St Peter’s must follow. At an event entitled ‘The Next Steps in the Reinvention of St Peter’s Seminary and Kilmahew’ held at Summerhall\footnote{15} in Edinburgh (December, 2013) Lorimer put it like this:

Kilmahew/St Peter’s becomes a place that we actually need, a place where new kinds of story can begin to take root, places that work because they are actually worked, creatively, socially and experimentally. Places where stuff
gets grown, harvested, and then eaten. Places where bright ideas sprout from collaborative action. Places where opposites are entertained and there’s a willingness to try things on the off chance that they might just happen to work. Places where you visit, not to watch what’s happening, but places where what you do is what is happening. (Ibid)

Lorimer concluded his presentation at Summerhall by citing the American novelist and nature writer Barbara Kingsolver who has written about the environmental and social challenges of the twenty-first century and who suggests that ‘learning to live with broken country’ (Ibid) should be a disposition to be held dear by any of us involved in repair and regeneration projects. Lorimer argued that the philosophy of NVA St Peter’s project was to reject the ‘jewel box’ paradigm for architectural preservation and positively to embrace the idea that ‘places are always on the way to becoming something else’ and that ‘adaptation will always trump preservation’ (Ibid).

The AHRC-funded Invisible College provided NVA with resources to carve out necessary time and space to continue thinking through the project, to experiment with prefigurative forms of activity for the future of St Peter’s and to forge contacts and traffic ideas with other organisations across the United Kingdom. Towards the end of the three-year cycle The Invisible College was taken out on the road to tell its story and to learn from other projects engaged with similar challenges. Amongst other encounters, Lorimer and Angus visited Grizedale Arts in the English Lake District to explore its practice and relationship to the Coniston Institute founded by John Ruskin in the nineteenth century. Angus was keen to develop a kind of informal curatorial partnership with Adam Sutherland of Grizedale and clearly found many elective affinities of ‘rural radicalism’ (Farquhar 2015) between the two projects. In conversation with me in 2015 he said:

Grizedale has cut an incredible swathe. There are very few organisations that could be in Sao Paolo one week and cooking road kill risotto in the Coniston Institute the next. Never done in a patronising way, but through a profound commitment to hard work and the rigours of just sheer graft. And then a very thoroughly worked through understanding of contemporary art and craft … In the Grizedale sense the artist is someone who uses their imagination and their skill to find solutions for societal problems. (Farquhar 2015)
Further afield in Norfolk the management of the Sheringham Estate and Park offered models of practice which Lorimer identifies as ‘progressive localism’ (Ibid) and which had obvious associations with the St Peter’s project.

During the period between 2009 and 2016, in conjunction with a design team, NVA developed a series of unfolding plans for the building and at the same time raised considerable financial support for the project from various cultural and conservation bodies. Essentially, the strategy rested on a series of activities: cleaning and clearing; making the building safe enough for public access and participation; repairing and reconstructing parts of the building to make them weatherproof and fit for discursive/educational events and for administration; preparing space within the main building to afford seating for 600 spectators in anticipation of various large-scale events and keeping significant parts of the site in a state of ruination. Angus articulated some of his anxieties around this process:

I was worried whether the site clearance would ‘ruin the ruin’. What if the powerfully desolate character which had attracted so many people to visit and make work there over the last two decades was erased? What if in becoming safe it would also become bland? (Farquhar cited in Watters 2016, p. 218)

His concerns illustrate the complex creative tensions within NVA’s vision and plans for St Peter’s: tensions inherent, perhaps, in the paradigm for regeneration articulated by himself, Lorimer and Hollis at the Summerhall event in 2013; tensions between the pragmatics of necessary repair and safety on the one hand—removing vast amounts of asbestos from the site, for example—and that open-ended sense of a field station or laboratory where outcomes were (happily) unknown and unpredictable.

For ten days during March 2016 NVA organised what in retrospect we can now acknowledge as the largest and most ambitious event within its ten-year relationship to the ruin of St Peter’s. Hinterland launched the opening of Scotland’s Festival of Architecture and was to be the first large-scale public performance on the site. It was preceded and accompanied by considerable press and media publicity across Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom and attracted a sell-out audience of 8100 which included a free preview attended by over 600 local people. In January 2016 The Observer newspaper ran a lengthy article by the architecture critic, Rowan Moore, profiling St Peter’s and NVA’s role within it, and
three days into *Hinterland* on 21 March the *Guardian* newspaper printed a double-page image of the building lit by lighting designer, Phil Supple. *Hinterland* was many things, but primarily a large-scale event of considerable logistical complexity designed, unashamedly, to bring public consideration to the past and present of St Peter’s and NVA’s plans and vision for its future. It announced to the world that St Peter’s was an extraordinary ruin that deserved attention in its own right and, through the *Hinterland Manifesto*, explicitly articulated the philosophy and politics of the whole project. In addition to the immediate visceral and aesthetic pleasure of experiencing the ruin through the media of live performance, sound and light, *Hinterland* signalled both promise and potential for the future. It also, perhaps, hinted at the challenges ahead for regular large-scale public use of the site. Like many of NVA’s large-scale projects, *Hinterland* was a masterful exercise in planning and organisation. All participants had to be bussed from Helensburgh to the Kilmahew estate (4.3 miles) having indicated on purchase of their tickets a date and time slot (three or four per evening between 18 and 27 March). My memories of the experience may be summarised like this: at the minibus drop-off point, we are given a glowing light stick (a twenty-first-century version of a pilgrim’s staff perhaps) and walk up through the woods guided by a team of volunteers and along tracks lit by lanterns. At the ruin itself we are obliged to follow carefully roped off and designated routes around and within the main building. We move at our own pace and pause to seep up the environment for as long as interest allows. On the walk up we become aware of a soundscape composed of what seems like tools clanging on stone and metal, punctuated and backed by choral singing. Once within the main hall of the building we can position ourselves at various sites of advantage and here a projected lighting score plays itself through an evolving sequence of colours, tints and textures revealing both the entropic decay of the walls and damaged concrete, and sometimes—as if by monstrous x-ray—the sharply symmetrical lines of Metzstein and MacMillan’s designs. As we stand for 10–15 minutes at one end of the main hall looking down towards where the altar used to be, a suspended, slowly swinging ‘tabernacle’ is moved from side to side by two performers wearing welding helmets, protective boiler suits and safety boots. In her review for the *Scottish Journal of Performance Studies*, theatre scholar Cara Berger records that

Spectators encounter this scene three times, from different angles. Each time the mood changes. The solemn image morphs into an ecstatic one
when the side-on living quarters above are illuminated in flashes of purple, blue and green. The final encounter exposes the performance’s mechanics: what appeared as an altar is revealed to be a lighting desk. This Dante-esque dramaturgy – in which the spectator ascends from the underworld to knowledge – mimics religious creed, but does not reproduce it. (Berger 2016, p.147)

Angus is at pains to distance this choreography of light from the kind of commercial son-et-lumière much exploited in heritage sites. He says, ‘our work has seriousness, purpose and intent. It is not a light show, we are public art with light as one of our mediums’ (Glenday 2016, n.p.). In a different account he adds:

Projections expressed the character of entropy, the slow disease of ceaseless disintegration. In contrast we also elucidated the sharply symmetrical lines of the original plan and paid homage to the pioneering Russian abstract artist Kazimir Malevich and the birth of Modernism, referencing his famous Black Square as well as the coloured geometric planes of his later works. (Farquhar in Watters 2016, p. 234)

_Hinterland_ was an invitation for the public to experience viscerally the materiality of the building, to whet appetites for future encounters and, above all perhaps, to embody and make concrete NVA’s philosophy of public art and of the ruin itself. As an integral part of the _Hinterland_ experience NVA published and communicated what it called the ‘Hinterland Manifesto’. This was printed in the programme and invited the 8100 participants to reflect beyond the immediate material experience of St Peter’s, its dramaturgies of sound and light and to position the whole project—and the role of art more widely—within the broken field of contemporary politics and civic life in Scotland and beyond. This manifesto resonates strongly with many of the other ruin projects I encountered across Europe, even if few of them ever articulated their aspirations so elegantly. For these reasons I reprint it in its entirety at the end of this chapter.

Before concluding this account of NVA/St Peter’s project I want to refer to other writing and art interventions inspired by the story of this ruin. Like many who have met the ruin of St Peter’s my first encounter was mildly transgressive as a trespasser with two friends from the University of Glasgow. The experience blasted me with sensations, images, thoughts and feelings. One of these was a sense of unsettling incredulity about the
proliferation of graffiti on almost every surface of what remained of the building. There is hardly a photographic image of St Peter’s from the moment it was abandoned by the Roman Catholic church in the mid-1980s which is not saturated either by the recognisable vernacular of modern graffiti, copying or critiquing the work of many well-known artists or the darker statements and images of ‘haters and baiters, referencing acts of violence and sexual transgression through crude commentary left in the darkened recesses’ (Farquhar in Watters 2016, p.226). It is tempting to romanticise these images and to read into their texts an overdue and transgressively witty rebuke to the pieties and grandiose pretensions of the ruins’ original begetter and owner. Regardless of intention, I guess, they cannot help but serve this function. Many of these punk and grunge murals, whilst executed with considerable skill, speak of a dark and violent view of the world: a nun wearing a gas mask whilst praying; skulls and crossbones; a giant scabrous inverted black beetle or spider; a black knight figure slumped dead against a wall, machine gun still clasped in his hands and so on. Scripts varying in degrees of animosity and occasional tenderness: ‘PISH’, ‘ROT IN PEACE’, ‘DOOM’, ‘LONG LIVE THE ART FAGS’, ‘BUILDING IS WELL. LIES!!!, VENTILATED’ …, ‘I LOVE CAITLYN’. Of course, the surfaces of St Peter’s are hardly unique in generating such an explosion of graphic imagery and my experience of abandoned buildings in different European cities suggests that street art and graffiti are a near universal response to decay and dereliction. A semiotic paradise, graffiti serves to breathe life back into ruins whilst at the same time confirming and hastening a kind of entropic death wish. The walls, recesses, fissures and crevices of St Peter’s creating an alternative gallery space for raves and untamed trespasser-artists armed with a 1000 aerosol spray paint cans.

In June 2015 the journal *Performance Research* devoted a whole issue to the theme of ruins and ruination and amongst 20 articles 2 were devoted to St Peter’s. Hayden Lorimer and Simon Murray in ‘The Ruin in Question’ (Lorimer and Murray 2015, pp.58–66) responded to the following series of (self-identified) questions which helped to reveal the state of play at St Peter’s in 2015:

- How do we let a ruin have its say?
- Are you a noun or are you a verb, or both?
- How does time work in your ruination?
- What is the mood and atmosphere of your ruination?
• Are you a very singular ruin or like so many others?
• Who owns you now as a ruin?
• What do you want to be in the future?

Taking inspiration from Elinor Fuchs seminal essay, ‘Visit to a Small Planet: Questions to ask a play’ (Fuchs 2004, pp.4–9) we adapted an approach which asks questions about the landscape and world of St Peter’s, attempting to convey the materiality of this ruin and the prospects for regeneration which spring from this reality. In ‘St Peter’s Seminary, Cardross: the ruin of modernism’ scholars David Archibald and Johnny Rodger examine the representation of the ruin through the lens of two experimental documentary films by Murray Grigor,20 *Space and Light* (1972) and *Space and Light Revisited* (2009). The first of these was filmed when St Peter’s was a fully functioning seminary and the second, nearly 40 years on, projects both films simultaneously on a split screen. Grigor and both authors are concerned with the generative relationship between architecture and film. Archibald and Rodger analyse

how the films might influence the idea that the initial structure and the ruin of St Peter’s can be viewed as paradigmatic of the crisis of modernist regimes of measure and the functional logic of the factory system. (Archibald and Rodger 2015, p.103)

Both these essays offer contrasting ways of approaching St Peter’s and reinforce NVA’s vision that only a plurality of perspectives can begin to do justice to the complex past and intricate futures of this ruined site.

**NVA/St Peter’s: Pause or Ending; Dotted Line or Epitaph?**

In the summer of 2018 a press release from NVA announced that it was to close all its operations and with it, the rescue of St Peter’s. For those who had become immersed in the St Peter’s/NVA narrative over ten years, particularly from within the world of Scottish culture and architecture, this news came as a startling blow and reversal of fortunes. For those inside NVA and closely connected to it, we must assume that the decision made public in early June 2018 had been unfolding for many months. Despite the extraordinary achievement of raising almost £9 m over a ten-year period, NVA had been informed by Creative Scotland21 earlier in the year
that it had been unsuccessful in its application for three-year core funding. The Creative Scotland decision did not actually cause NVA’s closure, but certainly compounded the complex matrix of risks and uncertainties associated with the project. Liable for any debts or losses, NVA trustees had reluctantly decided that the jeopardies and hazards entailed in pursuing its bold and ambitious plans were increasingly too much to bear, and that they could no longer guarantee a viable future for the St Peter’s project. A particular setback was that, instead of providing a grant of £1 m, the Scottish government offered a three-year loan for this sum, with the consequence of making the kind of business plan required of NVA impossible.

Such bald statements doubtless disguise many tortuous and highly charged debates and conversations within NVA over quite a lengthy period. On 14th December 2018 I recorded a second conversation with Angus. I had always intended to have such a dialogue with him to round off this book’s relationship with St Peter’s Seminary. The encounter would, I imagined, have been a small punctuation mark in NVA’s developing project. In the event, I expected that our conversation might have had a strong valedictory or elegiac quality, although this was not how the experience felt to me as he talked openly and honestly about the ending of this rather remarkable ruinous journey.

Angus was keen not to discuss the closure of NVA in simplistic terms of success or failure, for to do so would run counter to both the pragmatics and the spirit or ethos of NVA’s investment in St Peter’s. From 2008 the discourses around both the vision and the concrete plans for the ruin were iterative. The transformation of St Peter’s—and the public’s experience of these changes—was always going to be a graduated one. Within the bounds of practicality public events of varying scale were to happen—and did happen—during the period of necessary restitution and making safe. However, in certain ways it seems that NVA’s achievement of raising millions of pounds of resource and support brought with it a series of expectations and requirements which in part ran counter to the politics and ethos of the project.

In addition, the scale of this financial support was increasingly burdensome for a small arts organisation, even one that had had a successful record of funding large-scale projects. The informality and fluidity of a development model based on iterative experimentation and a model of a public, not as passive spectators, but as ‘active protagonists’, ran counter to the big funders’ expectations of creating a heritage centre and ‘visitor
attraction’ out of St Peter’s. In conversation, Angus admitted to me that in the previous three years much of his time had been spent thinking, for example, about the footprint and capacity of car parks, the kind of café that needed to be built, the positioning of public toilets, whether or not a paywall around the site should be imposed and—most significantly—the minimum footfall of visitors necessary to justify the grants received. All these became tied into a complex conundrum around, on the one hand, the relative inaccessibility of the Kilmahew site and, on the other the ‘progressive localism’ or ‘rural radicalism’ which were such signature qualities of their aspirations. Despite the success of some of the larger grant applications Angus and his team experienced a ‘deep distrust of the arts, and arts’ led approaches’ (Farquhar 2018) to regeneration from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). In conclusion, I felt that Angus was saying that it was not largely the inevitable administrative pressures which accompany large-scale funding, but the pull away from the original and unfolding vision, which ultimately led NVA to make its decision to close between 2017 and 2018.

This account of the ruins of St Peter’s on the Kilmahew Estate and NVA’s ambitious programme of regeneration is a compelling one in its own right, but for the purposes of this volume is hugely significant in what it reveals about ruination, salvage, restitution and the cultural politics of heritage. In many ways this story articulates the complexities and productive messiness in the relationship between artistic intervention and sites of decay and abandonment. The thinking and critical reflection—the Venice seminar, The Invisible College and the Hinterland Manifesto, for example—which were generated by the project over ten years offer a propulsive and productive context and frame of knowledge for many of the ruin projects identified in this book. Above all, NVA/St Peter’s story is not one of a radical public art organisation cleverly and sensitively imposing its will on an inert and passive ruin, but instead is one of a material ruin speaking out to its human protagonists and sharing the terms of reference for its regeneration and restitution.

**Hinterland Manifesto March 2016**

*Freedom of thought and the capacity to empathise with difference is central to life beyond mere survival. It follows that our society is not static but something we can influence and evolve collectively.*

(continued)
Postscript: St Peter’s/NVA—Another Ending

At the end of our 2018 conversation Angus suggested that by the following summer we would know whether Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and the Scottish government might together have found a way to support St Peter’s into the future. HES’ *Advice to Ministers on State Care Options* published on 27 June 2019 is too long and complex to describe here, but in a press release Angus expressed deep disappointment at what he regarded as a timid response which failed fully to acknowledge the £1 m repair work already undertaken at St Peter’s under NVA’s stewardship. Additionally, he felt, there were other exaggerations around future cost and risk. HES proposed a programme of ‘curated decay’ for St Peter’s
which would enable the site to be made safe whilst it continued its journey towards complete ruination. Farquhar felt that HES undermined this very strategy by weakly underplaying the reasons why the Scottish government should provide such support. After receipt of the HES report the Cabinet Secretary declined to take St Peter’s into state care citing high cost and risk as the main factors. In his press release Angus also contextualised the situation more widely in terms of what he felt was the Scottish establishment’s failure to recognise and protect the legacy of the Country’s twentieth-century built environment. A legacy which Professor Alan Dunlop\textsuperscript{22} describes ‘as important as Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s Glasgow School of Art’ (Dunlop 2019). Angus concludes by reflecting on the complex and contested politics of heritage and ruination:

Today Scotland has turned its back on the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century … It is a politicised decision and demonstrates that dreams of a progressive Scotland, with its aspirations for a ‘Scandinavian-style’ modern democracy, is mired by institutions who too often remain conservative, intellectually mediocre and parochial in their interpretation of cultural policy … Part of our recent built heritage will be erased, how sad that as a nation we can champion countless ruined castles celebrating a history of blood-soaked barbarism and maintain numerous country houses documenting the lives of the rich and privileged in distant times. These state buildings offer little intellectual challenge. But when it comes to the complexities of sustaining the artefacts of recent modernist history of telling ‘our story’, a subjective distaste for modernism comes into play. It is simply not good enough for a modern outward\textsuperscript{23} looking nation who wishes to remain positioned in the heart of Europe. (Farquhar 2019)

The St Peter’s/NVA story is richly illustrative of many of the themes which run through this book. It remains, like sundry cultural interventions into abandoned and decaying buildings featured here, an unfinished narrative. NVA’s attempts to re-purpose the ruins of St Peter’s in ways that departed radically from more conventional heritage ventures reflect a spirit and disposition also to be found in projects examined elsewhere in this volume. The complex opportunities afforded by St Peter’s in the twenty-first century in turn speak of the instability (literal, temporal and metaphorical) of all ruined sites and therefore of the challenges to artists and
activists who seek to occupy such places with ambitious and often utopian agendas.

Notes

1. ‘Fordism’, after Henry Ford, describes the early automation of manufacturing production initially in the automobile industry from around 1910, based upon the fixed assembly line and the construction of standardised low cost goods.

2. ‘Taylorism’, after Frederick Taylor (1836–1915), invented the ‘time and motion’ study within the workplace under the rubric of ‘Scientific Management’ and as a means of enhancing work flows and human productivity.

3. PACT, an arts centre sited in the old colliery shower and changing facilities opened in 2002. PACT is an acronym for Performing Arts Choreographisches Zentrum NRW Tanzlandschaft.

4. As this book goes to press, a communication from Forced Entertainment tells me that the planned premiere of their latest show, Under Bright Light, at PACT in April 2020 has had to be cancelled because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

5. The Ruhrtriennale is an arts and music festival which occurs every three years in late summer/early autumn.

6. NVA, an acronym for nacionale vitae activa, a Latin term meaning ‘the right to influence public affairs’, was founded by Angus Farquhar in 1992. A Scottish public art organisation, it closed in June 2018 as a result of funding difficulties associated with its plans to redevelop the St Peter’s Seminary site.

7. ‘Thatcherism’ refers to the political economics propounded and delivered by UK Conservative Prime Minister (1979–1990), Margaret Thatcher.

8. The Miners’ Strike during Margaret Thatcher’s Prime Ministership lasted for 12 months from March 1985. It was a bitter struggle between the Miners’ union (NUM) and Thatcher’s Conservative government over the planned closure of pits.

9. Neal Ascherson (b.1932) is a Scottish political journalist, historian and novelist who has written extensively on Scottish affairs, twentieth-century Poland and public archaeology.

10. Glasgow’s Tramway was originally a huge City Council tram repair shed. Between 1964 and 1987 it housed Glasgow’s Museum of Transport and in 1988 became the only UK venue to host Peter Brook’s seminal production of the Mahabharata. In 1990 it was a key venue for Glasgow City of Culture events and has remained a space ever since for performing and visual arts.
11. Roscher is a Glasgow-based designer and architect who had originally collaborated with NVA on the Tramway Hidden Gardens project. He subsequently played a pivotal role in the development of the site aesthetic for St Peter’s.

12. For the duration of NVA/St Peter’s reinvention Hayden Lorimer was closely associated with the development and became lead investigator on the AHRC-funded Invisible College research project. During this time he was Professor of Cultural Geography at the University of Glasgow, but moved to the University of Edinburgh in the autumn of 2019.

13. Hollis trained as an architect and is currently Professor of Interior Design and Director of Research at Edinburgh College of Art.

14. The Lighthouse is Scotland’s Centre for Design and Architecture in the centre of Glasgow. It hosts a programme of exhibitions and public events, and the building, which formerly housed The Glasgow Herald newspaper, was originally designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

15. Summerhall is now a multi-purpose arts centre in Edinburgh which opened in 2011. Previously it had been home to Edinburgh University’s School of Veterinary Studies and is now owned by the McDowell family.

16. Adam Sutherland was appointed director of Grizedale Arts in 1999. More information on Grizedale can be found at: https://www.grizedale.org/about/

17. Rural Radicalism is a term to cover many forms of progressive protest and action within rural areas. Sometimes these have constituted peasant or farm workers’ movements which have contested pay and conditions and often, too, the power structures of land ownership. Scotland has a particular tradition of rural radicalism and such movements have had a significant impact on changing the lives of rural workers and their families in the United States, Latin America and on the African continent.

18. From 2014 the design team comprised Avanti Architects, ERZ Landscape Architects and NORD Architecture.

19. Bodies which contributed funds (or in kind support) to the St Peter’s project during this period included the Heritage Lottery Fund, AHRC, Historic Environment Scotland, Creative Scotland, Argyll and Bute Council and Reigart (a Scottish demolition company).

20. Born in 1939, Murray Grigor is a Scottish film maker, writer and curator who has been director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

21. Creative Scotland (successor organisation to the Scottish Arts Council) is the public body that supports the arts, screen and creative industries across Scotland. It distributes money from the Scottish government and the National Lottery.

22. Dunlop is an architect and visiting professor at Robert Gordon University, Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and the University of Liverpool.
23. Angus Farquhar’s reference to a ‘modern outward looking nation’ must be understood in the context of a Scotland which voted overwhelmingly to remain within the European Union (EU) in the referendum of 2016. Associatedly he is positioning his disappointment about the failure to support St Peter’s in the context of the movement towards independence in Scotland.

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