Monuments to the period we live in

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**Abstract:** John Latham’s (1921 – 2006) ‘monuments to the period we live in’ are two partially protected groups of oil shale ‘bings’ (Norse: heaps). These were initially the voluminous waste by-product of Scotland’s energy production industries, reconceived within a synthesis of methods originally developed by the Artist Placement Group (APG) 1965 – 89 and allied to concepts within the manifesto of auto-destructive art (Metzger, 1965) and the proclivities of Latham’s renowned but often controversial practice. This chapter explains the methodology of Latham’s reimagining of the site he renamed *Niddrie Woman* (1975-6) and why it has resonance. In doing so the essay looks forward to how the future conservation of these remarkable forms as sculptural monuments is increasingly dependent on their assessment as ‘hotspots’ of biodiversity. The academic context builds on archival items within the Artist Placement Group Archive at Tate Britain’s Hyman Kreitman Research Centre, Richardson (2012), Walker (1976, 1994) and curatorial research (Hudek, 2012), and onsite environmental research (Harvie, 2005).
A methodology of engagement

Artist Placement Group (APG) was ‘founded’ in London in 1966 as both a collective and an agency. Barbara Steveni, John Latham, Anna Ridley, Barry Flanagan, David Hall and Jeffrey Shaw hybridized business, science and civil service practices with socially engaged art. In 2002, Mute Magazine described the artworld’s response to APG’s seemingly aberrant rationale for ‘tangling with the dirt of commerce and the public sector’, with it later coming ‘to define large swathes of artistic practice. APG worked hard to formulate a rigorous methodology of engagement’.

Barbara Steveni’s recollection of APG’s founding asserts her pivotal early role in its inception:

the Fluxus group came to stay in our house [in London] and they were going to do an exhibition, they wanted some material. And I said, I’ll go to the outer circular road, to the industrial estate, and I’ll pick up some material [from a factory]. So I went there. It was dead of night, but the factory was absolutely booming away and I thought: well why aren’t we here? Not to pick up buckets of plastic, but because there’s a whole life that we don’t touch. This is what people go on about - academics, artists, politicians - but they get nowhere near it.

APG’s fluctuating membership were mostly sculptors and those with an inter-medial practice. Their central meeting place in the early years was the Latham's Notting Hill house in which regular ‘Think Tanks’ - discussions on ‘alternative forms of artistic production’ identified the ways and means for artists to relocate their practices to other workplaces. Consciously examining the social and economic roles conventionally assigned to artists, these discussions became increasingly informed by a direct and viable engagement with industry and commerce. Their approach to policy change within the operation of UK and European government departmental responsibilities later became increasingly notable.


APG’s innovation was their proposal to private companies and public sector organizations that they should work directly with artists but ‘forego’ the conventions of artistic patronage. Instead, artists would work within the everyday environment of the host organization with an Open Brief, towards ‘benefitting from the artists' insights.’ These insights would accrue through this open-ended process, the results of which would be discussed and summarized in a Feasibility Study, authored by the artist, and outlining proposals that could be developed within a long-term, host-funded Placement. In turn, APG artists would ‘benefit from a “real world” context’ as a developmental resource. APG’s maxim ‘Context is half the work’ underpinned the rationale for their Placements, augmenting the joining of two kinds of productive capacity; industrial and managerial capacities with that of individualistic, artistic capacities.

The artistic foci of the early industrial Placements tended to be industrial entrepreneurial capabilities, also its labor division, internal communications, production linkages as well as the artist’s innovative re-use of physically resident materials. Organization and Imagination was how it was later styled. APG’s approach, an offer to ‘serve as a catalyst for change’, was grounded in the manner in which the industry hosts were typically offered a shortlist of artists established by the appropriateness of the materials or media or in which the artists normally worked. Above all, the Open Brief was essential to APG’s operation and their subsequent success. It was implicit within the development of Feasibility Studies that the APG method would position the importance of artist’s imagination, without necessarily prioritizing conventional artistic skill in the use of visual imagery and media. This might entail ways of seeing and an ability to discover forms, more importantly it was the generalist
presence of the artist that was intended to generate discussion, innovation and discovery. In some organizational engagements the host might invite the artists to consider a topic or access a resource, however, effectively artists formed their own research problems. The Open Brief privileged the artist’s capacity for the unexpected, as a note from a government memo supporting a 1974 Placement demonstrates: ‘(an individual)… might show us solutions to problems we do not know to exist.”

The second essential element in the viability of the APG method is how the results of their research would be presented as solutions to problems as formally submitted to the host organization in the aforementioned Feasibility Study. The contents of these would outline ideas for what were hoped to be mutually agreed projects, activities and even realizable artworks. While correspondence in the Tate Britain APG archive show it was clear that some organizations were suspect of some Feasibility Study’s concepts of art, nevertheless these also had a specific contextual value and were considered important enough for some hosts to further develop these within a salaried artist’s Placement.

APG as an organization also underwent changes in their collaborative foci. In the emergent period, 1965 – 68, APG’s functioning role was towards facilitating artists’ access to industrial materials, for instance for Jeffrey Shaw with whom Steveni obtained PVC film for the making of his Waterwalk inflatable ‘eventstructures’. APG's second phase, 1968 – 72, included their earliest Placements. One of the better known was the sculptor Garth Evans offer of a two-year Placement at British Steel Corporation. Evans, a part-time lecturer of the innovative ‘A’ Course emerging from the Undergraduate Degree Sculpture School of Saint Martins School of Art, visited a steel fabrication works, where he photographed steel constructions exercises made by the apprentice welders. These were comparable constructions to those he himself began to make during his Placement, including the sculpture Frame (1970 – 71). Crucially, Evans also studied the production of steel at the Corporation’s facilities and, finding ways to engage in its social organization, he drafted a well-received series of reports on this front. Notably, in the United Kingdom at this time and beyond, successive Labour and Conservative Governments wrestled with considerable industrial relations issues, from which emerged national legislation.

An even better-known Placement is David Hall's 10 TV Interruptions (1971), later released as 7 TV Interruptions. Hall, working with Scottish Television, the regional variant of the UK’s independent national broadcaster, produced and broadcast a series of intriguing television films: on the screen a television is seen on fire; or water tap is turned on and the waterline is seen rising noisily up the screen to create an illusion that the television set is now like a fish-tank. These were broadcast without explanatory announcement, nor a title or credit, interrupting the viewing pattern and audience’s expectations. As Scottish television was a commercial broadcaster these interventions would be initially misread as advertising.

Concurrent with industrial Placements, APG took part in the exhibitions Between 6 at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and convened their Art and Economics exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London. ‘Convened’ in the sense that APG experimented with a debate-based exhibition format: the main exhibit was a boardroom table entitled The Sculpture, where APG members hosted live discussions between artists, industrialists and government representatives. Representing APG in any exhibition format was often problematic; the diversity of APG’s output included publications and art objects, collages and appropriated objects, and documentation in photographs, film, video and sound recordings. On an aesthetic level the success of these were elusive, and yet were similarly arranged as Placements, primarily process driven and not necessarily resulting in a product.

The third phase in APG's history, of most relevance to my case study below, followed the devising in 1972 of a Civil Service or Whitehall Memorandum. APG received the support of civil servants, non-elected governmental officials with careers in developing and
implementing the policies of the government of the day’s policies. APG now had champions who held operational responsibilities across a broad array of organizations. The Memorandum paved the way for offers from national Government departments including Health and Social Security, the Environment and, via the Scottish Office, the Scottish Development Agency in Edinburgh. One undated archived note described the APG approach as perceived by a Civil Service department chief,

Their working methods would be likely to take forms of alternative periods of information-gathering, work on sites, studying different types of interests individually and in conjunction with voluntary groups in the area with whom rapport has been established.\(^{\text{xiii}}\)

Other aspects of the correspondence, building on the Civil Service Memorandum, articulated the clear operational arrangements supporting the initial Open Brief / Feasibility Study phase. For instance, John Latham’s Scottish Development Agency (Edinburgh) research was supported with an office, secretarial assistance, agreed lines of communication and a ‘link man’ in each of the department’s divisions. Crucially these arrangements also included an introductory seminar ‘at which the artist will be able to give the departmental staff concerned some idea of his objectives and methods.’\(^{\text{xiv}}\) Hence the object of the Feasibility Study could be introduced, to ‘explore areas of our departmental functions [by] employing an artist for about a year to work alongside departmental staff and make his own distinctive contribution to their work.’\(^{\text{xv}}\)

This had the potential to result in thought-provoking but contentious outcomes. Concurrent with John Latham’s Feasibility Study phase in Scotland, the Diary artist Ian Breakwell began a Placement at the Department of Health and Social Security in 1975 during which he

produced a slide sequence for members of a ‘Special Hospitals Internal Seminar’, which graphically portrayed the ignominy of the patients’ living standards, after which he was asked to join an interdisciplinary team tasked with improving not only Broadmoor’s physical structure but also its impact on healthcare.\(^{\text{xvi}}\)

After this Placement Breakwell continued to work with the material he produced, in an example of an artist working with the system of the Open Brief - Feasibility Study to collect ideas from a research phase, which later redevelop the APG approach in synthesis with their pre-existing and newly informed practices.\(^{\text{xvii}}\) Rather than diluting what Latham would later term Barbara Steveni’s APG ‘prescription’,\(^{\text{xviii}}\) such syntheses had the effect of intensifying and prolonging APG’s significance.

But there were also problems with the Artist Placement Group method; a theoretical method which intended a novel, practical application, while at the same time securing a salary and an organizational status in line with other professional persons engaged within said organization. And yet, the APG Open Brief insisted on the independence of its artists, ‘bound by invitation rather than by instructions from authority.’\(^{\text{xix}}\) The perception sometimes developed that the APG method was risky, supporting ‘a kind of licensed opposition situated within the system’.\(^{\text{x}}\) In some respects this problem articulated the radicalism of APG’s ambitions and their ‘very argument for the value of the artist’s presence in the company was rooted in a deliberately outsized view of the artist’s role in society.’\(^{\text{xiii}}\)

The APG archive at Tate Britain provides testament to this outsized view. The archive consists mostly of organizational and company correspondence. From the National Coal Board to Esso, persuasions were made to engage with artists over a ten-year period. The volume of correspondence increased when correspondents include the Civil Service and democratically elected officials. It is both within successive artist’s practice and through this correspondence that the iteration of artist’s research findings, as well as that formed in, or in
delivering the promise of, Feasibility Studies, is fully revealed and nuanced. As well as effective correspondence, APG relied upon self-critique which, in part, ‘sustained itself, for over two decades.’\textsuperscript{xxii} The APG proposition that an artist could meaningfully \textit{contribute} to commercial or bureaucratic organizations was sometimes met with a forceful critique of such motives, and suspicion. But there were contextual and conceptual innovations, not the least of which is how a successful Feasibility Study would broadly problematize conventional organizational strategies and challenge the institutionalization of the art object.

\textbf{Case Study: John Latham}

John Latham’s APG governmental host was The Scottish Development Agency. This was a new government body, formed in 1975 and based in Scotland, tasked with the promotion of industrial efficiency and international competitiveness; and furthering the improvement of the environment through dealing with, among other things, the problem of derelict land and urban decay in Scotland. The arrangement of Latham’s initial residency in Edinburgh differed as Latham solely was offered in a shortlist of one. The Feasibility Study phase was informed in part by ongoing concerns facing the resident civil servants and, although the preliminary phase did not result in a fuller funded Placement, at a key moment sometime after his initial residency they found themselves dependent upon his Study’s proposals.

In many ways, the bringing together of this artist with any governmental facility was quite remarkable. Right up to his death on the 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2006, Latham was suspicious of the language of power and he periodically experienced artistic censorship throughout his mature career. After serving in Britain’s Royal Navy and experiencing serious action in the Second World War, he returned to England and began a life as an artist. His early paintings displayed an interest in metamorphosis and organic processes, ‘his imagery and forms were \textit{found} during the activity of painting rather than being pre-conceived.’\textsuperscript{xxiii} Although his reasoning could be obscure, destruction and transformation\textsuperscript{xxiv} were important aspects in his worldview. In the early 1960s he began to incorporate modified books into his paintings, reliefs and assemblages, which, as his practice developed, offered significant and troubling challenges to audiences and critics alike.

Latham also participated in Gustav Metzger’s \textit{Destruction in Art Symposium} (1966) with a still controversial work \textit{Skoob Towers} (1964 – 8). The word Skoob is Books reversed, and these were set alight in towers of second-hand hardback books, including the \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}. Book destruction appeared in other of his key works. The provocative book mastication that later formed his work \textit{Still and Chew / Art and Culture} (1966 – 67), led to his dismissal from the teaching rota of St. Martins School of Art’s radical sculpture programme. In this work Latham invited his students at St. Martins to join him in the chewing up of Clement Greenberg’s \textit{Art and Culture} (1961), borrowed from the School library. The chewed pages were distilled and decanted into a phial; later displayed within a leather briefcase. John A. Walker, perhaps in irony, proposed Latham ‘performed an alchemical-like transformation in order to distil the book’s essence in such a way as to neutralise its potency.’\textsuperscript{xxv} Perhaps not coincidentally, when Latham was invited in 1975 to exhibit in an exhibition \textit{Structure and Codes} at The Royal College of Art in London he asked that a text decrying academic fraudulence be displayed, which to their credit the Royal College exhibited.

Fig. 2: John Latham, \textit{Senior Academic Institutions}, 1975

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|p{15cm}|}
\hline
\textbf{JOHN LATHAM} \\
Senior academic institutions have been defrauding the public and students for 300 years. They are not concerned with education, still less with truth – they are run for the benefit of the staff.
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
John Latham’s *Feasibility Study* (1976) included proposals for energy production from tidal movement and the local community application of portable video technologies for emergent community broadcast channels. Its core concept was his argument for re-conceiving post-industrial waste, previously designated ‘derelict land’, and the enumeration of relevant sites for such a transformation. The waste, huge heaps of red colored shale waste, or shale bings, littered the nearby west and mid-Lothian regions. xxvi The shale bings originated from a redundant mid-Nineteenth century waste-producing mining process which was designed to extract and distil products for use as paraffin oil from oil-bearing shale. Most bings have a steep frontage, formed from slow inclines upon which large vehicles deposited burnt shale after their ascension up the bings’ characteristic long ‘tail’. One of these bings rises to a height of ninety-five metres, it resembles an extinct volcano and its volume of oxidized mining waste evidences how this type of shale mining offered significant employment until midway into the twentieth century. Nineteen shale bings remain in the region.

The UK Government had tasked the Scottish Development Agency to devise a plan for the removal of such shale bings within a ten-year timeframe, and the problem Latham was asked to confront - whilst retaining an Open Brief - was their seeming unsightliness. Civil servants wondered if Latham had ideas about the use of this distinctive rock material. In his resultant Feasibility Study’s 36 plastic folders, each containing two sides mostly comprising of photographs, illustrations and detailed commentary, Latham proposed to ‘preserve a select few, which will be presented as monuments to the period we live in [ … ] to bring them by various means into common use again.’xxvii Generally, he argued these were not derelict land and were deemed problematic due of their scale. As they were so vast they are easily mistaken for naturally occurring terra-forms, but Latham re-represented these as a type of sculpture which could provide vital tourist-based benefits to this economically depressed region of the Scotland as well as other artistic Placements.

For one set of shale bings Latham also proposed a somewhat complicated schema but one that can claim to be the largest artwork in the United Kingdom. When initially asked by the Scottish civil servants from which perspective would he be looking at Scotland, Latham pointed to an office map of Scotland and apocryphally responded - from this distance. Indeed, Latham’s Open Brief began with his review of The Scottish Development Agency’s aerial photography archive and this provided him with a first informed glimpse of West Lothian shale bing constellation near Broxburn, known locally as ‘Greendykes’ and its adjoining bings. Latham determined there were not waste at all, in fact they were documents of value in terms of cultural history, and, given the manner in which they were originally produced, they were also a process sculpture, made through the unconscious acts of the many. Using the aerial perspective afforded by a single surveillance photograph Latham anthropomorphized Greendykes bing as a ‘Torso’ which alongside the other bings, the Faucheldean bing now named the ‘Limb’, Niddry bing as the ‘Heart’ (although too large to fit inside this approximately-scaled body) and Albyn as the ‘Head’, comprising a torn figure of a fictive female figure named *NIDDRIE WOMAN*. xxviii The prehistoric carving *The Venus of Willendorf* (28,000 and 25,000 BCE) was cited, and *Niddrie Woman*’s aerially visualized form was intentionally redolent of ancient images cut into England’s chalk hillsides such as the Uffington White Horse in Oxfordshire and the Cerne Giant in Dorset.
And at this moment of aerially envisioned intuition, Latham, having been granted access and a future responsibility for these derelict terra-forms, also decided it shared with a number of his previous works a processional transformation or context through destruction. In *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, Michel Serres notes ‘Discussion conserves, invention requires rapid intuition and being light as weightlessness’ and it is Latham’s previous practice that provides him with a platform to such weightlessness, of both contextualizing and decontextualization. After this intuition in the archive, Latham began an exhaustive series of terrestrial visits, photographing the sites of shale bings including what her later re-termed *Niddrie Woman*.

Fig. 5: From APG Files Box11 (Tate), Niddrie Heart. Photo: John Latham.

And then, as well as the site of *Niddrie Woman*, Latham became enraptured by another distinct bing to the west of *Niddrie Woman*. Westwood bing has five separate peaks on one base but is known locally as, in another anthropomorphism, ‘Five Sisters’. In the mid-1970s the surface of shale bings were relatively raw, and a harsh terrain. A very different contemporary surface ecology now covers these bings. At the time, this vast array of singular raw materiality as well as the destructive process which led to their formation, conforming to Latham’s principles (as he saw them) of sculpture, as well as those informed by Gustav Metzger’s manifesto of auto-destructive art, a ‘public art for industrial societies’.

In a text (an undated single sheet within APG’s Tate Britain Archive) Latham wrote of their idiom:

*Bings as Sculpture / Monuments:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom:</th>
<th>The better conceived Bings conform to classical sculptural principles, viz:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>They are form in a single material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>The singular material is linked to a singular process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Their scale is unique - less than geological but greater than other artefacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>They have both proportion, in classical terms and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Multiple evocative associations both visual and legendary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.</td>
<td>Added to these there is the link to be made with the book-relief idiom, to which is attributed a new contribution to philosophy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all of these aspects the Bing is unique, although the circumstance has had to be overawed in the past – the public having a fixed view of dirt danger and dereliction.

For ‘Five Sisters’ Latham made modest proposals for access to the site, including environmental vantage points markers, steps and notice-boards, and the preparation of historical records of the sites. For *Niddrie Woman* he proposed a different degree of consciousness-raising, including the incorporation of further artworks. Latham cited the Scottish artist and poet Ian Hamilton Finlay’s garden environment *Stonypath* as the region’s exemplar, an environmental garden artwork into which further artworks are made. Latham also proposed his own 24 metre intersecting-book beacon *Handbook of Reason*. Further mock-ups and illustrations in his Feasibility Study, as well as some recent additions to social networking websites, have provided glimpses of the dynamic quality such a towering monument would have brought to the site if it were possibly engineered.

Fig. 6: Unattributed image from creativeblether.wordpress.com/2011/08/12/latham-lives/

In 1976 Latham submitted his Feasibility Study to his hosts and his relationship with the Scottish Development Agency seemingly ended. Latham and APG had developing European priorities, including their participation in 1977’s Documenta 6 and verbal jousts with Joseph Beuys on the meaning of artist-with-government placements. However, this was merely a
starting point in his argument for the full conservation of Niddrie Woman within the scheme of its reconceptualization. Latham became convinced that he had solved the Scottish civil servants’ nearly impossible operational quandary about the vast bing’s material disposal and continued to insist that these monumental process sculptures were materially unique and should remain tethered to their sites. Their context had included their historical associations but now included his intuitive reconceptualization, which should be celebrated and concretized. His subsequent arguments, which continued to emphasize the possibility of all shale bings’ ‘derelict land’ as sculpture, but confused his case by shifting quickly from rationale argument (in the sense of the development of sculptural thinking in twentieth century art history) to sometimes elliptical, but always wondrous, commentary.

What are the environmental and art historical legacies of Latham’s Feasibility Study? ‘Five Sisters’ bing is now entirely preserved under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Latham and APG also played a central role in its preservation via its designation as, what is known as, a Scheduled Ancient Monument. In the early 1980s, the site’s owners wished to mine ‘Five Sisters’ for its inert shale is useful as infill for motorway construction. The Scottish civil servants desisted, arguing ‘Five Sisters’ is a monument to industrialization. The site’s owners then disputed the formalization of it’s monumental status and the Scottish Office invited Latham to make a public case contributing to the case that such bings were indeed ‘monuments’ produced through a unique process, i.e. process sculpture. But Latham’s argument was not reiterated in public. At the last moment the owners withdrew their Appeal against such its status as a scheduled monument, which left Latham unable to make a public case not only for ‘Five Sisters’ as invited, but also to argue for Niddrie Woman’s similar preservation. And as for Niddrie Woman and her Heart? Some of its sections are now preserved under the same Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, but not Niddrie Heart, which continues to be top-mined for motorway infill material.

The art historical legacy is less definitive. An obvious precursor to Latham’s programme relates to the social aspect of mining industry. Bernd and Hilla Becher’s 1966 scholarship from the British Council and other assistance provided by The National Coal Board, later enabled them narrate this type of landscape in an interview, ‘we worked in the mines of Wales, which, if you want to describe them visually, run along the valleys like a string of pearls’ describing hills and valleys, terraced housing and their proximity to the mines, some of which were closed. However comparing the Becher’s documentary methodology with Latham’s poetically and politically inflected practice is not useful. The former produced elegant and technically precise artwork; the latter was consciously diffuse and ponderous.

From waste to monument may have seemed an improbable reversal, and little by little, without investment at their sites, art historical knowledge of Niddrie Woman has drifted into the realm of myth and conjecture. Lucy Lippard refers to it in Overlay (1983) as a ‘pun on female earth, rebirth, modern society’s treatment of women’s bodies as castoffs, and so forth’ and she considered it had tapped into the strain of 1970s art, the ‘upsurge of interest among avant-garde artists in “primitivism”’. One may also infer a mocking critical reference to Latham’s re-conceptualization in Robert Morris’ Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation (1980); ‘Every large strip mine could support an artist-in-residence. Dank and noxious acres of spoil piles cry out for some redeeming sculptural shape.’ Morris warned against the acceptability of land reclamation ‘continuing acceleration of the resource - energy – commodity – consumption cycle.’ However, Latham’s Feasibility Study and his subsequent correspondences presage Morris’ environmental questioning of an aesthetics of pollution, as well as these pressing concerns for the sustainability of the planetary ecology.

Far from being sites of ecological devastation, shale bings now hold an important assessed environmental and social value. Barbra Harvie’s West Lothian Local Biodiversity Action Plan – Oil Shale Bings (2005) Report proposes that they ‘are a unique habitat, not found elsewhere in Britain or Western Europe’, a vital recreation area and ‘the focal point of community
identity in a population whose common culture of mining is slowly being eradicated.’ Her Report maintains that for such a developing and unique habitat, ‘The best management of oil-shale bings is no management.’ This exactly correlates with Latham’s own Study and like Latham seems to describe a magical place; brown hares, red grouse, badgers, sky larks, foxes, and showy species mainly butterflies, their habitats are ‘island refugia for wildlife in a primarily agricultural and urban / industrial landscape’ and hold a considerable diversity of very rare and Nationally Scarce plants species.

Latham’s Feasibility Study continues to provide a compelling example of an artist’s influence in political decision-making in the operation of regional government. The Scottish civil servants palpably developed a sense of respectful curiosity and in time engaged with Latham’s well argued resolution of these previously disregarded sites of dereliction. But Latham realized, and the Scottish civil servants accepted as much, that political recommendation does not by itself immediately result in meaningful art. And so a gap remains, the difference in appreciation which has opened up is between the site’s current recognition as heritage and Latham’s earlier proposals for sculpture, which meant in his view his ideas had not been fully conveyed, that the meaning of process sculpture is better than received ideas of heritage.

Table 1: The shale bings forming Niddrie Woman (1975-6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognized designation</th>
<th>Latham’s Feasibility Study</th>
<th>Status in 2006 (under The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Greendykes’</td>
<td>Torso</td>
<td>Intact bing where extraction is resisted - now scheduled monument (north part)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Faucheldean’</td>
<td>Limb</td>
<td>Intact bing where extraction is resisted - now scheduled monument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Niddry’</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Bing where extraction is encouraged with planning permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Albyn’</td>
<td>Head</td>
<td>Bing where extraction may be encouraged but requiring planning permission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And so it remained an uncompleted project. And, as if to underline the importance of these bings and their amplified centrality to his being, the final act following his Latham’s death in 2006 was the scattering of his ashes on the currently mined plateau atop Niddrie Heart’s within sight of a restored Niddry Castle, amidst the red coloured oil-shale he documented in 1975. In 2007 I hitched a lift on a monstrous mining vehicle to the top of Niddrie Heart and gained access to the mined crater. This crater affords distant views of Edinburgh Airport and the rest of Niddrie Woman, whose torso and limb are idyllic, protected sites. Looking inwards to the mined core of Niddrie Heart, the grandeur of its devastation is a profound metaphor for centuries of industrialization and devastation.

Latham and Artist Placement Group have left us with a challenge, their reconceptualization tells us something about our future. Is Niddrie Woman landscape, industrial monument, heritage site, or process sculpture? The APG method, which led Latham’s well-argued preservation of Niddrie Woman in its entirety was a reconceptualization of a site that pushed beyond the boundaries of Krauss ‘famous’, expanded field. But is it socially relevant to ponder its status as Land Art, or whether Latham’s insistence upon a figurative reference for Niddrie Woman distinguished it as separate from minimalist earthworks derived from crosses, circles, cubes, spirals and tubes? Is the conservation problem we are presented within best dealt with in an art historical context? Is it in fact they case now that they occupy ‘a tensed position within a complex layering of current uses and future trajectories.’ Above all, Latham anticipated the imaginative ways in which twenty-first century industries and communities will have to find new uses for past energy-producing transformations in the landscape and environment. And such imagination has a role in society’s move out of the
carbon age, aligned to developing much needed new technologies and the redundancy of environmentally destructive processes of energy production.

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Letter, J.A.Ford to Barbara Steveni (7 November 1975), Artist Placement Group Archive, Hyman Kreitman Research Centre, Tate Britain: 20042/1/3/54/28.

After 1979, APG engaged with organising high-level meetings in Germany, France and the Netherlands. It renamed itself O+I (Organisation + Imagination) in 1989, later dissolving in 2008.


Eleey, “Context is Half the Work” 2007: 154 – 9


While theories of material transformation and entropy continued to be present in many of his later works, scientific theories and the universe and his pursuit of a visual theory of ‘least time’ meant Latham’s work was increasingly described as relating the new theories in physics, one major exhibition entitled *Art after Physics* (1992) in Oxford’s Museum of Modern Art perfectly summing Latham’s intent.


Latham’s Scottish affiliation was enduring. Visiting briefly during summer of 1964 in the company of Scottish author Alexander Trocchi, staying with the Edinburgh bookshop owner Jim Haynes, and with his wife Barbara Steveni to speak at Edinburgh College of Art’s now forgotten art event *Participation Art* (1972).


In the mid-1970s the surface of these bings was relatively raw and harsh. A comparative image of ‘Five Sisters’ that I documented from the nearby Addiewell bing in 2008 using the same vantage point as Latham’s in 1976, asserts that the surface ecology covering these bings has continued to add to their naturalistic appearance. However unlike the manner in which aspects of *Niddrie Woman* have begun to harmonize with the surrounding terrain, the terrain of ‘Five Sisters’ is relatively flat, which lends it a dramatic appeal. Unlike the shale bings which form *Niddrie Woman*, ‘Five Sisters’ form is balanced, visibly unnaturally formed and emblematic.


*Sculpture may be able to stir a new approach… the inertia that seems to grip our capabilities (politics of power (maintenance or exercise), beaurocracry [sic] the growth industry, absence of a coherent vision) [sic] has either to be defied or submitted to. The Sculpture addition [Handbook of Reason] is to state this – we refuse to be buried by bing formations, we are a different kind of being’.

John Latham, *Artist Placement Group Archive*, Hyman Kreitman Research Centre, Tate Britain: TGA 20042 / 1/ 3/ 54/ 33:


Lippard later advocated a related pedagogical program:
“There are few courses, much less full-scale programs, in this country that train artists to work in social contexts. Most tend to come to a piece of land with an idea in their head, with their approach already formed. Few artists are working in park systems or allying themselves with farmers, ranchers, cultural geographers, archaeologists, national park bureaucrats, and wilderness advocates, or even know about the new field called “environmental interpretation,” which should be made-to-order for artists.”


